

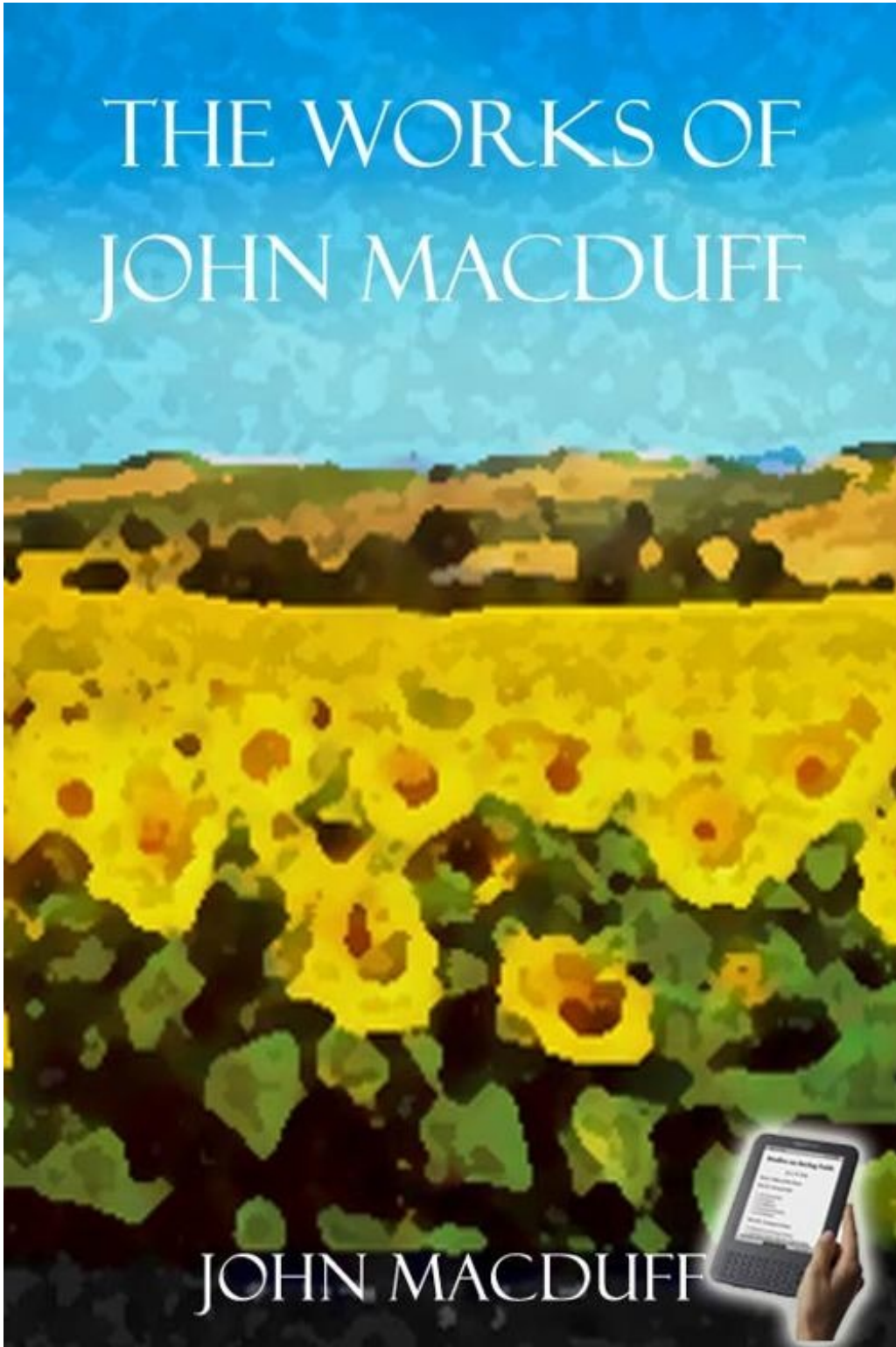
# THE WORKS OF JOHN MACDUFF



JOHN MACDUFF



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JOHN MACDUFF

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# The Works of John MacDuff

by John MacDuff 1818-1895

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# THE THOUGHTS OF GOD

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## **Introduction**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand! When I awake, I am still with You!" — Psalm 139:17-18

The thoughts of a great man on earth — how valued! With what feelings

then, shall we ponder the thoughts of God! We treasure the thoughts of the wise and the good for their own sake — but how is their value enhanced when they are personal, and have a special reference to ourselves? These "Thoughts of God," are thoughts toward us. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you." "Your thoughts which are to us." "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God."

We peruse with additional interest the diary — the recorded thoughts — of those with whom, while living, we interchanged hallowed friendship, and whose regard and love we had been privileged to enjoy. In opening the "Divine Diary" — unfolding the Divine Thoughts as these are recorded in Sacred Scripture — we have the elevating assurance, "this Great Being loves ME — pities me — carries me on His heart!" If it is consoling to be much in the thoughts of a revered earthly friend — then what must it be to occupy the thoughts of ONE, better than the best, more loving than the most loving human relative?

An earthly father writes his son in a distant land, 'You are never absent from my thoughts.' Such, too, is the comforting declaration of our Father in Heaven. The humblest and loneliest of His children on earth can say, "I am poor and needy — yet the Lord thinks upon me!"

In one sense we are everywhere surrounded with God's thoughts. The world of nature is a majestic volume of God's thoughts:  
His sublime thoughts — are the everlasting mountains;  
His lofty thoughts — the distant stars;  
His dreadful thoughts — the lightning and tempest, the earthquake and volcano;  
His minute thoughts — of discriminating care the tiny moss and lichen, the tender grass, the lily of the field, and pearly dewdrop;  
His loving thoughts — the blue sky, the quiet lake, the sunny glade, the budding blossoms and beauteous flowers;  
His joyful thoughts — the singing streams and sparkling waves;  
His unchanging thoughts — the rock in mid-ocean, on which the waves are in vain spending their fury.

But it is not in these mute, undefined, often mysterious symbols, that sinners, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, can discover the true Divine

breathings and utterances of the very heart of a reconciled Father. He "has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." It is in Christ that each thought of God becomes "precious," — a ministering angel of comfort and hope, a deep pool of unfathomable grace and love, reflecting the image and the peace of Heaven. Jesus is the true ladder of Jacob, upon which thoughts upon thoughts of unutterable tenderness flood down from the upper sanctuary. The Father is represented in an impressive figure as confiding to him one blessed thought after another, that he may speak them as "words in season to him that is weary."

And how precious are these thoughts of God! Well may He say regarding them, "As the heavens are higher than the earth — so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts," — infinite, immutable, everlasting — a glorious chime carrying their echoes from eternity to eternity! We may try to form whatever estimate of them we may, they far transcend our loftiest imaginings. "Now," says the apostle, "unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

God loves and treasures even our poor thoughts of Him. "A book of remembrance was written for those who feared the Lord, and who thought upon His name." Oh, how should we cherish and garner His ineffable thoughts towards us! We should take them to solve our doubts, calm our fears, soothe our sorrows, hush our misgivings — it may be to smooth our sick-pillows or our death-pillows. These, like tremulous music in some hallowed, time-honored sanctuary, floating on the entranced ear, have fallen with their heavenly vibrations on many a downcast, mourning, troubled, pensive spirit, and woke it up to hope and confidence, peace and joy. This has been the experience of believers in every age, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts [Your comforting thoughts] delight my soul."

With the devout Psalmist, these 'thoughts' seem to have formed the theme of morning meditation — for he adds, in our motto-verse, "When I awake, I am still with You." "What is man," exclaims a saint of an older age still, "that You should magnify him? and that You should set Your heart upon him? and that You should visit him every morning?"



In this little volume of daily devotional readings, we have been able only to make a brief selection from these "precious thoughts." "Many," truly, "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us, no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare!" But may these few sparks of living fire — a handful of burning coals taken from the holy altar — serve to kindle the fuel, or brighten the flame of the morning, or, it may be, evening sacrifice. Nothing surely can serve better to quicken faith — and animate love; to mitigate grief — and disarm temptation; to temper and moderate life's anxieties and engrossments; to sweeten our earthly joys; to hallow our earthly sorrows; to elevate and dignify our earthly pursuits — than to go forth to the world, climbing its mountains of toil, and descending its valleys of care, preoccupied and solemnized with A THOUGHT OF GOD!

## INFINITE CONDESCENSION

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

*"For this is what the high and lofty One says — He who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place — but also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite." — Isaiah 57:15*

This verse may with reverence be termed, *God's own description of His two dwelling-places*. How amazing the contrast and disparity; inhabiting eternity, AND — the human bosom! The great of the earth associate with the great — kings have their abodes in palaces. One of God's palaces — is the lowly heart. Inconceivable is the distance of those stars whose light takes millions of years in traveling to our earth; and yet what is this? A mere span, compared to the distance which separates the *creature* from the *Creator*. We are "but of yesterday." Our days are as an handbreadth, "as a dream when one awakens!"

Eternity is the *lifetime* — the *biography* of the Almighty — ages and eras

are the *pages* of the vast volume! If our distance from Him be great as *creatures* — it is greater still as *sinners!* Yet this high and lofty One, dwelling in the high and holy place, and whose name is Holy, condescends to be the inmate of the humble, contrite spirit, and to listen to its penitent sighs. *Oh, unutterable, unimaginable stoop!* The sovereign earthly king visiting the abode of poverty — is earth's illustrative picture and symbol of condescension. Yet what, after all, is this — but one perishable mortal, visiting another perishable mortal.

But here is Omnipotence — dwelling with weakness;  
Majesty — dwelling with nothingness;  
the Infinite — dwelling with the finite;  
Deity — dwelling with dust!

How this "precious thought" ennobles, elevates, consecrates the human soul. That home of earth is ever afterwards rendered illustrious, where royalty has sojourned. "If any man loves Me," says Jesus, "he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our *abode* with him."

What, O Lord, is man, that You are thus mindful of him — that You visit him? Prepare my heart for Your reception. Rend Your heavens and come down — fill its temple-courts with Your glory. May all its powers — sprinkled, like the sacred vessels of old, with the consecrating blood — be dedicated to Your service. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit — a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Destroy every *pedestal of pride*. Make me humble — keep me humble. What have I to be proud of? Nothing. I am *dependent* continually on Your bounty. My existence — my health — my strength — my reason — are a *loan* from You the Great Proprietor, who can, in the twinkling of an eye, paralyze strength, dethrone reason, arrest the pulses of joyous life, and write upon all I have, "Ichabod, the glory has departed!"

Much more is this the case in spiritual things — I am a *pensioner* from hour to hour on redeeming grace and love! But for Jesus — I would be lost forever! It is *lying low at the foot of His cross* that I can learn how the Greatest of all Beings can be the most condescending of all. "I cease to wonder at anything," said a believer, "after the discovery of God's love to

me in Christ!" "Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?"

## EVERLASTING LOVE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I have loved you with an everlasting love! Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you!" — Jeremiah 31:3

Here we have an everlasting thought of God, "in the beginning, before ever the earth was." Believer, travel back in imagination to the ages of the past. Before the trance of eternity was broken by any visible manifestation of power — before one temple was erected in space, before one angel waved his wing, or one note was heard of seraph's song — when God inhabited alone, these sublime solitudes — then there was a thought of *you* — and that thought was — Love!

Think of the *sovereignty* of that love. He says not, 'You have loved Me with your poor earthly love — therefore have I drawn you.' No, no! It is from nothing in *you* — no *foreseen goodness* on your part. Grace is the reason for all He has done, "God who is rich in mercy for His great love with which He loved us." "I will have mercy," is His own declaration — on whom I will have mercy!" "Jacob," (that cunning, scheming, crafty youth) "*Jacob* I loved — but Esau I hated!"

*Manasseh*, (that miserable man who has defiled his crown, dishonored his throne, and deluged Jerusalem with blood) "I have loved." That *dying thief* — fresh from a life of infamy, breathing out his blasphemies on a felon's cross, "I have loved." And why, let each of us ask, am *I* not a Cain or a Judas? Why am I not a wrecked and stranded vessel, like thousands before me? Here is the reason; "Yes, I have loved *you*." Before you had one thought of Me, yes, when your thoughts were those of hatred,

rebellion, and enmity — My thoughts towards you were thoughts of love!

And that Sovereign love, as it is *from* everlasting, so is it *to* everlasting — endless in duration — enduring as eternity. The love of the creature is but of yesterday — it may be gone tomorrow — dried like a *summer-brook* when most needed. But the love of God is fed from the glacier summits — the everlasting hills. We may estimate its intensity, when the Savior could utter regarding it such a prayer as this, "That the love with which You have loved Me — may be in them."

Oh, amid the often misgivings of my own doubting heart, with its frames and feelings as vacillating as the shifting sand, let me delight to ponder this precious thought — the long line of unbroken love — every *link* love — connecting the eternity that is past with the eternity to come — God thinking of me before the birth of time — even then mapping out all my future happiness and heavenly bliss — and standing now, with the *hoarded love* of that eternity in His heart, seeking therewith to "draw" me!

It is "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus" — which is the moral gravitation-power of the cross, by which His true people have ever been drawn. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth — will draw all men unto Myself!" Draw me, Lord — and I will run after You. Show me Your loving-kindness thus enshrined and manifested in Your dear Son. Constrain me to love You in Him, because You have first loved, and *so* loved, *me!* "How priceless is Your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of Your wings."

## **A DIVINE CHALLENGE**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"This is what the Lord says: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at

their appointed time — then my covenant with David my servant — and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me — can be broken, and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne." — Jeremiah 33:20-21

It is remarkable how often God's revealed thoughts have for their theme, the *immutability of His covenant*; as if the contemplation of His own inviolable faithfulness formed the mightiest of all topics of comfort and consolation for His believing people. Here He makes a solemn appeal to the constancy of the natural world — as a pledge and guarantee of His unchanging fidelity in spiritual things. Nothing seems so *undeviating* as the succession of day and night — the revolution of the seasons. The sun sinking at eventide in the golden west, and rising again like a giant refreshed. "While the earth remains," said the Great Creator over His own world, as it emerged of old from the waters of the Deluge, "seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

In our motto-verse, using human language as a vehicle of Divine thought, He makes the challenge, 'If you can forbid that sun to rise — if you can put drags on his burning chariot wheels, and prevent him from setting — if you can forbid the moon to hang her silver lamp from the vault of night, or pluck the stars from their silent thrones — if you can transpose summer's heat and winter's cold — if you can make seed-time belie its promise to expecting autumn — then — but not until then, shall I break My covenant with My chosen servants!'

"Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundation of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away forever for their sins. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

It is delightful thus to look around us on the steadfast and unvarying sequences in the material universe, and to regard them as *sacraments of grace* — silent witnesses for the inviolability of God's word and promise. *Nature*, in her majestic constancy, becomes a temple filled with monuments, each bearing the inscription, "God who cannot lie!" The God of *nature* and the God of *grace* are one — and He who for the last six thousand years has given such proof of unswerving faithfulness in the one



economy — (for "they continue this day according to Your ordinances") — will be equally faithful in fulfilling the more permanent provisions of the other. "Look up to the skies above, and gaze down on the earth beneath. For the skies will disappear like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a piece of clothing. The people of the earth will die like flies — but My salvation lasts forever. My righteous rule will never end!"

It is an "everlasting covenant, well-ordered in all things, and sure." How can it be otherwise, seeing it is founded on the work and righteousness of Jehovah-Jesus, Immanuel — God with us! Before one provision of that covenant can fail, immutability must first become mutable — and God Himself cease to be God! Standing on this "sure foundation," we can boldly utter the challenge, "Who is he that condemns?" Not God the Father — for "He has justified." Not Christ — for "He has died." Not angels in the heights above, not devils in the depths beneath.

Universal *nature*, in the ceaseless hymn of her own constancy, proclaims and celebrates our covenant security and safety. Her *four great evangelists*, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter — endorse the utterances of the inspired volume. In the mouth of the two witnesses, "Day and Night," every word is established. Thus, with reference not only to the glory and wisdom and power of God — but to His purpose and promise of salvation for His people, "Day unto day utters speech; and night unto night shows knowledge." "But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations!"

## THE THOUGHT OF THOUGHTS

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish — but have everlasting life!" —

John 3:16

Here is what Cyprian calls "an *ocean* of thought — in a *drop* of language!" Who can sound the depths of this "thought of God?" It will form the *theme* and the *mystery* of eternity. Manifold and glorious are His thoughts regarding His people. But this is the center and focus of all — around which all the others cluster. It is the *jewel* of which all the others are the setting — the thought of thoughts — the gift of gifts. We may well say, "*How precious!*"

There is no *measuring* that love; it defies all human computation. Christ Himself, in speaking of it, can only intimate its indescribability. He puts the plumbline into the hand — but He does not attempt to gauge or fathom — all He can say of the precious thought and the precious love is, "God *SO* loved!" And His redeemed Church in Heaven will forever stoop over the edge of the precipice and exclaim, in the contemplation of the profound abyss, "How *great* is the love the Father has lavished on us!" "Your thoughts are very deep!"

Think of that love in the *past* — a love so great as to put into the lips of the Eternal Father the mysterious summons, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man who is My Fellow — smite the Shepherd!" The same Almighty Being is represented elsewhere as looking around — scanning and surveying the needs of a doomed and dying world: "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold — therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me!" The alternative, "condemn — or not condemn," was before the Infinite mind. BUT "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it — but to save it."

Think of that love when it culminated thus in its triumph on the *cross*. When God's "precious thoughts," had their solemn revealing and interpreter in "the precious blood of Christ." Think of that moment when *Infinite paternal love* laid His *Isaac* on the altar, and the unsheathed sword descended on the priceless Sacrifice! Think of it, too, as a love evoked by *rebels* — a love manifested towards the *guilty* and *undeserving*, and *hell-deserving*. History's noblest deed and record of love — is in the self devotion of one generous heathen, Pylades, who forfeited his life to save his friend — but "God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, *Christ* died for us!"

"You have not yet seen," says a great writer and profound thinker, "the greatest gift of all — the HEART of God, the love of His heart — the heart of His love. And will He, in very deed, show us that? Yes, unveil that cross — and see! It was His only mode of showing us His heart! It is Infinite Love laboring to reveal itself — agonizing to utter the fullness of infinite love. Apart from that act — the *boundless ocean of love* would have remained forever shut up and concealed in the heart of God! But now it has found an ocean-channel. Beyond this He cannot go. Once and forever the proof has been given — God is love."

"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways — and My thoughts higher than your thoughts!"

## TENDER REMONSTRANCE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God — the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary — and His understanding no one can fathom!" — Isaiah 40:27-28

Here is a thought of desponding man — in contrast with a "thought of God." No, not only so; it is an ungrateful thought of God's own people. It is "Jacob," "Israel," — who are guilty of these unworthy complainings. They question the rectitude of His dispensations. "Surely," is the language of their doubting hearts, "He cannot be cognizant of our situation — our trials — our temptations — our perplexities — otherwise He would long before now have come to our relief! Surely the Lord does not see my troubles, and God refuses to hear my case!"

So thought *Gideon* in his hour of faithless despondency, when Israel had been ground down for seven years by the oppression of the Midianites, "If the Lord is with us — why then is all this befallen us?"

So thought *David*, in the wilds of Gilead, when, a broken-hearted exile, he repeated through his anguished tears, the challenge of his enemies, who continually said unto him, "Where is your God?"

So thought *Asaph* in his moments of guilty unbelief, when he saw the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering. Misjudging and misinterpreting the divine procedure, "his steps had well-near slipped;" he "remembered God and was troubled;" and amid the misery of unbelieving thoughts, exclaimed, "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

So thought *Martha* and *Mary* in the extremity of their grief, after they had sent prayer and messenger in vain, and were still left unsupported in their agony. They had ever fondly trusted that *mighty Heart of divine tenderness*. But how could they trust it now, in these mysterious moments of blank despair? If He had indeed 'loved' them and their lost one — why could Jesus, "remain two days still in the same place where He was?" Could there be *kindness* — could there be anything but forgetfulness in this strange prolonged absence? Surely, was their hasty, unworthy surmise, 'our way is hidden from Him, He has passed over and overlooked our case and our cause!' No, O desponding ones! "My thoughts are not your thoughts!" "I am the Lord; I do not change!" You have fainted and grown weary of Me — but I, the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth — have not fainted, and never can faint or grow weary of you!

Go, *Gideon*, on your deliverance mission, trusting in My sure word; and out of weakness you shall be made strong, become valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of your enemy!

Go, *fainting pilgrim* of Gilead, take down your harp from the willows — sing the Lord's song even in that strange land, for He will soon turn your mourning into dancing, take off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness!

Go, *mourning psalmist* of the olden temple, "call to remembrance your song in the night," "commune with your own heart," and thus rebuke your peevish murmurings, "This is my infirmity — but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High God."

Go, *mourning sisters* of Bethany, go forth to meet the lingering steps of 'the Brother born for adversity.' Dry these unkind, distrustful tears! There are wise, though yet undeveloped *reasons* — which both you and the Church will yet learn to appreciate, for these two long days of unsupported sorrow. Imagine anything but this: "Your God has forsaken you, and your Lord has forgotten you!"

Believer, trust the *divine faithfulness in the dark!* Trust His *loving heart* — where sight and sense fail to trace His *mysterious hand!* Think especially of the mighty God — yet Brother-man, who has left this last promise legacy, "Surely, I am with you always!" He ever *lives* — and ever *loves!* He is the true Moses on the mount, whose *hands* never grow heavy. Oh, amid the fainting and failing of what may be dearest to you in earthly love; may this be your sublime solace amid all trials and all changes: "The Lord is the everlasting God — the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary — and His understanding no one can fathom!" "You will keep in perfect peace — all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on You!"

## PATERNAL PITY

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"As a father pities his children — so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust!" — Psalm  
103:13-14

What feelings on earth are to be compared, in depth and intensity, to



those that link a *parent* to his children? Has some member of his family been unjustly wronged? Many a man would willingly submit to unmerited injury and ridicule — bear in silence the tongue of calumny and slander, and receive in silence the arrows of unkindness — who could not rest thus unmoved under the affront or stigma attempted to be fastened on his child.

Or does the parent see his child in suffering? He could himself bear pain with comparative composure; but when he sees slow, torturing disease ploughing its furrows on the young cheek, and dimming the luster of the young eye — the iron enters into his soul; he would gladly even risk his own life — were that of his loved one endangered. Many a father has stood by an early grave, and said, through anguished tears, "I wish that I could have died — rather than you!"

Behold, O believer, in the loving, pitying thoughts; and tender pitying deeds of the earthly parent — a picture and symbol of God's thoughts and God's love to you! No, more — He identifies Himself with the sufferings and wrongs of His children. Injure them — and you injure Him! He who touches them — touches the apple of His eye. He says, as David said to Abiathar, "Abide with me, for he who seeks your life, seeks my life — but with me you shall be in safeguard."

When and where does this pitying love of God begin? "And when he was yet a great way off — his father saw him!" God's thoughts of pity were upon us — when we had no thought of pity on ourselves. And at this hour, too, is He pitying us — in our weakness, in our sorrows, in our temptations, in our difficulties, in our perplexities. Many an earthly father can make only a little allowance for the weakness and feebleness of his offspring. Not so our heavenly Father. "He remembers that we are but dust." When Job was greatly perplexed and downcast by the bitter reflections of his adversaries, this was his comfort, "But He knows the way that I take!"

See how these same thoughts of pitying love, like the ivy clasping the battered ruin, cling even around His wayward, backsliding children, "Is not Israel still My son, My darling child? I had to punish him — but I still love him. I long for him and surely will have mercy on him." Oh, blessed

assurance, *this great Being loves me, pities me* — pities me and loves me even in the midst of my truant forgetfulness, ungrateful wandering — and continues to call me His "darling child." I have in Him a love in which fatherhood, brotherhood, sisterhood, are all combined!

Arise, go to your Father! He is waiting and willing to welcome you to His embrace. He asks elsewhere, in a passage which touchingly describes His thoughts (His loving, paternal thoughts) at work, "How shall I put you among the children?" The gospel plan of salvation has answered that question — solved that Divine problem of parental love. Jesus has opened a way of access to the heavenly household — and made us heirs to all these precious thoughts of a Father's heart! Seated under Calvary's cross — we can exclaim in grateful transport, "How great is the love which the Father has lavished on us — that we should be called children of God! And that is what we really are!"

## COMFORT FOR THE BEREAVED

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I have *seen* his ways — and will *heal* him. I will *lead* him also, and restore *comforts* unto him and to his mourners." — Isaiah 57:18

We have here the utterance of God's thoughts to the bereft mourner. He who looked down of old on bondaged Israel, and thus unlocked the thoughts of His heart, "I know their sorrows;" He who, in a later age, watched from the mountainside the frail bark tossed in the midst of the lake, and hastened to the rescue of faithless disciples — says to each poor afflicted one, 'My thoughts are upon you! I have appointed your trial. I have decreed that early, or that unlooked-for grave. Let faith trust Me in this dark hour, when fainting human nature may fail to comprehend the

mystery of My dealings.'

The successive clauses of this verse form a beautiful gradation. God "sees," He "heals," He "leads," He "comforts!"

God SEES. He knows all my case, my character, my circumstances. He alone can judge, as to the "needs-be" of trial. He has some wise reason for His discipline.

God HEALS. He comes with the balm of His own heavenly consolation. When the wave of sorrow has answered the end for which it was sent, He says, "Thus far shall you go — and no farther!"

God LEADS. He does not inflict the heavy blow — and then forsake. He does not leave the shorn lamb to the un-tempered winds of trial. "The Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought" — with guidance and provision, the two pilgrim necessities — and that, too, "in drought," — when the world's provisions fail!

God COMFORTS. The mother's love for her child is manifested, not at the moment only when it receives some severe injury — but in the subsequent nights of patient, tender care, and unwearying watchfulness. "As one whom his mother comforts — so," says God, "will I comfort you!"

In the hour of sorrowing bereavement, many a precious revelation is made of a before *unknown or hidden God*. In wrestling like Jacob with the covenant Angel, the soul is often brought to feel for the first time, in that struggle-hour, His touch — the consciousness of a Presence, before dimly recognized, is now felt. Like 'Israel,' we may go 'halting' to our graves. But the place of affliction is called by us to the last, "Peniel;" for there "we saw God face to face;" and from that hour we have journeyed on, sorrowful — yet always rejoicing.

Let us cleave to this thought of sustaining comfort. Other thoughts of other hearts may have perished. Others that used to think of us, and to interchange thoughts with us — may now only greet us with mute smiles from their *portraits on the wall*. The parent's arms that comforted us — may be moldering in the dust. The brook that once sang along its joyous

music — may be silent and still — we gaze upon a dry and waterless channel. But 'Jehovah lives!' Towards the mourner there is ONE heart ever throbbing with thoughts of *unalterable love!* Weeping one! you can say, in the midst even of intensest loneliness, and through anguished tears, "As for me, I am poor and needy — but You my God, are thinking about me right now! You are my Helper and my Savior. Do not delay, O my God."

## A GRACIOUS PARDON

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins!" — Isaiah 43:25

"I — yes, I alone" — the Great, the Pure, the Holy, the Righteous God! Surely if there is one way more than another, in which God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts, it is this — pardoning the *rebel*, welcoming the *undeserving*, forgiving and forgetting! How we remember the sins and the failings of others! How we harbor the recollection of ingratitude or unkindness. We say, "I *forgive* — but I cannot *forget*." God does *both*. Forgiveness is with Him no effort; it is a delight, "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake."

"I — yes, I alone" — the God who for weeks and months, and, it may be, for years, we have been wearying with our iniquities, whose Book of Remembrance is crowded with the record of our guilt; "I — yes, I alone" — the very Being who has registered that guilt — is ready to take the recording pen and erase the pages thus blotted with transgression!

How can He thus forgive? How can the God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity — cancel the handwriting that is against us in these volumes of transgression, so that they are remembered no more? It is through the atoning work of Jesus. "The Son of man has power to forgive sins." He shed His precious blood that He might have a right to say, "Your

sins, which are many — are all forgiven!" What a complete erasure! Crimson sins, scarlet sins; sins against grace, love, warning, and privilege — see them all cast into the depths of the sea, never again to be washed on shore!

"Whatever our *guiltiness* is," says Rutherford, "yet when it falls into the *sea of God's mercy* — it is but like a drop of blood fallen into the great ocean." The ancients said there was nothing so pure as *snow*. But we know of something purer — a human soul washed in the blood of Christ!

What is the impelling MOTIVE with God in so wondrous a forgiveness as this? It is, it can be — nothing He sees *in us*. No repentance, however sincere; no good works, however imposing or splendid. It is His own free sovereign grace! "For My own sake!" "Thus says the Lord God, I do not do this for your sakes, O house of Israel; but for My holy Name's sake." If He had meted out retribution in proportion to our deserts, His thoughts towards us must have been of evil, not of peace — our blood would, long before now, have been mingled with our sacrifices. But He is God, and not man. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." "O Israel you have destroyed yourself — but in Me is your help found."

Most wondrous chapter in the volume of God's thoughts — His full, free, unconditional, everlasting forgiveness of the guilty and undeserving! All the most gigantic thoughts of man, look poor and shabby after this. God, the just God — yet the Savior — just, in justifying the *ungodly*.

Lord! I accept the gracious overture of pardon. I joyfully repose on this thought of Your forgiving mercy. "My debt is very great, neither can I pay anything thereof myself. But I trust in the riches and graciousness of my Surety. Let Him free me, who became surety for me; who has taken my debt upon Himself." (John Gerhard) Yes, He has taken my debt! Think of God, not only willing to blot out and bury in oblivion a guilty past — but hear Him giving the assurance that the legion-sins are already cancelled. The debt has been discharged — the wages paid. He makes it an argument for immediate return and acceptance, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins! Return unto Me — for I have redeemed you!" What can we say about such wonderful things as these? "If God is for us — who can ever be against us?"

## ALMIGHTY GUIDANCE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I will *instruct* you and *teach* you in the way which you shall go; I will *guide* you with My eye." — Psalm 32:8

No more precious assurance can I have, than this — that I am under the constant, loving guidance of my heavenly Father — that He appoints the bounds of my habitation, and overrules all events for my good — that my whole life is a plan arranged by Him. Every apparent little contingency, as well as every momentous turn and crisis-hour — forms part of that plan! "God examines every path a man takes." "A man's heart devises his way — but the Lord directs his steps."

"I will *instruct* you and *teach* you." How patiently does this *almighty Preceptor* train, and with what infinite wisdom and tenderness does He adapt His varied teachings to the needs and requirements of His people! It is "line upon line;" — or if need be, *cross upon cross* — trial upon trial. Or it may be that startling providences are no longer required — the gentle indications of His will are enough, "I will guide you with *My eye*." The earthquake — the hurricane — the wind — the fire, may now have fulfilled their mission. "The still, small voice" is now sufficient.

And HOW does He promise to teach and to guide? Not in the way that *we* would like to go — the way of *our* own choosing — but "the way which you shall go." Often we would decide on pursuing the sunny highway. But God says, 'the rough mountain-track is best for you!' Often we would, like Israel, take the near and smooth road to Canaan by the land of the

Philistines. But God's *pillar-cloud* decides otherwise, and takes us by a circuitous route "by the way of the wilderness." Often we would prefer, like the disciples at sea of Tiberias, the safe path by the seashore, so as to avoid the gathering storm, "for the wind is contrary." But God says, "No!" He constrains us to get into the ship.

"He led them by the *right path* — to go to a city where they could live!" It is not for us to question His plans. He led His people of old — He leads them still — by the *right path*. There is a day coming when, in the words of Augustine, "both vessel and cargo safe, and not a hair of our heads hurt — we reach the haven of our desire," we shall own the wisdom of every earthly lesson, the "needs-be" of every wave in the troubled sea!

The gardener has occasionally to subject his plants to apparently rough usage — cutting, lopping, mutilating; reducing them to unsightly shapes — before they burst into flower. Summer, however, before long, vindicates the wisdom of his treatment, in its clusters of varied fragrance and beauty. So also, at times, does our heavenly Gardener see fit to use His pruning-knife. But be assured there is not one superfluous or redundant *lopping*. We shall understand and acknowledge an *infinitely wise necessity* for all — when the plant has unfolded itself into the full flower, bathed in the tints and diffusing the fragrance of Heaven.

Believer, go up and on your way — rejoicing in the *teaching and guidance of unerring Wisdom!* "I will guide you with My eye." The sleepless eye of *Israel's un-slumbering Shepherd* is upon you by day and by night — in sickness and in health — in joy and in sorrow — in life and in death! "Does not He who weighs the heart, perceive it? Does not He who guards your life, know it?" "But the Lord watches over those who fear Him, those who rely on His unfailing love."

## **HELP FOR THE FEEBLE**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Do not be afraid, *worm Jacob*; I will help you! says the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." — Isaiah 41:14

"Worm Jacob!" What weakness, insignificance, unworthiness! Yet it is this helpless, groveling "worm," which occupies 'the thoughts of God' — receives His sympathy, and has the assurance of His almighty aid.

Believer, beaten down it may be, with a great fight of affliction, or trembling under a sense of your unworthiness and guilt — mourning the coldness of your faith, the lukewarmness of your love, the frequency of your backslidings, the fitfulness of your best purposes, and the feebleness of your best services — your God draws near to you — He remembers that though you are a worm — still you are "worm Jacob," — His own beloved, covenant one; and He tells that the thoughts which He thinks towards you, are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil."

Mark His message of comfort, "Do not be afraid!" Mark His promise, "I will help you!" The guarantee which He gives for the fulfillment of that promise, is His own great name; "says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." "By whom shall Jacob arise?" says the prophet Amos, "for he is small." We have here an answer. He shall rise by the might of His covenant God — the God who has given JESUS as a pledge for the bestowment of all other blessings.

"I Myself will help you!" Yes, poor, weak, trembling one, "Jehovah", "your Redeemer", "the Holy One of Israel" — in other words, Omnipotence, Love, Righteousness, are all embarked on your side, and pledged for your salvation!

He loves to draw near to His people in the extremity of their weakness. "He will not break the *bruised reed*; He will not quench the *smoking flax*." Man would do so. Man would often crush the writhing worm under his feet — bid the trembling penitent away; but He whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, says, "Neither do I condemn you."

"He shall deliver the *needy* when he cries, the poor also, and him that has



no helper." "All you descendants of Jacob, honor Him! Revere Him, all you descendants of Israel! For He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from him — but has listened to his cry for help!" Listen to the testimony of one such lowly suppliant, "I called upon Your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You drew near in the day that I called upon You — You said, Do not be afraid!"

Seek to be humble. It is to the humble, that God 'gives grace.' He perfects strength in weakness. "When the *high cedars*," says Philip Henry, "tumble down, the *shrubs* are safe." "When I am weak," says the great apostle, "then am I strong." Worm Jacob, the halting cripple of Peniel, was made strong in the moment of his apparent weakness. He received a new name, "as a prince, he had power with God, and prevailed."

Be it mine to go in the strength of the Lord God. "I will help you!" is enough for all the emergencies of the *present*; and all the contingencies of an untried, and, it may be, a dark *future*. "But happy are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God."

## SOVEREIGNTY

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I form the light — and create darkness; I make peace — and create evil! I the LORD do all these things!" — Isaiah 45:7

What a sad world this would be — were it governed by *Fate!* Were its blended lights and shadows, its joys and sorrows — the result of *capricious accident* — or blind and wayward *chance!* How blessed to

think that each separate occurrence which befalls me — is "a thought of God" — the fulfillment of His own immutable purpose!

Is it the **material** world? It is He who "forms the *light* — and creates *darkness*" — who appoints the *sun* and *moon* for their seasons — who gives to the *sea* its decree — who watches the *sparrow* in its fall — who tends the *lily* in the field — and who paints the tiniest *flower* that blossoms in the meadow.

Is it the **moral** world? All events are predetermined and prearranged by Him! "*I make peace — and create evil!*" Both *prosperity* and *adversity* are His appointment. The Lord who of old prepared Jonah's shade-plant, prepared also the *worm*. He *gives* — and He *takes away*. He molds every tear. He "puts them into His bottle." He knows them all, counts them all, treasures them all. Not one of them falls unbidden — unnoted.

"The *lot* is cast into the lap — but the whole *disposing* thereof is of the Lord." Over every occurrence in nature and in providence He writes, "I the Lord do *all* these things!" True, His *thoughts* are often mysterious, and His *ways* are past finding out. We are led at times, amid the *bewildering mazes of His providential dealings*, to exclaim, "O Lord, how great are Your works, and Your thoughts are very deep!" Be it ours to defer our *verdict* — until their *full development*.

We cannot envision the thoughts and intents of the architect or engineer in the first clearing of the ground for the foundation of some gigantic structure. The uninitiated eye can discover nothing but piles of unshapely rubbish — a chaos of confusion. But gradually, as week by week passes — we see his thoughts molding themselves into visible and substantial shapes of order and beauty; and when the edifice at last stands before us complete, we discern that all which was mystery and confusion at first — was a necessary part and portion of the undertaking.

So is it, at present, regarding the mysterious dealings of God. Often, in vain, do we try to comprehend the purposes of *the Almighty Architect*, amid the dust and debris of the earthly foundations. Let us wait patiently, until we gaze on the finished structure of eternity.

Oh, blessed assurance — 'precious thought' of God — that *the loom of our life* is in the hands of the Great Designer — that it is He who is interweaving the *threads of our existence*: the light — and the dark, the acknowledged good — and the apparent evil. The *chain* of what is erroneously called "destiny," is in His keeping. He *knows* its every connecting link — He has *forged* each one on His own anvil! Man's purposes have failed, and are ever liable to fail — his brightest anticipations may be thwarted; his best-laid schemes may be frustrated.

Life is often a retrospect of crushed hopes — the bright rainbow-hues of morning, passing in its afternoon into damp mist and drizzling rain. "Many are the thoughts in a man's heart," (knowing no fulfillment nor fruition) "but the counsel of the Lord — that shall stand." "From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do. No one can reverse My actions!" "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!" Revelation 19:6

## **DIVINE JOY**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty! He will *save*, He will *rejoice* over you with joy; He will *rest* in his love. He will *rejoice* over you with singing!" — Zephaniah 3:17

Wondrous 'thought of God!' — God resting in His love — His love not for unsinning angels — but for fallen, redeemed man! The idea is, the joy and satisfaction of one reposing after the completion of some arduous work. God rested at creation — He rejoiced with joy over a new-born world. But this was a feeble type of His delightful rest and rejoicing over the new-born ransomed soul.

There is a beautiful *sequence* in the verse. It rises to a climax. First, God

"saves." Then He "rejoices." Then He "rests" (the contemplative rest of joy). Then, as if this were not enough, He *rejoices* over His people "with singing." Like an earthly warrior — first, the victory; then, the shout of joy; then the calm survey of the field of conquest; then the hymn of triumph.

He "rests in His love!" With God, love is a disposition. People may, from impulse, perform an act of love. Momentary feeling and emotion, even in the case of a naturally unloving heart, may prompt to some deed of generosity and kindness. But God's nature and His name being *love*, with Him there can be nothing fitful, arbitrary, capricious. His love is no wayward, inconstant stream — but a deep, quiet, everflowing, overflowing river!

A word or a look, may alienate and estrange your best earthly friend. But the *Friend of friends* is immutable. Oh, how intense must that love be for the guilty and the lost, which is thus spoken of by the lips of Divine filial love, "therefore," says Jesus, "does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life for the sheep."

"He will rejoice over you with singing!" "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride — so shall your God rejoice over you." The returning prodigal is met, not only with the tear and the grasp of parental forgiveness; but *high festival* is kept within these paternal halls, "It is fit that we should make merry and be glad." The gladdest countenance in that scene of joy, is not that of the haggard wanderer — but that of the rejoicing father, exulting over his *lost and found son!*

"There is joy in Heaven among the angels of God, over one sinner that repents" — but it is a joy which, though spreading through the concentric ranks, and reaching to the very circumference of glory, is deepest in the *center*. It begins at the throne — the *keynote* of that song is struck by God Himself! So also in the parable of the lost sheep. See how Christ speaks, as if He had all the joy to Himself of that wanderer's return; "He lays it on his shoulders *rejoicing*," and says, "Rejoice with me!" The joy of His people is part of His own, "These things have I spoken unto you — that *My* joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

"God is in the *midst* of you;" "He is *mighty*;" "He will *save*." What more does any poor sinner need than this — a present God, a mighty God, a Savior God? Able to save, willing to save — even more — delighting to save! "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him." "Since you are precious and honored in My sight — and because I love you!"

## SUFFICIENT GRACE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:9

The apostle's 'thoughts' were desponding ones — when his God whispered in his ear this precious thought of comfort. A *thorn* in the flesh — a messenger from Satan — had been sent to buffet him! We know not what this *thorn* may have been. God purposely leaves it unidentified, that each may make an *individual application* to his own particular case and circumstances.

But who, in their diversified and chequered experience, has not to tell of some similar trial? Some *dead fly* in life's otherwise fragrant ointment — some *sorrow* which casts a softened shadow over perhaps an otherwise sunny path! Infirm health; worldly loss; domestic problems; family bereavement; the discharge of arduous and painful duty; the treachery of tried and trusted friends; the sting of wounded pride or disappointed ambition; the fierce struggle with inward corruption and un-mortified sin; the scorpion-dart of a violated and accusing conscience! And the world all the time, perhaps little knowing or dreaming of the inward conflict, the life-long trial, the fountain of tears, though "a fountain sealed."

As the apostle earnestly entreated that his *thorn* might be taken away — so may you, reader, also have prayed fervently and long — that your *trial* might be averted, your *sorrow* mitigated, if not removed! You doubtless imagine that it would be far better — were this messenger of Satan, this spirit of evil, exorcized and cast out! But here again, God's thoughts are often not our thoughts!

What was the answer to the apostle's earnest petition, when "three times he pleaded with the Lord to take it away." It was not granting the removal of the trial — but it was *better*. It was the promise of *grace to bear it*. "And He said unto me, *My grace is sufficient for you!*" It was enough; he asked no more. He may have demurred at first to the strange answer — so unlike what he *expected*, so unlike what he *wished*. But he was led before long, not only joyfully to *acquiesce* — but heartily to own and acknowledge the higher and better wisdom of the Divine procedure, "Most *gladly* therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me!"

This, too, may be God's dealings with *you*. Often and again, it may be, have you taken your hidden sorrow — the burdening secret of your heart — laid it on the mercy-seat, and with importunate tears implored that it might be taken away! Yet the *sorrow* still remains! But, nevertheless, remember: the prayer is not unanswered. It has been answered — not perhaps according to *your* thoughts or desires — but according to the *better* thoughts and purposes of your heavenly Father!

*The thorn is still left to pierce and lacerate* — but *strength* has been given to *bear* it! The trial, be what it may, has taught you, as it did Paul, the lesson of your own weakness — and your dependence on Divine aid. It has been a needful *drag on your chariot wheels* — a needful *clipping of your wings* — lest, like the great apostle, "you should be exalted above measure." Who can complain of the heaviest of sorrows — if they have thus been the means alike of revealing to us our own weakness — and of endearing to us the all-sufficient grace of a Savior God?

Blessed, comforting assurance: "in all time of our need," that God will deal out the requisite grace. Seated by us like a kind physician, with His hand on our pulse — He will watch our weakness, and accommodate the

divine *supply* — to our several needs and circumstances. He will not allow the *thorn* to pierce too far — He will not allow the *temptation* to go beyond what we are able to endure. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation." "As your *day* — so shall your *strength* be."

Grace "sufficient" will be given — sufficient for every emergency. His *everlasting arms* are ever lower than our troubles! I will go forth bearing my cross, fortified with the assurance, and breathing the prayer, "Summon your might, O God. Display your power, O God, as You have in the past!" "Do not be afraid — for I am *with* you. Do not be dismayed — for I am your God! I will *strengthen* you. I will *help* you. I will *uphold* you with My victorious right hand!"

## COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

*"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed! says the LORD who has mercy on you."* — Isaiah

54:10

The *mountains* are the most stable objects in the material world — nature's *noblest emblem of immutability*. But these have "change" written upon their stupendous brows. Time is furrowing them with wrinkles — and wearing down their colossal forms. Atmospheric influences are subjecting them to continual waste and decay. The snowy-crowned Alp is included in the doom, "All these things shall be dissolved!"

But, more enduring than *mountains of granite* — is *God's kindness*.

Whatever is dearest to us *may* change — and sooner or later *must* perish. The *gourd* we have lovingly nurtured and tended — may wither — like Jonah's, just when most needed! The *gold* we have taken a life-time to amass — may be forfeited by one adverse turn of capricious fortune! The *brook* which for long years has sung its joyful way at our side — may be dried in its channel. The "staff and beautiful rod" which blossomed in our household — may be broken, and strewed in withered leaves at our feet! The *cistern* — hewn with such pains — may be fractured by a stroke of the chisel while hewing it, and lie scattered on the ground in fragments of shapeless ruin!

But God's love is immutable and immovable! Mark the succession of golden links, "precious thoughts," in our motto-verse. He speaks of the "covenant," "the covenant of peace," — of "My peace" — a covenant not to be "removed." These are *glorious guarantees*. Mountains, rocks, forests — all *may* decay and *will* decay; but "the Lord lives", "His years shall have no end!" "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon those who fear Him."

Nothing can assail the believer's *safety* — or undermine his *security*. The oriental shepherds used to surround their flocks and folds, with a belt of fire, to scare away the devouring wolves. 'I,' says God to His Zion, and to each child of Zion, 'I will be that fiery defense. This covenant of My peace will be as a *wall of flame!* Once within My fold — you are safe forever. My sheep *shall* never — *can* never, perish!'

"Our cause," says Luther, "is in the very hands of Him who can say with unimpeachable dignity, 'No one shall pluck them out of My hands!' I would not have it in our hands, and it would not be desirable that it were so. I have had many things in *my* hands — and I have lost them all! But whatever I have been able to place in *God's* hands — I still possess." "As soon might Satan," says Charnock, "pull God out of Heaven, undermine the security of Christ, and tear Him from the bosom of the Father — as deprive His people of their spiritual life."

Believer, rejoice in this faithful, covenant-keeping God. Anchor your soul on this *Rock of the Divine veracity*. The great adversary may try at times to impair your confidence — shake your trust — lead you to question your



personal interest in the great salvation. But what are his *negatives*, compared to one *affirmative* of that God who cannot lie? His covenant of peace has something better than your own ever-fluctuating frames and feelings to rest upon. It is ratified by His own oath and promise. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations." "Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever!"

## CHASTENING LOVE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"As many as I love — I rebuke and chasten." — Revelation 3:19

"I have chosen you in the *furnace of affliction*." — Isaiah 48:10

Do the well known tones of a mother's voice hush the child asleep, that has been startled from its couch by unquiet dreams? These two "thoughts of God" above — the voice of our heavenly Parent — may well lull our tossed spirits to rest, and lead us to pillow our heads with confidence in His holy will.

There are times, indeed, when, despite of better convictions and a truer philosophy, our own thoughts are mingled with guilty doubts — unworthy surmises — regarding the *rectitude of the Divine dealings*. We are led to say or to think with aged Jacob, "All these things are against me!" — there can be no kindness or faithfulness, surely, in such a sorrow as this! "Yes," is the reply of the *Divine Chastener*, "that trial, with all its apparent severity, is a thought of My love — a proof, and pledge of My interest in your well-being. In these fierce furnace-fires, I have chosen you — in these I will keep you; from these, I will bring you forth a vessel refined and fitted for the Master's use!"

"That this affliction is unspeakable love," says one who could write from the depths of experience, "I have no doubt; because He who has sent it is no new Friend — but a tried and a precious One." "The afflictions with which we are visited," says another, "are so many notes in which God says, 'I have not forgotten you!'" He sits, as refiner of His own furnace, tempering the fury of the flames. The human parent, in chastisement, may act at times capriciously, guided by wayward impulse; "but God disciplines us for our profit — that we may be made partakers of His holiness."

Rather, surely, the acutest discipline, the *hardest strokes of the rod* — than to be left unchecked and un-reclaimed in our career of worldliness, forgetfulness, and sin — God uttering that severest word, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will only revolt more and more." As if He had said, "Why should I any longer 'think' of you, or attempt to reclaim you? My warnings and remonstrances are in vain — I will return to My place — I will give you up!" Oh, most fearful of chastisements — when God's loving thoughts, and patient thoughts, and forbearing thoughts are exhausted, and when our stubborn unbelief brings Him to utter the doom of abandonment!

Tried one, recognize henceforth, in your sorest afflictions, a Father's *rod*, hear in them a Father's voice, see in each what will invest them with a halo of subdued glory, a mysterious, it may be — but yet a 'precious thought' of God, and that thought kindness and mercy. That *loss* of worldly substance — it was a thought of God. That withering *disappointment*, the blighting of young hope — it was a thought of God. That protracted *sickness*, that wasting disease — it was a thought of God. The *smiting* of that clay idol — it was a thought of God.

This is surely enough to wake up the tuneless broken strings of your heart to melody, "Whom the Lord loves — He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives." He is never so near to you as in a time of trial — never does He so reveal His heart as then. *Trial* is God's *love-letter* to His beloved people. "I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul."

## UNBOUNDED PATIENCE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within Me, and My compassion overflows! No, I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy!" — Hosea 11:8-9

What a tender unfolding of the heart of God is here! It is the yearning thought of the fondest of Fathers over a nation of wayward prodigals! How grievous had been their ingratitude. He speaks in the beginning of the chapter, of His loving thoughts to Israel "when a child," and of His specially gentle upbringing of them, "I Myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn't know or even care that it was I who took care of him. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love!" Yet what is the requital for all this endearing tenderness? "My people are bent to backsliding from Me!"

Surely the next entry in the Divine record will be the sentence of righteous retribution, "Ephraim is joined to his idols — let him alone!" No! it is a burst of fond parental love; such as, at times, is dimly pictured on earth, when we see a mother with breaking heart and eyes dim with weeping, locking in her embrace the *prodigal boy* who has wounded her, embittered her existence, and scorned her tears.

Listen to the tender apostrophe, "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go?" (give you over, that is, to the vengeance of the enemy.) He remembers "the cry" of Sodom and Gomorrah of a former age, and "their sin, which was very grievous." The iniquity of Israel can be compared in turpitude only to that of these inhabitants of the plain, on

whom "the Lord rained fire and brimstone from out of heaven." Admah and Zeboiim were two adjoining cities in the Valley of Sodom, which were involved in this terrible overthrow. "How," says He, "How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim?" And then, when He sums up with the declaration, "I will not completely destroy Israel." He gives as the reason, "for I am God and not a mere mortal!"

Yes, truly, Your thoughts, O God, are not as man's thoughts; Your ways are not as man's ways; had they been so, long before now how many of us would have been "given up," and had executed against us the *guilty cumberer's doom* — the God we have so often grieved and provoked by our obstinacy and rebellion, swearing in His wrath that "we should never enter into His rest." But, for all this, His anger is turned away from us; His hand of mercy is outstretched still! Well may we say, with the stricken monarch of Israel, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord — for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man."

Backslider, return! Though you may have tried the patience of your God by years of provocation — yet He still "keeps silence;" He waits to be gracious; He is not willing that any should perish. Let His goodness and patience, His tenderness and long-suffering, lead you to repentance.

Trembling penitent, bowed down under a sense of your base ingratitude, your prolonged alienation, fearful lest a guilty past may have cut you off from the hope of pardoning mercy — return! You are saying, perhaps, in the bitter reproach of self-abandonment and despair, "I am given up! I am delivered over to the tyranny of my spiritual enemies — the Lord has cast me off forever! He can be favorable no more!" No! hear His wondrous, precious thoughts — the musings of that Infinite Heart which you have wounded, "How shall I give you up? Man would crush his enemy — but I am God, and not man. I will not destroy, I will save you!" "Behold," He says in another place, "You have spoken and done as many evil things as you could; yet, return unto Me!" "My wayward children," says the Lord, "come back to Me, and I will heal your wayward hearts!"

## A GRACIOUS ALTERNATIVE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Or let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." — Isaiah 27:5

God had just spoken of the certain destruction that would overtake obstinate and incorrigible sinners. These He describes under the similitude of "briers and thorns set against Me in battle." "I will go through them," says He, "I will burn them up together!" He guards us, by a preliminary statement, against entertaining the supposition that He has any delight in the exercise of such stern retribution, "Fury is not in Me." There is with Him, whose nature and whose name is Love — no vindictive passion, no capricious wrath, no wayward impulses of anger — analogous to those in man. His thoughts, in this respect too, are not our thoughts.

His hatred at sin is a *principle*. It is the deliberate recoil of His own infinitely Holy nature from iniquity — that iniquity which His Justice and Righteousness require Him to punish. Let us beware of a harsh and repulsive theology that would assimilate God to the avenging deities of the heathen. He is "slow to smite." He "delights in mercy." "Judgment is His *strange* work." "He visits iniquity to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. He shows mercy to thousands of those who love Him."

At the same time, neither must we forget that He is 'glorious in holiness.' To that very revelation which He made to Moses of His name and memorial as, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," He appends the solemn averment, "and who will by no means clear the guilty."

Oh, most solemn, most terrible 'thought' to those who are still as "thorns and briers against Him in battle" — who are still enemies by nature and wicked works. They cannot escape His wrath! They cannot elude His righteous retribution. If they continue in sin, they can know only in their

bitter experience, "what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God!" "He will burn them up together!" He is to all such, "a consuming fire!"

But our motto-verse contains a *wondrous alternative of mercy*. At the very moment when sinners are rushing with blind madness against the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler — He whom they have made their enemy has a 'thought' in His heart of *loving reconciliation*. Listen to the gracious proposal, "Or, let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me."

Who is "the *Strength* of God?" Let Scripture answer, "Let Your hand be upon the *man* of Your right hand, upon the Son of man whom You made strong for Yourself." Christ is "the Power of God", "the Arbitrator between us, who has laid His hand upon us both." He, also, is "our Peace." "Being justified by faith — we have peace with God." Peace, "not as the world gives," was His parting, special legacy. It is a sure and well-grounded peace, purchased by His atoning blood, and secured and perpetuated by His continual intercession. Hence the gracious Proposer of reconciliation adds the assurance, "And he SHALL make peace with Me." It is a glorious certainty. Take hold of that arm, and salvation is sure. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." A *present* peace, a *sure* peace, a *permanent* peace, peace *now*, and peace *forever*. "None is able to pluck you out of His hand!"

"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock. Stir up Your STRENGTH, and come and save us!" "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

## **TENDER DEALING**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Therefore, behold, I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her!" — Hosea 2:14-15

"Therefore" has a strangely beautiful connection in this verse. God's people had been grievously backsliding. He had been loading them with mercies — and they had been guiltily disowning His hand! They had taken the *gifts* — and spurned *the Giver!* "She did not know that *I* gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold!" No, more, she had shamelessly gone after her lovers — she had deliberately preferred the ways of sin — to the ways of God!

What will His thoughts be towards this treacherous one? Can they be anything else but those of merited retribution — casting her out, and casting her off forever? We expect when we hear the concluding word, "therefore," that it is the awful summing up of His controversy — the turning of the Judge to pronounce righteous sentence. We listen — but lo! only *utterances of love* are heard! "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards."

This is the way He deals with His people still. They often forget Him in the glare and glitter of prosperity. He then hushes the din of the world — takes them out into the solitudes of trial — and there — while abased, humbled, chastened — He unburdens in their ear His thoughts of love, forgiveness, and "comfort." Oh, what *infinite tenderness* characterizes the dealings of this *heavenly Chastener!* How slow to abandon those who have abandoned Him! Every means and instrumentality is employed, rather than leave them to the bitter fruits of their own guilty estrangement!

The kindest human thoughts towards an offender are harshness and severity, when compared with His. What were the thoughts — the deeds — of the *watchmen* in the Song of Solomon towards the Bride, as she wandered disconsolate in search of her heavenly Bridegroom — and that, too, in consequence of her own un-watchfulness and sloth? They tore off her veil — smote her — reviled her — and loaded her with reproach! But

when she found her lost Lord, though she had kept Him standing amid the cold dews of night — He smites her not — He upbraids her not — no angry *syllable* escapes His lips. He brings her into the wilderness, and speaks comfortably to her — and the next picture in the inspired allegory, is the *restored one* coming up from that wilderness "leaning on her Beloved!"

Reader! is God dealing with you by affliction? Has He blighted your earthly hopes, "caused your mirth to cease," "destroyed your vines and fig-trees," and made all around you a wilderness? Think what it would have been — had He allowed you to go on in your course of guilty estrangement — your *truant heart* plunging deeper and deeper in its career of sin! Is it not mercy in Him — that He has *dimmed* that false and deceptive glitter of earth? You would not listen to His voice in prosperity. You took the ten thousand precious gifts of His bestowing — but there was no *breathing of gratitude* to the *Infinite Bestower*! You sat, it may be — sullen, peevish, proud, ungrateful — at the very moment when His horn of plenty was being emptied in your lap!

He has brought you "*into the wilderness.*" As Jesus did with His disciples of old, when He would nerve them for coming trial — He has taken you to "a high mountain alone," — "a solitary place" — apart from the world. He has there *humbled* you and proved you. He may have touched you to the quick — touched you in your tenderest point — severed hallowed companionships — leveled in the *dust clay idols*! Yes, it was all *His* doing! "Behold, *I will allure*", "*I will bring into the wilderness*", "*I will comfort.*" He leads us *into* the wilderness — and He leads us *through* it — and *out* of it!

As He *gives* us our comforts: our "oil and wine," our "wool and flax," our "vines and our fig-trees" — just so, when He sees fit, does He *take them away*! Whatever are the voices He may be now addressing to me, be it mine to recognize in them the thoughts and utterances of unalterable love, and to say, "I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying, for He speaks peace to His people, His faithful ones."



## A GRACIOUS REMEMBRANCE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me; and how you followed Me in the wilderness." — Jeremiah 2:2

Backslider! listen to this Divine retrospect — a precious and encouraging 'thought' regarding your past. This may be the present sorrowful feeling and confession of your heart, "I am not what once I was! Once I loved my God. I can remember hallowed seasons of communion and fellowship, of which, alas! the memory is now all that remains. I once was enabled to live, somewhat at least, under the sovereignty of that lofty motive, walking so as to please Him. But I have forsaken and forgotten my first love. I have to mourn over a treacherous, wandering heart! I am conscious of deterioration — spiritual declension. Self-indulged sin — permitted worldliness, in some subtle shape or form, has crept in — blunted the fine edge of conscience, dulled the sensibilities of my spiritual nature, dimmed my soul to its grander destinies, and left me to muse in my better moments, in sadness and tears, over the wreck of former joys!"

Are you prone to feel, in this desponding contrast between *past devotedness* and *present faithlessness*, as if the Lord's countenance and favor must be withdrawn from you forever — that there can be nothing but the bitterness of an ever sadder and more hopeless estrangement? No, no! He remembers that time, "the devotion of your youth" — these early vows, that early pledged love; the vows so poorly kept, the love so strangely diminished. While the *pages* of your own memory are all blurred by sin — He remembers the earlier entries and inscriptions of devotedness that stood on these yet un-blotted pages. He remembers the efforts (it may be — the feeble efforts) you made in His service — the secret struggles in the closet, the fervent prayers and recorded vows of the sanctuary, the testimony borne for Him in the world.

How tenderly and lovingly does God deal with His backsliding children!

He has no delight in remembering their *sin*. He loves to exhume rather from a forgotten past — anything which He sees in them worthy of commendation — even, notwithstanding much, it may be, of present frailty, inconsistency, and self-righteousness. He speaks of "My *servant* Job." He speaks of Lot as "that *righteous* man." See in the case of *Peter* what his Lord "remembers," when the erring disciple is confronted on the lake-shore. It is not the faithless hours of his apostolic manhood; but it is "the devotion of his youth." Not Jerusalem, with its recent Palace-hall; but Bethsaida, Capernaum, Caesarea-Philippi, and many other scenes and associations of hallowed, devoted love.

And so with us. He is willing in our case, too, to forget the long-intervening season of coldness, and distance, and alienation, if we offer the *promise* of renewed obedience. Yes, fearful one, take courage! Cast your eye back on those gracious seasons "when the candle of the Lord did shine, and when by His light you walked through darkness." On that time, which the lapse of years may have partially dimmed or obliterated, the loving thoughts of your God delight to rest. "You may have banished Me," He seems to say, "from your thoughts; but I have not banished you from Mine", "I remember the devotion of your youth." "Now let Your unfailing love comfort me, just as You promised me, Your servant."

## **CORRECTION IN MEASURE**

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I will correct you — in measure." — Jeremiah 30:11

Here is a gracious and alleviating "thought of God" in a season of trial, "I will *correct* you," says He. He does not disguise that He will send affliction — that He will subject His own people to chastisement. He knows them too well — He loves them too well — to allow the unbroken sunshine, the unfurrowed, waveless sea. The *rough stone* needs polishing

— the *musical chord* must be strained to give forth sweet sounds — notes of harmony; but all is "in measure."

Amid our tossings, night and day, on the *sea of trial*, how comforting the assurance, "When my spirit was overwhelmed, then You knew my path." He suits the *yoke* — to the *neck*; He adapts His chastisements — to the *characters* and *necessities*, the *strengths* of His people. All are meted out, all are weighed in the balances of *undeviating rectitude*.

There is no *needless wrinkle* on any brow — no redundant or superfluous *drop* in the cup of suffering. He who paints every *flower* and molds every *raindrop* in the natural world — fashions *every tear* in the dimmed eye, and imparts every delicate touch and shading to grief.

A human father may err — he may wear a needless frown — he may punish with undue and unnecessary severity, "But thus says the Lord your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord your God, who *teaches you to profit*, which leads you by the way that you should go."

Tried one! seek that this be the end of God's present dealing — that "He teaches you to profit." Too often, in seasons of sorrow, our great aim is to receive comfort. That is a limited and selfish view. God has a higher end — a nobler lesson, "He disciplines us for our profit." Trial is a season for expecting great blessings to ourselves, and for greatly glorifying God. It was from the *bruised spices* of old that the perfumed clouds of incense arose! The fallen, withered rose, emits the sweetest fragrance — the butterfly shuns it, the bee passes it by — the very rays of sunshine can gild it with no beauty; yet it loads the summer air with richer perfume than when it hung in full-blown glory on its parent branch.

Where the *lava stream* once carried desolation and ruin down the mountainside, vines are now seen hanging their purple clusters. Just so, where the *stream of sorrow* once swept distressingly down, are now clusters of heavenly graces — the fruits of righteousness — to the glory and praise of God.

I may not be able at times to see the "measure" in His correction. There may, to the eye of sense, appear nothing but a *capricious exercise of*

*sovereign power*. No chastening for the present may seem to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, *afterward* it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Oh, let me joyfully endorse every such affliction with an "Even so, Father, because this was Your good pleasure!" "Not my will — but may Your will be done!" "Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs!"

## PROMISED DELIVERANCE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Because he has set his love upon Me — therefore will I deliver him. I will set him on high — because he has known My name." — Psalm 91:14

Here we have the *prodigal* looking and longing for a father's welcome — the *prisoner* striving to break his chains and set himself free — the *wounded bird* struggling in the furrow, and wailing out its plaintive note, "Oh that I might fly away — and be at rest!"

"I will deliver him," is the gracious thought and declaration of an *unseen* but *gracious* God. "No, not only will I deliver him — save him from wrath and condemnation — but I will 'set him on high' — I will bestow exalted honors on him — I will adopt him as My child, and finally glorify him!"

Most frequently, indeed, He delivers independently and irrespectively of any antecedent love on our part. "For God's gifts and His calling are irrevocable." His grace often triumphs in the case of those who have never cast one look of love towards Him — He "sets on high" those to whom for a whole lifetime, His name has been unknown. Nevertheless, to any who may be seeking after Him, if haply they may find Him — to those who *feel their chains*, and are longing for emancipation — who, by reason of permitted sin or omitted duty, may be in spiritual darkness, exclaiming, in the bitterness of their estrangement, "Oh that I knew

where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" — it is an encouraging thought to such — that they have His own promise of deliverance.

The *Believer*, in Solomon's Song, is beautifully likened to a *dove* in the clefts of the rock. The timid, fluttering, trembling wanderer is welcomed into the crevices of the Rock of Ages. He can fold his weary wing under the shadow of the Almighty; he can find rest and peace in the very Being whom he has offended. Yes, desponding one, He is waiting to be gracious. If you are now casting one fond, ardent, loving look towards your God — if you are cherishing one longing desire for His returning favor, "He will deliver you." This will be your testimony, as it has been of many, "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me — and He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire! He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along."

"What have I to do any more with idols?" was the soliloquy and *resolve* of penitent Ephraim, when, divorcing himself from all sinful attachments, all rival claimants for the throne of his affections, he turned his face towards his God. "I have heard him and observed him," says the great Being who was watching the penitent's tears, counting the throbs of his anguished spirit. And He adds the assurance of *supporting* grace and strength, "From Me is your fruit found."

Do I "know His name?" Acquainting myself with God, am I now at peace? Do I feel that His loving-kindness is better than life? Amid the brokenness of *nature's cisterns* — am I turning with earnest longing to the infinite and only satisfying *fountain-head*, like the deer panting for the waterbrooks? All other objects of earthly love and enjoyment are perishable. But "the name of the Lord is a strong tower — the righteous runs into it, and is safe." "Great is the blessing," says one who knew well that Name, "that the *anchor* of our love is firmly fixed beneath the *cross* of Christ! The silver cord of life may be snapped in a moment; but this is embedded in the cleft of the Rock forever!" "Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, O Lord, have never abandoned anyone who searches for You."

## THOUGHT UPON THOUGHT

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name — you are Mine! When you go through deep waters — I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty — you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression — you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" — Isaiah 43:1-3

What a library of "precious thoughts!" What an unlocking of the full heart of God do these verses contain! In reading them, we may say indeed with the Psalmist, "Many, O Lord my God, are Your thoughts into us." Each *clause* is in itself a *volume!* Well may the Divine speaker begin with the words, "Do not be afraid!" These tender thoughts and tender assertions remind us of the gush of parental affection when a child is in danger or is afraid, and when its most loving earthly friend heaps assurance on assurance to quiet and lull its misgivings.

"I have *redeemed* you," seems to be the foundation-thought of comfort in this cluster of exceeding great and precious promises. No other blessing could have been ours — but for "Redeeming love." And as Christ is the *Alpha* — so is He the *Omega* of all consolation. Hence this inspired register of spiritual privileges is terminated by the assurance, "I am your *Savior*." The pendant chain of "precious thoughts" has these two words for its support, "Redeemer," "Savior;" and each separate link in the intermediate line of blessings is connected with Him who is the "Beginner" and "Finisher" of our faith.

God, indeed, forewarns us in the diversified symbols here employed, that the trials of His people are to be varied in *kind* — as well as difficult in

*degree*: "waters," "rivers," "fires," "flames." Yet we may well rise above them all, under the sublime consciousness, that the chain from first to last — is in the hands of Him who died for us.

We are here further assured, not only that God is the *Author* of our troubles — but that He Himself is *in* them all; that His 'thoughts' are upon us as we "pass" through the waters, and "walk" through the fires. He is minutely cognizant of all that befalls us; and is alike able and willing to grant us assistance and support. Others cannot do so. It is in their case like watching the bursting of the distant thunderstorm, or the vessel plunging in the distant sea, without the ability to render assistance. But "You know my thoughts afar off." God is not only our "refuge and strength," but "*a present help* in trouble."

More than this — He has set *bounds* to our trials. The rivers and streams will *purify* — but not overflow or overwhelm! The fires will *refine* — but not scorch or burn! He has too deep an interest in those of whom He says, "I have called you by your name — you are Mine!" to allow our afflictions to go further than He sees to be absolutely needful. Never are His "thoughts" more fondly centered upon us than in a time of trouble. His loving presence *tempers* the fury of the fiercest furnace-flames! His everlasting arms are underneath the deepest and darkest waves! "O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as You, Lord? Faithfulness is Your very character. You are the one who rules the oceans. When their waves rise in fearful storms, You subdue them."

## EVERLASTING ESPOUSALS

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I will betroth you unto Me forever! I will betroth you in righteousness

and justice, in love and mercy." — Hosea 2:19

The most endearing as well as the most exalted relationships of earth are employed to illustrate and symbolize God's love to His people. He is represented as:

comforting as a *mother*;  
pitying as a *father*;  
sympathizing as a *friend*;  
healing as a *physician*;  
bestowing as a *king*.

Here He is described as entering into *everlasting espousals* with His Church, and with every redeemed member of it — in the depths of eternity past, pledging His vow to His betrothed Bride — putting the engagement-ring on her finger; summoning Righteousness, Justice, Love, and Mercy — as witnesses of the magnificent ceremony, to sign and ratify the marriage-contract.

How uncertain are earth's apparently securest ties! Brother may be severed from brother, husband from wife, child from parent, friend from friend. But, in our union with God — linked to Him in the bonds of the ever-lasting covenant — the pang of separation can neither be *felt* nor *feared*. Age can never plough its furrows on the brow. Sickness can never blanch the cheek. Death can never unlock the fountain of tears. The grave can never close over our "loved and lost." "I will betroth you to Me *forever!*"

As in the human union which here, as in other passages, is made the type and symbol of the nobler covenant — that Divine espousal is reared on the twofold basis of HONOR and of LOVE. Righteousness and Justice, the two representatives of God's honor, come first; Love and Mercy follow. It is a union founded on everlasting truth, justice, and rectitude. These attesting witnesses sign the contract around the Cross of Calvary. There "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." What an endless *dowry* did that mighty Sacrifice purchase and secure for the *Bride of Heaven!*



Soon the festal-day shall be here; when the betrothed spouse shall be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom — ushered into the blessed pavilion of His own presence! The marriage-procession is even now on foot. The train is sweeping along to the hall of the King's palace. Righteousness, Justice, Love, Mercy — these are the *four torch-bearers* lighting the way to the gladsome scene! Have we heard and obeyed the midnight summons, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes! Go out to meet Him!" "Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know Me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

## WONDROUS COMFORT

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I, even I — am He who comforts you!" — Isaiah 51:12

How soothing the thought for the weary head to lean upon, that in the midst of our bitterest trials, we have the great God of Heaven for our comforter! "Dry your tears!"

He seems to say: "I am by your side, O poor afflicted one! Other *comforts* may fail you — other *comforters* may prove utterly powerless to gauge the depths of your sorrow and to heal your aching wounds — but I, as God, infinite in Wisdom, Omniscience, and Love — know all the peculiarities of your case! I will be to you better than the best and tenderest of human friends. My delight is to 'uphold all who fall, and to raise up all those who are bowed down.' I have 'precious thoughts' reserved for the day of calamity — thoughts that are whispered into the ear of the sorrowful. *I,*

*even I* — the same hand that has wounded — will bind up; the same hand that is strong to smite — will be strong to save. I will give you solaces undreamt of in the day of prosperity; songs in the night, and wells of refreshing in the valley of weeping!"

"Is it *sickness* that has blanched your cheek; and chained you down for weeks and months — or maybe years — to a couch of pain and languishing? I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you!"

"Is it your *worldly schemes* that have been blighted — moth and rust corrupting the earthly treasure? I will give you compensating riches, beyond the spoiler's touch and the throw of capricious fortune!"

"Is it *bereavement* that has traced lines of sadness on your brow, created vacant chairs in your household, left your *heart of hearts* stripped and desolate? Be still. I will take the place of the mourned one. I will come and fill up these aching voids, that yawning chasm — with My own loving presence. The *shallow rill* is gone — but you will have in exchange the *Infinite Fountainhead!*"

"Is it *sin* that is making your countenance sad — the bitter thought of estrangement from Me whose favor alone is life? Wearied with the successive failure of all worldly sources of satisfaction and happiness, are you turning with longing, wistful gaze, like the battered flower to the sunlight, towards Myself, 'the living God,' wondering if there can be peace and forgiveness for such as you? I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions! I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely; for My anger is turned away from you!"

"*I, even I!*" Do not doubt His *ability* or *willingness* to comfort; God is beautifully spoken of as "the God of all comfort," "the comforter of all who are cast down." As wide as His afflicted family are — He has consolations commensurate with every diversity of experience. He has a thought of *comfort* — for every thought of *sorrow*. "In the multitude of the sorrows I have in my heart," says the Psalmist, "Your comforts delight my soul." His message to the Church of old, after burden on burden of reluctantly-spoken woe, was, "*Comfort, comfort My people!*" Repeating the word is the usual Hebrew method of *intensifying* — as if He wished to

tell, with what *delight* He passed from the gloomy prophetic utterances of judgment — to the joyous promises of mercy and love!

"He does not afflict willingly," [or, 'He does not afflict from His heart'] "nor grieve the children of men." As if affliction in itself were alien to the heart and the thoughts of God!

And let the thought of God the Comforter be all the more precious to me, since that God is Immanuel — our *Brother* on the throne of Heaven! Himself once the Prince of Sufferers — He is supremely qualified, by the exquisite sensibilities of His human nature — to enter into every pang which rends the heart! *I, even I* — the God-Man who shed tears over the bereaved of Bethany! *I, even I* — who welcomed *weeping penitence* to My feet! *I, even I* — who Myself struggled with temptation, grappled with superhuman anguish, lived a life of sorrow, and died a death of shame! *I, even I* — that same Jesus, "am He who comforts you." "Though You have made me see troubles, many and bitter, You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up!"

## COMPLETE FORGIVENESS

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." — Hebrews 8:12

No thought can be more precious than this — God's thought of *mercy* to the unrighteous and undeserving. The consciousness of past sin lies like a cold avalanche on many a heart. "How can man be just with God?" "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities — O Lord, who shall stand?" "What then shall I do when God rises up? And when He confronts me — what shall I answer Him?" These are the solemn questions which, despite of all efforts to silence or evade them, are ever and always confronting the most

indifferent and unconcerned. Blessed be God, He has not left them unanswered. He can bestow pardon on the unrighteous, and bury the *remembrance of sin* in the depths of oblivion!

"There is forgiveness with You — that You may be feared." "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption!" By a precious, peerless thought of infinite love, He has "devised ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him." He "spared not His own Son — but delivered Him up for us all." The true anti-typical scapegoat has borne away the burden of imputed sin into a land of forgetfulness — so that on that *great day* "when God rises up," "the iniquity of Judah shall be sought for — and shall not be found!"

May I be enabled joyfully to accept this glorious method of salvation, by which, in strict accordance with every attribute of the Divine nature, and every requirement of the Divine law — forgiveness may be dispensed to the *chief of sinners*. Nothing I could *do*, or that others could do for me — would prove in any way availing to purchase that salvation. Lebanon itself, with all its cedars piled for altar and for fuel, and all its flocks for the sacrifice and burnt offering — would have been an insufficient atoning sacrifice!

But this 'precious thought' comes winged with love from the Cross of Calvary, "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." He is as *able* — as He is willing; and as *willing* — as He is able, to save "unto the uttermost!"

Is it *crimson* and *scarlet* sins — some deep, dark, foul blots on the tablet of memory — their terrible remembrance haunting like specters from the abyss? — God says, 'I will make even these like the spotless snow and the stainless wool!' What is *that great mountain of transgression* before the *true Zerubbabel*, the storms of judgment brooding over it? It has become a *plain* — the work of Jesus has leveled it!

What is that great cloud, the aggregate of bypast sin, charged with condemnation, spreading itself overhead? Lo! it has melted away, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions; and, as a cloud, your sins!" The Sun of righteousness has shone upon it. His rays, like burning

arrows, have dispersed the elements of wrath. There is nothing now seen but the bright azure of a radiant heaven; and a voice is heard, amid the glorious sunshine, uttering the words, "Return unto Me — for I have redeemed you!" "Who is a God like You, who pardons sin — and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever — but delight to show mercy!"

## MORE THAN PARENTAL LOVE

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"But Zion said: *'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me!'*

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget — I will not forget you!"

— Isaiah 49:14-15

There are seasons in the experience of many of God's people, when, by reason of outward trials or inward troubles, they feel desolate and desponding. Spiritual comforts are gone. They have little of the hallowed communion they once enjoyed with their heavenly Father — little fervor or filial nearness in prayer — little pleasure in reading the Word or attending the Sanctuary. A chilling blight has passed over their spiritual being. In the bitterness of conscious estrangement from the God of their life, they are led to harbor the secret thought, *'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me!'*

God points to the tenderest type of earthly love — the *mother* with her infant hanging on her breast, or seated by its cradle tending it in sickness. That infant's cry may fail to rouse the *hireling* from slumber; but with wakeful ear she anticipates its every need. For days and nights she seats herself by the couch of the tiny sufferer — smoothing every dimple in its pillow, and kissing away the hot tears from the fevered cheek. Such, says God, is the most touching picture of tender human affection. "Yes," He

adds, "they may forget." There may be exceptional cases where a mother may be found untrue to her offspring, and nature prove faithless to her strongest instincts. "Yet *I* will not forget you!"

Think of this. If His dealings should at times appear inexplicable, if amid baffling dispensations, we may be led at times to say, with Gideon of old, "If the Lord is with us — then why is all this befallen us?" — let us hush the unkind misgiving, by the remembrance, that the affection of the fondest human parent to her offspring is but a feeble shadow, when compared to that of Him who pities as a *father*, comforts as a *mother*, and loves as *God* alone can do!

The earthly parent sees it needful at times, to employ beneficial rebuke and discipline. So does our Father in Heaven at times consider it necessary to let His tenderest affection to His covenant people take the form of chastisement. But His faithfulness on that account dare not be questioned or impeached. *He chastens us — because He loves us!* The time will come when all that is now dark and perplexing will be explained and vindicated. "What a day is before us," writes one who has the glowing wish fulfilled, "when we shall be able to adore His faithfulness, without the teaching of it by a crossed will and disappointed prospects!"

Go, burdened one, fearlessly on. He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That loving *eye* never slumbers — that wakeful *vigilance* is never suspended. Do not dishonor God by unbelieving distrust of His word and ways. Look back on the *past* — trace His footprints of love — the unmistakable tokens of His presence and supporting grace — let these be encouragements for the *present* — and pledges for the *future*. The dearest earthly friend may forget you — distance may sever — memory may fail — the mind may become a blank — the old familiar greetings may be met only by an unconscious gaze; Death may have already, and at some time will, put his impressive seal on the most sacred interchanges of human affection, "YET I will not forget you!" "Yet I still belong to You; You are holding my right hand."

## DEATH VANQUISHED

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave ; I will redeem them from death! Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" — Hosea 13:14

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." — Psalm 116:15

In the first of these "precious thoughts," God is represented in a past eternity as looking down the vista of the future. He sees a captive world doomed to destruction; its perishing millions laden with fetters moving onwards to death and the grave. He hears their cry. It stirs the thoughts and longings of His divine heart. "I will ransom them," He exclaims, "from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death!" Nor was this a mere passing thought, a transient emotion, akin to the human pity which is evoked for the moment by some spectacle of pain or distress. Many generous and benevolent 'thoughts of man' have never been embodied in *deed*. Many *noble resolves* die away with the hour which gave them birth, "that very day his thoughts perish."

But what God *thought* — He *did*. He gave the costliest proof which Omnipotence could give, of the reality and intensity of these thoughts. The ransom-price He paid to "redeem from death" was the blood of His *own* Son — His *only* Son. By the doing and dying of Jesus, Death has now become to the believer a vanquished foe — no, the hour of dissolution is in reality the commencement — the birthday of a nobler life! It is the dropping of the flower — to let the fruit expand; the bursting of the prison-bars — to lead the soul out to gladsome light and freedom. We can look forward with triumphant hope and joy to that hour, when this eternal 'thought' in all its sublime magnitude shall be fulfilled. Buried

myriads arising from their graves — their every chain broken — the *king of terrors* dethroned and uncrowned. The triumphant song of the risen dead ascending, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Reader, the time of your death is a solemn moment — when about to enter the realities of the eternal world. But precious is that moment in the sight and in the thoughts of God! You may possibly then be removed from the loving thoughts of others. Cherished voices may be separated by distance when the *last enemy* overtakes you. But there will be divine thoughts and a divine Presence which cannot be away. When words can no longer be heard — when too weak to listen, too feeble to speak — one joyous and blessed assurance will be yours, "*My God thinks of me!*"

As an earthly father's tenderest thoughts are on his dying child — so is it with our heavenly Father. The *life* of His people, indeed, is lovingly watched over and nourished by Him; but specially "precious in the sight of the Lord" is their *death*. An earthly father's most joyous thoughts, are in the prospect of welcoming his long absent child once more to his dwelling. Just so, it is precious and joyous in the sight of the Lord, as each member of His ransomed family stands on the heavenly threshold, ready to enter the Eternal Home; the adopted child, the cherished heir — ready to take possession of the Everlasting Inheritance!

Or, is it the death of some member of the household of faith who is near and dear to you? precious also is *their* death in the sight of the Lord. Their pillow is smoothed by Divine hands, "So He gives His beloved *sleep*." They may now be precious only in your *memory* — but they are precious in God's "sight." Yes! "the beloved of the Lord shall dwell safely." "Your unfailing love is better to me than life itself; how I praise You!"



## CONTRASTED DEALINGS

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD." — Isaiah 55:7-8

The precious thought of this verse is "the exceeding riches of God's grace;" the contrast between His *judgments* — and His *kindnesses*. The forsaking is "for a small moment," the gathering is "with great mercies." The hidden face is "but for a moment," and "in a little wrath" — the "mercy" is accompanied "with everlasting kindness." Judgment is His *strange* work. Strong to *smite* — He is stronger still to *save*.

What an encouragement to every backslider to return! — that he will be met, not with coldness, rebuke, reserve, or distance — but with a forgiving welcome! That gospel picture of the father receiving the lost prodigal may be regarded as the representation of the Lord's *thoughts* embodied in *acts*. He gives the kiss, the robe, the ring, the feast. There is not a frown on that Father's brow — all the erring past is buried in everlasting oblivion!

Moreover, the forsaking on His part, is only *apparent*. The sun shines as brightly as ever behind these temporary intervening clouds. The stone or impeding rock obstructs the flow of the great river "for a moment." But it is only "for a moment;" and it rolls on as deep and still as before, in its full volume of "everlasting kindness."

Be it mine, if the flow is arrested, to search out and remove the obstruction: if God's face is hidden — to discover the intervening clouds; if the spiritual life is languishing — to trace out the secret of the sorrowful declension — whether it be neglected privilege, or omitted duty, or secret sin, or tampering with temptation, or engrossing worldliness. "I will say unto God my Rock, why have You forgotten me?"

Oh how little it takes to *soil* the windows of the soul, and to dim and blur the spiritual landscape! How small the *worm* needed — to wither and blight the *gourd* of our spiritual joys! How little it takes to rust the key of prayer, clip the wings of faith, chill the warmth of love, and shut us out from the loving ear of God! "If I regard iniquity in my heart — the Lord will not hear me!" As it is "the Lord the Redeemer," who speaks in our motto-verse, to Him I must look for grace and strength — for restoration and revival. "I can do all things — through Christ who strengthens me." "Will you not revive us O Lord? Then we will never forsake You again. Revive us so we can call on Your name once more."

## GUIDANCE IN THE DARK

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things I will do unto them, and not forsake them." — Isaiah 42:16

There are times when God's *dealings* with His people are *perplexing* — His *thoughts* very deep — His *ways* past finding out — when the *present* is full of difficulty, and the *future* is full of anxiety. Their condition is that of blind men groping about — the whole of life a mazy labyrinth, of which they have lost the guiding thread. Their path seems shut up. Pharaoh is behind, and the raging Red Sea in front — their feeling is, "We are entangled; the wilderness has shut us in."

Or they may be *confounded* in solving some question of duty. The

employment and destiny of a lifetime may depend on a moment's choice. They may feel the responsibility of deciding between rival and competing claims; trembling and fearful lest some selfish, carnal, unworthy motive may mingle in the decision — and yet experiencing a painful inability to decide what is best.

Perplexed or desponding one! amid these your anxious, wavering, undecided thoughts — be this your comfort: God's thoughts are upon you! He is the *leader of the blind*. "Speak," says He, "to the children of Israel, that they go forward." At the crisis-hour of difficulty or trial, He will appear to all His seeking, trusting people, and grant either *guidance* or *deliverance* — not, perhaps, what *they* expect — but what He knows to be *best* for them! At the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to His disciples — walking upon the sea. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."

Rely on *the God of the pillar-cloud*. He will bring you, as He did His Israel, "through the flood on foot." "Be still," is His tender rebuke to the distrustful soul, "and know that I am God." How it would disarm life of many of its anxieties, and take the sting from many perplexities, if we were careful to listen to His *voice* (the expression and utterance of His 'precious thoughts'), "This is the way — walk in it." "A *wondrous way* — a *tender way* — but, with all its humiliations, the RIGHT way." (Evans)

Yes, believe it, "All the paths of the Lord [and this present dark and perplexing path of yours, whatever it may be — is one of them] are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." Confide in no fallible guidance. Be this your lofty resolve, "In the Lord I put my trust!" Regard every new turn in existence — as a wise, provident "thought" of your heavenly Father! Make it your earnest prayer in the words of Nehemiah, "Think upon me, my God, for good."

Thus, putting your case in His hands, and leaving it there, "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." Yours may be a mingled, chequered *past* — yet, too, how bright with

blessings — how full of remembrances of God's loving thoughts — His gracious interventions — His signal deliverances! Make these an argument and reason for implicit trust in the *future*, "You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." "Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history, the faithful love of the Lord."

## DIVINE TREASURES

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"They shall be Mine, says the LORD Almighty, in that day when I make up My jewels! And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him." — Malachi 3:17

The preceding context tells us of "a book of remembrance" that was "written before Him, for those who feared the Lord, and who thought upon His name." That book of remembrance was a record of the believer's "thoughts" towards God. We have here the wondrous counterpart — God's thoughts towards the believer. We have two beautiful pictures of earth and Heaven! On *earth*, His children are gathered together, speaking "often one to another" — of the great and glorious Being they delight to serve. In *Heaven*, He who sees in secret, "hearkens" — and thus records His own gracious thoughts respecting them in the book of life, "They shall be Mine, says the LORD Almighty, in that day when I make up My jewels!" (or "My precious treasure")

With what eager thoughts — ardent aspirations — do men look forward to the attainment of some cherished hope or prize or treasure, for which, as the case may be, they have wisely or unwisely toiled. The *money-seeker* longs for the day when he shall collect and store his coveted heaps. The

*historian* longs for the day when his hoarded facts — his lettered wisdom — shall be compiled into a volume. The *architect* longs for the hour when the last plank of scaffolding shall be removed from the building on which he expects his renown to rest. The *sculptor* longs for the last touch being put on the life-like marble, that he may set it among his finished works.

The great God, here as elsewhere, is represented as anticipating with joy and satisfaction the day of "the consummation of all things" — the day on which the topstone of His temple shall be brought forth with shouting — when the now compiling *volume of remembrance* shall be finished — when the now filling treasure-box shall be complete; and He shall display His jewels before an admiring and adoring world. And what does He say is to form, amid these lustrous jewels, His most prized treasure — that on which His eye seems most lovingly and fondly to rest? "They," says He (My believing people, the trembling band that feared Me and spoke of Me on earth), "they" on that day "shall be Mine!"

Oh most precious, most wondrous thought of God! Can it be that He can think of treasuring me — a poor, unworthy, contemptible piece of clay, in His treasure-box now, and at last of setting me a jewel in His crown? Yes! What has He given for that jewel? Estimate its worth by the purchase-price, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold — but with the precious blood of Christ!"

And, as if this one exquisite figure were not enough, He adds, "And I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him." *Jewels* are precious; but what are they compared to a loved and dutiful *son*? If jewels were in a burning house, a man would rush to save them. But if the alternative lay between saving them — and a precious child, would he for a moment hesitate? I will spare My believing people, says God, as a man would rush, heedless of the flames, to rescue his darling son. When the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat — not a hair of their heads shall perish! I will save them with a great salvation. They are Mine *now* — Mine, justified in Christ, Mine, adopted into My family! Mine they *shall* be — acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment! Yes, Mine *forever* and ever! "All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be My children."

## MOURNING ENDED

"How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended." — Isaiah 60:20

We have traced, in previous meditations, God's thoughts towards us from a *past* eternity — loving us with an everlasting love. We have pondered some of His *present* thoughts of tenderness, kindness, and sympathy, towards His suffering and sorrowing, His tried and tempted people. But as His thoughts have been *from* everlasting, so are they *to* everlasting. "He who loved His people *out of darkness*," says a now glorified saint, "loves them *into everlasting light*!"

It is again the *mourner* who is the specially benefitted heir to the preciousness of this 'thought of God' regarding a world of glory. Some *prized earthly sun* has set. Some *fond earthly star* that has long lighted up the earthly pathway, has been swept from the skies. "Hush your sorrow!" says He, "dry your tears." These setting suns, and waning moons, and quenched stars — shall reappear as fixed orbs in an unchanging sphere — where the 'loved and lost' shall be loved never to be lost again! Yes, and better still, there will be a nobler light — a peerless Sun — to supersede the need of all earthly luminaries, and lead you to be independent of all, "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof!"

Other luminaries may still be there, with their cherished radiance. But

the city and the citizens will have no need of them; they will not require the tiny candle, or glimmering starlight — when they have the full blaze of noon. They will not need the feeble rill — when they have the boundless, infinite ocean!

God's works and ways, His character and perfections, His wisdom and faithfulness, His ever-present fellowship and love — will form perpetual theme and material for contemplation. The ever-new song of the ransomed will be the old strain of earth, "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"And the days of your mourning shall be ended." Mourning one, think of this! Weeping days here *on earth*; joyful days *yonder*. The muffled harp here; the golden harp *yonder*. The ocean swept with storm and tempest here; the crystal sea unruffled with one wave *yonder*. The dew-drops and tear-drops of earthly sorrow, as they sparkle in the radiance of the risen Sun of Eternity — will be so many *little mirrors* reflecting the glory of God — lustrous witnesses of His faithfulness and love!

Life may now be to you a dreary *winter* landscape — its once sunny hollows and green nooks — the crevices of spring and summer — embedded with snow. But a glorious resurrection-time is at hand, when the gladsome announcement shall be made: "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds has come!" Oh! blessed prospect. In God's light, we shall see light. The unexplained thoughts of the present all made luminous in the glory of that unsetting sun — not one floating *cloud* discernible on the boundless horizon! "Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror — but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete — but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now." "The Lord Almighty has sworn this oath: It will all happen as I have planned. It will come about according to My purposes."

# **THE FAITHFUL PROMISER**

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## Introduction

*"He has given us His **very great and precious promises!**"* — 2 Peter 1:4

*"He who has promised is faithful."* — Hebrews 10:23

It has often been felt a delightful exercise by the child of God, to take, night by night, an individual *promise* and plead it at the mercy-seat. Often are our prayers pointless, from not following, in this respect, the example of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, the *royal promise-pleader*, who delighted to direct his finger to some particular "word" of the Faithful Promiser, saying, *"Remember Your promise unto Your servant, upon which you have caused me to hope."* — Psalm 119:49

The following are a few gleanings from the *Promise Treasury* — a few

"crumbs from the Master's Table," which may serve to help the thoughts in the hour of closet meditation, or the season of sorrow.

## PARDONING GRACE

*"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." — Isaiah 1:18*

My soul! your God summons you to His audience chamber! *Infinite purity* seeks to reason with *immense vileness!* *Deity* stoops to speak to *dust!* Do not dread the meeting. It is the most *gracious* — as well as most *wondrous* of all conferences. Jehovah Himself breaks silence! He utters the best tidings a lost soul or a lost world can hear, "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." What! Scarlet sins, and crimson sins! and these all to be forgiven and forgotten! The just God "justifying" the unjust! — the *mightiest* of all beings, the *kindest* of all!

Oh! what is there *in you* to merit such love as this? You might have known your God only as the "consuming fire," and had nothing before you except "a fearful looking for of vengeance!" This gracious conference bids you to dispel your fears! It tells you that it is no longer a "fearful thing," but a blessed thing to fall into His hands! Have you consented to His overtures? Until you are at *peace* with Him, *happiness* must be a stranger to your bosom.

Though you have all else beside, if bereft of God — you must be bereft indeed! Lord! I come! As your *pardoning grace* is freely offered, so shall I freely accept it. May it be mine, even now, to listen to the gladdening accents, "Son! Daughter! be of good cheer! Your sins, which are many —

are all forgiven!"

## NEEDFUL GRACE

*"As your days — so shall your strength be."* — Deuteronomy 33:25

God does not give grace — *until* the hour of trial comes. But when it does come — the amount of grace, and the nature of the special grace required, is granted. My soul! do not dwell with painful apprehension on the *future*. Do not anticipate coming sorrows; perplexing yourself with the grace needed for future emergencies; tomorrow will bring its promised *grace* — along with tomorrow's *trials*.

God, wishing to keep His people humble, and dependent on Himself, does not give a *stock of grace*; He metes it out for every day's exigencies, that they may be constantly traveling between their own emptiness — and Christ's fullness; their own weakness — and Christ's strength. But when the exigency comes, you may safely trust an *Almighty arm* to bear you through!

Is there now some "thorn in the flesh" sent to lacerate you? You may have been entreating the Lord for its removal. Your prayer has, doubtless, been heard and answered; but not in the way, perhaps, either expected or desired by you. The "thorn" may still be left to goad, the *trial* may still be left to buffet; but "more grace" has been given to endure them. Oh! how often have His people thus been led to glory in their infirmities, and triumph in their afflictions — seeing that the power of Christ rests more abundantly upon them! The strength which the hour of trial brings — often makes the Christian wonder to himself!

## ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

"God is able to make **all grace** abound toward you; that you, always having **all sufficiency in all things** — may abound to every good work." — 2 Corinthians 9:8

All-sufficiency in all things! Believer! Surely you are "thoroughly equipped for every good work!" Grace is no scanty thing, doled out in pittance. It is a glorious treasury, which the *key of prayer* can always unlock — but can never empty. It is a *fountain* — full, flowing, ever flowing, over flowing!

Mark these *three ALL'S* in this precious promise. It is a three-fold link in a golden chain, let down from the throne of grace by the God of grace. "All grace!" "all-sufficiency!" in "all things!" and these to "abound." Oh! precious thought! My need cannot impoverish that *inexhaustible treasury of grace!* Myriads are hourly hanging on it, drawing from it — and yet there is no diminution. Out of that fullness we, too, may all receive, "grace upon grace!"

My soul, do you not love to dwell on that *all-abounding grace?* Your own insufficiency in everything, met with a divine "all-sufficiency in all things!" Grace in all circumstances and situations, in all vicissitudes and changes, in all the varied phases of the Christian's being. Grace in sunshine — and in storm; in health — and in sickness; in life — and in death! Grace for the old believer — and the young believer. Grace for the *tried* believer, and the *weak* believer, and the *tempted* believer. Grace *for* duty — and grace *in* duty; grace to carry the *joyous* cup with a steady hand — and grace to drink the *bitter* cup with an unmurmuring spirit; grace to have *prosperity* sanctified — and grace to say through tears, "May Your will be done!"

## COMFORTING GRACE

*"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."* — John 14:18

Blessed Jesus! How Your presence sanctifies trial; takes loneliness from the chamber of sickness; and the sting from the chamber of death! Bright and Morning Star! Precious at all times, You are never so precious as in "the dark and cloudy day!" The bitterness of sorrow is well worth enduring — to have Your promised consolations.

How well qualified, Man of Sorrows, are You to be my Comforter! How well fitted to dry my tears — You who shed so many Yourself! What are my tears — my sorrows — my crosses — my losses, compared with Yours, who shed first Your *tears*, and then Your *blood* for me! Mine are all deserved, and infinitely less than I deserve. How different, O Spotless Lamb of God — those pangs which rent Your guiltless bosom!

How sweet those comforts which You have promised to the comfortless, when I think of them as flowing from an *Almighty Fellow Sufferer*, "A brother born for adversity" — the "Friend that sticks closer than any brother!" — one who can say, with all the refined sympathies of a holy exalted human nature, *"I know your sorrows!"*

My soul! calm your griefs! There is not a sorrow you can experience but Jesus, in His treasury of grace — has an exact corresponding solace: "In the multitude of the sorrows I have in my heart — Your comforts delight my soul!"

## RESTRAINING GRACE

*"Satan has desired to have you — that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you — that your faith may not fail."* — Luke 22:31, 32

What a scene does this unfold!  
Satan tempting — Jesus praying!

Satan sifting — Jesus pleading!

"The strong man assailing" — "the stronger than the strong" beating him back!

Believer! here is the past history and present secret of your safety in the midst of temptation. An *interceding Savior* was at your side, saying to every threatening wave, "Thus far shall you go — and no farther!" God often permits His people to be on the very *verge* of the precipice, to remind them of their own weakness; but never farther than the brink! The *restraining hand* and *grace* of Omnipotence is ready to rescue them, "Although he stumbles — yet he shall not be utterly cast down." And why? "For the Lord upholds him with His right hand!"

The wolf may be prowling for his prey; but what can he do when the almighty Shepherd is always there, tending with the watchful eye that "neither slumbers nor sleeps!" Who cannot subscribe to the testimony, "When my foot slipped, Your mercy, O Lord! held me up!" Who can look back on his past pilgrimage, and fail to see it crowded with *Ebenezers*, with this inscription: "You have delivered my *soul* from death, my *eyes* from tears, and my *feet* from falling!" My soul, where would you have been this day, had you not been "kept" by the power of God?

"Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

## RESTORING GRACE

*"I will heal their backsliding!"* — Hosea 14:4

Wandering again! And has He not left me to perish? Stumbling and straying on the dark mountains, away from the Shepherd's eye and the Shepherd's fold — shall He not leave the *erring wanderer* to the fruit of his own ways, and his *truant heart* to go hopelessly onward in its career of guilty estrangement?

"My thoughts," says God, "are not as your thoughts, neither are your ways

My ways."

*Man* would say, "Go, perish! ungrateful apostate!"

*God* says, "Return, O backsliding children!"

The Shepherd will not, cannot, allow those sheep to perish, whom He has purchased with His own blood! How wondrous His forbearance towards His wandering sheep! — tracking its guilty steps, and not ceasing the pursuit until He lays the wanderer on His shoulders and returns with it to His fold rejoicing! My soul! why increase by farther departures, your own distance from the fold? Why lengthen the dreary road your gracious Shepherd has to traverse in bringing you back? Do not delay your return! Do not provoke His patience any longer!

Do not venture farther on forbidden ground! He waits with outstretched arms to welcome you once more to His tender bosom! Be humble for the past, trust Him for the future. Think of your former backslidings — and tremble! Think of His patience — and be filled with holy gratitude! Think of His promised grace — "and take courage."

## SANCTIFYING GRACE

*"Being confident of this very thing — that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus!" —*

Philippians 1:6

Reader! Is the good work begun in you? Are you *holy*? Is *sin* being crucified? Are your heart's *idols* abolished, one by one? Is the *world* less to you — and *eternity* more to you? Is more of your Savior's image impressed on your character; and your Savior's love more enthroned in your heart? Is Salvation to you, "the one thing needful?" Oh! take heed! There can be no *middle ground*, no standing still; or if it is so, your position must be a false one.

The Savior's blood is not more necessary — to give you a *title* to Heaven; than the Spirit's work — to give you a *fitness* for Heaven. "If any man has



not the Spirit of Christ — he is none of His!" *Onwards!* should be your motto. There is no *standing still* in the life of faith. "The man," says Augustine, "who says 'Enough,' that man's soul is lost!"

Let this be the superscription in all your ways and doings, "*Holiness to the Lord!*" Let the admonishing word exercise over you its habitual power, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Moreover, remember, that to be *holy* — is to be *happy*. The two are equivalent terms. Holiness! It is the secret and spring of the joy of angels; and the more of holiness attained on earth — the nearer and closer my walk is with God — the more of a sweet pledge shall I have of the bliss that awaits me in a holy Heaven. Oh! my soul, let it be your sacred ambition to "Be Holy!"

## REVIVING GRACE

*"But those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles! They shall run — and not be weary; and they shall walk — and not faint." — Isaiah 40:31*

*"Will You not revive us, O Lord?"* My soul! are you conscious of your *declining* state? Is your walk less with God, your affections less heavenly? Have you less conscious nearness to the mercy-seat, diminished communion with your Savior? Is prayer less a privilege than it has been? Are the pulsations of spiritual life more languid, and fitful, and spasmodic? Is the bread of life less relished? Are the seen, and the temporal, and the tangible, displacing unseen and eternal realities? Are you sinking down into this state of drowsy self-contentment, this conformity of your life with the world, forfeiting all the happiness of true religion and risking and endangering the better life to come? Arise! Call upon your God! *"Will you not revive us, O Lord?"*

He might have returned nothing but the withering repulse, "How often would I have gathered you — but you were not willing!" "Ephraim is joined to his idols — let him alone!" But "in wrath, He remembers

mercy." "They shall revive as the corn." "The mouth of the Lord has spoken it." How and where is reviving grace to be found? He gives you, in this precious promise, the *key*. It is on your bended knees — by a return to your deserted and unfrequented prayer-chamber! "Those who wait upon the Lord!" "Wait on the Lord; be of good cheer, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!"

## PERSEVERING GRACE

*"The righteous shall hold on his way." — Job 17:9*

Reader! How comforting to you amid the ebbings and flowings of your changing history — to know that the change is all with you, and not with your God! Your spiritual vessel may be tossed on *waves of temptation*, in many a dark midnight storm. You may think your Pilot has left you, and be ready continually to say, "Where is my God?"

But fear not! The ship which bears your spiritual destiny, is in better hands than yours! A *golden chain of covenant love* links it to the eternal throne! That chain can never snap asunder. He who holds it in His hand gives you this as the pledge of your safety, "Because I live — you shall live also!"

"Why are you then cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? hope in God!" You will assuredly ride out these stormy surges, and reach the desired haven! But be faithful with yourself: see that there is nothing to hinder or impede your growth in grace. Think how little may retard your progress. One *sin* indulged — one *temptation* tampered with — one *bosom traitor* — may cost you many a bitter hour and bitter tear, by separating between you and your God. Make it your daily prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life!"

## DYING GRACE

*"I have the keys of hell and of death!"* — Revelation 1:18

And from whom could dying grace come so welcome — as from You, O blessed Jesus? Not only is Your name, "The Abolisher of Death;" but You Yourself have died! You have sanctified the grave by Your own presence, and divested it of all its terrors.

My soul! are you at times afraid of this, your last enemy? If the rest of your pilgrimage-way is peaceful and unclouded, does there rest a dark and portentous *shadow* over the *terminating portals*? Fear not! When that dismal entrance is reached — He who has the keys of the grave and of death suspended at His golden belt, will impart grace to bear you through!

Death is but the *messenger of peace* — it is your Savior calling for you! The promptings of nature, when, at first, you see the darkening waves, may be that of the frightened disciples, when they said, "It is a ghost! and cried out for fear!" But a gentle voice will be heard high above the storm, "*It is I! Do not be afraid!*" Death, indeed, as the wages of sin, must, even by the believer, be regarded as an *enemy*. But, oh! blessed thought, it is your *last enemy* — the cause of your last tear! In a few brief moments after that tear is shed — and your God will be wiping every vestige of it away! "O Death! where is your sting? O Grave! where is your victory? Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Welcome, vanquished foe! Birthday of Heaven! "To die is gain!"

## AFTER GRACE — GLORY

*"The Lord will give grace — and glory!"* — Psalm 84:11

Oh! happy day: when this toilsome warfare will all be ended — Jordan crossed — Canaan entered — the multitude of enemies of the wilderness no longer dreaded — sorrow, sighing, death, and, worst of all, sin, no

more either to be felt or feared! Here is the *terminating* link in the golden chain of the everlasting covenant. It began with *predestination*; it ends with *glorification*. It began with sovereign grace in eternity past, and no link will be lacking until the ransomed spirit is presented faultless before the throne!

Grace — and glory! If the *pledge* is sweet — then what must be the *reality*? If the wilderness table contains such rich provision — then what must be the glories of the eternal banqueting house? Oh! my soul, make sure of your saving interest in the grace — as the blessed prelude to glory. "Having access by faith into this grace, you can rejoice in hope of the glory of God;" for "whom He justifies — those He also glorifies!"

Has grace begun in you? Can you mark — though it should be but the drops of the beginning *streamlet* which is to terminate in such an *ocean* — the tiny grains which are to accumulate and issue in such "an exceeding weight of glory?" Do not delay the momentous question! The day of offered grace is on the wing! "No grace — no glory!"

## ANOTHER COMFORTER

*"And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever!" — John 14:16*

Blessed Spirit of all grace! how often have I grieved You! resisted Your dealings, quenched Your strivings; and yet You are still pleading with me! Oh! let me realize more than I do — the need of Your gracious influences. Ordinances, sermons, communions, providential dispensations, are nothing without *Your life-giving power!*

"It is the Spirit who quickens." "No man can call Jesus, Lord — but by the Holy Spirit." Church of the living God! is not this one cause of your deadness? My soul! is not this the secret of your languishing frames, repeated declensions, uneven walk, and sudden falls — that *the influences of the Holy Spirit are undervalued and unsought?* Pray for the

outpouring of this blessed Agent for the world's renovation, and your own. "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh," is the precursor of millennial bliss!

Jesus! draw near, in Your mercy, to this dull heart, as You did of old to Your mourning disciples, and breathe upon it, and say, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" It is the *mightiest* of all blessings; but, like the sun in the heavens, it is the *freest* of all, "For if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit unto those who ask Him!"

## PROVIDENTIAL OVERRULING

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God; to those who are the called according to his purpose."* — Romans 8:28

My soul! be still! You are in the hands of your Covenant God! Were all the strange circumstances in your history the result of *accident*, or *chance* — you might well be overwhelmed! But "all things," and this thing (be what it may) which may be now disquieting you — is one of these "all things" that are so working mysteriously for your good. Trust your God! He will not deceive you — your interests are with Him in safe custody.

When *sight* says, "All these things are against me," let *faith* rebuke the hasty conclusion, and say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" How often does God hedge up your way with thorns — to elicit *simple trust!* How seldom can we *see* all things so working for our good! But it is better discipline to *believe* it. Oh! for faith amid frowning providences, to say, "I know that Your judgments are good;" and, relying in the *dark*, to exclaim, "Though He slays me — yet will I trust Him!"

Blessed Jesus! to You are committed the reins of this universal empire. The same hand that was once nailed to the cross — is now wielding the scepter on the throne, "all power in Heaven and in earth is given unto

You." How can I doubt the wisdom, and the faithfulness, and love, of the most mysterious earthly dealing — when I know that the *Scroll of Providence* is thus in the hands of Him who has given the mightiest pledge Omnipotence could give — of His tender interest in my soul's well-being, by giving Himself for me?

## SAFE WALKING

*"All the **paths** of the LORD are mercy and truth — unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."* — Psalm 25:10

The *paths* of the Lord! My soul! never follow your own paths. If you do, you will be in danger often of following *sight* rather than *faith* — choosing the evil, and refusing the good. But "commit your way unto the Lord — and He shall bring it to pass." Let this be your prayer, "Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your *paths*." Oh! for Caleb's spirit, "to wholly follow the Lord my God" — to follow Him when *self* must be sacrificed, and hardship must be borne, and trials await me. To "walk with God" — to ask in simple faith, "What would You have me to do?" — to have no will of my own — but this, that God's will is to be my will. Here is safety — here is happiness!

Fearlessly follow the *Guiding Pillar*. He will *lead* you by a right way, though it may be by a way of hardship, and crosses, and losses, and privations — to the city of God. Oh! the blessedness of thus *lying passive in the hands of God*, saying "Undertake for me God!" Oh! the blessedness of dwelling with holy gratitude on past mercies and interpositions; trusting these as pledges of future faithfulness and love; and hearing His voice behind us, amid life's many perplexities, exclaiming, "This is the way — walk in it!" "Happy," surely, "are every people who are in such a case!" It will be for you, Reader, if you can form the resolve in a strength greater than you own: *"This God shall be my God forever and ever; He shall be my Guide even unto death!"*

## LOVE IN CHASTISEMENT

*"As many as I love — I rebuke and chasten."* — Revelation 3:19

Sorrowing Believer! what could you wish more than this? Your *furnace* is severe; but look at this assurance of Him who lit it. Love is the *fuel* that feeds its flames! Its every *spark* is love! It is *kindled* by your heavenly Father's hand — and *designed* as a pledge of His special love. How many of His dear children has He so rebuked and chastened; and all, all for one reason, "I *love* them!" The myriads in glory have passed through these *furnace-fires* — there they were chosen — there they were purified, sanctified, and made "vessels fit for the Master's use;" the *dross* and the *alloy* purged — that the pure metal might remain.

And are you to claim *exemption* from the same discipline? Are you to think it strange concerning these same fiery trials that may be *purifying* you? Rather exult in them — as your *adoption privilege*. Do not envy those who are strangers to the *refining flames* — who are "without chastisement."

You should surely rather have the severest discipline — with a Father's love; than the fullest earthly cup — without that Father's smile. Oh! for grace to say, when the *furnace* is hottest, and the *rod* sorest, "Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure!" And what, after all, is the severest of your *chastisements*, in comparison with what your *sins* have deserved? Do you murmur under a Father's correcting love? What would it have been to have stood the wrath of an un-propitiated Judge, and that, too, forever? Surely, in the light of eternity, the heaviest pang of earth — is indeed "a light affliction!"

## A CONDITION IN CHASTISEMENT

*"If need be!"* — 1 Peter 1:6

Three gracious words! Not one of all my *tears* has been shed for nothing!

Not one *stroke of the rod* has been unneeded — or might have been spared! Your heavenly Father loves you too much, and too tenderly, to bestow *harsher correction* than your case requires!

Is it loss of health — or loss of wealth — or loss of beloved friends? Be still! there was *a needs be!* We are no competent judges of what that "needs be" is; often through aching hearts we are forced to exclaim, "Your judgments are a great deep!" But God here pledges Himself, that there will not be one *unnecessary thorn* in the believer's crown of suffering. No *burden* too heavy will be laid on him; and no *sacrifice* too great will be exacted from him. He will "temper the *wind* — to the shorn lamb."

Whenever the "need be" has accomplished its end — then the *rod* is removed, the *chastisement* suspended, and the *furnace* quenched.

"If need be!" Oh! what a pillow on which to rest your aching head — that there is not a *drop* in all your *bitter cup* — but what a God of love saw to be absolutely necessary! Will you not *trust His heart* — even though you cannot trace the mystery of His dealings? Not too curiously prying into the "*WHY* it is?" or "*HOW* it is?" — but satisfied that "*SO* it is," and, therefore, that all must be well!

## STRENGTH IN THE WEAK

*"He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not quench a smoldering wick!" — Matthew 12:20*

Will Jesus accept such a heart as mine? — this erring, treacherous, vile heart? The PAST — how many forgotten vows — broken covenants — prayerless days! How often have I made new resolutions, and as often has the reed succumbed to the first blast of temptation!

Oh! my soul! you are low indeed — the things that remain, seem "ready to die." But your Savior-God will not give you "over unto death." The *reed* is bruised — but He will not pluck it up by the roots. The *wick* is reduced to



a smoldering ember — but He will fan the decaying flame.

Why wound your loving Savior's heart — by these repeated declensions? He *will* not — *cannot* give you up! Go, mourn your weakness and unbelief. Cry unto the *Strong* for strength.

Weary and faint one! You have an *Omnipotent arm* to lean on. "He never grows faint or weary!" Listen to His own gracious assurance: "Do not be afraid — for I am with you. Do not be discouraged — for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with My victorious right hand!" Leaving all your false props and refuges, let this be your resolve, "I will trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock!"

## ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DESPONDING

*"All whom the Father gives Me — will come to Me; and whoever comes to Me — I will never cast out!" — John 6:37*

*Cast out!* My soul! how often might this have been your history! You have cast off your God — might He not often have cast out you? Yes! cast you out as *fuel for the fire of His wrath* — a sapless, fruitless cumberer! And, notwithstanding all your ungrateful requital for His unmerited forbearance — yet He is still declaring, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies!" Your sins may be legion — the sand of the sea may be their befitting type — the thought of their vileness and aggravation may be ready to overwhelm you; but be still! your patient God waits to be gracious! Oh! be deeply humbled and softened because of your guilt, and resolve to dedicate yourself anew to His service, and so coming, He will by no means cast you out!

Do not despond by reason of *former shortcomings* — your *sins* are great — but your *Savior's merits* are greater! He is willing to forget all the past, and sink it in oblivion, if there is present love, and the promise of future obedience. "Simon, son of Jonah — do you love Me?" Ah! how different is

God's verdict from man's! After such sins as yours, man's sentence would have been, "I will cast him out!" But "it is better to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of man;" for He says, "*I will never cast out!*"

## PEACE IN BELIEVING

*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* —

John 14:27

"You will keep him in *perfect peace* — whose mind is stayed on You." "Perfect Peace!" What a blessed attainment! My soul! is it yours? I am sure it is not — if you are seeking it in a perishable *world*, or in the perishable *creature*, or in your perishable *self*. Although you have all that the world would call enviable and happy, unless you have peace *in* God, and *with* God — all else is unworthy of the name — a spurious thing, which the first breath of *adversity* will shatter, and the hour of *death* will utterly annihilate!

*Perfect Peace!* What is it? It is the peace of *forgiveness*. It is the peace arising out of a sense of God reconciled through the blood of the everlasting covenant — resting sweetly on the bosom, and the work of Jesus — committing your *eternal all* to Him.

My soul! stay yourself on God, so that this blessed peace may be yours. You have tried the *world*. It has deceived you. Prop after prop of earthly scaffolding has yielded, and tottered, and fallen! Has your God ever done so? Ah! this false and *counterfeit worldly peace* may do well for the world's day of prosperity. But test it in the hour of sorrow; and what can it do for you when it is most needed? On the other hand, what though you have no other blessing on earth to call your own? You are *rich indeed* — if you can look upwards to Heaven, and say with an unpresumptuous smile, "I am at peace with God."

## BLISS IN DYING

*"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."* — Revelation 14:13

O my soul! is this blessedness yours in prospect? Are you ready, if called this night to lie down on your death-pillow, sweetly to fall asleep in Jesus?

What is the *sting* of death? — It is sin. Is death, then, to you, robbed of its sting, by having listened to the gracious accents of pardoning love, "Be of good cheer, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven!" If you have made your peace with God, resting on the work and atoning blood of His dear Son, then the *Last Enemy* is divested of all his terror, and you can say, in sweet composure, of your dying couch and dying hour, "I will both lay down in peace and sleep — because You, Lord, make me to dwell in safety!" Reader! ponder that solemn question, "Am I *ready* to die? Am I living as I should wish I had done — when that *last hour* arrives?"

And when shall it arrive? Tomorrow is not yours. Truly, there may be but a *step* between you and death! Oh! solve the question speedily — risk no *doubts* and no *perhaps*. Every day is proclaiming anew the lesson, "The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong." Seek to live, so that that hour cannot come upon you too soon, or too unexpectedly. *Live a dying life!* How blessed to live — how blessed to die — with the consciousness, that there may be but a *step* between you and glory!

## A DUE REAPING

*"In due season we shall reap — if we faint not."* — Galatians 6:9

Believer! all the glory of your salvation belongs to Jesus — none to yourself! Every *jewel* in your eternal crown is His — *purchased* by His blood, and *polished* by His Spirit. The confession of time — will be the ascription of all eternity: "*By the grace of God I am what I am!*" But though "all is of grace," your God calls you to personal strenuousness in

the work of your high calling — to "labor," to "fight," to "wrestle," to "agonize;" and the *heavenly reaping* will be in proportion to the *earthly sowing*: "He who sows sparingly — shall also reap sparingly; and He who sows bountifully — shall also reap bountifully!" What an incentive to holy living, and increased spiritual attainments!

My soul! would you be a star shining high and bright in the skies of glory? Would you receive the *ten-talent* recompense? Then do not be weary. Put on your *armor* for fresh conquests. Be daily gaining some new *victory over sin*. Deny yourself. Be a willing cross-bearer for your Lord's sake. Do good to all men as you have opportunity; be patient under provocation, "slow to anger," resigned in trial. Let the world take knowledge of you — that you are wearing Christ's *uniform*, and bearing Christ's *spirit*, and sharing Christ's *cross*. And when the *reaping time* comes, He who has promised that the cup of cold water cannot go unrecompensed, will not allow you to lose your reward!

## AN END OF WEEPING

*"The days of your mourning shall be ended!"* — Isaiah 60:20

Christ's people are a *weeping band* — though there is much in this lovely world to make them joyous and happy. Yet when they think of sin — their own sin, and the unblushing sins of a world in which their God is dishonored — need we wonder at their tears? Are we surprised that they should be called "Mourners," and their pilgrimage home a "Valley of Tears?" *Sickness, bereavement, poverty* and *death* following the track of sin — add to their mourning experience; and with many of God's best beloved, one tear is scarce dried — when another is ready to flow!

Mourners! rejoice! When the *reaping time* comes — the *weeping time* ends! When the *white robe* and the *golden harp* are bestowed — every remnant of the *sackcloth attire* is removed. The moment the pilgrim, whose forehead is here furrowed with woe, bathes it in the crystal river of life — that moment the pangs of a lifetime of sorrow are eternally

forgotten!

Reader! if you are one of these careworn ones, take heart — the days of your mourning are numbered! A few more throbbings of this aching heart — and then sorrow, and sighing, and mourning, will be forever past! "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain!"

Seek now to mourn your *sins* — more than your *sorrows*; reserve your bitterest tears for forgetfulness of your dear Lord. The saddest and sorest of all bereavements, is when the sins which have separated you from Him, evoke the anguish-cry, "Where is my God?"

## A SPEEDY COMING

*"Behold, I come quickly!"* — Revelation 3:11

*"Even so! come, Lord Jesus!"* "Why do the wheels of Your chariot tarry?" For six thousand years, this world has rolled on, getting timeworn with age, and wrinkled with sins and sorrows. A waiting Church sees the long-drawn shadows of twilight announcing, "The Lord is at hand!" Prepare, my soul, to meet Him! Oh! happy day, when your adorable Redeemer, so long dishonored and despised, shall be publicly enthroned in the presence of an assembled universe, crowned Lord of All, glorified in His saints, satisfied in the fruits of His soul's travail, destroying His enemies with the brightness of His coming — the lightning-gance of wrath — causing the hearts of His exulting people to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" Prepare, my soul, to meet Him!

Let it be a joyous thought to you — your "blessed hope" — the meeting of your *Elder Brother!* Stand oftentimes on the *watchtower* to catch the first streak of that coming brightness, the first murmur of these chariot wheels. The world is now in preparation! It is rocking on its worn-out axle. There are voices on every side proclaiming "He comes! He comes to judge the earth!" Reader! are you among the number of those who "love

His appearing?" Remember the attitude of His expectant saints: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He comes, will find WATCHING!"

## EVENING LIGHT

*"At evening time — it shall be light!" — Zechariah 14:7*

How inspiring is the thought of coming glory! How would we rise above our sins, and sorrows, and sufferings — if we could live under the power of "the world to come!" — were *faith* to take at all times its giant leap beyond a soul-trammeling earth, and remember its brighter destiny — if it could stand on its Pisgah Mount, and look above and beyond the mists and vapors of this *land of shadows*, and gaze on the "better country." But, alas! in spite of ourselves, the *wings of faith* often refuse to soar — the spirit droops — guilty fears depress — sin dims and darkens — God's providences seem to frown — God's ways are misinterpreted — the Christian belies his name, and his destiny.

But, "At evening time — it shall be light!" The material sun, which wades through clouds and a troubled sky, sets often in a couch of lustrous gold! So, when the *sun of life* is setting, many a ray of light will shoot across memory's darkened sky, and many mysterious dealings of the wilderness will then elicit an "*All is well!*" How frequently is the presence and upholding grace of Jesus especially felt and acknowledged at that hour, and griefs and misgivings hushed with His own gentle accents, "Fear not! It is I! Do not be afraid."

*A triumphant deathbed!* It is no unmeaning word; the *eye* is lit with holy luster, the *tongue* with holy rapture, as if the harps of Heaven were on it. My soul! may such a *life's evening time* be yours!

## HEAVENLY ILLUMINATION

*"You do not realize now what I am doing — but you will understand hereafter." — John 13:7*

As the natural sun sometimes sinks in *clouds* — so, occasionally, the Christian who has a bright rising, and a brighter meridian, *sets* in gloom. It is not always "light" at his evening time; but this we know, that when the *day of immortality* breaks, the last vestige of earth's shadows will forever flee away! To the closing hour of time, *Divine Providence* may be to him a *baffling enigma*; but before the first hour has struck on Heaven's clock — all will be cleared up! My soul! "in God's light you shall see light." The *Book of His decrees* is a *sealed* book now, "A great deep" is all the explanation you can often give to His mysterious ways. The *why* and the *wherefore* — He seems to keep from us — to test our faith, to discipline us in trustful submission, and lead us to say, "*May Your will be done!*"

But rejoice in that '*hereafter*' — light awaits you! *Now* we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror — but *then*, face to face! In the great *mirror of eternity* — all the events of this chequered earthly scene will be reflected; the *darkest* of them will be seen to be bright with mercy — the severest dispensations, "only the severer aspects of His love!" Pry not, then, too curiously! Do not judge too censoriously on *God's dealings* with you. Wait with patience, until the *grand day of disclosures*; one confession shall then burst from every tongue, "*He has done all things well!*"

## **A GLORIOUS REUNION**

*"I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also!" — John 14:3*

If the meeting of a long absent friend or brother on earth is a joyous event — then what, my soul, must be the joy of your union with this Brother of brothers, this Friend of friends!

"I will come again!" Oh! what an errand of love, what a promised honor and dignity is this — His saints to share, not His *Heaven* only — but His *immediate* presence! "Where I am — there you shall be also!"

"Father, I will" (It was *His dying wish* — a wondrous addition in that testamentary prayer) "that those whom You have given Me be with Me where I am." Happy reunion! Blessed Savior, if Your presence is so sweet on a sin-stricken earth, and when known only by the invisible *eye of faith* — then what must be that presence in a sinless Heaven, unfolded in all its unutterable loveliness and glory!

Happy reunion! it will be a meeting of the whole ransomed family — the *Head* with all its members — the *Vine* with all its branches — the *Shepherd* with all His flock — the *Elder Brother* with all His kinsmen. Oh, the joy, too, of mutual recognition among the *death-divided ties* snapped asunder on earth — and now indissolubly renewed — severed friendships reunited — the triumph of love complete — love binding brother with brother, and friend with friend, and all to the Elder Brother! My soul! what do you think of this Heaven? Remember *who* it is that Jesus says shall sit with Him upon His throne, "He who *overcomes!*"

## EVERLASTING ESPOUSALS

*"And I will betroth you unto Me forever!"* — Hosea 2:19

How wondrous and varied are the *figures* which Jesus employs to express the tenderness of His covenant love! My soul! your Savior-God has *married you!* Would you know the *TIME* of your betrothal? Go back into the depths of a by-past eternity, before the world was; then and there, your espousals were contracted: "I have loved you with an everlasting love!"

Soon shall the bridal-hour arrive, when your absent Lord shall come to welcome His betrothed bride into His royal palace! The *Bridegroom* now tarries — but see that *you* do not slumber and sleep! Surely there is much



all around, demanding the girded loins and the burning lamps. At "midnight!" (the hour when He is least expected) the cry may be — shall be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes!"

My soul! has this mystic union been formed between you and your Lord? Can you say, in humble assurance of your faith in Him, "My beloved is mine — and I am His!" If so, great, unspeakably great — are the glories which await you! Your dowry, as the bride of Christ — is all that *Omnipotence* can bestow — and all that a glorified bride can receive! In the prospect of those glorious nuptials, you need dread no pang of widowhood. What God has joined together, no created power can put asunder! He betroths you, and it is, "forever!"

## A JOYFUL RESURRECTION

*"The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed! For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality!" — 1 Corinthians 15:52-53*

Marvel of marvels! The sleeping ashes of the sepulcher — springing up at the blast of the archangel's trumpet! The dishonored dust — rising into a glorified body, like its risen Lord's!

At the time of *death*, the **soul's** bliss is perfect in *kind*; but this bliss is not complete in *degree*, until reunited to the *tabernacle* it has left behind to mingle with the sods of the valley. But tread lightly on that grave — it contains precious, because ransomed, dust! My *body*, as well as my *soul* — was included in the redemption price of Calvary! And "those also who sleep in Jesus — will God bring with Him." Oh! blessed Jubilee-day of creation, when Christ's "dead men shall arise!" The summons shall sound forth, "*Awake, and sing — you who dwell in the dust!*"

All the joys of that resurrection morn — we cannot tell; but its chief glory we do know, "When He shall appear, we shall be *like* Him; for we shall

see Him as He is!" LIKE Him! My soul, are you waiting for this manifestation of the sons of God? Like Him! Have you caught up any faint *resemblance* to that all-glorious image? Having this blessed hope — are you *purifying* yourself, even as He is pure? Be much with Jesus now — that you may exult in meeting Him hereafter. Thus taking Him as your Guide and Portion in life, you may lay down in your dark and loathsome grave — and look forward with triumphant hope to the dawn of a resurrection morn, saying, "And when I wake up — You are still with me!"

## A NIGHTLESS HEAVEN

*"And the city has no need of sun or moon — for the glory of God illuminates the city, and **the Lamb is its light!**" — Revelation 21:23*

*"There shall be **no night** there!" — Revelation 21:25*

My soul! is it night with you here? Are you wearied with these midnight tossings on life's tumultuous sea? Be still! The day is breaking! Soon shall your Lord appear! "His going forth is prepared as the morning." That *glorious appearing* shall disperse every cloud, and usher in an eternal noontide which knows no twilight. "The sun will never set; the moon will not go down. For the Lord will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end!" *Everlasting light!* Wondrous secret of a nightless world! — the glories of a present God! — the everlasting light of the *Three in One*, quenching the radiance of all created orbs — superseding all material luminaries!

"My soul waits for the Lord — more than those who watch for the morning!" The *haven* is nearing — star after star is quenched in more glorious effulgence! Every bound over these *dark waves* is bringing you nearer to the eternal shore! Will you not, then, humbly and patiently endure "weeping for the night," in the prospect of the *eternal joy which comes in the morning?*

Strange realities! A world without night! A heaven without a sun! And,

greater wonder still, *yourself* in this world — a joyful citizen of this nightless, sinless, sorrowless, tearless Heaven! — basking underneath the Fountain of uncreated light! No exhaustion of glorified body and spirit to require repose; no lassitude or weariness to suspend the ever-deepening song, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

## A CROWN OF LIFE

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive  
a crown of glory that fades not away." — 1 Peter 5:4

What! is the beggar to be "raised from the ash-heap, set among Princes, and made to inherit a throne of glory?" Is dust and ashes, a puny rebel, a guilty traitor — to be pitied, pardoned, loved, exalted from the depths of despair, raised to the heights of Heaven — gifted with kingly honor — royally fed — royally clothed — royally attended — and, at last, royally crowned? O my soul, look forward with joyous emotion to that day of wonders, when He whose head shall be crowned with many crowns, shall be the dispenser of royal diadems to His people; and when they shall begin the joyful ascription of all eternity, "Unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us Kings — to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Will you not be among the number? Shall the princes and monarchs of the earth wade through seas of blood for a corruptible crown; and will you permit yourself to lose the incorruptible diadem, or barter it for some perishable nothings of earth? Oh! that you would awake to your high destiny, and live up to your transcendent privileges as the citizen of a Kingly Commonwealth, a member of the Blood-royal family of Heaven. What would you not sacrifice, what effort would you grudge, if you were included in the gracious benediction, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?"

## THE VISION AND FRUITION OF GOD

*"Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God's dwelling is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God! He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away. Then the One seated on the throne said: Look! I am making everything new! Write, because these words are faithful and true." — Revelation 21:3-5*

Glorious consummation! All the other glories of Heaven are but dim emanations from this all excelling glory. Here is the focus and center to which every ray of light converges. God is "all in all."

Heaven without God! — it would send a chill of dismay through the burning ranks of angels and archangels; it would dim every eye, and hush every harp, and change the whitest robe into sackcloth!

And shall *I* then, indeed, "see God?" What! shall *I* gaze on these inscrutable glories — and live? Yes, God Himself shall be with them, and be their God! They shall "see His face!" And not only the vision — but the *fruition*.

Oh! how does sin in my holiest moments, damp the enjoyment of Him! It is the "pure in heart" alone who can "see," far more — who can "enjoy" God. Even if He did reveal Himself now, these eyes could never endure His emanating brightness.

But then, with a heart *purified* from corruption — a world where the taint of sin and the power of temptation never enters — the soul again a bright mirror, reflecting the lost image of the Godhead — all the affections devoted to their original high destiny — the love of God the *motive principle*, the *ruling passion* — the glory of God the *undivided object* and *aim* — the will with no opposing or antagonist bias — man will, for the

first time, know all the blessedness of his chief end: "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever!"

## **THE WORDS OF JESUS**

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### 31. THE CLOSING BENEDICTION

## THE GRACIOUS INVITATION

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

"Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." — Matthew 11:28

Gracious "word" of a gracious Savior, on which the soul may confidently repose, and be at peace forever! It is a *present* rest — the rest of *grace* as well as the rest of *glory*. Not only are there signals of peace hung out from the walls of Heaven — the lights of Home glimmering in the distance to cheer our footsteps; but we have the "shadow" of this "great Rock!" in a *present* "weary land." Before the Throne above is there "the sea of glass," without one rippling wave; but there is a haven even on earth for the tempest-tossed, "We who have believed DO enter into rest."

Reader, have you found this blessed repose in the blood and work of Immanuel? Long going about "seeking rest and finding none," does this "word" sound like music in your ears — "*Come unto Me*"? All other peace is counterfeit, shadowy, unreal. The eagle spurns the gilded cage as a poor exchange for his free-born soarings. The soul's immortal aspirations cannot be satisfied, short of the possession of God's favor and love in Jesus.

How complete is the invitation! If there had been one *condition* in entering this covenant Ark, we must have been through eternity at the

mercy of the storm! But all are alike warranted and welcome, and none *more* warranted than welcome. For the weak, the weary, the sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened, there is an open door of grace.

Return, then, unto your rest, O my soul! Let the sweet cadence of this "word of Jesus" move quietly upon you amid the disquietudes of earth. Sheltered in Him, you are safe for time — safe for eternity! There may be, and *will* be, temporary tossings, fears, and misgivings; manifestations of inward corruption; but these will only be like the surface-heavings of the ocean, while underneath there is a deep, settled calm. "You will keep him in perfect peace" (*lit.* peace, peace) "whose mind is stayed on You." In the world — it is care on care, trouble on trouble, sin on sin — but every wave that breaks on the believer's soul seems sweetly to murmur, "*Peace, peace!*"

And if the *foretaste* of this rest is precious, what must be the glorious *consummation*? Awaking in the morning of immortality, with the unquiet dream of earth over — faith lost in sight, and hope in fruition — no more any bias to sin — no more latent principles of evil — nothing to disturb the spirit's deep, everlasting tranquility — the trembling magnet of the heart reposing, where alone it can confidingly and permanently rest — in the enjoyment of the Infinite God. "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace."



## THE COMFORTING ASSURANCE

Acts 20:35, "Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

"Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things." —  
Matthew 6:32

Though spoken originally by Jesus regarding temporal things, this may be taken as a *motto* for the child of God amid all the changing vicissitudes of his changing history. How it should lull all misgivings; silence all murmurings; lead to lowly, unquestioning submissiveness, "My Heavenly Father knows that I have need of all these things!"

Where can a child be safer or better — than in a father's hand? Where can the believer be better — than in the hands of his God? We are poor judges of what is best for us. We are under safe guidance with infallible wisdom. If we are tempted in a moment of rash presumption to say, "All these things are against me!" let this "word" rebuke the hasty and unworthy surmise. Unerring wisdom and Fatherly love, have pronounced *all* to be "needful."

My soul, is there anything that is disturbing your peace? Are providences dark, or crosses heavy? Are spiritual props removed, creature comforts curtailed, gourds smitten and withered like grass? Write on each, "*Your Father knows that you have need of all these things!*" It was He who increased your burden. Why? "*It was needed.*" It was He who crossed your worldly schemes, marred your cherished hopes. Why? "*It was needed.*" A *pleasant flower* in the coveted path — it was supplanting Himself — He had to remove it! There was some higher spiritual blessing in communion with God.

Seek to cherish a spirit of more childlike confidence in your Heavenly Father's will. You are not left unfriended and alone to buffet the storms of the wilderness. Your *Marahs* as well as your *Elims* are appointed by Him. A gracious pillar-cloud is before you. Follow it through sunshine and storm. He may "lead you about," but He will not lead you wrong.

Unutterable tenderness is the characteristic of all His dealings. "Blessed be His name," says a tried believer, "He makes my feet like hinds' feet" (*literally*, "equals" them), "He *equals* them for every precipice, every ascent, every leap."

And who is it that speaks this quieting word? It is He who Himself felt the preciousness of the assurance during His own awful sufferings, that all were *needed*, and all *appointed*; that from Bethlehem's cradle to Calvary's Cross — there was not an unnecessary thorn in the crown of sorrow which He, the *Man of Sorrows*, bore. Every drop in His bitter cup was mingled by His Father: "This cup which *You* give Me to drink, shall I not drink it?" Oh, if He could extract comfort in this hour of inconceivable agony, in the thought that a Father's hand lighted the fearful furnace-fires — what strong consolation is there is the same truth to all His suffering people!

What! one superfluous drop! one unessential pang! one unneeded cross! Hush the secret atheism! He gave His Son for you! He calls Himself "your Father!" Whatever be the trial under which you are now smarting, let the word of a gracious Savior be "like oil thrown on the fretful sea;" let it dry every rebellious tear-drop. "He, your unerring Parent, knows that you have need of *this* as well as *all* these things."

## THE POWER OF PRAYER

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

"Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do — that the Father may be glorified in the Son." — John 14:13

Blessed Jesus! it is You who has unlocked to Your people the gates of prayer. Without You, they must have been shut forever. It was Your *atoning merit* on earth that first opened them; it is Your *intercessory work* in Heaven that keeps them open still.

How unlimited the promise — "*Whatever you shall ask!*" It is the pledge of all that the needy sinner requires — all that an Omnipotent Savior can bestow! As the great Steward of the mysteries of grace, He seems to say to His faithful servants, "Take your request, and under this, My superscription, write what you please." And then, when the blank is filled up, He further endorses each petition with the words, "*I WILL do it!*"

He further encourages us to ask "*in His name.*" In the case of an earthly petitioner there are some pleas more influential in obtaining a benefit than others. Jesus speaks of *this* as forming the key to the heart of God. As David loved the helpless cripple of Saul's house "*for Jonathan's sake,*" so will the Father, by virtue of our covenant relationship to the true Jonathan (*lit.*, "the gift of God"), delight in giving us even "exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

Reader, do you know the blessedness of confiding your every need and every care — your every sorrow and every cross — into the ear of the Savior? He is the "Wonderful Counselor." With an exquisitely tender sympathy, He can enter into the innermost depths of your need. That need may be great — but the everlasting arms are underneath it all. Think of Him now, at this moment — the great Angel of the Covenant, with the censer full of much incense, in which are placed your feeblest aspirations, your most burdened sighs — the odor-breathing cloud ascending with acceptance before the Father's throne. The answer may tarry — these your supplications may seem to be kept long on the wing, hovering around the mercy-seat. A gracious God sometimes sees it fitting thus to test the faith and patience of His people. He delights to hear the music of their importunate pleadings — to see them undeterred by difficulties — unrepelled by apparent forgetfulness and neglect. But He *will* come at last — the pent-up fountain of love and mercy will at length burst out — the soothing accents will in His own good time be heard, "Be it unto you according to your word!"

Soldier of Christ! with all your other armor, do not forget the weapon, "*All-prayer.*" It is that which keeps bright and shining "the whole armor of God." While yet out in the night of a dark world — while still camping in an enemy's country — kindle your watch-fires at the altar of incense. You must be Moses — pleading on the Mount; if you would be Joshua —

victorious in the world's daily battle. Confide your cause to this waiting Redeemer. You cannot weary Him with your importunity. He delights in hearing. He is glorified in giving. The memorable Bethany-utterance remains unaltered and unrepealed, "I know that You hear Me always." He is still the "Prince that has power with God and prevails" — He still promises and pleads — he still He lives and loves!

## THE UNVEILED DEALINGS

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"You do not realize **now** what I am doing — but **later** you will understand."* — John 13:7

O blessed day, when the long sealed book of mystery shall be unfolded, when the "fountains of the great deep shall be broken up," "the channels of the waters seen," and *all* discovered to be one vast revelation of unerring wisdom and ineffable love! Here we are often baffled at the *Lord's dispensations*; we cannot fathom *His ways* — like the well of Sychar — they are deep, and we have nothing to draw with. But soon the "mystery of God will be finished;" the enigmatical "seals," with all their inner meanings, opened. When that "morning without clouds" shall break, each soul will be like the angel standing in the sun — there will be no shadow; all will be perfect day!

Believer, be still! The dealings of your Heavenly Father may seem dark to you; there may seem now to be no golden fringe, no "bright light in the clouds;" but a day of disclosures is at hand. "Take it on trust a little while." An earthly child takes on trust what his father tells him: when he reaches maturity, much that was baffling to his infant comprehension is then explained. You are in this world in the childhood of your being — Eternity is the soul's immortal manhood. *There*, every dealing will be vindicated. It will lose all its "darkness" when bathed in floods "of the excellent glory!"

Ah! instead of thus being as weaned children, how apt are we to exercise ourselves in matters too high for us! not content with knowing that our Father *wills* it — but presumptuously seeking to know *how* it is, and *why* it is. If it is unfair to pronounce on the *unfinished* and *incomplete* works of man; if the painter, or sculptor, or artificer, would shrink from having his labors judged of when in a rough, unpolished, immature state — how much more so with the works of God! How we should honor Him by a simple, confiding, unreserved submission to His will — contented patiently to wait the fulfillment of this "*later*" promise, when all the lights and shadows in the now half-finished *picture* will be blended and melted into one harmonious whole — when all the now disjointed stones in the *temple* will be seen to fit into their appointed place — giving unity, and symmetry, and compactness to all the building.

And who is it that speaks these living "words," "What *I* am doing?" It is He who died for us! who now lives for us! Blessed Jesus! You may *do* much that our blind hearts would like *undone* — "terrible things in righteousness which we looked not for." The heaviest (what we may be tempted to call the severest) cross You can lay upon us we shall regard as only the *apparent* severity of unutterable and unalterable love. Eternity will unfold how *all* — *all* was needed; that nothing else, nothing less, could have done! If not now, at least then — the verdict on a calm retrospect of life will be this, "The Word of the Lord is right, and all His works are done in truth."

## THE FATHER GLORIFIED

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Herein is My Father glorified — that you bear much fruit; showing yourselves to be My disciples."* — John 15:8

When surveying the boundless ocean of covenant mercy — every wave chiming, "*God is Love!*" — does the thought ever present itself, "*What can I do for this great Being who has done so much for me?*" Recompense, I

cannot! No more can my purest services add one iota to His un-derived glory, than the tiny candle can add to the blaze of the sun at noonday, or a drop of water to the boundless ocean. Yet, wondrous thought! from this worthless soul of mine there may roll in a revenue of glory which He who loves the broken and contrite spirit will "not despise." "*Herein is My Father glorified — that you bear much fruit.*"

Reader! are you a *fruit-bearer* in your Lord's vineyard? Are you seeking to make life one grand act of consecration to His glory — one thank-offering for His unmerited love? You may be unable to exhibit much fruit in the eye of the world. Your circumstances and position in life may forbid you to point to any splendid services, or laborious and imposing efforts in the cause of God. It matters not. It is often those fruits that are unseen and unknown to man, ripening in seclusion — that He values most — the quiet, lowly walk — patience and submission — gentleness and humility — putting yourself unreservedly in His hands — willing to be led by Him even in darkness — saying, Not *my* will — but *Your* will — the unselfish spirit, the meek bearing of an injury, the unostentatious kindness; these are some of the "fruits" which your Heavenly Father loves, and by which He is glorified.

Perchance it may be with you the season of *trial*, the chamber of protracted *sickness*, the time of desolating *bereavement*, some *furnace* seven times heated. Herein, too, you may sweetly glorify your God. Never is your Heavenly Father *more* glorified by His children on earth, than when, in the midst of these furnace-fires, He listens to nothing but the gentle breathings of confiding faith and love, "Let Him do what seems good unto Him." Yes — you can, there in the furnace, glorify Him in a way which angels cannot do in a world where they have no trials. They can glorify God only with the *crown*; you can glorify Him with the *cross* and the prospect of the *crown* together! Ah, if He is dealing severely with you — if He, as the *Great Gardener*, is *pruning* His vines, *lopping* their boughs, and *stripping off* their luxuriant branches — remember the end! "He prunes it — that it may bring forth *more* fruit," and "*Herein is My Father glorified!*"

Be it yours to lie passive in His hands, saying in un murmuring resignation, "*Father, glorify Your name! Glorify Yourself, whether by*

*giving — or taking, filling my cup — or "emptying me from vessel to vessel! Let me know no will but Yours!"* Angels possess no higher honor and privilege than glorifying the God before whom they cast their crowns. How blessed to be able thus to claim brotherhood with the spirits in the upper sanctuary! No, more, to be associated with the Savior Himself in the theme of His own exalted joy, when He said, "*I have glorified You on earth!*" "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

## THE TENDER SOLICITUDE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"The very hairs of your head are all numbered!"* — Matthew 10:30

What a "word" is this! All that befalls you, to the very numbering of your hairs — is known to God! Nothing can happen by *accident* or *chance*. Nothing can elude His inspection. The fall of the forest leaf — the fluttering of the insect — the waving of the angel's wing — the annihilation of a world — all are equally noted by Him! Man speaks of *great* things and *small* things — but God knows no such distinction.

How especially comforting to think of this tender solicitude with reference to His own covenant people — that He metes out all their *joys* — and all their *sorrows!* Every *sweet*--and every *bitter*--is ordained by Him. Even "wearisome nights" are "appointed." Not a *pang* I feel, not a *tear* I shed — but is known to Him. What are called "dark dealings," are the *ordinations of undeviating faithfulness*. Man may err — his ways are often crooked; "but as for God — *His way is perfect!*" He puts my tears into His bottle. Every moment *His everlasting arms* are underneath and around me. He keeps me "as the apple of His eye." He "bears" me as a man bears his own son!

Do I look to the FUTURE? Is there much of uncertainty and mystery hanging over it? It may be, much foreboding of evil. Trust Him. All is

marked out for me. Dangers will be averted; bewildering mazes will show themselves to be interlaced and interweaved with mercy. "He keeps the *feet* of His saints." Not a *hair* of their head will be touched.

He leads sometimes darkly, sometimes sorrowfully; most frequently by cross and circuitous ways, which we ourselves would not have chosen; but always *wisely*, always *tenderly*. With all its mazy windings and turnings, its roughness and ruggedness — the believer's is not only a *right* way — but *the* right way — the *best* which covenant love and wisdom could select.

"Nothing," says Jeremy Taylor, "does so establish the mind amid the rollings and turbulence of present things — as both a look *above* them and a look *beyond* them; above them — to the steady and loving hand by which they are ruled; and beyond them — to the sweet and beautiful end to which, by that hand, they will be brought." "The Great Counselor," says Thomas Brooks, "puts clouds and darkness round about Him, bidding us follow at His beck through the cloud, promising an eternal and uninterrupted sunshine on the other side." On that "other side" we shall see how every apparent rough blast has been hastening our *boats* nearer the desired *haven*.

Well may I commit the keeping of my soul to Jesus in well-doing — as unto a faithful Creator. He gave *Himself* for me. This transcendent pledge of love — is the guarantee for the bestowment of every other needed blessing. Oh, blessed thought! my *sorrows* are numbered--by the Man of Sorrows; my *tears* are counted--by Him who shed first His tears, and then His blood for me! He will impose no *needless* burden, and exact no *unnecessary* sacrifice. There was no unnecessary *drop* in the cup of His own sufferings; neither will there be in that of His people. "Though He slays me — yet will I trust in Him!" "Therefore comfort one another with *these words*."

## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**



"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"I am the Good Shepherd. I know My sheep — and My sheep know Me."*

— John 10:14

*"The Good Shepherd"* — well can the sheep who know His voice, attest the truthfulness and faithfulness of this endearing name and word. Where would they have been through eternity — had He not left His throne of light and glory, traveling down to this dark valley of the curse, and giving His life a ransom for them? Think of His love to each separate member of the flock — wandering over pathless wilds with unwearied patience and unquenchable ardor, ceasing not the pursuit — *until* He finds it.

Think of His love *now* — "I AM the Good Shepherd." Still that *tender eye of watchfulness* following the guilty wanderers — the glories of Heaven and the songs of angels unable to dim or alter His affection — the music of the words, at this moment coming as sweetly from His lips as when first He uttered them, "I know My sheep." Every individual believer — the weakest, the weariest, the faintest — claims His attention. His loving eye follows me day by day out to the wilderness — marks out my pasture, studies my needs, and trials, and sorrows, and perplexities — every steep ascent, every brook, every winding path, every thorny thicket!

*"He goes before them."* It is not rough driving — but *gentle guiding*. He does not take them over an unknown road; He Himself has trodden it before. He has drunk of every "brook by the way;" He Himself has "suffered being tempted;" He is "able to support those who are tempted." He seems to say, "Fear not! I cannot lead you wrong; follow Me in the bleak wasteland, the blackened wilderness — as well as by the green pastures and the still waters. Do you ask why I have left the sunny side of the valley — carpeted with flowers, and bathed in sunshine — leading you to some high mountain alone, some cheerless spot of sorrow? Trust Me! I will lead you by paths you have not known — but they are all known *to* Me, and selected *by* Me — Follow Me!"

*"My sheep know Me!"* Reader! can you subscribe to these closing words of this gracious utterance? Do you "know" Him in all the glories of His

*person* — in all the completeness of His finished *work* — in all the tenderness and unutterable love of His every *dealing* towards you?

It has been remarked by Palestine travelers, that not only do the sheep there follow the guiding shepherd — but even while eating the herbage as they go along, they look wistfully up to see that they are *near* him. Is this your attitude — "*looking unto Jesus?*" "In all your ways acknowledge Him — and He will direct your paths." Leave the future — to His providing. "The Lord is my Shepherd — I shall not lack." *I shall not lack!* — it has been beautifully called "the bleating of Messiah's sheep." Take it as your watchword during your wilderness wanderings, until *grace* is perfected in *glory*. Let this be the record of your simple faith and unwavering trust, "These are those who follow — wherever He sees fit to guide them." "His sheep follow Him — for they know His voice."

## THE ABIDING COMFORTER

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."* — John 14:16

When one beloved earthly friend is taken away — how the heart is drawn out towards those that remain! Jesus was now about to leave His sorrowing disciples. He directs them to one whose presence would fill up the vast blank which His own absence was to make. His name was, *The Comforter*; His mission was, "to abide with them forever." Accordingly, no sooner had the gates of Heaven closed on their ascended Lord, than, in fulfillment of His own gracious promise, the bereaved and orphaned Church was baptized with Pentecostal fire. "When I depart — I will send Him to you."

Reader, do you realize your privilege — living under the dispensation of the Spirit? Is it your daily prayer that He may come down in all the plenitude of His heavenly graces on your soul, even "as rain upon the

mown grass, and showers that water the earth?" You cannot live without Him; there cannot be one heavenly aspiration, not one breathing of love, not one upward glance of faith — without His gracious influences! Apart from Him — there is no preciousness in the *Word*, no blessing in *ordinances*, no permanent sanctifying results in *affliction*. As the angel directed Hagar to the hidden spring — so this blessed Agent, true to His name and office, directs His people to the waters of comfort, giving new glory to the promises, investing the Savior's character and work with new loveliness and beauty.

How precious is the title which this "Word of Jesus" gives Him — the COMFORTER! What a word for a sorrowing world! The Church militant has its tent pitched in a "valley of tears." The name of the divine visitor, who comes to her and ministers to her needs, is — *the Comforter*. Wide is the family of the afflicted — but He has a healing balm for all — the weak, the tempted, the sick, the sorrowing, the bereaved, the dying! How different from other "sons of consolation!" *Human friends* — a look may alienate; adversity may estrange; death must separate! The "Word of Jesus" speaks of One whose attribute and prerogative is to "abide with us forever" — superior to all vicissitudes — surviving death itself!

And surely if anything else can endear His mission of love to His Church, it is that He comes direct from God, as the fruit and gift of Jesus' intercession, "I will ask the Father." *This Holy Dove of peace and comfort* is let out by the hand of Jesus — from the *ark of covenant mercy* within the veil! Nor is the gift more *glorious* — than it is *free*. Does the word, the look, of a suffering child — get the eye and the heart of an *earthly* father? "If you, then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children — how much more shall your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit unto those who ask Him?" It is He who makes these "words of Jesus" "winged words." "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you."

## THE GRACIOUS VERDICT

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more!"* — John 8:11

How much more tender is Jesus — than the tenderest of earthly friends! The *Apostles*, in a moment of irritation, would have called down fire from heaven on obstinate sinners — but their Master rebuked the unkind suggestion.

*Peter*, the trusted but treacherous disciple, expected nothing but harsh and merited reproof for faithlessness — but He who knew well how that heart would be bowed with penitential sorrow, sends first the kindest of messages, and then the gentlest of rebukes — "Do you love Me?"

The *watchmen* in the Song of Solomon smote the bride, tore off her veil, and loaded her with reproaches — but when she found her lost Lord, there was not one word of upbraiding from Him! "So slow is He to anger," says an illustrious believer, "so ready to forgive, that when His *prophets* lost all patience with the people so as to make intercession *against* them — yet even then, He could not cast off His people whom He foreknew, for His great Name's sake."

The guilty sinner to whom He speaks this comforting "word" above, was frowned upon by her accusers. But, if others spurned her from their presence, "*Neither do I condemn you,*" Well it is to fall into the hands of this blessed Savior-God, for great are His mercies!

Are we to infer from this, that He merely *winks* at sin? Far from it! His blood, His work — Bethlehem, and Calvary, refute the thought! Before the guilt even of one solitary soul could be washed out — He had to descend from His everlasting throne to agonize on the accursed tree. But this "word of Jesus" is a word of tender encouragement to every sincere, broken-hearted penitent — that *crimson* sins, and *scarlet* sins — are no barrier to a free, full, everlasting forgiveness.

The Israelite of old, gasping in his agony in the sands of the wilderness, had but to "*look — and live!*" And still does He say, "*Look* unto Me — and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" Upreared by the side of His own cross

there was a *monumental column* for all time, only second to itself in wonder. Over the head of the dying felon is the superscription written for despairing guilt and trembling penitence, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sinners*." "He never yet," says Charnock, "put out a dim candle that was lighted at the Sun of Righteousness." "Whatever our guiltiness is," says Rutherford, "yet when it falls into the sea of God's mercy, it is but like a drop of blood fallen into the great ocean!"

Reader, you may be the chief of *sinners* — or it may be the chief of *backsliders*; your soul may have *veered astray* like an arrow from a broken bow. As the bankrupt is afraid to look into his books — so you may be afraid to look into your own heart! You are hovering on the *verge of despair*. Conscience, and the memory of unnumbered sins, is uttering the desponding verdict, "I condemn you!" Jesus has a kinder word — a more cheering declaration, "*Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more!*" "And all wondered at the gracious WORDS that proceeded out of His mouth!"

## THE WONDROUS RELATIONSHIP

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"For whoever shall do the will of God — the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother."* — Mark 3:35

As if no solitary earthly type were enough to image forth the love of Jesus, He assembles into one verse — a group of the tenderest earthly relationships. Human affection has to focus its loveliest hues — but all is too little to adequately expatiate the *depth* and *intensity* of His love. He is "Son," "Brother," "Friend" — all in one; "cleaving closer than any brother."

And can we wonder at such language? He gave *Himself* for us; after that pledge of His affection — we must cease to marvel at any expression of

the interest He feels in us. Anything that He can *say* or *do* for us now — is infinitely less than what He *has done*.

Believer! are you *solitary* and desolate? Has *bereavement* severed earthly ties? Has the grave made forced estrangements — sundered the closest links of earthly affection? In Jesus you have filial and fraternal love combined; He is *the Friend of friends*, whose presence and fellowship compensates for all losses, and supplies all blanks! If you are orphaned, friendless, comfortless here, remember that there is in the Elder Brother on the Throne — a love *deep* as the unfathomed ocean, and *boundless* as Eternity!

And **who** are those who can claim the blessedness spoken of under this wondrous imagery? On *whom* does He lavish this unutterable affection? No mere outward profession will purchase it. No church, no priest, no ordinances, no denominational distinctions are sufficient.

It is for those who are possessed of *holy characters*. "He who *does* the will of My Father who is in Heaven!" He who reflects the mind of Jesus; imbibes His Spirit; takes His Word as the regulator of his daily walk, and makes His glory the great end of his being; he who lives *to* God, and *with* God, and *for* God; the humble, lowly, Christ-like, Heaven-seeking Christian — he it is who can claim as his own this wondrous heritage of love!

If it is a worthy object of ambition to be loved by the good and the great on earth — then what must it be to have an eye of love ever beaming upon us from the eternal Throne, in comparison of which the attachment here of brother, sister, kinsman, friend — all combined — pales like the stars before the rising sun!

Though we are often ashamed to call Him "Brother," "He is not ashamed to call *us* brethren." He looks down on poor worms, and says, "*These* are My mother, and sisters, and brothers!" "I will write upon them," He says in another place, "My new name." Just as we write our name on a book to tell that it belongs to us — so Jesus would write His own name on *us*, the *wondrous volumes of His grace* — that they may be read and pondered by principalities and powers.

Have we known and believed this astonishing love of God to us? Ah, how poor has been the requital! Who cannot subscribe to these holy words: "*Your love* has been as a *shower* to us — but *our return* but a *dew-drop*, and that dew-drop is stained with sin!" "If a man loves Me, he will *keep My Words*; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

## THE BEFRIENDED ORPHANS

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"I will not leave you comfortless — I will come to you."* — John 14:18

Does the Christian's path lie all the way through *Beulah* land? No, he is forewarned it is to be one of "much tribulation." He has his *Marahs* — as well as his *Elims*; his valleys of *Baca* — as well as his grapes of *Eshcol*. Often is he left un-befriended to bear the brunt of the storm — his *gourds* fading when most needed — his sun going down while it is yet day — his happy home and happy heart darkened in a moment with sorrows, with which a stranger (with which often a *brother*) cannot understand.

But there is *One Brother* "born for adversity" who *can* understand. How often has that voice broken with its silvery accents, the muffled stillness of the sick-chamber! "I will not leave you comfortless — the *world* may, *friends* may, the desolations of *bereavement* and death may — but *I* will not! You will be alone — yet *not* alone, for I your Savior and your God will be with you!"

Jesus seems to have an especial love and affection for His orphaned and comfortless people. A father loves his *sick and sorrowing* child most; of all his household, this sick one occupies most of his thoughts. Christ seems to delight to lavish His deepest sympathy on "him that has no helper." It is in the hour of sorrow, His people have found Him most precious; it is in "the wilderness" that He speaks most "comfortable unto them." He gives them "their vineyards from thence" — in the places they

least expected, wells of heavenly consolation break forth at their feet. As Jonathan of old, when faint and weary, had his strength revived by the honey he found dropping in the tangled thicket — so the faint and woe-worn children of God find "honey in the forest" — everlasting consolation dropping from the tree of life, in the midst of the thorniest thickets of affliction!

Comfortless ones — be comforted! Jesus often makes you *portionless* here in this world — to drive you to Himself, the *everlasting portion*. He often dries every rill and fountain of earthly bliss — that He may lead you to say, "All my springs are in You!" "He seems intent," says one who could speak from experience, "to fill up every *gap* which love has been forced to make; one of His errands from Heaven was to bind up the broken-hearted." How beautifully in one amazing verse does He conjoin the *depth* and tenderness of His comfort — with the *certainty* of it, "As one whom his mother comforts — so will I comfort you, and you SHALL be comforted!"

Ah, how many would not have their wilderness-state altered, with all its trials, and gloom, and sorrow — just so that they might enjoy the unutterable sympathy and love of this Comforter of the comfortless, one ray of whose approving smile can dispel the deepest earthly gloom! As the clustering constellations shine with the most intense luster in the midnight sky — so these "words of Jesus" come out like ministering angels in the *deep dark night of earthly sorrow*. We may see no beauty in them when the world is sunny and bright; but He has laid them up in store for us — for the dark and cloudy day. "These things have I told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them."

## THE WORLD CONQUERED

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!"*



And shall I be afraid of the world, which is already conquered? The Almighty Victor, within view of His crown, turns around to His faint and weary soldiers — and bids them take courage. They are not fighting their way through untried enemies. The God-Man Mediator "*knows* their sorrows." "He was tempted in every way, just as we are." "Both He who sanctifies (that is, Christ), and those who are sanctified (His people), are all of one (nature)." As the great Predecessor, He heads the pilgrim band, saying, "I will show you the path of life." The way to Heaven is consecrated by His footprints! Every *thorn* that wounds them — has wounded Him before. Every *cross* they can bear — He has borne before. Every *tear* they shed — He has shed before. There is one respect, indeed, in which the identity fails — He was "yet without sin;" but this recoil of His holy nature from moral evil gives Him a deeper and more intense sensibility towards those who have still corruption within, responding to temptation without.

Reader! are you ready to faint under your troubles? under a seducing world? under a wandering, wayward heart? "Consider *Him* who endured!" Listen to your adorable Redeemer, stooping from His Throne, and saying, "*I* have overcome the world." He came forth unscathed from its snares. With the same heavenly weapon which He bids you to wield — three times did He repel the Tempter, saying, "It is written!"

Is it some crushing trial — or overwhelming grief? He is "*acquainted* with grief." He, the mighty Vine, knows the minutest fibers of sorrow in the branches; when the pruning knife touches *them* — it touches *Him*. "He has gone," says a tried sufferer, "through every class of suffering in our wilderness school." He loves to bring His people into untried and perplexing places — that they may seek out the *guiding pillar*, and prize its radiance. He puts them on the darkened waves, that they may follow the *guiding light* hung out astern from the only Ship of pure and unsullied humanity that was ever armored against the storm.

Be assured that there is *disguised love* in all that He does. He who knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves, often puts a *thorn* in our nest to drive us to the wing — that we may not be *grovelers* forever. "It is,"

says Evans, "upon the *smooth ice* that we slip; the *rough path* is safest for the feet."

The tearless and undimmed eye — is not to be coveted *here* on earth; that is reserved for Heaven! Who can tell what muffled and disguised "needs be" there may lurk under these worldly troubles? His true spiritual seeds are often planted deep in the soil; they have to make their way through a load of sorrow before they reach the surface; but their roots are thereby the firmer and deeper struck. Had it not been for these lowly and needed "depths," they might have rushed up as feeble saplings, and succumbed to the first cold blast. He often leads His people still, as He led them of old, to a "high mountain, alone;" but it is to a *high* mountain — *above the world*; and, better still, He who Himself has overcome the world — leads them there, and speaks comfort unto them!

## THE LITTLE FLOCK

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* — Luke 12:32

The music of the Shepherd's voice again! Another comforting "word," and how tender! *His* flock, a *little* flock, a *feeble* flock, a *fearful* flock — but a *beloved* flock — loved of the Father, enjoying His "good pleasure," and soon to be a *glorified* flock — safe in the fold, secure within the kingdom! How does He quiet their fears and misgivings? As they stand panting on the bleak mountainside, He points His crook upwards to the bright and shining gates of glory, and says, "*It is your Father's good pleasure to give you these!*" What gentle words! what a blessed consummation! Gracious Savior, Your *gentleness* has made me great!

That kingdom is the believer's — by irreversible and inalienable *covenant-right*. Says Jesus in another place, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father has appointed unto Me." It is as sure as

*everlasting love* and *almighty power* can make it. Satan, the great foe of the kingdom, may be injecting foul misgivings, doubts, and fears as to your security; but he cannot *divest* you of your purchased immunities! He must first pluck the crown from the 'brow upon the throne', before he can weaken or impair this sure word of promise! If "it pleased the Lord" to *bruise* the Shepherd — then it will surely please Him to glorify the purchased flock.

Believers, think of this! "It is your Father's good pleasure." The Good Shepherd, in leading you across the intervening mountains, shows you signals and memorials of paternal grace studding all the way. He may "lead you about" in your way there. *How* did He lead the children of Israel of old out of Egypt — to their promised kingdom? By forty years' *wilderness discipline* and privations! But trust Him; do not dishonor Him with guilty doubts and fears. Do not look *back* on your dark, stumbling paths, nor *within* on your fitful and vacillating heart; but *forwards* to the promised heavenly kingdom!

Let the melody of the Shepherd's voice fall gently on your ear, "It is your Father's good pleasure." I have given you, He seems to say, the best proof that it is *My* good pleasure. In order to purchase that kingdom — I died for you! "I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find My sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day." Fear not, then, little flock! Though for a while, you are in the bleak mountain and arid wasteland, seeking your way Zionward, it may be "with torn fleeces and bleeding feet;" for, "It is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven — that one of these little ones should perish!"

## **THE UNLIMITED OFFER**

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"If any man thirsts — let him come unto Me, and drink."* — John 7:37

This is one of the most gracious "words" which ever "proceeded out of the mouth of God!" The *time* that it was uttered was an impressive one; it was on "the last, the great day" of the Feast of Tabernacles, when a denser multitude than on any of the seven preceding ones were assembled together. The golden bowl, according to custom, had probably just been filled with the waters of Siloam, and was being carried up to the Temple amid the acclamations of the crowd, when the *Savior of the world* seized the opportunity of speaking to them some truths of momentous import. Many, doubtless, were the "words of Jesus" uttered on the previous days — but the most important is reserved for the last. What, then, is the great closing theme on which He rivets the attention of this vast auditory, and which He would have them carry away to their distant homes? It is, *The freeness of His own great Salvation*, "If any man thirsts — let him come unto Me, and drink."

Reader, do you discredit the reality of this gracious offer? Are your *legion sins* standing as a barrier between you and a Savior's offered mercy? Do you feel as if you cannot come "just as you are;" that some partial cleansing, some preparatory reformation must take place *before* you can venture to the living fountain? No, "*If any man.*"

What is freer than water? — The poorest beggar may drink "without money" from the wayside pool. *That* is your Lord's own picture of His own glorious salvation; you are invited to come, "without one plea," in all your poverty and need, in all your weakness and unworthiness. Remember the Redeemer's saying to the woman of Samaria. She was the chief of sinners — profligate, hardened, degraded — but He made no condition, no qualification; *simple believing* was all that was required, "If you knew the gift of God," you would have asked, and He would have given you "living water."

But is there not, after all, one *condition* mentioned in this "word of Jesus?", "*If any man thirsts.*" You may have the depressing consciousness that you experience no such *ardent longings* after holiness — but only of your *need* of the Savior. But is not this very conviction of your need — an indication of a feeble longing after Christ? If you are saying, "I have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," then He who makes the offer of the salvation — will Himself fill your empty vessel, "He satisfies the

*longing soul with goodness."*

"Jesus *stood and cried out.*" It is the *solitary instance* recorded of Him, of whom it is said, "He shall *not* strive nor cry out, nor raise His voice in the streets." But it was truth of surpassing interest and magnitude He had to proclaim. It was a declaration, moreover, especially dear to Him. As it formed the theme of this ever-memorable *sermon* during His public ministry, so when He was sealing up the inspired record — the last utterances of His voice on earth, until that voice shall be heard again on the throne, contained the same life-giving invitation, "Let him that is thirsty come — and whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely!" Oh! as the echoes of that gracious saying — this blast of the silver trumpet — are still sounding to the ends of the world, may this be the recorded result, "As He spoke *these words* — many believed on Him."

## THE SONFUL SERVITUDE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"For My yoke is easy — and My burden is light."* — Matthew 11:30

Can the same be said of *Satan* — or *sin*? With regard to *them* — how faithfully true rather is the reverse, "My yoke is *heavy*, and my burden is *grievous!*" Christ's service is a happy service, the only happy one; and even when there is a *cross* to carry, or a yoke to bear — it is His own appointment. "*My yoke.*" It is sent by no untried friend. No, He who puts it on His people, bore this very yoke Himself. "He *carried* our sorrows." How blessed this feeling of *holy servitude to so kind a Master!* not like "dumb, driven cattle," goaded on — but *led*, and led often most tenderly when the yoke and the burden are upon us. The great apostle rarely speaks of himself under any other title but *one*. That *one* he seems to make his boast. He had much whereof he might glory — he had been the instrument in saving thousands — he had spoken before kings — he had been in Caesar's palace and Caesar's presence — he had been caught up into the third heaven — but in all his letters this is his joyful prefix and

superscription, "The *servant* (literally, the **slave**) of Jesus Christ!"

Reader! do you know this *blessed servitude*? Can you say with a joyful heart, "O Lord, truly I am Your servant"? He is no hard taskmaster. Would Satan try to teach you so? Let this be the refutation, "He loved me — and *gave Himself for me*." True, the *yoke* is the appointed *discipline* He employs in training His children for immortality. But be comforted! "It is His tender hand that *puts* it on — and *keeps* it on." He will suit the yoke — to the neck; and the neck — to the yoke. He will suit His *grace* to your *trials*. No, He will bring you even to be in love with these, when they bring along with them such gracious unfoldings of His own faithfulness and mercy!

How His people need thus to be in heaviness through manifold temptations, to keep them meek and submissive! "Jeshurun (like a bullock unaccustomed to the harness, fed and pampered in the stall) waxed fat, and kicked!" Never is there more gracious love than when God takes means to curb and subjugate, humble us, and to prove us — bringing us out from *ourselves*, our *likings*, our *confidences*, our *prosperity* — and putting us under the needed YOKE!

And who has ever repented of that joyful servitude? Among all the regrets that mingle with a dying hour, and often bedew with bitter tears a dying pillow — who ever told of regrets and repentance here?

Tried believer — has He ever *failed* you? Has His *yoke* been too grievous? Have your tears been unalleviated — your sorrows unsoled — your temptations above that which you were able to bear? Ah! rather can you not testify, "I cast my burden upon Him — and He sustained me!" How have *seeming difficulties* melted away! How has the *yoke* lost its heaviness, and the *cross* its bitterness, in the thought of *who* you were bearing it for! There is a promised rest in the very carrying of the yoke; and a better rest remains for the weary and toil-worn when the appointed work is finished; for thus says "that same Jesus," "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me — and you shall find REST unto your souls!"

## THE MEASURE OF LOVE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"As the Father has loved Me — so have I loved you."* — John 15:9

This is the most amazing verse in the Bible! Who can fathom the *unimagined depths* of that love which dwelt in the bosom of the Father from all eternity towards His Son? — and yet, here is the Savior's own measure of His love towards His people!

There is no subject more profoundly mysterious than those mystic inter-communicings between the first and second persons in the adorable Trinity before the world was. Scripture gives us only some dim and shadowy revelations regarding them — distant gleams of light, and no more. Let one suffice. "*Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.*"

We know that earthly affection is deepened and intensified by increased familiarity with its object. The friendship that began only yesterday is not the sacred, hallowed thing which years of growing communion have matured. If we may with reverence apply this test to the highest type of holy affection, what must have been that *interchange of love* which the measureless span of Eternity had fostered — a love, moreover, not fitful, transient, vacillating, subject to altered tones and estranged looks — but pure, constant, untainted, without one shadow of turning! And yet, listen to the words of Jesus, "*As the Father has loved Me — so have I loved you!*"

It would have been infinitely more than we had reason to expect, if He had said, "*As My Father has loved angels — so have I loved you.*" But the love borne to no finite beings is an appropriate symbol. Long before the birth of time or of worlds — that love existed. It was together with Eternity itself. Hear how the two themes of the Savior's eternal rejoicing — the *love of His Father*, and His *love for sinners* — are grouped together, "*Rejoicing always before Him, and in the habitable part of His earth!*"

To complete the picture, we must take in a counterpart description of the Father's love to us, "Therefore does My Father love Me," says Jesus in another place, "because I lay down My life!" God had an all-sufficiency in His love — He needed not the wearisome love of creatures to add to His glory or happiness; but He seems to say, that so intense is His love for us — that He loves even His beloved Son more (if infinite love be capable of increase), because He laid down His life for the guilty! It is regarding the Redeemed it is said, "He shall *rest* in His love — He shall rejoice over them with singing."

In the assertion, "God is love," we are left truly with no mere unproved affirmation regarding the existence of some abstract quality in the divine nature. "Herein," says the apostle, "perceive we THE LOVE of God," but, as it has been remarked, ("Our translators need not have added *whose* love, for there is but one such specimen"), "*because* He laid down His life for us." No expression of love can be wondered at, after *this*. Ah, how miserable are our best expressions, compared with His! "*Our* love is but the reflection — as cold as the *moon*; *His* is as the *sun*." Shall we refuse to love HIM more in return, who has *first* loved, and SO *loved us*?

## THE BRIEF GOSPEL

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

"*Only believe!*" — Mark 5:36

The *briefest* of the "words of Jesus," but one of the most *comforting*. They contain the essence and epitome of all saving truth.

Reader, is *Satan* assailing you with tormenting fears? Is the thought of your sins — the guilty past — coming up in terrible memorial before you, almost tempting you to give way to hopeless despondency? Fear not! A gentle voice whispers in your ear, "*Only believe*. *Your sins* are great — but *My grace* and merits are greater! 'Only believe' that I *died* for you — that I am *living* for you and *pleading* for you, and that 'the faithful saying' is



as 'faithful' as ever, and as 'worthy of all acceptance' as ever."

Are you a *backslider*? Did you once run well? Has your own guilty backsliding alienated and estranged you from that *face* which was once all love, and that *service* which was once all delight? Are you breathing in broken-hearted sorrow over the holy memories of a close walk with God, "Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone on me!" "*Only believe.*" Take this your mournful soliloquy, and convert it into a prayer. "Only believe" Him whose ways are not as man's ways, "Return O backsliding children — and I will heal your backsliding!"

Are you beaten down with some *heavy trial*? Have your *fondest schemes* been blown upon — your *fairest blossoms* been withered in the bud? Has wave after wave of trouble been rolling upon you? Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious? Hear the "word of Jesus" resounding amid the thickest midnight of gloom — penetrating even through the vaults of the dead, "Believe, *only believe.*" There is an infinite *reason* for the trial — some lurking *thorn* that required removal — or some gracious *lesson* that required teaching. The dreadful severing blow — was dealt in love! God will be glorified in it, and your own soul made the better for it. Patiently wait until the *light of immortality* is reflected on a receding world. Here you must take *His dealings* on trust. The word of Jesus to you now is, "*Only believe.*" The word of Jesus in eternity (every inner meaning and purpose being unfolded), "Did I not tell you — that you will see God's glory if you believe?"

Are you fearful and agitated in *the prospect of death*? Through fear of the last enemy, have you been all your lifetime subject to bondage? "*Only believe.*" "As your day is — so shall your strength be." Dying *grace* will be given — when a dying *hour* comes! In the dark river, a *sustaining arm* will be underneath you — deeper than the deepest and darkest wave. Before you know it, the darkness will be past, the true Light shining — the whisper of faith in the nether valley. "Believe! Believe!" will be exchanged for angel-voices exclaiming, as you enter the portals of glory, "No longer through a glass darkly — but now face to face!"

Yes! Jesus Himself had no higher remedy for *sin*, for *sorrow*, and for *suffering* — than those two words convey. At the utmost extremity of His

own distress, and of His disciples' wretchedness, He could only say "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me." Believe — only believe. "Lord, I believe — help my unbelief."

## THE GREAT CALM

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Take courage! It is I--do not be afraid!"* — Mark 6:50

Jesus lives! His people may dispel their misgivings--for *Omnipotence* treads the waves! To sense it may seem at times to be otherwise--wayward accident and chance may appear to regulate human allotments; but not so! "The Lord's voice is upon the waters!" He sits at the helm guiding the tempest-tossed bark, and guiding it well.

How often does He come to us as He did to the disciples in that midnight hour when all seems lost, "in the fourth watch of the night," — when we least looked for Him; or when, like the shipwrecked apostle, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved!" — how often *just at that moment*, is the "word of Jesus" heard floating over the billows, "Take courage! It is I--do not be afraid!"

Believer, are you in *trouble*? Listen to the *voice in the storm*, "It is I--do not be afraid!" That voice, like Joseph's of old to his brethren, may *seem* rough — but there are *gracious undertones* of love. "*It is I!*" He seems to say: "It *was* I — who *roused* the storm! It is I — who when it has done its work, will *calm* it, and say, 'Peace, be still.' Every wave rolls at My bidding — every trial is My appointment — all have some gracious end; they are not sent to dash you against the sunken rocks — but to *waft you nearer to Heaven!*"

Is it *sickness*? "I am He who ordained your sicknesses; the weary wasted frame, and the nights of languishing — were sent by Me!"

Is it *bereavement*? "I am 'the Brother' born for adversity! Your loved and lost were plucked away by Me!"

Is it *death*? "I am the 'Abolisher of death,' seated by your side to calm the waves of ebbing life! It is I — about to fetch My pilgrim *home*. It is My voice that speaks: the Master has come — and calls for you!"

Reader, you will have reason yet to praise your God for every such *storm*! This is the history of every *heavenly voyager*, "**SO He** brings them to their desired haven." "*So!*" That word, in all its unknown and diversified meaning, is in *His* hand. He suits *His dealings* to every case. "*So!*" With some it is through quiet seas unfretted by one buffeting wave. "*So!*" With others it is "mounting up to heaven, and going down again to the deep!" But whatever is the leading and the discipline, here is the grand consummation, "**SO He** brings them to their desired haven!" It might have been with you the moanings of an eternal night-blast — no lull or pause in the storm. But soon the darkness will be past — and the hues of morn tipping the shores of glory!

And what, then, should your attitude be? "Looking unto Jesus!" Looking away from *self*, and *sin*, and *human props*, and *earthly refuges* and *confidences* — and fixing the eye of unwavering and unflinching faith on a reigning Savior! Ah, how a real quickening sight of Christ — dispels all guilty fears! The Roman keepers of old were frightened, and became as dead men. The lowly Jewish women were not afraid; why? "*I know that you seek Jesus!*" Reader, let your weary spirit fold itself to rest under the composing "word" of a gracious Savior, saying, "I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in *His Word* do I hope."

## THE DYING LEGACY

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Peace I leave with you, **My peace** I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be*

*afraid.*" — John 14:27

How we treasure the *last sayings* of a dying parent! How specially cherished and memorable are his last *looks* and last *words*! Here are the last words, the parting legacy, of a dying Savior. It is a legacy of *peace*.

What peace is this? It is His own purchase — a peace arising out of free forgiveness through His precious blood. It is sung in concert with "Glory to God in the highest" — a peace made as sure to us, as *eternal power* and *infinite love* can make it! It is *peace* the soul needs, that is nowhere else to be found — but through the blood of His cross! "Being justified by faith — we *have* peace with God." "HE gives His beloved *rest!*"

How different from the false and counterfeit peace in which so many are content to live, and content to die! *The world's peace* is all well — so long as *prosperity* lasts — so long as the stream runs smooth, and the sky is clear; but when the *flood* is at hand, or the *storm* is gathering, where is it? It is *gone!* There is no depending on its *permanency*. Often when the cup is fullest — there is the trembling apprehension that in one brief moment it may be dashed to the ground. The soul may be saying to itself, "Peace, peace;" but, like the *writing on the sand*, it may be obliterated by the first *wave of adversity!*

But, the peace which Jesus gives, is "not as the world gives." The peace of the *believer* is deep — calm — lasting — *everlasting*. The world, with all its blandishments, cannot *give* it. The world, with all its vicissitudes and fluctuations, cannot *take it away!* This peace is brightest — in the hour of trial; it lights up the final valley-gloom. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright — for the *end* of that man is peace!" Yes! how often is the believer's deathbed like the deep calm repose of a summer-evening's sky, when all nature is hushed to rest; the departing soul, like the vanishing sun, peacefully disappearing — only to shine in another and brighter universe! "I seem," said a Christian on his deathbed, "to have nothing to do but to wait: there is now nothing but *peace*, the *sweetest peace.*"

Believer! do you know this *peace which passes understanding?* Is it "*keeping* (literally, '*garrisoning* as in a citadel') your heart?" Have you

learned the blessedness of waking up, morning after morning, and feeling "I am at peace with my God!" Do you know the blessedness of beholding by faith the true Aaron — the great High Priest — coming forth from "the holiest of all" to "bless His people with peace?"

Waves of trouble may be murmuring around you — but they cannot touch you! You are in the *rock-crevice* against which the fiercest tornado sweeps on by. Oh! leave not the making of your peace with God to a dying hour! It will be a hard thing to smooth the death-pillow, if peace with God is left unsought until then. Make sure of it *now*. He, the true Melchizedek, is willing *now* to come forth to meet you with bread and wine — emblems of peaceful gospel blessings. All the "words of Jesus" are so many streams contributing to make your peace flow as a river, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace." "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints."

## THE SUPREME INVESTITURE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"All power in heaven and in earth is given unto Me!"* — Matthew 28:18

What an empire is this! Heaven and earth — the Church *militant* — the Church *triumphant* — angels and archangels — saints and seraphs are under Christ's supreme authority! At His mandate: the *billows* were hushed — *demons* crouched in terror — the *grave* yielded its prey! "Upon His head are *many crowns!*" He is made "Head over *all things!*" Yes! over *all things*, from the minutest — to the mightiest. He holds the stars in His right hand — He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, feeding every candlestick with the oil of His grace, and preserving every star in its spiritual orbit.

The Prince of Darkness has "a power," but it is not an "*all power.*" Satan is *potent* — but not *omnipotent*. Christ holds him on a chain! He has set

*bounds* that he may not pass over. "Satan," we read in the book of Job, "went out (with permission) from the presence of the Lord." Satan "*desired*" to have Peter that he might "sift him;" but there was a mightier agency at hand: "I have prayed for you," Jesus said to Peter, "that your faith will not fail!"

Believer, how often is there nothing but this grace of Jesus, between you and everlasting destruction! *Satan's key* may be fitting the lock in your wayward heart — but a stronger than *the strong man* is barring him out! The power of the adversary *fanning the flame* — the Omnipotence of Jesus quenching it!

Are you even now feeling the *strength* of your corruptions, the *weakness* of your graces, the presence of some outward or inward temptation? Look up to Him who has promised to make His grace sufficient for you; "all-sufficiency in all things" is His promise.

It is *power*, too — in conjunction with *tenderness*. He who sways the scepter of His universal empire "gently leads" His weak, and weary, and burdened ones! He who counts the number of the *stars* — loves to count the number of their *sorrows*! Nothing is too *great* — and nothing is too *insignificant* for *Him*! He paves His people's pathway, with love!

Blessed Jesus! my everlasting interests cannot be in better or in safer keeping, than in Yours. I can rely on the *all-power* of Your Godhead. I can sweetly rejoice in the *all-sympathy* of Your Manhood. I can confidently repose in the *all-wisdom* of Your dealings!

"Sometimes," says one, "we expect the blessing in *our own way* — but He chooses to bestow it in *His way*." But His way and His will must be the best! Infinite *love*, infinite *power*, infinite *wisdom* — are surely infallible guarantees! Nothing can alter His *purposes*. His *promises* can never fail. His *Word* never falls to the ground. "Heaven and earth shall pass away — but MY WORDS shall not pass away!"

## THE DIVINE GLORIFIER

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

**"He will glorify Me**, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you." — John 16:14

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus in the unfoldings of His *person*, and His *character*, and His *work* — to His redeemed *people!* The Spirit is the *great ministering agent* between the Church on earth — and its glorified Head in Heaven. He carries **up** to Christ, the Intercessor on the throne — the ever-recurring *needs* and *trials*, the *perplexities* and *sins* — of each believer! And receiving out of His inexhaustible treasury of love — He carries **down** to us: *comfort* for our sorrows — *strength* for our tears — *fullness* for our emptiness!

And *this* the one sublime end and object of His gracious agency, "*He shall glorify Me!*" "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears." My words of sympathy — My omnipotent pleadings — the tender messages sent from an unchanged Human Heart — all these shall He speak. "He shall tell you," says Goodwin, commenting on this passage, "He shall tell you nothing but stories of My love!" He will have an ineffable delight in magnifying Me in the affections of My people, and endearing Me to their hearts! He is worthy of credence, for He is "the Spirit of truth."

How faithful has He been in every age to this, His great office as "the glorifier of Jesus!" See the first manifestation of His power in the Christian Church at the day of Pentecost. What was the grand truth which forms the focal point of interest in that unparalleled scene, and which brings three thousand stricken penitents to their knees? *It is the Spirit's unfolding of Jesus* — glorifying *Him* in eyes that before this, saw in Him no beauty! Hear the keynote of that sermon, preached "in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power," "HIM has God exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to His people, and forgiveness of sins."

Ah! it is still the same peerless truth which the Spirit delights to unfold to the *stricken sinner*, and, in unfolding it — to make it mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. All these glorious inner beauties of Christ's *work* and *character* are undiscerned and indiscernible by the natural eye. "It is the Spirit who gives life." "No man can call Jesus Lord — but by the Holy Spirit." He is the great Forerunner — a mightier than the Baptist — proclaiming, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*"

Reader! any bright and realizing view you have had of the Savior's glory and excellency — is of the Spirit's imparting! When in some hour of *sorrow* you have been led to cleave with preeminent consolation to the thought of the Redeemer's exalted sympathy — His dying, ever-living love; or in the hour of *death*, when you feel the sustaining power of His exceeding great and precious promises; what is this — but the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of His all-gracious office, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto you! Thus enabling you to magnify Him in your body, whether it be by life or death!

As your motto should ever be, "*None but Christ!*" and your ever-increasing aspiration, "*More of Christ!*" seek to bear in mind who it is that is alone qualified to impart the "excellency of this knowledge." "When the Comforter comes, the One I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father — *He will testify about ME!*"

## THE JOYFUL TRANSFORMATION

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy!"* — John 16:20

Christ's people are a *sorrowing* people! Chastisement is their badge; "great tribulation" is their appointed discipline. When they enter the gates of glory, Christ is represented as wiping away tears from their eyes. But, weeping ones, be comforted! Your Lord's special mission to earth —



the great errand He came from Heaven to fulfill, was "to bind up the brokenhearted." Your trials are *meted out by a tender hand!* He *knows* you too well — He *loves* you too well — to make this world tearless and sorrowless!

"There must be rain, and hail, and storm," says Rutherford, "in the saint's cloud." Were your earthly course strewn with flowers, and nothing but sunbeams played around your dwelling, it would lead you to forget your *nomadic* life — that you are but a pilgrim and sojourner here. The *tent* must at times be struck — the movable tabernacle taken down, pin by pin, to enable you to say and to feel with the spirit of a pilgrim, "I desire a better country!"

Meantime, while sorrow is your portion, think of Him who says, "I know your sorrows!" *Angels* cannot say so — they cannot sympathize with you, for *trial* is a strange word to them. But there is a mightier than they, who *can*. All He *appoints* for you, and *sends* to you — is in love. There is a provision and condition wrapped up in the bosom of every affliction, "*if need be!*" Coming from His hand, *sorrows* and *riches* are to His people *equivalent* terms. If tempted to murmur at their *trials* — they often murmur at *disguised mercies*. "Why do you ask me," said one, on his deathbed, "what I like? I am the Lord's patient — I cannot but like *everything* which He does."

And *then*, "your sorrow shall be turned into joy!" "The morning comes" — that bright morning when the dew-drops collected during earth's *night of weeping* shall sparkle in its beams; when in one blessed moment, a lifelong experience of trial will be effaced and forgotten — or remembered only by *contrast* — to enhance the fullness of the joys of immortality! What a revelation of gladness! The *map of time* disclosed, and every little *streamlet* of sorrow, every *river* will be seen to have been *flowing heavenwards* — every rough blast to have been sending the ship nearer the haven! In that joy, God Himself will participate. In the last "words of Jesus" to His people when they are standing by the triumphal archway of Glory, ready to enter on their thrones and crowns, He speaks of their joy as if it were all *His own*. "Enter into the *joy of your Lord*."

Reader, may this joy be yours! Sit loose to the *world's* joys. Have a feeling

of chastened gratitude and thankfulness when you have them; but beware of resting in them, or investing them with a permanency which they cannot have. Jesus had His eye on *Heaven* when He added, "Your joy no man takes from you!"

## THE OMNIPOTENT PRAYER

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Father, I will that those also, whom You have given Me — be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory!" — John 17:24*

This is not the *petition* of a suppliant — but *the claim of a conqueror!*

There was only *one* request He ever made, or ever *can* make — that was refused; it was the prayer wrung forth by the presence and power of superhuman anguish: "Father, *if it is possible*, let this cup pass from Me!" Had that prayer been answered, never could one consolatory "word of Jesus" have been ours. "*If it is possible*" — *but* for that gracious parenthesis, we must have been lost forever! In un murmuring submission, the bitter cup was drained; all the dread penalties of the law were borne, the atonement completed, an all-perfect righteousness wrought out; and now, as the stipulated reward of His obedience and sufferings — the *Victor* claims His *trophies*.

What are they? Those who were *given* Him by the Father — the countless multitudes *redeemed* by His blood. These He "wills" to be with Him "where He is" — the spectators of His glory, and partakers of His crown! Wondrous word and will of a dying testator! His last prayer on earth is an importunate pleading for *their* glorification! His parting wish is to meet them in Heaven — as if these *earthly jewels* were needed to make His crown complete — their happiness the complement of His own!

Reader! learn from this, the grand element in the bliss of your future condition — it is *the presence of Christ!* "*With ME — where I am.*" It

matters comparatively little as to the *locality* of Heaven. "We shall see *Him* as He is!" is "the blessed hope" of the Christian. Heaven would be *no Heaven* without Jesus! The withdrawal of His presence would be like the blotting out of the sun from the skies; it would uncrown every seraph and unstring every harp! But, blessed thought! it is His own stipulation in His testamentary prayer — that Eternity is to be spent in union and communion with *Himself*, gazing on the unfathomed mysteries of His love, becoming more assimilated to His glorious image, and drinking deeper from the bottomless ocean of His own joy!

If anything can *enhance* the magnitude of this promised bliss, it is the concluding words of the verse, in which He grounds His plea for its bestowment: "*I will* — that they behold My glory;" — why? "For You loved (not *them* — but) ME before the foundation of the world!" It is equivalent to saying, "If You would give *Me* a continued proof of Your everlasting love and favor to Me — it is by loving and exalting My redeemed people! In loving them and glorifying them — You are loving and glorifying Me — so endearingly are their interests and My own bound up together!"

Believer, think of that *all-prevailing Voice*, at this moment pleading for you within the veil! — that omnipotent "*Father, I will,*" securing every needed blessing! There is given, so to speak, a *blank check* by which He and His people may draw unlimited supplies out of the exhaustless treasury of the Father's grace and love! God Himself endorses it with the words, "Son, You are ever with Me — and *all* that I have is Yours." How it would reconcile us to Earth's bitterest sorrows, and hallow Earth's holiest joys — if we saw them thus hanging on the "will" of an all-wise Intercessor, who ever pleads in love, and never pleads in vain! "Be it unto me according to YOUR WORD."

## THE IMMUTABLE PLEDGE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Because I live — you shall live also!"* — John 14:19

God sometimes selects the most stable and enduring objects in the material world, to illustrate His unchanging faithfulness and love to His Church, "As the *mountains* are round about Jerusalem, so does the Lord compass His people." But here, the Redeemer fetches an argument from *His own everlasting nature*. He stakes, so to speak, His own existence on that of His saints, "*Because I live — you shall live also!*"

Believer! read in this "word of Jesus" your glorious title-deed. *Your Savior lives* — and His life is the guarantee of your own. Our *true Joseph* is alive! He is our Brother. He talks kindly to us! That life of His, is all that is between us and everlasting ruin. But with Christ for our life, how inviolable our security! The great *Fountain* of being must first be dried up — before the *streamlet* can. The great *Sun* must first be quenched — before one glimmering *disciple* which He lights up with splendor can. Satan must first pluck the crown from that glorified Head — before he can touch one *jewel* in the crown of His people. They cannot shake one *pillar* — without first shaking the *throne*. "*If we perish,*" says Luther, "*Christ perishes with us!*"

Reader! is your life now "hidden with Christ in God?" Do you know the blessedness of a vital and living union with a living, life-giving Savior? Can you say with humble and joyous confidence, amid the fitfulness of your own ever-changing frames and feelings, "Nevertheless I live — yet not I — but Christ lives in me"? "*Jesus lives!*" — They are the happiest words which a lost soul and a lost world can hear! Job, four thousand years ago, rejoiced in them. "I know," says he, "that I have a *living Kinsman*." John, in his Patmos exile, rejoiced in them. "I am He who lives" (or *the Living One*), was the simple but sublime utterance with which he was addressed by that same "Kinsman," when He appeared arrayed in the lusters of His glorified humanity.

"This is *the* record" (as if there was a whole gospel comprised in the statement), "that God has given to us eternal life, and this *life* is in His Son." Paul, in the 8th chapter to the Romans — that finest portraiture of Christian character and privilege ever drawn, begins with "no *condemnation*," and ends with "no *separation*." Why "no separation?" Because the life of the believer is incorporated with that of his adorable Head and Surety! The colossal Heart of redeemed humanity beats upon

the throne — sending its mighty pulsations through every member of His body! So that, before the believer's spiritual life can be destroyed, Omnipotence must become feebleness, and Immutability become mutable! But, blessed Jesus, "Your word is very sure, therefore Your servant loves it." "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish — neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand!"

## THE ABIDING PRESENCE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Surely, I am with you always — even unto the end of the world!" —*  
Matthew 28:20

Such were "the words of Jesus" when He was just about to ascend to Heaven. The mediatorial throne was in view — the harps of glory were sounding in His ears; but all His thoughts are on the *pilgrim Church* He is to leave behind. His last words and benedictions are *for them*. "I go," He seems to say, "to Heaven, to My purchased crown — to the fellowship of angels — to the presence of My Father; but, nevertheless, surely I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

How faithfully did the Apostles, to whom this promise was first addressed, experience its reality! Hear the testimony of the beloved disciple who had once leaned on his Divine Master's bosom — who "had heard, and seen, and looked upon Him." That glorified bosom was now hidden from his sight; but does he speak of an absent Lord, and of His fellowship only among the holy *memories* of the past? No! with rejoicing emphasis he can exclaim, "Truly our fellowship is with *Jesus Christ!*"

Amid so much that is fleeting here — how the heart clings to this assurance of the *abiding presence of the Savior!* Our *best earthly friends* — a few weeks may estrange them! But centuries have rolled on — Christ is still the same! How blessed to think that if I am indeed a child of God, there is not the lonely instant I am without His guardianship! When the

beams of the *morning* visit my chamber — the brighter beams of a brighter Sun are shining upon me. When the shadows of *evening* are gathering around, "it is not night, if He, the unsetting 'Sun of my soul,' is near!"

His is no *fitful* companionship — present in *prosperity* — but gone in *adversity*. He never changes. He is *always* the same — in sickness and solitude, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death! Not more faithfully did the *pillar-cloud* and *column of fire* of old precede Israel, until the last murmuring ripple of Jordan fell on their ears on the shores of Canaan — than does the presence and love of Jesus abide with His people! Has His word of *promise* ever proved false? Let the great cloud of witnesses now in glory testify. "*Not one thing* has failed of all that the Lord our God has spoken!" *This* "word of the Lord is tried!", "having loved His own, who were in the world — He loved them *unto the end!*"

Believer! are you *troubled* and *tempted*? Do *dark providences* and *severe afflictions* seem to belie the truth and reality of this gracious assurance? Are you ready, with Gideon, to say, "If the Lord is indeed with us — then why has all this befallen us?" Be assured He has some *faithful end* in view. By the removal of prized and cherished earthly props and refuges — He would unfold more of His own tenderness. Amid the wreck and ruin of *earthly joys*, which, it may be, the *grave* has hidden from your sight — One nearer, dearer, tenderer still, would have you say of Himself, "*The Lord lives!* Blessed be my Rock — and let the God of my salvation be exalted!" "Thanks be to God, who *always* makes us to triumph in Christ." Yes! and never more so than when, stripped of all competing objects of creature affection — we are left, like the disciples on the mount, with "*Jesus only!*" "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace."

## THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"I am the resurrection, and the life! He who believes in Me, though he were dead — yet shall he live!" — John 11:25*

What a voice is this breaking over a world which for six thousand years has been a *dormitory of sin and death!* For four thousand of these years, *heathendom* could observe no light through the *bars of the grave*; her oracles were speechless on the great doctrine of a future state, and more especially regarding the body's resurrection. Even the Jewish Church, under the Old Testament dispensation, seemed to enjoy little more than fitful and uncertain *glimmerings*, like men groping in the dark!

It required *death's great Abolisher* to show, to a benighted world — the luminous "path of life." With Him rested the "bringing in of a better hope" — the unfolding of "the mystery which had been hidden from ages and generations." Marvelous disclosure! that this mortal frame, decomposed and resolved into its original dust — shall yet rise from its ashes, remodeled and reconstructed, "a glorified body!" Not like "the earthly tabernacle" (a mere shifting and movable *tent*, as the word denotes) — but incorruptible — immortal! The beauteous transformation of the *butterfly* from its embryo state — the buried *seed* springing up from its tiny grave to the full-eared corn or gorgeous flower — these are *nature's mute utterances* as to the possibility of this great truth, which required the unfoldings of "a more sure word of prophecy."

But the *Gospel* has fully revealed what *Reason*, in her loftiest imaginings, could not have dreamt of! Jesus "has brought life and immortality to light!" He, the Bright and Morning Star, has "turned the shadow of death — into the morning!" He gives, in His own resurrection, the *pledge* of that of His people — He is the *first-fruits* of the *immortal harvest* yet to be gathered into the garner of Heaven!

Precious truth! This "word of Jesus" spans like a celestial rainbow the *entrance to the dark valley*. Death is robbed of its sting! In the case of every child of God — the grave holds in custody *precious dust*, because it is redeemed! Do not talk of it as being committed to an earthly *tomb!* It is locked up, rather, in the *casket of God* until the day "when He makes up His jewels," when it will be fashioned in deathless beauty like unto the glorified body of the Redeemer! Angels, meanwhile, are commissioned to

keep watch over it, until the trumpet of the archangel shall proclaim the great "resurrection of creation." They are the "reapers," waiting for the world's great "Harvest Home," when Jesus Himself shall come again — not as He once did, humiliated and in sorrow — but rejoicing in the thought of bringing back all His *redeemed sheaves* with Him!

Afflicted and bereaved Christian! — you who may be mourning in bitterness over those who have died — rejoice through your tears, in these hopes "full of immortality." The silver cord is only "loosed," not *broken*. Perchance, as you stand in the chamber of death, or by the brink of the grave — in the depths of that awful solitude and silence which reigns around — this may be your plaintive and mournful soliloquy, "Shall the dust praise You?" Yes, it *shall!* This very dust shall through eternity praise its redeeming God — it shall proclaim His truth! "Lord, to whom shall we go but to You; You have the WORDS of ETERNAL LIFE."

## THE LITTLE WHILE

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"In a little while — you will see Me no more; and then after a little while — you will see Me!" — John 16:16*

Long seem the moments when we are *separated* from the friend we love. An absent brother — how his return is looked and longed for! The "Elder Brother" — the "Living Kinsman" — sends a message to His waiting Church and people — a word of solace, telling that *soon* ("in a little while"), and He will be back again, never again to leave them!

There are indeed blessed moments of communion which the believer enjoys with His beloved Lord *now*; but how fitful and transient! *Today*, life is a brief Emmaus Journey — the soul happy in the presence and love of an unseen Savior. *Tomorrow*, He is *gone*; and the bereft spirit is led to interrogate itself in plaintive sorrow, "Where is now your God?" Even when there is no such experience of darkness and depression, how much



there is in the world around to fill the believer with sadness! His *Lord* rejected and disowned — His *love* spurned — His *providences* slighted — His *name* blasphemed — His *creation* groaning and travailing in pain — disunion, too, among His people — His loving heart wounded in the house of His friends!

But, in just a little while — all this *mystery of iniquity* will be finished! The absent Brother's footfall will soon be heard — no longer "as a wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night," but to receive His people into the *permanent* "mansions" His love has been preparing, and from which they shall never leave! Oh, blessed day! when creation will put on her resurrection robes — when her Lord, so long dishonored, will be enthroned amid the *Hosannas* of a rejoicing universe — angels lauding Him — saints crowning Him; and *sin, the dark plague-spot on His universe*, extinguished forever — *death* swallowed up in eternal victory!

And it is but "in a little while!" "Yet in a little while," we elsewhere read, "and He who shall come — will come, and will not tarry." "He will stay not a moment longer," says Goodwin, "than He has dispatched all our business in Heaven for us." With what joy will He send His mission-Angel with the announcement, "the little while is at an end!" and to issue the invitation to the great festival of glory, "*Come! For all things are now ready!*"

Child of sorrow! think often of this "*little while.*" "The days of your mourning will *soon* be ended." There is a *limit* set to your *suffering* time, "After you have suffered for a *while.*" Every *wave* is numbered, between you and the haven; and then when that haven is reached, oh, what an apocalypse of glory! The "little while" of time merged into the *great and unending "while" of eternity!* — to be *forever with the Lord* — the same unchanged and unchanging Savior!

"In a little while — and *you shall see Me!*" Would that the eye of faith might be kept more intently fixed on "that glorious appearing!" How the *world*, with its guilty fascinations, tries to dim and obscure this blessed hope! How the *heart* is prone to throw out its tendrils into the *earth*, and get them rooted in some *perishable* object! Reader! seek to dwell more habitually on this the *grand consummation of all your dearest wishes!*

"Stand on the edge of your nest — pluming your wings for flight!"

## THE BEATIFIC VISION

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall **see** God!"* — Matthew 5:8

Here is Heaven! This "word of Jesus" represents the future state of the glorified to consist not in locality — but in *character*; the essence of its bliss is the *full vision and fruition of God!* Our attention is called away from all vague and indefinite *theories* about the *circumstantials* of future happiness. The one grand **object** of contemplation — the "glory which excels," is *the sight of God Himself!* The one grand practical **lesson** enforced on His people, is the cultivation of that purity of heart without which none could *see*, or (even could we suppose it possible to be admitted to *see* Him) none could *enjoy* God!

Reader, have you attained any of this heart-purity and heart-preparation? It has been beautifully said that "the openings of the streets of Heaven — are on earth." Even here we may enjoy, in the possession of *holiness* — some *foretaste* of coming bliss. Who has not felt that the happiest moments of their lives, were those of close walking with God — nearness to the mercy-seat — when *self* was surrendered, and the eye was directed to the glory of Jesus, with most single, unwavering, undivided aim?

*What will Heaven be* — but the entire surrender of the soul to Him, without any bias to evil, without the fear of corruption within, echoing to temptation without; every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; no contrariety to His mind; all in blessed unison with His will! And the whole being *impregnated with holiness*: the *intellect* — purified and ennobled, consecrating all its powers to His service; the *memory* — a holy repository of pure and hallowed recollections; the *affections* — without one competing rival, purged from all the dross of earthliness; the *love of God* — the one supreme animating passion; the *glory of God* —

the motive principle interfused through every thought, feeling, and action of the life immortal! In one word, the *heart* a clear fountain — no *sediment* to dim its purity, "no angel of sorrow" to come and trouble the pool! The *long night of life* over, and *this* is the glory of the *eternal morrow* which follows it: "I shall be satisfied — when I awake with Your likeness!"

Yes, this is Heaven, subjectively and objectively — *purity of heart* and "*God all in all!*" Much, doubtless, there may and will be of a subordinate kind, to intensify the bliss of the redeemed: communion with saints and angels; re-admission into the society of death-divided friends. But all these will fade before *the great central glory*: "God Himself shall be with them, and be their God! They shall see His face!"

Believers have been aptly called 'sunflowers' — turning their faces as the sunflower, towards the *Sun of Righteousness*; and hanging their leaves in sadness and sorrow — when that *Sun* is away. It will be in Heaven, that the *emblem* is complete. *There*, everyflower in the heavenly garden will be turned God-wards, bathing its tints of loveliness in the all-excelling glory of God! Reader, may it be yours, to know all the marvels contained in these few glowing words, "We shall be like Him — for we shall see Him as He is!" "And every man who has this hope in Him — *purifies* himself, even as He is pure."

## THE MANY MANSIONS

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

"*In My Father's house are many mansions!*" — John 14:2

What a 'home aspect' there is in this "word of Jesus!" He comforts His Church by telling those, whose wilderness wanderings will soon be finished — that the tented tabernacle suited to their present probation-state will be exchanged for an enduring "mansion!" Nor will it be a strange dwelling — but a *Father's home!* A *Father's welcome* awaits

them! There will be accommodation for all God's redeemed people. Thousands have already entered — patriarchs, prophets, saints, martyrs, young and old — and still there is room!

The *pilgrim's motto* on earth is, "Here on earth — we have no continuing city." Even "Sabbath tents" must be taken down. Holy seasons of communion must terminate. "Arise, let us go from here!" is a summons which disturbs the sweetest moments of tranquility in the Church below. But in *Heaven*, every believer becomes a *pillar* in the temple of God, and "he shall go out no more." Here on earth, it is but the lodging of a *wayfarer* turning aside to tarry for the brief night. Here we are but *temporary tenants* — our possessions are all *transient* — ours today — but gone tomorrow! But these many "mansions" are an *incorruptible* and *eternal* inheritance! Nothing can touch the heavenly inheritance. Once within our Father's house — and we are in His house forever!

Think, too, of Jesus, gone to *prepare* these mansions, "I go to prepare a place for you." What a wondrous thought — Jesus now busied in Heaven — on His Church's behalf! He can find no abode in all His wide dominions, befitting as a permanent dwelling for His *ransomed* ones. He says, "I will make a new heaven and a new earth. I will establish a special kingdom — eternal mansions expressly for those I have redeemed with My blood!"

Reader, let the prospect of a dwelling in this "house of the Lord forever," reconcile you to any of the *roughness* or *difficulties* in your *present path* — to your pilgrim *provision* and pilgrim *fare*. Let the distant beacon light, that so cheerfully speaks of a *Home*, brighter and better far than the happiest of earthly ones — lead you to forget the *intervening billows*, or to think of them only as *wafting you nearer to your desired glorious haven!* "Would," says a saint, who has now entered on his rest, "that one could read, and write, and pray, and eat and drink, and compose one's self to sleep, as with the thought — *soon I will be in Heaven, and that forever and ever!*"

"My Father's house!" How many a departing spirit has been cheered and consoled by the sight of these glorious Mansions looming through the *mists* of the *dark valley of death* — the tears of weeping friends rebuked

by the gentle chiding, "If you loved Me — you would rejoice, because I said, I go to *My Father!*" **Death truly is but the entrance to our Father's house!** We speak of the "*shadow of death*" — it is only the *shadow* which falls on the portico — as we stand for a moment knocking at the longed-for gate! Then next — a Father's voice of *welcome* is heard, "*Son! you are always to be with Me, and all that I have is yours!*"

## THE PROMISED RETURN

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"I will come again--and receive you unto Myself; that where I am--there you may be also!"* — John 14:3

Another "word of promise" concerning the Church's "blessed hope." Orphaned pilgrims, dry your tears! Soon the Morning Hour will strike, and the sighs of a groaning and burdened creation will be heard no more! Earth's six thousand years of *toil* and *sorrow* are *waning*; the eternal Sabbath is at hand! Jesus will soon be heard to repeat concerning all His sleeping saints, what He said of old regarding one of them: "*I go to awake him out of sleep!*"

Your beloved Lord's *first* coming was in humiliation and woe; His name was, "the Man of Sorrows;" He had to travel on His blood-stained path, amid darkness and desertion; a crown of thorns was the only crown He bore!

But soon He will come "the *second* time without a sin-offering, unto salvation," never again to leave His Church — but to receive those who followed Him in His cross, to be everlasting partakers with Him in His glorious crown!

He may seem to *tarry*. The *natural* world, in her unvarying and undeviating sequences, gives no indication of His approach. Centuries have elapsed since He uttered the promise — and still He lingers; the

everlasting hills wear no streak of approaching dawn; we seem to listen in vain for the noise of His chariot wheels. "But the Lord is not slack concerning His promise;" He gives you "this promise" in addition to many others as a *keepsake* — a *pledge* and *guarantee* for the certainty of His return, "*I will come again!*"

Who can conceive all the *surpassing blessedness* connected with His second coming? The *Elder Brother* arrived to fetch the *younger brethren* home! The *true Joseph* revealing Himself in tenderness to the brethren who were once estranged from Him, "receiving them to Himself" — not satisfied with apportioning a *kingdom* for them — but, as if all His own joy and bliss were intermingled with theirs, "Where *I* am," says He, "there *you* must be also." "He who overcomes, I will grant to *sit with Me on My Throne!*"

Believer, can you *now* say with some of the holy transport of the apostle, "Whom having not seen — we love"? What must it be when you come to *see Him "face to face," and that forever and ever!* If you can tell of precious hours of communion in a sin-stricken, woe-worn world, with a treacherous heart, and an imperfect or divided love — then what must it be when you come, in a sinless, sorrowless state, with purified and renewed affections — to see the King in His beauty!

The *letter* of an absent brother, as cheering and consolatory as it is — is a poor compensation for the joys of *personal* and *visible* communion with him. The absent Elder Brother on the Throne speaks to you *now* only by His Word and Spirit — soon you shall be admitted to His immediate fellowship, seeing Him "as He is" — He Himself unfolding the *wondrous chart of His providence and grace* — leading you about from fountain to fountain among the living waters, and *with His own gentle hand wiping the last lingering tear-drop from your eye!*

*Heaven is an everlasting home with Jesus!* "Where I am — there you may be also!" He has added a cheering postscript to this promise, on which He has caused us to hope: "He which testifies these things says, *surely I come quickly!*"

## THE CLOSING BENEDICTION

"Remember *the words of the Lord Jesus*, how He said,"

*"Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He comes — shall find watching!"* — Luke 12:37

Child of God! is this your attitude, as the *expectant* of your Lord's appearing? Are your *loins* girded, and your *lights* burning? If the cry were to break upon your ears this day, "Behold the Bridegroom comes!" could you joyfully respond, "Yes, this is my God, I have waited for Him!"

WHEN He may come, we cannot tell — ages may elapse before *then*. It may be centuries before our graves are gilded with the beams of a Millennial sun; but while He *may* or may *not* come soon — He *must* come at some time — yes, and the day of *our death* — is virtually to all of us, the day of *His coming*.

Reader! do not put off the solemn preparation. Do not be deceived or deluded with the mocker's presumptuous challenge, "Where is the promise of His coming?" See to it that the enticements of an engrossing world, do not foster this procrastinating spirit. It may be *now* — or *never* with you. Do not put off your *sowing* time — until *harvest* time! Leave nothing for a dying hour — *but to die*, and calmly to resign your spirit into the hands of Jesus. Of all times, *that* is the least suitable: to attempt to get the vessel filled with oil; to attend to the great business of life — when life is ebbing; to trim the lamp — when the oil is finished, and it is flickering in its socket; to begin to watch — when the *summons* is heard to leave the watchtower to meet our God!

Were you ever struck how often, amid the many *gentle* words of Jesus, the summons "to watch" is over and over repeated — to rouse a *sleeping Church* and a *slumbering world*? Let this last "Word" of your Lord's send you to your knees with the question, "*Am I indeed a servant of Christ?*" Have I fled to Him, and am I reposing in Him, as my only Savior? Or am I still *lingering* like Lot — when I should be escaping? Am I only *sleeping* — when I should be waking? Am I only *neglecting* and *trifling* — when "a

long eternity is lying at my door!" If I neglect *Him* who is my *last* and *only* refuge — then *all is lost!*

Believer! you who are standing on your watchtower — be more faithful than ever at your post. Remember what is implied in *watching*. It is no dreamy state of inactive torpor! It is a holy jealousy over the heart — wakeful vigilance regarding sin — every avenue and loophole of the soul carefully guarded! *Holy living* is the best, the only, preparative for *holy dying!* "Persuade yourself," says Rutherford, "that the King is coming. Read His letter sent before Him: *Behold I come quickly!*"

Let these "*Words of Jesus*" we have now been meditating upon in this little volume, be as the *Golden Bells* of old, hung on the vestments of the officiating High Priest, emitting sweet sounds to His *spiritual Israel* — telling that the *true High Priest* is still living and pleading in "the Holiest of all;" and that soon He will come forth to pour His blessing on His waiting Church.

We have been pleasingly employed in gathering up a few "crumbs" falling from "the Master's table." Soon we shall have, not the "*Words*" but the *Presence* of Jesus — not the *crumbs* falling from His table — but *everlasting fellowship with the Master Himself!* "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

## THE MIND OF JESUS

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## **Introduction**

*"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" Philippians 2:5*

*"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" 1 Peter 4:1*

THE MIND OF JESUS! What a study is this! To attain a dim reflection of it, is the ambition of angel — higher they cannot soar.

*"To be conformed to the image of His Son!" — this is the design of God in the predestination of His people from all eternity.*

"We shall be *like* Him!" — this is the Bible picture of *heaven*!

In a former little volume, we pondered some of the gracious *Words* which proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus. In the present, we have a few faint lineaments of that holy *Character* which constituted the living expositor and embodiment of His precepts.

But how lofty such a standard! How all creature-perfection shrinks abashed and confounded before a Divine portraiture like this! He is the true "Angel standing in the sun," who alone projects no shadow; so bathed in the glories of Deity, that *likeness* to Him becomes like the light in which He is shrouded — "no man can approach unto it." May we not, however, seek at least to *approximate*, though we cannot adequately and fully *resemble*? It is impossible on earth to associate with a fellow-being without getting in some degree *assimilated* to him. Just so, the more we study "the Mind of Christ," the more we are in His company — holding converse with Him as our best and dearest friend — catching up His holy looks and holy deeds — the more shall we be "transformed into the same image."

"Consider," says the Great Apostle (literally 'gaze on') "Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1.) Study feature by feature, lineament by lineament — of that Peerless Exemplar. "*Gaze*" on the Sun of Righteousness, until, like gazing long on the natural sun, you carry away with you, on your spiritual vision, dazzling images of His brightness and glory! Though He is the Archetype of all goodness — remember He is no shadowy model — though the Infinite Jehovah — He was "the *Man* Christ Jesus."

We must never, indeed, forget that it is not the *mind*, but the *work* of Emmanuel which lies at the foundation of a sinner's hope. He must be known as a *Savior*, before He is studied as an *Example*. His *doing* and *dying* is the center jewel — of which all the *virtues* of His holy life are merely the setting. But neither must we overlook the Scripture obligation to *walk* in His footsteps and imbibe His Spirit, for "if any man has not the *Spirit of Christ* — *he is none of His!*"

Oh, that each individual Christian were more Savior-like! that, in the manifestation of a holy character and heavenly demeanor, it might be

said in some feeble measure of the faint and imperfect reflection — "Such was *Jesus!*"

How far short we are of such a criterion — our mournful experience can testify. But it is at least comforting to know that there is a day coming, when, in the full vision and fruition of the *Glorious Original*, the exhortation of our motto-verse will be needed no more; when we shall be able to say, in the words of an inspired apostle — "We *have* the MIND OF CHRIST!"

## 1. COMPASSION.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I have **compassion** on the multitude." — Mark 8:2.

What a pattern to His people, the tender *compassion* of Jesus! He found the world He came to save a *moral Bethesda* — where crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. The wail of suffering humanity was everywhere borne to His ear. It was His delight — to walk its porches, to pity, relieve, comfort, save! The faintest cry of misery arrested His footsteps — stirred a ripple in this fountain of Infinite Love.

Was it a *leper* — that dreaded name which entailed a life-long exile from friendly looks and kindly words? There was *One*, at least, who had tones and deeds of tenderness for the outcast. "Jesus, being moved with *compassion*, put forth His hand and *touched* him."

Was it some *blind beggars* on the Jericho highway, groping in darkness, pleading for help? "Jesus stood still, and had *compassion* on them, and touched their eyes!"

Was it the speechless pleadings of a *widow's* tears at the gate of Nain, when she followed her earthly pride and prop to the grave? "When the

Lord saw her, He had *compassion* on her, and said, Weep not!" Even when He rebukes — the *rainbow of compassion* is seen in the cloud, or rather, that cloud, as it passes, dissolves in a rain-shower of mercy! He pronounces Jerusalem "*desolate*," but the doom is uttered amid a flood of anguished sorrow!

Reader! do the compassionate *words* and *deeds* of a tender Savior find any feeble echo and transcript in yours? As you traverse in thought, the wastes of human wretchedness — does the spectacle give rise, not to the mere emotional feeling which weeps itself away in sentimental tears — but to an earnest desire to *do something* to mitigate the suffering of woe-worn humanity? How vast and world-wide, are the claims on your compassion! — now near, now at a distance — the unmet and unanswered cry of perishing millions abroad — the heathendom which lies unsaved at your own door — the public charity languishing — the mission staff dwarfed and crippled from lack of needful funds — a suffering district — a starving family — a poor neighbor — a helpless orphan — it may be, some crowded hovel where misery and vice run riot — or some lonely sick-chamber, where the dim lamp has been wasting for dreary nights — or some desolate home which death has entered, where "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not," and where some sobbing heart, under the tattered garb of poverty, mourns, unsolaced and unpitied, its "loved and lost one."

Are there none such within *your* reach, to whom a trifling pittance would be as an angel of mercy? How it would hallow and enhance all you possess, were you to seek to live as a *dispenser of Jehovah's bounties*! If He has given you of this world's substance, remember that it is *bestowed* — and not to be greedily *hoarded* or lavishly *squandered*! Property and wealth are *talents* to be traded on and laid out for the good of others — sacred trusts, not selfishly to be *enjoyed* — but generously to be *employed*.

The poor saints are the representatives of Jesus — their needs He considers as His own, and He will recompense accordingly. The feeblest expression of Christian pity and love, though it be but the widow's mite, or the cup of cold water, or the kindly look and word when there is neither mite nor cup to give — yet, if done in *His* name, it is entered in

the "book of life" as a "loan to the Lord;" and in that day when "the books are opened," the loan will be paid back with interest!

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **2. RESIGNATION IN TRIAL.**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Yet I want Your will to be done — not Mine!" — Luke 22:42.

Where was there ever *resignation* like this? The life of Jesus was *one long martyrdom*. From Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, there was scarcely one break in the clouds; these gathered more darkly and ominously around Him — until they burst over His devoted head as He uttered His expiring cry! Yet throughout this *pilgrimage of sorrow* — no murmuring accent escaped His lips. The most suffering of all suffering lives — was one of *uncomplaining submission*.

"Yet I want Your will to be done — not Mine!" was the motto of this wondrous Being! When He came into the world He thus announced His advent, "Lo, I come, I delight to do *Your will*, O my God!" When He left it, we listen to the same prayer of blended agony and acquiescence, "O My Father, if it is possible — let this cup pass from Me! Yet I want Your will to be done — not Mine!"

Reader! is this mind also in *you*? Ah, what are your trials — compared to His! What are the ripples in your tide of woe — compared to the waves and billows which swept over Him! If He, the spotless Lamb of God, "murmured not," how can *you* murmur? *His* were the sufferings of a bosom never once darkened with the passing shadow of guilt or sin. *Your* severest sufferings are deserved — yes, infinitely *less* than you deserve! Are you tempted to indulge in hard suspicions, as to God's faithfulness and love, in appointing some peculiar trial? Ask yourself, Would Jesus have complained? Should *I* seek to pry into "the deep things of God,"

when *He*, in the spirit of a weaned child, was satisfied with the solution, "*Even so, Father — for so it seems good in Your sight!*"

"Even so, *Father!*" Afflicted one! "tossed with tempest, and not comforted," take that *word* on which Your adorable Redeemer pillowed His suffering head, "*Father!*" — and make it, as He did, the secret of your resignation. "My Father!" my covenant God! the God who *spared not Jesus!* It may well hush my every repining word.

The sick child will take the bitterest medicine from a *father's* hand. "This cup which You, O God, give me to drink — shall I not drink it? Be it mine to lie passive in the *arms of Your chastening love*, exulting in the assurance that all Your appointments, though sovereign, are never arbitrary — but that there is a gracious 'need be' in them all."

Drinking deep of His sweet spirit of submission, you will be able thus to meet, yes, even to welcome, your sorest cross, saying, "Yes, Lord, all is well, just because it is Your blessed will. *Take me, use me, chasten me* — as seems good in Your sight. My will is resolved into Yours. This trial is dark; I cannot see the 'why and the wherefore' of it — yet I want Your will to be done — not mine! My *gourd* is withered; I cannot see the reason of so speedy a dissolution of my beloved earthly shelter; my sense and sight ask in vain why these *leaves of earthly refreshment* have been doomed so soon to droop in sadness and sorrow. But it is enough. *The Lord prepared the worm!*" I want Your will to be done — not mine!"

Oh, how does the stricken soul honor God by thus being *silent* in the midst of dark and perplexing dealings, recognizing in these, part of the needed *discipline* and *training* — for a sorrowless, sinless, deathless world; regarding every trial as a link in the chain — which draws it to heaven, where the whitest robes will be found to be those here baptized with suffering, and bathed in tears!

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

### 3. DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I must be about my Father's business" — Luke 2:49.

"My food and my drink are to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work." That *one* object brought Jesus from heaven — that *one* object He pursued with unflinching, undeviating constancy, until He could say, "It is finished!"

However short *man* comes of his 'chief end' — bringing glory to God was the motive, the rule, and exponent of every act of *Christ's* wondrous life. With us, the magnet of the soul, even when truest, is ever subject to partial oscillations and depressions, trembling at times away from its great attraction-point. But Christ's soul never knew one tremulous wavering from its all glorious center. With Him there were no ebbs and flows, no fits and starts. He could say, in the words of that prophetic psalm which speaks so pre-eminently of Himself, "I have set the Lord always before me!"

Reader! do you feel that in some feeble measure, this lofty life-motto of the sinless Son of God — is written on your home and heart, regulating your *actions*, chastening your *joys*, quickening your *hopes*, giving energy and direction to your whole being, subordinating all the affections of your nature to their high destiny? With pure and unalloyed motives, with a single eye, and a single aim — can you say, somewhat in the spirit of His brightest follower, "This *one* thing I do!" Are you ready to regard all you have — rank, name, talents, riches, influence, distinctions — as valuable, only so far as they contribute to promote the glory of Him who is "first and last, and all in all?" Seek to feel that your heavenly Father's glory is *the* main business of life.

"Whose I am, and whom I serve," — let this be the superscription written on your thoughts and deeds, your employments and enjoyments, your sleeping and waking. Be not, as the fixed stars, cold and distant; but be ever bathing in the sunshine of conscious nearness to Him, who is the sun



and center of all happiness and joy.

Each has some appointed work to perform, some little *niche* in the spiritual temple to occupy. Yours may be no *splendid* services, no *flaming* or *brilliant* actions to blaze and dazzle in the eye of man. It may be the quiet unobtrusive inner work — the secret prayer, the mortified sin, the forgiven injury, the trifling act of self-sacrifice for God's glory and the good of others, of which no eye but the Eye which sees in secret is cognizant. It matters not how *small*. Remember, with Him — *motive* dignifies *action*. It is not *what* we do — but *how* we do it. He can be glorified in *little* things as well as *great* things — and by nothing more than the daily walk, the daily life.

Beware of anything that would interfere with a surrender of heart and soul to His service — worldly entanglements, indulged sin, an uneven walk, a divided heart, nestling in creature comforts, shrinking from the cross. How many hazard, if they do not made shipwreck, of their eternal hopes — by becoming *idlers* in the vineyard; lingerers, like Lot; world-lovers, like Demas; "do-nothing Christians," like the inhabitants of Meroz! The command is, "Go, work!" *Words* tell what you *should* be; *deeds* tell what you *are*! Let those around you see there is a *reality* in walking *with* God — and working *for* God!

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## 4. FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Father, forgive them — for they know not what they do!" — Luke 23:34.

Many a death-struggle has been made — to save a *friend*. A dying Savior gathers up His expiring breath — to plead for His *foes*! At the climax of His own woe, and of human ingratitude — forsaken by man, and deserted by God — His faltering voice mingles with the shout of His murderers —

"Father, forgive them — for they know not what they do!" Had the faithless Peter been there, could he have wondered at the reply to a former question — "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him — until seven times?" Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto you, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven," (Matthew 18:21, 22).

Superiority to insult and disgrace, with some, proceeds from a callous and indifferent temperament — a cold, phlegmatic, stoical insensibility, alike to kindness or unkindness. It was not so with Jesus. The tender sensibilities of His holy nature rendered Him keenly sensitive to ingratitude and injury, whether this was manifested in the malice of undisguised enmity, or the treachery of trusted friendship. Perhaps to a noble nature — the latter of these is the more deeply wounding. Many are inclined to forgive an open and unmasked antagonist, who are not so willing to forget or forgive heartless faithlessness, or unrequited love.

But see, too, in this respect, the conduct of the blessed Redeemer! Mark how He deals with His own disciples who had basely forsaken Him and fled, and that, too, in the hour He most needed their sympathy! No sooner does He rise from the dead than He hastens to disarm their fears and to assure them of an unaltered and unalterable affection. "Go tell *my brethren*," is the first message He sends; "*Peace be unto you*," is the salutation at the first meeting; "*Children!*" is the word with which He first greets them on the shores of Tiberias. Even Joseph, (the Old Testament type and pattern of generous forgiveness,) when he makes himself known to his brethren, recalls the bitter thought, "I am Joseph your brother — *whom you sold into Egypt*." The true Joseph, when *He* reveals Himself to His disciples, buries in oblivion the memory of bygone faithlessness. He *meets* them with a benediction. He *leaves* them at His ascension with the same — "He lifted up His hands and *blessed* them!"

"*Father, forgive them!*" Reader! follow in all this, the spirit of your Lord and Master. In rising from the study of His holy example, seek to feel that with you there should be no such name, no such word, as *enemy!* Harbor no resentful thought, indulge in no bitter recrimination. Surrender yourself to no sullen fretfulness. Let "the law of kindness" be always in your heart. Put the *best construction* on the failings of others. Make no

injurious comments on their frailties; no uncharitable insinuations. When disposed at any time to cherish an unforgiving spirit towards a brother, think — if your God had retained His anger forever, where would *you* have been? If *He*, the Infinite One, who might have spurned you forever from His presence, has had patience with you, and forgiven you *all* — will *you*, on account of some petty grievance which your calmer moments would pronounce unworthy of a thought, indulge in the look of cold estrangement, the unrelenting word, or unforgiving deed? "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

## 5. MEEKNESS

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I am meek and lowly in heart." — Matthew 11:29.

In great minds, there is often a beautiful blending of majesty and humility, magnanimity and lowliness. *The mightiest and holiest of all Beings that ever trod our world — was the meekest of all.* The Ancient of Days — was as the "infant of days." He who had listened to nothing but angel-melodies from all eternity, found, while on earth, melody in the lisping of an infant's voice, or in an outcast's tears! No wonder an innocent *lamb* was His emblem, or that the anointing Spirit came down upon Him in the form of the gentle *dove*. He had the wealth of worlds at His feet. The hosts of heaven had only to be summoned as His retinue. But all the pageantry of the world, all its dreams of carnal glory, had, for Him — no fascination. The Tempter, from a mountain-summit, showed Him a wide scene of "splendid misery;" but He spurned alike the thought and the adversary away! John and James would call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village; He rebukes the vengeful suggestion! Peter, on the night of the betrayal, cuts off the ear of an assassin; the intended Victim, again, only challenges His disciple, and heals His enemy!

Arraigned before Pilate's judgment-seat, how meekly He bears nameless wrongs and indignities! Suspended on the cross — the execrations of the multitude are rising around Him — but He hears as though He heard them not; they extract no angry look, no bitter word — "Behold the *Lamb* of God!" Need we wonder that "meekness" and "poverty of spirit" should stand foremost in His own cluster of beatitudes; that He should select *this* among all His other qualities for the peculiar study and imitation of His disciples, "Learn of Me, *for I am meek;*" or that an apostle should exhort "by the *meekness* and *gentleness* of Christ!"

How different the world's maxims — and His! The *world's* maxim — "Resent the affront, vindicate honor!" *His* maxim — "Overcome evil with

good!" The *world's* maxim — "Only let it be when for your *faults* you are buffeted, that you take it patiently." *His* maxim — "When you do *well* and suffer for it, you take it patiently; *this* is acceptable with God." (1 Pet. 2:20.)

Reader! strive to obtain, like your adorable Lord, this "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price." Be "clothed" with gentleness and humility. Follow not the world's fleeting shadows, which mock you as you grasp them. If always aspiring — ever soaring on the wing — you are likely to become discontented, proud, and selfish! In whatever position of life God has placed you — be satisfied. What! ambitious to be on a pinnacle of the temple — to be in a higher place in the Church, or in the world? — Satan might hurl you down! "Be not high-minded — but fear." And with respect to others, honor their gifts; contemplate their excellences — only to imitate them. Speak kindly, act gently. "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

Be assured, no happiness is equal to that enjoyed by the "*meek Christian*." He has within him a perpetual *inner sunshine*, a perennial well-spring of peace. Never ruffled and fretted by real or imaginary injuries, he puts the best construction on motives and actions, and by a gentle answer to unmerited reproach — often disarms man's anger.

## 6. THANKFULNESS

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." — Matthew 11:25.

A thankful spirit pervaded the entire life of Jesus, and surrounded with a heavenly halo His otherwise darkened path. In moments we least expect to find it, this *beauteous ray* breaks through the gloom. In instituting the memorial of His *death*, He "*gave thanks!*" Even in crossing the Kedron to Gethsemane, "He sang a hymn!"

We know in seasons of deep sorrow and trial, that everything wears a gloomy aspect. Speechless nature herself to the burdened spirit, seems as if she partook in the hues of sadness. The life of Jesus was one continuous experience of privation and woe — a "Valley of Baca," from first to last; yet, amid accents of plaintive sorrow, there are ever heard subdued undertones of *thankfulness* and *joy!*

Ah, if He, the suffering "Man of Sorrows," could, during a life of *unparalleled woe*, lift up His heart in grateful acknowledgment to His Father in heaven, how ought the lives of those to be one perpetual "hymn of thankfulness," who are from day to day and hour to hour (for all they have, both temporally and spiritually) *pensioners on God's bounty and love!*

Reader! cultivate this thankful spirit — it will be to you, a perpetual feast. There is, or ought to be, with us no such thing as *small* mercies; all are *great*, because the least are *undeserved*. Indeed, a really thankful heart will extract motive for gratitude from everything, making the most even of scanty blessings. Paul, when in his dungeon at Rome, a prisoner in chains is heard to say, "I have *all* and abound!"

Guard, on the other hand, against that spirit of continual *fretting* and *moping* over *imagined* ills; that temptation to exaggerate the real or supposed disadvantages of our condition, magnifying the trifling inconveniences of every-day life into enormous evils. Think rather how much we have to be thankful for. The world in which we live, in spite of all the scars of sin and suffering upon it — is a pleasant world. It is not, as many would morbidly paint it, flooded with tears and strewn with wrecks, plaintive with a perpetual dirge of sorrow. True, the "Everlasting Hills" are in glory — but there are numberless eminences of grace, and love, and mercy below; many green spots in the lower valley — *many more than we deserve!*

God will reward a thankful spirit. Just as on earth, when a man receives with gratitude what is given we are more disposed to give again, so also, "the *Lord* loves" a cheerful "receiver," as well as a cheerful "giver."

Let ours, moreover, be a *Gospel* thankfulness. Let the incense of a

grateful spirit rise not only to the Great Giver of all good — but to our Covenant God in Christ. Let it be the spirit of the child exulting in the bounty and beneficence of his *Father's* house and home! "Giving *thanks* always for all things unto the *Father*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

While the sweet melody of *gratitude* vibrates through every successive moment of our daily being — let love to our adorable Redeemer show for *whom* and for *what* it is, that we reserve our notes of loftiest and most fervent praise. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!

## 7. UNSELFISHNESS

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"For even Christ did not please Himself." Romans 15:3

Too legibly are the characters written on the fallen heart and a fallen world — "All seek their own!" *Selfishness* is the great law of our degenerated nature. When the *love of God* was dethroned from the soul, SELF vaulted into the vacant seat, and there, in some one of its ever-changing shapes, continues to reign.

Jesus stands out for our imitation, as a grand solitary exception in the midst of a world of selfishness. His entire life was one abnegation of self; a beautiful living embodiment of that love which "seeks not her own." He who for others turned water into wine, and provided a miraculous supply for the fainting thousands in the wilderness — exerted no such miraculous power for His own necessities. During His forty days' temptation, no table did He spread for Himself, no booth did He rear for His unpillowed head. Twice do we read of Him shedding tears — on neither occasion were they for Himself. The approach of His cross and passion, instead of absorbing Him in His own approaching sufferings, seemed only to elicit new and more gracious promises to His people. When His enemies came to apprehend Him, His only stipulation was for

His disciples' release — "Let *these* go their way." In the very act of departure, with all the boundless glories of eternity in sight — *they* were still all His care.

Ah, how different is the spirit of the world! With how many is day after day only a new oblation to that idol SELF — pampering their own wishes; envying and grieving at the good of a neighbor; unable to brook the praise of a rival; establishing their own reputation on the ruins of another; thus engendering jealousy, discontent, peevishness, and every kindred unholy passion.

"But you have not so learned Christ!" Reader! have you been sitting at the feet of Him who "pleased not Himself?" Are you "dying daily;" — dying to *self* as well as to *sin*? Are you animated with *this* as the high end and aim of existence — to lay out your time, and talents, and opportunities — for God's glory and the good of your fellow-men; not seeking your own interests — but rather relinquishing these, if, by doing so, another will be made holier, and your Savior honored?

You may not have it in your power to manifest this "mind of Jesus" on a great scale, by enduring great sacrifices; nor is this required. His denial of self had about it no repulsive austerity; but you can evince its holy influence and sway, by innumerable little offices of kindness and goodwill; taking a generous interest in the welfare of others, or engaging in schemes for the mitigation of human misery.

Avoid *ostentation* — which is only another repulsive form of self. Be eager to be in the *shadows*; sound no *trumpet* before you. The evangelist Matthew held a great banquet for Jesus at his house; but in his Gospel, he says not one word about it!

Seek to live more constantly and habitually under the constraining influence of the love of Jesus. *Selfishness withers and dies beneath Calvary!*

Ah, believer! if Christ had "pleased Himself," where would *you* have been this day?



## 8. SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WORD

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Jesus said unto him: It is written!" — Matthew 4:7.

We cannot fail to be struck, in the course of the Savior's public teaching, with His *constant appeal to the word of God*. While, at times, He utters, in His own name, the authoritative behest, "Truly, truly, *I say unto you*," He often thus introduces some mighty work, or gives intimation of some impending event in His own momentous life, "These things must come to pass, that *the Scriptures be fulfilled, which says . . .*" He commands His people to "search the Scriptures;" but He sets the example, by *searching and submitting* to them Himself. Whether He drives the money-changers from their sacrilegious traffic in the temple, or foils his great adversary on the mount of temptation — he does so with the same weapon, "*It is written!*" When He rises from the grave, the theme of His first discourse is one impressive tribute to the value and authority of the same sacred oracles. The disciples on the road to Emmaus listen to nothing but *a Bible lesson*. "He expounded unto them in all *the Scriptures* — the things concerning Himself."

How momentous the instruction herein conveyed! The necessity of the absolute subjection of the mind to God's written Word — making churches, creeds, ministers, books, religious opinions — all subordinate and subservient to Scripture; rebuking the philosophy, falsely so called, that would distort the plain statements of Revelation, and lay their *proud Reason* in the dust.

If an infallible Redeemer, "a law to Himself," was submissive in all respects to the "*written law*," — shall fallible man refuse to sit with the teachableness of a little child, and listen to the Divine message? There may be, there *is*, in the Bible, what Reason staggers at: "we have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." But, "*Thus says the Lord*," is enough. Faith does not first ask what the bread is made of — but *eats* it. It does

not analyze the components of the living stream — but with joy draws the water from "the wells of salvation."

Reader! take that Word as "the lamp to your feet, and the light to your path." In days when *false lights* are hung out, there is the more need of keeping the eye steadily fixed on the unerring beacon. Make the Bible the *arbiter* in all difficulties — the ultimate court of appeal. Like Mary, "sit at the feet of Jesus," willing only to learn of Him. How many perplexities it would save you! how many fatal steps in life it would prevent — how many tears! "It is a great matter," says the noblest of modern Christian philosophers, "when the mind dwells on any passage of Scripture, just to think how true it is." (*Chalmer's Life*).

In every dubious question, when the foot is trembling on debatable ground, knowing not whether to advance or recede, make this the final criterion, "What says the Scripture?" The world may remonstrate — erring friends may disapprove — Satan may tempt — ingenious arguments may explain away; but, with our finger on the revealed page, let the words of our Great Example be ever a divine formula for our guidance — "This commandment I have received from my Father!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **9. PRAYERFULNESS**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He continued all night in prayer to God." — Luke 6:12.

We speak of *this* Christian and *that* Christian as "a man of prayer," Jesus was emphatically so. The Spirit was "poured upon Him without measure" — yet He prayed! He was incarnate wisdom, "needing not that any should teach Him" — yet He prayed! He was infinite in His power, and boundless in His resources — yet He prayed! How deeply sacred the prayerful memories that hover around the solitudes of Olivet and the shores of

Tiberias! He seemed often to turn night into day to redeem moments for prayer, rather than lose the blessed privilege.

We are rarely, indeed, admitted into the solemnities of His inner life. The veil of night is generally between us and the Great High Priest, when He entered "the holiest of all;" but we have enough to reveal the depth of fervor, the tenderness and confidingness of this blissful intercommunion with His heavenly Father. No morning dawns without His fetching *fresh manna* from the mercy-seat. "He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught," (Isaiah 50:4). Beautiful description! — a praying Redeemer, wakening, as if at early dawn, the ear of His Father, to get fresh supplies for the duties and the trials of the day! All His public acts were consecrated by prayer — His baptism, His transfiguration, His miracles, His agony, His death. He breathed away His spirit in prayer. "His *last breath*," says Philip Henry, "was *praying breath*."

How sweet to think, in holding communion with God — that *Jesus* drank of this very brook! He consecrated the *bended knee* and the *silent chamber*. He refreshed His fainting spirit at the same great Fountain-head from which it is life for us to draw, and death to forsake.

Reader! do you complain of your languid spirit, your drooping faith, your fitful affections, your lukewarm love? May you not trace much of what you deplore — to an unfrequented prayer chamber? The *treasures* are locked up from you — because you have allowed the *key* to rust! Your hands hang down — because they have ceased to be uplifted in prayer. Without prayer! — It is the pilgrim without a staff — the seaman without a compass — the soldier going unarmed to battle.

Beware of encouraging what indisposes to prayer — going to the audience-chamber of God with soiled garments, the din of the world following you, its distracting thoughts hovering unforbidden over your spirit. Can you wonder that the *living water* refuses to flow through obstructed channels, or the *heavenly light* to pierce murky vapors?

Among men, fellowship with lofty minds — imparts a certain nobility to the character. Just so, in a far higher sense, by communion with God you

will be transformed into His image, and get assimilated to His likeness. Make every event in life — a reason for fresh going to Him. If difficulties in duty, bring them to the test of prayer. If bowed down with anticipated trial, "fearing to enter the cloud," — remember Christ's preparation, "Sit here while I go and *pray* yonder."

Let prayer consecrate everything — your time, your talents, your pursuits, your engagements, your joys, your sorrows, your crosses, your losses. By prayer, rough paths will be made smooth, trials are disarmed of their bitterness, enjoyments are hallowed and refined, the bread of the world turned into angels' food. "It is in the prayer-closet," says Payson, "where the battle is lost or won!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **10. LOVE TO THE BRETHREN**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us!" — Ephesians 5:2.

"Jesus," says a writer, "came from heaven on the wings of love." Love was the element in which He moved and walked. He sought to baptize the world afresh with it. When we find Him teaching us by love to vanquish an *enemy*, we need not wonder at the tenderness of His appeals to the *brethren* to "love one another." Like a fond father impressing his children, how the Divine Teacher lingers over the lesson, "This is *My* commandment!"

If *selfishness* had guided His actions, we might have expected Him to demand all His people's love for Himself. But He claims no such monopoly. He not only encourages mutual affection — but He makes it the *badge* of discipleship! He gave them at once its *measure* and *motive*. "Love one another — AS I have loved you!" What a love was that! — it

reached to the lowliest and humblest — "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these — you did it unto *Me*."

Ah! if such was the Elder Brother's love to His younger brethren — then what should the love of these younger brothers be for one another! How humbling that there should be so much that is sadly and strangely unlike the spirit which our blessed Master sought to inculcate alike by *precept* and *example*! Christians, why these bitter estrangements, these censorious words, these harsh judgments, this lack of kind consideration of the feelings and failings of those who may differ from you? Why are your friendships so often like the summer brook, soon dried? You hope, before long, to meet in glory. Doubtless, when you enter on that "sabbath of love," many a greeting will be this, "Alas! my brother, that on earth I did not love you more!"

Do you see the image of God in a professing believer? It is your duty to love him for the sake of that image. No church, no outward attire, no denominational creed — should prevent your owning and claiming him as a fellow-pilgrim and fellow-heir. It has been said of a portrait, however poor the painting, however unfinished the style, however faulty the touches, however coarse and unseemly the frame — yet if the *likeness* is faithful, we overlook many subordinate defects. So it is with the Christian: however plain the exterior, however rough the setting, or even manifold the blemishes still found cleaving to a partially sanctified nature — yet if the Redeemer's likeness is feebly and faintly traced there, we should love the *blemished copy* for the sake of the *Divine Original*. There may be other bonds of association and communion linking spirit with spirit — family ties, mental congenialities, intellectual tastes, philanthropic pursuits; but that which ought to take the precedence of all, is the love of *God's image* in the brethren. What will heaven be, but this love perfected — loving Christ, and beloved by those who love Him?

Reader! seek to love *Him* more — and you will love His *people* more. *John* had more love than the other disciples. Why? He drank deepest of the love within that Bosom on which he delighted to lean, every beat of which was love. "Walk," then, "in love!" Let it be the very foot-road you tread; let your way to heaven be paved with it. Soon shall we come to look within the portal. Then shall every jarring and dissonant note be merged

into the sublime harmonies of "the new heavens and the new earth," and we shall all "see eye to eye!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## 11. SYMPATHY

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Jesus wept!" — John 11:35.

It is an affecting thing to see a *great* man in tears! "*Jesus wept!*" It was ever His delight to tread in the footsteps of sorrow — to heal the broken-hearted — turning aside from His own path of suffering — to "weep with those who weep."

*Bethany!* That scene, that *word*, is a condensed volume of consolation for yearning and desolate hearts. What a majesty was in those tears! He had just before been discoursing on Himself as the Resurrection and the Life — the next moment He is a Weeping Man by a human grave, melted in anguished sorrow at a bereaved one's side!

Think of the funeral at the gate of Nain, reading its lesson to dejected myriads — "Let your widows trust in me!" Think of the farewell discourse to His disciples, when, muffling all His own foreseen and anticipated sorrows — He thought only of soothing and mitigating theirs! Think of the affecting pause in that silent procession to Calvary, when He turns around and stills the sobs of those who are tracking His steps with their weeping! Think of that wondrous epitome of human tenderness, just before His eyes closed in their sleep of agony — in the mightiest crisis of all time — when filial love looked down on an anguished mother, and provided her a son and a home!

Ah, was there ever *sympathy* like this! Son! Brother! Kinsman! Savior! all in one! The *majesty of Godhead* almost lost in the *tenderness of the*

*Friend.* But so it was — and so it now is! The heart of the now enthroned King beats responsive to the humblest of His sorrow-stricken people. "I am poor and needy — yet the Lord *carries me on His heart!*"

Let us "go and do likewise." Let us be ready, like our Lord — to follow the call of misery — "to deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him that has no helper." *Sympathy costs but little.* Its recompense and return are great, in the priceless consolation it imparts. Few there are, who undervalue it. Look at Paul — the weary, jaded prisoner — chained to a soldier — recently ship-wrecked, about to stand before Caesar. He reaches Forum dejected and depressed. Brethren come from Rome, a distance of sixty miles, to offer their *sympathy.* The aged man is cheered! His spirit, like Jacob's, "revived!" "He thanked God — and took courage!"

Reader! let "this mind," this holy, Christ-like *habit* be in you, which was also in your adorable Master. Delight, when opportunity occurs — to frequent the *house of mourning* — to bind up the widow's heart, and to dry the orphan's tears. If you can do nothing else, you can whisper into the ear of disconsolate sorrow, those majestic solaces, which, rising first in the graveyard of Bethany, have sent their undying echoes through the world, and stirred the depths of ten thousand hearts — "*Your brother will rise again!*" "Exercise your souls," says Butler, "in a loving sympathy with sorrow in every form. Soothe it, minister to it, support it, revere it. It is the *relic of Christ* in the world, an *image* of the Great Sufferer, a *shadow* of the cross. It is a holy and venerable thing."

Jesus Himself "*looked* for some to take *pity* — but there was *none*; and for comforters — but He found *none!*" It shows how even He valued sympathy, and that, too, in its commonest form of "pity," though an ungrateful world denied it.

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **12. FIDELITY IN REBUKE**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"The Lord turned and *looked* straight at Peter." — Luke 22:61.

Jesus never spoke one unnecessarily harsh or severe word. He had a *divine sympathy* for the frailties and infirmities of the tried, the suffering, the tempted. He was *forbearing* to the ignorant, *encouraging* to the weak, *tender* to the penitent, *loving* to all.

Yet how faithful was He as "the Reprover of sin!" Silent under wrongs done to Himself — with what burning invective did He lay bare the Pharisees' masked corruption and hypocrisy! When His Father's name and temple were profaned — how did He sweep, with an avenging hand, the mammon-crowd away, replacing the superscription, "Holiness to the Lord," over the defiled altars!

Nor was it different with His own disciples. With what fidelity, when rebuke was needed, did He administer it: the withering reprimand conveyed, sometimes by an impressive *word* (Matthew 16:23); sometimes by a silent *look* (Luke 22:61). "Faithful always — were the wounds of *this* Friend!"

Reader! are you equally faithful with your Lord in rebuking evil — not with man's anger — but with a holy jealousy for His glory; feeling, with the sensitive honor of "the good soldier of Jesus Christ," that an affront offered to Him — is offered to yourself?

*The giving of a wise reproof* requires much Christian prudence and delicate discretion. It is not by a rash and inconsiderate exposure of failings, that we must attempt to reclaim an erring brother. But neither, for the sake of a false peace, must we compromise fidelity; for even friendship is too dearly purchased — by winking at sin. Perhaps, when Peter was led to call the Apostle who honestly *reproved* him, "Our beloved brother Paul," in nothing did he love his rebuker more, than for the honest boldness of his Christian reproof. If Paul had, in that crisis of the Church, with a timidity unworthy of him, evaded the difficult task, what, humanly speaking, might have been the result?



*How often does a seasonable reprimand, a faithful caution — save from a lifetime of sin and sorrow! How many a deathbed has made the disclosure, "That kind warning of my friend put an arrest on my career of sin; it altered my whole being; it brought me to the cross; touched my heart, and, by God's grace, saved my soul!" On the other hand, how many have felt, when death has put his impressive seal on some close earthly intimacy, "I might have spoken a solemn word to my friend; but now he is no more, the opportunity is lost, never to be recalled!"*

Reader! see that you act not the *spiritual coward*. When tempted to sit silent when the name of God is slighted or dishonored, think — *would Jesus have done so?* Would He have allowed the *blasphemy* to go unrebuked — or the *lie* to be uttered unchallenged? Where there is a natural shyness which makes you shrink from a more bold and open reproof, remember much may be done to *discountenance* sin, by the silent holiness of demeanor, which refuses to smile at the unholy allusion or ribald jest. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" "Speak gently," yet speak faithfully: "be pitiful — be courteous:" yet "be men of courage, be strong!"

### **13. GENTLENESS IN REBUKE**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Simon son of John — do you truly love me?" — John 21:15

No word here of the erring disciple's past faithlessness — his guilty cowardice, his base denial, his oaths and curses, and treacherous desertion — all are *unmentioned!* The memory of a threefold denial is *suggested*, and no more, by the threefold question of unutterable tenderness, "Simon son of John — do you truly love me?"

When Jesus found His disciples sleeping at the gate of Gethsemane, He rebukes them; but how is the rebuke disarmed of its poignancy by the merciful apology which is added — "The spirit indeed is willing — but the

flesh is weak!" How different from *their* unkind insinuation regarding *Him*, when, in the vessel or Tiberias, "He was asleep" — "Master, don't you *care* that we perish!"

The woman of Samaria is full of worldliness, carnality, sectarianism, sin — yet how gently the Savior speaks to her! How forbearingly — yet faithfully, He directs the arrow of conviction to that seared and hardened conscience, until He lays it bleeding at His feet! Truly, "He will not break the bruised reed — He will not quench the smoking flax." By "the *goodness* of God," He would lead to repentance. When others are speaking of merciless violence, He can dismiss the most guilty of *profligates* with the words "Neither do I condemn you — go, and sin no more."

How many have an *unholy pleasure* in discovering a brother's faults — blazing abroad his failings; administering rebuke, not in gentle forbearance and kindly admonition — but with harsh and impatient severity! How beautifully did Jesus unite intense sensibility to sin — along with tenderest compassion for the sinner, showing in this that "He knows our frame!" Many a sinner needs *gentleness* in chastisement. The reverse would crush a sensitive spirit, or drive it to despair. Jesus tenderly "considers" the case of those He disciplines, "*tempering* the wind to the shorn lamb." In the picture of the good shepherd bearing home the wandering sheep, He illustrated by parable, what He had often and again taught by His own example. No word of needless harshness or upbraiding uttered to the erring wanderer! Ingratitude is too deeply felt, to need rebuke. In silent love, "He lays it on His shoulders rejoicing."

Reader! seek to mingle *gentleness* in all your rebukes; bear with the infirmities of others; make allowance for constitutional frailties; never say harsh things, if kind things will do as well; do not unnecessarily lacerate with recalling former delinquencies. In reproving another — let us rather feel how much we need reproof ourselves. "Consider yourself," is a searching Scripture motto for dealing with an erring brother. Remember your Lord's method of silencing fierce accusation — "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone." Moreover, anger and severity are not the successful means of reclaiming the backslider, or of melting the obdurate. Like the *smooth* stones with which David smote Goliath —

*gentle rebukes* are generally the most powerful. The old fable of the traveler and his *cloak* has a moral here as in other things. The *warm sunshine* will effect its removal — sooner than the *rough tempest*. It was said of Leighton, that "he rebuked faults so mildly, that they were never repeated, not because the admonished were afraid — but ashamed to do so."

## 14. ENDURANCE OF CONTRADICTION

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." — Hebrews 12:3.

What endurance was this!

Perfect *truth* — in the midst of error;

perfect *love* — in the midst of ingratitude and coldness;

perfect *rectitude* — in the midst of perjury, violence, fraud;

perfect *constancy* — in the midst of ridicule and desertion;

perfect *innocence* — confronting every debased form of depravity and guilt;

perfect *patience* — encountering every species of gross provocation! "Oppressed and afflicted, He opened not His mouth!" "For my love" (in return for my love,) "they are my adversaries; *but*" (see His endurance! — the only species of revenge of which His sinless nature was capable) "*I give myself unto prayer!*" (Psalm 109:4.)

Reader! "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!" The greatest test of an earthly soldier's courage is *patient endurance!* The noblest trait of the spiritual soldier is the same. "Having done all, to

*stand,*" "He *endured*, as seeing Him who is invisible!" Beware of the angry recrimination, the hasty ebullition of temper. Amid unkind insinuations — when your motives are misrepresented, and reputation assailed; when your good deeds are ridiculed, kind intentions coldly thwarted and repulsed, chilling reproach manifested where you expected nothing but friendship — what a triumph over natural impulse to manifest a spirit of meek endurance! — like a rainbow, radiant with the hues of heaven, resting peacefully amid the storms of derision and "the floods of ungodly men." What an opportunity of magnifying the *sustaining grace of God!* "It is a small thing for me to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; He who judges me is the Lord." "The Lord is on my side. I will not fear what man can do unto me." "Blessed is the man who *endures.*" "He who *endures* to the end, the same shall be saved."

If faithful to our God, we must expect to encounter contradiction in the same form which Jesus did — "the contradiction of *sinner*." It has been well said, "There is no cross of *nails* and wood erected now for the Christian — but there is one of *words* and *looks* which is never taken down!" If believers are set as *lights* in the earth, lamps in the "city of destruction," we know that "he who does evil *hates* the light." "Marvel not my brethren, if the world hates you!"

Weary and faint ones, exposed to the shafts of calumny and scorn because of your fidelity to your God — encountering, it may be, the coldness and estrangement of those dear to you, who cannot, perhaps, sympathize in the holiness of your walk and the loftiness of your aims — "consider *Him* who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest *you* be weary and faint in your minds!" What is *your* "contradiction" compared to *His*? Soon your cross, whatever it is, will have an end. "The seat of the scorner" has no place in yonder glorious heaven, where all will be peace — no jarring note to disturb its blissful harmonies! Look forward to the great coronation-day of the Church triumphant — the day of your divine Lord's appearing, when motives and aims, now misunderstood, will be vindicated; wrongs redressed, calumnies and aspersions wiped away. Meanwhile, "rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

## 15. PLEASING GOD

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I do always those things that please Him." — John 8:29.

What a glorious motto for a man — "*I live for God!*" It is religion's truest definition. It is the essence of angelic bliss — the motive principle of angelic action — "You ministers of His that do His pleasure." The Lord of angels knew no higher, no *other* motive. It was during His incarnation — the regulator and directory of His daily being. It supported Him amid the depressing sorrows of His woe-worn path. It upheld Him in their dreadful termination in the *garden* and on the *cross*. For a moment sinking human nature faltered under the load which His Godhead sustained; but the thought of "pleasing God" nerved and revived Him. "Not my will — but *Yours* be done."

It is only when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, that this animating desire to "please Him" can exist. In the holy bosom of Jesus, that love reigned paramount, admitting no rival — no competing affection. Though infinitely inferior in degree, it is the same impelling principle which leads His people still to link *enjoyment* with His *service*, and which makes consecration to Him of heart and life its own best recompense and reward. Says one, "When love to God is habitually in the ascendant, or occupying the place of will, it gathers round it all the other desires of the soul as satellites, and whirls them along with it in its orbit round the center of attraction." Until the heart, then, is changed, the believer cannot have this "testimony that he *pleases God*."

The *world, self, sin* — these are the *gods* of the unregenerate soul. And even *when* renewed, alas that there should be so many ebbings and flowings in our tide of devotedness! Jesus could say, "I do *always* these things that please the Father." Glory to God burned within His bosom like a living fire. "Many waters could not quench it." His were no fitful and inconstant frames and feelings — but *the persistent habit of a holy life*, which had the one end in view, from which it never diverged or deviated.

Let it be so, in some lowly measure with us. Let God's service not be merely set times and seasons; but, like the alabaster box of ointment, let us *always* be giving forth the fragrant perfume of holiness. Even when the shadows of trial are falling around us, let us "pass through the cloud" with the sustaining motive — "All my wish, O God, is to please and glorify You! By giving or taking — by smiting or healing — by the sweet cup or the bitter — Father, glorify your name!"

"I don't want to be weary of God's dealings with me," said Bickersteth, on his death-bed; "I want to glorify Jesus in them, and to find Him more precious." Do I shrink from trials — duties — crosses — because involving hardships and self-denial, or because frowned on by the world? Let the thought of God's approving countenance be enough. Let me dread no censure, if conscious of acting in accordance with *His* will. Let the Apostle's monitory word determine many a perplexing path — "If I please men — then I am not the servant of Christ."

## 16. GRIEF AT SIN

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He looked around at them in *anger* — being deeply *grieved* at their hardness of their hearts." — Mark 3:5.

On this one occasion only, is the expression used with reference to Jesus — "He looked around at them in *anger!*" Never did He grieve for Himself. His intensest sorrows were reserved for those who were tampering with their own souls, and dishonoring His God. The continual spectacle of moral evil, thrust on the gaze of spotless purity, made His earthly history one consecutive history of grief, one perpetual "cross and passion."

In the tears shed at the grave of Bethany — *sympathy*, doubtless, for the world's myriad mourners, had its own share (the bereaved could not part with so precious a tribute in their hours of sadness) — but a far more impressive cause was one undiscerned by the weeping sisters and

sorrowing crowd — His knowledge of the deep and obdurate impenitence of those who were about to gaze on the mightiest of miracles, only to "despise, and be astonished, and perish!" "*Jesus wept!*" — but His profoundest anguish was over resisted grace, abused privileges, scorned mercy! It was the *Divine Craftsman* mourning over His *shattered handiwork* — the *Almighty Creator* weeping over His *ruined world* — God, the God-man, "grieving" over the Temple of the soul — a humiliating wreck of what once was made "after His own image!"

Can we sympathize in any respect with such *exalted tears*? Do we mourn for sin, our *own* sin — the deep insult which it inflicts on God — the ruinous consequences it entails on ourselves? Do we grieve at sin in *others*? Do we know anything of Lot's grief, "Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day!" — by the stupid hardness and obduracy of the depraved heart, which resists alike the appeals of wrath and love, judgment and mercy? Ah! it is easy, in general terms, to condemn vice, and to utter harsh, severe, and cutting denunciations on the guilty! It is easy to pass uncharitable comments on the inconsistencies or follies of others; but to "*grieve*" as our Lord did, is a different thing; to mourn over the hardness of heart, and yet to have the burning desire to teach it better things — to hate, as He did, the *sin* — but, like Him also, to love the *sinner!*

Reader! look specially to your own spirit. In one respect, the example of Jesus falls short of your case. He had *no sin* of His own to mourn over. He could only commiserate others. *Your* intensest grief must begin with *yourself*. Like the watchful Levite of old, be a guardian at the temple-gates of your own soul. Whatever is your besetting iniquity, your constitutional bias to sin — seek to guard it with wakeful vigilance. Grieve at the thought of incurring one passing shadow of displeasure from so kind and compassionate a Savior. Let this be a holy preservative in your every hour of temptation, "How can I do this great wickedness — and sin against God?"

Grieve for a perishing world — a groaning creation fettered and chained in unwilling "subjection to vanity." Do what you can, by effort, by prayer — to hasten on the hour of jubilee when its *ashy robes of sin and sorrow* shall be laid aside, and, attired in the "beauties of holiness," it shall exult

in "the glorious liberty of the sons of God!"

## 17. HUMILITY

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him!" John 13:3-5

What a matchless picture of humility! At the very moment when His throne was in view — angel-anthems floating in His ear — the hour come "when He was to depart out of this world" — possessing a lofty consciousness of His peerless dignity, that "He came *from* God and was going *to* God;" THEN "Jesus took a towel, and girded Himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet!" All heaven was ready at that moment to cast their combined crowns at His feet. But the High and the Lofty One inhabiting eternity is on earth "as one that serves!" "That *infinite stoop!* it sinks all creature humiliation to nothing, and renders it impossible for a creature to *humble* himself." — (*Evans.*)

Humility follows Him, from His unhonored birthplace — to His borrowed grave. It throws a subdued splendor over all He did. "The poor in spirit" — the "mourner" — the "meek" — claim His first beatitudes. He was severe only to one class — those who despised others. However He is employed — whether performing His works of miraculous power, or taking little children in His arms — He stands forth as "clothed with humility." No, this humility becomes more conspicuous as He draws nearer glory. Before His death, He calls His disciples "*Friends;*" subsequently, it is "*Brethren,*" "*Children.*" How sad the contrast between the Master — and His disciples! Two hours had not elapsed after He washed their feet, when "they began to argue among themselves about



who would be the greatest among them!"

Let the image of that lowly Redeemer be ever in our mind's eye. His example may well speak in silent impressiveness, bringing us down from our *pedestal of pride*. There surely can be no labor of love too humiliating for us — when *He* stooped so low. Let us be content to take the humblest place — not envious of the success or exaltation of another; not, "like Diotrefes, loving pre-eminence;" but willing to be thought little of; saying with the Baptist, with our eye on our Lord, "*He* must increase — but *I* must decrease!"

How much we have cause to be humble for! — the constant cleaving of defilement to our souls; and even what is partially good in us — how mixed with imperfection, self-seeking, arrogance, vain-glory! A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms. The Seraphim of old (a type of believers) had six wings — *two* were for errands of love but "with *four* he covered himself!" It has been beautifully said, "You lie nearest the River of Life when you *bend* to it; you cannot drink — but as you *stoop*." The corn of the field, as it ripens — bows its head; just so, the Christian, as he ripens in the divine life, bends in this lowly grace. Christ speaks of His people as "lilies" — they are "lilies of the *Valley*," they can only grow in the shade!

"I live in a high and holy place — but also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit."

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." "Go" with what Rutherford calls "a low sail." Humility is the demeanor of your blessed Master; the family badge — the family likeness. "I live in a high and holy place — but also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit." Yes! the humble, sanctified heart is God's *second Heaven!*

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **18. PATIENCE**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth." — Isaiah 53:7.

*Behold the infinite patience of Jesus!*

Even among His own disciples, how forbearingly He endured their blindness, their misconceptions and hardness of heart! *Philip* had been with Him for three years — yet he had "not known Him" — all that time he had remained in strange and culpable ignorance of his Lord's dignity and glory! See how tenderly Jesus bears with him — giving him nothing in reply for his confession of ignorance — but unparalleled promises of grace!

*Peter*, the honored and trusted disciple — becomes a renegade and a coward. Justly might his dishonored Lord, stung with such *unrequited love*, have cut the unworthy cumberer down! But He spares him, bears with him, gently rebukes him, and loves him more than ever! See the Divine Sufferer in the terminating scenes of His own ignominy and woe! How patient! "Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth!" In these dreadful moments, *outraged Omnipotence* might have summoned twelve legions of angels — and put into the hand of each a *vial of wrath!* But He submits in meek, majestic silence. Truly, in *Him* "patience had her *perfect work!*"

Think of this same patience with His people — since He ascended to glory. The years upon years He has borne with their perverse resistance of His grace, their treacherous ingratitude, their wayward wanderings, their hardness of heart and contempt of His holy Word. Yet, behold the forbearing love of this Savior God! His *hand of mercy* is stretched out still!

Child of God! are you not undergoing some bitter trial? The way of your God, it may be, all mystery — no *footprints of love* traceable in the chequered path; no *light* in the clouds above; no *bright ray* in the dark future. *Be patient!* "The Lord is good to those who *wait* upon Him."

"Those who *wait* upon the Lord shall renew their strength!"

Or have you been long tossed on some bed of sickness — days of pain and nights of weariness appointed to you? *Be patient!* "I trust this groaning," said a suffering saint, "is not murmuring." God, by this very affliction, is nurturing within you this beautiful grace which shone so conspicuously in the character of your dear Lord. With Him it was a lovely habit of the soul. With you, the "tribulation" which works "patience" is *needful discipline*. "It is *good* for a man that he should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God."

Are you suffering some unmerited wrong or unkindness, exposed to harsh and wounding accusations, hard for flesh and blood to bear? *Be patient!* Beware of hastiness of speech or temper; remember how much evil may be done by a few inconsiderate words "spoken unadvisedly with the lip." Think of Jesus standing before a human tribunal, in the silent submissiveness of conscious innocence and integrity. Leave your cause with God. Let this be the only form of your complaint, "O God, I am oppressed — undertake for me!"

"In patience," then, "possess you your souls." Let it not be a grace for peculiar seasons, called forth on peculiar exigencies; but a habitable frame manifested in the calm serenity of a daily walk — placidity amid the *little fretting annoyances of every-day life* — a fixed purpose of the heart to wait upon God, and cast its every burden upon Him!

## **19. SUBJECTION**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"That the world may know that I *love* the Father and that I *do* exactly what my Father has commanded me." John 14:31

Jesus as God-man, had *omnipotence* slumbering in His arm. He had the *hoarded treasures of eternity* in His grasp. He had only to "speak — and

it was done." But as an example to His people, His whole life on earth was one impressive act of *subordination* and *dependence*. At *Nazareth* He was "subject to his parents." There He remained in studied obscurity, occupying for thirty years a lowly hut, willing to continue in a state of seclusion, until the Father's summons called Him to His appointed work.

At His *baptism*, sinless Himself, He gives this reason for receiving a sinner's rite at a sinner's hands — "Allow it to be so now, for thus it befits Me to fulfill all righteousness." The same beautiful spirit of filial *subjection* shines conspicuous amid His acts of stupendous power. Even among His own disciples His language is, "I am among you as He who serves." With an act of submission He closed His pilgrimage and work of love. "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."

What an example to us, in all this, is our beloved Lord! Surely, if *He*, "God only wise" — the Self-existent One, to whom "all power was committed;" — the Sinless One, never liable to err, on whom "the Spirit was poured without measure" — if *He* manifested such *habitual dependence* on His heavenly Father — then how earnestly ought *we*, weak, erring, fallible creatures, to seek to live every hour — every moment — as *pensioners on God's grace and love*, following His directing hand in all things! As the *servant* has his eyes on his master, or the *child* on its parent, "so should our eyes be on the Lord our God." Whatever He speaks, be it ours with all docility to follow the voice, endorsing every utterance of providence, and every precept of Scripture, with our Lord's own words, "*This is the Father's will!*"

Beware of *self-dependence*. The first step in spiritual declension is this — "Let him that *thinks he stands!*" The secret of real strength is this — "*Kept by the power of God!*" How it sweetens all our blessings, and alleviates all our sorrows — to regard *both* as emanations from a loving Father's hand! Even if we should be like the disciples of old, "*constrained*" to go into the ship; if all should be darkness and tempest — frowning providences — "the wind contrary;" how blessed to feel that in embarking on the unquiet element, that "the Lord has bidden us!" Paul could not speak even of taking an earthly journey, without the parenthesis, ("if the Lord wills.")

How many trials, and sorrows, and sins, would it save us, if the same

were the habitual regulator of our daily life! It would lead to calm contentment with our lot, hushing every disquieting suggestion with the thought that our lot, with all that is apparently *adverse* in it — was *ordained* for us! It would teach us not to be aspiring after *great* things — but humbly to wait the will and purposes of a wise Provider; not to go *before* our Heavenly Guide — but to *follow* Him, saying, in meek subjection, "Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with matters too great or awesome for me. But I have stilled and quieted myself, just as a small child is quiet with its mother. Yes, like a small child is my soul within me!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **20. NOT RETALIATING**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"When they hurled their insults at Him — He did not retaliate; when He suffered — He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly!" — 1 Peter 2:23.

What a common dictate of the fallen and unregenerate heart — to resent and recriminate! How alien to natural feeling — to answer cutting taunts, and meet unmerited wrong, with the Divine method the Gospel prescribes, "Overcome evil with good!" It was in the closing scenes of the Savior's humiliation, when silent, and unresenting, He stood "silent before His shearers," that this beautiful feature in his character was most wondrously manifested; but it beams forth also for our imitation in the ordinary and less prominent incidents of His pilgrimage.

When He met *Nathanael* of Cana in Galilee, He found him clinging to an unreasonable prejudice — "Can any good thing come out of *Nazareth*?" The severe remark is allowed to pass unnoticed. Overlooking the unkind insinuation, the Savior fixes on the favorable feature of his character, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

After His resurrection, He appears to His disciples. They were cowering in shame, half afraid to confront the glance of *injured goodness*. He breathes on them, and says, "Peace be unto you!" — Peter was the one of all the rest who had most reason to dread estranged looks and upbraiding words; but a special message is sent to reassure that trembling disciple, that there was no alienation in the unresentful Heart he had secretly wounded — "Go and tell the disciples — *and Peter!*"

Even when *Judas* first unveiled himself to his Lord as the *betrayed*, we believe it was not in bitter irony or rebuke — but in the fullness of pitying tenderness, that Jesus addressed him, "*Friend*, why have you come?"

Tears and prayers were His only revenge on Jerusalem — the city and scene of His murder. "Beginning at Jerusalem," was the closing illustration of a spirit "not of this world" — a significant parting testimony that in the bosom that uttered it — *retaliation* had no place.

More than one of the disciples seem to have imbibed much of this "mind" of their Lord. "They stoned *Stephen*. Then he fell on his knees and cried out — *Lord, do not hold this sin against them!*"

Take another example — The great Apostle of the Gentiles felt himself under a painful necessity faithfully to rebuke Peter in presence of the whole Church. He had *recorded* that rebuke, too, in one of his epistles. It was thus to be handed down to every age as a permanent and humiliating evidence of the *wavering inconstancy* of his fellow-laborer. Peter, doubtless, must have felt acutely the severity of the chastisement. Does he resent it? He, too, puts on record, long after, in one of his own epistles, a sentence regarding his rebuker — but it is this — "Our *beloved brother Paul!*"

Reader! when tempted to utter the harsh word, or give the cutting or hasty answer — seek to check yourself with the question, "Is this the reply my Savior would have given?" If your fellow-men should prove unkind, inconsiderate, ungrateful — be it yours to refer the cause to God. Speak of the faults of others only in *prayer*; manifesting more sorrow for their sin — than for the evil inflicted by them on yourselves. *Retaliate!* No such word should have a place in the Christian's vocabulary. *Retaliate!* If I

cherish such a spirit towards my brother — how can I meet that brother in heaven? "But you have not so learned Christ."

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## 21. BEARING THE CROSS

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"And He bearing His cross." — John 19:17.

*When* did Jesus bear the cross? Not that moment alone, surely, when the bitter tree was placed on His shoulders, on the way to Golgotha. Its *vision* may be said to have risen before Him in His infant dreams in Bethlehem's cradle; there, rather, its *reality* began; and He ceased not to carry it, until his work was finished, and the victory won! A *cloud* of old, hovered over the mercy-seat in the tabernacle and temple. So it was with the Great Antitype — the living Mercy-seat — He had ever a cloud of woe hanging over Him. "He *carried* our sorrows."

Reader! dwell much and often under the shadow of your Lord's cross — and it will lead you to think lightly of your own! If *He* gave utterance to not one murmuring word — how then, can *you* complain? "If we were deeper students of His bitter anguish — we would think less of the ripplings of *our waves*, amid His horrible tempest" — (*Evans.*)

The saint's cross assumes many and diverse shapes. Sometimes it is the bitter trial, the crushing pang of bereavement, desolate households, and aching hearts. Sometimes it is the crucifixion of sin, the determined battling with "lusts which war against the soul." Sometimes it is the resistance of the evil *maxims* and *practices* of a lying world — vindicating the honor of Christ, in the midst, it may be, of taunt, and ridicule, and shame. And as there are different *crosses* — so there are different *ways* of bearing them. To some, God says, "Put your shoulder to the burden; lift it up, and bear it on; work, and toil, and labor!" To others, He says, "Be still,

bear it — and *suffer!*"

Believer! *your cross* may be hard to endure, it may involve deep struggles — tears by day, watchings by night; bear it meekly, patiently justifying God's wisdom in laying it on you. Rejoice in the assurance that He gives not one atom more of earthly trial than He sees to be really needful; not one *unnecessary thorn* pierces your feet. In the very bearing of the cross for His sake — there are mighty compensations. What new views of your Savior's love, His truth, His promises, His sustaining grace, His sufferings, His glory! What new filial nearness; increased delight in prayer; in inner sunshine when it is darkest without! The *waves* cover you — but underneath them all, are "the everlasting arms!"

Do not look out for a situation *without* crosses. Do not be over-anxious to walk in "smooth paths," — leaving your God, as Orpha did Naomi, just when the cross requires to be carried. Immoderate earthly enjoyments — unbroken earthly prosperity — write upon these "*Beware!*" You may live to see them become your greatest trials!

Remember the old saying, "No cross — no crown!" The sun of the saint's life generally struggles through "weeping clouds." One of the loveliest passages of Scripture is that in which the portals of heaven being opened, we overhear this dialogue between two ransomed ones: "Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the *great tribulation!*'"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **22. HOLY ZEAL**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Zeal for Your house will consume Me." — John 2:17



Such was the holy heavenly zeal of our Great Exemplar. His were no *transient outbursts of ardor* which time cooled and difficulties impeded. His life was *one indignant protest against sin* — and *one ceaseless current of undying love* for souls which all the malignity of foes and unkindness of friends could not for one moment divert from its course. Even when He rises from the dead, and we imagine His work at an end — His zeal only meditates fresh deeds of love. "Still His heart and His care," says Goodwin, "is upon doing more. Having now dispatched that great work on earth — He sends His disciples word that He is hastening to heaven as fast as He can, to do another" (John 20:17).

Reader! do you know anything of this zeal, which "many waters could not quench?" See that, like your Lord's — it is steady, sober, consistent, and undeviating. How many are, like the children of Ephraim, "carrying bows" — all zealous when zeal demands no sacrifice — but "turning their backs to the day of battle!" Others running well for a time — but gradually "hindered," through the benumbing influences of worldliness, selfishness, and sin! Two disciples, apparently equally devoted and zealous, send through Paul, in one of his epistles, a joint Christian salutation — "*Luke and Demas* greet you." A few years afterwards, thus he writes from his Roman dungeon — "Only *Luke* is with me." "*Demas* has *forsaken* me, having loved this present world!"

While zeal is commendable, remember the Apostle's qualification, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a *good* thing." There is in these days, much base coin current, *called* "zeal," which bears not the image and superscription of Jesus. There is zeal for church-membership and denominations; zeal for creeds and dogmas; zeal for trifles and nonessentials. "From such turn aside!" Your Lord stamped with His example and approval — no such counterfeits. *His* zeal was ever brought to bear on two objects, and two objects alone — *the glory of God* and *the good of man*. Be it so with you.

Enter, first of all (as He did the earthly temple), the sanctuary of *your own heart*, with "the scourge of small cords." Drive out every *unhallowed intruder* there! Do not allow yourself to be deceived. Others may call such jealous searchings of spirit, "sanctimoniousness" and "wild enthusiasm." But remember, to be *almost saved* — is to be *altogether lost!* To be

zealous about everything but "the one thing needful" — is an insult to God and your everlasting interests!

Have a zeal for *others*. Dying myriads are around you. As a member of the Christian priesthood, it becomes you to rush in with your censer and incense between the living and the dead, "that the plague may be stopped!"

Be it yours to say, "Blessed Jesus! I am Yours! — Yours only! — Yours wholly! — Yours forever! I am willing to *follow* You — and (if need be) to *suffer* for You. I am ready at Your bidding to leave the homestead in the valley — and to face the cutting blasts of the mountain. Take me — use me for Your glory. Lord, what will You have me to do?"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **23. BENEVOLENCE**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He went around doing good." — Acts 10:38.

"Christ's great end," says Richard Baxter, "was to save men from their *sins*; but He delighted to save them from their *sorrows*." His heart bled for human misery. Benevolence brought Him from heaven; and benevolence followed His steps wherever He went on earth. The journeys of the Divine Philanthropist were marked by tears of thankfulness, and breathings of grateful love. The helpless, the blind, the lame, the desolate — rejoiced at the sound of His footfall. Truly might it be said of Him, "All who heard Me praised Me. All who saw Me spoke well of Me. For I assisted the poor in their need and the orphans who required help. I helped those without hope — and they blessed Me. And I caused the widows' hearts to sing for joy" (Job 29:11-13).

All suffering hearts were a magnet to Jesus. It was not more His

prerogative, than His happiness — to turn tears into smiles. One of the few pleasures which on earth gladdened the spirit of the "Man of sorrows" was the pleasure of *doing good* — soothing grief, and alleviating misery. Next to the joy of the widow of Nain when her son was restored, was the joy in the bosom of the *Divine Restorer!* He often went out of His way to be kind. A journey was not grudged, even if *one* aching heart were to be soothed (Mark 5:1; John 4:4, 5). Nor were His kindnesses dispensed through the intervention of others. They were all *personal* acts. His own *hand* healed. His own *voice* spoke. His own *footsteps* lingered on the threshold of bereavement, or at the precincts of the tomb. Ah! had the princes of this world known the loving tenderness and unselfishness of that wondrous heart, "they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory!"

Reader! do you know anything of such active benevolence? Have you ever felt the *luxury of doing good*? Have you ever felt, that in making others happy — you make yourself so? Do you know anything of that great law of your being, enunciated by the Divine Patron and Pattern of Benevolence, "It is more blessed to give — than to receive?"

Has God enriched you with this world's goods? Seek to view yourself as a consecrated medium for dispensing them to others. Beware alike of *miserly hoarding* — and *selfish extravagance!* How sad the case of those whose lot God has made thus to abound with temporal mercies, who have gone to the grave unconscious of diminishing one drop of human misery, or making one of the world's myriad aching hearts happier! How the example of *Jesus* rebukes the cold and calculating kindnesses — the *mite-like* offerings of many even of His own people! "whose libation is not like His, from the *brim* of an overflowing cup — but from the *bottom* — from the *dregs!*"

You may have *little* to give. Your sphere and means may be alike limited. But remember that God is as much glorified by the *trifle* bestowed from the *earnings of poverty* — as by the splendid benefaction from the *lap of plenty*. "The Lord loves a *cheerful* giver."

The nobler part of Christian benevolence is not vast donations, or munificent financial sacrifices. "He went about *doing good.*" The merciful visit — the friendly word — the look of sympathy — the cup of cold water

— the little unostentatious service — the giving without thought or hope of recompense — the kindly "considering of the poor" — anticipating their needs — considering their comforts — these are what God values and loves! They are "loans" to Himself — tributary streams to "the river of *His* pleasure". They will be acknowledged at last as such — "I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine — you did for Me!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **24. FIRMNESS IN TEMPTATION**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Jesus said to him — *Away from Me, Satan!*" — Matthew 4:10.

There is a dreadful intensity of meaning in the words, as applied to Jesus, "He *suffered*, being tempted!" Though *incapable* of sin — there was, in the *refined sensibilities* of His holy nature, that which made temptation unspeakably appalling. What must it have been to confront the Arch-traitor? — to stand face to face with the foe of His throne, and His universe? But the "prince of this world" came, and found "nothing in Him." Billow after billow of Satanic violence spent their fury, in vain, on the Living Rock!

Reader! you have still the same malignant enemy to contend with; assailing you in a thousand insidious forms; astonishingly adapting his assaults to your circumstances, your temperament, your mental bent, your master passion! There is no place, where "Satan's seat" is not; The whole world lies in the Wicked one. — (1 John 5:19) He has his whispers for the ear of childhood; hoary age is not inaccessible to his wiles. "*All this will I give you*" — is still his bribe to deny Jesus and to "mind earthly things." He will meet you in the crowd; he will follow you to the solitude; his is a sleepless vigilance!

Are you bold in repelling him as your Master was? Are you ready with the retort to every foul suggestion, "*Away from me, Satan!*" Cultivate a tender sensitiveness about sin. The finest barometers are the most *sensitive*. Whatever your besetting frailty is — whatever bitter or baleful passion you are conscious aspires to the mastery — watch it, crucify it, Nail it to your Lord's cross! *You* may despise "the day of small things" — the *Great Adversary* does not. He knows the power of *littles* — that little by little consumes and eats out the vigor of the soul. And once the downwards movement in the spiritual life begins — who can predict where it may end? — the going on "from weakness to weakness," instead of "from strength to strength."

Make no compromises; never join in the ungodly amusement, or venture on the questionable path, with the plea, "It does me no harm." The Israelites, on entering Canaan, instead of obeying the Divine injunction of extirpating their enemies, made a hollow truce with them. — What was the result? Years upon years of tedious warfare. "They were scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes!" It is quaintly — but truthfully said by an old writer, "Sin indulged, in the conscience, is like Jonah in the ship, which causes such a tempest, that the conscience is like a troubled sea, whose waters cannot rest." — (*Thomas Brooks.*)

"Keep," then, "your heart with all diligence," or, (as it is in the forcible original Hebrew,) "keep your heart *above all keeping*, for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Let this ever be our preservative against temptation, "How would *Jesus* have acted here? Would *He* not have recoiled, like the sensitive plant, from the remotest contact with sin? Can I think of dishonoring Him by tampering with His enemy — incurring from His own lips the bitter reflection of injured love — '*I am wounded in the house of My friends!*'"

He tells us *the secret of our preservation and safety*, "Simon! Simon! Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you — that your faith fail not!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## 25. RECEIVING SINNERS

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"This man receives sinners!" — Luke 15:2.

The *ironic taunt* of proud and censorious Pharisees formed the *glory* of Him who came, "not to call the righteous — but sinners, to repentance." Publicans and outcasts; those covered with a deeper than any bodily leprosy — laid bare their wounds to the "Great Physician;" and as conscious guilt and timid penitence crept abashed and imploring to His feet — they found nothing but a forgiving and a gracious welcome!

"His ways" were not as "man's ways!" The "watchman," in the Canticles, "smote" the disconsolate one seeking her lost Lord; they tore off her veil, mocking with chilling unkindness her anguished tears. Not so "the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls." "This man *receives* sinners!" See in Nicodemus, stealing under the shadows of night to elude observation — a type of the thousand thousand who in every age have gone *trembling in their night of sin and sorrow* to this Heavenly Friend! Does Jesus punish his timidity by shutting His door against him, spurning him from His presence? — "He will not break the bruised reed, He will not quench the smoking flax!"

And He is still the same! He who arrested a *persecutor* in his blasphemies, and turned the lips of an *expiring felon* with faith and love — is at this hour standing with all the garnered treasures of Redemption in His hand, proclaiming, "whoever comes unto Me, I will never cast out!"

Are we from this to think lightly of sin? or by example and conduct to palliate and overlook its enormity? Not so! Sin, as sin, can never be sufficiently *stamped* with the *brand* of reprobation. But we must seek carefully to distinguish between the *offence* — and the *offender*. Nothing should be done on our part by word or deed to mock the penitential sighings of a guilty spirit, or send the trembling outcast away, with the despairing feeling of "*No hope.*"

"This man receives sinners" — and shall not *we*? Does *He* allow the worst dregs of human depravity to crouch unbidden at His feet, and to gaze on His forgiving countenance with the uplifted eye of hope — and shall *we* dare to deal out harsh, and severe and crushing verdicts on an offending (it may be a *deeply* offending) brother? Shall we pronounce "crimson" and "scarlet" sins and sinners — beyond the pale of mercy, when *Jesus* does not? No! Rather, when *wretchedness*, and *depravity*, and *backsliding* cross our path — let it not be with the bitter taunt or the ironical retort that we bid them away. Let us bear — endure — remonstrate — deal tenderly with them; Jesus *did* so, Jesus *does* so! Ah! if we had within us His unconquerable love of souls; His yearning desire for the everlasting happiness of sinners — we would be more frequently in earnest admonition and affectionate appeal with those who have hitherto received no other than harsh looks and repulsive words. If this "mind" really was in us, "which was also in Him," we would more frequently ask ourselves, "Have I done all I *might* have done to pluck this *brand* from the burning? Have I remembered what grace *has* wrought, what grace *can* do?"

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **26. TRUTHFULNESS**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He committed no sin, and no *deceit* was found in his mouth." — 1 Peter 2:22.

How rare, and all the more beautiful because of its rarity, is a purely *deceitless* spirit! A transparent medium through which the light of

Heaven comes and goes: open, candid, just, honorable, sincere; scorning every unfair dealing, every hollow pretension, every narrow prejudice. Wherever such characters exist, they are like "apples of gold, in pictures of silver."

Such, in all the loveliness of sinless perfection, was the Son of God! His truthfulness and sincerity shining the more conspicuously amid the artful and malignant deceits alike of men and devils. Passing by manifold instances in the course of His ministry, look at its manifestation, as the hour of His death approached. When, on the night of His apprehension, He confronts the assassin band, in meek majesty He puts the question, "Whom do you seek?" They said to Him, "Jesus of Nazareth!" In guileless innocence, He replies, "I am He!" "Are You the King of the Jews?" asks Pilate, a few hours after. An evasive answer might again have purchased immunity from suffering and indignity — but once more the lips which scorned the semblance of evasion reply, "Yes, it is as you say!"

How He loved the same spirit in His people! "Behold," said He, of Nathaniel, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is *no deceit!*" That upright man had, we may suppose, been day after day kneeling in prayer under his fig-tree, with an open and candid spirit —

"Musing on the law he taught,

And waiting for the Lord he loved."

See how the Savior honored him; setting His own divine seal on the loveliness of this same spirit!

Take one other example: when the startling — saddening announcement is made to the disciples, "One of you shall betray Me!" they do not accuse one another; they attempt to throw no suspicion on Judas; each in trembling apprehension suspects only his own treacherous heart, "*Lord, is it I?*"

How much of a different "mind" is there abroad! In the school of the world (this *painted* world,) how much is there of what is called "policy," double-dealing! — accomplishing its ends by distorting means; outward



artificial polish, often only a cloak for falseness and selfishness! — in the daily interchange of business, one seeking to overreach the other by tricky arts — sacrificing *principle* for temporal advantage. There is nothing so derogatory to religion as anything allied to such a spirit among Christ's people — any such *blots* on the "living epistles." "You are the *light* of the world." That world is a quick observer. It is sharp to detect inconsistencies; and slow to forget them. The true Christian has been likened to an *anagram* — you ought to be able to read him up and down, every way!

Be all *reality*, no counterfeit. Do not pass for current coin, what is base alloy. Let transparent honor and sincerity regulate all your dealings! Despise all deceitfulness; avoid the sinister motive — the underhand dealing; aim at that unswerving love of truth that would scorn to stoop to base compliances and unworthy equivocations; live more under the power of the purifying and ennobling influences of the gospel. Take its golden rule as the matchless directory for the daily transactions of life — "So in everything, do unto others — what you would have them do unto you."

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **27. ACTIVITY IN DUTY**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day; the night comes, when no man can work." — John 9:4

How constant and unremitting was Jesus in the service of His Heavenly Father! "He rose a great while before day;" — and when His *secret* communion was over, then His *public* work began. It mattered not to Him where He was: whether on the bosom of the deep, or a mountain slope — in the desert, or at a well side — the "gracious words" always "proceeded out of His mouth." He redeemed every precious moment!

Oh, how our most unceasing activities pale into nothing, before such an example as this! Would that we could remember that each of us has some great mission to perform for God — that true religion is not a thing of *dreamy sentimentalism* — but of energetic practical action; moreover, that no trade, no profession, no position, however high or however humble in the scale of society — can disqualify for this life of Christian activity and usefulness! Who were the writers in the Bible? We have among them a king — a lawgiver — a herdsman — a tax collector — a physician! Nor is it to high spheres, or to great services only, that God looks. The *widow's mite* and Mary's "alabaster box of ointment" are recorded as examples for imitation by the Holy Spirit, while many more munificent deeds are passed by unrecorded. We believe that God says, regarding the attempt of many a humble Christian to serve Him by active duty, "I saw that effort, that *feeble* effort, to serve and glorify Me; it was the very *febleness* of it I loved!"

Did it ever strike you, that notwithstanding the *dignity* of Christ, and the *activity* of Christ — how *little success* comparatively He met with in His public work? We read of no *numerous* conversions; no Pentecostal *revivals* in the course of His ministry. May not this well encourage us — in the absence of great outward results? He sets up no higher standard than this — "She has done what she could." An artist may be great in painting a *peasant* — as well as a *king*. Yes, and if laid aside from the *activities* of the Christian life, we can equally glorify God by *passive endurance*. "Who am I," said Luther, when he witnessed the patience of a great sufferer, "who am I? a wordy preacher in comparison with this great doer."

Reader! do not forget the motive of our motto verse, "*The night comes!*" Soon our *tale* shall be told; our little day is flitting fast — the shadows of night are falling. "Our span length of time," as Rutherford says, "will come to an inch." What if the eleventh hour should strike after having been "*idle* all the day?" A long lifetime of opportunities allowed to pass unemployed and unimproved — and absolutely *nothing* done for God! A judgment-day arrived at — our golden moments squandered — our talents untraded on — our work undone — met at the bar of Heaven with the withering repulse, "Inasmuch as you did it *not*." "The time we have

lost," says Richard Baxter, "cannot be recalled; should we not then redeem and improve the *little* that remains? If a traveler sleeps or trifles most of the day — he must travel so much the faster in the evening, or fall short of his journey's end."

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

## **28. COMMITTING OUR WAY TO GOD**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"He committed himself to Him who judges righteously" — 1 Peter 2:23.

With what perfect and entire confidingness did Jesus commit Himself to His Heavenly Father's guidance! He loved to call Him, "*My Father!*" There was music in that name, which enabled Him to face the most trying hour, and to drink the most bitter cup. The scoffing taunt arose at the scene of crucifixion, "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him — let Him deliver Him!" It failed to shake, for one moment, His unswerving confidence, even when the sensible tokens of the Divine presence were withdrawn; the realized consciousness of God's abiding love sustained Him still — "My God! my God!"

How many a perplexity would we save ourselves, by thus implicitly "committing ourselves," as He did, to God! In seasons of darkness and trouble — when our way is shut up with thorns — to lift the confiding eye of faith to Him, and say, "I am oppressed, undertake for me!" How blessed to feel that He *directs* all that befalls us; that no *contingencies* can frustrate His plans; that the way He leads us is not only a "right way," — but, with all its briars and thorns — its tears and trials — it is *the* right way!

The result of such an habitual staying ourselves on the Lord, will be a deep, abiding *peace* — any ripple will only be on the surface — no more. It is the *bosom* of the ocean alone, which the storm ruffles; all beneath is a

serene, settled calm. "You will keep him, O God, in perfect peace — whose mind is stayed on *You!*"

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want." I shall be content alike with what he appoints or withholds. I cannot wrong that love with one shadow of suspicion! I have His own plighted promise of unchanging faithfulness, that "all things work together for good to those who love Him!" Often there are earthly sorrows which are hard to bear — the unkind accusation when it was least merited or expected — the estrangement of tried and trusted friends, the failure of cherished hopes, favorite schemes broken up, plans of usefulness demolished, the gourd breeding its own *worm* and withering. "Commit your cause and your way to God!" We little know what tenderness there is in the blast of the rough wind; what "needs be" are folded under the wings of the storm! "All is well," because *all* is from *Him*. "Events are God's," says Rutherford; "let Him sit at His own helm — that moderates all."

Christian! look back on your chequered path. How wondrously has He threaded you through the mazy way — disappointing your fears, realizing your hopes! Are evils looming through the mists of the future? Do not anticipate the trials of tomorrow, to aggravate those of today. Leave the morrow with Him, who has promised, by "casting all your care on Him, to care for you." No affliction will be sent greater than you can bear. His voice will be heard stealing from the bosom of the threatening cloud, "Be still, and know that I am God!"

"*My Father!*" With such a word, you can stretch out your neck for any yoke! As with Israel of old, He will make those very *waves* that may now be so threatening, a fenced wall on every side! "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." "In *all* your ways acknowledge Him — and He shall direct your paths!"

## **29. LOVE OF UNITY**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"That they all may be one." — John 17:21.

Surely there is nothing for which Christian churches have such cause to hang their harps on the willows — as the extent to which the Shibboleth of *party* is heard in the camp of the faithful — *sectarianism* rearing its "untempered walls" within the Temple gates!

How different "the mind of Jesus!" Sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," He was never found disowning "*other* sheep not of that fold." "Them also will I bring," was an assertion continually illustrated by His deeds. Take one example: The woman of Samaria revealed what, alas! is too common in the world — a total absence of all real religion; combined with an ardent zeal for her sect. She was living in open sin; yet she was all alive to the petty distinctions between a Jew and a Samaritan — between Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion — "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, who am a woman of Samaria?" Did Jesus sanction or reciprocate her sectarianism? — did He leave her bigotry unrebuked? Hear His reply — "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me a drink; you would have asked of *Him*, and *He* would have given you!" He would have allowed no such narrow-minded exclusiveness to have interfered with the interchange of kindly civilities with a stranger. No, He would have given you better than all, the "living water" which "springs up to everlasting life!"

How sad, that when the enemy is "coming in like a flood" — the ranks of Popery and infidelity linked in fatal and formidable confederacy — that the soldiers of Christ are forced to meet the assault with standards soiled, and mutilated by *internal* feuds! "Uniformity" there *may* not be — but "unity," in the true sense of the word, there *ought* to be. We may be clad in different livery — but let us stand side by side, and rank by rank, fighting the battles of our Lord. We may be different branches of the seven golden candlesticks, varying and diversified in outward form and workmanship; but let us combine in "showing forth the praises of Him" who recognizes as the one true "churchmanship," — fidelity in shining for His glory "as lights in the world." How can we read the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, and then think of our divisions? "How miserable," says Edward Bickersteth, "would a hospital be, if each patient were to be so offended with his neighbor's disease, as to differ with him on account of

it, instead of trying to alleviate it!"

Ah! if we had more real communion with our Savior — would we not have more real communion with one another? If Christians would dip their arrows more in "the balm of Gilead," would there not be fewer wounds in the body of Christ? "How that word '*toleration*' is used among us!" said one who drank deeper than most, of his Master's spirit — "how we *tolerate* one another — Dissenters *tolerate* Churchmen, and Churchmen *tolerate* Dissenters! Oh! hateful word! TOLERATE one for whom *Jesus* died! *Tolerate* one whom He bears upon His heart! *Tolerate* a temple of the living God! Oh! there ought to be *that* in the word which should make us feel *ashamed* before God!"

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."

### **30. NOT OF THE WORLD**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"I am not of the world." — John 17:14.

In one sense it was *not* so. Jesus did not seek to maintain His holiness intact and unspotted — by *avoiding contact* with the world. He mingled familiarly in its busy crowds. He frowned on none of its innocent enjoyments; He fostered, by His example, no love of seclusion; He gave no warrant or encouragement to mortified pride, or disappointed hopes, to rush from its duties — yet, with all this, what a halo of heavenliness encircled His pathway through it! "I am from above," was breathed in His every look, and word, and action, from the time when He lay in the slumbers of infancy in His Bethlehem cradle, until He said, "I leave the world, and go to My Father!" He had moved *uncontaminated* through its varied scenes, like the *sunbeam*, which, whatever it touches, remains as unsullied, as when it issues from its great fountain.

But though Himself in His sinless nature "unconquerable" by temptation

— immutably secure from the world's malignant influences, it is all worthy of note, as an example to us, that He never *unnecessarily* braved these. He knew the seducing spell that same world would exercise on His people, of whom, with touching sympathy, He says, "*These* are in the world!" He knew the *many* who would be involved and ensnared in its subtle worship, who, "minding earthly things," would seek to slake their thirst at *polluted streams!*

Reader! the great problem which you have to solve, Jesus has solved for you — to be "*in* the world, and yet not *of* it." To abandon it, would be a dereliction of duty. It would be servants deserting their work — soldiers flying from the battle-field. *Live* in it, that while you live, the world may feel the better for you. *Die*, that when you die, the world — the *Church* — may feel your loss, and cherish your example!

On its cares and duties, its trusts and responsibilities, its employments and enjoyments, inscribe the motto, "*The world passes away!*" Beware of everything in it that would tend to deaden spirituality of heart; unfitting the mind for serious thought, lowering the standard of Christian duty, and inducing a perilous conformity to its false manners, habits, tastes, and principles. As the best antidote to the love of the world — let the inner vacuum of the heart be filled with the love of God. Seek to feel the nobility of your regenerated nature — that you have a nobler heritage to care for, than the transitory shadows of this world. How can I mix with the potsherds of the earth? Once, "I lay among the pots;" now, I am "like a dove, whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold!" "Stranger — pilgrim — sojourner;" — "my *citizenship* is in heaven!" Why covet tinsel honors and glories? Why be solicitous about the smiles of that which knew not, (no, which frowned on) its Lord?

Live above its corroding cares and anxieties; remembering the description Jesus gives of His own true people, "They are not of the world — even as I am not of the world!"

### **31. CALMNESS IN DEATH**

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." — Luke 23:46.

In the death of Jesus, there were elements of fearfulness, which the believer can know nothing of. It was with Him the execution of a penal sentence. The sins of an elect world were bearing Him down! The very voice of His God was heard giving the tremendous summons, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd!" Yet His was a death of *peace*, no, of *triumph*! Before He closed His eyes, light broke through the curtain of thick darkness. In the calm composure of filial confidence He breathed away His soul — "Father, into your hands I commend My spirit!" What was the secret of such tranquility? This is His own key to it — "I have glorified You on the earth, I have *finished the work* which You gave me to do."

Reader! will it be so with *you* at a dying hour? will *your* "work" be done? Have you already fled to Jesus? Are you reposing in Him as your only Savior, and following Him as your only pattern? Then — let death overtake you when it may — you will have nothing to do *but to die*! The grave will be irradiated with His presence and smile. He will be standing there as He did by His own tomb of old, pointing to yours, tenanted with angel forms, no, Himself as the "Precursor," showing you "*the path of life*!" There can be no true peace until the fear of death is conquered by the sense of sin forgiven, through "the blood of the Cross." "Not until then," as one has said, "will you be able to be a quiet spectator of the open grave at the bottom of the hill which you are soon to descend." The sting of death is sin — but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ!"

Seek now to live in the enjoyment of greater filial nearness to your covenant God; and thus, when the hour of departure *does* come, you will be able, without irreverence, to take the very words of your dying Lord, and make them your own — "FATHER, into Your hands I commend my spirit!" FATHER! *Death*! It is only going HOME! — the heart of the child leaping at the thought of the paternal roof, and the paternal welcome! "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours!"



Christian! can you dread that which your Savior has already vanquished? *Death!* It is as the angel to Peter breaking the dungeon-doors, and leading to open day — it is going to the world of your birthright, and leaving the one of your exile — "it is the soldier at nightfall lying down in his tent in peace, waiting the morning to receive his laurels." Oh! to be ever living in a state of holy preparation! — the mental eye gazing on the vista — view of an opening Heaven! — feeling that *every moment* is bringing us nearer and nearer that happy *Home!* — soon to be within reach of the Heavenly threshold, in sight of the Throne! — soon to be basking in adoring rapture with the Church triumphant — bathing in floods of infinite glory — "LIKE HIM," — seeing HIM *as He is*, and that *forever and Ever!*

"And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure!"

## THE PRECEPTS OF JESUS

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## **Introduction**

*"Remember the words I spoke to you." John 15:20*

*"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" Mark 9:7*

"O be my Counselor,  
My Pattern and my Guide;  
And through this desert land,  
Still keep me near Your side.  
O let my feet ne'er run astray,  
Nor rove, nor seek the crooked way!"

It is our incumbent duty to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, and give earnest heed to the truths which proceeded from His gracious lips.

"Never any man spoke like this man!" was the testimony of the officers who were sent to apprehend him—a testimony altogether spontaneous and unbribed on the one hand — and most faithful and true on the other.

The whole of His instructions have the highest claims upon our devout regards. In every *doctrine* He taught, every *invitation* He uttered, every *promise* He gave — we should "listen to Him!" And while we ought to listen to His voice as He speaks to us in words of *encouragement* and *consolation*, we are also to be equally attentive when, in a more practical strain, He enforces the various *duties* we have to discharge as His followers!

Our attachment to the gospel is very doubtful, if we are only concerned about enjoying its *privileges* — while its *demands* and *obligations* are viewed with less favor. But if we take as much delight in the *precepts* which enjoin holiness of heart and life — as we do in the *promises* which contain the richest blessings, and insure exemption from the sorest calamities — it is a conclusive evidence that our love of the truth is sincere and genuine.

The following brief meditations, intended for the Christian's daily perusal, are based upon a few of those *divine injunctions* which the Savior delivered — and which relate to the *spirit* we should nourish — and the *conduct* it befits us to pursue. Favored with such lessons from the mouth of the great Teacher, all of which are most impressively enforced by His own bright example — what kind of people ought we to be in all holy living and godliness! May each reader of this small volume aspire to reach that high standard which is laid down in these sacred precepts — and thereby afford a living demonstration of the unspeakable superiority of the Christian system, to all that ancient sages ever taught, or the most enlightened moralists of more modern times ever inculcated!

John MacDuff, February 6, 1858

## **The Great Commandment**

"You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength*. This is the first commandment." Mark 12:30.

Of all the precepts of Jesus, this is, undoubtedly, the chief. What it enjoins is love to God — even the highest, warmest love of which we are capable. True love to Him cannot be a secondary or subordinate feeling. We cannot love Him *sincerely* — unless we love Him *supremely*. He is not loved *at all* — unless He is loved *above all*. "Love," as one remarks, "when *creatures* are the objects of it, should, like ordinary rivers, be kept within banks and bounds; but when God is its object, it should overflow like the Nile, or spread itself like a sea without limits."

**That God is worthy of our supreme love, appears from two considerations:**

The first is, **what He IS in Himself**. He is the perfection of moral beauty, the source and center of all excellence, infinitely holy, just, and true. Whatever is lovely and of good report in created beings — is only a dim shadow of His infinite attractions; nothing but feeble rays from His ineffable light and glory.

If we are for ascertaining what the blessed God is — let us ask those who know Him best. What are the feelings of the angelic legions who surround His throne, and of the spirits of the perfected just who have been feasting for ages upon His smiles? They know full well that their highest admiration of His matchless character falls unspeakably short of what it deserves, and that their affection, if intensified to a degree of fervency ten thousand fold greater than what they have realized in their most ecstatic moments — would be completely disproportionate to His infinite claims!

But, in addition to what He is in Himself — we are to bear in mind **what He has DONE for us**. To love Him, on the former ground, being more unselfish, is, of necessity, a higher feeling — than that which takes the form of *devout gratitude for the benefits we have received from His bountiful hand*.

Some have contended that love of this latter kind is essentially spurious,

being based upon *mere selfish* considerations, and that God can only be truly loved on account of His intrinsic perfections. Others, again, have argued that such absolute unselfishness is impossible, and that the emotions of the heart cannot be called forth by any *abstract virtues* in however high a degree they may appear. We believe that both of these classes have fallen into error. Imperfect as we are, our nature is evidently capable of such a state of mind as is repudiated in the second objection. We all feel sentiments of admiration and love while contemplating *true nobility of character* — although we personally have never profited by it.

As to the former opinion, it is in direct contrariety to the whole tenor of the sacred volume. The penitent woman in the house of Simon loved much — *because* she had much forgiven. And the Savior, far from stigmatizing it, in consequence of its being prompted by such a feeling, warmly commended her in the presence of the whole company. "I love the Lord," is the language of David. Why? "Because He has heard my voice and my supplication." "We love Him," says John, not simply or chiefly on account of what He is in Himself — but, "because He first loved us." It is evident that He deserves our love on *both* grounds; whether we regard Him as the "altogether lovely," in His own ineffable nature, or as the fountainhead whence every blessing flows, both of providence and grace — He has the strongest claims upon our highest and holiest affections.

How blessed is the promise, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart — to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live."

"O Lord, let my heart be thus circumcised. Abundant reason have I to mourn over the feebleness of my love to You; but as You can break the *hardest* heart — so You can warm the *coldest* heart. O shed abroad Your love within me by the Holy Spirit, and enable me to manifest its constraining influence, by doing Your will and devoting myself to Your glory!"

## The True Disciple

"Not everyone who *says* to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven — but only he who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

We cannot be too often reminded of the important truth — that true religion is a *practical* thing. While it includes *knowledge* and *experience* — it also includes *practice*; and the two former will be altogether worthless — unless they produce the latter.

In doing the will of God, the true believer finds *enjoyment*. He can say, in the language of the great Master, "I *delight* to do your will, O my God; yes, your law is within my heart." "For this is the love of God," says the apostle John, "that we *keep* His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." The reason why they are not grievous — is because the bias of the believer's mind is towards them; because the desires and instincts of his new nature go after them. Does the *magnetic needle* always turn to the same point? Do the *rivers* flow on without resting until they reach the ocean? Do the *flames* ever rise upward — and *objects* of weight and substance invariably fall downward? As there are natural principles operating in such cases — so there are spiritual principles operating in connection with the child of God.

In proportion as his soul is sanctified — he is sure to delight in the law of the Lord, and take it as his heritage forever. Compliance with the divine requirements may be a very irksome thing to many — but the Christian finds it his food and drink, to do the will of his Father who is in heaven. Others may think it a wearisome drudgery — but the Christian regards it, on the contrary, as pure delight. Perfect freedom does he find that to be — which is looked upon by many as a hard and heavy bondage.

Our *obedience*, in order to be cheerful and joyous, must be *evangelical*. It must be, both as regards substance and motive — such as God requires in His Word. Several things may prompt men to endeavor to walk in the way of His precepts. **Custom** may prompt them. They have been trained from their earliest days to show a considerable amount of respect for the things

which are just, true, lovely, and of good report. **Conscience** may prompt them. That *inward monitor*, when allowed to speak, never fails to plead the cause of Him who implanted it as his viceregent in the human heart. A **legal spirit** may prompt them — by doing certain things they expect to secure eternal life, or they have a vague hope that they will at least contribute in some measure to its attainment. But in none of these cases, is the will of God be done with delight. Such obedience will be either *formal* on the one hand — or *wearisome* and *heartless task* on the other. It is only as we comply with the divine precepts upon **gospel principles**, that we shall find wisdom's ways to be those of pleasantness, and realize that in keeping of them there is great reward.

Reader, endeavor to cultivate such a spirit. Aspire after the mind of the Psalmist, who declared, "I will run the way of your commandments, when you shall enlarge my heart." Thus only can you be regarded as belonging to the household of faith, and be spiritually related to Him who is the first-born among many brethren. "For whoever shall *do* the will of My Father who is in heaven — the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." Such alone are recognized by Him now — and none else will He acknowledge in the great day of judgment!

## The Brotherhood of Believers

"For one is your Master, even Christ; and you are all brothers." Matthew 23:8.

All men, however divided by language, social position, or mental endowments — form *one vast brotherhood*. All men are the workmanship of the same divine hand; all have emanated from the same original stock; and all are partakers of the same common nature — with its diversified needs, feelings, sympathies, and aspirations.

When our country was agitated on the subject of slavery, a medal was struck, on which a black man was represented with his chains around him, and with clasped hands, and imploring looks, he inquires, "Am I not



a *man* — and a *brother*?" The manner in which we responded to that touching appeal, showed that we recognized the claim in both of its branches. We acknowledged him first as a *man*, and then we held out the right hand of fellowship to him as a *brother* also. A brother deeply degraded, it is true — but still a brother. Although often treated like a brute, the tyrant's lash having made deep its furrows upon his lacerated frame, until the blood flowed in copious currents — yet still a brother. And not these sable bondsmen alone — but every kindred and tribe. God has made of one blood, all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth — and towards all, should the throbbings of tender compassion and generous philanthropy be felt.

But while the *whole human family* should be thus viewed as brethren, there is a class, separated from the rest, who are so in a sense far higher and holier, namely — the *household of faith*. To the former we are bound by *natural* ties — to the latter by *spiritual* ties. And while we should love *all* people with the love of benevolence and good will; towards those with whom we are united in the faith and fellowship of the gospel — our love should be that of delight — a love resembling our Heavenly Father's, who takes pleasure in His saints, and who rejoices over them with joy and singing.

It is recorded of the early disciples of Christ, that "they remembered His words." Well would it be for those who now bear His name ever to keep this saying in mind, "And all you are brethren!" We may differ concerning many minor matters — but surely any *trifling diversities* of judgment in reference to such points, which have little or no relation to "the weightier matters of the law," should not be permitted to cool our affection, or operate as a *barrier* to united efforts in opposing the great enemy, and advancing the kingdom of our common Lord.

"Let our only rivalry," to quote the striking language of a living writer, "be the holy one of who shall do most and succeed best in converting the *wilderness* into an Eden, and causing the *desert* to blossom as the rose. Like those allies on Crimean fields who forgot their old quarrels, and buried the recollections of the past in oblivion — let us all sit down together before the great fortress of the evil one. They cooperated for the common good. Rebuking our wretched jealousies, and presenting us with

a heroic example of generous sympathy and indomitable energy, in the teeth of frost and famine, and pestilence and war — they clung to the rocks of that stormy shore. With mutual cooperation they threw up their batteries — they pressed on their lines — they manned the trenches — they rushed to the assault, mingling the shouts of different nations in the same gallant charge, and the blood of different races on the same battlefield. And if *nations*, once hostile, there fought and fell together — then why should not *different churches* come to as common and cordial an understanding. If we make a united effort, I believe, with God's blessing, we shall make an irresistible assault upon the strongholds of sin and Satan."

"Blessed God! Giver of peace and lover of concord — unite the hearts of all Your people in holy love and harmony. Adorable Jesus! the great object of Your gracious mission to our sinful and distracted world was, that You might gather together in one, all the children of God that are scattered abroad. Soon let Your prayer, offered on the night of Your sore agony, be fully answered, that they all may be one — that the world may believe that you have sent Me."

## **Continuance in Well-Doing**

"If you *continue* in My Word — then are you My disciples indeed." John 8:31.

There is an account given of a certain slave who had been treated with great kindness by his master. The favor shown to him was well deserved, for he appears to have been eminently faithful and devoted. At length the master resolved, as a reward for his good conduct, to grant him his liberty; and he was informed that he could go wherever he pleased, and serve any employer he thought proper. His instant reply was, "Me leave you, my dear master — Oh no! not for all the world! I need no wages to serve you!" And with special emphasis he added, "if you turn me out at one door — this poor nigger will come back in at once through the other!"

The spirit which this slave manifested, is one after which we ought to aspire in reference to Him, whose servants we profess to be. He loved his master, and the thought of leaving his service — he could not entertain for a single moment. He resolved to abide with him, for better and for worse, a resolve to which he gave utterance in the above *simple*, but very *striking* and *emphatic* words.

What the Savior demands is not a mere *temporary* allegiance and devotedness — but He requires us to be steadfast and immovable to the *end* of our days. In order to this, several things are indispensable; but to have a thorough renewal of heart is doubtless the chief thing. There may be *deep convictions*, and warm and lively *emotions*, in the absence of this great change; but without a thorough renewal of heart — there will be nothing lasting. Unless the heart of stone is taken away, and a heart of flesh implanted in its stead — all will be in vain. We may be moved and melted, like stones in damp weather, which appear as if they were beginning to dissolve; but the dampness soon evaporates, and they are found to be stones still — cold, hard, and unyielding. So will it be with us — if we are satisfied with anything short of the fulfillment of the gracious promise, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. I will give you a *new heart* and put a *new spirit* within you; I will remove your heart of stone — and give you a heart of flesh. I will place My Spirit within you — and *cause* you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances."

If a new heart is created in us, and a right spirit is renewed within us, there will assuredly be *patient continuance* in the ways of the Lord. That the *principles of divine grace in the soul* possess a character of permanence, is a truth clearly set forth in the inspired volume. They are not like the summer's brook, which may soon dry up; but they resemble the full and over-flowing fountain. "Whoever drinks of this water," said Jesus, "shall thirst again: but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him — shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life!"

Of all the evidences of the possession of saving grace, a *steady growth* therein, is the most conclusive. If we spotted, towards the hour of early dawn, a faint gleam of light streaking the eastern horizon, and were not

certain whether it was the break of day or not, what would be the best course to be pursued in seeking to decide the matter? It would evidently be to *wait a little while*. If it is the light of day, then it is sure to increase, and half an hour's patience will be more than sufficient to settle the point. While on the other hand, if it remains stationary, or, after a few fitful glimmerings, altogether disappears, it may be safely concluded that it is only the reflection of some artificial illumination.

Just so with the great concern. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more, unto the perfect day." His course is *steady, progressive, continuous*; and it behooves us seriously to inquire whether ours is of that nature. May He who is able to preserve our goings, grant to us His continuing grace, so that, firmly rooted and grounded, we may never be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

## The Prevailing Plea

"Until now you have not asked for anything *in My name*. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." John 16:24.

Among the many indispensable prerequisites of acceptable prayer, one of the chief is that of *asking in the name of Jesus*. "Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name — He will give you." As if He had said, When you draw near to His footstool, only make use of My name — and you will find it a sure *passport* to His favor. Make it known that you belong to Me, and that My name is dear to you — and all your requests will be granted. Ask whatever you will — the forgiveness of your sins — the sanctifying influences of His grace — strength in weakness — light in darkness — joy in sorrow — every blessing you need, both for time and eternity — will He give you. So beloved am I by Him, that *for My sake* — He will refuse you nothing!

Christian, do you believe this? If you do, act upon it. Draw near to the throne of grace with the confidence which such an assurance ought to inspire. The promise is, "*Whatever* you shall ask," implying that you can

ask largely, and that you need not fear to extend your requests to the utmost limits of your manifold necessities. "Open your mouth wide — and I will fill it."

It is recorded that an individual once applied to Alexander the Great for a sum of money, as a marriage portion for his daughter. The king sent him to his treasurer, and told him to demand whatever he pleased. He went, and asked for an enormous sum. The treasurer, astounded by such a request, said that he could not think of giving so much without an express order, or without consulting the king on the subject. On laying the case before his royal master, he stated that a small part of the amount requested would be sufficient to serve the purpose for which it was required. But what did Alexander say in response? "Yes; let him have it all; he does me honor; he treats me like a king, and proves, by what he asks, that he believes me to be both rich and generous!" Christian, go and do likewise!

"You are coming to a King,  
Large petitions with you bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much!"

But our requests, whether large or more limited, must ever be *presented in the name of Jesus*. "For Jesus' sake," must be our only plea. As He is the only medium of approach, so must He be the exclusive ground of our confidence. "For Jesus' sake," this is an argument that can never fail. It is the *magic key* which opens all the riches both of grace and glory! It is the *golden key* which unlocks the cabinet wherein is contained inexhaustible treasures! It is only in virtue of His adorable name, that the voice from heaven proclaims, "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's!"

## **The Power of Faith**

"Jesus replied — I tell you the truth, if you have *faith* and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree — but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done!"  
Matthew 21:21.

We can say of *faith*, in the language of the Psalmist in reference to Zion, that "glorious things are spoken" concerning it. Whose heart does not leap within him, as he reads the records of *faith's achievements* in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews? All the wonders of the ancient church we are there shown, were wrought through this divine principle. During the personal ministry of the Savior, how clearly was its importance evinced. His miraculous blessings were conferred in almost every case on one simple condition; He required all who applied to Him to *believe*—and to those who were enabled to do so, His power was at once put forth. But there were seasons when *His mighty arm seemed to be paralyzed*, and when the flow of *His omnipotent compassion* was suddenly checked; and what was it that produced so strange a result? "He could do no mighty works there — because of their unbelief."

How necessary, then, is the prayer, "Lord, *increase* our faith!" Those who are strong in faith — can give their fears to the winds; they possess a *shield* with which they are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and against the allurements of time and sense — they have a sure safeguard! "For this is the victory that overcomes the world — even our faith." Well may the poet say,

"O could we but believe;  
Then all would easy be!"

There are two things to which faith has particular respect, namely — the divine *power* and the divine *faithfulness*. The question which the Redeemer put to the blind men was, "Do you believe that I am **able** to do this?" They at once replied, "Yes, Lord!" and according to their faith, it was done to them. The same question is now proposed to us — and happy are those who can exercise similar confidence.

Those numberless **sins** of yours — do you believe that I am able to *pardon* them? Those **evil propensities** of yours — do you believe that I

am able to *subdue* them? Those **threatening disasters** — do you believe that I am able to *avert* them? Those **fiery trials** — do you believe that I am able to *support* you under, and bring you safely through them? Let our answer be, "Yes, Lord! for with You nothing is impossible, and You are able to do exceeding abundantly above all that I can ask or think!"

"When He entered the house, the blind men approached Him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I m able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord!' they answered Him. Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'Let it be done for you — according to your faith!'" Matthew 9:28-29

We are also to remember that His **faithfulness** is as great as His power. Not merely is He *able* to perform what He has promised — but He will *surely* do what He has declared. Let God be true, though all men were liars; for Him to deceive is altogether impossible; He will not allow His faithfulness to fail.

God grant that we may be preserved from dishonoring Him by giving way to an *evil heart of unbelief*. While we doubt His Word, or cherish any secret misgivings in reference to His adorable character — how greatly do we sin against Him. We are all of us, truly guilty in this matter, and shame and confusion of face befit us in consequence. No wonder that our *souls* have been unblessed; no wonder that our *prayers* have been unanswered. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must *believe* and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord!" James 1:5-7

## **Brotherly Love**

"This is what I command you — love one another." John 15:17.

There are some people who can speak on certain subjects with marked

propriety. We at once perceive that the apostle John, for example, could with great appropriateness, insist upon the obligations of brotherly love, since he himself exhibited that feature of the Christian character in so conspicuous a manner. And if John, owing to this circumstance, had a special right to enlarge upon such a topic, how much more may the Blessed Jesus call attention to it, and make it a prominent subject of exhortation and appeal. For a loving Savior to command us to love one another — with what special grace could He do so!

But this duty, by *whoever* enforced — is in itself preeminently reasonable. While we ought to regard all our fellow creatures with feelings of kindness and good-will, it is clearly incumbent upon us to nourish other and higher emotions towards those with whom we are united by spiritual bonds. The household of faith should evidently be regarded by us with an attachment of no common kind.

We are told that "everyone who loves the Father — loves His children, also." Loving Christ — we shall love His people; and we shall be likely to love them — just in proportion as we love Him. The lines in a circle, the nearer they approach the center, become increasingly closer to each other. The loadstone cannot attract the particles of iron to itself, without bringing the entire mass into direct contact at the same time. And so with Christ, the great central object of the gospel system — if we live near to Him, we are sure to feel a nearness to all who are animated by His spirit, and bear His gracious image. And while He is a stumbling stone and rock of offence to His enemies — He is a loadstone to His people, who are made willing in the day of His power. And as we are drawn to Him — so shall we, under the influence of the same divine attraction — be drawn to one another. The distance being removed between our souls and Himself as the *Great Head* — it will also be removed in reference to all the members of *His mystical body*.

We are to remember that love to the brethren should not be a matter of *mere theory*, or *vague sentimentalism* — but of a *practical* character. It was said by Jacob in his dying charge concerning one of his sons, "Naphtali is a hind let loose; he gives goodly words." And it is to be feared that the brotherly affection of many consists altogether in *kind expressions*; they give "goodly words," but that is all. The Scriptures,



however, in the strongest manner condemn the love which exists in word and in tongue exclusively, and approve only of that which is in *deed* and in *truth*. Hence we read of "the *labor* of love," and when it is genuine and vigorous, its labors will be abundant; it will be "full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Love without activity, is like *fire* — without heat; or like a *shadow* — without a substance; or like a *fountain* — without a stream; or like a body — without a soul. What James says of *faith* can be said of *love*, its sister grace, "If it has not *works* — it is dead, being alone."

Child of God, seek for an increase of brotherly affection. Yield yourself more and more to its compassionate promptings. Covet daily that richest of all luxuries — the *luxury of doing good*. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give — than to receive." Many of your brethren in the Lord, fellow-heirs with yourself of the heavenly inheritance, are suffering great privations; and will you not, from your more ample means, extend to them some trifling relief? "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

## The Divine Work

"Jesus answered and said unto them — This is the work of God, that you *believe* on Him whom He has sent." John 6:29.

It is evident that *true faith* in the Lord Jesus is something more than a mere *assent* to the things concerning Him. It is a belief that is invariably connected with certain results, the first and chief of which is a personal application to Him for life and salvation. Faith has always respect to some testimony, to some statement made, or assurance given. To have faith in one of our fellow-creatures, is to place reliance upon the veracity of his declarations. In like manner faith in Christ has reference to the Word of Christ. "The one who comes unto Me, I will never cast out," is one of the most precious and encouraging of His many gracious sayings.

Now the sinner, convinced of his lost condition, and conscious of the danger to which he is exposed, believes this promise to be true; but is he satisfied with merely *assenting* to it as such? No! he resolves to *apply* to the Savior on the strength of it. While prostrate at His footstool, his language is, "You have *said* that You will not reject those who come to You, and I praise Your blessed name for having made such a statement. I, therefore, a poor, guilty, hell-deserving creature, present myself before You, not doubting but that You will be as good as Your Word. O Friend of sinners, in infinite love and mercy remember me. You are able to save to the uttermost, and this is my humble, heart-felt cry — *Lord, save me, or I perish!*"

Such, we conceive, is saving faith. It is not a mere *notional* belief in the person, or work, or character, or sufferings of Christ; but it leads the soul in its deep distress to *apply* to Him, in order to obtain the salvation which He procured by His perfect obedience and sacrificial death, and which He has promised to bestow without money and without price.

We have a striking emblem of the sinner believing in Christ, in the conduct of the children of Israel, when they were stung by the serpents in the wilderness. See the serpent-bitten Israelite writhing in the agonies of

death. The poison is in his blood; the fever is burning through his convulsed and agonizing frame. But in his extremity he is exhorted to look to the bronze serpent which is lifted up on a pole in the midst of the camp. The bronze emblem of the Redeemer appears before him, and he casts his languid eye upon it. The ravages of the disease are at once stayed; the pulses of health begin to beat within him; and with renovated vigor he is restored to the bosom of his family and friends.

Now in reference to this memorable scene, the Savior says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish — but have eternal life." We are thus clearly shown that if we only *look* to Him in the exercise of faith, the blessed consequence will be — that we shall live. He is now lifted up, not on the cross — but at the right hand of the Majesty on high; and from yonder radiant throne on which He sits as a Prince and Savior, His language is, "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other!"

## The Hard Saying

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Matthew 16:24.

In order to follow Christ aright — we must follow Him *fully*; we must possess the spirit of those of whom it is said, "These are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* He goes!" Such was strikingly the case with the early disciples of the Savior. He said to them, "Follow Me" — and immediately they left all, and followed Him. They did not confer for a single moment with flesh and blood — but at once abandoned their homes, their ease, their earthly prospects — for the great object of promoting His cause. In obedience to His command, they engaged in the most arduous enterprises; they encountered the most formidable difficulties and dangers; perils, whether by sea or by land, they heeded not; the most fiery persecutions they patiently, yes, joyfully bore — rejoicing that they were counted *worthy* to suffer for His sake! None of these things moved them,

neither did they count their lives dear to them, so that they might finish their course with joy. Their exclusive desire was that Christ should be magnified — and whether this was done by living or dying, they were equally satisfied.

Now the same command which was addressed to *them* — is addressed to *us*. And is the Savior's authority less binding, and His claims less imperative upon us — than they were upon them? Are we to hesitate — when they were so decided? Are we to recede — when they advanced? Are we to be faint-hearted — when they waxed valiant for the fight, and went forth conquering and to conquer?

In order to be followers of them, as they were also of Christ, a spirit of *self-denial* is indispensable. The great Master did not please Himself — and by having the mind that was in Him, they clearly showed that they were His disciples, not in name only — but in deed and in truth. Alas! how great the disparity that exists between us and *them* — and especially between us and *Him!* "The best of us," as one observes, "have abundant cause to pray for a deeper baptism of His spirit.

Blessed Savior! blessed pattern! how did You leave the delights of heaven and Your Father's bosom, on a mission of most generous mercy! Your *love* grudged no labor; Your *eye* refused no pity; Your *ear* was never shut against the story of distress; Your *hand* was always ready to relieve the sufferer. From Your cradle to Your grave — Your whole life was passed in daily acts of the loftiest self-denial. And, with the blood trickling down Your brow, and the heavy cross on Your lacerated back upon Your way to Calvary, to save the vilest wretches and the chief of sinners — You turn around to say to us — *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*" Christian, listen to His voice, and comply with His injunction.

And remember for your encouragement, that such a course will be attended with the richest compensations. "Peter said to Him, 'We have left all we had to follow You!' 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus said to them, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God — will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life!'" Luke 18:28-30

## The Christian and the Secret Place

There is, we believe, nothing invidious or uncharitable in the statement, that the *saints of old* were in general of a more *eminent* stamp, of a more *robust spiritual constitution* than the majority of the present race of professing Christians. It may be truly said, "There were *giants* in the earth in those days!" But what made them so preeminent? We answer, without hesitation, that it was their *private communion* with God; it was their dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. The prayer-closet was to them a *hallowed* place; it was truly *consecrated* ground.

It was a *Bethel* to their souls — a spot which they found, like Jacob of old, to be none other than the *house of God*, and the very gate of heaven!

It was a *Peniel* — where they often *wrestled* even until the dawn of day; and in consequence of their importunity — they had power with God and prevailed.

It was a *Tabor* — where *spiritual transformations* were frequently realized, which led them to say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" And, like Peter, they would there have pitched their tents, and made it the place of their constant abode — had not the calls of active duty urged them to arise and depart.

It was a *Moriah*, where the most remarkable *interpositions* were given. It was the *mountain of the Lord*, where His covenant was ratified, and His wonders seen! And, filled with rapturous joy, and inspired with holy confidence, they have shouted, "*Jehovah-jireh! the Lord will provide!*"

Christian, resolve to *prize* your closet more — and to *frequent* it oftener. It is only thus that you will become a follower of those, who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises. They found the advantage of drawing near to their heavenly Father, and if you will imitate their example, you shall not go unrewarded. The benefits will be great and

manifold; for while others may be in a languishing condition — your progress and profiting will be evident unto all.

## The Father Glorified

"Herein is My Father glorified, that you *bear much fruit*; showing yourselves to be My disciples." John 15:8.

The *essential glory* of the Divine Being admits of neither *limitation* or *increase*. Shall the *sun* borrow beams from the glow-worm? Or can the tiny candle add to the effulgence of his noontide splendor? God would have been infinitely glorious in Himself — had not a single creature been called into existence! He was infinitely glorious in the solitudes of eternity — before any of the bright legions of cherubim or seraphim were created. The adorations of angels add nothing to His essential glory; and the blasphemies of men on earth, or of devils in hell, detract nothing from it. "Look at the heavens and see; gaze at the clouds high above you. If you sin — how does it affect God? If you multiply your transgressions — what does it do to Him? If you are righteous — what do you give Him, or what does He receive from your hand?" Job 35:5-7. There is thus, an important sense, in which He is altogether *unaffected* by our *obedience* on the one hand — and by our *rebellion* on the other. The wickedness of men cannot hurt Him; neither can the righteousness of men profit Him.

At the same time, it is possible for us to glorify God. An individual of exalted rank may possess every blessing in abundance, so as to need nothing that we might be able to do for him; and yet, such a one may be honored by us. In like manner, although the blessed God is in no way dependent upon our services — we are permitted, notwithstanding, to show forth the honor of His name, and make His praise glorious.

Not merely are we *permitted* to do so — but it is our incumbent *duty* — the neglect of which involves the greatest guilt, as well as the basest ingratitude. To glorify God is the *great design for which we were formed*, and, therefore, to lose sight of it is to miss the very end of our existence!

What if the *sun* refused to diffuse its light and heat? Would not the law of its creation be transgressed, since it was expressly designed for that purpose? What if the *showers* refused to leave the clouds to fertilize the thirsty ground; or the *earth* to bring forth her treasures, after all the cultivation it had received?

What, however, would be merely unnatural in the inanimate creation — would in us be far more monstrous, inasmuch as we are capable of knowing our duty, and are under the highest obligations to perform it! Let the *sun* refuse to shine, and the *showers* refuse to descend, and the *earth* refuse to yield its produce — they but transgress the great law of their creation. Let us see to it — by all that is binding in the *authority* of the Most High God, by all that is solemn in the thought of our *responsibility* to Him, and by the appalling *consequences* which must ensue if His claims are disregarded — that we do not transgress that higher law under which we are placed — a law which requires us to glorify God, both with our bodies and spirits, which are His.

How fearful was the charge brought against the impious monarch of old — "The God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways — you have not glorified!" Reader, beware lest the same charge is brought against you. That it may not, seek to ascertain what the divine requirements are — with a full determination to *comply* with all of them. And what does the Lord your God require of you?

He requires your *warmest gratitude* — "for whoever offers praise glorifies Me." He requires your *fullest confidence*, so that, like the father of the faithful, you may be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." And, above all, He requires that every feeling and faculty of your nature be consecrated, in *unreserved devotedness*, to Him!

"What will you have me to do?" — should be your daily inquiry! And to be ever abounding in the work of the Lord — should be your constant aim and object. Seek, then, to be filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

## The Important Injunction

"But I tell you: *love* your enemies, *bless* those who curse you, *do good* to those who hate you, and *pray* for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." Matthew 5:44.

This precept, like every other which the **Savior** delivered, was strikingly exemplified in His own history. The spirit which He manifested towards those who hated Him with the most bitter hatred, was truly admirable. Let us think of Him especially while passing through the trying scenes which issued in His death. At His trial the officers of government were convinced of His innocence, and therefore acquitted Him. But this would not satisfy His foes, who were determined to take away His life; and hence on the very day on which He was publicly declared to be guiltless, He was led forth to die. Yonder is the *meek sufferer*, driven on by a shouting, infuriated rabble up the hill of Calvary. In a short time He reaches its summit, and, after being stripped of His clothing, He is stretched upon the ignominious cross. Large iron spikes, strong enough to bear the weight of a man's body, are hammered through His hands and feet; and He is then lifted up between heaven and earth — a spectacle of shame and agony — naked, and wounded, and bleeding!

When thus suspended, the crowds mock Him, the scribes and priests revile Him, and the soldiers torment Him with crude violence. But while all this is going on, let us turn to look at Him; let us contemplate that visage which is so marred, and that blessed face which is spit upon and buffeted. And what does it express? In all its lines there are indications of grief and bitter anguish — but there are no traces of anything approaching to resentment or revenge. Let us, however, not merely gaze upon His countenance — but listen to His *voice*. It is addressed to Him who is the God of truth and righteousness, and who executes judgment for those that are oppressed. And for what does He ask? Is it for legions of angels to avenge the insults He receives? Is it for the thunderbolt to strike, or the consuming flame to devour the impious wretches around Him? No! But lifting up His languid eyes to heaven, He cries, "Father, forgive them — for they know not what they do!" What a prayer to issue from the quivering lips of one so cruelly treated! What a spirit for Him to



manifest while thus mocked, insulted, tormented!

In the apostle **Paul** we have also a striking example of the same feeling. On one occasion we hear him saying, "Not that I have anything to accuse my own nation of." But how could that be, since it is well known that they cherished the bitterest animosity towards him? Who was it that hunted him from place to place, even as David was hunted by Saul, like a partridge upon the mountains? Who was it that shouted in a burst of malignant frenzy, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live!" Who was it that vowed a solemn vow, that they would neither eat nor drink until they had taken away his life? They were not Romans — but Jews; they were his own kinsmen according to the flesh. And yet he declares that he has nothing to charge them with, notwithstanding their cruel treatment of him; a declaration which shows that their vile conduct was forgiven and forgotten, and that all their deadly animosity was buried in the oblivion of love.

Christian, seek to be like-minded. Pray to be baptized with the same spirit, for a nobler, lovelier one cannot be conceived. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

## The Fear of God

"I tell you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!" Luke 12:4-5.

The representations which are given of God in His Word are eminently calculated to produce, in every reflecting mind, a feeling of sacred awe. What is there declared of *His infinite greatness* — is especially adapted to secure such a result. How striking, for example, are the words of the prophet:

"Who has measured the *waters* in the hollow of His hand,  
Measured *heaven* with a span  
And calculated the *dust* of the earth in a measure?  
Weighed the *mountains* in scales  
And the *hills* in a balance?" Isaiah 40:12

What a view of the Divine greatness is here presented! Let us think of the mass of *waters* contained in the caverns of the various oceans. How vast their depth, and how extended their length and breadth! Yet to God so insignificant are they — that He measures the whole in the hollow of His hand!

Let us think again of the *heavens* above — the sun, and moon, and stars; how amazing their dimensions, how immense their orbits! But He measures with a *span* — almost the least of measures — all the boundless regions through which they sweep in their majestic courses!

Let us also think of the *earth* beneath, with its islands, its cloud-capped mountains, its trackless forests, its boundless plains; yet He measures the *dust* of the earth in a measure, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance!

And as to the nations, with their teeming myriads of population, "Behold all the nations of the world are but a drop in the bucket. They are nothing more than dust on the scales. He picks up the whole earth as though it were a grain of sand. Yes, all the nations of the world are worth nothing to Him. In His eyes they count for less than nothing — mere emptiness and froth."

How reasonable is it, then, that this glorious Being, whose greatness is unsearchable, should be regarded with feelings of the profoundest reverence. "Who would not fear you, O King of nations!" It is, indeed, His due, and as such He claims it from all His creatures. To have no fear of Him before our eyes, is at once the greatest *injustice*, and the most unutterable *folly*! All who have the boldness to lift up their puny arms in rebellion against Him — are engaged in a conflict, which, if persisted in, is sure to terminate in their utter destruction!

Reader, think of His **incomprehensible greatness** and majesty. Think of Him as the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity — the heavens His *throne*, the earth His *footstool*, the light His *garment*, the clouds His *chariot*, the thunder His *voice*! Viewing Him thus — it will be impossible for you to treat Him with indifference, far less with scornful disdain. If you are only brought in some measure to realize the fact that He is great — you cannot fail to acknowledge that He is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all His creatures.

Just so, with all the other attributes of His nature. Who can think of His **power** so mighty, so irresistible — a power that is able to crush us into atoms with infinitely greater ease than we can tread the crawling worm beneath our feet — and not fear Him?

Who can think of His **knowledge**, nothing being hidden from His omniscient glance, the darkness of midnight and the splendor of noon, being altogether alike to Him — and not fear Him?

Who can think, especially, of the terrors of His avenging **justice**, as when He proclaims from His exalted throne, "I kill, and I make alive, neither is there any who can deliver out of My hand! If I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on My adversaries and repay those who hate Me!" — and not fear Him? Our God is, truly, a consuming fire! It is most befitting for us, to regard Him with reverence and godly fear.

It is not those who can deprive us of our present life, that we should so much dread. It is not the loaded musket aimed at us; it is not the axe of the executioner suspended over our heads; it is not the naked sword ready to be plunged into our vitals — which should alarm us. The sight of the instruments of death has, it is true, unnerved the stoutest heart; even the *frowns of a fellow-worm* have often caused the most reckless to tremble. Limited, however, and of brief duration — is the power of all mortal foes at best. They can kill the body — and then have no more that they can do. "But," says the faithful witness, "I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

## **The *Evidence* of Love**

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." John 14:15.

The Savior was accustomed often to state the same truths, in His addresses to the people, and in His more private conversations with His disciples. It was not because of any lack of matter that He did so, for He might have kept His hearers in enrapt astonishment at the perpetual freshness of His ideas. But He chose to harp again and again on the same strings, for the purpose of impressing the truth upon the minds of His hearers.

We have a striking example of this in the last discourse which He delivered. He had but a short time to remain with the disciples, and He had much to say to them on various subjects; but, notwithstanding, we find Him frequently reiterating the same lesson, giving them line upon line, and precept upon precept. In the fourteenth verse of the chapter before us, He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." A little further on He adds, "He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me." Again, He declares, "If any man loves Me, he will keep My Words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He who loves Me not, keeps not My sayings." It is evident that there must be something specially important in this subject, or He would not have thought it necessary to advert to it so repeatedly.

And what topic can have higher claims upon our attention than that which is here set forth? The question "*Do you love Me?*" is of all others, the most momentous; and hence, to ascertain whether the Savior's love has been shed abroad in our hearts — is a matter that demands our most serious consideration. It is a point on which our *present state* and our *future destiny* depends. Without love to Christ, we cannot be the friends of Christ; and if we are not His friends, we are enemies to Him, by wicked works, and as such, we are exposed to His everlasting displeasure.

There are various ways in which we may evidence the sincerity of our love to Him — but the chief is *compliance with His commands*. "Why do you call Me, *Lord, Lord* — and do not *do* what I say?" It is not by the *leaves of an empty profession*, nor by any blossoms or buds, however full of promise, which, after all, frequently prove abortive — that we are to be known — but by the actual fruits of holy, sincere, constant, and universal obedience. Such is the *practical* test, by which we should now examine ourselves, inasmuch as our acceptance or rejection with God, will turn upon it in the great day of final reckoning.

The commands which the Savior enjoins, are not grievous. He does not require us to offer thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil; to make long and painful pilgrimages, to inflict tortures upon our bodies, or cover ourselves with sackcloth and ashes. The rigors of *superstition* are altogether alien to the spirit of that gracious system which He came to establish. His yoke is easy and His burden is light; and all His injunctions are intended to promote our happiness, both here and hereafter. Let our language, then, be, "O that my ways were directed to keep your statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all your commandments."

## The Needful Caution

"But he who shall *endure* unto the end — the same shall be saved." Mark 13:13.

There was great need for the Savior to caution His followers against the sin of backsliding, inasmuch as many who had once identified themselves with His cause, went back, and walked with Him no more. In the times of the apostles also, the same danger existed, as appears from Paul's exhortation to the Hebrews — "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," and a similar warning is greatly applicable in the present day.

That there is something peculiarly heinous in such conduct is evident

from the following considerations: In the first place, it is a sin expressive of the most ***extreme folly***. This feature belongs to every sin, and therefore wicked men are frequently represented as *fools*; but this is especially the case with the sin of backsliding. What would be thought of people in a time of *drought* — if they moved their tents from a full fountain which was close at hand, with the expectation of getting a larger supply by settling in a dry desert, where, with the greatest labor, they had to hew out for themselves cisterns — yes, broken cisterns, which could hold no water? Now, this is what we do when we *depart* from God; and hence both heaven and earth are called upon to wonder at such *detestable folly* — the folly of leaving Him who is the source of all felicity — and of engaging in the useless toil!

In the next place, it is a sin committed ***without any provocation*** whatever, there being nothing in the Blessed God to deserve such treatment from us. Has He ever been a hard or austere Master? Has His conduct on any occasion evinced an unfeeling and unforbearing spirit? Have we found any iniquity in Him, that we should forsake Him? "O My people, what have I done to you — or how have I wearied you? Testify against Me!" Alas! what can we testify? All we can say is, "O Lord, righteousness belongs unto you — but unto us confusion of face, as it is this day."

Again, it is a sin that involves the ***greatest ingratitude***. Not merely has He done nothing *against* us — but how much has He done *for* us! He led His people of old through the wilderness, and brought them to a plentiful land, to eat of the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof; and yet, notwithstanding all His mercies, their hearts were fully set upon backsliding from Him. And how often has it been with us — as it was with them!

Finally, what ***solemn engagements*** are violated by this sin! To bind ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, to declare publicly that we would be His entirely and forever — and *then* to break our vows, and prove faithless in the face of our most express and deliberate promises!

Reader, dread the most distant thought of putting your hand to the plough — and then turning back. Having entered the army of Christ,

resolve, in the strength of His grace, never to become a deserter — but to fight His battles at all hazards, and to stand your ground until you become either a corpse — or a conqueror!

## The Shining Light

"Let your light so shine before men — that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16.

What unspeakable injury has been done to the cause of Christ — by the *inconsistent lives* of many professors of religion! To this must be mainly ascribed the comparatively little progress which Christianity has hitherto made. It is this — which emboldens the scoffer, which encourages the profligate, which strengthens the hands of the infidel, and which seals the eyes of the impenitent in death-like slumber!

Those who bear the name of Jesus should ever remember that *the eyes of an ungodly world are upon them*, and that their impression of the gospel, both in its nature and results — is derived from what they witness in the conduct of those who are identified with it. "The Bible," as one observes, "is God's revelation to Christians; and Christians are God's revelation to the world." That *sacred book* is not read by the careless and ungodly multitude — but they are eager in reading the *character of the followers of Christ!*

How important is it, then, that we should give, by our spirit and deportment — a correct representation of our holy religion. What a blessed thing it would be if all the members of our churches could be addressed in the language of the apostle, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that *you are a letter from Christ*, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Great is the power of impassioned oratory, as embodied in burning words, dramatic gestures, and flowing tears. But, after all, *the most effective eloquence — is that of a pure, upright, consistent life!* It shames the accusers of our holy faith; it puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and often constrains them, by the good works which they behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation.

Christian, let it be your *earnest prayer* and *daily endeavor* to be kept from dishonoring that worthy name by which you are called. Prefer, a thousand times over — to suffer for Christ, rather than that He should suffer by you. *Adorn* the doctrine of God your Savior, not in some — but in all things. Adorn it by the purity of your *conversation*, by the blamelessness of your *life*, by the integrity of your *dealings*, by your abhorrence of all which is base or impure. Adorn it in the various *conditions* in which you may be placed — in prosperity and adversity; in obscurity and eminence; in health and sickness; in joy and sorrow; in youth and old age; in life and death. Let there be nothing lacking, which will contribute to the completeness of your godly character — but seek that *every grace* may be in you and abound more and more. Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, Christian love. Thus you will thus be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Persevering Supplication**

"And He spoke a parable unto them to this end — that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Luke 18:1.

The success which attended the importunity and perseverance of the *poor widow*, whose case is here referred to — should stimulate and encourage us in our approaches to the Divine footstool. The person whom she addressed — was an unjust and hard-hearted judge. But He with whom we have to do — is very compassionate and of tender mercy, being more



ready to hear than we are to pray; and delights to give not merely more than we deserve — but exceeding abundantly above all that we can solicit or desire!

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." Colossians 4:2. It must, however, be remembered that the prayer which God honors, and in answer to which He bestows His promised blessings — is heartfelt, fervent, wrestling prayer. Such was the prayer of Jacob on the memorable night which preceded his interview with his brother Esau. "And Jacob was left alone; and a man *wrestled* with him until the breaking of the day. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me." And he was blessed! As a prince he had power with God — and prevailed. O Christian, aspire after his spirit — that you may meet with his success. Our *formal lifeless* and *lukewarm* petitions are altogether unavailing; but "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

O what losers are we, in consequence of not possessing more of such a spirit. It is for lack of it, that in *affliction* — we are not consoled; that in *perplexity* — we are not directed; that in *temptation* — we are not preserved. It is for lack of it, that we are *barren* — when we might abound in all the fruits of righteousness; that we are *indigent* — when we might have been rich in faith; that we are such *dwarfs* — when we might have been spiritual giants! We have not — because we ask not, or because we ask amiss; and we certainly ask amiss if we ask in that spirit of coldness and indifference, which is so common.

But to *earnestness* — we must add *perseverance*. The question is asked concerning certain formalists, "Will they always call upon God?" a question which implies that their zeal and importunity will soon pass away. It is not sufficient for us to be anxious and earnest for a short time — but we must hold on until we obtain the blessing. Our fervor must not be like a mere blaze of straw; it should rather resemble the sacred flame on the Jewish altar, which kindled by the breath of heaven, never went out. O reader, beware of restraining prayer before God; but seek, in giving yourself to this sacred exercise, to do so with *importunity* on the one hand — and with *perseverance* on the other.

## Mutual Forgiveness

"But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:15.

The expression, "an unforgiving Christian," is a contradiction in terms. We might almost as well speak of a *wise fool*, an *honest thief*, a *chaste harlot*, a *sober drunkard*. And yet there are those who bear the name of the meek and loving Jesus — who live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

"Ah!" said a shrewd Indian on one occasion, "Englishman's *book* is very good; but *Englishman* is not so good as Englishman's *book*." And the testimony is true. It is so concerning many particulars — but especially as regards the spirit to which we are now adverting. In reference to the *forgiveness* and *brotherly kindness* we ought to cherish — the love, and peace, and harmony we ought to pursue — Christian's *book* is good indeed; its goodness in that one department loudly proclaims its heavenly origin, for where besides are such precepts to be found? Let the treasures of classic lore be searched, the ethics of pagan sages be ransacked — and can anything worthy of being named the same day, be produced from such sources. But while the Christian's *book* is thus good — let the Christian take shame to himself — that *he* and his *book* are so unlike each other! The pages of the *book* full of love — but how frequently is the *man* characterized by hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness! Now what are we to think of such? There is much room for suspecting that the religion of such people is vain!

Reader, cultivate the important and lovely grace of *brotherly forgiveness*. No duty is urged more clearly and repeatedly; it is a subject on which we have line upon line, precept upon precept. In the beautiful form of prayer which the Savior gave His disciples, they were taught to say, "Forgive us our debts — *as we forgive our debtors*" — a petition which He enforced by adding, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your

Father will not forgive your sins." Says the apostle, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved — clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

In extending forgiveness to our fellow creatures, and especially to our fellow Christians, we should seek to do it after the divine pattern. "I, even I — am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." We are here shown that God not merely *forgives* but *forgets* — and we are required to do the one as well as the other. Let, then, all animosity be buried, and let no *tombstone* be erected to mark the place of its interment, and serve as a memorial to keep it fresh in mind. Above the grave in which God has laid the sins of His people — no such *remembrancer* can be put up; for what says the prophet? "He will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea!" They are buried in the *fathomless ocean*, and thus, if sought for, can never be found. "Be therefore, followers of God, as dear children;" yes, "Be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

## The Savior Reverenced

"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." John 5:23.

There are several ways in which the Lord Jesus should be honored by us. We should honor Him with our *confidence*, our *affection*, our *obedience* — and especially, with our most *devout adoration*. The latter is the highest honor which we can render Him, and that it is proper for us to do so, is clearly shown in the sacred volume. When Jesus was a man of sorrows in this lower world, He was *repeatedly worshiped*, and in no instance did He refuse such homage. How was it with the Eastern sages at His birth? Not merely did they present their costly offerings — but they fell down before Him, and *worshiped* Him. How was it with those who heard Him rebuke the winds and waves, and who saw Him walking upon

the boisterous billows, as upon a solid pavement? "Those who were in the ship," we are told, "came and *worshiped* Him." How was it with the blind man, upon whose sightless eyeballs, He poured the light of day? No sooner was he brought to know his great Deliverer, than he exclaimed, "Lord, I believe; and he *worshiped* Him." How was it with those devoted women who first beheld Him after He rose triumphant from the tomb? "They came, and held Him by the feet, and *worshiped* Him." And what was the last act of the disciples as He ascended from the heights of Olivet? "It came to pass, while He blessed them, He parted from them; and they *worshiped* Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

In that blessed state on which He then entered, the homage that awaited Him was, not only equal — but immeasurably surpassed what He received here below! That such was the case appears from the glowing representations which are given by the exiled prophet of Patmos. Who, according to his statements, is the *great object* of the adorations of the heavenly multitudes? It is the Lamb who was slain; not separate from — but conjointly, with the Eternal Father. Not the least distinction is there between the worship paid to the one, and that which is rendered to the other. The same blessing, power, glory, thanksgiving, and might are equally ascribed to Him who sits upon the throne — and unto the *Lamb*. What a transporting sight! How do the heavenly legions, in countless multitudes and shining troops, press forward to present their profoundest homage!

O my soul, what are your feelings towards this exalted Personage? Are you despising Him on earth — who is thus honored by saints and angels in heaven? Be assured that to reverence the Son is at once your bounden duty — and your highest privilege; and if you have at present no heart for such exercises as those to which we have referred — dream not of dwelling hereafter with those who will be thus employed, without intermission, and without end! "In a loud voice they sang: Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Revelation 5:12

## The Golden Rule

"Do unto others — what you would like them to do unto you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets." Matthew 6:12.

All the duties which are enjoined upon us by our Lord may be enforced on the ground of their being essentially right and reasonable. The precepts of Jesus, and especially the one before us, are neither *above* reason, nor *contrary* to reason — they are in complete accordance with all its dictates. Their propriety is instantly recognized, and every candid mind must acknowledge, that to comply therewith is "our reasonable service."

What a happy world would this be if the command, "Do unto others — what you would like them to do unto you," or the parallel one of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," were universally acted upon. There would be then no wars, no antipathies, no unhallowed rivalries among nations; no jealousies or bitter contentions among neighbors and families; no haughtiness or oppression in the rich, and no envy or discontent in the poor. No heart would burn with anger, no breast rankle with revenge. Every species of violence, fraud, deceit, and treachery would be abolished. Such would be the effects produced, were this precept embodied in the hearts and lives of men. Our *moral wilderness* would be made into an *Eden*; and the desert would rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Let us guard, then, against every violation of this simple but sublime law. Let us seek, especially, to mortify that selfishness to which we are so prone; and, after the example of the Great Master, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus!"

## Neutrality Condemned

"He who is not with Me — is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me — scatters." Matthew 12:30.

In the world there are many opposite *subjects* discussed, and many conflicting *causes* advocated — in reference to which we may say that we are on neither side; but as to the claims of Christ, and the concerns of religion — *neutrality* is altogether impossible. It is clearly revealed in the Word of God, that there are but *two ways*, in one or other of which, all mankind are traveling. There is no middle condition. If we are not the friends of God — we are His enemies. If we are not quickened by divine grace — we are dead in trespasses and sins. If we are not pardoned — we are condemned. It is impossible to occupy any *neutral ground* between the armies of the Prince of light — and the Prince of darkness. "We know," says the apostle John, "that *we* are of God, and the *whole world* lies in wickedness."

All, it is true, are not equally holy on the one hand; and all have not gone to the same length in sin on the other; but while there may be thus *manifold gradations*, there is but one separating line whereby the whole race of Adam are divided. "And you will again see the *distinction* between the righteous and the wicked — between those who serve God and those who do not."

"Who is on the Lord's side?" was the inquiry of Moses. A more important question cannot be proposed. Reader, should you not resolve, by the help of divine grace, that you will now be on that side which you will wish to be on — when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, and when the startled dead shall be swarming from their sepulchers to hear their final doom! Be assured that the Lord's side is the happiest, the safest, and the most honorable side; it is the side on which are found all the holy and faithful throughout the whole universe; it is the side of truth and righteousness, of love, mercy, and peace.

If we are on the Lord's side, He will be upon ours; and having Him for our guardian and guide — we need not be alarmed though ten thousand foes should set themselves against us. "The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?"

If we would, then, be undefended in the hour of danger; if we would be left without support and support in the day of affliction and distress; if we would have our souls uncheered with a single ray of hope when the *last enemy* shall stare us in the face; if we would be undone to all eternity, and have our portion with those who will be eternally banished from the presence of the Lord; if such is our desire — then let us choose the side of the ungodly, pursue their carnal pleasures, and walk according to the course of this present evil world.

But if we would have peace with God; if we would have a well-grounded assurance of a blessed immortality; if we would have the everlasting arms beneath our dying pillow; if we would hear on the great day the transporting language, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" — in a word, if we would be happy in life, happy in death, and happy forever — let us choose the side of Christ, follow Him, and yield ourselves unreservedly to Him.

## **The Reasonable Requirement**

"Render unto Caesar — the things which are Caesar's; and unto God — the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21.

The enemies of Christ, being envious of His growing popularity, endeavored in every way to lower Him in the estimation of the people. For this end, they frequently sought "to entangle Him in His words," as appears from the occasion on which the above words were spoken. It is shown that they addressed Him in very flattering terms, and pretended to regard Him as a teacher pre-eminently distinguished by His incorruptible integrity. "Teacher, we know," was their language, "that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are." This, we need not say, was strictly correct; but, although *words of truth*, they proceeded from *deceitful lips* — and were prompted by cunning craftiness, and the most hollow and heartless hypocrisy.

After this ensnaring preamble — a question of some difficulty, and under the circumstances which then existed, of considerable delicacy, was proposed by them, namely, "Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" It seems that they were fully assured in their own minds that the object they had in view would be gained — *whatever* answer might be given. If He had said that it was not lawful — He would have been called a sower of sedition, and been charged with fostering a spirit of rebellion, and as such He would doubtless have been arrested by the civil authorities. On the other hand, if He had stated that it was lawful — it is not improbable that the populace might have mobbed Him; for they regarded the Roman yoke with feelings of the deepest hatred! But in neither of the *snares* which were laid by these cunning fowlers, was the Savior taken. "But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap Me? Show Me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and He asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then He said to them, 'Render unto Caesar — the things which are Caesar's; and unto God — the things that are God's!'" No wonder, seeing how completely they were defeated, that, abashed and mortified, "they left Him, and went their way."

While, however, this answer was intended to *silence them* — it is also adapted to *instruct us*. What belongs to Caesar, we should give to Caesar. In the words of the apostle, we should "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes — pay taxes; if revenue — then revenue; if respect — then respect; if honor — then honor."

But while we render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's — let us not forget to render to God the things are God's. Has He no claims upon us? Doubtless He has; and these ought to have the precedence of every other. In rendering to all their due, we should, in the first place — render to *Him* His due. He demands our love, our gratitude, our reverence, our worship, our submission, our devotedness; and if we disregard His requirements, we are guilty of the most dreadful sacrilege; and to us may the withering rebuke be addressed, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!"

Reader, remember that you are also the subject of another and eternal Sovereign — and He cannot hold you guiltless if you disown His



authority, and desire not the knowledge of His ways. His language is, "My son, give Me your heart!" — and may your sincere and cordial response be,

"Here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it from your courts above!"

## The Sacred Oracles

"You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!" John 5:39.

Unspeakably great are our obligations to the God of all grace for His holy Word. Truly wretched would our situation have been without it. The unhappy *mariner*, tossed to and fro on the tempestuous ocean without chart or compass — affords only a faint emblem of our condition — if destitute of this precious treasure. We are indebted to it for all the light that ever chased the thick gloom of ignorance, or cheered the darkness of despondency and despair. From it is derived whatever can give *confidence* to faith, *energy* to hope, *ardency* to love, and *fervency* to devotion.

God's Word embodies everything that the child of God can possibly require during his pilgrimage through this *valley of tears*. In trouble — it is his *solace*; in difficulty trouble — it is his *guide*; in danger trouble — it is his *protection*; in conflict trouble — it is his *shield*; and, when descending the dark valley — it is the day-star which illumines his solitary pathway, brightening his pallid countenance with unearthly joy, and cheering his departing spirit with the prospect of a blissful immortality! And when death will be swallowed up in victory, it will furnish the glorious company of the redeemed with themes of adoring contemplation, while eternal ages will be rolling their ceaseless rounds!

O blessed book! It is the gift of infinite love, to sinful men! How ardently should we *prize* it, and how diligently should we *search* it. Millions of our fellow-creatures have never been blessed with this priceless blessing,

having nothing but the dim and flickering *light of nature*. But we are favored with the *lamp of life* — a lamp lighted at the altar of heaven, to guide our feet in the ways of peace.

Reader, imitate the conduct of the noble Bereans, of whom it is said, "that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily." With them the perusal of the sacred volume was not an occasional employment — but one in which every returning day found them engaged. And if *we* are anxious that our soul should prosper and be in health — we shall no more allow a day to pass without reading some portion of it, than a person who wished to be strong and vigorous in body, would allow a day to pass without partaking of his necessary food. To advance in the divine life is altogether impossible — if the Scriptures are neglected by us. Hence the apostle's exhortation, "As new-born babes, *desire* the sincere milk of the Word — that you may *grow* thereby."

And, above all, let us not forget to implore the illuminating influences of the *Divine Spirit*, through whose inspiration it was first given. We are sure to read the Bible without profit — if we read it without prayer. "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law!"

## **Intolerance Rebuked**

"When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' 'You know not what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of man has not come to destroy men's lives — but to save them.'" Luke 9:55-56.

It is a circumstance worthy of notice — that the *failings of godly men* have often been in those points, where there was the least likelihood of their being overcome. *Abraham* was strong in faith — and yet the darkest spot upon his character was produced by a spirit of distrust, which led to the most unworthy prevarication. *Moses* was the meekest of men — yet he lost his temper and spoke unadvisedly with his lips. "You have heard of the patience of *Job*;" for so marked was his calm endurance and

submission under unexampled sufferings, that his name has been identified with patience in all ages — yet when he acted inconsistently with his high character, it was in reference to that feature in which he most excelled. And so with *John*, whom we are accustomed to regard as the embodiment of all that was gentle, loving, compassionate; but he, irritated by the conduct of the Samaritans, displayed a spirit altogether opposed to that tenderness and forbearance which the gospel enjoins.

Had the Savior complied with the request of John and his brother James on that occasion, what a powerful argument would have been thereby afforded to the enemies of the Christian cause. How triumphantly would they refer to the circumstance as indicative of the spirit of that system to which they are so much opposed. "Go," would have been their language, "to yonder Samaritan village, and see the place reduced to a mass of ruins. View the whole of its hapless inhabitants perishing together. Behold those wretched mothers, with their babes in their arms, consumed without distinction by the devouring flames; and all, forsooth, to avenge the affront received by those upstart fishermen; all to gratify and glut their old Jewish antipathies against the poor and oppressed Samaritans! Go and learn the character of your Christianity there; study its mild and beneficent genius in those cruel deaths and abounding desolations!"

Happily, however, such an occasion of triumph to our enemies was not afforded. The Master was not like-minded with the disciples, as the answer He gave them clearly evinces.

We are thus shown that *there may be many things in the conduct of those whose general character is excellent, against which it befits us to be on our guard*. What is good in them — we are to imitate; while we are to shun — whatever is censurable. "*The best of men — are but men at the best!*" How pleasing, then, is the thought that in following Jesus — there is no possibility for us to go astray. He could say in reference to His Heavenly Father, "I always do those things which please Him" — His *spirit* at all times, and His *conduct*, on all occasions being altogether such as the divine law required. O gracious Lord! impart unto us more abundantly of that mind which was in You. O gentle Jesus! who is still meek and merciful — help us to learn of You; and may we, by laying aside

all malice and resentment, cause those by whom we are surrounded to take knowledge of us, that we are Your disciples indeed.

## The Honor of Humility

"For everyone who exalts himself — will be humbled; and he who humbles himself — will be exalted." Luke 18:14.

We are very prone to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. But if we unduly magnify our own importance, whether mentally or morally — the consequences cannot fail to be pernicious.

In the teaching of Christ, a place of special prominence is given to **humility**. "As portrayed by Him," as one observes, "it is a *little child*, to whom belief is natural — which is an emblem of candor, simplicity, and faith. When hearing His Word — humility sits at His feet, and is all docility and attention. On entering the presence of God — humility throws itself prostrate, or smites on its breast, and dares not lift up so much as its eyes to heaven. When it is free to take the highest seat in the assembly — humility voluntarily selects the lowest, and is taken by surprise if called up higher. In the presence of superior excellence — humility is praise and imitation. When associated with fellow-Christians — humility is willing subordination, desiring of no distinction, but that which arises from pre-eminent service. Humility declines to be called *master* — and lays all its honors at the Savior's feet. And when, at length, he shall ascend his throne — he is filled with self-abasement even there, and diffident of receiving his divine award. Under the reign of holiness, it is the office of humility to lay a foundation for universal obedience — by filling every subject with gratitude for the blessings he enjoys, and making him feel that the lowest situation is a post of unmerited distinction, held by a grant from sovereign grace."

Among the various means which are calculated to lead us to entertain humble thoughts of ourselves — one is the contemplation of *real* greatness and pre-eminent worth. In the report given by the people sent

by Moses to examine the land which the tribes were about to possess, they stated, "And all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature; and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers." Such, in their case, was the effect of *contrast*; it was the sight of these imposing individuals which caused them to appear so insignificant in their own eyes. Let us, in like manner, place ourselves beside those of high spiritual stature — and we shall be likely to feel our own nothingness.

It is the purpose of God, in all His dispensations, to "keep man from pride". And until our haughtiness is subdued, and our lofty looks are brought low — we cannot be happy on the one hand, nor in a state of safety on the other.

"He who is down need fear no fall,  
He who is low no pride;  
He who is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide."

To the meek, He has promised to teach His ways. He has special respect unto the lowly; and while He resists the proud — He gives grace unto the humble.

Reader, seek to be clothed with deep humility; continually aspire after the ornament of a meek and humble spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price. And, being brought low in your own estimation, you will surely find that the saying is faithful and true, which declares that those who humble themselves shall, in due time, be exalted. "He shall save the humble person."

## **The Dying Command**

"Do this in remembrance of Me." Luke 22:19.

These words are addressed to all who love the Savior, even to the end of

time. They show that it is the incumbent duty of all such to observe that *sacred memorial* which He appointed on the memorable night in which He was betrayed. Far from leaving it optional with themselves, to attend to it or not, as *inclination* or *convenience* might dictate — He has commanded them, in the most distinct manner, to "DO this in remembrance of Me."

The design of this interesting ordinance, is the commemoration of the Savior's death. And how reasonable is it that such an astonishing event should be *remembered*. And if remembered at all — ought not *He* to be allowed the privilege of fixing *how* it should be done. It may not be the method that we would have thought of; but having been appointed by Him, it behooves us cheerfully and gratefully to comply. *Unkind*, to use the mildest expression, must it be to refuse. Christian, embrace every opportunity of commemorating that glorious event, to which we are indebted for every blessing we enjoy, and every hope we are permitted to cherish. Let your language be,

"According to Your gracious Word,  
In meek humility,  
This will I do, my dying Lord—  
I will remember Thee.

"Your body broken for my sake,  
My bread from heaven shall be,  
Your testamental cup I take—  
And thus remember Thee.

"Gethsemane can I forget?  
Or there Your conflict see,  
Your agony and bloody sweat—  
And not remember Thee?

"When to the Cross I turn my eyes,  
And rest on Calvary,  
O Lamb of God, my sacrifice—  
I must remember Thee!

"And all Your love to me;  
Yes, while a breath, a pulse remains,  
Remember You, and all Your pains—  
I will remember Thee.

"And when these failing lips grow dumb,  
And mind and memory flee,  
When You shall in Your kingdom come—  
Jesus — remember me!"

## **Inordinate Anxiety**

"And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not *worry* about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them." Luke 12:29-30

The "worry" of which the Savior here speaks, has reference to our *temporal necessities*. It is often found more difficult to trust God with the interests of the *body* — than with those of the *soul*. Not a few are oppressed with gloomy doubts and fears concerning the former — who enjoy the sweet assurance that all will be well with the latter. It is a very common thing for people to distress themselves with the painful apprehension that they will be left destitute of the necessities of life, or that they will have to end their days in the poor-house — who have a good hope through grace, that there are everlasting mansions prepared for them, above. But such anxious thoughts should not be entertained, inasmuch as He who has promised to His people eternal life in heaven — has also promised to supply all their needs upon earth. Why, then, should there be confidence in the one case — and distrust in the other.

Child of God, shall we refresh your memory, by reminding you of some of those precious promises which appertain to the present life — in contradistinction to that which is to come. Is it not written, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and truly you shall be fed." "O fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack

nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry — but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." "He will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him." "For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory — no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." And remember He is *faithful* who promised — and that none of His declarations have ever been forfeited yet.

Give not way, then, to *undue anxiety* about those lesser things which, as well as the weightier matters of your soul's salvation — are secured to you by an inalienable charter. He "who clothes the lily", who gives to the beast his food, and who listens to the young ravens when they cry, who opens His bountiful hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing — He will surely care for you His child, and not fail to be present with His aid in your every exigency. Has it not been so in the past? Has He not interposed again and again on your behalf, when all human help seemed vain, and thus showed that *man's extremity — is God's opportunity?*

## **Concealed Allegiance**

"If any man *serves* Me — let him *follow* Me; and where I am — there shall also My servant be." John 12:26.

The Savior requires those who follow Him to do so publicly — by confessing His name before men. This is one of the laws of His kingdom which cannot be slighted without incurring His displeasure. Not merely does He forbid open rebellion — but *concealed attachment*; not merely open enmity — but *concealed love*. We are not to endeavor to reach heaven by some unobserved or secluded path — but we should go along the *King's highway*. If we have been made partakers of that religion which is pure and undefined — we should not seek to keep it to ourselves; we should let it be known, on the contrary, to all around us — whose we are and whom we serve.

In all the representations which are given of the followers of Christ, this



feature is most clearly involved. They are set forth, not as wandering sheep — but as a *flock* — and as such they have a fold and a shepherd. They are represented, not as solitary plants growing waste and wild — but in an *enclosure*; they are a *vineyard* walled around; they are a *garden* watched and watered. They are described not as stones, loose on the ground, scattered here and there — but as in a *building*; they are built up a spiritual house, a habitation of God through the Spirit. They are spoken of not as vagrants, not as wanderers in the highways and hedges — but as fellow citizens with the saints, and composing of the *household* of God.

When addressing the Romans the apostle says that, "If you shall *confess* with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall *believe* in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead — you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." These words ought to be seriously pondered by those who have been accustomed to regard a *public profession* of religion as a comparatively unimportant matter. If believing with the heart is the great concern, and confessing with the mouth an affair of trifling consequence — then it is strange that both should be thus connected together in so close and decided a manner.

Reader, if you would serve the Redeemer, follow Him; identify yourself with His people and His cause — and fight under the blood-stained banner of His cross. If you do so, He will be your present defense, and He will abundantly reward you hereafter. Confessing Him before men — He will confess you before His Father and all the holy angels. He was not ashamed to call us brethren — and should we be ashamed to call Him Lord? Love, gratitude, honor, consistency, unite in exclaiming, *God forbid!*

## **The Infallible Test**

"By their *fruits* you shall know them." Matthew 7:30.

*True religion is an internal principle* — its essence being hidden in the

heart. But although it is inward as regards its *essence* — it has always an outward and visible *influence* and *manifestation*. Its *roots* are concealed, like those of a tree, to which it is so often compared — but its *fruits* are exposed to public observation.

*Conversion* is invariably followed by certain *effects* — whereby its reality is manifested. Where there is a change of *heart* — there will be a change of *life*. Where there is the *faith* which is so much spoken of by Paul — there will be the *works* referred to by James, and the one is the evidence of the other.

How is the approach of *Spring* ascertained? It is by those *effects* with which it is invariably attended. The lengthened days, the milder temperature, the singing of the birds, the blooming vegetation, the flowers with which the fields are decked, and the blossoms with which the trees are adorned — all these are indications that winter, with its chilling blasts, has passed away.

In like manner, how do we know when the *winter of the soul* has passed? It is by those fruits and results, with which the work of the Spirit is always accompanied. We know it by a holy consistency of conduct; by a spirit of deadness to the world; by devotedness to the Savior's glory, and warm attachment to His cause. In a word, we know it by an exhibition of all the *graces* of the gospel, and a constant abounding in those *fruits of righteousness* which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Reader, if you are savingly interested in Christ? Then show it by the old things having passed away, and all things becoming new. Do you say by your profession, that you abide in Him? Then prove it by walking even as He walked. Is secret communion with Him a privilege enjoyed by you? Then let your whole spirit and demeanor be such that men shall take knowledge of you, as they did of the early disciples — that you have been with Jesus!

## Love of the World

"You cannot serve both God — and mammon." Matthew 6:24.

Of the *enemies* of the cross of Christ, the apostle declares that they "mind earthly things." They are only concerned about increasing their stores, and thus be able to say with the rich man of whom the Savior speaks, that they have much goods laid up for many years; on the strength of which they intend to take their ease, and eat, drink, and be merry. All their thoughts are of the earth, earthy. The things of *time* and *sense* — they regard as first and last, middle and end.

It is recorded of a certain *Dutch trader*, that if he could get riches by it — that he said he would be willing to run his vessel into the mouth of hell, though he should scorch his sails in so doing. We may be ready to shrink with horror while contemplating a spirit so reckless and profane — and yet how many are there who virtually act upon a similar principle. If they can only buy and sell, and get gain — what do they care if they hazard all that ought to be dear to them, as immortal creatures. While making haste to be rich, they often do it with the consciousness that they thereby fall "into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition!"

It is impossible for the mind to be governed at the same time by *two opposite principles*. The love of the *world*--and the love of *God*--are diametrically opposed to each other. "If any man loves the world — the love of the Father is not in him." "Don't you know that the friendship of the world — is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world — is the enemy of God." "You cannot serve both God — and mammon."

To borrow a quaint illustration from one of our old writers, "When you see a dog following two men — as long as they walk together, you do not know to which of them the dog belongs. But let them come to a *parting road* and there separate from each other — then it will soon be seen who is the owner, for *the dog will follow his master wherever he goes.*"

Just so, an individual may pursue the world, and retain a Christian profession at the same time — and it is often difficult to ascertain whether God or the world possesses his affections. But by and bye he comes to a *parting road*, when God calls him one way, and the world another way — and then he will show to whom he really belongs. If God is his master — then he will follow and obey God. But if the world is his master — then he will follow after it!

O my soul, how are you affected by the respective claims of the things of *time* — and those of *eternity*? After a few more rising and setting suns, it will be a matter of total indifference to you — whether you have been rich or poor, successful in your business or unsuccessful. But it will be of unspeakable consequence — whether you have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel.

Listen, then, to the words of the Lord Jesus, "Do not labor for food that spoils — but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!"

## The Solemn Warning

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him!" Matthew 24:44.

A minister was once called to visit a young lady who was seriously ill. On entering her apartment, he asked her how she felt? "*I am dying!*" was the reply she gave. He then said to her, "If you think you are dying, how do you feel in prospect of the eternal world?" Her brief — but mournful answer was, "*Not prepared!*" and in a short time she expired!

Reader, it will be a fearfully solemn thing, if death should come, and find

you *not prepared*. To be in the grasp of the *King of terrors*; to enter upon the dread realities of an unending eternity; to stand, single and alone, before the great tribunal — and yet unprepared! Is it likely to be so? If you are living regardless of your immortal interests — then you have great reason to apprehend that it will, for the summons may come at an hour when it is least expected.

What is the *preparation* that is required, in order to secure a happy death — and a blissful immortality? All is included in "winning Christ, and being found in Him." Those who possess this one blessing are saved, and they will not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. United to the Lord Jesus by a living faith — their guilty persons are accepted of God; they enjoy His favor which is life, being reconciled to Him by the death of the cross; from the condemnation of that holy law which they have broken — they are fully discharged; their sins, which are many, are all forgiven; their hearts are renewed by the quickening energies of the Divine Spirit, and by His effectual working — their natures are sanctified, whereby they are led more and more to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Should we be asked, then, What is *your* petition, and what is your request? Let us not hesitate to say, in the language of the apostle, "That I may win Christ, and be found in Him — not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith!"

To the true Christian, *death*, whatever form he may assume, and at whatever season he may appear, will be a *messenger of joy and peace*. In his case — the day of *death* will be better than the day of his *birth*. It will be the day when, as a weary *traveler* — he shall arrive at home; when, as a tempest-tossed mariner — he shall reach the desired haven; and when, as an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ — he will take possession of his promised glorious inheritance!

If we are in Christ, we have thus nothing to fear in looking forward to the coming of Christ — either His coming at our *death*, or His coming at the final *judgment*. We ought rather to long, with an ardent longing, for His appearing. In the meanwhile it is our duty to serve Him, not hiding our

talent in the earth like the unprofitable servant — but to be up and doing, having our loins girt, and our lamps burning. Constrained by His matchless love, seeking continually to glorify His adorable name, following the perfect example which He has set before us, and taking His sacred precepts as our daily directory — we shall, while pursuing such a course, possess the surest evidence ourselves, and afford the most conclusive proof to others — that when the hour of our departure shall have arrived, it will be to leave a world of sin and sorrow — and enter upon that blessed state where we shall be forever "with Christ, which is far better!"

## **THE NIGHT WATCHES**

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## **Introduction**

"I remember You upon my bed — and meditate on You in the *night watches*." — Psalm 63:6

"My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning."  
— Psalm 130:6

"Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day time, and in the *night* His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." — Psalm 42:8

## **THE GLORY OF GOD**



"Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God!" — Psalm 90:2

O My Soul! Seek to fill yourself with thoughts of the Almighty. Lose yourself in the impenetrable tracts of His Glory!

"Can you by searching find out God?" Can the *insect* fathom the ocean, or the *worm* scale the skies? Can the *finite* comprehend the Infinite? Can the *mortal* grasp Immortality? We can do no more than stand on the brink of the shoreless sea, and cry, "Oh the depth!"

"From everlasting!" — shrouded in the great and amazing mystery of eternity! Before one star revolved in its sphere — before one angel moved his wing — God was! His own infinite presence filling all *space*. All *time*, to Him, is but as the heaving of a breath — the beat of a pulse — the twinkling of an eye!

The Eternity of bliss, which is the noblest heritage of the creature, is in its nature progressive. It admits of advance in degrees of happiness and glory. Not so the Eternity of the Great Creator; He was as *perfect* before the *birth of time* — as He will be when "time shall be no longer!" He was as infinitely *glorious* when He inhabited the solitudes of immensity alone — as He is now with the songs of angel and archangel sounding in His ear! But "who can show forth all His praise?" We can at best but lisp the *alphabet* of His glory. Moses, who saw more of God than most, makes it still his prayer, "I beseech You, show me Your glory!" Paul, who knew more of God than other men, prays still, "that I may *know* Him." "Our safest *eloquence* concerning Him," says Hooker, "is our *silence*, when we confess that His glory is inexplicable."

And is this the Being to whom I can look up with sweetest confidence — and call "My Father"? Is it this Infinite One, whom "the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain," I can call "My God"?

Believer, contemplate the medium through which it is you can see the glory of God, and yet live. "No man has seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him." He who dwells in inaccessible light, comes forth from the *pavilion of His*

*glory* in the person of "Immanuel, God with us." In Christ, "the Image of the invisible God," the creature — yes, sinners — can gaze unconsumed on the lusters of Deity! Be it yours to glorify Him. Seek thus to fulfill the great design of your being. Let all your words and ways, your actions and purposes, your crosses and losses, redound to His praise. The highest seraph can have no higher or nobler end than this — the glory of the God before whom he casts his crown.

But He has a claim on you, which He has not on the unredeemed angels. "He gave Himself for you!" This mightiest of all boons which Omnipotence could give, is the guarantee for the bestowment of all lesser necessary blessings, and for the withholding of all unnecessary trials. While you are called to behold "His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father," remember its characteristic; it is not a glory to appall you by its *splendors* — but to win and captivate you by its *beauties* — it is "full of grace and truth." He is your God in covenant. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." You may compose yourself on your nightly pillow, with the sweet pledge of security, and say, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

"But You are the same — and Your years will never end." — Psalm 102:27

What a *fountain of comfort* is to be found in the *Immutability* of God! Not one ripple can disturb the calm of His unchanging nature. Were it so, He would no longer be a perfect Being — He would un-deify Himself — He would cease to be God!

Change is our portion here on earth. "They shall perish!" is the brief chronicle regarding everything on this side Heaven. The *skies* above us, the *earth* beneath us, the *elements* around us shall be destroyed. "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll! The stars will fall from the sky like withered leaves from a grapevine, or

shriveled figs from a fig tree!" Isaiah 34:4

*Scenes* of hallowed endearment — they have fled! *Friends* who sweetened our pilgrimage with their presence — they are gone! But here is a sure and safe anchorage amid the world's heaving ocean of vicissitude: "But You are the same — and Your years will never end." All is changing — but the Unchanging One! The earthly scaffolding may give way — but the living Temple remains. The reed may bend to the blast — but the living Rock spurns and outlives the storm!

How blessed, especially, to contemplate the unchangeableness of our *Great High Priest*, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" True, He is, in one sense, "changed." No longer the *Man of sorrows*; no longer the *homeless wanderer*. He is *enthroned* amid the glories of Heaven. Seraphs praise Him — Saints adore Him. But His Heart knows no change. His ascension glories have not obliterated His tender human sympathies. We can think of Him receiving an outcast sinner, or stilling the storm, or standing at the gate of Nain, or weeping tears of pity over a lost city, or tears of sympathy over a buried friend — and write over all these, "You are the same!" The name which He bequeathed by angels to His Church until He comes again is, "that *same* Jesus!" His own Patmos title is His memorial for all time, "I AM He who lives!"

Believer! has He ever seemed to change towards you? Are you even now mourning over the withdrawal of that countenance whose smile is heaven? Are you saying in the bitterness of your spirit, "Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious?" The change is with yourself — and not with your God. Behind the *clouds* of your own departure, the *Sun* of His love shines brightly as ever. "He faints not, neither is weary."

Or, it may be, you are laboring under severe trials. The hand of your God may be heavy upon you. The secret thought may be harbored that some *tear* might have been spared; that your *chastisement* might have been less severe — that your *bereavement*, with its dark accompaniment, might have been mitigated or averted. Look *upwards* and take the Psalmist's antidote as your own, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High God." Think that the same Hand which for you

was nailed to the Cross — is now pleading for you on the Throne; ordering and controlling every trial; and over every dark providence writing the unanswerable challenge, "He who spared not His own Son — but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Oh! thus pillowing your head on the Immutability of Jesus, amid the crude buffetings of a changing world, you will be able to say — until the dawn of the morning breaks on you, which knows neither night nor vicissitude, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

"The Lord God omnipotent reigns!" — Revelation 19:6

Believer! what can better support and sustain you amid the trials of your pilgrimage, than the thought that you have an Omnipotent arm to lean upon? The God with whom you have to do — is boundless in His resources! There is no *crossing* His designs — no *thwarting* His purposes — no *questioning* His counsels. His mandate is law! "He speaks — and it is done!" Your need is great. From the humblest crumb of providential goodness, up to the richest blessing of Divine grace — you are hanging from moment to moment, as a poor pensioner on Jehovah's bounty! But, fear not! "I am the Almighty God!" Finite necessities can never exhaust My infinite fullness! "My God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus!"

To You, O blessed Jesus! *all power* has been committed in Heaven and in earth. "ALL power!" He has in His hands the reigns of universal empire! To "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" has been entrusted the seven-sealed scroll of Providence. Whatever is the blessing which the poorest, weakest, loneliest, most afflicted of His saints require — if it is really for their good — the "Wonderful Counselor" secures it. "As a Prince, He has power with God," and must "prevail."

He combines in His adorable Person, all that a sinner requires: a Heart tender enough to love; and a Hand strong enough to save. The Elder Brother! the "Mighty God!" How He delights in the exercise of His omnipotence in behalf of His own people — in ruling over their interests, and overruling their trials for their eternal good! When He prays for *Himself*, it is "Not *My* will." When He prays for *them*, it is, "Father, *I* will!" I may well take the *motto* which He still bears on His breastplate before the Throne, as the ground of support and encouragement in all time of tribulation, "able to save to the uttermost!"

My *enemies* are many — their name is Legion:

*Satan*, the great adversary;

*heart* traitors — bosom sins;

the *world*, and the world's trinity: "the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life!"

But He who is *for* me, is greater far than all that can be *against* me. He is "stronger" than the "strong man." "Christ the Power of God." "I, who speak in righteousness, am mighty to save!"

Believer, are you in trial, beaten down with a great fight of afflictions — like the disciples, out in a midnight of storm, buffeting a sea of trouble? Fear not! When the *tempest* has done its work, when the *trial* has fulfilled its mission — the voice which hushed the waters of old, has only to give forth the omnipotent mandate, "*Peace, be still!*" and immediately there will be a great calm! The "all power" of Jesus! — what a pillow on which to rest my aching head; disarming all my fears, and inducing thoughts of sweetest comfort, consolation, and joy! "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

"Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Where shall I flee from Your presence?" — Psalm 139:7

The omnipresence of God! How baffling to any finite comprehension! To

think that *above* us, and *around* us, and *within* us — there is Deity — the invisible footprints of an Omniscient, Omnipresent One! "His Eyes are in every place;" on rolling planets — and tiny atoms; on the bright seraph — and the lowly worm; roaming in searching scrutiny through the tracks of immensity — and reading the dark and hidden page of my heart! "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!"

O God! shall this Your Omnipresence appall me? No! In my seasons of *sadness* and *sorrow* and *loneliness* — when other comforts and comforters have failed — when, it may be, in the darkness and silence of some midnight hour, in vain I have sought repose — how sweet to think, "My God is here! I am not alone. The Omniscient One, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike — is hovering over my sleepless pillow!" "He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" O my *Unsetting Sun*, it cannot be darkness or loneliness or sadness — where You are. There can be no *night* to the soul which has been cheered with Your glorious radiance!

"Surely, I am with you always!" How precious, blessed Jesus, is this Your legacy of parting love! Present with each of Your people until the end of time — ever present, omnipresent. The true "Pillar of cloud" by day and "Pillar of fire" by night, preceding and encamping by us in every step of our wilderness journey. My soul! think of Him, at this moment, in the mysteriousness of His Godhead nature — and yet, with all the exquisitely tender sympathies of a glorified Humanity — as present with every member of the family that He has redeemed with His blood! Yes, and as much present with every individual soul, as if He had none other to care for — but as if that one engrossed all His affection and love!

The Great *Builder* — surveying every stone and pillar of His spiritual temple; the Great *Shepherd* — with His eye on every sheep of His fold; the Great *High Priest* — marking every tear-drop; noting every sorrow; listening to every prayer; knowing the peculiarities of every case; no number perplexing Him — no variety bewildering Him; able to *attend* to all, and *satisfy* all, and *answer* all — myriads drawing hourly from His Treasury — and yet no diminution of that Treasury — ever emptying, and yet ever filling, and always full!

Jesus! Your perpetual and all-pervading presence turns darkness into day! I am not left un-befriended to weather the storms of life — Your hand is from hour to hour piloting my frail vessel. The omnipresence of God--*gracious antidote to every earthly sorrow!*

"I have set the Lord always before me!" Even now, as night is drawing its curtains around me, be this my closing prayer, 'Blessed Savior! abide with me, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent!' Under the shadowing wings of Your presence and love, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE WISDOM OF GOD

"His understanding is infinite!" — Psalm 147:5

How baffling often are God's dispensations! The more we attempt to fathom their mystery — the more we are driven to rest in the best earthly solution, "Your judgments are a great deep!" But where sense says, "*All these things are against me!*" — faith has a different verdict, "*All things are working together for my good!*" This is the province of faith, confidently to lean on the arm of God, and to say, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways."

We speak of God "foreseeing," but the past, present, and future — are with Him all alike. He sees the end from the beginning. We can discern but a short way, and that, through an imperfect and distorted medium. In a piece of earthly mechanism we seldom can discover beauty in the uncompleted structure. The mightiest works of science, while in progress — often appear a chaos of confusion. It is only when finished that we can admire the relation and adjustment of every part to the whole. So also with the mechanism of God's moral administration. At present, how much mystery! But, when in the light of eternity we come to contemplate the completion of the mighty plan, how shall we be brought to own and

exclaim, "The works of the Lord are right!"

Believer, are the dealings of your God at present displaying a mysterious aspect to you? Are you about to enter some dark cloud, exclaiming, "Truly, You are a God that hides Yourself?" Do you "fear to enter the cloud?" Take courage! It will be with you as with the disciples on their Mount of Transfiguration; unexpected glimpses of heavenly glory — unlooked-for tokens of the Savior's presence and love await you! If your Lord leads you into the *cloud* — follow Him. If He "constrains you to get into the ship," — obey Him. The *cloud* will burst in blessings. The ship will conduct you (it may be over a stormy sea) to a quiet haven at last. It is only the *surface* of the ocean that is rough. All beneath is a deep calm; and in every threatening wave there is a "needs-be!"

Oh! trust Him, who is emphatically "The Wisdom of God." He is your Counselor — combining the infinite knowledge of God with the experience and sympathy of man. He is pledged to use the discipline most wisely suited for each believer's case.

Under the blessed persuasion, that a day of disclosures is at hand, when, "in Your light, I shall see light," I will trust the divine wisdom which I cannot fathom; and repeat, as the shadows of evening gather around me, until the night of earth's ignorance vanishes before the breaking of an eternal day, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## **THE HOLINESS OF GOD**

"You only are holy!" — Revelation 15:4

What a sublime perfection is this! It would seem to form the loftiest theme for the adorations of saints and angels. They cease not day nor night to cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!" It evokes from the Church on earth her loudest strains, "Let them praise His great and awesome name, for it is Holy!"



Reader, seek, in some feeble measure, to apprehend the nature of God's unswerving hatred at sin! It is the deep, deliberate, innate holiness of His nature which requires Him to hate moral evil, and to visit it with impartial punishment.

But what pleasure can there be in meditating on so solemn a theme? The contemplation of a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" — in whose sight "the heavens are not clean!" Jesus! Your glorious *atonement* is the mirror in which we can gaze un-appalled on this august attribute! Your *cross* is, to the wide universe, a perpetual monument and memorial of the Holiness of God. It proclaims, as nothing else could, "You love righteousness — and hate wickedness!" Through that cross, the Holiest of all Beings becomes the most gracious of all. "Now, we can love Him," says a saint who has entered on his rest, "not only *although* He is holy — but *because* He is holy."

Gaze, and gaze again on that monumental cross, until it teaches the lesson! How vain elsewhere to look for pardon; how delusive that dream on which multitudes peril their eternal safety, that God will be at last *too merciful* to punish! Surely, if any less solemn vindication could have sufficed — or had it been compatible with the rectitude of the Divine nature, and the requirements of the Divine law, to dispense pardon in any other way — then Gethsemane and Calvary, with all their awful exponents of agony, would have been spared. The *Almighty victim* would not have voluntarily submitted to a life of ignominy and a death of woe — if, by any simpler method, He could have "cleared the guilty." But this was impossible. If He was to "save others," He could not save Himself!

Believer, seek that some faint and feeble emanations from this Divine attribute of Holiness may be yours. Let "*Holiness to the Lord*" be the superscription on your *heart* and *life*. Abounding grace can give no sanction or encouragement to abound in sin. 'His mercy,' says Reynolds, 'is a holy mercy which knows how to pardon sin — not to protect it; it is a sanctuary for the penitent — not for the presumptuous.'

Oh, are you tempted to murmur under the dealings of your God? What are the sorest of your trials — in comparison with what they might have been, had this Holy God left you to know, in all the sternness of its

meaning, how "Glorious He is in Holiness"? Rather marvel, considering your sins, that your *trial* has been so small — your *cross* so light. Blessed Jesus! into this sanctuary of "holy mercy" which You have opened for me — I will flee. I can now "give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness." Deriving, even from this splendid attribute, one of the 'songs in the night', "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD

"Righteousness and justice are the habitation of Your throne!" — Psalm  
89:14

The *Justice* of God is "His Holiness in exercise." Let us go to the spot marked out as the scene of its most solemn manifestation. In the depths of eternity past, the summons was heard, "Awake, O Sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man who is My Fellow!" That mysterious commission has been fulfilled. The Shepherd has been smitten. Myriads of condemned spirits could not have borne God's inexorable rectitude as when, on the cross of Calvary, One lone voice sent up the wailing cry, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!*"

Believer, rejoice! *Justice*, which before had demanded the execution of a righteous doom upon lost millions — can now unite with *Mercy* in sheathing the avenging sword and exulting over redeemed myriads. The *Law* which brought in a whole world "guilty before God," can exult with *Mercy* — in seeing its every requirement obeyed, its every demand fulfilled; the Lawgiver Himself "the Just and yet the Justifier;" unloosing every chain of condemnation, and pronouncing "Not guilty!" "O Law!" says Luther, "I drown my conscience in the wounds, blood, death, resurrection, and victory of Christ!"

Wondrous thought! — Justice, the very attribute which *excluded* the sinner — has become the first to throw open a door of welcome; proclaiming that infinite merit — has cancelled infinite demerit; infinite

holiness — has covered infinite sin! While "righteousness and justice" are the habitation of God's throne, provision has been made whereby, in perfect consistency with every principle of His moral government, "mercy and truth" may go continually before His face!

Reader, it is well for you often to thus devoutly dwell on the *inflexible Justice* of your God. It will magnify and enhance to you, the riches of His grace, the glories of redemption, and the preciousness of Jesus. If the sinner is to be saved, "judgment must be laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet!" Says Lefevre, "The Sinless One must be condemned — if he who is guilty is to go free. The Blessed One must bear the curse — if the cursed ones are to be brought into blessing. The Life must die — if the dead are to live!" "In prayer one evening," says Henry Martyn, "I had such near and frightening views of God's judgment upon sinners in Hell, that my flesh trembled for fear of them. I flew trembling to Jesus Christ, as if the flames were taking hold of me! Oh! Christ will indeed save me — or else I must perish!"

My soul! take hold of that touchingly simple assurance to which Justice has appended its seal, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish!" "Not perish!" Justice, and a God of justice, proclaiming so great salvation — safety from the terrors of a violated law — rest from the accusations of a guilty conscience — calmness in the prospect of death! Grace here! Glory hereafter! Oh, what more can the sinner need — or God bestow! "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## **THE LOVE OF GOD**

"God is love." — 1 John 4:16

"The only real mystery of the Bible," says an old writer, "is a mystery of Love." "God so loved the world — that He gave His only begotten Son." What? For a lost and ruined world — the Prince of Life should leave His Throne of glory, travel down to a valley of tears, and expire by an

ignominious death on the bitter tree! Love unutterable! Love unspeakable! The reflection of the skeptic of a by-gone age, may have formed at times the musing of better minds, "This is far too great — it is far too good to be true!" Infinite majesty — compassionating infinite weakness! The great Sun of heaven, the Fountain of uncreated light — undergoing an eclipse of darkness and blood for the sake of a candle that glimmered in nothingness, in comparison with His beams.

"God so loved the world!" Man never can get farther in the solution of the wondrous problem. Eternity itself will form a ladder — the saints climbing step by step its ascending glories — but, as the prospect widens, each will elicit the same confession, "The love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge!"

My soul! seek to enter into the secrets of this Love of your adorable Redeemer! Before all time — that love began. We have glimpses of it bursting out from the recesses of a past eternity, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him!" And "when the fullness of the time had come," though He foresaw all His untold sufferings — nothing would deter Him from pursuing His anguished path, "He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." More — as if *longing* for the hour of victory, He exclaimed, "There is a terrible baptism ahead of Me — and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished!"

Think of that love now! The *live coals*, in the censer of old, form a feeble type of the burning ardor of affection still manifested by our Great High Priest within the veil, in behalf of His own people. There He bears the name of each of them, indelibly engraved on His breastplate. Loving them at the beginning — He will love them even unto the end. Earthly love may grow cold and changeable; earthly love may die. Not so the love of this "Friend of friends." His love is as strong as death — surviving death — no, as deathless as eternity! Listen to His own exponent of its intensity, "As the Father has loved Me — so have I loved you!" "You see in Him;" says an old writer, "an ocean of love without bottom, without bounds, overflowing the banks of Heaven, streaming down to this world to wash away the vileness of man!"

Blessed Jesus! how cold, and fitful, and transient has been *my* love to You — in comparison of *Your* love to me! Bring me more under its constraining influence. May this be the superscription on all my thoughts and actions — on all my occupations and my time, 'I am not my own. Lord, I am Yours! How can I love You enough, Who so loves me! My life shall henceforth be one thank-offering of praise for Your redeeming mercies!'

Standing this night on the shores of this illimitable ocean — surveying its length and breadth — every wave murmuring, "Peace on earth — and good-will to men," "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE GRACE OF GOD

"The God of all grace." — 1 Peter 5:10

"By the Grace of God — I am what I am!" This is the believer's eternal confession. Grace found him a *rebel* against God — it leaves him a *son* of God! Grace found him wandering at the gates of Hell — it leaves him at the gates of Heaven! Grace devised the scheme of Redemption. Justice never would; Reason never could. And it is Grace which carries out that scheme. No sinner would ever have sought God — but "by grace." The thickets of Eden would have proved *Adam's* grave — had not grace called him out. *Saul* would have lived and died the haughty self-righteous persecutor — had not grace laid him low. The *thief on the cross* would have continued breathing out his blasphemies — had not grace arrested his tongue and tuned it for glory. "Out of the *knottiest timber*," says Rutherford, "God can make *vessels of mercy* for service in the high palace of glory!"

"I came, I saw, I conquered!" may be inscribed by the Savior on every *monument of His grace*. "I came to the sinner; I *looked* upon him; and with a look of omnipotent love — I *conquered* him!"

Believer, you would have been this day a wandering star, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever! You would have been Christless — hopeless — portionless; had not grace invited you, and grace constrained you! And it is grace which, at this moment, "keeps" you. You have often been a *Peter* — forsaking your Lord — but brought back to Him again. Why have you not been a *Demas* or a *Judas*? "I have prayed for you — that your faith fail not." Is not this your own comment and reflection on life's retrospect: "Yet not I — but the grace of God which was with me!"

Seek to realize your dependence on this grace every moment. "*More grace! more grace!*" needs to be your continual cry. His infinite *supply* — is commensurate with your infinite *need*. The treasury of grace, though always emptying — is always full. The *key of prayer* which opens it — is always at hand! And the *Almighty Bestower* of the blessings of grace — is always "waiting to be gracious." The recorded promise can never be cancelled or reversed, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Reader! seek to dwell much on this inexhaustible theme! The grace of God is the source of lesser *temporal* blessings — as well as of higher *spiritual* blessings. Grace accounts for the *crumb of daily bread* — as well as for the *crown of eternal glory*! But even in regard to earthly mercies, never forget the CHANNEL of grace: "*through Christ Jesus!*" It is sweet thus to connect every blessing, even the smallest and humblest token of providential bounty — with Calvary's cross — to have the common blessings of life stamped with "the print of the nails!" It makes them doubly precious to think, "*All this flows from Jesus!*"

Let others be contented with the un-covenanted mercies of God. Be it mine to say, as the child of grace, and heir of glory — 'My Father in Heaven, give me today my daily bread.' Reposing in the "all sufficiency in all things" promised by "the God of all grace," "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE TENDERNESS OF GOD

"He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young." — Isaiah 40:11

How soothing, in the hour of sorrow, or bereavement, or death — to have the countenance and sympathy of a tender earthly friend. Reader, these words tell you of One nearer, dearer, and tenderer still — the Friend that never fails — a tender God! By how many endearing epithets does Jesus exhibit the tenderness of His relation to His people. Does a *shepherd* watch tenderly over his flock? "The Lord is my Shepherd." Does a *father* exercise fondest solicitude towards his children? "I will be a Father unto you." Does a *mother's love* exceed all other earthly types of affection. "As one whom his mother comforts — so will I comfort you." Is the 'apple of the eye' (the pupil) the most sensitive part of the most delicate bodily organ? He guards His people "as the apple of His eye!"

When the Shepherd and Guardian of Souls finds the redeemed sinner, like a lost sheep, stumbling on the dark mountains — how tenderly He deals with him! There is no look of wrath — no word of upbraiding; in silent love "He lays him on His shoulders rejoicing!"

When *Peter* fell, Jesus did not unnecessarily wound him. He might have repeated often and again, the *piercing look* which brought the flood of penitential sorrow. But He gave that look only once; and when He reminded Peter of his threefold denial, it was by thrice repeating the gentlest of questions, "*Do you love Me?*"

Reader, are you mourning over the weakness of your faith; the coldness of your love; your manifold spiritual declensions? Fear not! He knows your frame! He will give 'feeble faith' *tender dealing*. He will "carry" in His arms those that are unable to walk, and will conduct the burdened ones through a path less rough and rugged than others.

When "the lion" or "the bear" comes, you may trust the *true David*, the tenderest of Shepherds! Are you suffering from outward trial? Confide in

the tenderness of your God's dealings with you. The strokes of His *rod* are gentle strokes — the *needed discipline* of a father yearning over his children, at the very moment he is chastising them. The gentlest earthly parent may speak a harsh word at times; it may be needlessly harsh. But not so with God. He may seem, like *Joseph* to his brethren, to speak roughly; but all the while there is *love in His heart*.

The 'pruning knife' will not be used unnecessarily — it will never cut too deeply! The 'furnace' will not burn more fiercely than is absolutely required — a tender God is seated by it, tempering the fury of its flames!

And what, believer, is the secret of all this tenderness? "There is a Man upon the Throne!" Jesus, the God-Man Mediator; combining with the might of *Godhead* — the tenderness of *spotless humanity*. Is your heart crushed with sorrow? So was His! Are your eyes dimmed with tears? So were His! "Jesus wept!" *Bethany's Chief Mourner* still wears the *Brother's heart* in glory. Others may be unable to enter into the depths of your trial — He can — He does!

With such a "tender God" caring for me, providing for me, watching my path by day, and guarding my couch by night, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE PATIENCE OF GOD

"The God of patience." — Romans 15:5

There is no more wondrous subject than this — "The Patience of God." Think of the lapse of *ages* during which that patience has lasted 6,000 years! Think of the *multitudes* who have been the subjects of it — millions on millions, in successive climates and centuries! Think of the *sins* which have, all that time, been trying and wearying that patience — their number — their heinousness — their aggravation! The world's history is a consecutive *history of iniquity* — a lengthened provocation of the



Almighty's forbearance! The Church, like a feeble ark, tossed on a mighty ocean of unbelief; and yet the world, with its cumberers, still spared! The cry of its sinful millions at this moment enters "the ears of the Lord Almighty" and yet, "for all this," His hand of mercy is "stretched out still!"

And *who* is this God of patience? It is the Almighty Being who could strike these millions down in a moment; who could, by a breath, annihilate the world — no, who would require no positive or visible putting forth of His omnipotence to effect this — but simply to *withdraw His sustaining arm!*

Surely, of all the examples of the Almighty's power, there is none more wondrous or amazing than "God's power over Himself." He is "slow to anger." "Judgment is His strange work." He "shows mercy unto thousands." God bears for 1500 years, from Moses to Jesus, with *Israel's* unbelief; and yet, as a writer remarks, "He speaks of it as but *a day*." "All *day* long have I stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." What explanation for this tenderness? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways — says the Lord!"

Believer, how great has been God's patience towards you! In your unconverted state, when a wanderer from His fold, with what unwearied love He went after you; notwithstanding all your waywardness; never ceasing the pursuit "until He found you!" Think of your fainting and weariness since being converted — your ever-changing frames and feelings — the ebbings and the flowings in the tide of your love; and yet, instead of surrendering you to your own perverse will, His language concerning you is, "How can I give you up?" For a lifetime, your Savior-God has been standing knocking at your door; and His attitude is still the same, "Behold, I stand!"

How should the patience of Jesus lead me to be submissive under trial! When He has so long borne with me, shall not I "bear" with Him? When I think of His patience under a far heavier cross, can I murmur — when He murmured not! No, I will check every repining thought, and looking up, in confiding affection, to "the God of all patience," "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" —  
Psalm 4:8

## THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

"Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds." — Psalm 36:5

It has been well said, that "the universe is a parable of grace." "Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever." But more stable than even these types of immutability in the kingdom of nature, is the word of a Covenant-keeping God in the kingdom of grace. These mountains (nature's best emblems of steadfastness) may depart, and the hills be removed, "but," says their Almighty Maker, "My kindness shall not be taken from you!" We can look upwards to the stars of night, and see the "faithfulness" of God "established" in the material heavens, "They continue, to this day, according to Your plans; for all are Your servants." But these are feeble types and symbols of brighter constellations in the spiritual skies — the declarations of an unchanging God, "Your Word is forever settled in Heaven!"

What a gracious assurance amid our own unfaithfulness, "The Lord is faithful!" My soul, anchor yourself on this rock of the Divine veracity. Take hold of that blessed parenthesis which has been, to many a tossed soul, as a polar star in its nights of darkness, "Having loved His own who were in the world — He loved them unto the end." He loves them in life — loves them in death — loves them through death — loves them into glory!

Are you not at this hour — a *monument of God's faithfulness*? Where would you have been, had not the *magnet of His grace* kept you, and drawn your fugitive affections towards Himself? From how many temptations He has rescued you — laying hold of you on the precipice, when about to plunge headlong down; employing, sometimes *constraining* grace, at other times, *restraining* grace — making this your brief history: "Kept by the power of God!" and overruling all — ALL for His own glory, and your own good!

I love to think of Your faithfulness, O "Tried stone — laid in Zion." You were tried by the Law — by Justice — by the fierce assaults and temptations of Satan — by the mockings and revilings and cruelties of wicked men; and yet You remain faithful! You have been tried in another sense by Prophets and Apostles; by Martyrs and Saints; by youthful sinners, and aged sinners, and dying sinners — and You have been found "faithful," by all and to all; and You are faithful still!

Reader, never suppose, amid the unfaithfulness of earth's trusted friends, that you are doomed to thread your way in loneliness and solitude. There is more than one 'Emmaus journey.' The "abiding" Friend is still here! He is always the same. "He faints not, neither is weary!" His *faithfulness* is a tried faithfulness. His *Word* is a tried Word. His *friendship* is a tried friendship. He is always *better* than His Word. He pays 'with interest'!

When I think that at this very moment the eye of that faithful Savior God is upon me, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

"All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: What have You done?" — Daniel 4:35

How blessed that elementary truth, "The Lord reigns!" To know that there is no *chance* or *accident* with God — that He decrees the fall of a sparrow — the destruction of a speck — the annihilation of a world!

The Almighty is not like Baal, "asleep." "He who keeps Israel" can never for a moment "slumber." *Man proposes — but God disposes!* "God has done it!" is the history of every event, past, present, and to come. His *purposes* — none can change; His *counsels* — none can resist.

Believer, how cheering to know that all that befalls you, is thus ordered in the eternal purpose of a Covenant God! Every minute circumstance of your lot — appointing the bounds of your habitation — meting out *every drop* in the cup of life — arranging what by you is called its "vicissitudes" — decreeing all its trials; and at last, as the great Proprietor of life, revoking the lease of existence when its allotted term has expired!

How it should keep the mind from its guilty proneness to brood and fret over second causes, were this grand but simple truth ever realized — that all that befalls us are integral parts in a stupendous plan of wisdom — that there is no crossing or thwarting the designs and dealings of God! None can say, "What have You done?" All ought to say, "He has done all things well."

We dare not venture, with presumptuous gaze, to penetrate into "those secret things which belong unto the Lord our God." In all that is fitting, in the consideration of this august theme of the Divine Decrees, to impart encouragement and consolation, let us rejoice. In all that is mysterious and incomprehensible, let us with childlike reverence exclaim, "Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are His riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be His counselor? And who could ever give Him so much that He would have to pay it back? For everything comes from Him; everything exists by His power and is intended for His glory. To Him be glory evermore. Amen!"

The contemplation of the Sovereignty of God formed subject-matter of rejoicing to the Savior Himself in His humiliation, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight!" What supplied material for comfort and joy to an Almighty Sufferer — may well dry the tears and soothe the pangs of His suffering people! Oh, how sinners may magnify their God by a calm submission to His will; by seeing no hand but One in their trials; in giving — or taking: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord *gave* — and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised!" "Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?"

Will it not further help to the breathing of the prayer, "May Your will be done," when I think, in connection with the Sovereignty of God, of the grand end of His immutable decrees — it is, "His own glory." "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are *all things*." What more can I desire? "All things." — God's glory and my own good! "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

"His kingdom rules over all." — Psalm 103:19

Believer, try to see God in everything — and everything in God! Lose your own will in His. Enter on no pursuit, engage in no plan, without Paul's prayer and condition, "May the will of the Lord be done." How it would hallow prosperity, and sweeten adversity, thus, in all things, to follow, like Israel, the Guiding Pillar — at His bidding to pitch our tents; at His bidding to depart. Each providence has a *voice* — if we would only hear it. It is a *signpost* in the journey, pointing us to "the right way," that we may go to "the city of habitation."

Often what a mysterious volume *Providence* is! Its every page full of dark hieroglyphics, to which human reason can furnish no key. But faith falls back on the assurance that "the Judge of all the earth must do right." The Father of all His people cannot do wrong. To the common observer, the stars in the nightly heavens are all confused masses, pursuing diverse and erratic courses. But to the astronomer, each has its allotted and prescribed pathway, and all are preserving inviolately, one universal law of harmony and order. It is faith's loftiest prerogative, patiently to wait until 'that day of disclosures,' when page by page the *mysterious book* will be unraveled, and the believer himself will endorse every page with, "*It is well!*"

Providences may even seem to be getting *darker* — merging like declining day into the shadows of twilight. But, contrary to nature, and to the

Christian's expectations, "At evening time — it shall be light!" The gathering cloud will then be seen to be fraught only with blessings, which will burst on the believer's head. My soul, be still, and know that He is God! "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." The mysterious "why" you have so long been waiting for, will soon be revealed. The long night-watch will soon terminate in the looked-for, longed-for morning.

Blessed Lord! my pilgrimage path is studded thick with *Ebenizers* testifying to Your faithfulness and mercy. I love to think of Your manifold gracious interpositions in the past — God *sustaining* me in trial — God *supporting* me in perplexity — God *rescuing* me when in temptation — God *helping* me when "vain was the help of man!" "When my foot slipped, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up!" And shall I not take all Your goodness previously manifested — as a pledge of faithfulness in the future? In full confidence that You are a "rich Provider," I shall take no anxious thought for the morrow — but repose in this covenant assurance of a covenant-keeping God, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE WORD OF GOD

"Your Word is a lamp unto my feet — and a light unto my path." — Psalm  
119:105

Man's word disappoints — God's Word, never! "The Word of the Lord is tried." It has been tried by the sinner — he neglected it and perished. It has been tried by the saint — he has believed it and has been saved. What a precious *legacy of God* to our world! The volume of NATURE, much as it teaches, is silent on the question of a sinner's acceptance with God. The Scriptures alone can solve the enigma, "How is God to deal with the guilty?" That question unanswered — in peace we could not live, and in peace we dared not die! But glad tidings, O precious messenger from God, have You brought to a doomed earth: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish —

but have everlasting life!" Were there no more in the Divine communication than that one brief entry, the Bible would still be better to us than "millions in gold and silver."

The Word of God is a vast *repository* and *emporium* of heavenly wisdom — free to all — suited for all — intended for all — offered to all. The Word of God is an *inexhaustible mine* — the deeper you dig, the richer the ore. It has a word in season for rich and poor; for young and old; for the *wandering*; for the *doubting*; for the *sorrowing*; for the *believing*; for the *dying*; for the *perishing*!

Reader, sit at the feet of Jesus in His Word, and with the docility of a little child, say, "Speak, Lord — for Your servant is listening!" Always approach it as if it met you with the living salutation, "I have a message from God for you!" There are differences in every heart-chamber — but this *key* fits every door! Make it a faithful *mirror*, in which you see a reflection of yourself! The more faithfully it is held up, the more will the sense of your deficiency and defilement drive you to the atoning blood. In all your difficulties — make it "your counselor." In all your perplexities — make it your *interpreter* and *guide*. In all your sorrows — make it your *fountain of consolation*. In all your *temptations* — make it your ultimate court of appeal. When venturing on debatable ground, let this deter you, "What does the Scripture say?" When assailed, let this protect and defend you, "*It is written!*"

Precious at all times, it is especially precious in "the cloudy and dark day." We may do without our *lamp* in the day; but where are we, without it — in the midnight tempestuous sea? "I would have perished in my affliction," says a sinking cast-away, "but Your Word has quickened me."

Be it mine to look forward to that blessed time, when the intervention of that Word, and all other means of grace, will terminate; for, in Heaven, "they need no *candle*." Meanwhile, pillowing my head on the Word of the eternal God, and with these glorious prospects in view, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE SPIRIT OF GOD

"Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." — Psalm 51:11

"It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I do not go away — the Comforter will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you." How momentous must be the agency of the Holy Spirit, when the adorable Redeemer represented the Church as being more than compensated for the blank of His own departure — the loss of His own presence — by the gift of this Divine Paraclete!

"It is the Spirit who quickens." It is He who is the Agent in the new birth, "Except a man is born of water, and of the Spirit — he cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven." It is He who enables the sinner by faith to lay hold on Jesus, and embrace His salvation, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord — but by the Holy Spirit." It is He who carries on the progressive work of holiness — we are saved "through the *sanctification* of the Spirit." It is He who creates anew the lost image of the Godhead — impresses on the soul the lineaments of the Savior's character, "We are changed into the same image, from glory to glory — by the Lord the Spirit." It is He who illumines the Divine Record, acting like a telescope to the moral vision, unveiling in the *skies of inspiration* "wondrous things" contained in the Word, which the natural eye cannot see. It is He who unfolds the glories of the Redeemer's work — the beauties of His person — the completeness of His sacrifice — the riches of His grace, "He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine — and making it known to you." More — the *soul* of the believer becomes itself a *temple* of the Holy Spirit.

Oh! with what holy jealousy would the child of God guard every avenue to temptation, if this amazing truth exercised its habitual and solemnizing power over him, "*The Spirit of God dwells within me!*" How would he avoid anything and everything by which he would be likely to "grieve" this blessed Agent, "whereby he is sealed until the day of redemption." "Behold!" He seems to say, "I make all things new." The initial operation is His — He broods over the face of the spiritual chaos, saying, "Let there be light!" The closing and consummating grace is His — He conducts the soul through the swellings of Jordan, until it joins with the ransomed



multitude before the throne, in ascribing to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — the glories of a completed salvation!

Take not, then, O God! Your Holy Spirit from me. In vain are the Word, ordinances, sacraments, sermons, prayers — without Him. All are in themselves, passive instruments; His is the omnipotent arm which wields and vanquishes! Our adorable Redeemer — the great High Priest — was Himself *anointed* with the Holy Spirit. That anointing oil, poured upon the Church's living Head, runs down to the skirts of His garment, anointing, as it flows, all His members. And those that are lowest and humblest — nearest the skirts — receive the *most*. Reader, if this is your position — at the feet of Jesus — the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit, streaming down upon you in copious effusion, sanctifying you more and more, and making you more fit for glory — then you may well say, night after night, until the day-spring of that glory bursts upon you, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE PROMISES OF GOD

"For all the promises of God in Him are *Yes*, and in Him *Amen*." — 2  
Corinthians 1:20

God has made a Will, or Testament, in behalf of His people! It is signed and sealed. It cannot be altered — nothing can divest us of our inheritance. The bequest is His own "exceeding great and precious promises." What a heritage! All that the sinner requires — all that the sinner's God can give. In this testamentary deed there are no *contingencies* — no *perhaps*. The testator commences it with the sure guarantee for its every jot and tittle being fulfilled, "Truly, truly, I say unto you!" He endorses every promise, and every page, with a "Yes, and Amen." "God, willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath."

*Who* provided such a rich Promise Treasury? What is the *source*, where is

the fountain-head, from which these *streams of mercy* flow to the Church? "In HIM." Believer! from Jesus every promise is derived — in Jesus every promise centers. Pardon, peace, adoption, consolation, eternal life — all "in Him." In Him you are "chosen," "called," "justified," "sanctified," and "glorified." You have in possession all the blessings of *present grace*; you have in reserve all the happiness of *coming glory*! And "He who has promised is faithful."

Your *friends* may deceive you — the *world* has deceived you — the Lord never will! Myriads in glory, are there to tell how not one thing has failed of all that the Lord their God has spoken. Rely on this faithfulness. He gave His Son for you. After the greater blessing — surely you may trust Him for subordinate ones. And where do these promises beam most brightly? Like the stars, it is in the *night*! In the midnight of trial — when the sun of earthly prosperity has set — when deep is calling to deep, and wave to wave; when tempted, bereaved, beaten down with "a great fight of afflictions," the spiritual sky with its *galaxy of Promises* is brightest and clearest!

But do not be deceived; the night of sorrow cannot 'in itself' give you the comfort of the Divine Promises. It may be night — and yet the stars invisible. It is only "in Him" these promises can be discerned in their luster. Reader! if you are "outside of Christ," these *stars of Gospel promise* shine in vain to you; they have, to the unspiritual eye, no beauty or brightness. The guiding pillar, so lustrous to the chosen people — was a column of portentous gloom to Pharaoh's army. But "in Him," as "heirs of God," you are inheritors of "all the promises." All the promises! Oh! with such a pillow whereon to rest your aching head, you may well resume your nightly song, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE WARNINGS OF GOD

"Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." — Exodus 34:7

"He is faithful who *promised*." Do we bear sufficiently in mind another truth of equal fidelity — He is faithful who *threatens*? Ponder that solemn word, "Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished!" Remember when that word was spoken it was in connection with a sublime apocalypse of God's majesty. It was as "the glory of the Lord" was passing before Moses. Was not this intended to show, that there is a solemn and inseparable connection between the Divine glory — and the impossibility of God's leaving the guilty unpunished? It was at a time, moreover, when the benignity of God was intended to be more specially manifested. It was when He was declared to be "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness." Then it was, we listen to the solemn note of warning, that He will not, and cannot leave the guilty unpunished!

His law requires — the honor of His throne requires; demands that the guilty be punished. Reader! are you still clinging to a dream of final mercy? Do you believe in the first part of the Divine proclamation at Sinai, and persist in presumptuous and fatal skepticism with regard to the last? That boundless in His resources, and infinite in His love, God will, by some means, "leave the guilty unpunished?" Do not be deceived, that you do not incur the woe of him who "strives with his Maker." The Lord, who "is not slack concerning His *promises*," cannot be slack concerning His *threatenings*.

Time blunts the wrath of *man*; and softens and subdues the turbulence of his passions; but there is no blind impulse — no vacillation in Him with whom "a thousand years are as one day." "God's threatenings," says a writer, "are God's doings!" The Law has not one breathing of mercy for you. There is not one cleft in all Mount Sinai where you can escape the vengeance of the storm. Unless you flee without delay to Him who has "cleared the guilty" by Himself — the Guiltless One, becoming the guilt-bearer; be assured that through eternity, you will surely be punished.

My soul! are you yet in this state of perilous estrangement from God? You are still launched on the cheerless ocean of uncertainty; leaving everything to a dying hour; the time to which nothing should be left — but to die! Ponder these living words of unchanging truth, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not escape unpunished!" The *golden chain*

*of grace* stretches from Heaven to earth — but it can go no further, "Seek the Lord *while* He may be found." There is solemn warning in that one word. It tells you, there is a day coming, when the Lord will be sought — but will not be found.

Reader! cast yourself this night at His footstool; implore His mercy. Rise not from your bended knees, until, with His propitiated smile gladdening you, and the hope of His Heaven cheering you — you may (it may be for the first time in your life) lie down with a quiet conscience and a pardoned soul on your nightly couch, exclaiming, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE CHASTISEMENTS OF GOD

"For whom the Lord loves — He chastens; and scourges every son whom He receives." — Hebrews 12:6

Chastisement is the family badge — the family pledge — the family privilege, "To you it is *granted* to suffer." "Troubles," says a godly man, "are in God's catalogue of mercies." "Afflictions," says another, "are God's hired laborers to break the clods and plow the land." Reader, is the hand of your God heavy upon you? Has He been breaking your *cisterns*, withering your *gourds*, poisoning your sweetest *fountains* of earthly bliss? Are the world's bright spots outnumbered by the dreary ones? Has one tear been following another in quick succession? You may have to tell, perhaps, of a varied experience of trials. Every tender point touched — sickness, bereavement, poverty — perhaps all of these.

Be still. If you are a child of God, there is *no exemption* from the "household discipline." The rod is the Father's; the *voice* that speaks may be rough — but the *hand* that smites is gentle. The *furnace* may be seven times heated — but the *Refiner* is seated nearby. His object is not to consume — but to *purify*. Do not misinterpret His dealings; there is mercy on the wings of "the rough wind." Our choicest fountains are fed

from dark lowering clouds. All, be assured, will yet bear the stamp of divine love. *Sense* cannot yet discern "the *rainbow* in the clouds." Aged Jacob exclaimed at first, "All these things are against me!" but at last he had a calmer and a more just verdict, and "his spirit revived!"

"At evening time it was light." The saint on *earth* can say, regarding his trials, in faith and in trust, "I *know*, O Lord, that Your judgments are right." The saint in *glory* can go a step farther, "I *see*, O Lord, that they are so!" His *losses* will then be shown to be his *riches*. Believer! on a calm retrospect of your heaviest afflictions — say, were they unneeded? This "severe mercy of God's discipline" — was it too severe? *Less* would not have done. Like Jonah, you never would have awoke — but for the *storm*. He may have led you to a Zarephath (a place of furnaces) — but it is to show you "one like unto the Son of God!" When was God ever so near to you, or you to your God — as in the furnace-fires?

When was the *presence* and *love* and *sympathy* of Jesus so precious? It was when "the Beloved" comes down from the *Mountain of Myrrh* and the *Hill of Frankincense* — to His Garden on earth. He can get no fragrance from some plants but by *bruising* them. The spices in the Temple of old were *crushed*. The gold of its candlestick was *beaten* gold! It was when the Marah-fountain of your heart was bitter with sin — that He cast in some cross, some trial, and "the waters were made sweet!"

My soul, be still! You have, in affliction, one means of glorifying God, which even angels have not, in their sorrowless world — patience under the rod — submission to your Heavenly Father's will! Pray not to have your affliction *removed* — but for grace to *bear up* under it, so that you may glorify God even "in the fires!" Remember that though "weeping endures for a night — joy comes in the morning!" Close your tearful eyes, saying, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE INVITATIONS OF GOD

"All whom the Father gives Me — will come to Me; and whoever comes to Me — I will never cast out." — John 6:37

How *broad* is the door of welcome! Before the prodigal son, the ungrateful returning wanderer, could stammer forth through penitential tears the confession of his sins — the arms of his father's mercy were around him! The prodigal son thought of no more than the servant's place; the father had in readiness the best robe and the fattened calf! God has the first word in the overtures of mercy. He refuses none — He welcomes all — the poor — the wretched — the blind — the naked — the burdened — the heavy laden — the hardened sinner — the aged sinner — the daring sinner — the dying sinner — ALL are invited to come! "*Come now, let us reason together!*" says the Lord. "*Though your sins are like scarlet — they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson — they shall be like wool!*"

The most parched tongue that laps the streams from the smitten Rock — has everlasting life! "When *we* forgive — it costs us an effort; when *God* forgives — it is His delight." From the battlements of Heaven He is calling after us: "Turn, turn! Why will you die?" He seems to wonder if sinners have pleasure in their own death. He declares, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live!"

Reader! have you yet closed with the Gospel's free invitation? Have you gone to Him, just as you are — with all the raggedness of nature's garments — standing in your own nothingness — feeling that you are insolvent — that, you have "nothing to pay," already a bankrupt, and the debt always increasing? Have you taken hold of that blessed assurance, "He is able to save to the uttermost"? Are you resting your *eternal all* on Him who has done all and suffered all, for you; leaving you, "without money and without price," a free, full, unconditional offer of a great salvation?

Do not say that your sins are too *many* — the crimson dye too *deep*. It is because you are a great *sinner*, and have great *sins* — that you need a great *Savior!* "Of whom I am the chief," is a *golden postscript* to "the faithful saying — that Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Do not dishonor God by casting doubts on His willingness or ability. If your sins

are heinous, you will be all the more an amazing monument of grace! You may be the weakest and unworthiest of vessels; but, remember, there was a *niche* in the Temple for both the *great* and for the *small* — for the cups, as well as for the pitchers. Even the smallest vessel glorifies Christ.

Arise then, call upon the Lord! We cannot say, with the king of Nineveh, "Who can tell? God may yet relent and with compassion *turn* from His fierce anger so that we will not perish!" He is turning now — declaring, on His own immutable Word, that "whoever comes to Me — I will never cast out." "Though you have lived among the pots — you shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold!" Close, without delay, with these precious invitations, that so, looking up to a reconciled God and Father in Heaven, you may even this night say, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD

*"Comfort, comfort My people, says your God."* — Isaiah 40:1

God's people are prone to be discouraged because of the *difficulty* of the way. In the bitterness of their spirits, they are often apt to say, with desponding Zion, "The Lord has forsaken me!" Or with the faithless prophet, "It is better for me to die than to live!"

But the Christian has his consolations too, and they are "strong consolations." The "still small voice" mingles with the hurricane and the storm. The bush burns with fire — but the great God is in the bush, and therefore it is indestructible! "The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; and may the God of my salvation be exalted!" Earthly consolations may help to dry one tear — but another tear is ready to flow. God dries *all* tears. There is no need in the aching voids of the heart — which He cannot supply.

Is it *mercy to pardon*? I can look up to the throne of the Most High God

— and see Holiness and Righteousness, Justice and Truth, all bending, in exulting harmony, over my ruined soul, exclaiming, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!" Is it *grace to help*? I can look up to that same throne, and behold, seated thereon, a Great High Priest — no, a mighty Prince, having power with God, and prevailing — prayer without ceasing ascending from His lips in behalf of His people!

When *Satan* seeks "to sift" them — His upholding power protects them. When *temptation* assails them in their earthly conflicts — the *true Moses* on the Mount, with hands that never "grow heavy," makes them "more than conquerors!" When *trial* threatens to prostrate them, He identifies Himself with the sufferers — He points to His own sorrows, to show them how light the heaviest of earth's sorrows are. Even over the gloomy portals of the *grave* He can write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!" He alone felt Death's *substance*. His people only see "the *shadow*." He makes it a Valley of Achor, through which "the two spies," *Faith* and *Hope*, fetch back Eshcol-pledges of the true Land of Promise!

Reader, are you now weary or desponding? Is some *cross* heavy on you — some *trial* oppressing you — some *thorn* in the flesh sorely lacerating you? Be still! He will make His grace sufficient. If He has *allured you into the wilderness* — it is that He may speak comfortably to you. He has an *antidote* for every sorrowful bosom — a *balm* for every wound — a *comfort* for every pang — a *solace* for every tear. "When anxiety was great within me — Your consolation brought joy to my soul." "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE PATHS OF GOD

"All the *paths* of the LORD are mercy and truth — unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." — Psalm 25:10

"All the paths." It is no small effort of faith to say so, when  *blessings* are



blighted, and *schemes* crossed, and fellow-pilgrims, (it may be beloved spouses in our spiritual joys) are mysteriously removed, to say, "All — ALL is mercy! All — ALL is well!" They are "the paths of the Lord" — His choosing; and, be assured, He will "lead His people by a *right* way." It may not be the way of *their* own selecting. It may be the very last path *they* would have chosen. But when He leads His sheep, "He goes before them." The Shepherd portions off our pasture-ground. He guides the *footsteps* of the flock. He will lead them by no rougher way — than He sees needful. Does a human father give his child his own way? If he did — it would be his ruin! Will God surrender us to our own truant wills — which are often bent on wandering farthest from Him? No! He knows us better! He loves us better!

Believer, it is the loftiest triumph and prerogative of faith, to have no *way* — no *path* of your own — but with childlike simplicity and reliance to say, "Teach me Your paths. Lead me *however* and *wherever* You please. Let it be through the darkest, loneliest, thorniest way — only let it bring me nearer Yourself!"

Would that we could keep our eye not so much on the *path* — as on the *bright gate*, which terminates it. When standing at that luminous portal, we shall trace, with adoring wonder, the way in which our God has led us; discerning the "need be" of every teardrop! And to the question, "*Is it well?*" to which often on earth we gave an evasive answer — we will be ready with an unhesitating reply, "*It is well!*" What a *light* will then be flashed on these three often mysterious words, "*God is love!*" Then, at last, shall we be able to add the joyful comment, "We have known and believed the love which God has to us!"

Meanwhile, Reader! if you are treading a path of sorrow, consider, as an encouragement, that your Lord and Master trod the same before you. Behold, as He toiled on *His blood-stained journey*, how *submission to the Divine will* formed the secret of His support. "Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure!" "Not My will — but may Your will be done!" The *True David* was strengthened with what sustained His typical ancestor in a dark and trying hour: "O Lord, You are my God!"

Believer, if it is your God in covenant who is leading you — then what

more can you require? "His Ways are truth and judgment." He will guide you by His counsel, while you live — and afterward receive you into glory! My God! if such is the design of Your dealings and discipline, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE SECRET OF GOD

"The secret of the LORD is with those who fear him; and He will show them His covenant." — Psalm 25:14

Believer, your God has some mighty secret to confide to you! What is this, which (a mystery to the world), is to be conveyed in whispers into the ears of His people! "He will show them His Covenant!" Listen, this night, to this blessed "secret." You have pondered it often before. But its wonders never diminish by repetition.

The *Author* of it is God — the Eternal Father. He framed its articles before the foundation of the world. It wrong to represent the *atonement* as the *cause* of God's love. God's love was rather the originating cause of the atonement. "God so *loved* the world — that He *gave* His one and only Son." How runs the Covenant-Charter? "Everything belongs to you .... the whole world and life and death; the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

The initiative — the first overture of covenant-mercy, was with Him. It was the *insulted Sovereign* who first dreamed of mercy towards the rebels! It was the *injured Father* who first thought of His ungrateful children. Wondrous secret — that from all eternity, the Heart of God was *all LOVE* to us!

Think of the *Surety* of the Covenant. It was the adorable Son of the Father. He voluntarily accepted the Covenant stipulations: "Lo, I come! I delight to do Your will, O My God!" He ceased not, until, all the terms being fulfilled, He could claim His stipulated reward: "I have glorified

You on the earth, I have finished the work which You gave Me to do." And still He lives, and reigns, and intercedes, under the blessed title of "*Mediator of the Everlasting Covenant!*"

Think of the Almighty *Dispenser* of the blessings of the Covenant. It is the *Spirit* of all Grace — the third person in the ever-blessed, co-equal Trinity.

Think of the *Heirs* of the Covenant. They are all who, by simple faith, are willing to appropriate its inestimable blessings.

Think of the *Security* of the Covenant. There is much *uncertainty* in all earthly agreements. But all is certainty in the Covenant, "*I will be your God — and you shall My people.*" This unfailing Covenant has the rock of Christ's Deity to rest upon; and a Triune God pledged to make good all its provisions, "My covenant I will not break — nor alter the Word that has gone out of My mouth!"

Think of the *Perpetuity* of the Covenant: "I will betroth you unto Me *forever!*"

Think of the rich *Inheritance* of the Covenant. Oh! here is the mighty secret of unfathomable love: "If we are His children, then Heirs — Heirs of God." "Heirs of God!" Our in hesitance is all within the scope of Omnipotence to bestow! He puts His hand to a *blank check*, that His people may write under it whatever they please, which is for their good.

My soul! are you an heir of God? Can you look upwards to the throne of that "Great I am," and say, "This God is my God!" Happier words — a more glorious assurance — cannot thrill on an archangel's tongue! With such a *Portion* as this — surely I need no other! Let that amazing "secret" form the last thought of this day; and, as the Almighty is even now whispering it in my ears, I may close my eyes, repeating, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!"  
— Psalm 4:8

# THE NAME OF GOD

"The *name* of the Lord is a strong tower! The righteous run into it — and are safe." — Proverbs 18:10

Strong indeed! "We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts." Every ATTRIBUTE of the Godhead is such a tower. Every *perfection* such a rampart — all combined to insure the believer's everlasting security! Reader, "Go, inspect the city of Jerusalem. Walk around and count the many towers. Take note of the fortified walls, and tour all the citadels, that you may describe them to future generations. For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and He will be our guide until we die!"

Mark the strong Tower of divine OMNIPOTENCE. It proclaims that the Almighty God is on your side — that there is One with you and for you, boundless in His resources, greater far than all that can be against you!

Mark the strong Tower of divine UNCHANGEABLENESS. All *earthly* fabrics are tottering and crumbling around you. The dearest of all your earthly refuges has written on it — the doom of the dust! But, sheltered here, you can gaze on all the fitful changes of life, and exult in an unchanging God!

Mark the strong Tower of divine WISDOM. When His dealings are dark, and chastisements mysterious, you must retire within this fortress — and to be reminded that all, all that befalls you, is the planning of unerring rectitude and faithfulness! See inscribed on the chamber-walls, "The only Wise God!"

Mark the strong Tower of divine LOVE. When the *hurricane* has been fierce, your heart breaking with new trials, the past dark, the future a dreary waste, no *lull* in the storm, no *light* in the clouds — oh! It is a great comfort to you to retire into this most hallowed of bulwarks, and read the living motto emblazoned on its every turret, "*God is love!*"

My soul! are you safe in this impregnable fortress? Have you entered

within the gate? Remember, it is not to be "near" the city — but "in" it. Not to know *about* Christ — but to "win Him, and be found in Him." One footstep outside the walls, and the *Avenger of blood* can cut you down! "Turn, then, to the stronghold!" as a "prisoner of hope!"

Once, these were colossal walls to 'exclude'. Now, they are unassailable barriers to 'protect'! They are now a *citadel* where His saints are "kept" by the power of God. Every portal is open; and the God of Mercy issues the gracious proclamation, "Come, My people, enter into your chambers!" How safe! how happy here!

IN GOD! "There is, in this," says Jonathan Edwards, speaking of the same blessed truth, "secured to me, as it were — a calm, sweet aspect, or appearance, of glory in almost everything." We can hear, amid the surges of life, a voice high above the storm, the Name of the Lord, "It is I! Do not be afraid!"

"*It is I,*" remarks Newman Hall, "were as much as a hundred names. It is I — your Lord and Master! It is I — the Commander of winds and waters! It is I — the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth! Let Heaven be but as one Scroll, and let it be written all over with titles — they cannot express more than — *It is I!* Oh, sweet and seasonable word of a gracious Savior! — able to calm all tempests — able to revive all hearts — say but so to my soul, and I am safe!" "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE FAVOR OF GOD

"In His favor is life!" — Psalm 30:5

How anxious are we to stand well with our fellow-men, and secure their favor! Are we equally so to stand well with God? The favor of *man* — what is it? A passing breath, which a *moment* may alienate, a *look* forfeit, and which, at best, a few brief years will forever terminate! But the favor of *God* — how ennobling, constant, and enduring! In possession of His

favor, we are independent alike of what the world either gives — or withholds. With it, we are rich — whatever else we lack! Without it, we are poor — though we have the wealth of worlds beside! Bereft of Him, we can truly say with aged Jacob, "I am bereaved!" *Nothing can compensate for His loss — but He can compensate for the loss of everything!*

Reader! are you a stranger to His favor, under the cheerless sense of alienation from God? Sin un-cancelled; peace un-purchased; all uncertainty about the question of your eternity? Who need ask, living thus, if you are satisfied, or happy? *Satisfied?* Impossible! Nothing can satisfy your infinite capacities — but the infinite God. Nothing can fill up the aching voids of your immortal being — but Him "who only has immortality." *Happy?* Impossible! There can be no happiness with sin unforgiven; the conscience unappeased; eternal interests hanging overhead unsettled and unadjusted; death, and judgment, and eternity, all un-provided for! Living at this "dying rate," peace must be a stranger to your bosom!

Seek to make up your peace with God. Covet His life-giving favor. What a *blessed fountain of unsullied joy* has that soul which can look up to Heaven and say, "God is mine!" That word — that thought — wipes away every tear-drop — *"My Father!"* What though the perishable streams are dried, if you are driven to learn the truth, "All my springs are in You!" He may empty your *cistern* — but the *Fountainhead* remains. Job was the sorest of sufferers — but he could bear patiently to be bereft of all, save One, "Oh that I knew where I might find *Him!*"

"Go," said Chrysostom, exulting in this favor of the King of kings, when an earthly princess tried to shake his spirit, *"Go, tell her that I fear nothing but sin!"* Blessed state of conscious security!

The same mighty consolation which supported Jesus in His season of humiliation, forms the solace and rejoicing of His true people, "Because He is on my right hand — I shall not be moved." Blessed Jesus! Oh encompass me this night with Your favor as with a shield, and then, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE JEWELS OF GOD

"And they shall be Mine, says the LORD Almighty, in that day when I make up *My jewels*." — Malachi 3:17

"MY JEWELS!" (or, My special treasure!) Of what favored creatures does Jehovah thus speak? Is it of seraphs? Is it of angels? Methinks, at such a title, even they would take the dust of abasement, and veiling their faces, cry, "Unclean! unclean!" But, marvel of marvels! It is *redeemed sinners* of the earth — once crude, unshapely stones, lying in "the horrible pit and the miry clay," amid the rubbish of corruption — who are thus sought out by divine grace, purchased by divine love, destined through eternity to be set as jewels in the crown of the eternal God!

"The Lord's *portion* is His people!" There is a surpassing revelation of love here. Great, unspeakably great, is the privilege of the believer, to be able to look up to the everlasting Jehovah, and say, "You are my portion, O Lord!" But what is this in comparison with the response of Omnipotence to the child of dust, "You are Mine!" Reader, have you learned to lisp your part in this wondrous interchange of covenant-love, "My beloved is Mine — and I am His!"

What an array of wondrous titles belong to the saints of God, and given, too, by God Himself, in His own Word! He calls them — Sons! Brethren! Princes! Friends! Heirs! Jewels! My Portion! Mine!

And *when* is the time when they become thus dear to Him? Sinner, when you wept at the cross of Jesus, and joined yourself in covenant with God — you became His jewel. No — from eternity past — "He has loved you with an *everlasting* love!" True, you are not yet set in His *crown*. You are yet undergoing the process of *polishing*. Affliction is preparing you; trial is needed to remove all the roughness and blemishes of nature, and make you *fit* for your Master's use. But, blessed thought! "Now it is God who has made us (literally, *chiseled* or *polished* us) for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Yes,

God Himself, the possessor, who prized that earthly jewel so much, as to give in exchange for it Heaven's "Pearl of great price!" He has the *polishing* in His own hand! He will not deal too rashly or roughly.

And where, meanwhile, is the *casket* in which these jewels are kept until the coronation-day arrives, when the crown of His Church triumphant (every saint a gem) will be placed on the head of Jesus? It is He, their Purchaser, their Proprietor, who preserves them. They are "kept by the power of God." Our great High Priest, the *true Aaron*, has them set in His breastplate; He bears them on His *heart* on His every approach to the throne. They are the precious stones set in gold upon the ephod! And though the *sins* of His people, and the schemes of Satan, combine in doing what they can to destroy them, He declares that none shall ever pluck them out of His hand, or from His heart!

A jewel in Immanuel's crown! Not only raised from the ash-heap to be set among princes, but to gem through eternity — the Forehead that for me, was once wreathed with thorns!

Shall I — can I — murmur at any way my Savior sees fit to *polish* and *prepare* me for such an honor as this? Let me sink down on my nightly pillow overpowered with the thought; and as I hear my covenant God whispering in my ear the astounding accents, "You are Mine!" I may well reply, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body — whether good or bad." — 2 Corinthians 5:10

ALL must appear! There is no eluding His searching scrutiny! Believer, there is to you no terror in that coming reckoning. The judicial dealing between yourself and your God is already past. You are already acquitted.



The moment you cast yourself at the cross of your dear Lord, the sentence of "Not Guilty!" was pronounced upon you; and if "it is God who justifies — then who can condemn?" But this sentence will be ratified and openly proclaimed before an assembled world. On that *great day of disclosures* God will avenge His own elect. All the calumnies and aspersions heaped on their character will be wiped away. In the presence of devils, and angels, and men — the approving sentence will go forth from the lips of the Omniscient One, "Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

And WHO is to be your Judge? Who is to be enthroned on that tribunal of unerring rectitude, before whom every knee is to bow and every heart is to be laid open? "For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by THAT MAN He has appointed." "That Man!" Oh, it is no stranger! It is Him who died for you! who is now interceding for you! who will then stand to espouse your cause, vindicate your integrity, and utter the challenge to every reclaiming adversary, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

Reader, seek to know this *God-Man Mediator* on a throne of *grace*, before you meet Him on a throne of *judgment*! Seek to have your name now enrolled in this Book of Life, that you may hear it then confessed before His "Father and the holy angels." What an incentive to increased aspirations after holiness and higher spiritual attainments, to remember that the awards of that day and of eternity — will be determined by the transactions of time! It is a grand Bible principle, that though *justified* by faith — we shall be *judged* by works. No more, while from first to last, Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the *meritorious* cause of salvation — yet the works flowing from faith in Him and love to Him, will regulate the degree of future bliss; whether we shall be among the "greatest" or "the least in the kingdom;" whether we shall occupy the outskirts of glory, or revolve in orbits around the throne in the blaze of God's immediate presence!

Were that trumpet-blast now to break on your ear, would you be prepared with the welcome response, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" Seek to be living in this habitual state of holy preparedness, that even the midnight cry would not take you by surprise; that the summons which will prove so startling to a slumbering world, would be to you the herald of glory, "He comes, He comes to judge the earth!"

Oh the blessedness of being able, in sweet confidence in the Savior's second coming, to compose myself to rest night after night, and say, "Even though the trumpet of judgment should break upon my ears, I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## GOD'S BANQUETING HOUSE

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love!" — Song of Solomon 2:4

"HE brought me!" All of grace! He justifies! He glorifies! The top-stone is brought forth, the banqueting house is entered with shoutings, saying, "Grace, grace unto it!" Believer, contemplate the *journey* ended, the *course* finished, the *victory* won. Seated at the marriage feast of the Lamb in glory, guest talking to guest with bounding hearts — recounting their Lord's dealings on earth — the watchword circulating from tongue to tongue, "*He has done all things well!*"

Angels and archangels, too, will be participants in that banquet of glory; and bright seraphs, who never knew what it was to have a heart of sin or to shed a tear of sorrow. But, for this reason, there will be one element of joy peculiar to the Redeemed, into which the other unfallen guests cannot enter — the "joy of contrast." How will this present world's "great tribulation" augment the bliss of a world at once sinless and sorrowless! How will earth's woe-worn cheek, and sin-stricken spirit, and tear-dimmed eye — enhance the glories of that perfect state, where there is not that symbol of sadness, nor the solitary trace of one lingering tear-drop!

Then will be realized that *sweet paradox*: "They rest" — "They rest not!" "The rest without a rest." "They rest" — the eternal pause and cessation from all the feverish disquietudes of this world's sins and sorrows; all that would disturb the rapture of a holy repose. And yet, it is but the *restless activity of holiness* — the Divine energy of beings whose grand element of

happiness is employment in the service and executing of the will of God. In this "they cease not day nor night."

It is sublimely said of the God before whom they hymn their anthems and cast their crowns, that "*He inhabits the praises of eternity!*" My soul, seek often to ponder, in the midst of your days of sadness, the joys of that eternal banqueting house. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain!" One *moment* at that banquet table — one *crumb* of the heavenly manna — one *draught* from the river of life — and all the bitter experiences of the valley of tears will be obliterated and forgotten!

Look upwards even now, and behold your dear Lord preparing for you this glorious "feast of fat things!" "Do not be troubled. There are many rooms in My Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am!" He has Himself entered the banqueting house as the pledge and forerunner of the coming guests. He, the first Sheaf of the mighty harvest, has been waved before God in the temple of the New Jerusalem, as a pledge of the immortal sheaves still to be gathered into the heavenly garner!

The invitation is issued, "Come, for all things are ready!" "The feast has been prepared, and choice meats have been cooked. Everything is ready. Hurry to the wedding banquet!" Reader, prepare for the feast — suitably attire yourself for such a glorious banquet. Put on your beautiful garments — that righteousness of Jesus, without which you cannot be accepted — that holiness of heart, without which no one can see the Lord. Soon shall *the little hour of life's unquiet dream* be over; and then, oh the glorious surprise of being ushered into that banqueting table — to know, forever — the blessedness of those "who are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb!"

With the prospect of such joys awaiting me in the *morning of immortality*, with the dark nights of death before me, and the grave my couch, I shall be able to say, even of its lonely chamber, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"In Your presence is fullness of joy!" — Psalm 16:11

Even in this world, where the Christian can only dimly apprehend God — how sweet is the sense of His presence, and friendship, and love! What will it be in that eternal world — where He is seen in *open vision*! If the *foretaste* is blessed — what must be the *fruition*! If the *rays* of the Divine glory are gladdening — what must be the *full blaze* of that Sun itself!

Believer, do you often delight to pause in your journey? Does faith love to ascend its Pisgah Mount and get a prospect of this Land of Promise? What is the grand feature and element which swallows up all the circumstantials in your future bliss? Let Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, answer — It is "Your Presence!" "In my flesh, I shall see God!" says one. "I shall be satisfied," says another, "when I awake, with Your likeness!" "They shall see His face!" says a third. Amid all the glowing visions of a coming Heaven granted to John in Patmos, there is *One all-glorious object* that has ever a peerless and distinctive pre-eminence — God Himself!

There is no *sun* — Why? "For the Lord God gives them light." There is no *temple* — Why? "For the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple thereof." The saints dwell in holy brotherhood; but what is the mighty bond of their union; their chief joy? "He who sits on the Throne shall dwell among them!" They have no longer the intervention of ordinances and means — Why? Because "the Lamb who is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters." They no longer draw on the storehouse of the *Promises* — Why? Because "God Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Reader, here is the true "Peniel," where you will "*see God face to face*." Here is the true "Mahanaim," where the Angels of God meet you.

In Heaven is the true communion of *saints* — the glorious fellowship of the *Prophets* — the goodly fellowship of the *Apostles* — the noble army of

*Martyrs*. Yet all these will be subservient and subordinate to the first — the vision and fruition of God! Even the recognition of *death-divided* loved ones (that sweet element in the believer's prospect of bliss) will pale, in comparison, before this "Glory that excels!"

Are you among these "pure in heart," who are to "see God"? Remember the Bible's solemn warning, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Remember its solemn admonition, "And every man who has this hope fixed on Him, *purifies himself* even as He is pure." To "see God!" Oh, what *preparation* is needed for so magnificent a contemplation! *Infinite unworthiness and nothingness*, to stand in the presence of *Infinite Majesty, Purity, and Glory!*

Can I wonder at the *much discipline* required, before I can be thus "presented faultless before the presence of His glory?" How will these needed *furnace-fires* be dimmed into nothing — when viewed from the Sapphire throne! Heart and flesh may be fainting and failing; but, remembering that that same God is now "the strength of my heart," who is to be my "portion forever;" I may joyfully say, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!" — Psalm 4:8

## **GOD'S CLOSING CALL**

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." —  
2 Corinthians 6:2

Reader! How does it stand with you? Is the question of *your soul's salvation* finally and forever settled? Are you at peace with God? Can you say with Paul, in the prospect of death, "I am now ready!" Have you been led to feel the infinite peril of postponement and procrastination, and responded to the appeal, "Behold, Now!" Ah, how many have found, when the imagined hour of deathbed preparation had come — that the *tear of penitence* was too late to be shed, and the *prayer of mercy* too late to be uttered! Let there be plain dealing between your *conscience* and

your *God*. Do not try to escape from the pressing urgency of the question. You may dismiss it now — but there is a day coming when you dare not! Let it not merge in vague generalities — let it be realized as matter of personal concern; of infinite importance to yourself, "Am I saved — or am I not saved? Am I prepared — or am I unprepared, to meet Almighty God?"

You may have, perhaps, an honest intent of giving it some *future* deliberation at another and "more convenient season." Do we ever read of Felix's "more convenient season?" It were better not to risk the experiment of a dying hour, for the solution of the problem, "*Is my soul safe for eternity?*" That it is too difficult a matter — a conference about the soul on the brink of eternity! Remember, God's Spirit "will not always strive." All His other attributes are infinite — but His *patience* and *forbearance* have their "bounds and limits."

The *invitation* which is yours today — may be withdrawn tomorrow! The *axe* may be even now laid at the root of the tree, and the *sentence* on the wing, "*Cut it down!*" How awful, that you are *yet* living in this state of estrangement and guilt! What a surrender of present peace! What a forfeiture of eternal joy! Hurry! flee for your life, lest you be consumed! *Your immortality is no trifle!*

"The night is *far* spent!" Who can tell how far? It may be *now* — or *never* with you! Once more you are about to lie down on your nightly pillow. What if your awaking tomorrow were to be "in outer darkness" in the infernal pit! But, take courage, that night is not *too* far spent. Close this last of the "Night Watches," by fleeing, without delay, to Jesus — the Sinner's Savior and the Sinner's Friend. It was on the *last watch of the night*, He came of old to His tempest-tossed disciples. Like them, receive Him now into your soul; and have all your guilty fears calmed by His omnipotent, "*Peace, be still!*"

Are there not *ominous signs* all around, as if the *world's* last and closing "night-watch" has come? The billows are heaving high. We hear the footsteps on the waters. Amid the fitful moanings of the blast, the watchword is heard — of joy to some, of terror to others, "Maranatha! The Lord is coming!"

Reader! are *you* ready? Is the joyous response on your tongue, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!" If this night were indeed your very last, and the thunders of judgment were to break upon you before daybreak; would you be able, in the assurance of an eternal dawn, to say, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me live in safety!"  
— Psalm 4:8

## THE RAINBOW IN THE CLOUDS

*"Whenever I bring **clouds** over the earth — and the **rainbow** appears in the clouds."* Genesis 9:14

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## **SOVEREIGNTY**

"The Lord reigns!" Psalm 93:1

No rainbow of promise in the "dark and cloudy day" shines more radiantly than this. God, my God, the God who gave Jesus — orders all events, and overrules all for my good! "When I," says He, "send clouds over the earth." He has no wish to conceal the hand which shadows for a time earth's brightest prospects. It is He alike who "brings the cloud," who brings us into it, and in mercy leads us through it! His kingdom rules over all. "The lot is cast into the lap — but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." He puts the burden on, and keeps it on — and at His own time will remove it!

Beware of brooding over second causes. It is the worst form of atheism! When our most fondly cherished gourds are smitten; our fairest flowers lie withered in our bosom; this is the silencer of all reflections: "The Lord prepared the worm!" When the temple of the soul is smitten with

lightning, and its pillars rent: "The Lord is in His holy temple!" Accident, chance, fate, destiny — have no place in the Christian's creed. He is no unpiloted vessel left to the mercy of the storm. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters!" There is but one explanation of all that befalls him: "I will be silent, I will not open my mouth, because You are the One who has done this!"

Death seems to the human spectator, the most capricious and severe of all events. But not so! The keys of Death and Hell are in the hands of this same reigning God! Look at the parable of the fig-tree. Its prolonged existence, or its doom as a cumberer, forms matter of conversation in Heaven; the axe cannot be laid at its root — until God gives the warrant! How much more will this be the case regarding every "Tree of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord?" It will be watched over by Him, "Lest anyone hurt it." Every trembling fiber — He will care for; and if made early to succumb to the inevitable stroke, "Who does not know — that in all these things, that the hand of the Lord has wrought this." Be it mine to merge my own will in His; not to cavil at His ways, or to seek to have one jot or tittle of His will altered; but to lie passive in His hands; to take the bitter as well as the sweet, knowing that the bitter cup is mingled by One who loves me too well to add one bitter ingredient that might have been spared!

Who can wonder that the sweet Psalmist of Israel should seek, as he sees it spanning the lower heavens, to fix the arrested gaze of a whole world on the softened tints of this Rainbow of Comfort, "The Lord reigns — let the earth rejoice!"

## **A LOVING PURPOSE**

"Let the Lord be exalted, who delights in the prosperity of his servant."  
Psalm 35:27

What is "prosperity?" Is it threads of life weaved into a bright outcome? a full cup? ample riches? worldly applause? an unbroken circle? No! these are often a snare; received without gratitude; dimming the soul to its nobler destinies. Often spiritually, it rather means God taking us by the

hand into the lowly Valleys of Humiliation; leading us as He did His servant Job of old; out of his sheep, oxen, camels, health, wealth, children; in order that we may be brought before Him in the dust, and say, "Blessed be His holy name!"

Yes! The very reverse of what is generally known in the world as Prosperity — forms the background on which the Rainbow of Promise is seen. God smiles on us through these rainbows and teardrops of sorrows! He loves us too well. He has too great an interest in our spiritual welfare to permit us to live on in what is misnamed "Prosperity." When He sees duties languidly performed, or coldly neglected, the heart deadened, and love to Himself congealed by the absorbing power of the present world — He puts a thorn in our nest to drive us to the wing — and prevent our being grovelers forever!

I may not be able now to understand the mystery of these dealings. I may be asking through the tears, "Why this unkind arrest on my earthly happiness? Why so premature a lopping of my boughs of promise? Why such a speedy withering of my most cherished gourd?" The answer is plain. It is your soul's prosperity which He has in view. Believe it — your true Ebenezers will yet be raised close by your Zarephaths (the place of furnace).

His afflictions are no arbitrary appointments. There is righteous necessity in all that He does. As He lays His chastening hand upon you, and leads you by ways you know not, and which you never would have chosen — He whispers the gentle accents in your ear, "Beloved I wish above all things that you would prosper — even as your soul prospers."

Rest in the quiet consciousness that all is well. Murmur at nothing which brings you nearer to His own loving Presence. Be thankful for your very cares, because you can confidently cast them all upon Him. He has both your temporal and eternal "prosperity" too much at heart — to appoint one superfluous pang, one needless stroke. Commit therefore, all that concerns you to His safe keeping, and leave it there!

## **THE SAFE REFUGE**

"And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah 32:2

"A man!" This first word forms the key to the precious verse, it is "The man Christ Jesus!" And when and where is He thus revealed to His people as their hiding place and shelter? It is, as with Elijah of old, in the whirlwind and the storm! Amid the world's bright sunshine, in the tranquil skies, uninterrupted prosperity — they seek Him not! But when the clouds begin to gather, and the sun is swept from the skies; when they have learned the insecurity of all earthly refuges — then the prayer ascends, "My heart is overwhelmed — lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." The Earthquake, the Tempest, the Fire — and then "the still small voice!"

Sorrowing believer, you have indeed a Sure Refuge; a Strong Tower which cannot be shaken! The world has its refuges too — but they cannot stand the day of trial. The wind passes over them — and they are gone! But the louder the hurricane — the more will it endear to you the abiding Shelter; the deeper in the clefts of this ROCK — the safer you are.

A Man! Delight often to dwell on the humanity of Jesus; you have a brother on the throne! a "living Kinsman," one who "knows your frame," and who, by the exquisite sympathies of His exalted human nature — can gauge, as none other can, the depths of your sorrow!

An earthly friend comes to you in trial — he has never known bereavement, and therefore can not enter into your woe. Another comes — he has been again and again in the furnace — his heart has been touched tenderly as your own; he can feelingly sympathize with you. It is just so with Jesus. As man, He has passed through every experience of suffering. He has Himself known the storm from which He offers you shelter. He is the ROCK — yet "a Man!" "Mighty to save;" yet mighty to compassionate! "Emmanuel, God with us!" He is like the rainbow in the material heavens, which, while its summit is in the clouds, each base of its are rests on earth; or like the oak which, while it can wrestle with the tempest, yet invites the most feeble bird to fold its wing on its branches!

Mourner! Go sit under your "Beloved's shadow with great delight." Hide in His wounded side! The hand which was pierced for you — is ordering your trials; He who roused the storm — is the hiding place from it! And as you journey on, gloomy clouds mustering around you, let this bright rainbow of comfort ever arrest your drooping eye; "For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way... since He Himself has gone through suffering and temptation, He is able to help us when we are being tempted."

## **THE REASON FOR CHASTISEMENT**

"For whom the Lord loves — He chastens." Hebrews 12:6

What! God loves me — when He is discharging His quiver upon me — when He is emptying me from vessel to vessel — when He is causing the sun of my earthly joys to set in clouds? Yes! O afflicted, tempest-tossed one, He chastens you — because He loves you! This trial comes from His own tender, loving hand — from His own tender, unchanging heart!

Are you laid on a sickbed — with sorrowful months and wearisome nights appointed unto you? Let this be the pillow on which your aching head reclines: It is because He loves me!

Is it bereavement that has swept your heart and desolated your dwelling? He appointed that chamber of death — because He loves you! As it is the suffering child of the family which claims a mother's deepest affections and most tender solicitude, so have you at this moment embarked on your side, the most tender love and solicitude of your heavenly Father. He loved you into this sorrow — and will love you through it. There is nothing capricious in His dealings. LOVE is the reason for all He does. There is not one drop of wrath — in that bitter cup you are called to drink!

Says one, "He has purchased these afflictions for us, as well as everything else. Blessed be His name, it is part of His covenant to visit us with the rod." What does our adorable Lord Himself say? The words were spoken, not when He was on earth, a sojourner in a sorrowing world — but when

enthroned amid the glories of Heaven. "As many as I love — I rebuke and chasten." Believer! rejoice in the thought that the rod, the chastening rod — is in the hands of the living, loving Savior who died for you!

Tribulation is the King's Highway — and yet that highway is paved with love. As some flowers require crushing before shedding their fragrance — so does your God think it suitable to bruise you. As some birds are said to sing their sweetest notes when the thorn pierces their bosom — so does He appoint affliction to lacerate — that you may be driven to the wing, singing, in your upward soaring, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed!"

Be it ours to say, "Lord, I will love You not only despite Your rod — but because of Your rod! I will rush into the very arms that are chastening me!"

## **IMMUTABILITY**

"I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." Malachi 3:6

The UNCHANGEABLENESS of God. What an anchor for a storm tossed sea! Change is our portion here on earth! Scenes are altering. Joys are fading. Some friends are removed by distance; others have gone to their 'long home.' Who, amid these checkered experiences, does not sigh for something permanent, stable, enduring? The vessel has again and again slipped its earthly moorings. We long for some secure and sheltered harbor.

"I am the LORD, I do not change!" Heart and flesh may faint; yes, do faint and fail — but we have an unfainting, unfailing, unvarying God! All the changes in the world around us — cannot affect Him. Our own fitfulness cannot alter Him. When we are depressed, downcast, fluctuating, our treacherous hearts turning aside "like a broken bow," He is without one "shadow of turning." "God who cannot lie," is the superscription on His eternal throne; and inscribed on all His dealings.

"I am the LORD, I do not change!" Precious name! It forms a blessed guarantee that nothing can befall me but what is for my good. I cannot doubt His faithfulness. I dare not arraign the rectitude of His dispensations. It is covenant love which is now darkening my earthly horizon. In this hour of my affliction, He is the same — as when He "spared not His own Son!"

Oh, instead of wondering at my trials, let me rather wonder that He has borne with me so long! It is of the Lord's unchanging mercies that I am not consumed. Had He been man, changeful, vacillating, as myself — long before now would He have spurned me away, and consigned me to the doom of the cumberer! But, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord." "I am the LORD, I do not change!"

## **DIVINE SYMPATHY**

"I know their sorrows!" Exodus 3:7

Man cannot say so. There are many sensitive fibers in the soul, which the best and most tender human sympathy cannot touch. But the Prince of Sufferers, He who led the way in the path of sorrow, "knows our frame." When crushing bereavement lies like ice on the heart, when the dearest earthly friend cannot enter into the peculiarities of our grief — Jesus can, Jesus does! He who once bore my sins — also carried my sorrows. That eye, now on the throne, was once dim with weeping! I can think in all my afflictions — "He was afflicted;" in all my tears — "Jesus wept."

"I know their sorrows!" He may seem at times thus to forget and forsake us; leaving us to utter the plaintive cry, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" when all the while He is bending over us in the most tender love. He often allows our needs to attain their extremity, that He may stretch forth His succoring hand, and reveal the plenitude of His Grace! "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

And "knowing" our sorrows, is a guarantee that none will be sent — but only what He sees to be needful. "I will not," says He, "make a full end of

you — but I will correct you in measure." All that He sends is precisely meted out; wisely apportioned. There is nothing accidental — no unneeded thorn; no superfluous pang. He "puts our tears in a bottle." Each one is counted, drop by drop, tear by tear, they are sacred things among the treasures of God!

Suffering believer, the iron may have entered deeply into your soul--yet rejoice! Jesus--a sorrowing, sympathizing Jesus--"knows" your aching pangs and burning tears, and He will "come down to deliver you!"

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are!" Hebrews 4:15

## **A GRACIOUS CONDITION**

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have had to struggle in various trials." 1 Peter 1:6

What a blessed motto and superscription over the dark lintels of sorrow: "If need be!" Every sharp arrow from the quiver of God is feathered with it! Write it, child of affliction, over every trial your God sees fit to send! If He calls you down from the sunny mountain heights — to the dark glades, hear Him saying, "There is a need be!" If He has dashed the cup of prosperity from your lips, curtailed your creature comforts, diminished your "basket and your store," hear Him saying, "There is a need be!" If He has ploughed and furrowed your soul with severe bereavement; extinguished light after light in your dwelling; hear Him therefore stilling the tumult of your grief: "there is a need be!"

Yes! believe it, there is some profound reason for your trial, which at present may be indiscernible. No furnace will be hotter than He sees needed. Sometimes indeed, His teachings are mysterious. We can with difficulty spell out the letters, "God is love!" We can see no "bright light," in "our dark cloud." It is all mystery; there is not one break in the sky! No! Hear what God the Lord speaks: "If need be!"



He does not long leave His people alone, if He sees their chariot wheels dragging heavily. He will take His own means to sever them from an absorbing love of the world; to pursue them out of self; and dislodge usurping clay idols that may have vaulted on the throne which He alone may occupy!

Before your present trial He may have seen your love waxing cold; or your influence for good, lessening. As the sun puts out the fire, the sun of earthly prosperity may have been extinguishing the fires of your soul. You may have been shining less brightly for Christ, effecting some guilty compromise with an insinuating and seductive world! He has appointed this very discipline and dealing as needful to you; nothing less could have done!

Be still, and know that He is God! That "need be," remember, is in the hands of Infinite Love, Infinite Wisdom, Infinite Power! Trust Him in little things — as well as great things; in trifles — as well as tragedies!

Seek to have unquestioning faith. Though other paths, doubtless, would have been selected by you, had the choice been in your hands — be it yours to listen to His voice at every turn in the road, saying, "This is the way — walk in it."

We may not be able to understand it now — but one day we shall come to find, that AFFLICTION is one of God's blessed angels, "sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation." Lovelier, indeed, to the eye, is the azure blue; the fleecy summer vapors, or gold and vermilion of western sunsets. But what would become of the earth if no dark clouds from time to time hung over it; distilling their treasures, reviving and refreshing its drooping vegetable tribes?

Is it otherwise with the soul? No! The cloud of sorrow is needed. Its every raindrop has an inner meaning of LOVE! If, even now, afflicted one, these clouds are gathering, and the tempest sighing — lift up your eye to the divine scroll gleaming in the darkened heavens, and remember that He who has put the Rainbow of Promise there, saw also a "need be" for the cloud on which it rests!

## PRESENCE AND REST

"My presence shall go with you — and I will give you rest." Exodus 33:14

Moses asked to be shown "the way." Here is the answer: The way is not shown; but better than this, God says, "Trust Me — I Myself will go with you!" Afflicted one! hear the voice addressing you from the cloudy pillar. It is a wilderness promise which "the God of Jeshurun" speaks to His spiritual Israel still. He who led His people of old "like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron," will manifest towards you the same Shepherd love. The way may be very different from what we could have wished; what we would have chosen. But the choice is in better hands. He had His own wise and righteous ends in every diverse turning in it.

Who can look back on the past leadings of God without gratitude and thankfulness? When His sheep have been conducted to the rougher parts of the wilderness — He, their Shepherd, has "gone before them. When their fleece was torn, and they were footsore and weary — He has borne them in His arms! His presence has lightened every cross — and sweetened every care. Let us trust Him for an unknown and checkered future. Other companionships we cherished may have failed us — but One who is better than the best, goes before us in His gracious pillar cloud. With God Himself for our portion, take what He will away — we can be happy; we can rise above the loss of the earthly gift, in the consciousness of the nobler possession and heritage we enjoy in the Great Bestower.

He may have seen fit to level clay idols, that He, the All Satisfying One — might reign paramount and supreme. He may have seen to take "earthly presences" away — to cause us to breathe more earnestly the prayer "If YOUR presence go not with us — do not carry us hence." He will not allow us to rear havens on earth, and to write upon them, "This is my rest!" No — it is 'tenting time' here; resting time yonder! But "Fear not," He seems to say, "You are not left without a friend or without solace on the way, Pilgrim in a pilgrim land! My presence shall go with you — in all your dark and cloudy days; in your hours of faintness and dejection; in sadness; in life and in death! And when the journey is ended — I will give

you rest."

The pledge of Grace — will be followed with the fruition of Glory!

## **THE GIVER — AND THE TAKER**

"The LORD gave — and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Job 1:21

Noble posture this — to kneel and to adore! To see no hand but ONE! Sabeans; Fire; Whirlwind; Sword — are all overlooked. The Patriarch alone recognizes "the Lord" who gave and "the Lord" who has taken away. What is the cause of so much dejection, needless sorrow, and unchristian murmuring — in our hours of trial? It was what Rutherford calls "our looking to the confused rollings of the wheels of second causes;" a refusal to rise to "the height of the great argument," and confidently to say, "May the will of the Lord be done!" A refusal to hear His voice; His own loving voice, mingling with the accents of the wildest storm: "It is I!" "When disaster comes to a city — has not the Lord caused it?" Is there a bitter drop in the cup — and the Lord has not mingled it?

The Lord loves His people too well — to entrust their interest to any other. We are but clay in the hand of the Potter; earthen vessels in the hand of the Refiner of silver. He metes out our portion. He appoints the bounds of our habitation. "The Lord God prepared the gourd!" "The Lord God prepared the worm!" He is the Author alike of mercies — and sorrows; of comforts — and crosses. He breathes into our nostrils the breath of life; and it is at His summons that the spirit returns "to the God who gave it!"

Oh, that we would seek to regard our own lives and the lives of those dear to us — as a loan from the Divine Bestower. God, as the Great Proprietor, when He sees fit — can revoke the grant or curtail the lease He gave! All mercies by Him bestowed; by Him continued; and by Him withheld. And how often does He take away — that He Himself may enter the vacuum of the heart, and fill it with His own ineffable presence and love! No loss can compensate for the lack of Him — but He can compensate for all losses!

Let us trust His love and faithfulness as a "taking" as well as a "giving" God. Often are Sense and Sight tempted to say, "Not so, Lord!" But Faith, resting on the promise, can exult in this Rainbow spanning the darkest cloud, "Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure!"

## **DELIVERANCE IN TROUBLE**

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me!" Psalm 50:15

How varied are our days of trouble! Sickness, with its hours of restlessness and languor. Bereavement, with its rifled treasures and aching hearts. Loss of substance; the curtailment or forfeiture of worldly possessions; riches taking to themselves wings and fleeing away! Or, more severe than all — the wounds from friends; abused confidence; withered affections; hopes scattered like the leaves of autumn!

But "God is our refuge and strength — a very present help in trouble!" Tried one! He does not leave your defenseless head unsheltered in the storm. "Call upon Me!" He invites you into the pavilion of His presence! Better the bitter Marah waters — with His healing; than the purest fountain of the world — and no God! Better the hottest furnace flames — with one there "like the Son of God;" than that the dross should be allowed to accumulate and the soul left to cleave to the dust!

He, "the purifier of silver," is seated by these flames, tempering their fury! Yes, He gives the special promise, "I will deliver you!" It may not be the deliverance we expect; the deliverance we have prayed for; the deliverance we could have wished. But shall not the most severe trial be well worth enduring, if this is the result of His chastening love; "You will glorify Me." "Glorify Him!" How? By a simple unreasoning faith; by meek, lowly, uncomplaining acquiescence in His dealings; these dealings endearing the Savior and His grace more than ever to our hearts.

The day of trouble led His saints in all ages to glorify Him. David never could have written his touching Psalms, nor Paul his precious epistles — had not God cast them both into the crucible. To be teachers of the

Church of the future, they had to graduate in the school of affliction. If He is appointing similar discipline for us — let it be our endeavor to glorify Him by active obedience, as well as passive resignation; not abandoning ourselves to moody, sentimental, selfish grief; but rather going forth on our great mission; our work and warfare — with a vaster estimate of the value of time, and the grandeur of existence. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me!"

## **PITYING LOVE**

"As a father pities his children — so the LORD pities those who fear Him." Psalm 103:13

"Abba, Father!" is a Gospel word. A father bending over the sick bed of his weak or dying child; a mother pressing, in tender solitude, an infant sufferer to her bosom. These are the earthly pictures of Almighty God. "As a father pities his children." "As one whom his mother comforts — so will I comfort you!"

When tempted in our season of overwhelming sorrow to say, "Never has there been so dark a cloud, never a heart so stripped and desolate as mine!" Let this thought hush every murmur, "It is your Father's good pleasure!" The love and pity of the most tender parent — is but a dim shadow compared to the pitying love of God. If your heavenly Father's smile has for a moment been exchanged for the chastening rod — be assured there is some deep necessity for the severe discipline. If there are unutterable yearnings in the soul of the earthly parent as the surgeon's scapel is applied to the body of his child; infinitely more is it so with your covenant God as He subjects you to those deep wounds of heart! Finite wisdom has no place in His inscrutable ordinations. An earthly father may err; is ever erring; but "as for God — His way is perfect!" This is the explanation of His every dealing: "Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things!"

When you cannot trace His hand — trust His heart! Do not try to penetrate the cloud which "He brings over the earth" and to look through it. Keep your eye steadily fixed on the rainbow of promise. The mystery is

God's, the promise is yours. Seek that the end of all His dispensations with you — may be to make you more trusting and confiding. Without one misgiving, commit your way to Him. He says regarding each child of His covenant family, what He said of Ephraim of old (and never more so than in a season of suffering), "I do earnestly remember him still." While now bending your head like a bulrush; your heart breaking with sorrow; remember that His pitying eye is upon you! Be it yours, even through blinding tears, to say "Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure!"

## **THE BLESSED HOPE**

"Looking for that blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13

What a bright rainbow for a stormed-wreathed sky! Hope is a joyous emotion! Poetry sings of it; music warbles its lofty aspirations; but alas! how often does it weave fantastic visions — and then vanish! "In the morning" the flowers of life are flourishing and growing up; "in the evening" a mysterious blight comes — and they lie as withered garlands at our feet! The longing dreams of the whole life seem realized — but one wave of calamity overtakes us, and washes them all away!

Nevertheless, there is one "blessed hope" beyond the possibility of blight or decay: "the hope of the glory of God," "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior!" If on earth, we long for the return of an absent friend or brother, separated from us for a season, by intervening oceans or continents; if we count the weeks or months until we welcome him back again to the parental home — then how should the Christian long for the return of the Brother of brothers, the Friend of friends: "I will come again," is His own gracious promise, "To receive you unto Myself!"

Oh happy day! when He shall be "glorified in His saints;" when His people will suffer no more — and sin no more! No more couches of sickness, or aching hearts, or fevered brows! No more opened graves, or bitter tears! And, better than all — no more estrangements and traitorous unholy hearts! It will be the bridal day of the soul. The body slumbering in the dust — will be reunited, as a glorified body to a redeemed spirit.

The grave shall be forever spoiled; death swallowed up in eternal victory.  
"So shall we be forever with the Lord."

Reader, do you "love His appearing?" Are you waiting with the eager expectant attitude of those who are "looking for, and hastening unto the coming of God." "Yet a little while, and He who shall come — will come!" If you are a child of the covenant, having conscious filial nearness to the Throne of Grace — then you need not dread the Throne of Glory! True, He is the "great and awesome God," but He is "our Savior." It is our "Kinsman Redeemer" who is ordained to "judge the world in righteousness." Yes! turn your eye oftener towards this bright Rainbow of promise, spanning a glorious future; for remember, it is "to those who look for Him," that He shall "appear the second time without sin unto salvation!"

## **A GRACIOUS REMOVAL**

"The righteous is taken away from the evil to come. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death." Isaiah 57:1-2

How this thought reconciles to earth's saddest separations! The early (what we are apt to think the too early) graves of our "loved and lost" have saved them from much sorrow, much suffering, much sin! Who can tell what may have been brooding in a dark horizon? The fairest vessel; the life freighted with the greatest promise — might have been made shipwreck on this world's treacherous sea! My God knows what is best! If He plucked His lily soon — it was to save it some rough blast! If He early folded His lamb — it was to save it having its fleece soiled with earthly corruption! If the port of glory was soon entered — it was because He foresaw the threatening tempests that was screened from our limited vision; "So He brought them to the haven where they would be!"

Yes! the quiet haven! The storms of life are over! That shore is undisturbed by one murmuring wave. "Those who walk uprightly enter into peace" — the rest which remains for the people of God! Did the redeemed dead, at the hour of their departure, sink into blank oblivion;

inherit everlasting silence — then sad indeed would be the pangs of separation. But, "weep not, she is not dead — but sleeps!" Yes! weep not! She is not dead — but lives! At the very moment earth's tears are falling — the spirit is sunning in the realms of everlasting day, safely housed, safely home! The body rests in its bed of death. The grave — is its couch of repose! We bid it the long 'good night' in the joyful expectancy of a glorious reunion at the waking time of immortality; the "morning without clouds," whose sun shall never set!

Child of sorrow! mourning over the withdrawal of some beloved object of earthly affection. Dry your tears! An early death — has been an early crown! The tie sundered here — links you to the throne of God. You have a brother, a sister, a loved one — in Heaven! You are the relative of a redeemed saint! We are proud when we hear of our friends being "advanced" in this world. What are the world's noblest promotions, in comparison with that of the believer at death, when he graduates from grace — to glory? When he exchanges the pilgrim warfare — for eternal rest?

Often, in your hours of sadness, contrast the certainty of their present bliss — with the possibilities of them remaining in a suffering, sorrowing, sinning world. Contrast the eternal joys in their possession — with the evils which might have been theirs in life. You may now, like the Shunnamite of old, be gazing with tearful eye on some withered blossom — but when the question is put, "Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?" in the elevating confidence that they have entered into eternal peace — be it yours joyfully to answer, "It is well!"

## **UNVEILED MYSTERIES**

"You do not realize now what I am now doing — but afterwards you will understand." John 13:7

Much is baffling and perplexing to us in God's present dealings. "What!" we are often ready to exclaim, "Could not the cup have been less bitter! Could not the trial less severe! Could not the road less dreary?" "Hush



your misgivings!" says a gracious God; "Do not arraign the rectitude of My dispensations. You shall yet see all revealed and made bright — in the mirror of eternity!"

"What I am now doing." Yes — it is all My doing, My appointment. You have partial view of these dealings; they are seen by the eye of sense, through a dim and distorted medium. You can see nothing but plans crossed, and gourds laid low, and "beautiful rods" broken! But I see the end — from the beginning. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth, do what is right?"

"Afterwards you will understand!" Wait for the "later" revelation! An earthly father does not puzzle the ear of infancy with hard sayings and involved problems. He waits for their adulthood — and then unfolds all. So it is with God! We are now in our infancy — children lisping in earthly infancy a knowledge of His ways. We shall learn the "deep things of God" in the adulthood of eternity! Christ now often shows Himself only "behind the lattice," only a glimpse — and He is gone! But the day is coming when we shall "see Him as He is!" when every dark hieroglyphic in the Scroll of Providence will be interpreted and expounded!

It is unfair to criticize the half-finished picture; to censure or condemn the half-developed plan. God's plans, are here in embryo. "We see," says Rutherford, "the broken links in the chain of His providence. Let the Molder work His own clay into whatever form He pleases." But a flood of light will break upon us from the sapphire throne; "In Your light, O God! we shall see light." The "need be," muffled as a secret now — will be confided to us then, and become luminous with divine love.

Perhaps we may not have to wait until eternity, for the realization of this promise. We may experience its fulfillment here. We not infrequently find, even in this present world, mysterious dispensations issuing in unlooked for blessings. Jacob would never have seen Joseph — had he not parted with Benjamin. Often the believer never would have seen the true Joseph — had he not been called on to part with his best beloved! His language at the time is that of the patriarch "I am indeed bereaved! All these things are against me!" But the things he imagined to be so adverse — have proved the means of leading him to see the heavenly king

"in His beauty" before he dies. God sends much to "humble us and to prove us." It may not do us good now — but it is promised to do so "at our latter end."

I shall not dictate to my God — what His way with me should be. The patient does not dictate to the physician. He does not reject and refuse the prescription, because it is nauseous; he knows it is for his good — and takes it on trust. It is for faith to repose in whatever God appoints. Let me not wrong His love or dishonor His faithfulness, by supposing that there is one needless or nonessential bitter drop in the cup which His loving wisdom has mingled! "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known!"

## THE CHOOSING PLACE

"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10

The Furnace of Affliction? Yes! It is God's meeting place with His people. "I have chosen you," says He, "in the furnace of affliction. I will keep you there, until the purifying process is complete; and if need be, in a 'chariot of fire' I will carry you home to Heaven!"

Some fires are for destruction — but this fire is for purification. He, the Refiner, is sitting by the furnace regulating the flames, tempering the heat; not the least filing of the gold — but what is precious to Him! The bush is burning with fire — but He is in the middle of it — a living God in a bush; a living Savior in the furnace!

And has this not been the method of His dealing with His faithful people in every age. First, trial — then blessing. First, difficulties — then deliverances. First Egyptian plagues; darkness, brick kilns, the Red Sea, forty years of desert privations — then Canaan! First, the burning fiery furnace — then the vision of "one like the Son of God!" Or, as with Elijah on Carmel, the answer is first by fire — and then by rain. First, the fiery trial — then the gentle descent of the Spirit's influences, coming down like "rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth."

Believer! be it yours to ask, "Are my trials sanctified? Are they making me holier, purer, better, more meek, more gentle, more heavenly minded, more Savior like?" Seek to "glorify God in the fires."

Patience is a grace which the angels cannot manifest. It is a flower of earth; it does not bloom in the heavenly Paradise; it requires tribulation for its exercise; it is nurtured only amid wind, and hail, and storm. By patient, uncomplaining submission, remember that you — a poor sinner, can thus magnify God, in a way that the loftiest angelic natures cannot! He is taking you to the inner chambers of His covenant faithfulness. His design is to purge away your dross — to bring you forth from the furnace reflecting His own image, and fitted for glory! Those intended for great

usefulness, are much in the refining pot. "His children," says Romaine, "have found suffering times, to be happy times. They never have such nearness to their Father, such holy freedom with Him, and such heavenly refreshment with Him — as when in the furnace!" Beloved! "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. . . but rejoice!"

## **MOURNING ENDED**

"The days of your mourning shall be ended." Isaiah 60:20

The believer has "mourning days." The place of his earthly sojourn is a valley of tears. Adam went weeping from his paradise — and we go weeping on the way to ours! But, pilgrim of grief, your tears are divinely numbered. A few more aching sighs; a few more gloomy clouds — and the eternal sun shall burst on you, whose radiance shall never more be obscured! Present life may be to you one long "Valley of Baca" —one protracted "valley of weeping!" But soon shall you hear the herald chimes wafted from the towers of the new Jerusalem, "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" "The Lord God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces!"

"The days of your mourning!" It is a consoling thought that all these days are divinely appointed; meted out; numbered. "Unto you it is given," says the apostle, "to suffer!" Yes! and if you are a child of the covenant, your mourning days — are days of special privilege, intended to be fraught with blessing. To the unbeliever — they are pledges of everlasting woe; but to the believer — they are preludes and heralds of eternal glory! Affliction to the one — is the cloud without the Rainbow; to the other, it is the cloud radiant and lustrous with gospel promise and gospel hope!

Reader! are you now one of the many members of the family of sorrow? Be comforted! Soon the long night-watch will be over; pain, sickness, weakness, weariness will soon be at an eternal end! Soon the windows of the soul will be no more darkened. Soon you shall have nothing more to be delivered from — your present losses and crosses will turn into eternal gains, the dews of the night weeping (nature's tear-drops) will come to sparkle like beautiful gems in the morning of immortality! Soon the

Master's footsteps will be heard, saying, "The days of your mourning are ended!" And you shall take off your sackcloth, and be girded with eternal joy and gladness.

Up to that moment, your life may have been one long DAY of mourning! But once past the golden portals — and the eye can be no more be dimmed with tears; the very fountain of weeping will be dried! The period of your mourning — is counted by DAYS. But the time of your rejoicing — is reckoned by ERAS and AGES! "Why then, are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!" I will gaze through my tears — on this celestial rainbow, and sing this "song in the night," which the God, Who is to wipe my tears away, has put into my lips: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer — because the previous things have passed away!"

## **THE ABIDING FRIEND**

"He Himself has said: I will never leave you — nor forsake you!" Hebrews 13:5

No human friend can say so! The closest and dearest of earthly links may be broken; yes! have been broken. Distance may part, time estrange, and the grave separate. Loving earthly looks may only greet you now — in mute smiles from the portrait on the wall.

But here is an unfainting, unvarying, unailing Friend! Sorrowing one! amid the wreck of earthly joys which you may be even bewailing, here is a message sent from your God, "I will never leave you — nor forsake you!" Your gourd has withered — but He who gave it to you remains! Surrender yourself to His disposal. He wishes to show you His present sufficiency for your happiness. As often your heart in silence and sadness weaves its plaintive lament, "Joseph is dead, and Simeon is dead!" think of Him who has promised to set "the solitary in families" and to "give unto them a name and a place better than of sons or of daughters!"

Alone! you are not alone! Turn in self-oblivion unto Jesus. It is not, it cannot be "night;" if He, "the Sun of your soul," is ever near! In the morning He comes, with the earliest beam which visits your chamber. When the curtains of night close around you, He, to whom "the darkness and the light are both alike," is at your side! In the stillness of night, when in your wakeful moments, the visions of the departed flit before you like shadows on the wall — He, the sleepless Shepherd of Israel, is tending your couch, and whispering in your ear, "Do not be afraid — for I Myself am with you!"

Your experience may be that of Paul, "All have forsaken me!" But, like him, also, you will doubtless, be able to add in the extremity of your sorrow, "Nevertheless, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me!" He can compensate, by His own loving presence — for every earthly loss. Without the consciousness of His friendship and love — the smallest trial will crush you. With Him in your trial, supporting and sustaining you under it (yes, coming in the place of those you mourn) — you will have an infinite and inexhaustible portion — in the place of a finite and mutable one!

Many a cloud is there without a Rainbow in Nature — but never in Grace. Every sorrow has its corresponding and counterpart comfort. "In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart — Your comforts have refreshed my soul." If in the midnight of your grief your earthly sun appears to have set forever — an inner, but not less real sunshine — lights up your stricken heart. The stream of life may have been poisoned at its source — but blessed be His name — if it has driven you to say, "All my springs are in YOU!" "The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore will I hope in Him!"

## **UNWILLING DISCIPLINE**

"For He does not afflict willingly — nor grieve the children of men."

Lamentations 3:33

In our seasons of trial, when under some inscrutable dispensation, how apt is the murmuring thought to rise in our hearts: "All these things are against me!" Might not this overwhelming blow have been spared? Might

not this dark cloud which has shadowed my heart and my home with sadness, have been averted? Might not the accompaniments of my trial have been less severe? "Surely the Lord has forgotten to be gracious!"

No! These afflictions are errands of mercy in disguise! "He does not afflict willingly!" Though inscrutable to you — there is nothing capricious or arbitrary about your God's dealings. Unutterable tenderness is the character of all His allotments! The world may wound by unkindness; trusted friends may become disloyal; a brother may speak with unnecessary harshness and severity; but the Lord is "abundant in goodness and in truth." He appoints no needless pang. When He appears like Joseph to "speak roughly," there are gentle undertones of love. The stern accents are assumed, because He has precious lessons that could not otherwise have been taught!

Ah! be assured, that there is some deep necessity in all that He does. In our calendars of sorrow, we may put this luminous mark against every trying hour, "It was needed!" Some unfruitful branch in the tree required pruning. Some wheat required to be cast overboard, to lighten the ship and avert further disaster.

Mourning one! He might have dealt far otherwise with you! He might have cut you down as a fruitless, worthless cumberer! He might have abandoned you to drift disowned and unpiloted on the rocks of destruction! Joined to your idols — He might have "left you alone" to settle on your lees, and forfeit your eternal bliss! But He loved you better. It was divine kindness, which blighted your fairest blossoms — and hedged up your way with thorns! "Without this hedge of thorns," says Baxter, "on the right hand and on the left — we would hardly be able to keep on the way to Heaven!"

We, in our blind unbelief, may speak of trials which we imagine might have been spared; or chastisements that are unnecessarily severe. But the day is coming when every step of the Lord's mysterious dealings with us will be vindicated; when we shall own and recognize each separate experience of sorrow — to have been an unspeakably precious and important period in the history of the soul.

Yes! child of God. The messenger of affliction has an olive-branch in one hand — a love-token plucked from the bowers of paradise! And in the other — a chalice mingled by One too loving and gracious to insert one needless ingredient of sorrow! Remember, every drop of wrath in your cup — was exhausted by your surety-Savior. In taking it into your hand, be it yours to extract support and consolation from what so mightily sustained a greater Sufferer in a more awful hour, "This cup which YOU give me to drink — shall I not drink it?"

## **DEATH VANQUISHED**

"I am He who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hell and of death!" Revelation 1:18

An enthroned Savior speaks! "I am the LIVING One! Others have passed away — but I ever live, and ever love! I am now living — a personal Savior! Are you stooping over some treasured house of clay which the whirlwind has made a mass of ruins? I Myself roused the whirlwind from its chamber! I Myself appointed the startling dispensation. I Myself ordered the shroud, and prepared the grave! Do not let 'accident,' 'chance,' or 'fate,' enter into the vocabulary of your sorrow. I am the Lord of death — as well as of life. I have the keys of 'Hell and of death' suspended at My belt. The tomb is never unlocked — but by Me. Let others talk of the might of the King of Terrors — he has no might, but by My permission!"

More than this, mourning one! "I was DEAD. I Myself once entered that gloomy portico! I sanctified and consecrated it by My presence! I was a tenant of the tomb. This now glorified body — was once laid by human hands in a borrowed grave!"

Can you dread to walk the dark Valley which was trodden by your Lord — to encounter the 'last enemy,' which He fought and conquered. Death! It has been converted by Him — into a "parenthesis in endless life."

"I am He who was DEAD;" "I Am He who lives." What more could the Christian desire — than this twofold assurance? On the Day of Atonement



of old, the blood was sprinkled alike on the mercy seat; the voice of blood arose from the floor below, and the mercy seat above. So it is with the voice of our Elder Brother's blood. It cried first from earth beneath — and now from Heaven. His dying love, is now as ever — living, imperishable and immutable as His own being!

As the Rainbow in the material skies can never cease to appear so long as the present laws of nature continue, and there is a sun in the heavens; so the Rainbow of the Everlasting Covenant and all its blessings can only fail when Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, ceases to shine and ceases to be! With such a Rainbow over-arching the future, one limb resting amid the cloud-lands of life — and the other melting its hues into the deeper shadows of the Valley of Death — say, "I will fear no evil, for You, O SAVIOR GOD, are with me, Your rod and Your staff comfort me."

## **THE GREATEST GIFT**

"He who spared not His own Son — but delivered him up for us all; how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32

These are amazing words! God — the Infinite God — identifying Himself (so to speak) with the experiences of human sorrow; silencing every murmur with the unanswerable argument, "I spared not My own Son. I gave My greatest gift for you! Will you not cheerfully surrender your best to Me? Can you refuse to trust Me in lesser things — after this unspeakable gift of My love? My greater gift is surely be a pledge for My bestowment of all needed subordinate good!"

He promised to give "all things" — and these "all things" are in His hand. They will be selected and allotted by His loving wisdom: crosses — as well as comforts; sorrows and tears — as well as smiles and joys. Mourning one, this very trial which now dims your eye, is one of these "all things." Trust His faithfulness. He would as soon wound the Son of His love — as wound you!

"Will not God, who gave us His beloved Son — also give us all lesser things?" There is a "blessed impossibility," after the bestowment of the

Gift of Gifts, that He will inflict one unnecessary trial, or withhold one needed benefit! Think of His love when He offered His beloved Isaac on the cruel altar. It is the same at this hour, infinite and immutable. Yes! We may well be reconciled, even to the denial of any earthly blessedness, because all is ordered by Him who gave Jesus to die for us! Lying meekly in the arms of His mercy, be it ours to say in filial confidence, "Lord, anything with Your love; anything but Your frown!"

"All things." The whole range of human needs and necessities is known to Him. The care He invites me to cast upon Him — is "all my care"; the need "all my need!" This is His own special promise. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." He will give me nothing, and deny me nothing — but what is for my good! Let me not question the appointments of infinite wisdom. Let me not wound Him by one dishonoring doubt. Let me lean upon Him, in little things — as well as in great things. After the pledge of His love in Jesus, nothing can come wrong — which comes from His hands! If tempted at times to harbor some unkind misgivings, let the sight of the cross dispel it. Looking to the Rainbow in the cloud gleaming with the words, "He loved me — and gave Himself for me!" be it mine to say:

Lord, though You bend my spirit low,  
Love only will I see;  
The very hand that strikes the blow,  
Was wounded once for me!

## **SLEEPING AND WAKING**

"God will bring with Jesus — those who have fallen asleep in Him." 1  
Thessalonians 4:14

Or, as these words have been rendered: "Those who are laid asleep in Jesus." We bid an earthly friend "Good night" in the pleasing expectation of meeting next morning. The saints are "laid asleep" in the grave of Jesus, in the sure and certain hope of meeting Him in the morning of immortality!

Child of God! weep not for those who have "departed to be with Christ." It is with them "far better." Do not think of them "gone." That is a word taken from the vocabulary of death, and which, it is to be feared, is often employed with many in the heathen sense of annihilation. Seek not "the living among the dead." Think rather that their last sigh was scarcely over on earth — when their song was begun in Heaven! The Spirit winged its arrow-like flight among ministering seraphim. Hear that voice stealing down in the soft whisper of Heaven's music, and saying, "if you loved Me you would rejoice, because I said, I go to My Father!"

The body, the casket of this immortal jewel — the soul, is left for a season to the dishonors of the tomb. But it is only for a brief "night-watch." That dust is precious, because redeemed. Body as well as soul was purchased by the life-blood of Emmanuel. Angels guard these slumbering ashes; and the day is coming when God shall "send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other." Oh, if there is "joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents," then what shall be the joy of those blessed beings over the myriads of rising dead, hastening at their summons to their crowns and thrones!

Christian mourner! "Your brother shall rise again!" Do not wish him back amid the storms of this earthly wilderness. Be thankful rather that God's wheat is no longer out in the tempest and rain; but safely garnered, eternally housed. Would you, if you could — weep that blessed one back from glory? Would you ask him to unlearn Heaven's language — and be once more involved in the dust of battle? No! rather "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Death is not an eternal sleep. "Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." Jesus is now whispering in your ear the glorious secret hidden from ages and generations, and which was left to Him, as "the Abolisher of Death," to disclose: "Your dead shall live! Together with My dead body — they shall arise." He is pointing you onward to that hour of jubilee, when the summons shall be addressed to all His sleeping saints: "Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust!"

Oh happy day! when I shall see my Savior God in all the glories of His

exalted Humanity; and with Him, the once "loved and lost," now the loved and glorified — never to be lost again! "The Lord my God shall come — and all the saints with Him." Not one shall be lacking. In concert with those whose tongues are now silent on earth, we shall then unite in the lofty anthem, sung by the ingathered triumphant Church, "O death, where is your sting! O grave, where is your victory! Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ!"

## **INVISIBLE HARMONIES**

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

We are apt to "limit the Holy One of Israel," and to say "Some things have worked together for our good." God says, "All things!" Joys, sorrows, crosses, prosperity, health, sickness; the gourd bestowed — and the gourd withered; the cup full — and the cup emptied; the lingering sick-bed — and the early grave! Often, indeed, would sight and sense lead us to doubt the reality of the promise. We can see, in many things, scarcely a dim reflection of His love.

Useful lives taken; blossoms permanently plucked; spiritual props removed; benevolent schemes blown up. But the apostle does not say "We see," but "We know." It is the province of faith to trust God in the dark! The undiscerning cannot understand or explain the revolutions and dependencies of the varied wheels in a complicated machine; but they have confidence in the wisdom of the Engineer, that all is designed to "work out" some great useful end. Be it ours to write over the mysterious dealing, "This also comes from the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Let us "be still — and know that He is God."

"We have a wonderful advertisement of a Physician, from the Spirit of Truth," says one, "who heals all your diseases. He requires but one thing, to take all that He has prescribed — the bitter as well as sweet!" He will yet vindicate His own rectitude and faithfulness in our trials; our own souls will be made better for them; He Himself will be glorified in them.

"Do not doubt My love," He seems to say, "the day is coming when you shall have all mysteries explained, all secrets unraveled, and this very trial demonstrated to be one of the 'all things' working together for your good. Men do not see the bright light in the clouds, "but it shall come to pass — that at EVENING TIME it shall be light!"

## THE UNCHANGING NAME

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" Hebrews 13:8

All is changing here on earth. Life is a kaleidoscope, made of shifting forms; new scenes, new tastes, new feelings, new associations; and alternation of cloud and sunshine, tempest and calm. Its joys are like the airy bubbles on the stream — tinted with sunlight; we touch them — and they are gone! We have to tell of vacant seats in our sanctuaries; vacant seats at our home-hearths; the music of well known voices hushed. Often just when we imagine we have at last obtained a stable footing — the scaffolding gives way — the props on which for a lifetime we had been leaning fails — and we feel ourselves out amid the pitiless storm!

But is there nothing stable amid all this mutability? Is there nothing secure and abiding amid these fleeting shadows? Yes! Jesus is without any variableness. Nineteen hundred years have rolled by since He left our world. The world has changed — but He is to this hour the same. We can follow Him through all His wondrous pilgrimage of love on earth. We can behold Penitence crouching at His feet — and sent away forgiven. We behold Sorrow tracking His footsteps with tears — and sent away with her tears dried and her wounded spirit healed. We behold Pain and Sickness pleading with pallid lip and wasted feature; and Disease, at His omnipotent mandate, taking wings to itself and fleeing away! And He who is now on the heavenly throne — is "that same Jesus." His ascension glories have not altered His changeless heart, or alienated His affections. In Him we have a Rock which the billows of adversity cannot shake. The spent fury of the chafing waves may reach us; and this only endearing the security and value of the abiding Refuge!

How often does God rouse the storm — to drive us from all creature

confidences, to the stable One! How often does He poison and pollute the shallow stream — to lead us to seek the everlasting Fountainhead! "We may have lost much; but if we have found You, O blessed Jesus — we possess infinitely more than we have forfeited! We can glory in the persuasion that nothing can ever separate us from Your love."

A look may alienate us from our best earthly friends; an unintentional word may estrange; the grave must sunder. But "the Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." What You have been "yesterday" yes, from everlasting ages — You are to this day, and You shall be forever and ever! We can look to the rainbow of Your promises and behold all of them in You, "yes and amen!" You are addressing us from Your throne in glory; that throne spoken of in Revelation as encircled with "the rainbow of emerald" (the emblem of perpetuity), and saying, "Do not be afraid, I am He who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive forever more!" "Because I live — you shall live also!"

## **STRENGTH FOR THE DAY**

"As your days — so shall your strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25

Believer! have you not felt it so? Have you not found plants distilling precious balm, growing beside sorrow's path? Or supports granted, which were undreamed of until the dreaded cloud had burst, and the day of trial had come? Do not trouble yourself regarding an unknown and veiled future; but cast all your cares on God. "Our sandals," says a saint now in glory, "are a guard against the roughest path." He whose name is "the God of all grace" is better than His word. He will be found equal to all the emergencies of His people; enough for each moment and each hour — as they come. He never takes us to the bitter Marah streams — but He reveals also the hidden branch. Paul returned from the third heaven to endure the smarting of the "thorn," but he exulted in the sustaining grace of an "all-sufficient God."

The beautiful peculiarity in this promise is, that God proportions His grace — to the nature and season of the trial. He does not give an

'advance supply of grace' — but when the needed season and exigency comes, then the appropriate strength and support are imparted. He does not send the rainbow before the cloud — but when the cloud appears — then the rainbow is seen in it! He gives sustaining grace — for a trying day; and dying grace — for a dying day.

Reader! do not morbidly brood on the future. Live on the promise! When tomorrow comes with its trials — then Jesus will come with tomorrow and with its trials too. Present grace is enough for present necessity. Trust God for the future. We honor Him, not by anticipating trial — but by confiding in His faithfulness, and crediting His assurances, that no temptation will He send greater than we are able to bear. Even if you should see fresh storm-clouds returning after the rain, be ready to say, "I will fear no evil — for You are with me!"

You are of yourself, insufficient for any trial — but "your sufficiency is of God." The promise is not "your grace," but "My grace is sufficient." Oh, trust His all-sufficiency in all things. Jehovah-Jireh, "the Lord will provide!" See written over every trying hour of the future: "As your days — so shall your strength be."

## **THE GRAVE ROBBED**

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death! O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction!" Hosea 13:14

Christian! the grave is lit with Emmanuel's love. The darkest of all clouds, that which rests over the land of death — has the brightest rainbow in it. These gloomy portals are not to hold your loved and lost ones forever. The land of forgetfulness, where your buried treasures lie — is not a winter of unbroken darkness and desolation. A glorious spring-time of revival is promised, when the mortal shall put on immortality, and the corruptible shall be clothed with incorruption.

The resurrection of the body! It is the climax of the work of Jesus; its culminating glory. Paul represents a longing Church as "waiting for the

adoption, the redemption of the body." It was the preeminent theme of his preaching; "He preached unto them, Jesus and the resurrection." It was the beloved article in his creed, which engrossed his holiest aspirations, "If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." It was the grand solace, which he addressed to other mourners. It is not when speaking of the immediate bliss of the departed spirit at the hour of death — but it is when dwelling on the "last trumpet;" the dead "rising incorruptible," and "caught up," in their resurrection bodies, "to meet the Lord," that he says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words!"

Blessed day; the dawn of the Resurrection morn! the Jubilee of a triumphant Church! Christian mourner! Do not go to the grave, to weep there. Every particle of that moldering dust is redeemed by the oblation of Calvary; and the great Abolisher of death is only awaiting the ingathering of the elect — to give the commission to His archangels regarding all His saints, which He gave of old regarding one, "Loose him — and let him go!"

Who can paint the glory of these resurrection bodies, reunited to their companion spirits, fashioned like their Lord's ascended body? Every sense, every faculty, purified, glorified, overflowing with holiness; bursting with ardor in His service; eager to execute His will; retaining it may be, the personal identities of earth, the old features worn in the "nether valley." The Lamb, in the midst of the throne, "leading" them and "feeding" them; climbing along with them, steep by steep, in the path of life, and saying at each ascending step in the endless progression, "I will show you greater things than these!" Meanwhile He has Himself risen as the pledge of this resurrection of all His people. The Great Sheaf has been waved before the throne — as the Pledge of the mighty harvest. "Christ the First Fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming." "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection!"

## **EVERLASTING LOVE**

"I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3



Believer! are you now tempted to doubt His love? Are His footsteps lost amid the night shadows through which He is now conducting you? Remember He had His eye upon you before the birth of time; yes, from all eternity! What appears to you now some sudden capricious exercise of His power or sovereignty, is determination and decree of "everlasting love." "I have loved you," He seems to say, "suffering one, into this affliction; I will love you through it; and when My designs regarding you are complete, I will show you that all was done in love to you."

Child of God, if there is a ripple now agitating the surface of the stream, trace it up to this fountain-head of love. God is faithful. He cannot deny Himself. If some dark clouds are now intercepting those gracious beams, He must have some wise end to subserve. "For a brief moment I abandoned you — but with great compassion I will bring you back. In a moment of anger I turned My face away for a little while. But with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer. "Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again let a flood cover the earth and destroy its life — so now I swear that I will never again pour out My anger on you. For the mountains may depart and the hills disappear — but even then I will remain loyal to you. My covenant of blessing will never be broken," says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

God sets His rainbow in the dark sky; and as if it were not enough that His people should look upon it and take comfort in its many and varied promises; He Himself graciously becomes a party in gazing on the covenant pledge, "And the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I shall look upon it — that I may remember the everlasting covenant!" He puts Himself (so to speak) in mind of His own everlasting love! In His saint's dark and cloudy day, when they imagine that their eyes are alone resting on the tokens of covenant faithfulness, the Eye of a covenant keeping God is resting upon them too. "I will look upon My own promises," He seems to say. "They shall be memorials to Myself of My purposes of unchanging mercy."

Nor is this love merely a general indiscriminate affection. The verse speaks of each individual member of the Covenant family, "I have loved you!" "O my Father," says one, "it seems to me sometimes as if You did

forget every other being — in order to think only of my faithless and ungrateful heart."

Let us seek to view our trials as so many cords of loving-kindness, by which our God is seeking to draw us — yes, and will draw us nearer Himself. Who knows what mercy may be bound up in what may seem to us dark and mysterious dispensations? We are apt to misname and misinterpret His ways. We call His dealings severe trials. He calls them "loving-kindness." Drooping saint! let your eyes rest on the rainbow over-arching the throne of God, spanning from eternity to eternity; and read for your comfort the gracious declaration, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him."

## **INVIOLEABLE ATTACHMENT**

"There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother." Proverbs 18:24

Close is the tie which binds brother to brother; the companions of infancy, sharers of one another's joys and sorrows; cast in the same human mold; having engraved on their heart of hearts, the same hallowed associations of life's early morning.

But the time for separation at last comes. The birds must leave the parent's nest, and test their pinions beyond their native valley. The world's call to work and warfare is imperious. The old homestead, like a dismembered vessel, is broken to pieces; and the inhabitants, like the vessel's planks, are strewn far apart on life's ocean. The world's duties sever some ties; unhappy estrangements at times may sever others; but death at some time, must sever all.

But there is One whose friendship and love — circumstances cannot estrange, distance cannot affect, and death cannot destroy. The kindest of earth's relatives may say to us regarding this true Elder Brother, as Boaz said to Ruth, "It is true that I am your near kinsman, however there is a kinsman nearer than I." He is Brother, yes more than a Brother — He is a Friend, Counselor, Portion, Physician, Shepherd — all combined! Happy for us, when the old avenues of comfort are closed up — to hear Him,

whose faithfulness is unimpeachable, saying, "I will never fail you, nor ever forsake you!" Happy for us when the old moorings give way, to have one safe Anchorage, that cannot be removed or shaken. "I shall now go to sleep," said a remarkable saint, who, driven about with storm and tempest, at last found the safe Shelter, "I shall now go to sleep on the Rock of Ages!"

Tried believer! He has never failed you — and He never will. With Him are no altered tones, no fitful affections. The reed may be shaken — but the Rock remains immutable. He is Himself the true "rainbow in the cloud." The promises of Scripture, like the varied hues in the natural rainbow, are manifold. But all these promises are "In Him." Yes, and it is in the "cloudy day" that this Divine encircling rainbow most gloriously appears. Never would we have known Christ as the "Brother, born for adversity," unless by adversity. It is trial which unfolds and develops His infinite worth and preciousness.

When the love of earthly friends is buried in the grave — then the love of the heavenly Friend shines forth more tenderly than ever. As Jonathan of old, wandering faint and weary in the woods, found honey distilling from a tree and was revived by eating it; so, faint and weary one; wandering among the tangled thickets, the deep glades of affliction, seat yourself under your "Beloved's Shadow with great delight," and let His "fruit be pleasant to your taste!"

This "Tree of Life" distills a balm for every broken, wounded, bleeding heart; every faint and downcast spirit. Yes, Jesus will make, in this the hour of your loneliness and sorrow, His own life-giving, life-sustaining words and promises, "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Though now exalted on the throne, "inhabiting the praises of eternity," He still manifests the Brother's heart and the Brother's tenderness. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

## **THE SUPPORTING PRESENCE**

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters — I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers — they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fires — you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

What a diversity of afflictions in this trial world! 'Waters,' 'rivers,' 'fires,' 'flames!' The Christian is here forewarned that he will encounter these in some one of their innumerable phases; whether it be loss of health, loss of wealth, loss of friends, baffled schemes, or blighted hopes.

But, blessed thought; these trials have their limits. The floods will not "overflow," the fires will not "burn," the flames will not "consume." God will "stay His rough wind — in the day of His East wind." He will say, "Thus far shall you go — and no farther." And, better still, Jesus will be in all these trials, and prove sufficient for them all. We shall hear in the midst "of the great fight of afflictions" the sound of our Master's footsteps. He Himself has passed through these flames, braved these floods, and bowed His guiltless head to these storms. He comes to us as He did to His disciples in the very midst of the tempest, and says, "Fear not, it is I — do not be afraid!"

Believer! what is your experience? Is it not that of the triumphant Israelites? "They went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in Him" "The Flood!" the very scene of your trial, you were able to march boldly through it, unafraid of the threatening waves; yes, with your lips vocal with praise! Whence this moral heroism, this strange "rejoicing?" It was because the God of the Pillar-cloud was at your side. Your rejoicing was "in Him." He made you "more than conqueror." You may have many adversaries ranged against you: "Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword." But there is ONE in the midst of fires and flames and floods, who is mightier than all; and with Him at your side — you can boldly utter the challenge to the heights above and the depths beneath, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" "Oh, Sirs!" says Thomas Brooks, "there is in a crucified Jesus something proportionable to all the difficulties, needs, necessities, and trials of His poor people."

## FELLOW-FEELING

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are." Hebrews 4:15

What an elevating truth! The Sympathy of the God-Man-Mediator (the true Rainbow in the cloud), JESUS in our sorrows! What a source of exalted joy to the stripped and desolate heart! What a green pasture to lie down upon, amid the windy storm and tempest, or in the dark and cloudy day! The sympathy of man is cheering and comforting; but "thus far shall you go, and no farther." It is finite, limited — and often selfish. There are nameless and numberless sorrows on earth, beyond the reach of all human alleviation.

The sympathy of Jesus alone, is exalted, pure, infinite, removed from all taint of selfishness. He has Himself passed through every experience of woe. There are no depths of sorrow or anguish into which I can be plunged — but His everlasting arms are lower still. He has been called "The great sympathetic nerve of His Church, over which the afflictions, and oppressions, and sufferings of His people continually pass." Child of Sorrow! a human heart beats on the Throne! and He has your name written on that heart. He cares for you — as if none other claimed His regard. As the Great High Priest, He walks in the midst of His golden candlesticks, replenishing them, at times, with oil; trimming them, if need be; but all in order that they may burn with a steadier and purer luster.

He was "tempted in every way." Blessed assurance! I never can know the sorrow into which the "Man of Sorrows" cannot enter. Ah rather, in the midst of earth's most lacerating trials, let me listen to the unanswerable challenge from the lips of a suffering Savior, "Was there ever any sorrow — like unto My sorrow?" Yet He did not refuse to drink the cup of wrath! He did not shrink back from the appointed cross! "He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem;" and even when He hung upon the bitter tree, He refused the offer that would have assuaged the rage of thirst and mitigated physical suffering.

Are we tempted at times to murmur under God's afflicting hand? Think about all He endured when sinful people did such terrible things to Him — so that you do not become weary and give up. Shall we hesitate to bear any trial our Lord and Master sees fit to lay upon us — when we think of the infinitely weightier Cross He so meekly and uncomplainingly carried for us?

Afflicted one! Have your eye on this radiant Rainbow in your cloud of sorrow! You may, like the disciples on the Transfiguration mount, "fear to enter the cloud," but hear the Voice issuing from it, "This is My Beloved Son, hear Him." Jesus speaks through these clouds! He tells us that our cares — are His cares; our sorrows His sorrows. He has some wise and gracious end in every mysterious chastisement. His language is, "Hear the rod — and He who has appointed it." He has too kind and loving a heart — to cause us one needless or superfluous pang.

Oh that we may indeed hear the Voice out of the cloud, and seek that the trials He sends in love may be greatly sanctified. Let us not dream that affliction of itself — is a pathway to Heaven. Clouds do not form the material rainbow. These glorious hues come from the sunbeams alone. Without the latter, we could discern nothing but blackened heavens and dismal rain torrents. It is not because those clad in "white robes" had "come out of great tribulation" that they were enjoying the beatific Presence; but because they had "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." We only have reason to glory in affliction — when it has been the means of bringing us nearer the Savior, and leading us to the opened Fountain.

Jesus! my only hope You art,  
Strength of my failing flesh and heart;  
Oh! could I catch a smile from Thee,  
And drop into Eternity!

## **A SPEEDY COMING**

"Yet a little while, and he who shall come will come, and will not tarry."  
Hebrews 10:37

"A little while," and the unquiet dream of life will be over — and the "morning without clouds" shall dawn. A few more tossings on life's tempestuous sea — and the peaceful haven shall be entered. A few more night-watches — and the Lord of love will be seen standing on the heavenly shore, as once He did on the shores of an earthly lake, with an eternal banquet of love prepared for His "children."

Yes! "He comes!" that is the Church's "blessed hope." It is the voice and presence of her "Beloved" which will turn "the shadow of death into morning." The dead — the ransomed dead, shall "hear His voice and come forth;" those "asleep in Jesus" God is to "bring with Him." His final invitation is not, "Go, you blessed — to some bright paradise of angels prepared elsewhere for you;" but "Come share My bliss; be partakers in My crown," "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" Paul's heaven was described in two words: "With Christ!" John's heaven was made up of two elements: of likeness to Jesus, and fellowship with Jesus. "We shall be like Him," "we shall see Him as He is." In John's sublime apocalyptic visions, when "the door was opened in Heaven," the first object which attracts his arrested gaze is, "One who sat upon the throne" around whom was "a rainbow like unto an emerald."

Our happiness will not be complete until we are ushered into the full vision and fruition of Jesus. We are nourished in this far off land from "the King's country," but we shall not be satisfied until we see the King Himself! Jacob received full wagon loads from Joseph — but he could not rest until he had seen Joseph with his own eyes; when he did so, the aged man's spirit "revived." We receive manifold pledges of covenant mercy from the true Joseph, in this "house of our pilgrimage" but we long to "behold His face in righteousness." We shall only be "satisfied" when we "awake in His likeness!"

"Come! Lord Jesus, come quickly!" "He will not tarry!" Each sun, as it sets — is bringing us nearer to the joyful consummation. Time is hastening with gigantic footstep — to the eternal throne. The sackcloth attire of a now burdened creation will soon be exchanged for the full robe of light and beauty, which is to deck heavenly world.

Happy day! when "the Rainbow," in a nobler sense, "shall be seen in the

cloud;" not the Rainbow of Promise — but He in whom all the promises blend and center; "Behold, He comes with clouds!" Seek ever to be in an attitude of watchfulness. Like the mother of Sisera, let faith be straining its ear for the whir of the chariot wheels; that when the cry shall be heard; "Behold, it is He!" we may be able joyfully to respond, "Yes! this is our God, we have waited for Him!" "It will be good for those servants whose Master finds them watching when He comes."

## **ETERNAL JOY**

"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!" Isaiah 35:10

Believer! leave your "Rainbow in the cloud" behind you; and with your eye on the "Rainbow round about the throne," think of the glad return of God's ransomed ones to Zion — every tear drop dried, every pang forgotten!

Once wanderers "in the wilderness, in a solitary way," prisoners "bound with affliction and iron," mariners struggling in a tempest — mark the termination of their checkered history! God is not only represented as supporting their fainting souls, breaking to pieces their chains, and enabling them to buffet the angry surges; but He leads the pilgrims to "a city of habitation." He rescues the captives from "darkness and shadow of death." He brings the storm-tossed seamen to their "desired haven," and puts the "everlasting song" into the lips of all! "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Sorrowing one! tossed on life's stormy sea, soon will that peaceful haven be yours! From the sunlit shores of glory, each and all of your trials will be seen to be special proofs of your heavenly Father's faithfulness, circled with a halo of love! You may now be going forth "weeping," bearing your precious seed — but you shall "doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you."



As some seeds require to be soaked in water before they germinate, so is immortal seed often here soaked in tears. But, "those who sow in tears — shall reap in joy." Though "weeping may endure for the night — joy comes in the morning!" "You are," says Rutherford, "upon the entry of Heaven's harvest; the losses that I write of are but summer showers, and The Sun of the new Jerusalem shall quickly dry them up!" The "song of the night" shall then blend with the song of the skies, and inner, glorious meanings will be disclosed to sight, which are now hidden from the eye of faith!

"Sorrow and sighing shall forever flee away!" "No sickness, no sorrow, no pain," said an aged saint now entered on these glorious realities; "but this is only God's negative. What, O God! must be Your positive?" "Songs," "everlasting joy," "joy and gladness." It will be song upon song, joy upon joy, gladness upon gladness! These songs of Heaven will be "songs of degrees." The ransomed will be ever graduating in bliss, mounting "from glory to glory," each song suggesting the keynote of a louder and loftier one.

Reader! are you mourning the loss of those who "are not," the music of whose voices is hushed for the forever of time, and who have left you to travel companionless and alone, the wilderness journey? A few more fears, a few more tears — and you shall meet them in the day-break of glory! No, more; they have but preceded you to an earlier crown. If they have left you behind for a little season to continue your night-song; think with bounding heart of that eternal day, when, looking back on the clouds floating in the far distance in the nether valley, you shall be able to join in the anthem said to be sung by the twenty-four elders as they gaze on the throne encircled by the "RAINBOW OF EMERALD," for "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!"

# **GRAPES OF ESCHOL (Meditations on the Glories of Heaven)**

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## PREFACE

Numbers 13:23-27 — "Then they came to the *Valley of Eshcol*, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the men of Israel cut down there. And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.

Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. Then they told him, and said: *We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.*"

"But as it is written, *eye* has not seen, nor *ear* heard, neither has entered into the *heart* of man — the things which God has prepared for those who love Him!" — 1 Corinthians 2:9

Speculative discussion, attractive illustration, or the systematic treatment of a great theme — will not be found in these pages. They consist mainly of *simple meditations on the glories of the Eternal World!* They are fragmentary thoughts and reflections, written with special reference to the chamber of *sickness*, the couch of *suffering*, and the home of *bereavement*.

Nothing surely can so cheer the fainting believer, bowed down with sin and sorrow — as the prospect of Heavenly bliss. It is the thought of the *joy in the morning of immortality*, which dries earth's bitterest tears. The heart of the child leaps at the sight of his Father's house. The lights in the *distant windows* cannot fail to revive his spirit and quicken his footsteps.

The following are a few such *distant rays* from "the Excellent Glory;" a few GRAPES gathered by *Faith* and *Hope* — the *two spies* from the true Canaan; a few *Pisgah-glimpses* of its Vineyards and Olive-yards. *Glimpses*, indeed, they only are — at best partial and transient; for even the *mount of faith* is oftentimes wreathed with clouds and vapors, dimming to the brightest vision, its views of the future. But as *shadowy* and *indistinct* as at best they must be — they may yet help us the better to descend the Valley of Death, complete our warfare, and, finally, with our pilgrim-staff, "to pass over this Jordan." By revealing a distant view of our eternal and glorious *crown* — we may be enabled the more cheerfully to bear our transient earthly *cross*.

"The very hope we have of Heaven, works wonderful joy in the heart of a Christian. David did not live to see the glory of Solomon's temple — but he made *provision* for it, and cast the *model* of it, and he took much delight in the *contemplation of what it would be*. Here are some sparks, some beginnings of the Glory of Heaven, and of that great joy which we shall have hereafter." (Usher, 1638)

The *night-watch*, with some whose eyes may trace these pages, cannot now be long. Already the gray streaks of morning may be telling that they are "nearing sunrise." New strains of celestial music may be wafted from the half-opened portal — new voices from that far-off land heard saying, "Come up here!"

"Strangers and pilgrims" on the earth! let your thoughts be in Heaven! Let the gaps and cracks which trial, in its varied forms, may have made in the walls of your frail earthly tabernacle — only serve to let the *rays of the ineffable glory* shine more brightly through! May these *feeble foretastes* quicken your longings for the full and gladsome fruition!

There has been no attempt to link the chapters together by any train of consecutive thought. Each, purposely short, is independent of what precedes or follows. The reader may, moreover, find similar ideas or reflections more than once reappearing. But as the grand leading *characteristics of Heavenly happiness*, revealed in Scripture, are comparatively few, such repetition (in the case of a devotional series) was, to a certain extent, unavoidable; and by those who read for profit,

not for criticism, will be readily understood and forgiven.

## REST

"There remains a *rest* for the people of God." — Hebrews 4:9

How sweet the music of this first heavenly chime floating across the waters of death, from the towers of the new Jerusalem!

*Pilgrim*, faint under your long and arduous pilgrimage, hear it! *Rest!* *Soldier*, carrying still upon you the blood and dust of battle, hear it! *Rest!* *Voyager*, tossed on the waves of sin and sorrow, driven here and there on the world's heaving ocean of vicissitude, hear it! The haven is in sight! The very waves that are breaking on the shore seem to murmur, "So He gives His beloved *rest!*" It is the long-drawn sigh of existence at last answered. The toil and travail of *earth's protracted week* is at an end. The calm of its unbroken Sabbath is begun.

This Heavenly Rest will be a rest from SIN.

Sin is the great disturber of the moral universe. Joyful anticipation! Perfect and entire emancipation, not only from all temptation without — but from all *bias* to evil within. No latent *principle* of corruption — no depressing consciousness of *inherent* sin — no germinating seeds or roots of evil, that can develop themselves into fruit — no languid frames — no guilty fears and apprehensions — no sorrowful estrangements from that Love whose smile is Heaven. It is a rest from *Satan's deceitful wiles and insidious snares* — these no longer felt or feared. What more can be needed? It is a rest from sin — and a rest in God. As the needle in the compass, after many tremulous vibrations, at last settles in steady repose in the direction of its pole — so the redeemed spirit — all its tremblings,

and faintings, and fitful aberrations at an end — shall remain, with its refined energies, its ennobled powers, and purified aspirations, undeviatingly fixed and centered on Jehovah Himself. Its eternal motto will be, "*This is my rest forever!*"

Heaven will be a Rest from all DOUBT and ERROR.

Here on earth, how much there is of darkness and uncertainty! The *volume of the Divine Providence* is a mysterious volume. As the breath dims the window-pane in looking out on the fairest landscape, so the breath on the windows of sense and sight often obscures the glory of the moral landscape, causing us to exclaim, "Now we see through a glass darkly!" The material world around us, and the spiritual world within us — are full of enigmas which we cannot solve; much more may we expect marvels and mysteries in the *ways* and *dealings* of God, "deep judgments!" But *then* all will be cleared up. "In Your light — shall we see light." The *day* will then break — and the looming murky *shadows* shall forever flee away!

Doctrinal difficulties will be explained, apparent inconsistencies removed, withering doubts forever silenced. No more impeachments of the Divine veracity, or questionings of the Divine procedure. Looking down from the summit of the everlasting hills on the mazy windings of the earthly pilgrimage — every ransomed tongue will have the one confession, "He has done all things well!"

The Rest of Heaven — will be a rest from SORROW and SUFFERING.

This is a weeping world. Deny it who may; it has its smiles — but it has as often its tears. You who have the *full cup* of its joys — be thankful while it is yours; but carry it with a trembling hand. The head that is now planning its golden projects — may tomorrow be laid on the pillow of sickness, with the dim night-lamp its companion for weary months. The joyous circle, now uninvaded by the *King of Terrors*, may tomorrow be speaking of their "loved and lost." The towering fabric of *human happiness*, which is now rapidly being built — may, in the twinkling of an eye, become a mass of ruins!

But if "weeping endures for the night," "joy comes in the morning." Yet a little while, mourning believer — and you will shed your last tear, heave your last pang! Once enter that peaceful haven, and not one *wave* of trouble shall ever afterwards roll. The very *fountain* of your tears will be dried! Your remembrance of all the tribulations of the nether world, will be like the visions of some unquiet dream of an earthly night, which the gladsome sunshine of morning has dispelled, the confused memories of which, are all that remain. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever!"

Here on earth, our trials are needed. The angel has to come down "to trouble the waters," in order to make us sensible of His presence. It is when the pool is disturbed, that we see most of our God. But in Heaven, though the Great Angel will be ever present, there will be no more *waters* to trouble. It is "a sea of glass." The last ripple of the last murmuring billow will break upon the shores of Jordan, and "immediately" there will be "a great calm."

The Rest of Heaven — is a rest which REMAINS.

Nothing is permanent here on earth. The best of earthly joys are evanescent — like the bubble rising to the surface of the stream, which glitters for a moment in the sunshine in its rainbow-hues, and then is gone; the place that knew it — knowing it no more! But the rest above is eternal — no *foe* can invade it, no *storms* can disturb it. It is the rest of a final home, over the portals of which is written, "You shall go out no more!"

Reader, do not pitch your tabernacle here on earth! Yours life now is, or ought to be — a *pilgrim* or *nomad* life. The Christian is a nomad in the present probation state. He has no fixed abode. His dwelling is not constructed of stones or enduring material. The *tent* rope, and the canvas, and the wooden pins — all indicate "a pilgrim and stranger on the earth."

It is now a wilderness *rest* — and we must be content with wilderness *provision*. If you have many sources of earthly happiness, regard them



loosely. Let these shallow rills — only draw you nearer the Fountain-head; let these earthly gifts — only unite you closer to the Giver. "He gave them," says Richard Baxter, "to be *refreshments* in your journey; and would you dwell in your inn, and go no further?" Soon He Himself — your "exceeding joy" — will supersede them. The *rill* will be no longer needed — when you have the Great Source; neither the starlight — when you have the Sunlight; nor the creature-comforts-when you have the Infinite Presence!

"There remains a rest!" Listen to this, child of suffering and sorrow! You who are beaten about now with "a great fight of afflictions" — you will soon be at home — soon be with God — and nothing then, evermore, to break the rapture of your bliss! Every time the *sounding line* is let down, the response is, "Nearer shore!" Your eternal Home is at hand — you shall soon furl your sails, and reach the desired haven! "My little bark," says one who has now realized her glowing anticipations, "is riding serenely through the storm, and soon I shall drop my anchor in the still waters of eternal rest and glory!"

The joys of the Heavenly Rest — will be ENHANCED BY CONTRAST.

This is one beautiful element in the contemplation of future bliss, which angels know nothing of — the *joy of contrast*. These Blessed Beings never knew what it was to *sin*, or to *suffer*. These glorious Vessels, launched on the "summer seas of eternity," never knew what it was to wrestle with the tempest, or, like the shipwrecked apostle, to be "nights and days in the depths" of trial.

The *blind* man exults in the blessing of restored sight — in a way which others who have never known its loss can experience. The *sick* man appreciates the return of vigorous health — in a way which others can know nothing of, who have never felt its privation. The *laborer* enjoys his nightly repose all the more — by contrast with the hours of toil which preceded it. The *soldier*, after years of suffering and privation, appreciates the music of that word "home," as he never could have done, unless he had undergone the terrible discipline of trench, and night-watch, and battlefield.

Will it not be the same with the believer in entering on his Rest? Will not his former experiences of suffering, and sin, and sorrow — enhance all his new-born joys? It is said of saints, that they will be "*equal* to the angels." But in this respect they will be *superior!* The angel never knew what it was to have an eye dimmed with tears, or to be covered with the soil of conflict. He never can know the exquisite beauty of that Bible picture (none but the weeping pilgrim of earth can understand or experience it) where, as the climax of heavenly bliss, God is represented as "wiping away all tears from their eyes!" Beautiful thought! The weary ones from the pilgrim-valley seated by the calm river of life, bathing their temples — laving their wounds — ungirding their armor — the dust of battle forever washed away — and listening to the proclamation from the inner sanctuary — the soft strain stealing down from the Sabbath-bells of glory, "The days of your mourning are ended!"

Christian, has this glorious rest the place in your thoughts it ought to occupy? Are you delighting to have frequent Pisgah-glimpses of this Land of Promise? Are you *living* as the inheritor and heir of such a blessed immortality, "declaring plainly" that you "seek a better country?"

How sad, how strange, that the *eye of faith* should be dimmed to these glorious realities by the ephemeral and passing things of sense! Grovelers that we are! With all this wealth of glory within reach — with these deathless spirits claiming to outlive all time — that we should allow the seen and the temporal — to eclipse the splendors of eternal day!

Sit no longer cowering in darkness — when light is streaming from your *Father's windows* and inviting you upwards! A few more rolling suns — a few more swings of *Time's pendulum* — and the world's curfew-bell will toll, announcing the Sabbath of eternity has come. Seek rest in Christ now. Flee to the crevices of the *Rock of Ages* now — if you would nestle forever in the golden eaves of the eternal Temple. Be ever sitting on the edge of your nest, pluming yourself for flight — so that when death comes, "with wings like a dove" — the celestial plumage of faith, hope, and love — you may soar upwards to the Sabbath of your God, and be at rest FOREVER!

# CEASELESS ACTIVITY

"They rest not day and night." — Revelation 4:8

What a seeming paradox is this! We last contemplated Heaven under the beautiful and significant figure of a state of *rest* — here it is spoken of as a state of *unrest*! "They rest", "they rest not." It is what the old writers quaintly designate, "The rest without a rest!" The combination of these two similitudes involves no inconsistency; they bring together two different, but not antagonistic, elements of happiness, which will have their highest exemplification in the bliss of a perfect world. The emblem suggests *two views of a future heaven*:

## ***1. It is a state of ceaseless activity in the service of God.***

Constituted as we now are, a condition of *listlessness* and *inactivity* is most detrimental to true happiness. Indeed, if we can judge from the references in Scripture to the constitution of higher and nobler natures, we are led to infer that *activity* is a great moral law among the loftiest orders of intelligent beings. Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, the "burning ones and the shining ones," are "ministering spirits," engaged in untiring errands of love to redeemed man, and probably also to other provinces in God's vast empire. More, with reverence be it said, the Great God Himself is ever putting forth the unceasing activities of His omnipotence! "He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." "My Father," said Christ, "is always working — and so am I." It is sublimely said of Him, "He faints not, neither is weary."

The human spirit has the same lofty heritage. *Activity* is linked with pure and unsullied *enjoyment*. The very curse of the sweat of the brow — the birthright of *toil* — is the birthright of *mercy*. A philosopher of ancient times said, if he had *truth* in his grasp, he would open his hand and let it fly away that he might enjoy the *pursuit* of it. Transfer this to Heaven. There the law and love of activity will still be a governing principle among the spirits of the glorified; and in this we shall be assimilated to the "living ones," whose very name indicates the ardor of their holy being.

"They rest not!" There will be no more of the *lassitude* and *languor* of earth. Here our *bodies* are clogs and hindrances to mental activity. There the glorified frame will be a help and auxiliary to the ecstatic soul. Here the *remains of indwelling corruption* is like the chained corpse which criminals of old were compelled to drag behind them. It elicits the mournful cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" That soliloquy will be heard no more in the "better country." There, every *chain* will be unloosed, and the *uncaged spirit* soar upwards unhampered by the impediments of its earthly fetters!

Glorious description! "They *serve* Him day and night." No more pauses from weariness or faintness; no more fitful frames and feelings. It has been said of God's people in the present world, "Though they do not weary *of* their Master's work — they often weary *in* the work." Their experience is impressively given in the Song of Solomon, when the believer in his earthly state, is represented as saying, "I sleep — but my heart wakes" — worldly cares and business and engrossments chaining down the soul, and inducing a state of drowsy insensibility. But there, they shall not require to "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees." No more need for *repose* for the exhausted nature — no more complaining that "the spirit is willing — but the flesh is weak." If any of us have felt the pleasurable of doing good, even in a present imperfect, world, what will — what must — this feeling be, in a state of holy activity, with no sin or weakness to repress our ardor or dampen our energies!

And let us note the chief ingredient, the grand element, in this state of ceaseless employment. It will be THE SERVICE OF GOD. "They rest not day nor night," uttering the threefold ascription to a Triune-Jehovah — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty!*" If *activity* is an essential element in true happiness, surely that happiness will be enhanced by the attractiveness of the *service* in which it is our privilege to be engaged. An earthly servant, possessed of an honorable nature, would feel himself obligated to perform work faithfully and conscientiously even to a *bad* master; but how would his joy in the performance of his duty be increased by the consciousness that he was serving some lofty and beneficent master who was an ornament to

his station and revered by all? If we carry this law to the pinnacle of all greatness and moral excellence, surely here will be the crown and consummation of creature-happiness — cheerful duty in the service of Him whose favor is life!

What is the truest source of joy to an earthly child? Is it not by active duty, as well as by passive obedience — fulfilling his parent's wishes? Will he not even suffer much for the parent he loves? The earthly relationship is in this, as in many other respects, a beautiful type of the heavenly relationship. What pure and unsullied delight will it afford the glorified saint to be engaged constantly in doing the will of Him who is better and kinder than the best of earthly parents! Look at Him who, being "very man" as well as "very God," understood all the tenderest sensibilities of the human heart! What was the *great* (shall we say, the only) joy which brightened the pilgrimage of the Man of Sorrows? What was the one source of purest, ineffable delight to Him, as He toiled on His blood-stained path? Was it not the elevating consciousness of doing His heavenly Father's will? "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work!"

We are always most willing to *serve* those we *love* most. With what bounding joy, then, shall we embark in Heaven on errands of active service, when we shall there have unfolded to us (what we here know so little of) the unspeakable love of Him who for us spared not His *own* — His *only* Son! Oh, what a motive will there be here for all the energies of the glorified body, and all the faculties of the glorified spirit — to love, and serve, and honor, and adore Him, around whom our deepest affections are centered, and our heart of hearts entwined — getting ever *nearer* to Him and more *like* Him — gazing more intently on His matchless perfections — diving more into the ocean-depths and mysteries of His love, and becoming the channels of conveyance of that love to others! Then, indeed, will duty be turned into enjoyment, and supreme and unswerving devotedness to His service be its own best reward.

**2.** It will be a consecration, too, not only of unfettered, unclogged, unwearied powers which earth never knew; there will be the still further element of ***a pure and single-eyed devotedness.***

Here, alas! in the holiest activities of the present state of being, there are ever, even when we ourselves may be insensible to them — the existence of *mingled motives*. Wretched SELF, in its thousand insidious forms, so imperceptibly creeps in, marring and mutilating our *best* endeavors to please God! Our best offerings are full of blemishes — our best thoughts are *polluted* with low, groveling motives. But there, SELF will forever be dethroned. This usurping *Dagon* will then be broken forever in pieces before the presence of the true Ark, in that temple wherein "there is nothing that defiles." God's glory will then be the one grand, absorbing, and terminating object of all desires and all aspirations! Then, for the first time in reality, shall we come to realize and exemplify that great truth, which many from their childhood have had on their lips, "Man's chief end is to glorify God — and to enjoy Him forever!"

Thus will active and ceaseless occupation in the service of God, form one of the sweetest employments and sources of happiness in the upper sanctuary.

"They rest" — in a blessed absence from all sin, all suffering, all trial.

"They rest not" — in the lofty engagements of holiness.

Believers are called in this world by the name of "servants," "workmen," "laborers." They will still retain these same designations of active duty. "His servants," we read, "shall serve Him." God, in every portion of His wide universe, seems to work by *creature agency*. He does not need to do so. A simple volition of His sovereign will, would suffice to fulfill His counsels as effectually as if never an angel sped on His embassy of love! But as on earth He accomplishes His purposes in His Church by *human* agency, and as in Heaven He employs *angelic* agency — those who "excel in strength" "doing His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word" — so it would seem, as if in merciful consideration for the happiness of His glorified saints, He is to make this a permanent law through eternity; so that Heaven will be only a development of the present condition of Grace — with this single, but important difference: that there will be no sin.

Indeed, it is this very idea of Heaven as a state of *action* — which brings

out the beauty of the former representation as a state of *rest*. Rest, to be enjoyed, supposes previous activity or labor; and although it can have no such relation in a place where weariness and fatigue are unknown, we can readily carry out the beautiful idea of Mr. Pollok — of the ransomed spirit retiring from the loud hallelujahs around the throne, to hold its silent meditations apart by "the living fountains of waters." This, however, only for a time — once more to return with unflagging and unabated energy to resume the song, and speed on new errands of love.

Reader, is this your anticipation of Heaven? — Heaven, not as it is pictured in the *dreams* of the sentimental or contemplative religionist — neither a Mohammedan *sensual* paradise — nor a state of *torpor* and inaction; but as it is known to angels, who are now, though unseen to us, traveling down to our world in ceaseless agencies of love and comfort? Do we realize this, and in realizing the grand truth, are we training for these lofty duties? — ready to take the angels' place, or to join the angels' company, on similar ministries to some other distant provinces of creation? What the poet has said of the present life is as true of its glorious counterpart hereafter, "Life is real, life is earnest!"

Rest not until you have attained a well-grounded assurance that this future state of active blessedness is to be yours — that you are looking for it, preparing for it, ready for it. Test your fitness for the Heaven which is before you by the questions, "Do I delight now in energetic employment in the service of my God? Is prayer a season of refreshing? Does praise call into willing and gladsome exercise all the renewed affections of a Heaven-born nature? Is Sunday a joyful pausing-place in life's chequered journey — not a mere interlude of repose for the tired and jaded body after the incessant toils and cares of the week — but the day which summons into exercise the loftier activities of my nobler being? Do I spend it under the feeling of Eternity being an everlasting Sabbath, and that everlasting Sabbath occupied in some personal ministry of holiness and love?"

In this present life there should, at least — be assimilations to the life hereafter. Though not in degree, it should be the same in kind. If activity in a little child gives indication of the energy and resolution of the man — so activity in the service of God, in a state of grace, will be the pledge and

earnest of nobler activities in a state of glory.

"O blessed rest: When we 'rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!' When we shall rest from sin — but not from worship! When we shall from suffering and sorrow — but not from joy! O blessed day! when I shall rest with God! — when I shall rest in knowing, loving, rejoicing, and praising Him! — when my perfect soul and body shall together perfectly enjoy the most perfect God! — when God, who is love itself, shall perfectly love me, and rest in His love to me, and I shall rest in my love to Him — when He shall rejoice over me with joy, and joy over me with singing, and I shall rejoice in Him!" (Baxter)

## CONTINUAL PROGRESS

"They rest not day and night." — Revelation 4:8

We have already regarded this description of the Redeemed in Heaven, "They rest not" — as denoting a condition of *ceaseless employment in the service of God*. We may consider it now, as suggesting a state of *CONTINUAL PROGRESS*.

If we have found *activity* to be a law of our nature — we may assert the same, with equal truth, with reference to *progress*. The mind is ever aspiring after advancement. "Not as though I had already attained," is the utterance not merely of the renewed spiritual nature — it is the voice of man's restless spirit in all the varied phases and conditions of humanity. It is exemplified in everyday life. Without the consciousness of advancement, we have not a perfect idea of happiness.

Who does not feel, for example, a ceaseless and ever-increasing aspiration after *more knowledge*? This is all the more remarkable, too, in the case of those who have made the largest acquisitions in human learning. The range of their acquirements, instead of satisfying, seems rather to whet their appetite for more; so that the noblest and most gifted of the human species — our Lockes, and Bacons, and Newtons — are



those who are alike most conscious of the limited range of present knowledge, and most ardently desirous of adding to their intellectual wealth.

Transfer this to Heaven. In Heaven, there will be a constant aspiration after increased knowledge, holiness, love, and resemblance to God. All our present mental capacities will doubtless be indefinitely expanded on our entrance into bliss; but this will be only a fresh starting-point for loftier acquisitions. The soul and its glorified aspirations will be like the sun "coming forth from his chamber, and rejoicing like a strong man to run his race;" ever *climbing* the skies — yet never *reaching* the meridian; coming nearer "the excellent glory," and yet speaking of it as "inaccessible light!"

We have some pledge or foretaste given us of this advancement, even in our present spiritual state. The renewed man goes "from strength to strength;" he *advances* in the divine life; he becomes more and more "fit," by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, for the heavenly inheritance. May we not warrantably infer from analogy, that this *advancement* will not be arrested — but rather increased and carried on in a mightier magnitude? "If *grace*," says Baxter, "makes a Christian differ so much from what he was, as to say, 'I am not the man I was;' how much more will *glory* make us differ! Doubtless as God advances our senses and enlarges our capacity — so will He advance the happiness of those senses, and fill up with Himself all that capacity."

Add to all this — this element of *progression* will be in one direction. Not as on earth, where there was also a law of perpetual progress — but it was often a *downward* progress — where the aphorism, "Knowledge is power," had, alas! too often the fatal interpretation attached to it of a power for evil; not bringing the heart nearer God — but assimilating it more with the fiend, enlarging the intellect only for its degradation. But the advancement of the soul, in all the future phases of its moral and spiritual being, will be entirely God-wards. It will be the eagle's flight — soaring ever upward, nearer the sun, until lost in the blaze of "the excellent glory."

*God* is alone of all beings, unchangeable. He is as incapable of any

*addition* to His essential glory and happiness, as these are incapable of *detraction*. "He is without variableness or the least shadow of turning." The *devils* in a lost state are subject to a continual and progressive change — but it is a *downward* and progressive deterioration. With the sainted spirit all change will be only improvement. While the others are sinking deeper and deeper in the abyss of woe, or retreating into wider and more bizarre orbits from the great central Sun of all light and happiness, the redeemed will ever be narrowing their orbits, coming nearer and nearer the great central throne!

Reader, you are lispings here only the *alphabet* of knowledge; you know *nothing* — as you are yet to know. Heaven will be, in a nobler sense than ever was realized on earth, a *student's* life. The angels, we read, "desire to look into" the mysteries of salvation. They "stoop over" (as the word literally means) this vast volume in the archives of eternity. You will then unite with these principalities and powers in tasking your immortal intellect with fresh discoveries of "the manifold wisdom of God." We know that those saints on *earth* who have attained most knowledge of God, are those who have longed with greatest ardor to know more of Him. Though Moses had seen more of His glory than others, his prayer is, "I beseech You, show me Your glory!" David, whose thirst had been quenched more than most at the Fountain of infinite love and excellence, is heard exclaiming, "My soul thirsts for God!" Paul, who had soared to the third heaven, and who "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," still prays, like a lispings learner, "*that I may know Him.*"

Nor will it be one theme only, which will engross and engage the saints' glorified powers and activities. We must not think of Heaven as some startling revolution of present tastes, and studies, and occupations; as if we shall then be no longer the beings we once were, and be able to find no traces of personal identity. Our feelings, our tastes, our studies, may continue the same as they were — only glorified, sanctified, and purified from the dross of sin! In Heaven, may we not possibly delight still to unravel the mysteries of science, the laws which govern a renovated creation; or to ponder the story of Providence past — this, too, not confined to our earthly world — but as unfolded in God's works and ways

in other provinces of His empire?

The very feelings and affections, also, of our present nature (the best, at least, and noblest of them) will not be quenched or annihilated; they will, on the contrary, have vaster objects and loftier spheres for their exercise. Take, for example, apparently the most airy and visionary of all our present emotions, HOPE. Hope will not perish with the present preliminary state. It is, in one sense indeed, true, that Hope will then be changed into fruition; all distracting fears and misgivings will cease. The hope of eternal life, the hope full of immortality, the hope of being with God and His Christ, which in our moments of depression and faithlessness is clouded here — that hope will be "swallowed up" in complete fulfillment! But many of the present joyous elements of hope will still remain — the hope of reaching higher degrees of perfection, the hope of acquiring deeper and yet deeper views of the character and glory of Him who is past finding out; the hope of becoming more and more assimilated to His holy image, climbing higher and higher the altitudes of bliss, and obtaining a wider and still wider sweep of the moral landscape that grows upon our view with the widening horizon.

I love that beautiful description of Heaven, as the "rest" of God's people; when the clarion-call of battle is hushed — every storm-cloud past — every weary night-watch at an end — the spirit cradled in perfect peace — the Sabbath of eternity! But more elevating and glorious still seems the description of Heaven as a place of endless and ceaseless *progression* — the spirit making giant advances in all that is pure, and lovely, and godlike; ever adding to the domain of knowledge; having new and more wondrous revelations of the Divine character and attributes — comprehending more and more the mysteries of Redeeming love — and yet these mysteries growing with every fresh discovery; still speaking of its "heights and depths," its "lengths and breadths," — and these, as "passing understanding!"

## **MANY MANSIONS**

"In my Father's house are many mansions!" — John 14:2

"Mansions" — "many mansions"; "a house" — "my Father's house." How many reflections are crowded into this one brief utterance of our gracious Redeemer! With what a homelike aspect do they invest our every thought of Heaven! They were among His last words; He Himself was on His way to that peaceful "homestead" of which He speaks. Let us gather around Him, with the house of His Father in sight, and taste this *Eshcol grape* which He Himself plucks from the borders of the Heavenly Canaan.

The verse speaks of MULTIPLICITY, "many mansions." Had He been addressing His own disciples alone, the assurance would have been sufficient, "There will be a home for each of *you*." But He is discoursing for all time. His omniscient eye discerned at that moment the unborn myriads whom this chapter and this verse were to console and cheer. He would, therefore, certify that there is abundant provision made for all — patriarchs, prophets, saints, martyrs — from the time that righteous Abel bent alone, a righteous, redeemed saint, before the throne — the first sheaf of a mighty harvest — until the garners are filled, and the song of the ransomed become "as the voice of many people, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thundering." He is to bring "*many* sons unto glory."

There is *grace* for all — *crowns* for all — *mansions* for all! Heaven has been filling for six thousand years — and still there is room. How different its "recompense of reward" — from worldly crowns and worldly honors! In the earthly race "many run — but only one receives the prize." In the heavenly race, the competition is open to "whoever will." There is no jarring of interests in this loftier arena. The glorification of one is not attained there — at the expense of another's downfall or exclusion. The mansions are *many*. The candidates are a mighty multitude which no man can number. Believer! "so run that you may obtain!"

The verse speaks of PERMANENCY — they are "mansions." The word in the original is not a tent or temporary shelter — but a *durable residence*, never to be altered or demolished. "The *tents* of the East," says Professor Hackett, "seldom remain long in the same place. The traveler erects his temporary abode for the night, takes it down in the morning, and

journeys onward. The shepherds of the country are also always moving from one place to another. The brook dries up on which they relied for water, or the grass required for the support of their flocks is consumed, and they wander on to a new station."

How strikingly illustrative is this of the Bible figure, "Now we know that if the *earthly tent* we live in is destroyed, we have a *building* from God, an *eternal house in heaven*, not built by human hands!" 2 Corinthians 5. This mortal body, like the nomadic tent, is up-reared for a time — but, after serving its temporary purpose — it is, pin by pin, demolished, and the place that once knew it, knows it no more.

Not so the *ever-enduring mansions* of our Father's house! "A priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you — pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" 1 Peter 1:4. No failing of brooks there! No joys there will be withered and smitten like the grass of the wilderness. "The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters!" Ah! it is the saddest, the most humiliating feature of the *joys of earth*, that, however pure, noble, elevating they may be at the moment — there is no calculating on their *permanency*. The mind will, in spite of itself, be haunted with the dark possibility of that ruthless invader of all happiness coming and dashing the full cup in a thousand fragments on the ground. But in Heaven, no shadow of vicissitude or change can ever enter to dim an ever-brightening future. Once within that heavenly fold, we are in the fold forever! On the lintels of the eternal mansion are inscribed the words, "You shall never leave it!" Our happiness and joy will be as immutable and stable — as God's everlasting love and power and faithfulness can make them!

The verse speaks of DIVERSITY — there are "*many mansions*;" — not only many in number — but manifold in their degrees of glory. All will be happy. A *halo of unutterable bliss and glory* will encircle each separate dwelling, beyond what eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived. But as "one star differs from another star in glory," so, also, we believe, there will be *gradations* in the scale of future blessedness.

The allusion here is evidently to the different courts of the *Jewish temple*.

These were diverse in name and character. The outer and inner courts, the court of the Gentiles, the courts of the priests, the 'Holy of Holies'. All these were consecrated as portions of the same "House of the Lord." The lowliest Israelite was within sight of the altar, and within hearing of the High Priest's benediction. But there were some courts more hallowed and glorious than others — their sacredness increasing the nearer the worshiper approached the place where dwelt the mystic Shekinah. It will be the same with the "many mansions" of the *Heavenly Temple*. All the vast multitude in the new Jerusalem will be within range of the benediction of the Great High Priest; and as such, they must be blessed.

But there will be "inner courts" and enclosures of greater honor and glory. The more intense and exalted his love and devotedness on earth — the nearer will the believer be permitted to approach the Holiest of all — the nearer admission will he have to the Father's presence, and receive the more distinguishing badges of the Father's love. There will be one mansion for him whose pound has "gained *five* pounds," and another mansion for him whose pound has "gained *ten* pounds." Each, too, will be apportioned according to some earthly antecedents. There will be the special mansion of the faithful *martyr* — who was borne from his earthly tent in the chariot of fire. There will be the special mansion of the faithful *missionary* — who surrendered home, ease and worldly honor for his noble embassy, and stood alone, un-befriended on pagan shores, witnessing for a despised Savior. There will be the mansion for the faithful *minister* of Christ — who boldly proclaimed the message of life and death. There will be the mansion for the faithful Sunday-school *teacher* — who toiled to bring youthful trophies to the foot of the cross. There will be the mansion for the pining holy sufferer — who glorified God by patience and uncomplaining resignation. There will be the mansion for the godly child, who fell on earth a withered blossom, whose tent was taken down "while it was yet day," but reconstructed into a building of God eternal in the heavens. There will be a mansion for the old *veteran* of the cross — the champion in a hundred battles of the faith; and for the *youthful soldier* — who was only buckling on his armor when summoned from the earthly struggle.

The *least* in the kingdom, I repeat, will have blessedness to the *full* — a

glory and a joy which leaves no void or vacuum. As in the *terrestrial*, so in the *celestial* skies. Though every planet circling round the Sun of Deity will shine with a *borrowed* splendor — yet the *larger* the planet, and the *nearer* its orbit is to its grand center — the greater will be its radiance and glory! Though every *flower* will in itself be perfect, reflecting the lovely hues and tints of Heaven — yet they will be of diverse form and color. Some will diffuse a sweeter fragrance, or cluster in larger and richer groups than others. But all, large and small, the saint a hundred years old and the believing child, will (notwithstanding this diversity) have the same *quality* of bliss. The planet at the *outskirts* of the heavenly sphere, and that *nearest* the center — will be bathed in one and the same rays of ineffable glory.

But while the verse speaks of Diversity, it speaks also of UNITY. There will be diversity in unity, and unity in diversity. The Church triumphant is one house. The Church on *earth*, alas! is a house *divided* against itself — church divided against church — Christian against Christian. Nominally the children of one Father — but dwelling in separate tabernacles. One saying, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos." Nominally pilgrims on one road, traversing the same wilderness — but each keeping his own peculiar and separate pathway, journeying on often with no look of kindly recognition exchanged, as if they were aliens and foreigners to each other — instead of brethren and sisters in a common Lord.

But in yonder bright and happy home — discord, division, separation will be known no more! Once within that sacred portal, the exclamation will pass from tongue to tongue, "What! so long together on the *pilgrimage*, and maintaining a cold and chilling reserve and alienation! Alas! is it only now we are to begin to know what we should have known ages ago, 'how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!'"

You who are mourning over these *sad estrangements* in the Church of God, rejoice at this glorious prospect. All shall be one then! One *house* — one *home* — one *Father* — one *Elder Brother* — one *motive* for praise — one *theme* for eternal song — a united Church under its one glorious and glorified Head!

## MANY MANSIONS PART 2

"In my Father's house are many mansions." — John 14:2

In our last article, we considered the "many mansions" of coming glory, as betokening Multiplicity, Permanency, Diversity, and Unity.

Let us revert to the same figure, as still further suggestive of SAFETY. Where can a child be so safe — as in his Father's house? Trials, discouragements, buffetings, unkindness he may experience elsewhere; but here in his Father's house, at least he is secure and happy.

What music is there, even on earth, in that word "*Home!*" The garner of happiness — the haunt of tender affections — the nourisher of bright hope — the hallowed spot where the spent spirit's weary wing folds itself to rest — the glad retreat in "the dark and cloudy day." What must be the Home of Heaven? With what surpassing tenderness does that one word invest these many mansions, "*My Father's house!*" and how does it link us to the Savior, when He thus addresses each heavenward and homeward-bound pilgrim, "My Father — and your Father; My God — and your God!"

To enter Heaven, the dwelling-place of the great Jehovah — to be ushered into the presence-chamber of "the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity!" — there might be much to awe and overwhelm the spirit in such a contemplation. But this beautiful word, "*home,*" deprives it of all its dreadfulness, and invests it with all that is winning and captivating. Each believer, in the prospect of these bright mansions, may, without irreverence, adopt the words of the Redeemer, and say, "If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said, I go unto *my Father!*"

Would that we oftener realized Heaven as such; and, amid earth's troubles and vicissitudes and sorrows — were led to regard every new trial, every new epoch of existence, every new week and month and anniversary — as fresh chimes of celestial music floating from the towers



of glory, and sounding in our ears, "Nearer home! Nearer home!" Our Lord has taught us, while we "desire" in our daily prayer "a better country," to make it a *filial* aspiration, "Our Father, who is in Heaven," "May Your kingdom come."

The verse still further speaks of HONOR. It speaks of admission into God's presence — and to stand in that presence in the relation of *children* to a father. Even to be laid, like *Lazarus*, at the portals of Heaven, and fed with the *crumbs* falling from the table — would have been more than what, as sinners, we deserve! What will it be to be "within the house," honored with a place at the King's own banquet!

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the believer's *relation* to God. Both are significant. The former literally means a *slave* — and such His redeemed child really is. He is the willing slave of righteousness, "bought with a price" by a gracious Master. He feels it to be alike his highest honor and obligation to be called "the servant of God." The other word, though translated by the same term (servant), has a higher meaning. It has rather reference to the believer's heavenly calling. It speaks of his lofty designation and employment in his Father's house, when he becomes a "ministering one." His earthly service is over, "Henceforth I call you not servants — but friends."

"In My Father's house!" "Yes," said a dying believer, as he quoted these words; "our Lord tells me, you have been an out-door servant long enough, I will make you an in-door servant, and take you out of the wind and rain, to give you a glorified body, better wages and a better mansion!" What a wondrous transition from the frail clay tenement — to the everlasting mansions! Well may the poet exclaim, describing the emancipated spirit, "O change! O wondrous change!"

Finally, the verse tells us that all these wondrous home-mansions, JESUS has gone to make ready for us. "I go to prepare a place for you." No, more, He confers them as a right. He speaks as the "Heir of all things." Observe, it is not "*your* Father's house," but "*My* Father's house." As "the Son of the everlasting God," He seems to say, "I am not ashamed to call you brethren; and for My sake He will not be ashamed to own and welcome you as His sons and daughters. My *name* — as 'the Beloved of the Father,'

and My *work* — as the surety-Redeemer, will form a *passport* and title to every room in these paternal halls!"

The value of a *gift* — is enhanced by the character and worth of the *donor*. The gift of an earthly sovereign would be highly prized. Here is a gift bestowed by the "Prince of the kings of the earth," purchased by blood and toil and agony! These blood-bought mansions form the crown and consummation of all His other gifts. "This is THE gift, that God has given us eternal life — and that life is in His Son." "Everything else that He 'did and taught and suffered,' had a reference to the opening of the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. His coming from Heaven, was to *reveal* Heaven to us. His going again there, was to *prepare* a place for us. His sitting at the right hand of God, is to promote our interest in Heaven. His coming in judgment, is to take us back with Him to it!" (Manton)

If He has gone "to prepare this place" for us, be it ours to endeavor to be *prepared* for "the place;" seeking every returning morning to have our tent pitched "a day's march nearer home" — nearer the house of our Father. "Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." "He will not stay," says Goodwin, "a minute longer than He must. He tarries only until He has, throughout all ages, by His intercession, prepared every room for each saint, that He may entertain them altogether, and have them all around Him."

And shall we pause to ask, WHERE is that glorious home? where these sparkling *waters*, these *palms* ever green, these *robes* ever bright? Does the spirit at the hour of death wing its arrowy flight to some distant province of creation? Or may Heaven be some mysterious, impalpable spirit-world? Though we hear no *gush* of the crystal waters, and *gaze* on no "city of the crystal sea," may it not be that angel-wings are hovering over us, and that it is only these *dull senses of ours*, which hide from us the celestial vision?

But what though we can observe no dim outline of the everlasting hills? What though we look in vain for the lights gleaming in the distant windows of these "many mansions?" It is enough to know that One has gone to prepare them for us. And when completed, His voice will be heard, saying, "Come, for all things are ready!" "THEN shall the righteous

shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of THEIR FATHER!"

## JOYFUL REUNIONS

"And so shall *we* ever be with the Lord!" — 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Our fondest *wishes* respond to this verse in the affirmative. The noblest *affections* and *emotions* of our immortal natures endorse the verse. Our Bibles, in manifold direct as well as indirect passages, foster the inspiriting hope, that the hallowed intimacies of earth — will be renewed and perpetuated in glory. The thought of the loved and lost — now the loved and glorified — being "the loved and known again!" — does not this tinge our every anticipation of Heaven with a golden hue, and form a new and holy link binding us to the throne of God!

Our blessed Lord Himself, alike by His discourses and His example, has strengthened our belief in the future reunion and recognition of saints. He speaks of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" as distinct people in "the Kingdom of Heaven." He speaks of "the beggar" — the identical person laid on earth at "the rich man's gate" — now in "Abraham's bosom." His consolatory announcement, when He comforted the hearts of the bereaved sisters of Bethany, was not "*Lazarus* shall rise" but "*Your brother* shall rise again." The old hallowed earthly link of affection was to be restored at the Great Day — the brother of the *earthly* home was to be known and welcomed as brother in the *heavenly* home! On Mount Tabor, Moses and Elijah came down, in form and feature the same as they were when they dwelt in their earthly tabernacles. Could we venture the strange conjecture that their recognized identity was a mere accommodation for the ecstatic scene — that, though known for that little while to themselves and the disciples, when the vision passed away they again melted into shadows — their hallowed fellowship ceasing as they returned to the spirit-world? We cannot think so.

We speak of "the communion of saints" in the Church below. We know how blessed it is when in sacred bonds of gospel fellowship, even in a

world of imperfection, spirit is linked to spirit. Some of the holiest moments of earth are those in which the children of God "take sweet counsel together," and unburden into one another's ears the experience of their Lord's faithfulness and love. Shall all this terminate at the hour of death? Are pilgrim-spirits, who have wept and prayed and rejoiced together — mutual helpers until they reached the very gates of glory — are they — just when the object of their united hopes and prayers is attained — when the crown is in sight — to exchange a cheerless farewell? Are they to be permitted to walk to "the house of God in company" on earth — but forbidden to do so in Heaven? We cannot think so!

Shall Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus have no happiness there in recounting Bethany-scenes of love and friendship? Shall the Marys have no wondrous joy in re-traversing in thought their way to the tomb? Shall the disciples (no longer disconsolate) be forbidden to retrace together in glory their steps on the Emmaus road, and at the mutual recital, cause their hearts again to burn within them? We cannot think so! We cannot suppose that all the rills of earth's purest spiritual enjoyment would thus in a moment be so strangely cut off. Rather, whatever on earth is "pure, good, lovely, and of good report," Heaven is the expansion and amplification.

"If it be a happiness," says Baxter, "to live with the saints in their imperfection, where they have sin to embitter, what will it be to live with them in their perfection, when saints are only and wholly saints?" On earth, the accidental meetings of youth not infrequently ripen, as years roll on, into hallowed intimacies. If we view the present world as the childhood of immortality, the infancy of endless life — may we not picture its incipient attachments reaching their prime in that glorious manhood of being! The reverse of all we have now said would involve a total extinction of the most exalted feelings of our nature. Earthly friendship is one of the flowers of Heaven — an exotic growing in the crevices of man's rocky heart — it will be nurtured (surely not extirpated) in its native climate. Jesus Himself experienced and cherished its hallowed influence — He Himself reposed under this solitary column in the ruined temple of humanity. He has left Bethany behind Him as the memorial of the purest friendship earth ever witnessed; and while all the disciples were dearly

loved by Him, there were congenialities and idiosyncrasies in the spirit of the "Disciple of love" which drew the Master to him specially as "His own." What Jesus hallowed by His own example, shall we count it unhallowed to cherish when we meet Him and His in glory?

Paul invites us to entertain the same consoling assurance. He himself looked forward to his joy and crown. What was it? "YOU in the presence of the Lord Jesus!" "YOU." He had individual churches and members of these churches in his eye. He looked forward (can we doubt it?) to re-traverse many a hallowed scene in his and their chequered earthly path. How fondly he clung to the intimacies of his apostleship! How "his spirit had no rest because he found not Titus his brother!" How Luke lightened his toilsome journey! How Epaphroditus and Timothy cheered his imprisonment! How the brethren from Appia Forum kindled the waning luster of his dimmed eye! Shall that sympathetic spirit sympathize no more in a better and brighter world with those with whom he toiled in the great work of the gospel here? Shall all those for whom he labored and travailed until Christ was formed in them, be unknown to him beyond the grave? Is this mighty star to dwell apart in the spiritual skies, and never recognize the many who, by its earthly shining, were "turned to righteousness?"

No, rather may we not think of him as a spiritual father gathering his myriad children around him in glory, rejoicing in the permanency of friendships, which on earth were often unstable? No Demas now to forsake him — no "present evil world" to lure from his constancy. We may think of him as the sun of a little "system" of saints — redeemed planets clustering around him — bound to one another by that still closer and holier tie which binds them all to Jesus. And, just as astronomers tell us that our own is a mere integral part of a mightier astral system, of which Alcyone in the Pleiades is the wondrous center — so, while they who "turn many to righteousness" shall "shine as the fixed stars" (central suns) "forever and ever" — these are but subordinates — owning the presence and power of a mightier Lord — the great Alcyone (if we can with reverence use the simile) of the Heavenly system, who binds all together by the gravitation of His own supreme Love!

Yes! I fondly cling to the hope (the belief) that in Heaven there will be

joyful reunions and recognitions, in which the tear of bereavement shall never more dim the eye, and the march of the funeral crowd shall never more be heard. To imagine the reverse would, I repeat, be doing violence to all the analogies of earth and all the deepest emotions of our moral and social natures. We may exult in the anticipation of pouring into other hearts the story of redeeming love, and singing "the new song" in concert with voices that have been attuned with our own! If even the Patriarchs, the pilgrim-fathers of earlier times, exulted at death in the thought of being "gathered to their people," shall we, as Christians, be divested of this consolatory hope? No, no. The grave will not be permitted to efface the memorials of the past, and destroy our personal identity. The resurrection-body will wear its old smiles of love and tenderness. "Those also who sleep in Jesus (lit., laid to sleep by Jesus) will God bring with Him." It is the mother hushing her infant in its night-cradle, to rise the same as it lay down, in the morning-light of immortality. Friend will embrace friend — parent will embrace child — and child embrace parent!

"So Shall WE ever be with the Lord!" It will be no dreamy solitude — no hermit life. Ever and anon we may imagine groups of the redeemed, known to one another on earth, hushing the music of the universal song, and retiring to hold peaceful fellowship beside the still fountains of water — there refreshing their spirits with the memories of Time — and, after the sacred recitals, returning again to resume, with deeper cadence, the lofty anthem.

Nor need we so limit these ennobled friendships as to restrict them to that of contemporary and personal acquaintance. May we not rather picture them as embracing the vast multitude of pious dead, whose names (though they lived in other lands and centuries) are among us as "household words" — those whose example has animated our faith, quickened our love, and who, though dead, have been long heard to speak! Think of the untold joy of being ushered into the glorified presence and fellowship of such as Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Paul, and John! Think of the lesser cloud of witnesses, in times nearer our own. Sainted men; the modern Stephens who have suffered — the Enochs who have walked with God — burning and shining lights, whose words and deeds have embalmed them in our dearest memories! How the heart

bounds at the thought of this wondrous expansion of friendship in its noblest form; associated, in the sublime services of the upper sanctuary with the Great and Good of every successive age in the Church's history, "the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs!" We have but traced while on earth their "footsteps on the sands of time;" what will it be to stand with them on the shores of the glassy sea, and to sing together the "Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb!"

Yes! Live under the cheering hope of a joyful reunion with the white-robed multitude, and the dearer and tenderer hope of meeting with those who on earth have rejoiced with you in all your spiritual joys, and shared with you in your sorrows. Think of those spoken of as taking part in the sublime closing gospel invitation, "The BRIDE says, Come!" The Bride! It is the Church triumphant — beloved ones, now silent on earth — whose beaming spirits in "the better land" are beckoning you upwards to exult in ties that shall never know dissolution. They beckon you to fresh ardor in running your Christian race! Think of them crowding the walls of glory — eager to welcome those they have left for a little behind them, to buffet the wilderness-storms — waiting to lead them, hand in hand, up the golden streets! Think of them seated on the everlasting hills, tracing together every rill and streamlet in the "nether valley," and acknowledging how all had been combining mysteriously for good. Meanwhile, as you gather and taste this grape of the Heavenly Vintage, let it refresh your spirit, and cheer your footsteps towards your joyous home! A royal mourner, as he wept over a rosebud prematurely plucked, has left a brief motto-verse for all who have nameless treasures IN the tomb and BEYOND the tomb, "I MAY GO TO HIM!"

## **NO SICKNESS**

"The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." — Isaiah 33:24

Suffering believers, laid on beds of languishing, can alone appreciate the sweetness of this gleaning from the Eshcol-clusters. How many of God's

children are at this moment tossed on couches of distress, shut out from the light and sunshine of a busy world, their experience that of the afflicted patriarch of Uz, "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed unto me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day."

But in yonder bright world of purity and love, "there shall be no more pain." How often on the earthly sick-bed is the patient grateful for a single hour's release from oppressive suffering! What will it be in that glorious land where not so much as one pang shall ever be experienced! Here, how much present happiness is clouded by real or imaginary apprehensions. How often are the strong, robust and vigorous haunted with the dread that their strength may be prostrated. Even when life's sun is shining most brightly, the intrusive thought will steal across the spirit, that this lease of long health may not always last. How often, too, have these fore-shadowings been too truthfully verified; either we ourselves laid low with sickness, or else brought to watch with agonizing anxiety by the couch of some beloved relative! Oh, the blessedness of a world where the fear of fearful things will be unknown — where nothing shall ruffle our deep, everlasting repose! No Lazarus can be laid at Heaven's gate, "full of sores." No sunny countenance in a moment shrouded with paleness. No elastic step arrested with the spoiler's touch, and the brightness of morning changed into the shadow of death. The suffering caused by accident, infirmities of age, decay of intellectual vigor, or oppression of the spirit by sudden bereavement — all will be strange in that un-suffering state.

We know that sickness, in addition to its own attendant pain and uneasiness, unfits both mind and body for active duty and service. The emaciated, languid invalid is like the wounded bird struggling with disabled wing in the furrow and attempting, in vain, its former joyous soaring. But in Heaven nothing can weaken or impair the immortal energies. No longer will the renovated framework be the prey of disease, or subject to decay. No longer will there arise feverish anxieties about others; those moments of dread suspense that seem more like hours, when life, and all that life counts dear, is "balanced in a breath." Over the



earthly portals is written, "We have the sentence of death in ourselves." Over the gate of Heaven, "Neither shall they die any more."

And how will this exemption from present experiences of suffering and pain be secured? How will the new heaven and the new earth give forth no longer, as here, a plaintive "miserere?" Let the words following our motto-verse explain, "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." It is Sin which has made this world of ours dim with weeping. The glimmering lamp in every sufferer's chamber reads, in its sickly hue, the sad tale of transgression. It is sin that is forcing from his lips the plaintive soliloquy, "Would God it were evening! would God it were morning!" Here, and by reason of sin, the body is, in its every pore and muscle, susceptible of pain. Its nervous fibers can, in a moment, become chords of anguish. Science may be profuse of her inventions to mitigate disease in its thousand insidious forms — but still "the head will be sick," "the heart faint," the body bowed down with suffering, the healthy cheek furrowed with age; "the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves."

All the marvels and mysteries of the healing arts in vain can stem the tide of distress, quicken the ebbing pulses of life, ward off the bitter parting, or reanimate the silent ashes. Gourds are still withering; buds of promise are still drooping to decay; the wail of anguished humanity is as loud as ever. Not until the morning of a sinless immortality dawns, will the tongue of the sufferer be tuned to the better melody, "The days of our mourning are forever ended."

Happy, happy prospect! "The inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick." You who are now laid on beds of languishing and pain, listen to this. Now, as the shadows of each returning evening begin to fall, you may have nothing but gloomy anticipations. The morrow's light, which brings health and joy to a busy world, may bring nothing to you but fresh prostration and anguish. Sunday comes round — but its once joyous bells ring only in your ears the memory of forfeited joys — the lonely bird, still pining in its earthly cage, wailing, in muffled notes, "Oh that I could fly away from this weary prison-house of sorrow and pain, and be at rest!"

Yes! but that rest is at hand. Soon will you mount on eagle's wings to

these golden gates. Pilgrims, now often pacing along the wilderness-path with bleeding feet and fevered brow, the thorny path will soon be over. No more pain to harass you. No more "archers" to wound you. No more languor to depress you. "The former things shall have passed away." How will one moment in that sorrowless Heaven lead you to forget your present long experience of prostration and suffering! It will appear in the retrospect only as the shadow of a passing cloud — a dream of the night which the morning light has dispelled — voices on all sides sounding in your ears, "There shall be no more curse."

Meanwhile, as you lie tossing on your sickbed, do not ask, "Am I getting the better of my pain?" But ask, "Am I made the better for it? Is it executing the great mission for which it has been sent of God? Is it sanctifying me, purging away the dross, and fitting me for glory?" He has some wise end in view in laying you upon the bed of languishing. Sickness is one of His own chosen messengers — one of the arrows of His quiver. As the mother lavishes her tenderest affection on her invalid child, so may it be truthfully said regarding the suffering believer, "Lord, he whom You love is sick." He takes you apart by yourself — secludes you from the world, that through the rips of your shattered earthly tabernacle He may give you glimpses of coming glory. When your tongue is "failing you for thirst," He brings grapes, plucked by His own hand, from Canaan. Your soul, like that of aged Jacob, revives!

How often has the couch of suffering thus been made as the very gate of Heaven. Be assured you will yet come to acknowledge infinite mercy in this very discipline. In preparing to transplant His own tree to paradise — instead of cutting you down, or wrenching you up by the roots, hurrying you away without a note of warning into an unprovided-for eternity — He is pruning branch by branch, that you may fall gently. He is "purging you, that you may bring forth more fruit." Seek to exhibit the grace of patience under your trial. This is one of the few Christian virtues which can only be manifested on earth. In Heaven there is no suffering to call forth its exercise. "Let patience" now therefore "have its perfect work."

Seek to feel that the end your God has in these "light afflictions" is to work out for you "a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory." Tossed on this troubled sea, let the eye and the longings of faith

frequently rest on the quiet haven. "Oh, the blessed tranquility of that region," says Richard Baxter, himself no stranger to a couch of prolonged distress, "where there is nothing but sweet, continued peace! O healthful place where none are sick! O happy land, where all are kings! O holy assembly, where all are priests! How free a state, where none are servants but to their supreme Monarch! O my soul, bear with the infirmities of your earthly tabernacle! It will be thus but a little while. The sound of my Redeemer's feet is even at the door."

## **THE DEATH OF DEATH**

"He will swallow up death in victory." — Isaiah 25:8

Victory is a cheering word! Joyous is the return to their own land of a band of warriors after a long and triumphant campaign. Inspiring are the hosannas of welcome poured upon them by an applauding country; and sweeter still the music of home-voices. The memory of past suffering is forgotten, or remembered only to enhance the gladness of reunion!

What shall it be when the Christian, freed from the last conflict, enters the gates of the Heavenly City, the hosannas of angels and saints resounding through the streets of the new Jerusalem! Each toil-worn warrior bathing his wounds in the river of the water of life — death-divided friends gathered to welcome him to his everlasting home!

Looking back from the heights of glory on earth's long battlefield; it is a gloomy and chequered retrospect of stern foes, stubborn temptations, mountains of difficulties that had to be climbed, valleys of humiliation that had to be descended — yes, and the sadder memory of unwatchfulness and betrayal, temporary defeat and disaster. But all is now crowned with "VICTORY," and the last and most recent foe — Death itself — disarmed.

How great the contrast NOW and THEN!

Now, alas! Death is the unsparing invader of every household; all our precautions, all our wisest human expedients in vain are employed to disarm him of his power, and arrest his advancing footsteps. He reigns on earth with a frightful force! He comes in the hour least expected — often just when the fondest visions of earthly joy are being realized.

Do we think of it — we who may be living all careless and thoughtless, lulled by the dream of prosperity, presuming on our present cloudless horizon — that each moment, with sleepless vigilance, the stealthy foe is creeping nearer and nearer? — that the smooth current is gliding slowly but surely onward and still onward towards the brink of the waterfall, where all at once the irrevocable leap will and must be taken?

Reader, perchance you can even now tell the tale! You may at present be reading it, or you may have recently done so, with tearful eyes and a breaking heart. You may be marking the vacant seat at your table, missing the accents of some well-known voice, or the sound of some well-remembered footfall; a beaming eye in your daily walk may be gone, and gone forth forever from time! What other antidote for hearts smitten down by these hurricane-blasts which leave earth a blackened wilderness — but a look beyond, to that Better Land, where this enemy's power is neither felt nor feared?

In that glorious resurrection-morning, the scepter which death has wielded for six thousand years will be wrested from his grasp, and that chorus will begin for which centuries of suffering hearts have been willfully longing, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" Sounding trumpets commenced the song of the Lord in the temple of old. It was a type of a mightier festival in the temple of glory. "The trumpet of God" is to sound first. Slumbering millions will start at the summons, "Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust!"

Believer! seek to contemplate death from the heavenward side, as a foe doomed and conquered. If you are now in Jesus, victory over death is yours by anticipation. You cannot sing the song of victory completed; but you can be weaving the garlands of triumph, and tuning your harp for the prophetic strain! But although death is between us and the heavenly paradise, the monster's sting has been plucked away, and cast into the

flames of the Savior's sacrifice. Safe in Christ! — then, indeed, is death disarmed of its real terrors. It becomes a stupendous triumphal arch, through which God's redeemed legions pass into glory. A dark Valley — but bridged by the rainbow of promise, with its radiant hues of love, joy, and peace! Lean on the promises now; they alone will support you, like Elijah's horses and chariots of fire, in the hour of death. Living now near to Jesus, you will have nothing to do when the last solemn hour does arrive — but to step into these chariots, and be upborne by angels to your Father's house!

O blissful consummation! once across that threshold, and every remembrance of sadness which death generates here, and which often makes life one valley of Baca — a "valley of weeping" — will be obliterated, and that forever! No sun going down "while it is yet day;" no glory of manhood suddenly eclipsed; no early blossoms nipped in the bud; no venerable trees, under whose shadow we have long reposed, succumbing to the axe of the Destroyer. Viewing death from the earthly side, it seems the mournful "exodus of life" — the fatal extinguisher, the dread annihilator of fondest hopes and purest happiness. Taking the heavenward view, it is what Matthew Henry significantly calls "the parenthesis of being." It is the bridge from the finite to the infinite; the birthday of immortality; the momentary rasping of the shallows in entering the quiet haven; the day which, while it terminates the joys of the worldling, only truly begins those of the believer!

Suffering saints of God! you who may have been tossed about with "a great fight of afflictions," long out on the stormy sea, neither sun nor stars appearing, and, like the seamen in Adria of old, "wistfully looking for the day" — be comforted. Each day is bringing you nearer and nearer these peaceful shores. You may even now be discovering indications that you cannot be far from the desired port!

"Afflicted, tempest-tossed, and not yet comforted," "lift up your heads with joy, for your redemption draws near!" Yet a little while and He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Every new sorrow that visits you; every new season which passes over you; every friend taken from you; these are so many silent messengers from the shores of glory, whispering, "Nearer eternity!" Time itself seems not to be without

significant monitors — signals scattered on its ocean that "the day is at hand!" Prophecy is fast fulfilling. There are those who, from the shrouds and rigging, can observe, in the hazy distance, the dim outline of a more glorious hemisphere than that of earth, "the new world" — even "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness!"

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be NO MORE DEATH or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever."

## **WAKING REALITIES**

"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness." — Psalm 17:15

What a glorious awaking, after earth's unquiet dream! With God! Like God! Happiness has been well defined to be "the harmonizing of the finite will with the Infinite." On earth that harmonizing is never perfect. There are disturbing forces in the moral atmosphere tempting the soul ever and anon, like some wandering planet, to break loose from the sphere of the Divine favor, and pursue a devious and erratic orbit. Strange, indeed, that, despite of lessons constantly enforced, it should cling so fondly to the delusion that there are elements of heart-satisfying happiness independent of God. Vain thought! Even when the objects on which the affections are lavished seem the purest and noblest, there is ever a consciousness of unfulfilled longings, yearnings after something better, which earth cannot give. In this chase after happiness a point may be reached — but not retained. In grasping the imaginary good, it is but a shadow. It appeared, in approaching, fair and captivating. It proved, in reality, a piece of fairy frost-work; on touching it, it fell apart.

But in Heaven the harmonizing will be complete. Man's will and love will

there be entirely subordinate to the will and love of God. The lineaments of the Divine image, erased and effaced at the Fall, will there be again imprinted. There will be no competing affection to alienate from the great Source of happiness — no vacuity requiring anything else to fill it. The streams will be unneeded in the presence of the great Fountain-Head — Him who is essential love, essential goodness, essential glory.

"Lord," says Augustine, "You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it reposes in You!" There will be nothing more to be desired or longed for; and the rejoicing soul, gazing around on the floods of the excellent glory, will be able to say, "I am satisfied!"

"Once I dreamed," says Payson, "of being transported to Heaven; and being surprised to find myself so calm and tranquil in the midst of my happiness, I inquired the cause. The reply was, 'When you were on earth, you resembled a bottle partly filled with water, which was agitated by the least motion — now you are like the same bottle filled to the brim, which cannot be disturbed.'" Yes! then every soul will become a temple, and its distinguishing glory will be that of Solomon's on the day of consecration, "the house was filled with the glory of the Lord!" Other and minor sources of happiness there may be. There may be the waving of incense, sounds of sweet melody, the high praises of God chanted by a mighty multitude which no man can number, and the lofty companionship of cherubim and seraphim; but the believer's pre-eminent dignity and blessedness will consist in his own soul becoming a consecrated shrine for the mystic Shekinah, "God dwelling in him, and he in God."

Reader! whatever be the Divine dealings and discipline in fitting you for such a Heaven, and such a likeness, submit to them. To employ a well-known but beautiful illustration — The refining of silver is not complete, until the refiner beholds his own image reflected brightly in the fused metal. And, if He who calls Himself "a Refiner of silver" keeps you long in the crucible — subjecting you long in the furnace — it is only that every grain and speck of alloy may be purged away, and that in Heaven you may awake rejoicing, and "satisfied" in "His likeness."

What a glorious and strange transformation! Who would recognize the spirit that is now chafed and buffeted with temptation and sin, corruption

and iniquity, then made resplendent with the image of a holy God? Just as the shapeless, unseemly root of a flower or plant struggling amid rubbish and stones and cheerless darkness, after fastening its fibers in the soil, sends up a graceful stalk, efflorescing in loveliness and beauty, its leaves waving in the sunlight, and filling the summer air with their fragrance — so will it be with the soul. It is here sown in corruption. It fastens its roots in a world dark and cheerless, by reason of sin. Its immortal fibers are nursed and disciplined amid trials and sorrows, difficulties and perplexities. It is soiled and degraded with the corruptible elements through which it has to fight its upward way. But there is a glorious summer-time at hand, when the root thus nurtured shall burst its mortal chains, and its leaves and blossoms shall not only be bathed in the hues of Heaven — but their every tint will be resplendent with a glory reflected from the Great Source of all light and joy.

## FACE TO FACE

*"Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face."*

— 1 Corinthians 13:12

What an extension in the domain of knowledge on that blessed morning when "the day shall break," and earth's twilight shadows shall "flee away forever." The mysteries in Providence, the "deep things" in Scripture, the apparent discrepancies in God's moral government, all unfolded, vindicated, explained. "In Your light," O God, we shall "see light." How this new illumination will be effected we cannot say. We can only venture a few dim conjectures on a great problem which the future alone can solve. Much of our curtailed and partial knowledge here, is owing to the limited range of our present faculties. It is quite possible, in part, to conceive a future world of vast and indefinite extension and amplification of our present mental and bodily powers; such an amplification as the man born blind experiences when his eyes are opened for the first time, on a world of whose glories he has only been previously cognizant by hearing about them. We can imagine some faculty which either we do not



now possess, or which hitherto, like the sight of the blind man we have supposed, has been lying sealed and dormant, all at once imparted, "eyes of our understanding" opened, which are now closed — new powers, shall we say, of thought and reasoning, taking in knowledge by intuition, which now requires years of laborious thought.

Even in the case of the lower animals, we see powers and instincts which we do not possess — but which, if we did possess them, would add incalculably to our capacities. Instance, as familiar examples, the flight of the migratory birds, or that of the bee winging its way to a vast distance from its hive; yet, notwithstanding its complex aerial journey, finding, with unerring precision, its way back to the hidden nook where it started.

The present limited range alike of our physical and moral powers of observation may have been, as an able writer surmises, the reason why Paul, when he was caught up into the third heaven, tells us he saw things which it is not "possible for a man to utter." Why not possible? Simply because he was not gifted with earthly powers or faculties or language capable of giving expression to what he saw. The phenomena of heavenly glory (if I might so call them) were alike, in kind and degree, so diverse from all he had been conversant with here, that he would have needed another dialect and vocabulary to unfold his meaning.

"But THEN shall I know!" All enigma and difficulty will then vanish — all will be made plain to ennobled, refined, and purified powers. Here on earth, a passing breath from a carnal world dims my glass, and obscures my spiritual vision. There in Heaven, there will be no taint of sin to mar or blight my lofty contemplations. Here, amid the twilight shadows of an imperfect state, there is much to cause doubt, and, alas! disagreement among God's children. There, all shall see "eye to eye;" they will only wonder that trifles should have been allowed so sadly to divide and estrange. Here, we are in the gloomy crypt, walking amid the humiliating wrecks of sin and death, reading the mysterious records of mortality. There, it will be in the "cathedral aisles" of light and love, harmony and peace — the noon-day splendor of eternity. Glorious prospect! all made bright before that Sapphire Throne.

That mysterious PROVIDENCE, that desolating bereavement which, like

a sweeping avalanche, tore up by the roots the fibers of affection, then I shall know, and see, and acknowledge it to have been all for good. Then I shall understand, (what my aching heart cannot now) that the child I wept over — the parent I laid prematurely in the grave — the friend, early severed from my side — were all thereby taken from much evil to come, and invested with an earlier bliss. I shall wonder how I could ever have sorrowed on their behalf.

Meanwhile let me bow submissive to my Righteous Father's will, however dark and startling sometimes it may be. In infancy, the child takes much on trust; in matured life, he gets his difficulties explained. Let this be my position regarding the "deep things" of providence and grace. Wait patiently the explanation of my Father in Heaven. I shall see in the completed plan that all events had their mission and end — the Lord bringing glory to Himself from all. At present I behold only one or a few links, while He has the whole chain in His hands. Then, in retracing that long line of unbroken kindness, I shall feel satisfied that not only all was for the best — but truly the best. The whole by-past wilderness, as seen from the hills of glory, will appear carpeted with love. Like a traveler after a dark night, I shall look back along the region I have crossed; and noting the perils I had escaped by His gracious guidance, wonder at the way by which God has led me.

Above all, I shall grow in the knowledge of HIMSELF; and have amazing views — such as I have never had here — of His glory as the great end of life and being. Our present knowledge of God, even revealed knowledge, is but like the prattling of infancy, a mere attempt at a spoken language, most of which is still unintelligible. But then I shall be "filled with all the fullness of God." Not by any means that my knowledge of Him can be perfect. There will always be depths in that ocean-fullness, beyond the fathoming of any finite mind. No, further, the more I know, the more I shall feel that I have to know. When I know most, my befitting exclamation will be, "Oh the depth!" "It PASSES knowledge!"

"This is eternal life — to know You." God, by His varied discipline, is meanwhile training me in this knowledge. And, as a sainted writer has well said, "we must wait until we get entirely home to have lesson-books put by forever. But what ever are the gradations in our books, or in

whatever shape the lesson comes to us, this is the one grand blessed object aimed at by our wondrous Teacher in all, Acquaint yourself now with HIM, and be at peace." (Miss Plumptre)

## UNNEEDED LUMINARIES

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." —  
Revelation 21:23

Heaven is here compared to a city. But it is neither created orbs, nor material luminaries, which light up its glorious edifices. These are superseded. There is no longer need of the intervention of *means* as on earth. All the knowledge and light and glory of the Church triumphant emanate directly from the Divine Source of all excellence. The immediate presence of the Creator and the Lamb will render unnecessary every other medium of communication. As a vessel requires props before being launched to sea — or a house, in the building stage, requires scaffolding before it can be completed — so the Church, in its earthly condition, requires the props and scaffolding of ordinances and means of grace. But when finished — the last stone placed on the consummated structure — then the scaffolding is removed — it is needed no more. "There shall be no more prayer there," says Baxter, "because no more necessity; but the full enjoyment of the thing prayed for. God's *face* shall be the Scripture where we shall read the truth."

We have *servants* in the lower banqueting-house — angels are ministering spirits sent forth "to minister to the heirs of salvation." The Church has ordained office-bearers to carry the vessels of the sanctuary. *Here* it is *mediately* through the creature our spiritual needs are supplied — *there* all will be supplied *directly* from God and the Lamb. It is "THE LAMB who leads to the living fountains of water." It is "*God*" who "wipes away all tears from the eyes!" *Here on earth*, the use of means is indispensable. They are adapted for our state of *imperfection*. The infant or sick man cannot bear the full blaze of the sun — they must have the

curtain drawn, or the brightness tempered and subdued; it is only with increasing age or returning health that either are able to look on the light. So in the infancy and weakness of our probation-state we could not bear to gaze on the unveiled majesty of God's glory — we could not endure its intolerable brightness; it would blind and consume us. The figurative "sun" and "moon" of ordinances are, therefore, graciously appointed for the feebleness of our earthly condition. But when invested with the nobler powers of our heavenly manhood, we shall be able to dispense with these — we shall be able to draw aside the veiling curtain, which is needed now to subdue and modify, to then gaze with eagle-eye on the brightness of Jehovah's presence.

To borrow an apt illustration: None of the lower animals can hold, in the noblest sense of the word, *fellowship* with man, as they are at present constituted; but let one of them have suddenly imparted to it the gift of *reason*, *then* it becomes immediately fitted to do so. So it is with regard to our present and future relation to God. We are unable, with our present limited powers, to hold, in the highest sense, intimate fellowship with Him — we have the feeblest conceptions of His glory, the most inadequate apprehension of His goodness, and power, and excellency, and majesty. But when we come in a glorified state to have higher and nobler spiritual endowments conferred on us, we shall be able to *see*, as we cannot do now, His glorious perfections, and to *enjoy*, as we cannot do now, His presence and favor, His fellowship and love.

The city will then have no "*need*" of the sun! It is *needed* now, while on earth — the softer and more subdued light is required *now*; but earth's darkness will then be past, and the true Light will shine. We shall be able (without being, like Moses, hidden in the cleft of any sheltering rock) to "see God and live!"

And *what a fellowship* will this be! — The Being of all beings, the Light of all lights! David felt it to be subject-matter of gratitude and joy, "*I am companion to those who fear you.*" He had a hallowed joy in the fellowship of kindred spirits on earth. What will it be to be the companion of God Himself? — to be linked with all that is essentially *great*, and *glorious*, and *good*, in the universe — not only to be brother to the angelic hosts — but, in a higher sense than even Abraham, the father of the

faithful, knew it, "to be called" (and to BE) "the *friend* of God!"

If, even on earth, I have known something of Him as my "Light" and my "Salvation" — if I have seen somewhat of His glory shining through the battered chinks of my ruined soul — what will it be to bask in the floods of infinite light and love before the Throne? "What can be desired," says one now in the midst of the glorious realities on which he often dwelt, "beyond the bliss imparted by the consciousness of loving and being loved by Him, in whose smile of love the highest archangels find the very Heaven of Heaven to consist?"

I shall be independent of all that contributes to light up my earthly pathway. Friends I may have then among the angels — hallowed reunions of earthly affection may and *will* take place in that world of glory; but though I expect to prize and cherish them, I shall have no "NEED" of them. They will be among the "lesser glories," having no glory (comparatively) by reason of "the glory that excels." The sunlight and the moonlight will pale into *nothingness* in the presence of mightier beams!

But while I shall be lost in amazement at the exceeding greatness and excellency of this great Being, who is enthroned "in light, inaccessible, and full of glory" — while all the eloquence of earth that has tried to portray the majesty of His glory will fall immeasurably short — it will, at the same time, be a *softened* glory. Never, in these sublime pictures of Heaven which we have in the Book of Revelation, is the Lord God Almighty spoken of but in conjunction with "*the Lamb*." John "saw no temple; the Lord God Almighty and *the Lamb* were the temple." Now he sees no light. The luster of earthly sun, and moon, and stars, have faded, and are quenched forever — but "*the Lord God Almighty AND THE LAMB are the light thereof*." He hears the redeemed multitude sing a lofty anthem, "*Salvation to our God that sits upon the throne, AND UNTO THE LAMB*." What is the design of this often-recurring imagery and symbol but to keep ever before the Church, even in its triumphant state, the intervention of a Mediator, by whom alone it is that we can see God and live? "*The Lamb is the light thereof!*" Calvary's cross and Calvary's Savior will still be the *theme* and *mystery* of eternity!

And if light be the emblem of purity, how I ought, in the prospect of such

a Heaven and such a Presence, to make it my great ambition to be "*perfecting*" that "*holiness, without which no man can see the Lord!*" Holiness becomes that city! Its gates are never shut except against sin. Let me seek, as its chartered citizen, that every vestige of *the accursed thing* be now put away. What a happy world, where temptation shall no longer be felt or feared! — where I shall never more, by reason of sin, be mourning an absent Lord — never more, in the midst of my own erring estrangements, be uttering the plaintive soliloquy of the patriarch, "*Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!*" but ever reposing in the joyous consciousness, "*I am still with You!*"

## VISION AND FRUITION

"We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." — 1 John 3:2

This beautiful verse of John comprises the two grand elements of heavenly glory: To "*SEE* God" — to be "*LIKE* God." It describes the matured manhood of the Christian.

We are now in a state of infancy and childhood. As a child on earth is incapable of comprehending much that is made plain in after years, so, with regard to divine knowledge, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part." But in the full development of our spiritual being we shall "see Him face to face." The earthly prayer will, for the first time, in all its amplitude, be fulfilled, "I beseech You, show me Your glory."

*See Him!* What an advance does this announcement indicate in the moral capacities and privileges of the glorified, beyond what they enjoyed on earth! We cannot bear to look even on the natural sun here; we are dazzled and blinded with his intolerable brightness. But *there*, "the Lord our God" is to be our "everlasting light." The spiritual vision will be enlarged and adapted for the augmented glories of this higher manifestation.

*See Him!* What an honor! The Jewish High Priest was highly favored in

being permitted, *once a year*, to gaze on the majestic symbol of the Divine presence — the Temple Shekinah Glory. What will it be to enjoy the eternal and uninterrupted contemplation of the great God Himself — that, too, undimmed by any mystic or shadowy rites; but "with open face," (*lit.* face unveiled) "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." And it is to "see Him *as He is*." Not canopied in clouds and wreathed in rainbow-form, dreadful, inapproachable — but God in our nature, "Immanuel, God with us. It is plain that it is *Jesus* of whom the Apostle of love speaks in our motto-verse. Jesus as He was, is, and ever shall be — the Elder Brother — the kinsman Redeemer, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Often are we conscious of the thought presenting itself, "Would that I had been among the number of those who of old were privileged to hear that loving voice, and gaze on that countenance, 'fairer than the children of men!' Would that I had sat on the Hill of Beatitudes, and listened to those words of matchless wisdom; or stood by the sea-shore of Gennesaret, or in the graveyard of Bethany, or mingled in the jubilant crowd on Olivet!" This honor is ours in Heaven. *We shall* "see the King in His beauty." "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes." "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads." It will be said of His redeemed people in glory, as the queen of Sheba said of Solomon, "Happy are your men, happy are these your servants, which stand continually before you!"

"*Like Him!*" This is spoken of here as the second element in Heavenly bliss. Even on earth the contemplation of Christ by faith is represented as bringing about a resemblance to Himself. "*We are changed into the same image from glory to glory.*" How much more, when, as divine artists, gazing on His unveiled luster, we shall be enabled to copy the Divine Original, feature by feature! "We shall be *like* Him, FOR we shall SEE Him." We cannot, even in the present world, be much in the company of an individual without insensibly contracting a resemblance to him — catching up his tones, his manners, his habits of taste and thought. So will it be in Heaven with Jesus. We shall become more and more "*Savior-like.*" Oh, surely if it be an exalted honor to *see* Him, with what glory will it invest the ransomed thus, in any feeble measure, to *resemble* Him! If it be the Christian's secret aspiration on earth to be like Abraham, or

Moses, or David, or John, or Paul, what will it be to be "like HIM," of whom these are but the faintest shadows?

But, more than this — not only is likeness to Jesus an honor; it is a necessary requirement or qualification to render the believer fit for the enjoyment of Heaven. I need, in some degree at least, conformity to Him in character, in order to be able to appreciate His home of purity and love. The most beautiful landscape may be placed before the blind man — but, deprived of the organ of vision, by which alone its beauties can be apprehended, he can see no loveliness in it. So Heaven in its holiness would be one vacant and dreary blank, if I have no moral eye with which to behold it. But that moral vision will be imparted. The perfectly-renewed heart, a copy of its Lord's, will then be the true "organ of sight." There will be no sin to mar the contemplation of the Divine Original — nothing to disturb or divert the spiritual eye. The heart's affections will repose with full delight on Him, the great center of attraction. There will be perfect unison with His will, and entire, unreserved consecration to His glory; all the ennobled, renovated, sanctified powers of the glorified nature will be willingly embarked in His service. The feet will run for Him; the heart will be an altar consecrated to His worship; memory will be a labyrinth of remembered mercies; the tongue will be a glorified instrument to resound His praise; the whole regenerated being a storehouse of collected materials to proclaim and testify of His greatness and majesty — His grace, and truth, and love.

Be this, then, the view of Heaven I seek to have constantly before me — that I am to be "*like my Lord.*" What a solemn and searching test is thus afforded with which to try my anticipations of future bliss! Amid the most intense worldliness, there may be ethereal speculations about the glory of the *saints' everlasting dwelling-place*. But do I long after its mansions because their bliss consists in having a heart assimilated in holiness to that of Christ? Like the Elder Brother, and in Him to the whole brotherhood in glory — saints, angels, God!

Oh, if the consciousness of following, as His ransomed Israel, the pillar of His presence in the wilderness be delightful, what will it be to follow Him in the Promised Land? If the Eshcol pledges be gratifying, what will it be to pluck for ourselves in the heavenly vineyard, under the shadow of the



living Vine Himself? 'Lord Jesus! prepare me for meeting You, seeing You, enjoying You.'

Were I going, in a few years, to reside in a distant land, how I would strive now to master its language — to know its history — to put myself in a state of training for its *habits* and *occupations*. Heaven is that country; and this is the message sent by letter from its shores to every stranger and pilgrim on the earth, "*And everyone who has THIS HOPE in him purifies himself, even as Christ is pure.*" The priests in the earthly temple had to wash and purify themselves before they could engage in priestly service. So, if I am to be a "priest unto God" in the heavenly Jerusalem, I must sanctify myself for this everlasting feast.

It is a quaint but a true saying, "The man who does not find Heaven in his soul here, will not find his soul in Heaven hereafter." Unlike Jesus now, I cannot expect to be like Him forever. The fine chiselings of the perfected model, indeed, will be added in glory; but the seed of the likeness — the bold outlines of the moral sculpture — must be begun on earth. Meanwhile, let the words sound in my ears, like the preparation-bell for the great Sunday-services of the Church in Heaven — let them follow me like a celestial monitor wherever I am, and howsoever engaged, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*"

## LOCALITY AND CHARACTER

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness." — 2 Peter 3:13

Little has been said in Scripture fitted to gratify an idle curiosity regarding the circumstantial of future bliss. The extreme and studied reserve, indeed, of the sacred writers on this subject forms one of the striking indirect evidences that they were neither impostors nor enthusiasts — neither pleasers of men, nor compilers of cunningly-devised fables. Had they been so, they would doubtless have appealed more than they have done to the imaginations and passions of their

readers, expatiating on the scenery and splendors of the world to come.

While, however, the statements are brief and fragmentary regarding the locality and characteristics of Heaven, it becomes us, with a modest precaution, to be "wise up to what is written." The verse of the apostle Peter offers us two themes for meditation on a future state of bliss — two Grapes to be gleaned from the Eshcol clusters.

1st, We are to look for "*new heavens and a new earth.*"

The present globe on which we dwell is to undergo a purifying process by fire. When the day of the Lord comes "as a thief in the night," "*the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*" Although, however, a conflagration be here spoken of, we have strong reason to conjecture that this planet, over which "the morning stars sang together," and which the Almighty Creator Himself pronounced to be "*very good,*" is not to be annihilated — not to be expunged from the "records of creation" — but rather only remolded and reconstructed into a "*new earth,*" nobler and more beautiful than when the Sons of God shouted over it their lofty anthems. Again, (although we have no positive authority in assigning a special locality for the future home of the glorified) we can affirm, with strong grounds of certainty, that that home — be it where it may — must consist of a *material* habitation of some kind, suited to *material* bodies. Whatever change may take place hereafter on our physical frames — however refined and even spiritual in one sense they may be — we know that a glorified *body* cannot, in the nature of things, be an ethereal, angelic, spiritual essence; floating, in dreamy, shadowy form, through the regions of space. It must assume a substantial, visible, tangible shape. It is to be "*fashioned*" like unto the glorious resurrection-body of Jesus.

Much of our present corporeal organism, as we may afterwards more particularly note, *may*, and most probably *will*, be retained and restored; only their functions vastly augmented, and the sphere of activity vastly enlarged. If, then, for these glorified bodies some local material habitation must necessarily be provided, another step leads to the probable (the natural) inference, that their old abode, purified and

renovated, would form the most befitting locality for their eternal residence.

We have seen, in the previous Meditation, that the Great Being, at whose feet they are to cast their crowns, is most frequently spoken of and adored by them under His suffering title, "*The Lamb*." If He delights to remember earth as the scene of His humiliation — if He delighted to dwell in its "habitable parts" in eras long antecedent to the Incarnation, and before the millions He was to save were called into existence — how much more will He delight to traverse it, when "His blood, His pain, His toils" all past — it becomes the monument and trophy of His unspeakable grace and love! Is it not reasonable to infer that the theater on which His redemption-work was achieved, so far from being erased from the universe, will rather be retained — in restored and renovated beauty — a lustrous point on which principalities and powers will delight to fix their wondering gaze, and get from its memories fresh matter and motive for praise? Will not the song listened to by Isaiah in the old Jerusalem temple — when he heard "one cry to another" — rise to its full cadence, in the ingathered Church of the Redeemed, when, on the platform of "the new earth," and under the dome of "the new heavens," the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands will be heard rolling in the threefold ascription, "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts! The whole EARTH is full of His glory?*"

If we are forbidden to hazard stronger assertion, we may, at all events, speak of all this as substantial conjecture. Earth (our own present sin-stricken, woe-worn earth) may only have to put off these her ashen robes of guilt and woe, to become a heavenly and eternal home for her ransomed children — beautiful amid "a sisterhood of worlds." Scripture significantly speaks, not of the *renewing* or remodeling of all things — but of "the *restitution* of all things." It is the building of the old fabric which the earthquake had shattered — the disentangling of stone by stone from the matting weeds and ivy, and chiseling them afresh for the heavenly Temple. All that sin has left uncorrupted may remain as it is. We may have the same glorious sky for a canopy — the same everlasting mountains to gaze upon — the same grateful vicissitude of seasons, the same winds to chant — the same waves to chime, "Glory to God in the

highest!"

The *eye* may be charmed, as now, with harmonious coloring — the *ear* delighted, as now, with music and song. The *senses* may be as susceptible (or more susceptible) than they now are of the sublime and beautiful in nature — are may vindicate, under nobler auspices, her claim to be the handmaid of all that is pure and lovely and of good report — the harpers, harping on a glassy sea, undimmed and unfretted by a ripple of sin or sorrow — the very words which are now at times attuned to our sinful lips in a sinful world, may be set to the higher music and melodies of a world of purity and love, "*O Lord, how manifold are Your works! in wisdom have You made them all! THE EARTH is full of your riches!*"

The 2nd statement in the words of Peter, is the *special characteristic* of these "new heavens and new earth, *wherein dwells righteousness.*"

This brings us again to the great truth, that it is the moral aspect and *character* of Heaven, and not its *locality*, which *most* concerns us. If the Bible descriptions and pictures of a future state teach us anything, it is this — not to indulge in fanciful theories about the accessories of heavenly bliss — but to keep our minds focused on this great truth — that *holiness characterizes that kingdom!* It matters comparatively little *where* we shall be — but it matters much, and it concerns us much, to know *what* we shall be. We may not be able categorically to pronounce whether Heaven is on some distant, and as yet un-traversed nook in creation; or whether it may be this very earth, consecrated by so many mingled memories of sin, suffering, and glory. But this we do know, that *Righteousness* will be the great law of that blissful empire. We repeat the great truth dwelt upon in the previous chapter, "*It does not yet appear what we shall be — but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be LIKE Him.*"

It is SIN which forms the foul curse and blot on the "present *evil* world." In itself, our earth is all one could wish as a beautiful and befitting habitation for glorified natures. Take sin away, which has blighted and blasted whatever is fair within it, and you transmute it at once into a "Paradise restored." Yes! imagine this world — this very world — purged of its evils — its selfishness — its profligacy — its covetousness — its

jealousies — its backbiting — each heart a transparent fountain of pure and holy thought — each household a little Bethel — every life within it an incense-breathing altar — each nation linked with its fellow in everlasting brotherhood — the curse of Babel removed, and the one universal tongue is the language of *love!*

Then, following the expulsion of *sin*, picture the expulsion of SUFFERING. The cries of infancy — the pains of sickness — the pangs of disease — the ashen cheek (the sad premonitory symptom of coming dissolution) — the bitter bereavement — the tolling of the funeral bell — the crowded graveyard — the weeds of mourning, and deeper yawning chasms of bitterness in the soul which no human plummet can gauge — imagine all these unknown — these "former things passed away."

Moreover, add to this *negative*, the POSITIVE view of a world of bliss — the presence of God — the personal love of an ever-present Savior — fellowship with angels — communion with all that is holy and happy! Oh, I need not go and make the sun my chariot, and sweep the azure skies — I need not traverse the nightly plains, and make every star a resting-place in my search for a happy heaven — I have it wherever God and righteousness is! He might erect for me in infinite space some gigantic palace, glittering with coruscations of unearthly splendor — its halls gleaming with the treasures of the universe — resplendent with beauty, resonant with song. But if sin were there — Heaven it could not be! "*Blessed are the pure in heart; they alone can see*" — they alone can enjoy "*God!*"

Is my mind and character *now*, in any feeble measure, fitted for this sinless abode? No un-renewed, unregenerate man could be happy there. Take a peasant from the plough, and set him on a throne; how ill at ease would he feel at the strange transition! — how ill qualified to cope with the duties and cares and responsibilities of an empire! Take a deaf man to listen to melodious music — or a blind man to gaze on the glories of a landscape, both would fail to imbibe one pleasurable emotion, seeing they are destitute of the requisite inlets of enjoyment. The objects of pleasure are, in both cases, locked to their senses.

So likewise in Heaven. Without holiness, I could have no relish for

communion with God. I must have a moral vision to render me capable of appreciating the moral loveliness of its scenery — I must have spiritual tastes and likings to render its holy society congenial. As little could an inhabitant of our earth, with this present bodily organization, be able to sustain life on a planet nearer the sun, (such as *Mercury*) as the sinner, with his spiritual organization unchanged, be able to bear the blaze of that Heaven of unsullied purity!

O happy time! when alike the world without and the world within will be purified — hallowed, "made fit for the Master's use." Every sinful passion quelled — every usurper overthrown — when from this creation, now "groaning and travailing in pain," shall arise a perpetual hymn of praise and love — when sin, which like a vast avalanche has been crushing it down, shall have melted away forever! And more than this, when my own heart — regenerated, glorified — will become a consecrated altar, on which the sacrifices of righteousness will be offered continually — self, sin, corruption, no longer burning their defiled incense and strange fire — but all shall "*grow*" into a "*holy temple in the Lord.*"

Lord! I would seek to have this Heaven begun! Let me not only *see* the Eshcol clusters — let me *taste* them. Give me grace to become more and more holy. Let the power of evil wax weaker and weaker, and the power of holiness wax stronger and stronger. It has been beautifully said, "The lower streets of glory are on earth." Let it be so with me. Let my heart become now a miniature Heaven. Let me know, in my blissful experience, the truth of the Savior's words, "*The kingdom of God is WITHIN you.*"

## **THE MUTUAL JOY**

"Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." — John 17:24

An emigrant is about to sail for a distant land. As the vessel weighs anchor, and his family are gathered on the shore to bid a sorrowful farewell, his last words remind them that it is but a temporary separation

— that in a few brief years, by a favoring Providence, he will be back again, to take them along with him to his adopted home!

Or, a father gathers his children around his death-bed, to give them his last blessing. With his eye looking upwards to the glorious world on which his spirit is about to enter, he tells them, in faltering accents, to dry their tears; for in a little while they will be reunited in that "better land" which knows no parting.

Here is the utterance of a departing Savior to His orphaned children. It forms a petition in His last intercessory prayer, when about to leave the world, and return to the Father. "Oh, the full joys," says Richard Baxter, speaking of this verse in his 'Saint's Rest,' "offered to a believer in this one sentence of Christ! Every word full of life and joy!"

The verse brings before us these two thoughts in connection with a state of future bliss —

*The SAVIOR'S joy in Heaven in being with His people; and His PEOPLE'S joy in Heaven in being with their Savior.*

The Savior here speaks of HIS OWN JOY in having His saints with Him in glory. The language is that of a conqueror claiming a stipulated reward. God seems to say to Him, "Ask of Me, and I will give it to You. Son, You are ever with Me, and all that I have is Yours." And what *does* He ask? He had Heaven at His command, "thrones, and dominions, and powers, and principalities." But He prefers to be crowned as "Lord of all," in the midst of His saints — that redeemed sinners, like celestial planets, might through eternity circle and constellate around Him, their central Sun. "He will rest in His love; He will rejoice over them with singing."

On earth, a man likes to live and die among those he venerates. The old village patriarch desires to be laid where his fathers sleep, in his native churchyard. The Jew will travel back from the most distant region of the world, that his bones may be laid in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, under the shadow of Olivet, and within hearing of the Kedron. "Where you die," said Ruth to the one she loved, "I shall die, and there shall I be buried."

So speaks also an ever-living Savior of His people. "Where I live," He says, "there you are to live also; eternity shall not separate between you and Me." The well-known tomb of a great earthly architect is placed immediately under the dome of the vast temple that his genius had reared. With reverence we say, Jesus is through eternity to be enshrined in the Temple of His saints, the living stones rising tier on tier around — each glowing with the inscription, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

What joy thus to behold around Him the travail of His soul, the purchase of His agony! If we value great results generally in proportion to the labor and toil bestowed on them — if the philosopher, in arriving at some brilliant achievement in science, has all the greater joy when he thinks of it as the result of months and years of patient and unwearied exertion; if the artist or sculptor has all the greater joy in contemplating his completed work, by re-traversing in thought years of incessant labor, the line by line, and stroke by stroke, until he worked it up to the now "breathing" marble — if the Great God Himself, in resting from the work of creation, when He contemplated its magnitude, had delight when He pronounced it "very good" — what must be the transcendent joy with which the adorable Redeemer beholds in the completion of an undertaking which involved in it so unparalleled a cost of humiliation and pain and woe! What shall be the delight with which He, the mighty Architect, contemplates the living, breathing forms of immortal life, which, by His own and His Spirit's work, were chiseled and fashioned to adorn the Heavenly Temple!

Here was "the joy" we read "that was set before Him;" — the joy of seeing "a multitude which no man can number" who had "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." If the courageous mariner has joy, who, at the risk of his life, bravely dashed into the water, and rescued some struggling castaway from the weltering waves — if the Patriot-Philanthropist could with joy stand in thought amid the grateful millions whose fetters he had struck off, and into whose lips he had put the music of freedom — if the honored minister has joy, who, on his death-bed, can say, at the retrospect of a lifetime of self-sacrificing devotedness in his Master's cause, "Blessed be God, my work is done," —



what shall we say (if we can compare the earthly with the heavenly — the finite with the infinite) of that everlasting joy which shall fill the bosom of the Savior as He sees those once bound with the fetters of sin, struggling in the waves of despair, now saved with a great salvation, exulting in "the glorious liberty of the sons of God!"

If He had joy — as we believe He had — when in the depths of a bypast eternity He said, "Lo, I come," (though in that coming He had all the appalling prospect of ignominy and shame) — if "*Wisdom*" had "delights with the sons of men and rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth," when the solitary treading of the wine-press had yet to be borne; if He had joy when He stretched forth His hands over His "Church in the wilderness," and said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" — what intenser and holier joy must *that* be, when, every woe and pang and sorrow at an end, His people shall be with Him "where He is;" earth's battle, with its "confused noise and garments rolled in blood," terminated; the everlasting triumphal procession of eternity begun — immortal palm-branches strewed in the way — and the streets of the new Jerusalem echoing to the cry, "*Hosanna to the Son of David*", "*Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!*"

Behold, then, Heaven as a place where the Savior Himself shall rejoice over His ransomed ones. They are "glorified together." *They* are glorified in Him, and *He* is glorified in them. "Heaven would not be enough for Jesus without His people. It seems as if their presence were essential, not to His deity, (this cannot be) but to His mediatorial happiness." (Evans) The joy in that happy world would seem to begin at the center, and to be deepest there — but sending out its waves to the circumference of glory.

## THE MUTUAL JOY PART 2

*"Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." — John 17:24*

In our last chapter, we considered this verse as expressive of the Savior's

joy in Heaven in being with His people. We may consider it now as expressive of *HIS PEOPLE'S JOY in Heaven in being with their Savior*. Let us enumerate some of the causes or reasons of this joy.

1. *The very fact of HIS being joyful will give them joy.*

When a son hears of some honor done to his hoary-headed parent, or of some event or occurrence that has given him pleasure, the joy or the pride in the parent's bosom will be transfused into that of his child, and become part of his own. Or if we hear of the promotion of a brother or a friend — that by dint of intellect or goodness or worth he has risen to some position of honorable eminence — what a joy his success gives to us! And shall it not be so in an infinite degree with the redeemed in glory? When they behold the Brother of brothers, the Friend of friends, reaping the fruits of the "travail of His soul," and "being satisfied," His joy will be their own!

2. *The thought of His being near them and with them will impart to them joy.*

It makes us happy to have those we love near us. We never enjoy friendship so much as when that friend is by our side. We may be cheered from time to time by an absent brother's letters, his kind messages, and warm expressions of attachment; but the *written* epistle does not supply the blank of the *living* one — we long to see him face to face before our joy can be complete.

So likewise in Heaven with Jesus. "In Your *presence*," "there is *fullness* of joy." Then and there shall that presence be fully unveiled.

If even in this twilight world the Christian can say, in the enjoyment of a present Savior, "It is good for me to be *here*;" how good to be *there*! If even now the messages of this absent Elder Brother, through His Word and Spirit, be cheering and joyful, what will be the vision and fruition of the Brother Himself! If the manna from the banqueting-table be precious, what will it be to have the vision and fruition of the Master of assemblies!

3. *The thought of His not only being with them and near them — but*

*EVER with them, and EVER near them, will greatly intensify their joy.*

A friend or brother comes from a distant land. His visit is cheering at the time — but it is only a passing glimpse. The joy of his home-coming is soon damped by the necessity or summons again to return. The joy of the disciples in having their Lord with them in the days of His flesh was sadly clouded by the announcement, "It is expedient for you that I go away." "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow has filled your heart."

Not so will it be with His second and more glorious coming. "The Master has come," will be the joyful message and cry, "and He will never more be taken from us" — He will be no longer "a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night" — no farewell tear will ever again be shed — no Olivet in Heaven, like the earthly one, where He is to be "*parted* from them!" Oh, the joy comprehended in that key-note to the song of the Redeemed, "*And so shall we EVER be with the Lord!*"

4. One other element of the joy of the Redeemed in Heaven in having Jesus with them, is that *His presence will through eternity be the pledge and guarantee of their SAFETY.*

The Tree of Life in the first Eden was the guarantee of Adam's safety, so long as he continued faithful to his Maker. Christ is the Tree of Life in the midst of the *Heavenly* paradise — the immortal pledge of His people's covenant security. "*Because I live you shall live also.*" Their happiness through eternity is secured by His meritorious work — they are there as His blood-bought trophies — their presence in Heaven is an answer to the prayer we are now considering; it is the glorious Victor claiming His purchased rights, "*Father, I WILL.*" And not until He revokes that "will" — in other words, not until an unchanging Savior becomes changeable — can His people's happiness be altered or impaired.

Reader! learn from all this the same practical lesson we have previously enforced, "how little it matters where the *locality* of Heaven is. It is "with Christ." That is enough. "*With ME! where I AM!*" and the Christian needs no more. The last words of invitation of Jesus to His Church, when that Church is taking its transition step from the *militant* to the *triumphant* state, will be, "*Come, you blessed of My Father!*" Observe, it is not, "*Go,*

you blessed ones, to some paradise of My providing. I am about to return to My heavenly throne. I have marked out some new Eden for you; some blissful solitude where you can reign alone — but though separated from Me, I have made provision for the fullest measure of joy." No! this would hush every harp, and cloud every spirit. It would be like sending them to a universe without a sun. It would be to tell them they were to be dependent on the fitful luster of glimmering stars. But it is, "COME, you blessed ones! Come with ME! I ascend to *My* Father and *your* Father — to My God and your God. We go together. I will be your forerunner. I will show you the path of life. My glory is to be *your* glory. My gladness is to be *your* gladness. Enter into the joy of *your Lord*."

In some exalted sense, may we not put the words of the apostle into the mouth of his Lord and Master, and suppose Him thus to address His saints on the Great Day, "What is My joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not you in My own presence?"

The prayer of Jesus we have been considering is ascending *now*. It has been ascending and fulfilling for six thousand years. Though unseen to mortal eye, He, the great covenant Angel, is even now standing before the throne, with the breastplate of His unchanging priesthood. *The hand that was once transfixed to the tree*, is pointing to the names engraved there, and saying, "Father, I will" that those here imperishably inscribed "be with Me where I am."

With what solemn significance may we connect the utterance of that prayer with every believer's death. The Church on earth may be weeping and mourning over some bright light on the eve of being extinguished, wondering, perhaps, at the mysterious providence which is about to carry bereavement into a stricken household. Could they listen to the transactions in the *upper sanctuary*, every repining word would be hushed into silence. They would find *the death-bed on earth* was the answer to the request in Heaven, "Father, I will;" — angels hovering over it with the joyful summons, "The Master has come, and is calling for you!"

Christian! exult in this "blessed hope." Covet the possession of this fullness of joy — beholding Jesus as He is, rejoicing over you with all the

joy of His infinite Godhead and His glorified humanity. Here we are merely among the *shallows* of this ocean of infinite love; what will it be when we shall be "able to comprehend with all saints, what is the height and depth, and length and breadth, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge!"

## DIVERSE MAGNITUDES

*"One star differs from another star in glory."* — 1 Corinthians 15:41

In that world of light, and love, and glory, *all will be supremely blessed*. But it is a thoroughly scriptural view of the happiness of the Redeemed in glory, to represent it, though the same in *kind*, as differing in *degree*. The saints will be classified, "enrolled in moral genealogies."

DIVERSITY is a law of God's universe. It extends to great things as well as to little things. Some flowers are more beautiful than others. Some intellects are more lofty than others. One planet in the skies is of greater magnitude than another. There are gradations too in the heavenly hierarchy. Angels and archangels — principalities and powers, "the greatest and the least" in the kingdom of Heaven.

And have we not reason also to believe that it will be so with glorified saints? All, indeed, will have reached their thrones and their crowns through "the only *ONE* way." We cannot speak of any of that white-robed multitude as being more justified than others; for they equally point, as the ground of their justification, to the finished work and righteousness of their adorable Surety. They all equally feel that, in being saved, they were "saved by *grace*" — that nothing but the blood of that precious Lamb of God was between them and everlasting ruin! And just as one law binds the planets and the atoms which compose them; so the one great principle of love to Him who died for them, will bind together the vast family of the ransomed, from the soaring Paul to the weeping Magdalene.

But *the degree of the saints' happiness* will be regulated according to

their advances in holiness. Our blessed Lord Himself very emphatically enunciates this same truth, more especially in His parable of the Talents, where the amount of the reward is in exact proportion to diligence and fidelity in trading — a parable the lesson of which the great Apostle has thus translated into one of his weighty aphorisms: "*Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.*"

Works will form no plea or ground whatever for *acceptance* before the throne. But while it is not said of the "blessed dead" that their works "go *before* them," (as a *passport* to their crowns) it is said "their works do *follow* them." There will be a vast difference between the happiness of the man who had done much for Christ on earth — who had long stood "a pillar in the temple of God" — and that of the monument of grace who had just been plucked at the eleventh hour "a brand from the burning."

As memory, we have reason to know, will form a fearful element in the misery of the lost, so we may conclude, will the exercise of the same ennobled faculty form an element of exalted bliss in the case of the saved. The recollection of all that we have done out of love to the Savior, to promote His cause on earth — the sacrifices, little though they be, we have made for Him — the denial of self for the furtherance of His glory — the affection we have borne to His people — the pleasures we have forsworn and forgone for His sake — all such will be matter of hallowed joy. Jesus will love to recount them — His words will carry their approving echo through all eternity, "*Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, you did it unto me.*" "*You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.*"

But yet, with all this diversity in bliss and glory, there will be no strife among the heavenly, as once among the earthly disciples, as to "who should be the greatest." In this present world, the race for distinction is limited and restricted; only a favored few attain pre-eminence. "They which run" (on earth) "a race, *all* run — but *only one* receives the prize." In Heaven, each will receive his reward. The runner may be distanced in the earthly course by his competitor — not so in the heavenly. "In the race for most worldly objects, one who has *prepared* himself, however well, runs uncertainly, since, after all his exertions, another may outstrip him; whereas he who aids a brother in striving for the incorruptible crown, is

ever benefiting Himself." (Whately) There will be crowns with varying luster, and harps of varying tone; but, like the blending of different colors to the eye, or different notes to the ear, all will be pervaded by one beautiful harmony. The saint on the loftiest pinnacle of glory, and the saint on the outskirts of the spiritual horizon, will have the same confession, "We are all one in Christ Jesus."

There will, moreover, be a felt and acknowledged *equity* in this future reckoning. The grace or virtue most assiduously cultivated by the believer on earth, will, (in subordination to God's glory) be the main channel of his happiness in Heaven. In the words of Richard Baxter, "We shall join with Moses in his song — with David in his psalm of praise. We shall see Enoch walking with God — Noah enjoying the end of his singularity — Joseph of his integrity — Job of his patience — Hezekiah of his uprightness, and all the saints the end of their faith."

On earth, the cultivation of particular branches of knowledge brings a pleasure to their possessors which is denied to those ignorant of them. The man, for example, who has cultivated the science of *music*, is capable of enjoying the elaborate composition and exquisite harmonies of some great master, in a way which another cannot do who has neglected this study. So likewise in Heaven; we believe that whatever may have been the tree of righteousness — the Christian grace or virtue or labor — that you have most assiduously nurtured and cultivated here, you will through eternity encamp under its shadow and partake of its fruits. Whatever were the desires to which your lips and your heart were most frequently attuned below, you will resume with most intense pleasure amid the sublime harmonies of "the new heavens and the new earth." Whatever kindled your luster as an earthly star, that radiance will be perpetuated in the celestial skies. Heaven will not extinguish your earthly tastes and longings — your earthly energies and activities. As a luminous orb you will still shine for God — not absorbing your light — but delighting to be a holy medium in giving forth radiations to others. Not a volume bound up and put under lock and key in the library of Heaven — but continued as a living epistle to be read by other orders of intelligent beings. Not a life of dreamy inaction — all its moral activities halted upon entering the spirit-world — but occupied in true angel-work — endless ministries of love.

Jesus, knowing the tastes and capacities of His ransomed, will delight to lead from fountain to fountain — from scene to scene — from eminence to eminence, as He knows they will be severally able to appreciate them.

Oh, what an incentive is this to be "up and doing" — to be adding to your faith the catalogue of Christian graces! Seek an "*abundant entrance*." It will be joy indeed, happiness far transcending earth's happiest hours, to bask as a star on the *outskirts* of glory. But why not be fired by the noble ambition to be near the *all-glorious Center*? Your crown, given by grace and sprinkled with blood, can never be dim — but why not strive now, that when the Lord the righteous judge shall reward you, you may be "found unto *praise, and honor, and glory,*" at His second appearing?

## GLORIFIED BODIES

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." — Philippians 3:21

Is this frail BODY to share none of the glories of immortality? Is the decaying tenement to slumber on — a heap of unconscious dust — to be at last swept into annihilation at the dissolution of all things?

"*The voice said, Cry! and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is GRASS!*" (the noble! the beautiful! the ornamental!) all like withering, fading grass of the field! Such is the Bible's humiliating description of the body here, and it is echoed back in mournful experience from ten thousand tombstones, and ten thousand aching hearts.

But "*our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die.*" The resurrection-body, freed from the last vestige of corruption — purged from the last taint of earthliness — ennobled, purified, etherealized — shall stand "without fault before the throne," the crowning and culminating triumph of the redemption work.

We need not dwell on nature's familiar analogies. The *seed* expanding



into the perfect blossom — the little *grain* of corn, buried in its tiny grave of inert clod, bursting forth in the appointed spring-time — the torpid *caterpillar* cradled in a dark cell — a loathsome dungeon — yet that dungeon becoming the birthplace of a beauteous butterfly, mounting to heaven on wings of purple and gold. These are the mute utterances of the outer world on the possibility of a truth beyond the province of reason.

But Scripture comes in where reason is speechless or ambiguous. It tells me of the reconstruction of the dissolved earthly tabernacle into "*a building of God eternal in the heavens.*" It tells more — that the spiritual body is to be "fashioned" like that of the glorified Redeemer. It tells that there is at this moment a MAN wearing a glorified Human body on the throne. "Christ, the first-fruits" — the first Sheaf of the immortal harvest — has been waved in the new Jerusalem temple, the pledge of the myriad sheaves that are to follow; and His saints (raised up in their bodies) will be "*caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so be forever with the Lord.*"

It is vain to attempt conjectures as to the nature of the incorruptible and glorified frame — what changes will take place on the present condition of our bodily system. That there will be new powers and susceptibilities of enjoyment added to what we now possess, we have the strongest reason to believe. There will be no greater change, indeed, in a glorified state on our physical structure than is absolutely *necessary*. We know, however, the dependence of the mind on the body; and it is quite possible to conceive, by a finer bodily organization, a corresponding enlargement of the mental faculties and powers. We may be deprived of some important sources of happiness at present, owing to the lack in our existing bodily frames of some necessary inlets for these. A man deprived of eyesight has a *mind* as susceptible as others of taking impressions of beauty; but having no organ to be the medium of their conveyance, he forfeits the pleasures which his fellows enjoy.

So, may it not be possible in Heaven, by means of a more perfect bodily structure — a physical frame even more "fearfully and wonderfully made" than our present one — to have the way opened for new inlets of exalted enjoyment? It may be like a waking of energy dormant powers of which we are now as unconscious as the *deaf* man is of the sweets of music, or

the *blind* man of the glories of the sun, or the tiny *infant* of the philosopher's speculations.

We may infer, moreover, that whatever be the nature of the change, and however vast, *it will not be so vast as to destroy personal identity*. We might recur to earthly analogies here also. The grown-up man has an entirely different body in its component parts from what he had as an infant. The particles which make up his material framework have again and again been renewed — yet in *person* he remains the *same*. Heaven will be the manhood of our earthly being. But though the transformation must necessarily be great from our present "infant state," personal identity will remain undestroyed. "*Then shall I know, as also I am (here) known.*"

The features of my buried believing friend I shall recognize again. The beaming face of cherished affection shall wear the old impress of earth — no change but this, that the shifting *tent* is transmuted into "a *building* of God," made of permanent and imperishable materials — a bodily structure knowing no decrepitude — smiles that shall never die — new powers conferred which earth may have longed for — but never possessed — all emulous for the divine glory, and instinct with burning and untiring zeal in His service!

And more than all, it will be Humanity in its noblest type, "*fashioned like Christ's glorious body.*" There will be a *family resemblance* to the Elder Brother, bodily, spiritually. It is said that He shall come to be "glorified" not only BY His saints — but "IN His saints," as they bear His image, and wear His likeness. "*We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" Some of our loveliest garden flowers, are *grafts* from wild plants found in brush and forest-thicket and hedgerow. So beauteous are these transplants as almost belie their pedigree. Their perfect tints, and symmetrical forms, and sweet perfume, however, prove the culture and development of which the plant or flower in its native state was incapable.

So shall it be in a far higher and nobler sense with flowers transplanted into the garden above. The glorified body! how immeasurably will it transcend in physical and moral beauty the old earthly tabernacle! "Sown

in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body." The first was "of the earth," the second is fashioned like the glorious body of "the Lord from Heaven!"

Glorious body, indeed! without sin, without pain, without weakness, or weariness, or infirmity. The thought of dissolution, which now casts its cold shadow across our path, no longer known or dreaded! Paul's earthly soliloquy changed to this, "O *happy* man that I am, now that I am *delivered* from this body of death!" The Christian's grave, however lowly, is thus "hallowed ground." There slumbers, in these clods of the valley, *redeemed dust*. The mausoleum of clay becomes the casket of a gem which is to sparkle through eternal ages in the Redeemer's crown!

"It is the same way for the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies, which die and decay, will be different when they are resurrected, for they will never die. Our bodies now disappoint us — but when they are raised, they will be full of glory. They are weak now — but when they are raised, they will be full of power. They are natural human bodies now — but when they are raised, they will be spiritual bodies."

## NO TEMPLE

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." — Revelation 21:22

HEAVEN WITHOUT A TEMPLE! How strange, at first sight, is this figurative description! The temple was "the excellency of beauty" in the earthly Jerusalem. It was the place of solemnities, the sanctuary of prayer, the frequented resort of angels; the visible pavilion where God Himself in mystic splendor dwelt. To the exile of Patmos it had more than an Israelite's customary hallowed associations. Through its "Beautiful Gate" he had often and again passed, in company with his Divine Master. In its sacred porticos he had listened to the voice of Him who spoke as never a man spoke. But as the celestial vision now passes before him, he looks in vain, amid the shining portals, and jasper walls, and golden-paved streets, for a similar sacred shrine. John is struck with the mysterious absence. "*I saw no temple therein!*"

This apparent omission in the inspired picture tells us that there will be *no more need of Temples in Heaven*. There was no temple required in the first Eden! *There* our first parents, in the days of their innocence, worshiped God under the blue vault of *nature's* temple!

The angels in Heaven, so far as we know, have no visible sanctuary, there is nothing in their sinless world to interrupt their interchanges of love and fellowship, or to mar the cadence of their song. *Sin* first demanded some special localities for religious worship — consecrated spots partitioned off from the world. There was no need of sheepfolds, so long as no wolf prowled abroad. But when sin and Satan gained entrance, the little flock required the sheltering refuge, wherein they might rest in safety amid "*the mountains of prey.*"

As it was of old in the earthly paradise, so will it be amid the glories of "Eden restored" — there will be no "present evil world" to disturb its worshipers, and render needful the quiet and seclusion of hallowed edifices, to secure the sanctities of devotion. *Every place in the vast*

*domain of Heaven will be a Temple — every spot hallowed ground.*

Divisions, too, there will be none. Here, alas! the existence of many and separate Temples, is too often the painful indication of divided churches and severed believers; worshiping apart — refusing to hold fellowship in one and the same church, and drawing lines of improper demarcation between each other. In *Heaven*, all shall see "eye to eye." No walls of separation there. No rival Gerizims and Zions *there*. The worshipers being assimilated to God, shall be assimilated to one another. They shall have *one* temple, *one* motive, *one* heart, *one* song. "See how these glorified Christians love one another!"

But if the apostle, in gazing on the apocalyptic vision, "saw NO temple," what was the substitute? The lack of the earthly symbol of glory and beauty, must surely be supplied by something nobler and sublimer! Yes, there IS to be a Temple in Glory — but it is a house "not made with hands." Materialism, with all its magnificent dimensions, melts away , *"The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof."*

There is one sense, indeed, in which, at this moment, God and the Lamb are the Temple of the universe. God's presence is all-pervading. The splendors of the visible skies are but the hangings and drapery of a more magnificent and vast temple. But I cannot now, with my feeble faculties, discern the majesty of His glory. I feel that in this "childhood-world" I am like *the infant in the assembly of philosophers*, who is all unconscious of the superiority of the minds around him, and can hold no fellowship with them in their lofty themes of converse. Though surrounded on all hands with the footprints and manifestations of a present Divinity, my befitting exclamation is, *"Can you by searching find out God?"*

In *Heaven* there is to be a vast revelation and unveiling, of a "hidden God." In the Temple on earth, He was screened by an interposing veil — that veil in glory is withdrawn. No, I am to be *enshrined* in Deity! Heaven is not to be so much the temple of God, as *God* the temple of Heaven. His attributes are to be the walls and bulwarks of my everlasting security.

But this verse of our present Meditation tells us more than this. Jesus *"the Lamb"* is to form the "Gate Beautiful" of this Temple — the Revealer

of Him who dwells "*in the light which no man can approach unto!*"

We believe it will be as true of the *glorified* saint, as of the ransomed on earth, "*No man has seen God at any time: the only-begotten SON who is in the bosom of the Father; He has declared Him.*" He will be the true Angel "standing in the sun," the all-glorious medium through which we can see God and live!

*"The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof!"* This tells me that all my knowledge will come *directly* from *God in Christ*. Now, there is needed the intervention of the Word, Ordinances, Sacraments. *Then*, the spiritual world will no more be lighted up by *satellites*; the "fairness of the moon" will give way to the "brightness of the Sun;" — the starlight will be quenched and superseded by the Great Spiritual Luminary. "You have but now and then seen your Beloved looking through the lattice of ordinances — what a burst of joy awaits you when you shall see Him face to face, and evermore be with Him!" (Miss Plumtre)

Yes, indeed, ineffable bliss! fullness of joy! *No more yearning desires* after "something better;" — the infinite all-satisfying "good" attained — as happy as everlasting goodness and wisdom and omnipotence can make me. My feeble voice swelling the joyous anthem within temple-walls whose only confines are light and love.

Is my title clear to this glorious Heaven? Am I fitted now to be the inhabitant of such a Temple? — to dwell *with* God, (yes, *in* God) occupying these inner chambers of Deity? Heaven is a City. The thought of reigning there with the King of kings is an amazing privilege . But not less elevating, surely, the thought of Heaven as a Temple, where I shall be occupied as a ministering priest, "a priest unto *God* " — ready to cast my censer as well as my crown at His feet, and "offer the sacrifice of praise continually!"

Be it mine to prepare for the priestly work. "*Holiness to the Lord,*" was written on the high priest's frontlet of old. Let it be my superscription now. Let the eye of faith delight to dwell especially on the *great* High Priest — He who, as the Covenant Angel, is interceding for me; and who,

through eternity, will form the blood-besprinkled entrance, the ever-open gate conducting into the Holy Place. There may, and doubtless will be many other anthems that shall resound in that temple; but "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,*" will ever be the most sublime chant of the Church of the first-born. We shall exult in its other glories. But it will be the inscription over the portal that will be the theme of eternity, "Boldness to enter into the Holiest by the *blood of Jesus.*"

## THE GLORIOUS TRANSITION

"Absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." — 2 Corinthians  
5:8

Again the curtain of glory is lifted, and what do we see? The emancipated spirit bursting its cocoon shell — soaring upwards on immortal wings to be "with the Lord," and that "forever!" We are interested in the first look we get of "*a great man*" on earth. What must the first glance be in Heaven of JESUS! — that mystic name which has here put music into the heart in many a dark hour, and lighted up its wilderness with a halo of joy! If Jacob longed intently to see Joseph, what will be the saint's ardent desire to gaze on the true Joseph — Him whom his "soul loves!" Yes, on entering Heaven, it will not be the burning ranks of angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim, that will fix his arrested gaze. His exclamation will be, as his eye wanders upwards to the central Throne, and settles on a Countenance there beaming with unutterable loveliness, "Is *that* indeed the Savior, whom, though so long unseen, I have nevertheless loved!"

And what shall the believer see? It will be the same Lord to whose sublime utterances of love he has so often listened in thought, as eighteen hundred years ago He "spoke as never a man spoke." The same Being who wept, and groaned, and sympathized, and suffered. He will think of Him at Sychar's well — on Tabor — on Tiberias — on Olivet — by the Kedron — at Bethany — at Calvary. It is "that same Jesus" — He who once lay in a borrowed cradle, a helpless babe at Bethlehem; He who spoke comfortable words to the bereaved, and gave back to widowed and

yearning hearts their perished joys; He who invited the weary to rest, and never scorned the penitent's tears, or left un-helped the call of mercy; He who lay in anguish on the cold ground of Gethsemane; He who bowed His head on the bitter tree; He who met the weeping Mary with words of joy as she stood disconsolate by His grave, and addressed Peter with the gentlest and most tender of rebukes. I shall see (if I be one of His ransomed people) "that same Jesus" — I shall enjoy with Him near and confidential communion, and nothing shall ever separate me from His love!

Of old, some of the transient earthly glimpses of this Savior were blessed and consoling. If it were gladdening when Jacob saw Him in His angel-form at Peniel — or aged Simeon clasped Him in his withered arms in the temple — or the disciples beheld Him on Tabor — or Martha and Mary wept with Him at Bethany — or when the beloved apostle leaned on His bosom, or met Him on the way to Emmaus, or on the lonely shores of Patmos; what will it be to have these seasons of communion renewed without their transience — to bask through eternal years under the radiance of His smile — His own words obtaining an everlasting fulfillment, "*Where I AM, there shall also My servant be!*"

Here, too, we are again reminded that *means and agencies* will be required no longer in His communications with us. The streams will come welling fresh from the living fountain — the rays will be untainted and undimmed by transmission through any impurer medium — there will be *personal* communings between every saint and his living Head, "*They shall see His face.*" Whatever may be the believer's relation to the infinite circumference of Heaven — to the thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers — he will be ever near to the all-glorious Center! "He," it has been well said, "who is now in every saint the *hope* of glory, will then be in every saint the possession, realization, and fullness of glory."

And, observe from our motto verse, it is an *immediate* transition. The spirit, "with a bound," at the hour of death, as it forsakes its earthly tabernacle, enters the Divine presence and the heavenly Home. Be assured, Paul would never have uttered the wish for departure, in order to lapse into a mesmeric trance or lethargic slumber. Never would he



have used such language as this , "*We are confident*" (we are *bold*, as the word means, in the prospect of death) "*and willing rather to be absent from the body,*" if he had any less elevating desire and prospect than to be "*present with the Lord.*" Far rather would he have remained on earth, enjoying the blessed experiences of the Savior's felt presence and love, and the consciousness of promoting His cause, than to have passed into a state of dreamy, drowsy insensibility and torpor. The exchange, in such circumstances, would have been a positive *diminishing* of blessedness. It would have been the withdrawal from active work and warfare in the Church below — an inglorious transition for his hero-spirit. Dungeon, chains, watching, fasting, stripes and sufferings *with* Christ on earth, would have been, to a soul like his, infinitely preferable to such a state of slumberous oblivion and unconsciousness. But he specially guards us against any such supposition: "*Not,*" says he, "that we would be unclothed" — not that I long merely to leave the trammels of the flesh, in order to escape from the encumbering clay , "*but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*"

Am I prepared for this presence? am I living under the power of this "*blessed hope?*" Were I to be ushered into the presence of an earthly sovereign, how careful would I be in my preparation for so regal a privilege! What shall it be in the prospect of appearing before Him in comparison with whom the loftiest monarch of earth is but as a passing shadow — an atom of dust — the mote of a sunbeam! "*Present with the Lord!*" What an honor! The brightest of those bright and holy beings who bow before His throne with adoring reverence, know no higher!

"It is not here on earth," says the author of the 'Saint's Rest,' "that He has prepared the presence-chamber of His glory; He has drawn the curtain between us and Him; we are far from Him as creatures, and farther as frail mortals, and farthest as sinners." Death is the dressing-room, where the ragged pilgrim-garment is thrown off, and where, as glorified guests, we shall receive our wedding attire. But the barrier shall in due time be taken down, and we shall be ushered amid the un-curtained splendors of the "new heavens and the new earth." Then shall His own voice be heard announcing the believer's consummated bliss, and its mightiest element, "*Enter into the joy of Your Lord.*"

## THE ALL IN ALL

"That God may be all in all." — 1 Corinthians 15:28

We may shift and alter the heavenly kaleidoscope — but God is still the center of its ineffable bliss, "the glory of its glory." In union and communion with *Him* alone, will the longings of the immortal spirit be at length fully and forever satisfied.

Existence is one long endeavor after some infinite good. The disciples of Plato, in their gropings in the dark, aspired after a mystical, undefined "Fullness," the possession of which was associated with perfect happiness. This mythical dream of pagan philosophy has its reality in "the fullness of Him that fills all in all." Here on earth, we have at best only some feeble *foretastes* of the "fullness of God" — some *sips* at the earthly fountain — what shall it be when we come to stand on the margin of the infinite ocean! Ask the angels who are now peopling that world of bliss — or the myriads of ransomed saints whose probation is finished and their glorification begun, in what their supreme happiness consists. Their response would be in words they had often before used — but whole true meaning they had only learned in Glory, "*It is good for us to draw near unto GOD.*"

The best *earthly types of Heaven* in Scripture were designedly imperfect. How often, for example, was the earthly Zion spoken of as the pattern and image of the Heavenly. But even in this "perfection of beauty" there were defects and blemishes. No river (save the tiniest of brooks) flowed past its walls. No war-ship (as in other earthly capitals) was ever seen sailing by, or ship of commerce unloading its stores. "But," says God, in beautiful allusion to these needs in the earthly Zion, "I shall come in place of them in the Jerusalem above." "*The Lord will be our Mighty One. He will be like a wide river of protection that no enemy can cross.*"

*All other joys will be but reflections of the Great Joy.* We shall be independent of *starlight* blessings when we have the central sun — of the

rivulet when we have the ocean. Were the alternative presented, rather would the ranks of the glorified have God without Heaven, than Heaven without God. There will be a devout consciousness throughout all their wide circle of a sweet and holy dependence on Him. They will never forget the pilgrim prayer of earth, "*Hold me up, and I shall be safe.*" They will feel, even with the crown on their head and the victor-song on their lips, that it is "He alone who makes them to dwell in safety." Pensioners on earth, they will exult in the feeling that they are pensioners still. The confession of time will be the anthem of eternity, "By the grace of God we are what we are."

We read of the saints that, glorified though they be, they still "*fall down before the throne.*" Their ascription, crowned though they be, is this, "*Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne.*" The stream may sooner do without its fountain — the parched furrow without its refreshing shower — the sky without its sun — than they without Him who is the source and fountain-head of all life, and light, and joy. "*God Himself shall be with them and be their God, and they shall see His face.*" The infinite center of an infinite circumference, they shall love all in *Him*, and *Him* in all! Not more surely on earth do the rivers run to the ocean, than in Heaven will every aspiration of the Church triumphant be turned Godwards; and it will be our happiness thus supremely to love — supremely to adore Him.

Here on earth, how often, how constantly, has the Christian to watch over the objects of his love, lest ever and anon he be betrayed into some sinful excess of idolatrous attachment. There will be no such bound set in Heaven, because no such need for it. What a glory it imparts to the soul of man — what an ennobling consciousness it gives of our true dignity — future communion with, yes, future assimilation to, the great Jehovah! — gravitating towards Him as an all-glorious center — the aim and object of an infinite existence, perfectly to please Him!

Let me prepare for this lofty destiny, by making God more than ever "the portion of my inheritance;" having a more constant and habitual aim that His will and glory be the regulators of my daily being. This was my Savior's desire for Himself. It constituted the happiness of His spotless life — doing His Father's will and not His own. "I do think," says Lady

Powerscourt, "one chief part of our happiness hereafter will consist in our being done with wretched SELF — God being all in all." Oh! what a solemnizing influence would it exert on all our thoughts and feelings, our duties and engagements, our pursuits and pleasures, our sleeping and waking, our airy visions and worldly plans, were we to think that soon — very soon — we shall be with God, and that forever and ever!

## SUFFERING AND GLORY

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." — Romans 8:18

Thus does a master-hand strike the balance between present sufferings and future glory. "*I reckon*" (I make the calculation, and the deliberate result is), that the trials of earth are not to be named in contrast or comparison with the peerless joys of Heaven.

The great Apostle was one specially fitted to make such a calculation. He himself was abundantly acquainted in the school of suffering, and well able to cast up the balance-sheet. Few pilgrims that ever trod the lower valley, were more honored than he; but few had greater weights to carry. He felt that all these earthly weights added together and combined, were far outweighed by *one* other, and that was the "*weight of glory*."

His language here is remarkable. He institutes a comparison between present suffering and future bliss — two things which we may think cannot be compared. The following may have been a few points of antithesis which suggested themselves, as His mind made the sanctified reckoning:

*All present sufferings have intervals of release.* There are lulls in the storm. The fevered patient may have his snatches of repose, fitful and unrefreshing though they be. But in the glory that is to follow, there are no intervals, no ebbings in the ever-advancing tide of happiness and joy.

*In the sufferings of this life there are many alleviations.* The bitterest cup

is mingled with *some* sweet drops — the most aching soul is seldom without some supporting solaces. But the glory which follows knows no modifications. The golden vessels there are indeed always filling — always increasing — but yet they are always full. The "just made perfect," though ever aspiring after fresh draughts of the living fountain, will never be heard uttering the voice of complaint, "Oh, that it were with me as in months past!" The glory is a progressive glory — the joy a progressive joy — their change is a change for the better, never for the worse.

*The sufferings of the present*, in the case of the believer, much as they may cloud and darken his earthly and outward happiness, *cannot affect the unassailable bliss of his inner life*. But the heavenly glory will interpenetrate alike his outer and his inner being. He will be *steeped in bliss!* He will have around and on every side of him a glory which imagination has never ventured to conceive — while his glorified spirit will reflect, without speck or stain, the image of an all-glorious God!

*"The sufferings of the present!"* Go up to that bright and glorious multitude harping with their harps, and crowding the shores of the glassy sea. Hear their one, united testimony. It is, that but for their trials they would never have been there. Every page in their history bears the signet-mark of "much tribulation." It is endorsed with the words, "*So He brought them to their desired haven!*" "*So!*" It was by a way not of their own choosing. "*So!*" It was through winds, and waves, and buffeting elements — the ship tacking about, "neither sun nor stars for many days appeared, and no small tempest lay upon them." They love now to trace all the mystic windings in that untoward voyage; the "deep calling to deep" — the wave responding to wave. They love to think, "It was *thus* He brought me!" There was a time when I was prone to question His wisdom — to arraign His faithfulness; but now, I realize that I could not have lacked one thorn, one bitter drop, one tear.

As the contrary winds which carry high the migratory birds are found in reality to assist their flight, so with the soul; when the winds are contrary — the storm beating fiercely — it only leads it to soar higher and higher — upwards and heavenwards — further from earth — nearer its God! Oh, if we only saw our trials, not through the misty haze of this world — but in the light of eternity; the reckoning would not be how *little* they have been

— but how *precious* they have been! How all (yes, *all*) were needed to effect the desired end, all were composite parts of one way, and that way was *love*! It is with the believer as with the diamond; the more facets — the brighter it sparkles; so, the more the tools of sanctified affliction have been on him, the brighter and more gloriously will he shine in Heaven!

Let me seek, then, to look beyond these portals of sadness, and repose on the glory that is to be revealed. Soon the curfew-bell of time will toll, telling that the fires of affliction and trial are extinguished forever, and that the weary Church may now retire to the rest which remains for the people of God! "Live in Christ," says Rutherford, "and you are in the suburbs of Heaven. There is but a thin wall between you and the land of praises. You are within one hour's sailing of the shore of the new Canaan."

It is a mighty procession that is sweeping onwards to the Land of Promise. A sainted writer has beautifully compared it to the vast host of Israel entering the earthly Canaan. Some had crossed Jordan; their footsteps were treading the covenanted soil, the land of the patriarchs — others were passing through the river-channel, the waters standing up to make a way "for the ransomed to pass over;" — others were patiently occupying their allotted place in the rear, until those that preceded them had traversed the dry bed of the border river. But all were moving on; and those furthest behind knew that every tread of their footstep was bringing them nearer the moment when their desert trials and privations would be at an end, and their voices too would blend in the song of victory. And so it is with the Church of God on earth. Some are already in Heaven — glorified, safe on the Canaan side. Some are at this moment crossing the Jordan of death — the dark river separating the wilderness from the heavenly land. Some are still in the pilgrim rear, amid the smoldering fires and ashes of their encampment, casting a longing glance towards those who have already begun their everlasting ascription of praise. But the mighty mass moves on! The desert is retreating and the heavenly shores are nearing. Thousands on thousands of the ransomed Israel of God are already safely landed, "clean escaped," and their triumphant song should only inspire us with fresh ardor to follow their steps and share their crowns! The true Joshua-Jesus, the Heavenly Precursor, is

even now standing on the celestial shore, and to every faint and toil-worn traveler proclaiming, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is about to be revealed!"

How the thought of that blessed Heaven of eternal respite and rest, should reconcile me to any trial the Lord may see fit to lay upon me here! It was the prospect of future glory which led this heavenly reckoner to make so little of his earthly trials. He called that a "*light affliction*," which he had borne for thirty years!

Let me often school myself in the *devout arithmetic* of the tried Apostle — putting all my trials into one scale, and all the blessings — from grace to glory, which my God bestows — into the other, and then dare I murmur?

Lord! it is my prayer that my trial (my peculiar trial, be what it may), may be sanctified. It is a "muffled drum" in the march of life; but it is beating "*Home, brothers! home!*" Let every promise of Scripture seem as if a bright angel hung out from the skies a guiding signal, saying, "The darkness will soon be past, and the true light will shine!" "Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry," and *then*, the reckonings of *earthly* trial will give way to the reckonings of unending bliss. The voice of the Beloved will thus be heard calling on His weeping Bride to dry every tear and prepare for a tearless home, "*Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.*"

## THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." — Revelation 19:9

Under a new and beautiful symbol, we are called to behold Jesus as the Heavenly Bridegroom, seated at His own marriage-feast, summoning His

glorified guests around Him! — the true Solomon, "crowned in the day of His espousals, and the day of the gladness of His heart!" "Alone," says a writer, "in the depths of eternity stood Christ and His Church before the altar of that divine espousal; none was witness but the Father and the Holy Spirit when the vow was plighted, and the contract sealed." (Butler)

But all Heaven is now to be spectator of the gladsome consummation. The bridal-day has come! He has "*sent His angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other,*" and lo! a multitude which no man can number, "all-glorious within, their clothing of wrought gold," are seen passing through the gates of the city "with gladness and rejoicing," on their way to the King's palace! The Bride for six thousand weary years has been calling for her Lord to "*Come!*" The voice of the Beloved has at last been heard; the King has "*brought her into His banqueting-house, and His banner over her is love!*"

In that scene of festive joy, behold —

### 1. Jesus Glorified.

*"He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."* Oh, what a moment of joy will that be to the Church's Divine Head, when *all* His blood-bought people (not one of the sealed myriads missing) shall be assembled with Him to share His bliss, "betrothed unto Him forever;" "presented a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing!" If "Wisdom" rejoiced in the mere *anticipation* of redemption — if even then His "delights were with the sons of men" dwelling in "the habitable parts of the earth," what will the rejoicing be, when the vast undertaking is all completed, and the trophies of His grace are seated by His side! What a new and more glorious meaning will be given to His words of intercession on earth: "*All Yours are Mine, and Mine are Yours, and I am glorified in them!*" It is *their* glory and joy in which much of His own mediatorial happiness will consist. As "the Master," He girds Himself at the marriage-feast, and "comes forth to serve them." He has them in view in His every thought of Heaven: "I go to prepare a place for *you*, ...that where *I am*, there *you* may be also", "I shall drink no more of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new *with you* in My Father's



kingdom."

## 2. Behold the Church glorified.

"Called" to the Master's immediate presence, not to eat of the crumbs falling from His table — but of the children's bread; to see His face; to participate in His triumph; and with faith changed into sight, and hope into full fruition, to exclaim, "*My Beloved is mine, and I am His!*"

Seated at the wedding-feast! What nearness and intimacy of fellowship is here indicated! Even on earth, the believer's most blissful hours are those spent in intimate communion with his Lord. How the pain and weariness of the sickbed are alleviated — how the pang of the crushing bereavement has been mitigated, by that Presence and Name which puts music and joy into the saddest heart! What will it be in glory, with no sin to mar our communion, and no sorrow to dim our eye — the consummated union and communion of everlasting love! Truly, the glorified guests will be able to say to their heavenly Lord, as was said in His hearing at a marriage-feast on earth, "You have kept the *best* wine until now!"

On that coronation-day of the Church triumphant, angels will listen with amazement, as each ransomed one tells the story of blended grace and faithfulness — principalities and powers will stoop to hear the Church's perpetual *new song*, the keynote of which will be, "*the manifold wisdom of God!*" It will not be with the disciples in Heaven as with the disciples below. When they got a momentary glimpse of their Lord's glory on Tabor, we read, "They *feared* as they entered the cloud." Perfect love will then cast out fear. It is no stranger — no inaccessible, awe-inspiring Being who is to gather them around Him. It will indeed be a day of *Kingly* espousals. On His head there will be "many crowns." The Bride will "enter the *King's* palace." It will be a regal — a coronation anthem that will be sung by the lips of the great multitude, "*Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent REIGNS.*"

But it is also called the "marriage-supper of the Lamb;"; "that same Jesus" who in His person is so well known to us on earth — whose character and life are so beautifully and truthfully portrayed in what we may call His four inspired biographies, that we seem to feel as if we knew

Him — knew Him intimately — had seen Him — had sat with Him on Tiberias' shores, and talked with Him at Jacob's well, and wept with Him at the Bethany grave! We enjoy to be with those who have been kind to us; who so kind as "*the MAN Christ Jesus!*" what fellowship so blissful as with the all-glorious One, who has loved us with a love, in comparison with which the most endearing earthly friendship is coldness itself! How joyous when *He* shall meet us at the threshold of glory, conduct us to the coronation-hall to receive our crowns, and become guests at His table!

3. *Behold here a holy and happy meeting between guest and guest.*

The improper estrangements of the present will there be unknown forever. Cold looks, and averted faces, and distant and un-cordial recognitions, will be all at an end. The guests will only wonder they could have allowed petty differences to have sundered them so long and so strangely below. *Like* their beloved Lord, they will become *like* one another. Many a Christian on earth is nearer in heart and love and sympathy to a brother Christian, we believe, than the conventional distinctions — the Shibboleth of sect and party — will permit him to avow. In Heaven there will be no such reserve. The slumbering harmonies of the heart will then break forth, without one jarring note.

Let me delight often to carry my eye onward to the celebration of these espousals — to draw aside the world's scenes of *painted* glory, and to get a sight of "the invisible" — the great Sabbath of eternity inaugurated by this nuptial festival, where every redeemed Vessel, like the earthly types at Cana, are "filled to the brim." Jesus, who went forth from His eternal throne as the weeping "Man of sorrows," now comes again with rejoicing, to bring all His ransomed sheaves with Him!

"Will you not," says Baxter, "be almost ready to draw back, and say, 'What! I, Lord? I, the unworthy neglecter of Your grace, disesteemer of Your blood, and slighter of Your love, may *I* have this glory? I am utterly unworthy to be called a son.' But Love will have it so. Therefore you must enter into His joy."

## THE BRIMMING FOUNTAIN

"In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore." — Psalm 16:11

*FULLNESS of joy!* Can that be said of anything on this side Heaven? There is a restless craving in the human bosom for something better than this world can give.

There are aching voids — deep, yawning chasms in the soul of man, which the world and all its tinsel pleasures can never fill. Hope is ever gilding the future with the prospect of that happiness which the present denies. Lured and dazzled, the worldling pursues the phantom. But each successive failure more painfully convinces him that all here is a delusion. Happiness, the object of his life-search, is as far from him as ever!

These longings of the heart are only satisfied when it finds in God its "*fullness of joy*." The old nature, like the old philosophy, *will* cleave to the *world* as the center of its system. It holds its happiness in "minding earthly things." The new nature, like Copernicus, finds out "the secret hid from ages and generations." It dethrones a usurping earth, and makes all its affections circle and constellate around God Himself, the true "*Sun of the soul*." What will this be in that blessed world of purity, where there will be no disturbing forces to interfere with the saint's spiritual orbit, or dim and darken the emanations from the great Source of light and life, happiness and joy!

Happiness even on earth is proportioned to the *worthiness* of the object on which our hearts are fixed in connection with it. What must be the happiness of the glorified spirit which has its affections centered on Him who is unsearchable in His wisdom, boundless in His resources, unchanging in His love! David said regarding earthly things, "I have seen an end of all perfection." In Heaven the soul will have, in the enjoyment of God, the perfection of bliss. All the perfection of earth is finite; that of Heaven is infinite. All earthly bliss has its bounds and limits; in Heaven and in God's presence that bliss will be unbounded.

Think of the happiness of having no unfulfilled desire, nothing to be dreaded, nothing to be delivered from! To have the vision and fruition of God to guarantee all, and stamp permanency and immutability on every joy. Insecurity is the attribute of all worldly joys. Ours today, they may be gone tomorrow. How the thought of *the slender tie* which binds to life must haunt the idolater of earthly affection! — that in the twinkling of an eye the cup of creature-love may be dashed from his lips — his most fondly cherished fabric become a heap of humiliating ruins! often in one's happiest moments we have (do as we like) the chilling forebodings of coming trial — the feeling, *All this cannot last*. This gladsome music — earth's high holiday — may this night give place to the dirge of sorrow!

In Heaven, "our sun shall go down no more." No real or imagined evils will loom in a troubled future — the music of its eternal festival will never be suspended or hushed by the intrusion of sadder notes. *Here*, one main source of the believer's joy is in the words, "*no condemnation!*" *There*, it will rather be, "*no separation!*" His sorrow will be turned into joy, and that joy no one will take from him. The wheat will be "gathered into the garner." So long as it is un-harvested — standing in the open field — it is exposed to furious winds and corroding rains. But the angel-reapers have made it secure. These garnered sheaves of bliss are as safe as everlasting love and faithfulness and power can make them!

And while it is "*fullness of joy*" (denoting its *perfection*), and "*pleasures for evermore*" (denoting their *security*), let us not forget the nobler and grander attribute of that heavenly bliss, "*In Your presence.*" Is it this which is drawing me to Heaven — the prospect of being admitted into union and communion with my God? Some are eager to leave this world, because they have been the victims of disappointed hope and crossed affections. In a fit of morbid moroseness, they hate life, and look to the grave as a refuge from its ills! Am I conscious of nobler and loftier motives in my Heavenward aspirations? Is it the thought of *seeing* GOD, *enjoying* GOD, *loving* GOD, which is drawing me there? Other hallowed ties and motives I may have, beckoning me upwards. Voices hushed on earth may be stealing down, in tones of celestial music, from the spirit-land, "The Bride" (the blessed dead, among whom my fondest earthly memories linger) may be saying, "*Come.*" But do I feel that even such a

sacred incentive as this, is subordinate to the voice of the Bridegroom? — that these are but star-light glories, compared to the meridian sun, "the glory that excels?" Oh! how wondrous the thought that God's pleasures are to be my pleasures — that I am to be linked through eternity in congeniality of sentiment and enjoyment, with essential goodness, essential greatness, essential love! I will rejoice in God, and the Lord my God will rejoice over *me*. He shall make me to "drink of the river of His pleasures!"

And soon — very soon — all this happiness may be mine. A few more beats of the pulse — a few more falling grains of the sandglass, and I may be by that river's brink, washing off the dust and scars of battle, and bathing in the floods of ineffable joy! Meanwhile, let me seek to aspire after closer and more intimate communion with God, so as to feel that no blessing on earth can be comparable to His favor, and no loss equal to the forfeiture of His love. Let me often think of death as the moment which will admit me into the full possession of this transcendent bliss; and see the promises of the gospel, like so many lights hung out from the windows of my Father's house, beckoning me Home!

## IMMEDIATE ENTRANCE

"Today shall you be with me in paradise." — Luke 23:43

WHEN shall I be admitted into this glorious Heaven — to pluck for myself the Grapes of Eshcol, and enjoy the sweets of the true Land of Promise? Does the hour of death usher me at once into the mansions of my heavenly Father? Or is there some intermediate state of purification, preparatory to being introduced into the presence of the Lord? Is the disembodied spirit destined to remain in dream-land — a condition of unconsciousness and torpor — until awakened by the trumpet of God, along with the risen and glorified body, on the resurrection morning?

We have already seen, in a previous Meditation, that the Bible answer is explicit. We may return for a little, to ponder the same comforting theme.

There is an "immediate entrance." *The same moment in which I close my eyes on a world of sin and suffering, I open them in glory!* Whenever I pass through the swellings of Jordan, my feet shall touch the shores of "the better country;" — *that day* I am "with Jesus in paradise!"

Paul's verdict, as we previously noted, is conclusive: *"Having a desire to depart and to BE WITH CHRIST."* Can we suppose he would have expressed this longing desire to leave his work — to abandon his apostleship — to forego the delight of winning souls to Jesus — if his spirit, in leaving this earth, was to slumber in a state of inaction and unconsciousness until the 'day of God'? We can conceive of no other possible consideration but the thought of being ushered into the immediate presence of his Lord, that could make it to him a "gain to die." Nothing BUT this instantaneous beatific vision and fruition could have led him to add the strong assertion, *"which is far better."*

Again, how does he speak of the dissolution of the earthly *tent* ("tabernacle")? He seldom speaks more confidently. His words are expressed in the authoritative and confident formula of a creed, *"We KNOW that if this house of our earthly tabernacle is dissolved, We HAVE a building of God."* The pin is taken out — the cord is slipped — the tent is down! But *"immediately"* a nobler and more imperishable structure rises, *"a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!"*

Why would he urge, in another place — as an incentive to believers to run the Christian race — that they are gazed upon by a cloud of sainted witnesses, (mentioned in the previous context) if "the spirits of the just" remain in a state of unconsciousness until the final resurrection?

Can we suppose that Stephen, as he gazed upwards from his martyr-pillow on "the general assembly and church of the first-born," uttered an unanswered prayer, when he said, *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"*? No, rather, when he saw his Lord *"standing* at the right hand of God," can we think the beautiful comment of Chrysostom an unnatural one, that the Savior rose and stooped from His throne, to receive with outstretched arms the spirit of the first of that "noble army of martyrs," who were afterwards to "praise Him?"

Our blessed Lord's own teaching is all confirmatory of the same view. It was no mere accidental embellishment, surely, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus — but an essential part of the truth it was intended to convey, when the angels are represented as carrying the spirit of the beggar into Abraham's bosom. His words to the dying thief are themselves (independent of all other proof) sufficient to set at rest this comforting assurance, that *the gate of death and the gate of glory are one!*

*Vision* adds its attestation — for the ransomed multitude are represented now in glory, "standing before the throne" with "palms in their hands." Thrice blessed thought! The uncaged spirit will all at once fly upwards to nestle in the golden eaves of Heaven! The saint, when he enters glory, can say, in the words of one of earth's inspired songs regarding the death-bed he has just left, "*I laid me down and slept — I awaked, for the Lord sustained me!*" "*This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven!*" "Faithful souls," says Richard Baxter, "no sooner leave their pinions of flesh — but angels will be their convoy, Christ, with all the perfected spirits of the just, will be their companions, Heaven will be their residence, and God their happiness." No wonder that Paul with such a blessed certainty could say, "*We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.*"

It is true, indeed, that though "the souls of believers are at death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory," their *full* and *perfect* glorification does not then take place. The great coronation-day of the Church triumphant must come, before the saint ("complete in Christ") is invested with all his purchased privileges. The body until then, slumbers in weakness and dishonor. Its reunion with the spirit must take place — the grave must be rifled of its treasures — before the Divine Victor has reaped in all His trophies, and the believer receives full investiture of his rights. A writer beautifully speaks of the "blessed dead," as "a silent and veiled company, like the gathering worshipers of earth resting side by side until the bells cease, and vacant places fill, and all begin to sing one anthem." But be their present *intermediate* condition (shall we call it) what it may, they are with Christ — that is enough.

"*With Me!*" Safe in the presence of their adorable Redeemer. The *needle*

at last fixed true to its pole — all the old earthly vibrations and oscillations at an end. The *ship*, with all its tossings over, has reached its port, cast anchor in "the Rock" within the veil! The *sun-flower* drooped only for a moment in the evening of life, as the death-shades fell over it. But the morning of glory dawns — The Sun of Righteousness shines; and in His "unsetting beams" the leaves expand again, in unfading and undying glory.

*"With ME!"* Christ in our nature, our Friend, our Brother! We are happy on earth in the presence of those who have befriended us, and given us proofs of kindness and affection. Who has ever been friend or brother to us like Jesus? ETERNITY is a solemn word. Death ushers us into an untraveled country. The soul mounts in its arrowy flight into a region which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard." But *Christ is there*; and that assurance inverts it with a home-like aspect. I need not fear the fords of Jordan, when there is a well-known voice heard on the farther shores, *"Fear not! It is I! Be not afraid!"*

Let me look forward, then, with bounding heart, to the hour of death, as the hour of my entrance on endless bliss, the birthday of eternity. Oh, if there was "joy in Heaven among the angels of God" at the hour of conversion, what will it be at the hour of glorification! If God the Father even on earth has joy in seeing His returning prodigal; what will it be when He welcomes him to His everlasting home! *"He will rejoice over him with joy; He will rest in His love; He will rejoice over him with singing."* The Redeemer utters His intercessory prayer over the death-bed on earth, *"Father, I will that this one whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, to behold My glory."* The prayer is heard — the angels are sent down — and, swift as the volleyed lightning leaps from the cloud, *THAT HOUR, and forever, he is "with Jesus in paradise!"*

## FROM GLORY TO GLORY

"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." — Proverbs 4:18



As the Believer's path on earth is, or ought to be, a progressive one, in knowledge, love, happiness, and joy; so, in a loftier and more ennobling sense, will it be in a future world. The sun of his bliss will ever be climbing higher and higher in the skies — but yet never attaining its full meridian. Heaven, indeed, as we have seen in a former Meditation, would be lacking in one chief element of happiness were *advancement* unknown. The glorified spirit, constituted as our feelings at present are, would not be satisfied with a *stationary* bliss. "Perfect security from all danger of a *change for the worse*, is a highly gratifying idea; but the expectation of a change for the *better*, is an essential ingredient in all our present notions of happiness." (Whately) The Redeemed in heaven, "vessels of glory" "fitted for the Master's use" — while they will be always filled — yet, if it seems not a paradox, they will be always filling — ever increasing in the divine knowledge and likeness, progressing along the line of infinite blessedness flowing from God's presence and smile.

It is the privilege of the believer, even in this world, to be ever aspiring after a more intimate acquaintance with the Divine character, works, and ways. *David*, notwithstanding all that he had seen of Jehovah, says, "*My soul THIRSTS FOR GOD.*" *Paul*, notwithstanding his exalted attainments, prays, "*That I MAY KNOW HIM.*" The whole Christian dispensation, from the earliest times until now, has been *progressive* in its character. Those living anterior to the flood had but dim perceptions of the glorious things which our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard. Redemption was more fully unfolded to the patriarchs — more fully still to the prophets — and "in these last days," in which He has "spoken unto us by His Son," more fully than all. This *gradual development* will still characterize "the ages to come" — each cycle of these ages evolving some new manifestation of the Divine character and attributes. As the saints advanced on earth from grace to grace; so then they will be ascending from "glory to glory" — with each new pause on the everlasting hills only unfolding new and more amazing discoveries of God's grace and love.

Nor shall we ever reach that point where our knowledge of the Infinite will be complete — where we shall be able to fold the wing in its upward soaring. An old English writer beautifully compares the believer's knowledge of God in a future world, to the two well-known mathematical

lines, which, though approaching nearer and nearer to one another, never meet. So the ransomed spirit, borne upwards nearer and nearer the great Sun of all knowledge, will never reach the confines of that light which is spoken of as "inaccessible, and full of glory." Every new height reached in the infinite progress of the soul, while it will give more insight into the mysteries of God's dealings, will only inspire with greater longings to know more of His ineffable glories.

The song of the redeemed is represented as swelling louder and louder, the more that the mingled wisdom, and faithfulness, and love of the Almighty is unfolded. "The voice of a great multitude" increases to the "noise of many waters;" — deeper still, to "the voice of mighty thundering." Here we are but children-dreamers. Our path lies through misty shadows and murky clouds — our sun, either smiting with its beams, or wading through a stormy sky, or "going down while it is yet day." Here, the believer walks in darkness and can see no light; or when he has light for a time, it is often fitful and transient; like the luminous wake of a vessel on a midnight sea, which gilds, only for a moment, the waves over which it bounds, and then leaves them as dark as ever. But once across the threshold of glory, the "darkness is past, and the true light shines." His, then, is an "unsmiting and unsetting sun." "*The sun shall not smite you,*" says one. "*Your sun shall no more go down,*" says another. It is called "*the inheritance of the saints IN LIGHT.*"

Have I begun this path of heavenly love and knowledge now? Am I progressing in it? Do I feel some dawnings of the heavenly light — pledges and foretastes of the full day of glory? Let all God's dealings serve to quicken me in my way. Let every affliction it may please Him to send, be as the moving pillar-cloud of old, beckoning me to move my tent onwards — saying, "*Arise and depart, for this is not your rest.*" Let me be often standing now on faith's lofty eminences, looking for "the day of God" — the rising sun which is to set no more in weeping clouds.

Wondrous progression! How will all of earth's learning — its boasted acquirements and eagle-eyed philosophy — sink into the lispings of very infancy in comparison with this manhood of knowledge! Heaven will be the true "*Excelsior.*" Its song, "a song of degrees;" — Jesus leading His people from height to height of glory, and saying, as He said to

Nathanael, "*You shall see GREATER things than these!*"

And — most elevating thought of all! — I shall be advancing gradually in resemblance to my Divine Lord and Master! And yet the further I advance, with more fervent lip and devout ardor shall I sing — "*Nearer, my God, to You!*"

## THE HEAVENLY SKIES

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the skies; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." — Daniel

12:3

Here is another Grape from the Eshcol clusters — another glimpse of coming glory. Though suggestive of truths on which we have already dwelt, these may well bear repetition, presenting us, under a different aspect, with fresh motives and encouragements for pursuing with ardor our heavenly way.

We are here reminded that *there will be different gradations of bliss in the coming Heaven.*

This system of gradation, shown throughout all the other diverse works of the Creator, may in this respect be taken as a shadow of heavenly things:

1. In the *material* world, we ascend from the grain of dust and invisible atom, by giant strides, to satellites, planets, suns. In our own globe, we have the pleasing diversity and undulation of *surface*, from the little mound on the bosom of the plain, to the stupendous Alp and Andes.

2. In the *vegetable* kingdom, we have a graduating scale, from the tiny moss and lichen and blade of grass, through the ascending series of plants and shrubs to the monarch oak and cedar.

3. In the *animal* kingdom, we ascend from the animalcule and mollusk to the lordly lion. A still higher step brings us to the region of human

intellect and intelligence; while this, again, in its diversities of ranks, affords fresh evidence of the law of which we speak.

It will be the same in glory. There will be varying eminences in the Heavenly landscape — diversified grades in the Heavenly family. It will have its "thrones and dominions," its "principalities and powers" — the "*first*" and the "*least* in the kingdom."

God, in a striking passage in the prophecies of Isaiah, represents "the fir, the pine, and the cypress *together*," as "beautifying the place of His sanctuary." It is a picture of the heavenly courts — the celestial gardens. An assemblage of diverse trees, each perfect in their kind, from the lowly cypress to the stately pine. But they are "*together*" — in the same place — a glorious group — each branch and each leaf combining to "beautify" the holy place — glorifying the "house of His glory!"

The verse further tells us, that *all in Heaven will be happy*.

The "*wise*" are to have one reward; "*those who turn many to righteousness*" will have a higher and greater.

*The "wise"* — that is, they who have sought on earth the true "wisdom which comes from above" — they who have reposed with undivided and unwavering trust in Christ, the "*Wisdom of God*;" — who have been diligent in the cultivation of personal piety — *they* shall shine "*as the brightness of the skies*." They may have been little known on earth; their graces may have shone dimly and in obscurity; their faith may have even been comparatively weak, and their love languid and fitful; yet, being "the children of the kingdom," they will be invested with a happiness beyond the power of heart to conceive, or tongue to tell.

Let each ask, "Am I among the number of these 'wise'?" Let me see to it that mine is not the mere lamp of profession, destitute of the oil of grace, leaving me at last among the foolish "dreamers" and loiterers upon whom "the door is shut!" Let me make true Christianity a matter of earnest, downright, *personal* concernment. Let me prove in my happy experience even now, that wisdom's ways are "*ways of pleasantness*," and wisdom's paths "*paths of peace*." So that at last, in the day when He "makes up His

jewels," I may be *"a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of my God!"*

This verse further reminds us, that *there will be preeminent rewards and blessedness in store for those who have been energetic in the cause and service of God on earth.*

I must seek to be *"wise"* first — to have my own soul deeply imbued with Divine things — to have a personal and saving interest in the great salvation. But if I be aspiring after Heaven's loftiest recompense, I must *"add"* to my faith *"fortitude,"* and the other exalted graces of the Christian character. The privilege of shining as the fixed stars *"forever and ever,"* is reserved for *"those who turn many unto righteousness."*

There is a Christianity — a true and sincere life of faith — which, though we cannot call it selfish, is more negative, and less influential and expansive, than it ought to be. Like the quiet lake into which a stone has fallen, the center of the heart has been touched by a sanctified power; but we see at best only dim indications of the widening circles of beneficence and charity, self-denying love and holy deed. The nobler phase which true religion assumes, is that which manifests a diffusive influence: when the believer becomes an *"epistle of Christ, known and read of all men;"* — a living tree, not only deeply rooted in faith and love — but waving with the fruits of holy living and holy acting — love towards God expanding into a sanctified love towards all mankind. Following the footsteps of the Great Exemplar, he delights in doing good, and in attracting sinners to that glorious righteousness which is *"unto all, and upon all those who believe."*

While the faithful ambassador of Christ, the honored and self-denying missionary, are those who are preeminently referred to in this ennobling promise, it dare not be limited or restricted to these. Those in humbler and less prominent spheres in the Church and the world, have an equal warrant to appropriate it. It is a bold and beautiful figure, intended to express the recompense in store for earnest individual effort — whether by station, money, influence, or character — in the cause of God. The pious parent, the faithful teacher, the district visitor, the devout philanthropist, the generous giver for the sake of Christ; and, more than

all, those who exhibit the hallowed power of a devout, unselfish, Christ-like demeanor, the every-day and perpetual lesson of a holy walk and a holy life; these are hereafter to shine as the brightest constellations in the celestial skies.

There are many stars invisible to us, which are exerting an important influence among the heavenly bodies. So there are many lowly believers whose influence now is unknown — invisible — secret — who are yet telling upon others, often most powerfully, when least conscious of it themselves. The calm eloquence of a Christian's life and a Christian's death has impressed and convinced, when the most labored pulpit oratory has been of no avail. Remember the Bible picture of the judgment-day. "What! I saw *You* hungry, or naked, or thirsty? — I, who occupied no prominent part in *Your* Church on earth! — I, a lowly believer who lived and died in obscurity!" It is enough! "*You did it to the least of these My brethren,*" and in doing so, "*you did it unto ME!*"

Be it mine to aspire after higher and higher manifestations of Christian excellence. Let me take the lofty motto of the apostle: "*Not as though I had already attained;*", "*always abounding in the work of the Lord.*" The more of practical holiness now, the more of transcendent blessedness hereafter. The original *one* pound deposit may, by diligent trading, gain me ten pounds. As "the sleep of the laboring man" is said to be "sweet," so, sweeter will be the rest of glory to those who have toiled bravely, and worked earnestly. Not one tiny seed of all I sow can be lost. It will spring up at last, and yield an hundredfold of recompense, to the praise, and honor, and glory of God.

Is there nothing I can do in the way of turning some of my fellow-sinners to righteousness? What a transcendent honor to hear through eternity from the lips of some glorified saint, "You were the means of leading me first to think of my soul! You were the first to unfold to me the beauty and glory of the Savior's character, and His infinite adaptation to all the needs and necessities of my tried and suffering and tempted nature!" How blessed the thought, that as "jewels" set in Immanuel's crown, we shall, (like the gems of earth when placed in the same diadem) enhance by mutual reflection each other's brightness — all redounding to the glory of Jesus, at whose feet each gem and each crown will be cast.

Reader! let not the poor engrossments of earth eclipse the brightness of this glorious heritage. Seek to be able to say, with one who had Heaven ever in his eye, "*We look not at the things which are seen — but at the things which are NOT seen!*" He seems to say: So glorious and out-dazzling are the prospects of coming glory, that they are like the sun extinguishing the candle. The things of earth are not worth looking at — they pale into nothing, when brought side by side with the grandeur of the future.

Hear your Lord's voice saying, "*Occupy until I come.*" Make the most of fleeting opportunities. The night of earth is "far spent," the day of eternity is close "at hand." Do not forget, it is *now* or *never*. In most other earthly things, there are new chances — new experiments; in familiar language, "we can try again." But in eternity, once across yonder boundary of time, an irrevocable seal is stamped on the transactions of the past.

## THE VICTOR'S SONG

*"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."*— Revelation 5:11-12

Here is the Song of Heaven! It is sung by a mighty chorus — concentric ranks of the redeemed along with the angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. The prophet of Patmos gets only a distant glimpse of the vast multitude — he sees a few twinkling lights, as it were, in the suburbs of the eternal city. But the voice he hears is "*as the noise of many waters!*"

It is one section of that myriad throng on which the eye is most intently fixed, "the elders;" — *that is*, the ransomed from the earth.

How diverse and varied their antecedent histories! Some are there, who had died young. Some, who on earth had grown gray in the service of their heavenly Master. Some, who had been arrayed in worldly greatness — but who were yet "clothed with humility" — into whose lap had been poured the full cup of prosperity — but whose lives had been consecrated as a perpetual thank-offering of praise to the Giver. Others again, whose only earthly heritage was the beggar's hovel — whose path had been strewn with thorns, and their eyes dimmed with tears — yet who had borne all with un murmuring submission. Some, who were champions of the faith — their names in all the churches. Others, "the Lord's hidden ones" — their deeds of faith, and love, and charity, unknown to all except to Him who sees in secret.

1. *This vision speaks of the UNITY pervading the vast multitude.*

All unite in one song, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!*" No one worshiper will look with disdainful eye on another. The angels great in might — the cherubim burning with devotion — the seraphim soaring in intellectual power — will be bound to the lowliest saint in Heaven by the one cementing principle of *love!* These "redeemed from the earth" may have lived in diverse periods of the world, different epochs of the Church — they may have dwelt in different climates — they may have lisped the name of Jesus in different tongues, they may have belonged to varied denominations — wearing on earth different attire, and though looking to one Shepherd, may have clung to separate sheepfolds. Now, they are drawn into holy unity by *the sweet attraction of the same cross.* Having no longer any separate interests, each member of the glorified throng is actively employed in promoting the interests and happiness of his fellows. "Whether there be tongues, *they* shall cease." Language is now on earth, a greater barrier between church and church, than are mountains and rivers, continents and oceans; but these different dialects of earth shall then be merged into the one sublime language of eternity.

Well may the gifted author of the "Saint's Rest" say, "What a blessed society will the family of Heaven be, and those peaceful inhabitants of the new Jerusalem, where there is no division, nor differing judgments, no disaffection, nor coldness; no deceitful friendship, nor an angry look or thought — no, not one unkind expression; but all are one in Christ, who is



one with the Father, and all live in the love of Him who is love itself."

2. The sublime vision of John seems further to indicate, that *the Church triumphant will then be COMPLETE.*

Not one heir of glory will be missing — not one stone of the stupendous temple missing — not one sheaf of the glorious harvest lost. The number is "*ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands!*"

That was an hour of deep interest in the past, when the spirit of *Abel* entered Heaven, and stooped solitary and alone before the throne of God. He sung his song alone; he was the sole representative of the redeemed Church — the first sheaf in the future teeming harvest of ransomed immortals! But *now* the Great Gardener gathers the wheat into His garners, and, lo! it is "*a multitude which no man can number!*" How gladdening to think that vast convocation is every day, every year increasing. When John was on earth it was a feeble band. He said, "We are of God *and the whole world lies in wickedness!*" The Church then was like a spark in chaos — a tiny ark tossed on a great flood of evil; but before long, the number of His elect will be "as the sand on the sea-shore." "The children of God" now "scattered abroad" will be brought in, "the whole building, fitly framed together," will stand complete and glorious — a "holy temple in the Lord." *But,*

3. the "*top-stone*" will be brought forth "with shoutings," and the cry will be "Grace, grace unto *it.*" The song of this great multitude is an ascription of PRAISE to a Redeeming God, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!*"

Yes! this will be the sweet bond of union, "*all one in Christ Jesus.*" The hallelujah chorus of eternity will be the glorifying of His adorable Person and Name! How painful on earth it is to a generous heart, to see a kind and devoted friend unjustly calumniated and scorned. The believer is in this world constantly compelled to see his adorable Redeemer despised, rejected, slighted, blasphemed. *Then,* he will behold Him, honored, lauded, "crowned Lord of all!" Jesus glorified! — We shall be "eye-witnesses of His majesty." If, even here, we delight to see honor conferred on those we love — how shall we exult in joining our feeble ascriptions with those of the great multitude, in celebrating the glory of Him whose

love will there shine forth in all its peerless and transcendent magnitude!

*"The Lamb", "the Lamb who was slain."* It seems, at first, a strange name and a strange theme, in a place where suffering is unknown and where pain never enters! But it significantly tells, that the work of Christ is to be the theme of eternity; that it is the heights of Redeeming Love the saints are to be engaged in scaling — the depths of grace they are to be engaged in fathoming. They will ever have the wondrous truth recalled, *"But for that dying, bleeding Lamb, we must have been eternally lost — but for that wondrous grace of His, ours must now, and forever, have been a portion in the restless surges of that fiery burning lake!"* "Doubtless," says Baxter, "this will be our everlasting admiration, that so rich a crown should fit the head of so vile a sinner. Let DESERVED be written on the door of Hell; but on the door of Heaven and life, *the FREE GIFT.*"

Reader! prepare for this lofty society — the presence of angels — the presence of Jesus. Oh surpassing honor! the prospect of being linked through everlasting ages with every glorious being in the universe — a brotherhood with seraphim, cherubim, saints, martyrs — yes, union and communion with God Himself!

If there be "joy in Heaven among the angels of God over *one* sinner that repents;" what will be that lofty burst of jubilee resounding from a ransomed Church, when *all* its members shall be gathered in; and when the crowns of "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands," shall be cast at the feet of "Him who sits upon the throne" and "the Lamb, forever and ever!"

## THE VICTOR'S DRESS

"Clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." — Revelation 7:9

What a transition! from earth to Heaven — from the mortal to the immortal — from partial sanctification to complete and everlasting purity. The beggar "lifted from the ash-heap," "set among princes," and

caused to inherit "a throne of glory!"

"*Clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*" It is a figurative representation of glorified saints, as "*priests and kings unto God.*" The "white robe" is the *priestly* emblem — the "palm" is the *kingly* emblem. They are to have *censers* as well as *crowns*. They are to be employed as consecrated Levites in the Heavenly Temple, as well as to reign invested with regal dignity. As in all the Bible pictures of Heaven, so, here, there is a beautiful union of active *service* with royal *honor*. "His servants shall SERVE Him.", "They shall *reign* forever and ever."

The expression, "*standing* before the throne," denotes boldness and confidence — acceptance. They are "accepted in the Beloved." They could have no other boldness but in Jesus. Their robes derive all their whiteness, their palms all their greenness, from Him before whom every palm is waved and at whose feet every crown is cast. They sang by anticipation in their militant state, and they may love to repeat it still as "a song of remembrance" —

Bold shall I stand at that great day;  
For who anything to my charge shall lay?  
While by Your blood absolved I am,  
From sin's tremendous guilt and shame!

Have *I* this boldness and confidence now? Am I now clothed in the imputed righteousness of Immanuel? And do I look forward to the time when I shall stand arrayed also in the stainless robe of *personal* holiness — that "*clothing clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints?*" Do I love to think of Heaven as a place of living employment; where, as a member of the glorified *priesthood*, I shall minister at God's altar, and be filled with zeal for His honor and glory? Jesus comes down *now* to earth to "sup" with me. Then I shall sit down at His everlasting banquet, and hold uninterrupted fellowship with Him. "*They shall walk with ME in white, for they are worthy.*"

But I shall be a king too. I shall stand *with a palm-branch in my hand!* The weapons of earthly toil and warfare will then be laid aside; the emblems of triumph and victory take their place. The Roman conqueror

ascending to the capitol of old, with the laurel on his brow, and the palm-branch waving above his head, was a feeble type of the sinner saved by grace, passing through the triumphal arch of glory, to receive "the crown of life" which his Lord has promised! "*The kings of the earth,*" we read, "bring their glory and honor unto it." — that is to say, all the pomp and splendor of earthly sovereignty is taken to typify and image forth the transcendent greatness of Heaven.

We may well pause and wonder at these royal honors in reserve for us! "*Kings unto God!*" All the splendors of sovereignty, without its harassments and burdens! No thorn in the crown; no "suspended sword" from the "fretted ceiling," dimming the sparkling jewels with its shadow; and painfully reminding that the crown is "corruptible," often "defiled," always *fading!*

In Revelation 4:4 we read, that "round about the thrones were twenty-four seats" (or, "thrones" as might be better and more literally rendered). Every head is to be a crowned one. "*I appoint unto you*" by covenant, says Christ, "*a kingdom, even as My Father has appointed unto Me.*"

While believers are designated "a priesthood," they are a "*royal priesthood*" — royally born — royally fed — royally attended — royally crowned! Some are to have regal authority "over five," some "over ten cities," according to the fidelity with which they have discharged their trusts during the period of earthly probation.

Am I preparing for these royal honors? Having "*palms* in their hands" indicates that, as victors and victorious, these sainted conquerors were once engaged in the strife of battle. Am I *fighting* now? Do I feel the world — my own heart — to be a battle-field, and that there is no discharge from that spiritual warfare until I reach the gates of glory? Let me not dream of the crown, unless I am conscious of striving for it. It is alone promised "*to him who overcomes.*" It has been quaintly said by a writer on this verse, that "*a station on the feet* in front of the throne in *Heaven,* is the effect of being often *on the knees* before the throne on *earth.*" Oh for faith, and grace, and spiritual fortitude here, to "*fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life!*" How will the everlasting respite from pain and sorrow, corruption and sin, be all the

more enjoyed, by reason of the struggles and conflicts which have preceded it!

Believer, think of this! Once within yonder peaceful gates, the blood and dust of the earthly arena will be washed away forever. The long "white robe" speaks beautifully of this promised *rest*. The toil of the militant state is over. There may then be used the flowing vesture. There will be no need of fleeing, and of girding up the garment, when there is none to pursue. When we reach the battlements of glory, we shall be able to say, "*O enemy! destructions are now come to a PERPETUAL end.*"

Glorious time! — when we shall stand before the throne, faultless monuments of God's wondrous grace. How blessed if, at a dying hour, we can exclaim, in the prospect of this royal priesthood, this white robe, and evergreen palm, "*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day!*" Be of good cheer, Christian, the time is near when God and you shall be near, and as near as you can well desire. You shall ever stand before Him; around His throne — in the room with Him — in His presence-chamber! Would you yet be nearer? You shall be *His child*, and He your Father. Yes, you shall be an heir of His kingdom!

## THE NIGHTLESS WORLD

"There shall be no night there!" — Revelation 22:5

Here is another gleaning from the clusters of Canaan — another bright lamp hung out of our Father's distant dwelling! Amid the *falling shadows of earth*, let us come and anticipate the *noontide glories* of the better world, and enumerate a few respects in which it may be said, "*There shall be no night there!*"

We found, in our first Meditation, Heaven spoken of under the emblem of *Rest*. The present figure is suggestive of kindred reflections; which, though in some respects an echo of the former, we may, for the sake of

the beautiful and expressive symbol itself, be permitted for a little to pursue.

*There shall be no night of weakness or weariness there.*

Here on earth, we are incapable of serving God without intervals of repose. The weary, jaded framework requires a periodic cessation from activity. Overly encumber either the body or mental powers, and we are sure to suffer for it. *Here*, how often does *night* suggest the memory of *pain* and sickness — the fevered pulse — the throbbing brow — the sickly candle burning to its socket — the terrible moments of anxiety, when the spirit of some loved one was struggling on the confines of eternity.

Or, if the body be comparatively exempt from prostration or suffering, how often has the believer to complain of a weak and languishing frame of soul — the chill dews of night-fall creeping over his best affections — no, often deprived of the sensible tokens of God's presence and favor, groping in darkness and seeing no light!

But, "there is no night THERE!" — no languor to steal over the body — no lassitude to chain down and hamper the eagle-soarings of the spirit; no physical weariness or debility to cause a cessation in the eternal song — no remnants of corruption to produce one solitary moment or experience of estrangement from the great Source of all light, and love, and happiness! The tide of love ever full — never ebbing — the sun of our bliss ever climbing higher and higher the meridian, and never shaded by so much as a passing cloud! "Oh! what a moment," says a now sainted spirit, "will that be, when *the lamp of faith* will be extinguished — not amid the darkness of eternal *night* — but amid the splendors of everlasting day!"

*There shall be no night of ignorance there.*

We are encompassed here on every side with enigmas — the doctrines of Scripture (not a few of them) irreconcilable with the dogmas of proud reason. The ways of God! — they are often a "great deep" — misapprehended — misinterpreted! *Here*, we are in the *twilight* of our being — Scripture speaks of it as "neither light nor dark." What, if revealed in broad day, would be all symmetrical in form, assumes dim

and distorted and shadowy shapes.

Even in the *acquisition of knowledge*, the mind climbs its tedious way by slow and laborious processes. The ore is dug by dint of incessant toil; and often when the coveted load is just reached, the exhausted explorer has to resign his task! But *there*, the "glass darkly" will give way to the "face to face." All will be made luminous. "In your light," O God, "we shall see light." Knowledge, which is here the result of assiduous labor, will there be gained by intuition. To *see* will be to *understand*.

And what shall be said of what we call "*mysterious PROVIDENCES?*" Eternity will unravel every mazy labyrinth in them. It will be one of Heaven's loftiest occupations, studying the volumes of the past — discovering them to be volumes of faithfulness — every page, which on earth seemed blurred, will then stand forth in illuminated characters, endorsed with, "*God is Love!*" The cloudiest sky will be seen to have had its rainbow, some token of covenant mercy. The higher we climb the mountains of glory, the wider spread at our feet will be the discoveries of Jehovah's wisdom. There will be no more room for misgivings. The "why" and the "wherefore" of every earthly dealing will be revealed. "The channels of the deep waters will be all made plain, through which the Almighty held His darksome way." (M'Ewen)

*There shall be no night of sorrow there.*

A melancholy minor-note runs its under-tone through all our present joys. Even when the *cup* is full, there is the aching thought, "This cannot always last." Even when the *gourd* is most flourishing, there is often the too truthful foreboding, that the *worm* may come — in a moment, and *it is DOWN!*

*Night!* — poetry has ever spoken of it as the significant type and emblem of *Death*. How impressively it recalls that chamber of mysterious silence, where the footfall echoed no sound but its own, and the living lip of cherished friendship was sealed forever! With how many the mind is like a hall draped in sackcloth — the long winding passages of memory hung with portraits of those "who are not" — the memorials of *buried love!*

But *there*, "sorrow and sighing will forever flee away." Joy will be undiluted. The angel of death no longer crosses that threshold. Every shaft is expended. The last night on earth will be the last night of weeping. Not one *shadow* will flit across that bright sky — not one scalding tear will dim the eyes of the crowned and glorified. As the verse in Psalm 30 may be beautifully and literally rendered, "*Sorrow*" (like a wayfaring man, a sojourner) "*lodges* for a night," (the night of earth) "BUT, joy comes in the *morning!*" Happy time! As I reach the gates of glory, the last burden of *sorrow* will roll from my back, and I shall go my heavenly way rejoicing!

*There shall be no night of sin there.*

It is sin that bound its death-bands over the world's fevered brow. "What is soul-rest," says Richard Baxter, "but our freedom from sin?" Give me all that the world can bestow, so long as this nature of mine remains at the best only partially sanctified — continuing to drag about with it a body of SIN, I cannot be *perfectly happy*. What a blessed world would the present be, were sin expunged from it! What a joyful world that SHALL be, where we *know* that sin is to be forever expelled — the trail of the serpent never polluting its blessed soil! *Here*, Satan approached with his foul assaults even the holy Son of God. "Cast Yourself down," was his blasphemous appeal, as he took Him to the Temple summit. But the prince of this world will in vain plant his footsteps on the pinnacle of the New Jerusalem Temple — into it nothing that is unholy shall ever enter. "The spirits of the just" will then be "*made perfect!*" Here, there is sin in the best and holiest. There are decayed branches in the stateliest Lebanon cedars — flaws in the purest cisterns — ripples of corruption in the clearest fountains; but *there*, all will be presented "without fault" before the throne — not a trace or lineament of sin adhering — nothing to be feared — no dark contingencies — no real or imagined evils.

*Night* here on earth, is a shadowy-time — full of spectral images, types of uncertainty, mutability, change. But looking forward to Heaven, we have the "*hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*" Oh! thrice blessed moment, when the stormy night-watch will be over — when we shall feel the shallows underneath us — see the haven in sight — the morning light breaking over the towers of the



heavenly city — angels pointing to them as they crowd the shore, and exclaiming, in contrast with what we have left behind us, "THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE!"

## LIVING FOUNTAINS

*"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."* —

Revelation 7:16-17

This is a glorious note of celestial music, one of the sweetest chimes of the upper sanctuary. All that poetry ever wrote, or touching pathos conceived, falls immeasurably short of the grandeur of this passage.

The verse contains another of the many *negative* descriptions of Heaven; for the Bible most frequently describes Heaven, not by what it *is* — but by what it is *not*. The glorified band of once sin-stricken and woe-worn pilgrims, have now reached the pure river of the water of life. They are like Israel of old when seated under the walls of Jericho, to keep their first Passover in Canaan. The manna had ceased — they were eating the new corn of the land — the hunger, the thirst, the sun-blight of the desert were ended — Jordan was crossed. Their weary feet were treading the Land of Promise, for which they had toiled and suffered during forty protracted years of wilderness-privation. But the memory of these was all that now remained. Their Marahs and Achors — their scorching marches — the burning sands by day — the chilly damps of night — their conflict with the disciplined warriors of Amalek — the recollection of all this only served to enhance the prospect of peaceful repose in the Covenanted Heritage: "the land of brooks and fountains of waters," a land "flowing with milk and honey."

This verse unfolds the same element of joy in the future blessedness of the true Israel of God, which we referred to in speaking of Heaven under

a former *emblem* — *the joy of contrast*.

*Here*, and *There*, how startling the COMPARISON!

*Here*, in this sinning, sorrowing, weeping world, the believer weeps, suffers. *There* "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes." As the word "Eye," to the Jew, was synonymous with "Fountain," it would seem to denote that the gracious hand of a gracious God will dry up the very fountain of weeping; so that not so much as one tear-drop will again bedim or bedew the face!

*Here*, the sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened pilgrim — exposed to the fiery sun and the desert blast — hunger and thirst — toil and conflict. *There*, in yonder tearless world, "*he shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.*" The un-fallen angels know nothing of these experiences; they never sinned, and therefore they have never known what it is to suffer. These words are unknown to *them*!

*Here*, the burning rays of trial often wither up his best joys. Affliction, like the desolating windstorm, sweeps down in a moment his most cherished props and fondest shelters. *There*, no withering blast can burst upon him — no "fiery trial can try him;" — the furnace-heat of the desert can no longer be felt or feared!

*Here*, he "hungers," panting after the attainment of earthly objects, which, even when attained, never satisfy the longings of his immortal spirit. Often like the fevered patient, turning from side to side on his anguished couch, imagining every change of posture will be easier. *There*, he shall be eternally and everlastingly satisfied. No longer shall there be so much as one longing unanswered, or one aching void unfilled.

*Here*, he "*thirsts*", "he seeks water and there is none." The world's sources of refreshment are like the summer's brook, dry when most needed. Read the inscription on that earthly cistern, "*It is leaky;*" it "can hold no water!" But there the vessel is ever full, ever flowing, overflowing, "They shall drink of the river of Your pleasures", "*With You,*" O God, "*is the fountain of life.*"

Often, *here*, as weary wandering birds, with drooping wing and wailing cry, we roam over earth's ocean of change. *There*, we shall fold our wings forever — nestling in safety within the true ark of God.

*Here*, it is "outside the camp, bearing His reproach." *There*, it is within the gates, sharing His glory!

Oh, what a comfort to traverse in thought that glorious white-robed company, and to think, in the midst of my own vileness, "They were once as vile as I!" Every robe there, was stained with sin. "*Who are these?*" One was haughty, a persecutor, injurious. Another was a thief, translated from a felon's cross to a believer's crown. Another is a saint who had escaped the contaminating influences of "Caesar's household," and was made by grace a monument of mercy. Another was once a weeping Magdalene. But all had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." If the angels who have never sinned, find their chief happiness in God's service, what a deepened intensity of joy will there be in the happiness of sainted believers! The angels know God only as their Creator and Benefactor; believers know Him as their Redeeming God in Jesus. The one can sing, "*Worthy is the Lamb!*" the others alone can add, "*He was slain for us!*"

Do any mourners read this page? Be comforted. Listen once more to the sublime dialogue, "Who are these?" "*These are they who have come out of great tribulation!*" There is an identity of experience between you and every member of that glorified multitude. They have all graduated in a school of trial. You may now be sowing in tears — but, like them, you will soon "reap in joy." And, better than all, "the Lamb" shall "*feed you and lead you,*" and *with His own gentle hand* wipe away every lingering tear-drop! If it was delightful even on earth to repose in our every anxiety on Him — what will it be to rest in the arms of His love, when anxiety, sorrow, weakness, weariness, are known no more! He has loved us in the past — There, we are told He is to love us and tend us forever and ever. On earth we have loved perishable friends too much — but here is One we cannot love too well. In eternity we shall speak of "the great love with which He loved us" — no, with which He *loves* us!

Reader, often anticipate that blessed communion and exalted fellowship,

when you shall hear His voice of tenderness calling down from "the living fountains of waters," by which He is eternally to lead you, saying, "Come up here!" Soon your head will ache no more — your heart break no more — cherished earthly ties will be sundered no more — sin will reign no more. There will be no furrowed features there — no withered gourds — no blighted hopes — no dread of desolating afflictions. The days of your mourning will be ended. When you see Him and throw yourself at His feet, what will be your confession from the sunlit summit looking back on the windings of the lower valley? *"He has done all things WELL!"*

## FOREVER

*"I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."* — Psalm 23:6

So mused a saint of God six thousand years ago, who is now a safe "Dweller" in "the House" of which he so sweetly sung. Can I also pluck for myself this last Eshcol Grape — and go on through the wilderness, joyously treading whatever path my God may see fit to allot me, looking beyond the path and beyond the wilderness to the glorious termination? Can I close this little volume, endorsing every page with Paul's happy superscription, which made him rise superior to all trials, and exult in all tribulations: *"And so shall we EVER be with the Lord?"* Let us gather up a few closing thoughts of coming bliss which our motto-verse suggests.

1. "I will *dwell*." An expression of Perfect Security.

The great haven is reached; the raging waters are all past; nothing can ever disturb the deep rapture of Heavenly repose. Shall we repeat once more the often-reiterated assertion in these pages, that on earth all is mutation, change, insecurity, and that when the sea of life is least ruffled, there is often the too truthful foreboding of the gathering tempest!

Even our spiritual frames, and feelings, and experiences, how fitful and uncertain. Today, the entry in the soul-diary is, *"You are my portion, O God."* Tomorrow, it is, *"My soul is cast down within me."* No sooner do

we get a glimpse at the third heavens than a "messenger of Satan" is waiting to "buffet" us, and the soaring eagle falls with disabled wing to the earth. But not one shadow of change or temptation will ever flit across these heavenly skies. Stars may be quenched, suns annihilated, the world pass away; but the Believer in Glory stands *secure* — the crown must be plucked from the Redeemer's brow, before *his* can be touched! This is the guarantee of His bliss, "*Because I live you shall live also.*" "The unregenerate," says an old writer, "will be past hope, and the saints past fear, forever." Yes! "I will DWELL." It will be an *unchangeable* happiness; or, *if changing, changing only "from glory to glory!"*

2. "I will dwell *in the House of the Lord.*" Speaks of Happiness and Rest.

It is a *Home* word — it invests Heaven with a home-aspect — it is a household sanctuary. "*Absent,*" says Paul, "*from the body,*" "at home" "*with the Lord.*" *Here,* we are out-door servants, exposed to the "windy storm and tempest." *There,* we shall be taken and welcomed within the royal palace; clothed, fed, honored, inside the halls of our "Father's dwelling." "Did He love you, an enemy — you, a sinner — you, who even loathes yourself; and received you when you disclaimed yourself? and will He not now immeasurably love you as a son — you a perfect saint? When perfect created love and most perfect uncreated love meet together, it will not be like Joseph and his brethren who lay upon one another's necks weeping; it will be loving and rejoicing, not loving and sorrowing." (Baxter) "You now begin," said Chrysostom to a friend during his exile, "*you now begin to lament my banishment — but I have done so for a long time; for since I knew that Heaven is my home, I have esteemed the whole world a place of exile.*"

3. "I will dwell in the House of the Lord *forever.*" Realizes its Perpetuity.

"The last jewel of our crown," says Baxter, "is that it will be an *everlasting* rest. Our earthly paradise in Eden had a way *out* — but no entrance that we could ever find *in* again; but this eternal paradise has a way *in* — but no way *out* again."

Blessed assurance, amid so much that is transitory! All the most enduring things of earth *are* passing and *have* passed away. The palaces of

Babylon, the towers of Zion, the bulwarks of Tyre, they have had their proud magnificence written — but it was written on the sands of time! Where are they now? The tide of ages has washed nearly every vestige away! Every little *home*, too, is a world in miniature. Its joys, they are passing; its friendships, they are perishable; its props and shelters, in one night the storm sweeps them down! "*But,*" says Jesus of His redeemed saint, "*I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out.*"

The true Ark will bring its crowded millions to the summit of the heavenly Ararat, not to go forth again amid storm and tempest, to battle with sin and sorrow — but to repose amid the unbroken sunshine of the everlasting hills. On earth "there is a time to be born, and a time to die." In Heaven, "*they neither marry nor are given in marriage.*" There are neither births nor deaths as here; no wearing out of successive generations, "*neither shall they die any more.*"

*What a volume is contained in these two words, "FOREVER!"* To think that after millions on millions of years and ages shall have rolled by, still I shall be but on the threshold of immortal being, on the confines and outskirts of limitless life. My lifetime commensurate with that of God Himself. His throne the center of my bliss, *eternity* the circumference. "O Eternity! Eternity!" says one, who has now entered on the reality, "it is yours to crown the joys above. You are the knot which binds the bundle of life together. Without the thought of you, dim sadness would not spare the faces of the blessed; their songs would be marred with dreadful discordance, and all the blissful bowers would lose their charms."

Is this "House of the Lord" to be my everlasting dwelling-place? Let me seek to regard it with a home-feeling; to have my affections more centered on it. Let the intervention of no lower object dim or obscure its glories. It is said of good Philip Henry, that when his children visited him, he used to pray "that their next meeting might be either *in Heaven* or further on in their way *towards* it."

Soon the morning hour shall strike. The canopy of night is now glittering with stars of promise — pledges of the day of glory. Already gleams of light steal through the distant casement, "The Beloved" is "looking

through the lattice," and saying that the "little while" of earth will soon be over, and "He who *shall* come, *will* come." The precise day of His coming is unknown, that we may attend upon every day, and that we may not have our "scroll" to search for, when the sound of His chariot-wheels is heard!

We have been traversing in thought the glories of a coming Heaven — plucking a few *Eshcol-clusters* from the celestial vineyard; yet, after all, how poor, how inadequate is our conception of future bliss! Two inspired penmen have written on the same theme. *John saw* Heaven in his visions on Patmos — he *attempts* to describe it. He paints its walls of jasper, and gates of crystal, and streets of gold. *Paul saw* Heaven, when he was caught up to its gates. He gazed where mortal eye had never gazed before. He saw glory rising on glory. He obtained a sight of "the invisible." When he returns to earth to commit the wondrous apocalypse to writing, he is silent — the pen drops from his hand; he gives, as the noblest description of it he *can* give, that it is *indescribable*. "*I saw,*" he says, "*what it is not possible for a man to utter.*"

O God! do grant, by the aids of that Holy Spirit whose office and work it is "to show us things to come," that these feeble thoughts and musings on coming glory, may tend to wean me from earth, and train me for Heaven; leading me to live more habitually under the power of things unseen — to have more of the girded loins and the burning lamps, and "so much the more" as I see "the day approaching."

"Time passes on," says the saintly Baxter — who always seems to stand as if one foot had already crossed the heavenly threshold, "yet a few days and we shall be here no more. Many diseases are ready to assault us. We who are now preaching, and hearing, and talking, and walking, must very shortly be carried and laid in the dust. We are almost there already. We know not whether we shall have another sermon, or Sunday, or hour! How active should they be who know they have so short a space for so great a work."

Reader, may these "sips of the heavenly fountain" refresh you for your onward journey. May these *vintage-gleanings* in the desert lead you to long more ardently for the fullness and fruition of the true Canaan. Press

forward, "uphill and downhill, to the city which has foundations;" so that when death comes, you may have nothing to do but to die — to leave the pilgrim-staff, and take up the pilgrim-crown — to step ashore from the vessel of life, and make your final "leap into the arms of Infinite Love."

"Already," said Edward Bickersteth, when in sight of Glory, "already I see the distant shore! I behold the Holy City having the glory of God, where are gone many dear friends. There I hope to meet many of those now so justly dear to me. What more do I need? God is *there*, my portion, my joy, my happiness, and in *His* presence is 'fullness of joy.' Animated with these hopes, what is the painted pageant of this world?"

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."

"So, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life. And be at peace with God."

***"Amen! Even So! Come, Lord Jesus!"***

## **Encouragements to Patient Waiting**

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## Introduction

May the effort "to speak a word to him that is weary" be attended with the Divine blessing; and may many of God's tried and suffering ones realize in their hours of weakness, pain, and distress — the soothing, elevating, and strengthening power which lies in Christ.

If, through the blessing of the Eternal Spirit, this volume shall convey to any *child of affliction*, one gleam of soothing and hope, it will impart additional sweetness to the dealings of our Heavenly Father, to whom all glory shall be ascribed, even to Him "who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

May grace be imparted to us to improve the various dealings of our Heavenly Father — that our hearts may be purified, our affections raised to the things which are above, and our earthly will brought into conformity with the will of God. May we be kept by faith ever looking up to Christ — dwelling in Him and He in us, so that "beholding, with open face, as in a glass the glory of the Lord — we are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

## THE CHASTENING ROD

"Behold, *happy* is the man whom God corrects; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty." — Job 5:17

*Happiness!* How little does the word mean when used in its ordinary sense! We generally esteem those happy — who enjoy uninterrupted health, and are apt to imagine that all happiness is gone when they are laid on a bed of sickness. But it is not so! To many of God's children, the time of *sore trial* has been a time of peace and joy — a time to which they

have looked back with the deepest gratitude. Not that sickness is in itself *desirable* — but it is *precious*. In the buoyancy of health — when our sky is clear — our sun shining brilliantly — and our hearts are full of hope — oh, how prone are we to forget our true character of "strangers and pilgrims" here on earth! *How insidiously does the world entwine itself around our heart-strings!* And how slowly do we *advance* in our heavenward journey! But when the sky is darkened, and the heavy clouds are rolling overhead — when we are laid prostrate — weak and helpless — then is it that we are brought to realize the frailty of our nature, and to become conscious of the truth that *this world is not our rest — because it is polluted!*

In the midst of our heedlessness — God summons us to an *audience*. He who knows the secrets of all hearts, has seen that within us which must be corrected. He has discovered us *wandering* — and He would bring us back. He has watched us paying our homage to the *creature* — and He would remind us of our duty to Him — the Creator. He has noticed the gradual yielding of the heart's affections to things "seen and temporal" — and He would have us give more earnest heed to the things "unseen and eternal."

"*Happy* is the man whom God corrects." Yes, assuredly, because it is a proof that He *cares* for us. We are not left to wander on without a father's care, but when our steps are fast nearing *dangerous ground* — His hand of love is outstretched; when we are likely to stumble on the *dark mountains* — He points to the path of safety; when the *siren voice* is alluring us further and further away — He summons us back, and Himself condescends to become our Guide. But He will not commune with us in the midst of our heedlessness and folly. He must first draw us aside — away from the scenes in which we foolishly delighted, away from the companions who were making us as worldly as themselves — away even from our daily occupation — He would have us be *alone* with Him!

We are laid on a sick-bed — health vanishes like a dream, friends begin to look anxious — and we are made to pass through days and nights of weariness and pain. All nature wears a gloom around us. The *sun* still shines — but, for us, he is draped in sadness; the *flowers* still bloom — but we cannot enjoy their fragrance; the *seasons* change — but they seem

ever tending towards dreary winter.

This is the *trial-time* of sickness. There is much to be endured — much to be struggled against. Hard thoughts enter into the soul — tempting, sinful, unholy thoughts — which would lead us to question God's goodness and mercy — as if He took delight in the sufferings and sorrows of His children.

At such a time, there is little peace or comfort — and often those who wish to advise and comfort, come too soon. We cannot, as yet, feel that "all is well;" — we are not, as yet, *happy* in being corrected. They would have us at once "be of good cheer," but it may not be.

God does not *intend* that we *should* be happy yet. We must be brought to solemn thought — to heart-searching — to earnest, importunate prayer. The love of the world must be weakened; the cords which knit our heart-strings must be snapped asunder; the longings for earth's giddy joys must be driven from the soul — before we can have the "*happiness*" of a corrected child! But when again we turn "with our whole heart to the Lord," feeling not only that it is a "Father's hand" which has been laid on us — but that that "Father" desires by this correction to draw us more closely to Himself — *then* does He impart His promised peace; *then* does He give strength to bear meekly the burden laid upon us; and *then*, above all, is the blessed assurance realized, "Fear not, I am still with you — I will never leave you, nor ever forsake you."

Oh! who shall say that the "chastening time" is not a *precious* one — when such is the blessed result? Who will for a moment doubt the happiness of the tried one, when thus "the light of his Father's countenance has been lifted up," and the Lord has "strengthened him upon the bed of languishing?"

Fellow-sufferers! we may not have realized this blessed condition as ours; we may be *still* under the cloud — as yet the struggle may be still going on. Let us not give way to despair. Let us *hope on*, let us pray for grace to see *God's hand* in our sickness, to acknowledge that "in faithfulness, He has afflicted us," and to learn those lessons He designs to teach us. Let us *wait* on the Lord. He will not long delay His coming. In some blessed way

He *will* answer us. If He withholds the blessing of health — He will give the more precious one of His own presence. If He sees fit to continue our pain and suffering — He will impart strength equal to bear them. If He prolongs the time of bodily weakness — He will convey to the soul spiritual nourishment, and "strengthen us with all might in the inner man."

Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, to whom belong the issues of life and death — look down with compassion upon Your frail and afflicted servant. Oh, enable me to acknowledge the mercy of Your dispensations, and, without murmuring or doubting — to accept all things as coming from You. Give me *strength* against all my temptations, and *patience* under all my sufferings. In the midst of all my fears and anxieties, I would give You thanks for Your sparing mercy. I have grievously sinned, O Lord, and merit Your hot displeasure. But I would cast myself wholly upon Your mercy in Christ Jesus. Oh, hear me in the day of trouble. Send help from Your sanctuary, and strengthen me from Zion. Give me grace, O Lord, in remembrance of Your past loving-kindness — so to trust in Your *goodness*, to submit to Your *wisdom*, and meekly to bear what You think fit to lay upon me — that I may be brought to say at the last, "It was *good* for me that I was afflicted!" Grant this measure of grace unto Your servant for Your Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## VAIN IS THE HELP OF MAN

"Do not put your trust in mortal men, in whom there is no help." — Psalm 146:3

In one sense, we are *very dependent* on each other. How does the *infant* cling to the arm of its mother! and how do we in *sickness* trust to the care and kindness of a faithful attendant! In every relation of life, we are comforted, upheld, sustained by those around us — and especially is this the case in the family of Christ. Every member feels it is his solemn duty to support the *weak* — to gladden the *sorrowful* — to console the *mourner*. If he does *not*, he has not the mind of Christ — he has not been

drinking in the spirit of Him who came "to bind up the broken-hearted, and to pour the balm of consolation into the wounded spirit."

The help we are sometimes privileged to give one another, is very precious. The *kindly look* — how often has it chased sadness from the brow, even as the bright ray of sunshine chases the dark cloud from the heavens! The *word of sympathy* — how often has it sounded in the secret chambers of the soul — awakening gladness, where all was silence and gloom! And who shall tell how often God's sweet promises, whispered gently by the sick-bed, have calmed and tranquilized the troubled soul, even as of old, the words of Jesus, "Peace, be still," soothed the tempestuous billows — so that "immediately there was a great calm."

But in another and higher sense, it is true that "vain is the help of man!" We can only *effectually* help each other — when we are "instruments in God's hand." He makes use of us as His servants, and when we feel and realize our responsibility as such, then our feeble efforts are blessed, and we become "sons of consolation." Apart from this, of what avail is it that the *physician prescribes*; or that the *minister visits* the chamber of sickness? *Health* will not return at the bidding of the one — nor *comfort* flow from the exhortations of the other. It matters not that there is the exercise of the highest skill, and the utterance of the most thrilling eloquence. Still the burden of disease will bear down the body — and the load of anxiety oppress the spirit. But when the Divine blessing is given, and the Spirit pours forth His promised influence — all is changed. The *pulse* beats again with health — the *soul* is freed from its agitations and alarms!

Shall I, then, "*trust* in the son of man?" No, rather, shall I trust in Him who alone "has the issues of life and death!" My heart may be filled with *gratitude* and *love* to those who have been the "*instruments* in God's hand," and they may become dear to me — even as my own flesh; but I will not "put my *trust*" in them — I will look higher far — to *Him* who has promised to watch over me with a Father's care — and whose power nothing can withstand. I will look to Him who is seated as my Advocate and Elder Brother at the Father's right hand, and who has promised to 'undertake for me,' and to plead, in my behalf, the merits of His own most precious blood. I will look to Him who alone can carry home the truth to

my heart, even the *Comforting Spirit* — at whose bidding, doubt and fear must vanish, and hope and joy take possession of my soul.

Yes, suffering child! it is ever well to look *beyond the creature* — to realize the fact that only one *Arm* is all-powerful — only one *Heart* is all-loving — only one *Ear* is always open — only one *Eye* is never closed — and that to Him, and Him alone, "the secrets and sorrows, the wants and desires of the heart," are known. Just as far as we *trace God's hand* in what our fellow-creatures do in our behalf, earthly love and sympathy and kindness will be helpful and comforting to us. When we forget or overlook this — we will fail to derive any *benefit*, or any lasting *comfort* from their efforts.

Besides, there are needs of the soul, and extremities of suffering and trial — when human help is utterly unavailing. It cannot come close enough to us. It cannot reach the seat of anguish. There are inner depths in our souls, of which we are at times painfully conscious, where *only one Voice* can be heard. God sometimes permits anxiety, fear, anguish — that we may be driven to Him by finding, short of Him, "no help in man." He would have us make *Him* our confidence, our refuge, our strength. He would have us *know Him* as our Father and friend — not know *about* Him — but know *Him*. It is this for which we are training. It is this which God is teaching us during our earthly sojourn — by disappointments and sorrows — by sickness and trial and bodily infirmities — by dangers without and fears within, by sore and agonizing extremities where human help cannot reach us — by one and all, He is drawing us to Himself and bidding us put *all* our *trust* in Him, "to acquaint ourselves with Him and be at peace."

And, surely, it is a comforting and blessed thought, that "*He cares for us*" — that all our concerns are important in His sight. Our fellow-men may refuse *their* sympathy — *He* never will. *They* may be distant from us in the hour of need — *He* is "*a present help in the time of trouble.*" *They* may be occupied and engrossed with self — *His* ear "*is ever open to our cry.*" *They* may become wearied of helping us — *He* is ever "*touched by our infirmities,*" and ever ready to heal our woes. Let us, then, with feelings of increasing love and gratitude, as we meditate on the care of our heavenly Father, reveal to Him all our wants and weaknesses, all our

sorrows and anxieties, all our sins and shortcomings; assured that, of His infinite mercy, He will bestow upon us pardon, peace, help, hope, and joy.

Heavenly Father, I would draw near unto You with humble confidence, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank You for all Your past goodness, for Your watchful providence, Your unceasing care. I bless You for the gracious offers of mercy which You have given me, and I pray that You would enable me to place all my confidence in Him whom You have sent to seek and save the lost. Oh, may His precious blood wash out the *dark stain of sin* from my soul. Blessed Savior, make me Yours in heart and soul. Oh, give me Your Spirit. Purify my nature and impress Your image on my heart.

Help me, O Lord, in this time of sickness, to look up to You as my only help. Keep me from all repining thoughts, and in remembrance of Your past loving-kindness, help me now to trust in Your goodness and to submit to Your will. Make me patient, humble, and resigned, and enable me to bring forth more fruit to Your glory. Strengthen me ever, to show the power of Your grace — in my humility, gentleness, love, and gratitude, to all who help my infirmities and show kindness to me. May I ever regard them as *instruments* in Your hands, and able to bring me comfort according to Your pleasure. Give me, O God, a simple, entire dependence upon You — and enable me in all things to commit my way unto You, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.



## THE CRY OF DISTRESS

"In my distress I cried out to the Lord; yes, I cried to my God for help. He heard me from His sanctuary; my cry reached His ears!" — 2 Samuel 22:7

It is related of *King Asa*, that an alarming and painful disease came upon him — he was afflicted with a grievous bodily calamity; and his illness continued to increase, "until his disease was exceedingly great." Yet, although on a former occasion he had gathered the people and had "entered into a solemn covenant with them to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul" — we are told that, when sickness came upon him, he forgot his promise; and this is the melancholy declaration of Scripture, "Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians."

What a sad contrast between this sinful forgetfulness — and the heartfelt urgency of the royal psalmist! What wonder that the next thing recorded of the one is his death, and by the other, that "He heard me from His sanctuary; my cry reached His ears!" Asa's cry of distress, being made only to *man* — brought no relief; the psalmist's prayer to the Most High God — was heard and answered.

Which of these examples have we followed? When pain and suffering have laid hold upon us, to whom, in *our* extremity, have we made our appeal? Has it been to feeble, impotent man, whose every effort is powerless without God's blessing? or has it been to Him who, in His holy temple, hearkens to the cry of the humblest, the weakest, of His children?

Alas! have we not to acknowledge that many a time in our distress — we have looked for help *only* to men? We have made our appeal to them, believing that they could deliver us, and we have wondered that the sickness was not removed — the disease not cured.

Asa's sin was not his having applied to the physicians — but his having neglected, first of all, "to seek the Lord." We have been guilty, not in

having had recourse to *means* — but in *trusting solely* to their efficacy.

Whatever is our danger or disease, we can only hope for deliverance by immediately *crying to our God for help*. For is not this the end He has in view? He does not visit us with sore calamity, only to scare and frighten us away from Him — but that our danger may drive us to Him. He permits terror to lay hold upon us — that we may take refuge in His arms. He allows our faith to fail — that we may cling more confidently to His almighty arm. He delays the removal of disease — that we may become more importunate in prayer — that we may become more patient, resigned, and submissive to His will. When these ends are accomplished — He speaks the word, He dispels our fears, He grants our desires, He answers our prayers.

"The cry of distress." Oh! who but a doubting, faithless one would ever imagine that the God of love would be indifferent when it came "into His ears?" He, our Father, our covenant-God — He "who has not spared His own Son — but delivered Him up to the death for us," shall He refuse to hear our cry when danger or calamity threatens to overwhelm us? Away with such doubts! "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me," was the assurance of the Savior to His disciples; and still the same words are true regarding all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in *love*, that He lays His hand upon us — in love that He seems to deny our prayers — in love that He delays to send "help out of Zion." The Father of mercies is evermore compassionately intent upon the sufferings of His dear children — according to the depth and poignancy of their afflictions.

Our "cry of distress" He has indeed heard — but He *delays* to answer it, that we may learn to persevere in asking — that the passionate fervency of unchastened prayer may be deepened into the strong breath of humble supplication — that patience may have her perfect work — that we may still "wait upon the Lord, who hides His face" — that we may grow to trust His love, to know what He is to us, yes, what He is to all who wait upon Him. Oh! it is not that His ear is heavy, it is not that the tenderness of His sympathy is blunted — it is a part of His plan of faithfulness and wisdom. He is training His children — training them for the greatest dignity and the highest happiness.

And He best knows *how* to do it. We might rather choose comfort, health, an immediate answer to all our prayers; but we must be taught that *holiness* is of more importance than *comfort*; that fellowship with God more precious than health; and that "through *much* tribulation we must enter the kingdom." We must be brought to an entire and willing surrender of the soul to Him, that, in His own way, and by His own methods — He may cleanse it, may strengthen it, may renew it, may dwell in it, make it His eternally!

Suffering child of God! does your heart fail you? have *you* raised "the cry of distress," and received no answer, and are you beginning to doubt the love, the faithfulness of God? Oh, trust in Him still! He *has* heard you — your cry *did* enter into His ears. Cast yourself in the full assurance of faith upon Him — and all shall be well. It is He himself, who has stirred up your soul in the hour of extremity to call upon Him; and He has stirred you up to call — because He means to grant your desire, and this is His way of granting it. He has let this danger threaten you — -that you may draw nearer to Him — that you may open to Him your grief, your anxiety, your difficulties — that you may show Him your need — that you may plead with Him by His covenant of tears — and, flying from all others, and even from yourself — hide in His bosom.

Oh! you do not love yourself better than He loves you! You can not shrink from pain more than He dislikes your bearing it. And if He permits it still to continue, it is that a greater good may result to you in bearing it — that your heart may receive and retain deeper and sharper impressions of the likeness of your Lord. Oh, then, count the season of suffering a precious, blessed season, though it be dim and overcast — a season of promise and springing freshness — a token of His nearness, and of His purpose to cleanse you for His own — "Blessed are you who weep now."

He who is greatly tried, if he is learning obedience after the example of his Lord, is not far from the kingdom of God. Our heavenly Father is perfecting His own work — tracing the divine lineaments with His wise and gentle hand. He who perfected His own Son through sufferings, has brought many sons to glory by the same rough road, even by "the way of the wilderness and of the flood." He is bringing you home to Himself. Do not, then, shrink because the path is broken and solitary — because at

times the cry of distress, "Lord, help me," is not answered by a word — for the way is short, and the end blessed, and your every footstep is marked by an eye of love — your every supplication "enters into the ears" of the Lord God Almighty. He knows your every prayer for guidance, deliverance, and help — your every effort to bear patiently and contentedly what He has laid upon you, and to profit by the visitation — to hear the rod, and Him who appointed it — to yield yourself always meekly, as the redeemed of Christ, to the hand of God, as of a loving Father. All these things, which man can never know, are known and valued by Him.

Still hope, still struggle on, still feel assured that you are not under a harsh rod of vindictive infliction — but under the watchful care of a "Father in heaven," who mingles for you joy and sorrow, as He sees best for you, and who will "neither fail you nor forsake you."

O merciful God, who sees all my weakness, and the troubles I labor under — have regard unto the prayer of Your servant, who now implores Your comfort, Your direction, and Your help. Grant me grace neither to grieve nor repine under this, Your chastisement. May I be enabled to regard my troubles as an exercise of my faith, and patience, and humility — and may I improve all my afflictions to the good of my soul, and to Your glory. You alone know what is best for me. Let me never dispute Your *goodness* or *wisdom* — but ever trust Your *heart*, even when I cannot trace Your *hand*. Oh, help me, good Lord, that I may cheerfully suffer and obediently do Your will, and choose what You chose, and observe the ways of Your providence, and revere Your judgments, and wait for Your mercy, and delight in Your dispensations, and expect that all things shall work together for good to those who love You. Grant this, O Father, through Jesus Christ our blessed Savior. Amen.

## PAST JOYS

"The joy of our heart has ceased!" — Lamentations 5:15

The retrospect of the past, in its power to excite joy or grief, depends very much on our present condition. So long as we are *prosperous* — we can look back with feelings of delight; so long as we are *healthy* — we can think of the years that have gone by with pleasure; so long as there are no *missing children* in the family circle — we can recall the days of childhood with joyful emotion. And it is the same with our spiritual nature — so long as we have the *inward consciousness* that the light of God's countenance is shining upon us — we are glad and joyous; so long as we have *peace, calmness, and rest* of soul — we can think of other days without a tear.

But let *events* change — and how changed are *we!* When *prosperity* departs — then what pain do we often experience in recalling scenes which can no more return! When *disease* lays us prostrate — then how sadly do we think of the time of health! And when inward *soul-trouble* comes upon us, when we are sick at heart — then how do we cry with the patriarch, "Oh that it were with me as in months past!"

Reader, has not some such feeling been experienced by you in the time of sickness and trial? Perhaps it has been your lot to be summoned to the endurance of trial when your sky seemed brightest, when hope filled your bosom, and the pathway of life was fair and pleasant. Suddenly the sky became overcast — health declined, the rose-color faded from the cheek, the canker-worm gnawed at the vitals, and weakness and weariness took the place of strength and vigor! No longer able to mingle in the crowd, destitute even of strength to discharge accustomed duty — oh, have not *past joys* — the recollection of days of health, of innocent enjoyment with friends you dearly loved, of scenes in which without one sigh of weariness you were accustomed to be a part — have not these things come upon you with painful intensity during days and nights of languor, suffering, and wakefulness?

We have all felt this — all of us, at least, who know what is meant by failing strength, by increasing debility, by helpless prostration, by long-continued sickness. At such times we must pray more earnestly for grace — grace to keep us from repining — grace to enable us to see that God still designs kindly — grace to realize what might have been *lost* to us by unbroken health — but *gained* by us in the time of sickness — grace to be

grateful that we *ever* had *joys* in the past while we only merited sorrows — grace to extract all the *good* which is treasured up for us by our heavenly Father, in *that* which to a careless eye seems only *evil*.

For let us remember that what *we* count *joy* — is not really so; and the blessed lot — is not to live on in the world unchastened and unchecked, undisturbed by sorrow or suffering, having our good things in this life, left to our own ways. No, the blessed life it is to lie low (well is it for us if it be of our own accord — yet anyhow to lie low!) under the Savior's cross. Though for a time the *cross* lies heavy upon us — it is not so heavy as *sin*; though it wounds us — they are "the wounds of a Friend;" though it opens the floodgates of grief — it is that we may be partakers of heavenly joy; though it seems to rob us of some things which we counted precious — it is that we may obtain others infinitely more valuable, as enduring as eternity itself.

And if sickness becomes the means of drawing us more closely to Christ — if the discipline we are now undergoing (albeit it separates us from what *we* counted our *joys*) is intended to work for *good*, to clear our hearts from dross, to enable us to see Him as once we saw Him not, amid the shadows of this busy life of trifles, and to admit us to the high and holy privilege of hearing His voice sounding closer to us than it ever did before — oh, shall we *murmur* or *complain* that these "past joys" are no longer ours? Shall we not cease from repining or impatience when we think of His *present* gracious purpose regarding us, and say, "Lord, do with me as You desire! Carry on Your own work, and make me submissive to Your will."

Be this your prayer, suffering Christian — and sickness will be the means of awakening within your heart songs of "joy" which will gladden every remaining step of your pilgrimage here, and sound throughout the ages of a blessed eternity. "Past joys" will then seem small in comparison with "present joys." Gradually you will see the unfolding of the plan of Providence, and be amazed to find that "*all things*" — joy and sorrow, ease and pain, health and sickness — were working *together* for your good; that the great end which your Father had chiefly in view in all your afflictions — was the glory of His name, in your spiritual health and recovery, in your being brought to the knowledge of Himself, in your

being made a chosen vessel full of His power and of the riches of His grace.

Had your day continued *all* sunshine, your earthly joys ever increasing, and your health, ease, and worldly comfort suffering no break — you would soon have forgotten God — soon have wandered far from the Savior — soon have become unmindful of your character and destiny.

Oh! then, was it not in mercy that the *dark shadow* crossed your path — that the *painful visitation* came from God — that the *hand of love* arrested you — and that you were called to become the tenant of the sick-room and the sick-bed, with their weariness and their pain — their days of languor, and their nights of restlessness?

You are brought there by Him "who does not afflict willingly." You are brought into His own school, there to learn to read His own handwriting; to learn Heaven's holy alphabet — to see that 'earthly sorrow' is the *heavenly name for joy*; and bodily pain is His means for spiritual improvement; and the present wounding of the heart, is for your heart's healing and eternal cure. You are brought there that, by the power of His Holy Spirit, He may mold your heart as He will, may purify, and enlighten, and soften, and strengthen, and deepen it — by His presence in the cloud and mystery of sorrow.

Oh, then, do not think so much of "past joys" as of securing, in this hour of sickness, the peace, the comfort, the joy of a "present Savior." With Him by your side, you will be able to "rejoice in *tribulation*;" you will bid it welcome; you will cherish it as a heavenly visitant — a messenger sent from above with healing to your soul. You will find "the rainbow in the cloud" — the Savior's light arising out of darkness, His form upon the troubled waters; and if He hushes them not, He will say to your soul, "Fear not — for I am with you." He will make it more joyful for you to lie down in trouble and anguish, while He is with you — than ever any of the joys of this world were, while He was less present with you, or wherein you forgot, and turned aside from Him.

Suffering, *in itself*, were it a punishment for sin — would be oppressive and hopeless — but through God's mercy in Christ, it is His healing

medicine, to burn out our wounds, and purify us for His presence. Every throb of pain, every pang of soul-agony, is a messenger from God, testifying, if we will regard it, of His fatherly care: tempering our cup with pain and sorrow, as He sees needful for us; loosening our hold of this life; leading heavenwards, where there shall be no pain; humbling us, as being creatures who require it, and deserve far more — teaching us to look into ourselves, to see for what reason in us, this medicine has been sent.

Yes, every sorrow we meet with, is a *billow* on this world's tumultuous sea, which we must cross — to bring us nearer to our home. Every removed earthly enjoyment — is a weight removed from off us, which was crushing down our spirits, when they should have been soaring upwards heavenwards — homewards — Godwards.

So walking on earth — you may be in heaven; you may be a partaker of that "joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle," of that "peace which passes all understanding;" you may live beside the throne of grace, drawing closer the ties which no privation, nor suffering, nor vicissitude can dissolve; you may connect "a time of need" with the best and brightest manifestations of *mercy* and *grace* to your soul!

The remembrance of "past joys" will not then be dangerous or painful to you. Your "present joy" will be better far — the joy of near and sweet communion with your God and Savior; the joy of so hearkening to His voice of love — that pain and sorrow are utterly forgotten; the joy of being so "*alone* with God," that every murmuring is hushed, every disquietude removed; the joy of having such a manifestation of the Redeemer's glory to your soul — as will shed a calm and blissful radiance around every prospect, and proves the *pledge* of that better heritage where "there is fullness of joy for evermore."

Oh, then, look earnestly to Him — try to realize His presence — hearken for His voice of love; and instead of *murmuring* because past joys cannot be recalled — pray that "present joy" may be imparted — that the Savior may hold communion with you, and pour into your heart that "joy which no man can take from you!"

Gracious and merciful Father! You do not willingly afflict; but You rebuke



and chasten those whom You love — look down upon me, Your unworthy servant, and have mercy upon me for Christ's sake! I acknowledge both the *justice* and the *mercy* of Your dealings with me. Oh, keep me from murmuring because past joys are no longer mine. Give me to feel that You know the discipline I need — and that earthly joy cannot impart heavenly peace. Although You have visited me with sickness, and laid Your chastening hand upon me — oh grant that I may still have inward joy and comfort. May I have grace to surrender all things into Your hands, referring the disposal of them to You — and that heartily and fully.

Even in the *darkest night of sorrow* may I cast anchor in You, and repose on You when I see no light, remembering that this world is not my hope, nor the place of my rest — but the place of my trial and conflict; and that my true home is above. Good Lord and Father, of Your infinite mercy You have called me to eternal glory — save me, then, I pray You, from ever being so *ungrateful* as to repine against You, and so to drown precious heavenly blessings, in any little trouble that befalls me.

Give me more deep thoughts of the joys of the world to come; lift my eyes to that state where Your saints now rejoice before You; direct my steps to it, and lead me towards it, cheerful and unwearied, by an assured hope that the joyful day will at length come, when, as Christ's disciple, I too shall be admitted into the fullest bliss. Oh, give me grace to cast myself wholly on Your mercy, and neither to *despise* Your chastenings, nor *faint* under them; but, with resignation to Your blessed will, and acknowledgment of Your paternal love — to speak good of Your name, now and ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## SUBMISSION

"May Your will be done." — Luke 11:2

Such is part of the prayer which our Savior taught His disciples. It is familiar to us all. We have lisped it at a mother's knee; we have given utterance to it in the house of prayer; and in the secrecy of our closets we

have offered it up at the throne of the heavenly grace. And yet, how seldom have we fully realized its import — and given our willing, heartfelt response to the petition! The truth is, we can only fathom its deep meaning, and attain the power of saying "Amen" from the heart, *by degrees*. And the place where our heavenly Father most often imparts the power is the *chamber of sickness*. There we feel the intense *reality* of the spiritual struggle — the battlings of the human will against the Divine — the wrestlings between doubt — and trust; between earth — and heaven; between things seen and temporal — and things unseen and eternal.

It is for the very purpose of teaching us *submission* — that trials, and sickness, and sorrows come upon us. In *health* and *prosperity* — our great desire is *self-pleasure*, or looking for a state of rest and satisfaction here — instead of taking up the cross of labor in duty, and submission to the will of God, with a renunciation of all worldly schemes of happiness, and patience for death to put us in possession of it. And God, who seeks our well-being, who desires to bring our will into entire conformity with His own — withdraws us from the world, that by the painful *necessity* of sickness, suffering, crosses — He may break the *strong chain* which binds us to the world, may crucify our wills, may lead us to look ever to Him, and to trust in His promised faithfulness and unerring wisdom!

God knows that without *holiness* — we can have no true *happiness*; that our hearts can find no true rest — until they are drawn *upwards*, and centered in Him. And therefore He appoints for us a continual process of *purification* and *refining* — until the *dross* of selfishness, impatience, murmuring, and self-pleasing — is removed from our hearts; and we are brought to say, as we never could before, "Father, may Your will be done!" For this end — we are summoned to enter the *furnace of sharp affliction*; for this end — is long-continued suffering permitted; for this end — we have sometimes days, and nights, and months, and years of weariness, and anguish, and bitter disappointment.

Tried one! do *you* feel it a difficult thing, in the midst of pain, and weakness, and bodily infirmity, to say, "May Your will be done." Oh! deem it not strange — saints now in glory have been vexed and troubled by the same thought; often have they grieved and lamented because they were conscious of fretfulness and impatience under the afflictive hand of

God. While it is the very secret, the mystery of solid peace within — still it is the hardest and most difficult of all lessons — to resign everything to God's will, to be disposed of at His pleasure, without one resisting one opposing thought.

But if you are *learning*, if you are *striving* to endure with patience, if you are making *constant efforts*, be they ever so feeble, to cherish a meek and submissive spirit — fear not. All shall yet be well; more grace will be given you. The heavier the *trial* — the larger will be the measure of *strength*.

Remember the example of your blessed Lord. He went through far more than you can be called to suffer. His sorrows were not *merited* — as yours have been. He was all pure; *suffering* could find in Him no more to cleanse — than *sin* could find to fasten upon. Yet *whose* sorrow was like unto His? Who ever passed through such a fiery ordeal? And why was it? That He "might *learn obedience* by the things that He suffered." He was made "perfect" by sufferings; and of this perfection, after the measure of a creature and the proportions of our humanity, are the saints made to partake; they are purified — that they may be perfect. And therefore the sorrows of the holiest minds — are the highest approaches to the mind of Christ, and are full of a meaning which few can comprehend. Oh, then, strive to follow the Savior's steps! Be not dispirited, do not be afraid. Keep a sincere heart — and you will be carried through. He who perfected His own Son through *sufferings* — will bring you to glory by the same path!

Remember, too, that you are not your own — but His. You have given yourself up to Him. Why, then, complain that He is doing with you as He pleases? The great law of *sacrifice* is embracing you, and must have its perfect work. Let it be your prayer, then, that your will being crucified, you may offer up yourself to be disposed of as He sees best, whether for joy or sorrow, blessing or chastisement — to *be*, to *go*, to *do*, to *suffer* — even as He wills, even as He ordains; even as Christ endured, "who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God."

Oh, shrink not from any fellowship with your Lord in suffering — who for you "endured the cross, despising the shame," and is even now preparing for you joys which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered

into the heart of man to conceive!" Try to say, it may be with trembling, faltering lips, "O my Savior, let me be *silent* like You — and never open my mouth in complaining, whatever be the bitter cup You give me to drink; for it can only be a cup of *blessing* to Your *redeemed* child, for whom You have borne the curse, and exhausted the cup of wrath and indignation!"

Be comforted, too, by the thought that *submission* is pleasing in your Father's sight. The sooner you gain the submissive spirit of a child — the sooner will the cross, the trial, the suffering, be removed. Not that you are to try to bear *with patience* — *in order* to be freed from chastisement; but because you will be doing "that which is pleasing to Him;" and when you do, He will enable you to "rejoice with exceeding joy."

And oh, suffering child! will not this help us to be more patient and submissive — the thought that "yet in a *little while*, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." Then will He give rest to the weary, and consolation to the sorrowful. Their peace shall be as a river, ever flowing; they shall have entered into "the joy of their Lord." No more *sin*, nor any more *guilt*, no more *penitence*, no more *trial*, no *infirmity* to depress us, no *false affection* to mislead us, no *temper* to irritate us, no *prejudice* to blind us, no *sloth*, no *pride*, no *envy*, no *strife* — but the light of God's countenance, and a pure river of water of life, as clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God. That is our **home**. Here on earth, we are but on our *pilgrimage* — our *path* tangled and thorny, our *rest* broken and disturbed, our spiritual *vision* dim and obscured.

No more, child of God — your very sufferings on earth, so *soon* to be over, so *small* compared with your deservings, so *short* in duration compared with eternity, "shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" Oh! surely this consideration will also help to increase your patience under suffering. Your glory is to superabound — as your afflictions have abounded. Your *eternal refreshings* will be measured out to you — by the cup of trial you have drunk. God has beaten and hammered you — only to make you a vessel unto honor! All sorrow and sighing shall then flee away, and everlasting joy be upon your head.

Why then complain — because God designs to make you *very* glorious?

Does He injure you in thus rendering you fit for a *higher* and *nobler* place in heaven? *Impatience* and *fretfulness* can free you from no other weight but *one* — and that is "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Suffering may seem long and weary, and, for the present, grievous; yet it is but a little moment, a twinkling of an eye — when compared with the everlasting inheritance of the saints in glory, when the days of your mourning shall be ended.

Oh, fear not, trembling believer! Your Father knows the *weight* and *duration* of your sorrows and trials. He sees the end from the beginning — and the *happy outcome* out of all your afflictions which He has in store for you. Trust Him, submit to Him! No *sorrow* has been mingled in your cup, no *thorn* has been scattered on your path, no *grief* has oppressed your spirit — but what "is common to the whole family of God." The Shepherd is leading you by a *difficult* path — but in the *right* way to His own blessed fold. Leave all to Him — to His faithfulness, His love, His power, His watchful, sleepless care!

As you advance, still trying more and more to submit to your Father's will; in every fresh trouble — imploring fresh grace; in every onset of the evil heart — to resist God's pleasure; crying to Him for help — your prayer will be answered. *Mercies* you do not dream of now — will be strewn around your footsteps! *Powers* which until now have lain as sleeping shadows within you — will awake to life — powers of faith, of hope, of love, and of that perfect patience and submission which will enable you to lift your streaming eyes to heaven, and say, "Lord, I am Yours! *Do* with me what You will — *send* me what You desire; only abide with me." Then let the *shadows* of evening fall — let your *path* be dark and desolate — let your *burden* be heavy, your *cross* painful — in the surrounding stillness you will hear God's voice cheering you onward!

One, too, mightier than the angels will make His presence felt; and as you place your trembling hand in His, and cry, "Lord, guide me — for I cannot see," there will descend a stream of *light* upon your darkening path, and *peace* so perfect, that, with songs of praise and thanksgiving, you will pursue your way, willing to *wait*, willing to *endure*, willing to *do* all things and to *suffer* all things, for His dear sake — who is leading you through the valley of the shadow of death — to the fountains of living waters — to

the land of everlasting joy!

O You who are the God of patience and consolation — strengthen me in the inner man, that I may bear Your yoke and burden without murmuring. May I heartily *love* You, entirely *confide* in You, and absolutely *resign* both soul and body to *Your wise disposal*. Lord, I am sensible that I am far from exercising that *unreserved submission* to Your gracious will, which I ought to exercise. Help me, I beseech You, so to trust in Your *infinite goodness* and *unerring wisdom*, that I may be able to say, from my very heart, "May Your will be done!" Oh, teach me to be grateful for the *manifold comforts* allotted me; and support me graciously, that my soul be not cast down and disturbed within me. Assist me to nourish penitent, believing, and serious thoughts and affections, and such meekness and patience as my Divine Master manifested while He was a sufferer on earth. *Give me a deep sense of my sinfulness — that I may ever be humbled before You, and may feel Your great mercy and forbearance towards me!*

Grant that all Your dispensations may be *sanctified* by Your Holy Spirit, and be instrumental in preparing me for that happy state where peace, and purity, and love are perfected — where there is no more sin, no strife, no sorrow — where the former things are passed away, and You make all things new. Hear, gracious Lord, accept, and answer, and bless Your servant, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## **YOU ARE MY GOD**

"My soul follows hard after you." — Psalm 63:8

And it is the desire of our heavenly Father that it should. To this He brings *all* His dear children by *one way or other* — that they "follow hard after Him." Sometimes *He visits them with sore chastisement* — and then, with tear-dimmed eyes and bleeding hearts, they cry to Him for mercy, and He wipes their tears away, and gently binds up their wounds, so that they love Him more than ever, and "follow after Him."

Sometimes He permits *a dark cloud to overshadow them* — they become timid and fearful, they cannot realize His presence, and faith, hope, and love begin to languish. Then do they lift up their hearts, exclaiming, "Lord, send help. Oh, give light, comfort, security!" and soon a friendly hand is outstretched, and a loving voice whispers, "Fear not! I am with you still;" and with a firm, unfaltering step they "follow after Him."

Sometimes they become *surrounded with difficulties and dangers* — every step of their pathway is trodden with pain; they look around — but can discover no way of escape, until, in answer to the urgent prayer, "Lord, help me!" they are conducted to a quiet resting-spot, and then, permitted by their heavenly Guide to enter an easier path, "they follow hard after Him."

Or it may be that weary months are appointed them, months of *sickness and pain*, when prayer seems unheard, longing desire unheeded, and the most urgent entreaties appear utterly unavailing. The disease may even take such deep root that the appalling thought comes home, "this sickness is life-long!" Death itself would almost be regarded as a relief — but it comes not. No! the discipline is needed, severe though it is. But the suffering Christian will not be forsaken, for an eye of love rests upon him; the heart will not *utterly* fail, for One will yet strengthen it on the bed of languishing; the soul will not perish, for the Refiner is even now purifying it from its dross! Let "patience have her perfect work" — and then mark the change. Where all was once fretfulness, impatience, despondency — there is now submission, calmness, hope. And why?

Because the *Comforter* has come! He has revealed the truth, that pardon is more precious than health; that God's love is more precious than any earthly good; that salvation is more precious than years of unalloyed worldly happiness and unbroken health! Who shall wonder that the soul thus comforted should desire "to *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty" — to have Him ever near — to bask in the sunshine of His favor — to hold fast the everlasting Arm! And knowing, from bitter experience, how impossible it is to tread life's stormy path without such a companion — how soon the heart would fail, and doubt arise, and temptation beset, and despondency return — that this should be its language, "*O Lord, my soul follows hard after You!*"

Reader, what is *your* state? Are you under the chastening hand of God, pleading hard that He would send relief? Do you know what it is to groan underneath a burden which seems too heavy for you to bear? Oh, be comforted! Turn the *eye of faith* heavenward, and, if the burden is not removed, you will be abundantly strengthened to carry it. Still pray on; the Lord's time is coming.

Believe it, Christian, your *trial* has been sent in tender love! God has appointed it not only to bring you to *believe* in His love; but also to a *growing enjoyment* of it — that you may long ardently for its possession, and "follow hard after Him." He would have you *nearer* to Himself, and more *like* Himself — holy, as He is holy, not in degree — but in likeness. He would teach you, by His nearness — more entire submission to His will. He would improve your love to Him, which He will do — by manifesting His love to you. You will yet find the suffering-time — to be a blessed time — a time of holy freedom with your God and Savior — a time of heavenly refreshment from Him, such as you never enjoyed when as yet you were unvisited by *trial*, and distant from the *cross*. Oh, do not think that He is indifferent to your pains and anguish, to your prayers and tears, to your longings for help and deliverance. By the very permanence of your griefs — He designs to increase your desires after Him. He would have your *prayers* yet more urgent, your *submission* yet more entire, your *aspirations* yet more heavenly!

He sees you and understands you better than you do yourself; as He made you, He knows what is in you — all your peculiar feelings and thoughts, your dispositions and likings, your strengths and your weaknesses. He knows what must be rooted out — and what engrafted; what banished — and what nourished; what destroyed — and what sustained. And He is working out His own gracious purpose even now — interesting Himself in all your fears and anxieties, noting your very countenance, whether smiling — or in tears; noting your voice, the beating of your heart, and your very breathing. Oh, cling to the assurance that He loves you — that you are one for whom the Savior offered up His last prayer and sealed it with His precious blood! Oh, if He has given His own Son for you — how shall He not with Him, also freely give you all things!



Remember, too, that the great Intercessor — your Redeemer, Elder Brother, High Priest, and Mediator — is pleading for you within the veil. Who is so well fitted as *He* — to sympathize with and strengthen you? He has sorrowed Himself — groaned beneath the pressure of an anguish in which there was none to share, and for your sake drained the very dregs of the *cup of anguish*.

Oh, make known to Him your case! Go to Him in your weakness and weariness — oppressed by disease, weighed down by care — and be sure you go to One who has Himself felt oppression and weariness — One who will *pity* you; who forgets not the anguish He endured while on earth; who remembers what human weakness is; who will look upon your beating heart, upon your pale cheek, upon your anxious brow — and whose very pleadings will seem to echo within your soul, "O my Father, have compassion on this poor suppliant! I once wept. I once was sorrowful. I once endured pain and anguish. Now, Father, even now, have pity, as You once, in the days of my flesh, had pity on me!"

Yes, Jesus is ever the same. His heart is unchanged — unchangeable. He has passed into the heavens — but He is still the God-man, the God incarnate, and still feels in perfect sympathy and brotherhood with His people.

Then, whatever is your *cross*, whatever your *trouble*, whatever your *anguish* — bring it to Jesus! The Father may reject *you* — but His *own Son*, He will not. Your sins may cry aloud for *vengeance* — the blood of the slain Lamb will plead louder for *mercy*! You have no *merit* to entitle you to ask anything — but the Victim of the great atoning sacrifice is still before the throne. You may dread to enter the holy of holies — the great High Priest still and forever offers the eternal sacrifice. He is piteous and faithful. Oh, "follow hard after Him," for He loves you still, and He bears upon the palms of His *hands*, upon His jeweled *bosom*, and upon His swelling *heart* — the names, and needs, and prayers of His ransomed ones!

O Lord, my heavenly Father, I bow down before You to bless You for all Your mercies, and especially for not having dealt with me according to my

many sins. Pardon, I beseech You, for Your Son Jesus Christ's sake — all the offences of my past life, and enable me to believe in Him to the salvation of my soul. Increase my longing after conformity to my Divine Redeemer, and may the remembrance of His marvelous love, and grace, and mercy — incline my heart to follow hard after Him. Blessed Jesus! Your followers have the assurance of Your own gracious declaration, that whatever they shall ask in Your name — they will receive it. O Savior of the world! I humbly ask of You more *love*, more *grace*, more *faith* and *trust* in You. Help me to *cling* to You. In the darkest hour — may I realize Your presence; in the time of greatest danger — may I hear Your voice; and when my faith begins to fail — oh let Your strengthening arm uphold me! Remember, O Lord, the word unto Your servant in which You have caused me to hope, and answer me according to the multitude of Your mercies. Amen.

## THE REMEMBRANCER

"You write bitter things against me." — Job 13:26

Sickness is often a painful remembrancer. The, past, which seemed forgotten, comes back with its train of omissions and commissions — promises and vows, which never were fulfilled; privileges and warnings which passed by unimproved; and solemn knockings at the chamber of the soul which made only a slight and momentary impression. Have we never realized this? Have not our hearts trembled at the revived record of other days?

But oh, what is *our* recollection — when compared with the omniscience of God! He has seen and recorded thoughts and words and deeds from our very childhood. To Him all hearts are open, and from Him no secrets are hidden. He has watched our every movement, and there has not been within us, a secret purpose, a sinful desire, or an unholy thought — which has escaped His notice. How often has He warned us when we were treading the path of sin — warned us by His providence and by His grace — warned us by His word and ministers — warned us by blighted hopes

and shattered plans — warned us by threatening to snap asunder the frail cord of life, and terminate forever the possibility of a return to Him!

Well may our hearts fail us when we consider what "bitter things" God has written against us. "When I called — you did not answer." "They would have none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof." "They hearkened not — but hardened their neck." Oh, how often these "bitter things" have been written against us! And every year has added to their number and aggravation, for every year we owed it to the mercy and forbearance of God that He did not cut us off in the midst of our sins!

Blessed be God, as dark as the record has been — stained with the blackest ingratitude, and foul and polluted as it must have appeared to "Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" — we are not abandoned to despair! No! there is hope — hope in the crucified Savior, hope in His precious blood, hope in His all-sufficient atonement, hope in His all-prevailing intercession. Lamb of God! we would turn to You! By Your agony and bloody sweat, by Your cross and passion, by Your precious death and burial, by Your glorious resurrection and ascension — we beseech You to have mercy upon us!

Yes, fellow-sufferers, let our ground of hope be in Christ, the *Arbitrator* between God and us — the *Mediator* who for our sakes was nailed to the accursed tree — the mighty *Intercessor* who pleads for us at the Father's right hand. "Bitter things" have been written against us, and we have no words, no merits of our own to plead; we are "poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked;" "nothing in our hands we bring — simply to the cross we cling." But there, we cannot perish. As deep as is the *mountain of our guilt* — deeper, far deeper is that *ocean of infinite love* in which God has promised to bury it forever, and to remember it no more against us! O mercy unspeakable!

These "bitter things" let us mourn over, let us nourish at their recollection, that "godly sorrow which works repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of;" let us grieve because we ever sinned against a *God* so gracious, merciful, and compassionate — against a *Savior* so loving, tender, and sympathizing — against a *Holy Spirit* so patient, and gentle, and forbearing. Let us pray for grace to serve our God with more fidelity,

that in everything we may seek to please Him, that our inmost hearts may be given up to Him, and that we may present "our bodies and spirits as living sacrifices unto Him, which is our reasonable service."

And in our present season of sickness and suffering — let us resolve to take cheerfully whatever God may see fit to appoint. Pain, and distress and sorrow — are what we have justly merited — but "the Lord is very piteous and of tender mercy." He may have compassion upon us, and send relief. Having cast all our care on him — let us believe that He cares for us; that He has, and can have, no other object in His dealings towards us, but simply and solely that of making us holy and happy forever. Not that pain and sorrow have of themselves the power to make us so; they naturally irritate and vex the spirit; but, by God's blessing, suffering is made the means of carrying on His purifying process within us.

Under the leading of His grace, sorrow draws us to Him who can alone renew and sanctify the heart; it will bring us to Him who is the true and only Purifier — who will bend our wills to His will — so that we shall *love* what He loves, and *choose* what He chooses — and make us such as He would have us to be. Then will we wait patiently for Him, and seek His purifying Spirit, and cling to the cross of Jesus; and we will not desire to escape any of God's corrections or judgments — feeling that by this we would only be escaping one great means of preparing us for future blessedness. And, whatever our lot on earth may be, is it not *better than we deserve*? Amid all our troubles, have we not much to be thankful for? There are sadder hearts than ours, heavier burdens, and more painful agonies.

Besides, God means to draw us to Himself — and He will do it in His own way. He made us for eternity, and His aim in all He does — is to bring us happily into it. Hence the necessity of pain, sickness, crosses — to break the *strong chain* which binds us to the world, and to induce us to take part with God in His grand design. He will draw us, and securely lead us to Himself — in a way contrary to all our natural will, until He has divested us thereof, and consumed and made it thoroughly subject unto the Divine will. For this is His design — that we should cease to regard our own wishes or dislikes; that it should become a small matter whether He gives or takes away, whether we have health or sickness, joy or sorrow

— *if only* we may receive and apprehend God himself; that whether things please or displease us, we may leave all things to take their course, and cleave to Him. The "poor in spirit" are those who humbly *receive* from day to day — what God sends them; who are *thankful* for what they have, and think it far more than they deserve!

Reader, endeavor then to be an example of patience and thankfulness. If a murmuring word, or repining thought, arises in your mind, look by faith upon your dying Savior, and ask your own heart, "Was not His suffering more painful than the bed on which I lie? and He endured it that the 'bitter things' recorded against me might be blotted out forever!" This, believe it, is the only true foundation of peace of soul and contentment of mind — that our peace is made with God by Jesus Christ His only Son, who has taken our sins upon Himself, and borne the punishment of them — and who in exchange has given us His righteousness, by which we are made righteous before God.

Oh, then, feel assured that *God loves you too dearly* to send anything that would really harm you! The Savior has pleaded for you — is now pleading for you; and what you will receive must be a "blessing." It may not *seem* so to you; it may appear a punishment, as if those "bitter things" had roused the anger of God against you; but it is not so. You are "chastened by the Lord — that you may not be condemned with the world." Trials are sent in tenderest love. Receive them, then, meekly from your Father's gracious hands. Pray that He would *hallow* them to you — that He would by them work out His own blessed purpose in you, and impress daily more and more — the likeness of the ever-blessed Savior! Banish the first risings of doubt, as if God were unkind or unmindful of you. He knows every throb of your brow, each deeply-drawn breath, each beating of the fevered pulse, each sinking of the aching head.

Heavenly Father, give me grace at all times to trust Your love, and to receive thankfully what You send. Lord, I am not worthy of the least of Your mercies. I have sinned, and done very wickedly. My transgressions are more than can be numbered, and the remembrance of them is very grievous to me. But You, O God, are rich in mercy. For the sake of Your dear Son, my Savior Jesus Christ — forgive my iniquities, and remember them no more against me forever. Oh, increase my love of holiness! Let

the mind that was in Christ — be also in me. Transform me by Your Holy Spirit into His blessed image, so that I may *love* what You love, and *choose* what You chose, and make it my food and drink to do Your holy will. Grant that I may ever bear with patience the discipline I am called to undergo, assured that You will never leave me nor forsake me, and that all things will be ordered for my happiness and well-being throughout eternity.

Give me grace, O God, to glorify You in time, that I may enjoy You for evermore. And all I ask is for the sake of Jesus Christ my Savior. Amen.

## NOT FORSAKEN

"After dismissing the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, battered by the waves — for the wind was contrary." — Matthew 14:23-24

The narrative of which these words form a part, has often been a source of great comfort to the tried and suffering believer. Every little incident is of priceless value, as it brings more and more fully home to the heart, the tender sympathy of Jesus — His sleepless care — His ready help — His almighty power. We are told that, at the close of a busy and anxious day, when our Lord had miraculously fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish — when the people, astonished at His power, had resolved to make Him their king — He "constrained His disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side" of the sea of Galilee, while He Himself retired to a mountain to pray. Suddenly a violent tempest arose. The terrified disciples plied their oars — but in vain. Their little bark was "in the midst of the sea, battered by the waves" — the plaything of the storm, "for the wind was contrary." Darkness gathered around them, and, worse than all, they were *alone*; for "Jesus had not come unto them."

Fit representation of the believer still! How often has he to encounter, and that, too, at his Master's bidding — the stormy gales of trouble? The

*ocean of life*, how suddenly is it lashed into fury, and, despite all our efforts — our feeble bark is driven to and fro! It has been thus with Christ's disciples in every age. He has promised to deliver them *out* of the storm — but not to secure them from encountering it. "The same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world" since time began. The saints in glory *all* toiled, amid similar billows, in *life's stormy sea*. Though never shipwrecked, they were *all* tempest-tossed. Think of their bitter *disappointments*, their grievous *losses*, their perplexing *cares*, their fearful *sufferings*, their painful *trials*, their cruel mockings and *scourgings*, their buffetings and imprisonments and deaths — as they are recorded for our instruction in the Book of God! The Elder Brother Himself did not escape. He was made like unto His brethren, in all points tempted like we are. What a dreadful night — what a fearful tempest was that in which He was constrained in the bitterness of His anguished soul to cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

While the trembling disciples were battling with the waves on the lonely sea — the Savior was alone with His Father, pleading for them on the mount. He had not forgotten them. His *all-seeing eye* followed them in the gloom of night, and amid the furious waves. And just so does He plead for you, tempest-tossed believer. Do not think that, because the storm continues boisterous, that He intercedes in vain. The Father hears Him always. Your not sinking proves that His advocacy prevails. He does not pray that your day may never be *stormy* — but, in answer to His intercession, you may be confident that "as your day — so shall your strength be." His eye of love rests upon you. There cannot be a night so dark — in which He cannot trace your course. As on that lonely mountain-height, He "saw the disciples straining at the oars," so in the heights of glory He sees *you* also, storm-driven Christian. Every secret anxiety, every heart-buried grief — is watched from His throne on high! He knows all your difficulties, sorrows, and temptations. You shall not perish by any oversight of His. When He sees that the fitting season has arrived, He will appear for your deliverance.

He *foresaw* the toil and danger of His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. He purposely sent them away that they might be tempest-tossed. He who

could have prevented their sufferings by His power — permitted them in His wisdom, that He might glorify His mercy in their deliverance, and confirm their faith by the outcome of their distresses. Even so, Christian, He *permits your sorrows*. Every night of *pain* and *sickness*, every wave of *trouble* that rolls over you — comes at His command! He knows that they are necessary, and He has told you to expect them. "In the world you shall have tribulation." The experience of believers of all ages testifies that,

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,

Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown!"

Your afflictions may continue long, and appear overwhelmingly great. How did all things seem to conspire against the fearful disciples! The night was sullen and dark — their Master was absent, the sea was boisterous — the winds were high and contrary. Had their Master been with them, however wildly the elements might rage — they would have felt secure. Had their Master been absent, still if the sea had been quiet or the wind favorable, the passage might have been endured. Now, both season, and sea, and wind, and their Master's absence combined to render them miserable. And thus sometimes, the providence of God appoints that no glimpse of comfort shall appear to gladden the trembling heart — troubles surround us on every side — we are beaten back by opposing doubts and fears; and eagerly as we look out through the dark gloom, no ray of comfort darts across it — all is thick, impenetrable darkness. Oh, how often do our hearts fail within us, and we begin to cry, "Lord, why have You forsaken me? Why do these storms beat upon me? Why do You not hearken to my cry — and come to my help?"

"Hearken to your cry," O child of God! He has heard it *already*. Yes, amid the songs of angels and the anthems of adoring multitudes, your feeble voice has reached the courts of heaven. He who loves you with more than a brother's love, is even now watching *you* — noting your sorrows, caring for your griefs, sympathizing in all your pains and sufferings.

He *will* assuredly "come to your help." He *delays* for the wisest and best reasons. His *present intercession* has gained much for you. It has enabled



you to struggle on *until now* — it has given you strength to resist despair — it has kept you praying, wrestling, entreating — and soon it will accomplish more, far more. Take it as the pledge that Jesus loves you, when, though the storm has continued to rage, and the calm has been delayed — the waves have not been allowed to overwhelm you. *His time* — is the *best time*. Yet a little while — and the hour of deliverance will arrive. Yet a little while — and you will have rest, and peace, and quiet. You will find that it was *good* for you to have been afflicted — that your faith was strengthened by trial; that your progress heavenward, instead of being retarded — was hastened by the storm; that the winds you dreaded — were wafting you onward in your voyage; and that the waves which seemed to threaten you with death — were bearing you to the haven of eternal calm!

Oh, then, whatever your present state is — whatever the cares, and troubles, and griefs which burden your spirit, whatever the darkness which has been permitted to enwrap you — strive ever to feel that He who has for a season seemed to leave you all alone on a stormy sea — He who has spoken to the tempest, and allowed the waves to rear their foaming crests — is even now pleading for you on the mount — even now watching you, until the hour arrive when He shall say, "Peace, be still;" and drawing near to you, shall whisper these consoling words, "*It is I — do not be afraid!*"

Heavenly Father, give me grace to trust in You at all times. You know what is best for Your sinful creatures, and Your wisdom designs good to them by affliction. Teach me to acknowledge the mercy of Your dispensations, and the advantages of a bed of sickness. Make me to rejoice in the means which You have employed for strengthening my faith, increasing my love of prayer, and bringing me to a sense of my own utter helplessness. Oh, grant that in the midst of my distress, I may be able to feel assured that my Savior is interceding for me, and that in His own good time He will appear for my help and deliverance. Allow me not to give way to fear and despondency, or to fall into despair. Give me patience under my sufferings, and a hearty resignation to Your will. Mercifully hear me, O my Father, and give me that peace which You have promised to those whose hearts are set on You; for the sake of our Lord

Jesus Christ, who was once a man of sorrows, and is still touched with a feeling of our infirmities; to whom, as our merciful High Priest, be glory forever. Amen.

## **Do Not Be Afraid**

"When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: Take courage! It is I — do not be afraid!" — Matthew 14:26, 27

During a long and tempestuous night, the disciples had to struggle against the stormy billows. Doubtless they felt weary, oppressed, well-near hopeless; but even then it was that deliverance was given. After having been driven all night long — not so much by storms and waves as by their own anxious, troubled thoughts — in the fourth watch (which was near to the morning) Jesus came to them; and so strange and unexpected was the sight, that, instead of joy, their first emotion was terror — "they cried out for fear," they did not recognize their Deliverer — but imagined that they saw a ghost. Yet He had purposely delayed His coming, that He might exercise their patience — that He might teach them to wait upon Divine Providence in cases of extremity — that their devotions might be more whetted by delay — and that they might more gladly welcome their deliverance.

For the selfsame purpose Jesus often delays His coming to His disciples still. He permits sorrow upon sorrow to come upon them. He leaves them in pain, and sickness, and anguish until they are, as it were — in the depth of extremity. It is the *fourth* watch with them; but the storm still rages, the darkness continues, and their Protector, their Friend, is not near! Oh, how often in such a dreary hour, has Jesus come to His disciples — come to them amid the gloom, walking in majesty upon the stormy wave — come to them that He might say as of old on the Sea of Galilee, "It is I — do not be afraid!"

Yes, Christian, could we ask those blessed ones who are now hymning His

praises above, "When was it that the Savior was felt most precious by you?" "Oh," they would answer, "It was in the dreary night of our suffering — when we lay helpless, hopeless; it was in the hour of extremity — when there seemed no prospect of deliverance; it was in the hour of sore distress — when our hearts were torn with anguish, and our prayers had become intensely urgent, and we felt that if He did not help us, 'vain was the help of man;' it was even then, that the blessed Jesus revealed Himself, calmed our fears, and bade us to take courage!"

Or ask, if you will, that patient sufferer, at whose calmness you have often wondered, and whose language is ever that of child-like submission and acquiescence to the will of God — ask the same question, and you will be told, "Never did I feel my Lord so dear, never did I realize His love, His power, His grace, so fully — as on my bed of languishing, when He came to me in the night-watches, and permitted me to unbosom myself to Him, and rest my weary head upon His breast! Oh, it was then that He promised to be ever near me, to strengthen me under suffering, to give me patience to endure my Father's will, and to make His 'grace sufficient' for me. I know that He sends me trial — that He has commissioned this sickness — that He mingles the *bitter cup* which I have to drink — and I know also that these things are *needed* for my soul's welfare. Shall I not then welcome what is sent me in love — when I know and have the assurance that in every hour when my suffering is greatest, my pain most agonizing, my trouble most grievous and burdensome — that Jesus will come to my help — come to encourage and strengthen me — come to show me what He has suffered for my sake — to tell me that the *sorrows* which oppress my soul weighed more heavily on His — that the *foes* I have to battle with more fiercely assailed Him — that I but *taste the bitter cup*, while He had to drain it — that there fall on me only a *few drops* of the mighty tempest which spent its rage on Him — and that as He 'learned obedience by the things He suffered,' so His grace will enable me to do it also."

Thus have God's children found that *suffering* times were *blessed* times — that they never had such nearness to their Father, such holy freedom with Him, and such heavenly comforts from Him — as under affliction; it only took away what checked the current of His love, His peace, His joy in

their hearts. The afflictive cross, be it what it may — pain, sickness, calamity, loss of friends, fortune, fame — is the greatest blessing on this side heaven — because by it the Father keeps the children in the closest communion that they have with Him on earth; by it He purges them, makes them fruitful, and partakers of His holiness; by it He crucifies the life of sense, deadens them to the world, and mortifies their lusts and passions; and by it, as the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. They receive new life, new strength, new comfort, new peace — they become more and more conformed to Jesus, both *in* suffering and *by* suffering; they tread the steps of those who have "entered into rest," and come up "from the wilderness leaning on the arm of the Beloved." Christian, take comfort when you think of the mighty cloud of witnesses who would thus testify to your Savior's constant care and unchanging love.

Think on what He has *already done* for you. He groaned, bled, and died for you! You were *lost* and on your way to Hell — but He found you! You were His *enemy* — but He reconciled you! You were a *captive* of the devil — but He freed you! You were *blind* to your desperate condition — but He cured you! You were *dead* in sin — but He quickened you!

Oh! when you reflect how He has watched over you, *since* you have received the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus — how He has preserved you from dangers, supported you in seasons of temptation, sustained you in times of trial, nourished you in days of sickness, comforted you in the hours of despondency — you cannot surely imagine that He will now desert you — you cannot believe that He will so mar the work of His own hands — the labor of His own love — as to cast you off, and leave you to perish! If He sought you when His enemy — will He not take care of you when His child? If the enemy was loved — how much more the friend?

Will He refuse to *answer* the prayers He himself has prompted — to fulfill the *hopes* He himself has inspired — to honor the *confidence* He himself has encouraged — and to complete the work He himself has begun? Oh no! Learn to have more confidence in your Savior; more reliance upon Him who has said, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you!" more dependence upon

Him who poured out His precious blood to reconcile you to God.

Your suffering may now be great, your days and nights may be full of anxiety and restlessness — the *star of hope* may even be obscured by the mists of darkness which surround you; yet, take courage! You are meeting the *storm* which the Savior Himself has permitted to rage — you are battling with *elements* which He can in a moment control — you are passing through a *night* through which has already passed the Man of Sorrows — and soon He will come to you!

That voice which never speaks in vain, will command the storm to cease. Your best, your dearest Friend — the "Consolation of Israel" — will say to you, "Take courage! I know how you have borne and *suffered* during these weary hours. I know every trial through which you have passed, and which the world has never known — sorrows which could not, and ought not, to be communicated, but to Me alone. I know your every prayer for guidance — your every effort to bear well and patiently what I have laid upon you, and to profit by the visitation. From the calm shores of the land of everlasting life — I have watched you, my trembling disciple, *toiling through the waves of this troublesome world* — and now I have come to you upon the billows, that I may be near you in the time of extremest peril! Behold, I am with you in the ship! Fear not! Those who follow me shall never walk in darkness — your footsteps shall not slip! My mercy shall hold you up — when dangers encompass you — and though the sunshine of this world's joys is dim for you, in My light shall you see light."

Oh, then, afflicted one, be not cast down, neither be dismayed. Do not faint under your sorrows — but strive to wear out your *three watches* of tribulation with undaunted patience and holy resolution. Let songs of praise arise from the ark in which you are securely borne along amid the raging storm, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging! Though all your waves and your billows are gone over me — yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. O Lord God Almighty, who is a strong

Lord like unto you? You rule the raging of the sea — when the waves arise, you still them. Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Let these strains mingle with the roaring of the storm, and the dashing of the angry billows — and soon the *ear of faith* will hear, louder than the loud wind, those accents which have so often calmed the fears, and stilled the apprehensions of Christ's trembling disciples — "O afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed — but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord who has mercy on you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name — you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!"

Be not far from me, O Lord — for trouble is near. Fearfulness and trembling have taken hold upon me; let Your strength come in to support me. The sorrows of death compass me. Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. Help me, O Lord, for You are my hope. Appear for me when all human help fails. Make haste to help me. Give me patience to bear all my sufferings, and quietly to wait Your time for relief. You take pleasure in those who hope in Your mercy. Oh, increase my faith; sustain my hope in You. Forsake me not when my strength fails. If You, Lord, will be pleased to support me — then nothing will be too heavy for me. Oh, make Your strength perfect in my weakness. You who delight in mercy — save me for Your mercy's sake. Oh, turn unto me and have mercy upon me, for the sake of Your well-beloved Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

**IF NEED BE**

"Though now for a season, **if need be**, you are in heaviness." — 1 Peter 1:6

Of all things, the most difficult is to realize truly "*the need be*" for our own personal trials. We see it readily in the case of *another* — although our judgment is often very erroneous. We will quickly discover how cold and indifferent he had become — how the world had been gaining the mastery over him — how his time and talents were being spent far too much in caring for seen and temporal things.

But when it comes to our *own* turn — when we are compelled, as it were, to open up some pages in the "book of the heart," and find there many charges against us — we are seldom at a loss to find excuses. "True, we have not been as *diligent* as we used to be — but then, how many *necessary cares* have taken hold upon us. True, we have been less fervent in prayer, less frequently in our closet — but we have been regular in attending the house of God, we have not failed in the external duties of religion. And then, our trials are so much heavier than those of others, who are careless, indifferent, avowed worldlings."

In short, we inwardly think that *our lot* is a very hard one — that *our cross* is the most painful — *our suffering* the most agonizing — *our path* the most thorny. And all this arises from the fact that we have not discovered the "*need be*."

How could we? At the best, our spiritual eyesight is weak and dim. We cannot know the real state of our souls — or see them as He does, whose searching scrutiny detects the slightest symptom of disease. We fancy all is well — when we are sick, wounded, ready to die. We imagine that all is right with our heart — when faith is weak, love is cold, hope is almost obscured. Only gradually, after having been *long* in the school of trial — do we *begin* to realize that the Physician must probe the wound within us, and apply *severe remedies*, and cause pain and anguish — in order to cure the malady which is preying upon us! Only *after* we have passed through the trying ordeal, and feel that the pulse is beating more regularly, and the blood is coursing through the system with a healthier flow — only *then* can we rightly comprehend our former weakness, and thank God that in tender love He cared for us — not hesitating to inflict

pain, not withdrawing His hand, not sparing the rod — that He might do us good in the end.

Christian, just reflect for a little on some of the "needs be" for affliction and trial. Only a few can we here discover — in eternity we may hope they will all be revealed to us; but now "we see through a glass darkly."

"If need be," affliction will be sent for the purpose of bringing us to *realize* whether our religion is genuine or not. We perhaps thought ourselves Christians, and that we were founded on the Rock; and now an affliction comes, and we shake like aspen leaves! Could this be — if we were really standing on the Rock? We thought fondly that God was the chosen portion of our souls, and that though all earthly joys were taken from us, we had enough when we had Him; and yet, when He crosses some desire of our hearts, or removes some of His own gifts — we seem as if we had lost our all, and speedily grow sad and disconsolate! And thus we learn the fact, that our comfort did not before, as we supposed, flow from the Eternal Fountain — but had been drawn from *perishing cisterns*; and therefore, now that they are broken, we die of thirst. This is an important discovery to us, and it was to make this discovery to us, that God sent the affliction.

"If need be," pain and suffering will be our lot until we both discern and acknowledge *God's hand* in the painful visitation. We are very backward to do this. We say, indeed, when it comes, "It is the work of God;" but we do not half believe what we say — we have no deep or lively impression of its truth. We hear, also, people perpetually lamenting, uttering passionate expressions of grief, at visitations which, they say, have come upon them unlooked-for, and stunned them by their suddenness. *Friends* are removed, *riches* pass away, *health* rapidly declines, and they say, "Had we taken this step or that, had we adopted this precaution or that — it would not have been so with us." They "labor to push God out of their concerns," and they must be brought to feel that "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground," but that *God is the Author* of it, that He owns Himself as such, and would have His children *feel* that He is chastising them, and that He means to do them good thereby.



And, reader, it is when we come to know and realize this — that we begin to reap the benefit of affliction. So long as we attribute it only to *second causes*, there will be no submission, no gratitude, no praise. It is when the discovery has been made, that *God is at the root of our sufferings* — that He is desolating our comforts, robbing us of our joys with His own hand — when every grief and pang, every sorrow and anxiety, are felt to be His work — when we cannot banish Him from our thoughts, nor disconnect Him with one of our troubles, nor even wish to do either — it is *then* that the soul begins to bethink itself, and the heart to soften, and our proud, rebellious, stubborn spirit to give way. Then the knee bends — and the heartfelt prayer goes up — and the blessing comes down.

Then for the first time, we are quieted and subdued. "I was silent," said David; "I opened not my mouth, because *You* are the one who has done this!" "*It is the Lord*," said Eli; and then that tried, afflicted parent could add, "*let Him do what seems good to Him!*" And this conviction will carry us yet further. Only let us see that a *Father's hand* has mingled our cup of bitterness — and we will soon do more than say, "Shall I not drink it?" The Comforter will come, even when our heart is almost broken, and inspire the trembling utterance — "I came naked from my mother's womb — and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had — and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!"

"If need be," sickness and trial will be sent again and again — until we learn to sit loose to the world, and have our chief joy in God. How often have we risen from a sick bed — and returned to our folly! how often have we had trial — and very soon become as giddy and thoughtless as ever! But if we are God's children, He will not allow it so to be. He will again mingle the bitter cup for us to drink, again withdraw some blessing, and lead our thoughts heavenward, deepen our repentance, bring us to humility at His footstool. Oh, how thankful should we be that God will not allow us to injure ourselves! — that He will send pain, sickness, weariness, distress, languor, agony of mind and body, to rouse us from our lethargy and carelessness — to show us that the life we have been wasting is an priceless thing — that our souls are precious in His sight — and that He desires our eternal well-being and salvation!

There are few to whom God has not spoken by sickness, trial, and

affliction; but there are myriads who, when His hand has been lifted off of them — have rushed madly back to the world and the world's fleeting pleasures! And oh, surely, sadder far than the sight of any sorrow is it to see people so infatuated, becoming, after sorrow — more heedless than before! Oh, let it be our prayer that, when God has laid us low — there we may have grace to lie, humble, according as God has humbled us — to lie low at the foot of His cross, trusting that, by the virtue of that cross, He will raise us up again, and cause us to rejoice in Him.

It is well to be where God wills; and so, whatever it is — sorrow bringing sin to remembrance, or agony for past sin, or dread of judgment — let us not disregard it or drive it away from us — but to take it calmly home to our bosoms, and treasure it there, jealously watching lest we lose one drop of its *wholesome bitterness*; not anxious to *escape* sorrow — but anxious only not to lose its *fruits* — anxious to have it so impressed on our hearts, that, when God raises us up, we may walk softly before Him all our days, and turn our backs forever on those pleasures which would lead us to forget that we are "strangers and pilgrims" here on earth.

And, finally, (as including many other gracious designs,) "if need be," affliction and trial will be sent — to increase our longings after an absent Savior — to intensify our desires for heavenly bliss — and to bring us to nourish the feeling of the apostle, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

Willing to remain as long as God needs our service here — we should yet long to join the "general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven." Patient and submissive under the hand of God, we may, nevertheless, ardently long for the hour when we shall be freed from the body of sin and death!

*Affliction is a school*, under the blessing of God, to *ripen* us for an exceeding and eternal weight of glory! And vain as is the common imagination that those who are tried here — are saved from all sorrow hereafter, be they united to Christ or not — it is yet a true doctrine, that, as there are degrees of glory, so the most severely-afflicted ones, who are also believers in Jesus, will shine the brightest in that glory — not so much because of their suffering, as of the grace wrought to purification in

their souls, by the Spirit of God, through the *agency of suffering*.

Take courage, then, child of tribulation; if united to Jesus by a living faith — you are *training*, through your very afflictions, for superior glory! The *clouds* that now darken your horizon — will soon disappear before the brightness of the sun; and your spirit of heaviness — shall be exchanged for the garments of joy! Be resting on Jesus for all your strength, hope, and deliverance. Ask of Him in every fresh trial, and under every circumstance of the trial, "*Lord, what would You have me to do?*" Beg of Him increasing *submission* and *thankfulness* of spirit. Pray that He may be pleased to lighten your affliction; but beg Him not to withhold chastisement — "if need be."

Be assured, if you are of Christ's flock — that all shall be well with you. You will enter a land where there is no pain, no suffering; sorrow and sighing shall cease, and God shall wipe away all tears from all eyes. Yet a little more toil, a little more labor, a little more endurance — and your probationary state will finish, and that Savior, whom you are now delighting to serve, "will come again, and receive you unto Himself, that where He is, there you may be also."

Almighty and most merciful Father, our only refuge and strength, who, though unseen by our bodily eyes — is continually about our bed and about our path, and sees all our ways — who is the Author of all the various comforts which we here enjoy, and to whom we look for all future blessing — I desire humbly to bow down before You.

Oh, give me to feel the *necessity* for trial, distress, and suffering! Let me not repine under them. Help me to realize Your mercy in thus caring for me — in not allowing me to perish utterly — in not casting me off forever from Your fatherly care, as You might justly have done. Oh, fill me with a lively sense of Your goodness, loving-kindness, and long-suffering!

Pardon, O God, my sinfulness, my hardness of heart, my coldness, my waywardness. Oh, apply by Your Spirit, the blood of sprinkling. Unite me more closely to my dear Savior. Be pleased, O Lord, to guide, help, and deliver me. I am very weak, and unable to keep myself. I am prone to murmur, repine, and forget my high calling; but I implore the aid of Your

Holy Spirit to uphold, strengthen, and sanctify me. And, O Lord God, if at any time sin prevails against me — bring me back to Jesus, my Advocate with You, that through repentance and faith in Him, I may be forgiven and restored. Keep me, O God, by Your mighty power, through faith, unto salvation — for the sake of Him who has loved me, and who knows all my infirmities, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## HEAVIER SORROWS

"I am afraid of all my sorrows." — Job 9:28

When trial after trial comes upon us, or when our prayers seem unanswered, and our days and nights of sickness are multiplied — then we are prone, not merely to get discouraged — but to be ever conjuring up *phantoms of coming evil*. We do not *look* for a bright light. We sit down gloomily amid the darkness, terrified to move — expecting some fresh sorrow — dwelling only on some new *imaginary grief*, which we fancy is impending over us. We will not even admit the entrance of *hope* — our hearts are shut against it; and instead of drawing nearer and nearer to God, the longer He chastens us — we give ourselves up to sinful despondency, and stand at a distance from Him. We will not perhaps acknowledge to our own hearts, far less to any earthly friend — but our feelings are somewhat of this nature — "Why should I *hope*? I have met with nothing but disappointment! Why should I expect *relief*? My burden continues to press upon me with increasing weight! Why should I still entreat an answer to my *prayers*? They have all been rejected, and remain unheard."

Ah, if we have *ever* cherished such sentiments as these, if they are even now taking possession of us — let us beware! This may be the very reason why God does not withdraw His chastening hand — the very reason why His comforts have not delighted our souls — the very reason why we are left to suffer, to agonize, to fear, to despair. Let us reflect what God's purpose is: it is to *draw us to Him* — and not to *drive us away from Him*. He would have us *come* to Him in sorrow — and not *leave* Him until we

have won our suit. He would have us *cling* to the assurance of His love — even though it bears the semblance of the 'flame-breath of the furnace'. He would have us *believe* that He hears us — even though He delays long to answer, and seems to disregard our petitions.

This is *His* design; but if we balk at it, if we refuse to learn the lesson He desires to teach us — then He will send 'heavier sorrows' to effect His purpose! Nothing but our *whole hearts*, our *entire confidence*, our *complete submission*, our *willing acquiescence* in *all* that He appoints — will satisfy Him. He will not accept half-confidence, half-reliance, half-desires — but He will continue to *deal* with us. He will send messenger after messenger, trial upon trial, and sorrow upon sorrow — until we have been brought low, brought in penitence to His footstool — brought, it may be, *faint, bleeding, wounded* — to say, in the language of heartfelt submission, "Lord, I am Yours, do with me as You please! I desire to yield myself entirely to You — to do or suffer, according to Your pleasure." O blessed result of continued trial — when thus the believer comes to *will* what God wills, to *choose* what God chooses — to have this much of the mind that was in Christ!

But the ordeal which is passed through *before* all this is accomplished is painful and trying. We are sure, from the declaration of Holy Scripture, that "whom the Lord loves — He chastens," and that in some way or other, every one who believes in Christ Jesus, will be brought to submission, trust, and acquiescence in the will of God. But we do not know the *various steps* in this process; we do not know the path of "tribulation" through which multitudes have gone to glory, the months and years they *first* spent in sadness, pain, and suffering — before they could say, "May Your will be done!" We do not know the hard, stern, and inflexible discipline they had to undergo, *before* they realized true, hearty submission. We do not know the pangs and sorrows they brought upon themselves, before they were permitted to taste the "joys of His salvation."

But *knowing* that trial is meant to *draw* us to God — that fretfulness and murmuring, or a gloomy foreboding of coming ills — tends to frustrate His gracious purpose; and that the sooner we yield ourselves up to Him, in heart and soul, in will, affection, and desire — the sooner will we be

able to "rejoice in Him;" — knowing this, oh, let it be our earnest prayer that *now*, even *now*, we may receive grace to say, "Not as I will — but as You will," and yield ourselves meekly — as the redeemed of Christ, to the hand of God, as of a loving Father.

It may be that He will accept our *submission* and *quiet waiting* upon Him — and release us from the rough discipline of still sharper affliction. Not that we should desire to be freed from it, merely because it is painful — but because we have *learned God's lesson*, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, been enabled to enter a path in which these "heavier sorrows" are no longer necessary.

Christian, what is your present frame of mind? Have you been brought to submission — or are you sitting sad and disconsolate, brooding over your troubles, vexed with dark forebodings, and refusing to be comforted? Oh, it is not wise to act thus! You are displeasing your Father — you are wounding your Savior — you are grieving the Holy Spirit! I know you will not be utterly forsaken. I know that, although your murmurings and despondency might well provoke God to cast you off forever — He will still have mercy upon you. He will *follow* you in your *wanderings* away from Him. He will call upon you to return.

But, ah! think what you are bringing upon yourself by indulging in a fretful, morose, and gloomy temper! You are rendering *necessary*, another and another stroke of affliction — bringing on yourself more bitter griefs and "heavier sorrows." You are provoking your Father to hide His face still from you, and withhold His comforts, and *keep you in the furnace!* You think that your present sorrow is as heavy as it can be — that the darkness could not be more appalling and dreadful than it is. Ah, foolish one! what is your sorrow? Perhaps you are the victim of disease — your body is often racked with pain — your nights are spent in wakefulness, and your days in sadness.

But, has God *no "heavier sorrow?"* Look at your **comforts!** Kind friends to sympathize with you, and to relieve your needs — the prayers of the faithful, which are continually rising up in behalf of "all who are in affliction or trouble of any kind" — the promises of God, which are "yes and amen in Christ Jesus."

Think, too, of your **past blessings** — days, months, and years of health — prosperity and peace attending your steps — the sunshine gladdening you — no storm threatening you. And will you now give way to murmuring and despondency, because your God has seen proper and necessary to send trial? He might strip you of *every* blessing — even as He has removed *one*! He might give you *no* rest from pain. He might visit you with *pinching* poverty — as well as painful sickness. He might with His arrow strike down every loved one whose affection is now so precious to you! And, worse than all — He might "leave you alone!"

Believe it, nothing is gained by struggling, by gloomy forebodings of evil, or by impatience under the trial sent by God. Do you wish God to care for you? Do you desire to be His child, to place your soul in His keeping? Then leave *everything* to Him — to send joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure, prosperity or adversity, health or sickness! Do not disturb yourself about *coming evils*. The *future*, if you are only willing to submit to God — can but bring you only good; it may *appear* evil — but "He brings good *out of* evil."

Instead of indulging in gloomy forebodings — instead of thus tempting God to inflict "heavier sorrows" — instead of barring with your own hand — the entrance of peace, comfort, submission, hope — by imagining that now there is no joy for you, no happiness in life, no blessing in the future, no termination to pain — nothing but sorrow and grief and trouble — turn away from all these things, bid them farewell forever, and *take a pilgrimage in thought to Gethsemane and Calvary!* Gaze upon Him "who left us an example, that we should follow His steps." He knew all the sorrows that awaited Him — the shame, the suffering, the anguish — but He takes the bitter cup, and, with His heart set on the salvation of His people — His heart set on *you* — the blessed Savior drains it to the very dregs! See Him on Calvary — unpitied by the crowd — deserted by His disciples — forsaken by His Father — the Lamb led to the slaughter — and *all for you!*

Oh, surely such a contemplation should lead you to cry, "My Savior-God, let me be silent like You — let me never open my mouth in complaining — let me entrust my future to You, and You alone — let me enter into fellowship with You in suffering, and count it all joy that I am permitted

to follow You in the path of tribulation, in the humble, obedient, cheerful endurance of trial, and the giving up of my will to my Father's."

Oh, if thus you bow your soul before the cross, comfort will flow in upon you, tranquility will take the place of fear, and forebodings of evil will be exchanged for childish submission. A hand will sustain you under every burden, so that, smiling at yesterday's fears, you shall say, "This is easy, this is light!" Every "lion in the way," as you come upon it — shall be seen to be chained. And whether your trial is removed or not — it will be sanctified: in your growing conformity to the image and mind of Christ, in your progressive advancement in holiness, in your fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Hear the language of one who underwent a painful discipline for many years, and who had learned to take everything cheerfully from her Father's hand — "I want," she says, "to have no will of my own; I want to have all my wishes and inclinations lost in the will of God, so that, if I see His will apparent in anything, I may with pleasure, do or suffer that thing — yes, do or suffer it — as if it were the very thing I liked best, because it is the will of God."

And again it is recorded of another afflicted believer: For thirty-six years the victim of incurable maladies, often undergoing excruciating agony, sometimes blind for a long period, few have experienced the excruciating scourges of which her shattered body was the habitual abode. As she said to a friend, "My nights are very pleasant in general. I feel like David, when he said, I wait for the Lord; my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. And while I am enabled to contemplate the wonders of redeeming grace and love — the hours pass swiftly on, and the morn appears even before I am aware. I experience so much of the Savior's love in supporting me under pain — that I cannot fear its increase. I think that one end to be answered in my long affliction is, encouragement for others to trust in Him."

Reader, pray that such a spirit may be imparted to you — that ever as you move onward in life's journey, you "may cast all your care on Him, who cares for you," assured that He will bring you safely home. Strive to follow the example of one who thus writes of himself — "For a long time I felt



myself to be a lost sheep, not knowing on whom to rely; and now, with the deepest consciousness that I have at last attained rest, I exclaim — the Lord is my shepherd! What is there that can harm me? I have reached the harbor, and storms can no more drive my little vessel afloat upon the wide sea. And as I look forward into the future, I can exclaim with David — the Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!"

O Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, who does not willingly afflict, but rebukes and chastens those whom You love — look down upon me Your unworthy servant, and have mercy upon me, for Christ's sake. Oh, grant me grace to bear with patience — whatever You are pleased to send! Preserve me from all murmuring, fretfulness, and impatience — and enable me without doubting, to accept all things as coming from You. Let my soul be supported by faith, hope, and love, under all the sufferings I may yet endure. Teach me to remember that all sickness, pain, and grief — are the *fruit of sin*. Whatever offences I have committed against You — oh, mercifully forgive me, and make me heartily sorry for them!

Lord, grant that this affliction may be *sanctified* to my spiritual and eternal good. Bless the *means* that are used, and make them effectual — if it is Your good pleasure — for restoring me to health, that I may again praise You in the assembly of Your people.

I acknowledge it to be of Your bounty alone, that I have my being; and I adore Your mercy and patience for preserving me thus long in the land of the living. My many days and years of health and comfort have been Your gift — and my deliverance out of the troubles and dangers with which I have at any time been visited — are owing to You alone. Grant me, O Lord, I beseech You — a due sense of my entire dependence upon You. Inspire me with that true and heavenly wisdom which may help me to discern aright the *reasons*, and enable me to answer the *ends* — of all Your dealings with me — that in the dispensation of Your providence I may submit myself entirely to Your good pleasure, and glorify You in the day of visitation.

Do with me what is good in Your sight. Let patience have her perfect

work. If this sickness is unto death — oh, prepare me for it, that I may depart, only to be with You! If it is Your will that I recover, may I rise from a sick-bed strong through Your grace — to walk far more closely with You than ever I have yet done, to the end of my life. I offer up every prayer through the merits and intercession of my gracious Redeemer. Amen.

"I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew tired of looking to heaven for help. *I am in trouble, Lord. Help me!*" Isaiah 38:14

## SUNSHINE

"Lord, lift up the *light* of your countenance upon us!" — Psalm 4:6

A time of *sickness* is not infrequently a time of *gloom*. We seem to be surrounded with thick darkness. As in the natural world, when dense clouds come between us and the light of the sun, we are more timid and fearful — as in threading our way amid precipices and pitfalls we tremble to find the shadows of evening gathering around us. Just so, when in the *dangerous pilgrimage of life* — we find ourselves suddenly enwrapped in mist and gloom — our hearts begin to fail, and our fears are awakened at every onward step. We lose for a while the comforting sense of the Divine favor and presence; we are cast down by the pressure of painful doubts and apprehensions; we know not which way to turn for light, and the language of our troubled souls often is, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" Why has this *darkness* come upon me? Why am I left so *comfortless*? Why is that hand withdrawn — which used to guide me? Why that comfort withheld — which used to gladden me? Why that peace destroyed — which used to quiet me? Why do these fears, and doubts, and apprehensions so gather round and beset my soul?

Suffering one, have *you* not experienced this sadness? Have you not agonized under the appalling thought that your God and Father had forsaken you — that the light was forever withdrawn which was the very joy of your heart? Lying on your sick-bed, have you not passed many a

weary, anxious hour trying to discover, "Why are things so bad with me? Why has my *health* been taken away? Why has *trouble* been sent upon me? Why, O my God, are You angry with Your child? Why do You leave me to grope my way through such impenetrable darkness?"

Oh! this is the ordeal of sickness, this is part of the "much tribulation." No "strange" thing has happened unto you. Your Father has not left you — neither has He withdrawn the sunshine of His favor. He has only permitted *clouds* to intervene, dark and mysterious providences to come across the sky, and dangers to threaten you for a season. And He has had the wisest reasons for so doing. He knew how prone His children ever are to forget or undervalue their most precious blessings. He knew how the world, and our daily interaction with it, tend to weaken and destroy our longings for heavenly communion and fellowship. He knew how the uninterrupted continuance of blessing and comfort and peace — is not conducive to the growth and development of the Christian character — but oftentimes leads to listlessness, inactivity, and spiritual pride!

Therefore does He send trial, distress, suffering! Therefore does He remove some valued blessing or comfort! Therefore does He command the *clouds* to gather and to cast their deepening shadows round His loved one. It is not that He delights in giving pain — or in lessening the peace and comfort of His children. Oh, no! It is that they may long more ardently, for that of which they have been for a season deprived! It is that the darkness may make the sunshine more precious! It is that the fears and doubts may intensify the desire for peace and security! It is that the absence of spiritual joy may reawaken the longing for its return! It is that the dangers and perils which ever and always are exciting the cry for help, may lead the trembling one to distrust self, to feel no security in mere human help — but to look upwards to Him "whose *arm* is not shortened that it cannot save, whose ear is not heavy that it cannot hear."

"It is in this way that a *forgotten* God recalls our wandering affections to Himself. He lays waste the 'enthroned creature' — that He may once again enthrone Himself! He breaks the cistern, not that we may be left parched and fainting in the wilderness of life — but go and satisfy our thirsting souls once again from the everlasting spring. He crushes the bruised reed — but He substitutes for it a rock. He puts far away from us

'lover and friend,' with all the unutterable sweetness of their affection and the tenderness of their love; but what does He substitute? Himself, the intense, unfathomable love of His own infinite mind, the presence of Christ, and communion with heaven!"

Precious surely is the time of sickness — if it accomplishes this gracious design — if it brings the soul to a nearer, closer, more intimate and endearing fellowship with its God and Father. *Painful* it doubtless is to undergo this discipline — yet is it *needful*. And shall we for a moment compare the brief interval of suffering — with the season of restored joy and peace and gladness? What though *health* may have declined? What though we may have been withdrawn from the *world*, and have been robbed of some of its enjoyments? To have again the assurance of the *Father's* love, of the *Savior's* intercession, of the *Spirit's* help and guidance — oh, is not this infinitely more precious? To feel that our spiritual energies have been quickened and renewed — that our faith, and love, and hope, have been strengthened and increased — that our thoughts and feelings, our desires and aspirations, have all become more heavenly and pure — oh, surely it was well for us that we were left for a season amid the darkness — until our cry of distress was heard and answered, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us."

Yes, Christian, these seasons of *darkness* and *trembling* are all needed, and it is only when we come to realize how much we have *gained* by them — that we see how gracious, kind, and good our heavenly Father has been in permitting them; and that we feel assured that they are as much the fruit of His tender love — as His more obvious blessings. Faint not then, suffering one, if even yet you have not realized the full measure of God's love in your trial. Be sure that you are precious in His sight; and although He allows you for a while to tread a dark and dangerous path — yet He is near at hand. Still *grope* on — albeit with a trembling heart; *pray* on — albeit with faltering tongue. The darkness will yet be dispersed; the gloom will pass away; your trial hour will come to an end, and you will again rejoice in "the light of your Father's countenance."

Not forever has the *hand of love* been withdrawn — not forever has the *voice of mercy* been hushed to silence — not forever has the *fountain of heavenly blessing and joy* been sealed up — not forever has the *sunshine*

departed, and the misty shadows gathered round you. "Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage." He will strengthen your heart. Yes, He will "lift upon you the light of His countenance," and whisper words of consolation and endearment. He will take you by the hand, and guide you over the slippery places. He will refresh your soul with heavenly manna and living water. He will reveal to you more than you have ever yet known of the beauties of holiness — the attractiveness of spiritual intimacy and communion — the joy of living in sensible fellowship, and in childlike simplicity and trustfulness, with your God and Redeemer.

And at length, when the end of the journey has been reached, when your soul is *fitted* for a more glorious land — He will send His *messenger of love*. "Rise up, my child, my faithful one, and come away for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone" — the clouds are fast receding from the sky, the shadows depart of your mortal life, and the bright effulgent day is dawning, which shall never fade. It is past, it is gone — the dark time of your conflict and trial — the dreary season of sickness, and trouble, and disquietude — the time of the singing of angels is come for you, and the voice of the seraphim is heard in that land. You have wrestled with sin until the breaking of the day; you have toiled all night — but the morning is near. "Arise up then, my child, my faithful one — and come away, let us hasten and be gone; for the dawn is bright on the everlasting hills!"

Oh, sweet and blessed hour for the weary and toil-worn! Who shall describe the happiness awaiting the believer in that world where the "sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself, and where the days of mourning shall be ended?" True, the 'valley' must be passed through, and it is dark; but there is a song of triumph prepared for that hour. We must bid farewell to time and time's possessions — farewell to the loved ones who have been our companions in life's journey — farewell to home, and friends, and earthly blessings. And such an hour is full of deep solemnity; but, blessed be God, there is a *light* which can penetrate even the darkness of death's valley — there is a *voice* whose whispered accents will then fall sweetly on the listening ear, and calm every rising apprehension. "I am with you still!" Your Savior is near; therefore do not dread the darkness and gloom which are gathering around you.

My child, the day breaks, and we must depart; the shadow of death is deepening on your eyelids, and the radiance of earthly suns has passed away from them forever. But fear not, a better light will cheer you, even the light of your Father's countenance — that sun, whose effulgence eternity itself will never diminish or cloud, is about to rise upon you. And though your soul, already trembling on the threshold of a new existence — the glorious splendor of heaven is dawning, before yet the silver cord that binds your mortal life is altogether loosed. Soon shall you bask in the unclouded radiance of your Father's countenance, you shall see the King in His beauty, and have no more need to offer the prayer, "Lord, lift on me the light of Your countenance" — for never again shall a passing cloud fling its dark shadow between you and your God — never again shall you know doubt, or fear, or peril — no evening shadow will ever come — no gloomy night enwrap your spirit; but you shall "have fullness of joy, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore."

O Lord, heavenly Father, I beseech You look down in pity and compassion upon me, Your afflicted servant! I humbly desire to acknowledge my sins, negligences, and errors — and to plead the all-sufficient merits and the precious blood-shedding of Christ my Savior. Blessed Jesus! Your followers and people have the assurance of Your own gracious declaration, that if they come to You weary and heavy laden — they shall find rest unto their souls. O Savior of the world! I come to You weary and heavy laden with the burden of sin; may I find deliverance in You! May I find access to Your favor by that living way which You have appointed. May my faith fail not in the day of trial! and when clouds and darkness are around my steps, oh, may You be near to help me, and to lift upon me the light of Your countenance!

Grant, O Lord, that I may be kept from all distrust or murmuring, and may I have grace to resign myself into Your hands, with entire submission to Your wise appointments. You, Lord, know the *discipline* I need — the *furnace of trial* through which I must pass — until the love of sin is wholly removed, and my heart purified from all iniquity. Help me by Your Holy Spirit to surrender my will to Yours, and to feel assured that Your *eye of love* is ever watching me. Oh, calm my spirit, and speak peace to me in my anxieties, and enable me to say under every trying

dispensation, however grievous, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Give me patience to bear all my sufferings, and quietly to wait Your time for relief. You take pleasure in those who hope in Your mercy; oh, increase my faith, sustain my hope in You! Forsake me not when my strength fails. If You, Lord, will be pleased to *support* me — then nothing will be *too heavy* for me. Oh, make Your strength perfect in my weakness! You who delight in mercy — save me for Your mercy's sake. You know my exceeding weakness. Oh, hold me up, that my footsteps slip not! Strengthen me with all Your might, according to Your glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness. Gracious God, restore me to health — if it seems good unto You, in order to Your great ends, and my own interest.

And however You shall determine concerning me in this — yet make my *repentance* perfect, my *passage* safe, and my *faith* strong; that when You shall call my soul from the *prison of the body* — it may enter into the rest of the sons of God, through Jesus Christ. And to Your name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be ascribed all glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## GRACE SUFFICIENT

"And He said unto me, *My grace is sufficient for you — for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Nothing affords such sweet comfort in a time of sickness and trial as the thought of the "all-sufficiency" of Christ our Redeemer. Be our *case* ever so trying, our *needs* ever so numerous, our *enemies* ever so strong, our *fears* ever so appalling, our *danger* ever so imminent — Jesus is "all-sufficient." It is only our *weak faith* which makes us to become downcast and sad at heart. What is the assurance of Scripture? "He is able to make *all grace* abound toward you, that you always, having *all sufficiency* in *all things*, may *abound* to every good word and work." "*All grace!*" — "all sufficiency!" — in "all things" — and these to "abound." "Like as a father

pities his children — so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Here there is enough surely to afford comfort — "*grace,*" "*sufficiency,*" "*pity.*"

Christian, what is your *sorrow* — your *trial* — your *temptation*? Is it, "I have had a lengthened time of sickness and pain — my strength has failed, and the skill of man has been unavailing. Around me I can see no ray of hope; no symptom of returning health — no indication of the removal of my disease — and my prayers have returned to me unanswered."

Ah, Christian, it is to be feared there is within you a 'spirit of murmuring'. Whose hand is laid upon you? Your Father's! Why has He chastened you? To bring *your* will fully into conformity with *His* will. Does not He, "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hidden," know best *when* His gracious purpose has been accomplished in you, His child? Is it not a token for good that your days have been prolonged? He waits but to see you bowing submissively before Him — saying from your inmost soul, "Do with me what seems good in Your sight" — and He will either remove the cross from off you, or give you the blessedness of realizing the truth of these words, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

But perhaps you are distressed by doubts and fears that God is angry with you — that in displeasure, not in love — He has laid you low. Oftentimes you are compelled to look backward, and the retrospect is gloomy — a retrospect of ingratitude, forgetfulness, wandering — of warnings unheeded, providences disregarded, mercies received unthankfully; and the thought arises — "For these transgressions I am chastened of the Lord; they are too aggravated, too numerous, to be *forgiven.*"

"*Forgiven!*" "My grace is sufficient for you." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from *all* sin." "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

It is well to look backward — well to recall the past; but not in a gloomy, despairing spirit — not as if by present or future suffering we could *atone* for sin. No, assuredly — but to lead us "to believe on Him who is able to save unto the uttermost" — to "believe, and be saved." All our *woe* and



*misery* could not *atone* for any one transgression! It is not by a painful counting up of duties undone, and sins committed, or by a resolving ever so earnestly to be more careful in all these things for the time to come — that we can be saved. Salvation is *alone* in Christ. To Him we must go — to Him who, by His death, purchased for Himself the heirs of death, that they might become heirs of glory. To Him we must go — who sends sickness and trial to check and restrain us — to make us bethink ourselves — to bring us to Him, the only Savior and Redeemer — that we may be driven from the world, and from *ourselves* — to Him, and in Him find rest unto our souls.

Christian, look away then from self and sin — so vile and loathsome — to Jesus your Redeemer, Savior, God. He will not cast you off, as guilty as you are; He will not fail to welcome you; but He will say unto you, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!" And if at any time you are becoming faint and weary in the pilgrimage of life — oh, turn hopefully, turn without a misgiving to these words, "My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

But perhaps this is not *your* case. You tell us, "I feel and acknowledge the infinity of God's mercy in Christ. For years have I tasted that the Lord is gracious, and He has borne with me amid countless sins and shortcomings; but I have an evil heart of unbelief, against whose suggestions I have continually to struggle, and whose temptings I sometimes feel myself unable to resist. No sooner have I gained a *victory* over some besetting sin, some evil temper, some worldly desire — than another, equally powerful and seductive, presents itself, and from day to day I am engaged in a conflict, battling with some enemy, resisting some onset of temptation, and hardly able to keep my ground."

Reader, yours is precisely the Christian's experience, just what you were told to expect when you entered the narrow way — and what you may continue to anticipate until you "enter the rest which remains for the people of God." But why be discouraged? He who has sustained you hitherto — will be "with you" still. Your strength has often been fast failing — but you have not been overcome; why then should you dread that defeat awaits you? The very struggles you have maintained — have added to your strength, and given you fresh vigor! The very fear of being

vanquished — has been a stimulus to new exertion, and is a sign that you "will finally prevail." Your enemies are strong and mighty — yes — but not stronger than those whom your blessed Savior met and trampled underfoot. He will nerve your arm afresh for the struggle. He will help you not only to maintain your ground — but to gain the victory; and if ever you feel within you the risings of fear, or doubt, or despondency, oh, be cheered by these two precious assurances — "My grace is sufficient for you;" and again, "To him who overcomes — I will grant to sit with Me on my throne!"

Christian, whatever your trial, distress, or sorrow — have faith in the promise of your Savior. All else may fail you — but "His word stands sure." You will have your struggles and conflicts, you will have dark and gloomy days and nights of storm and tempest; but fear not — you will be carried safely through them all. You may be wounded and torn, and, covered with many scars, bearing the marks of many a hard-fought battle — with the dust of a weary journey on your garments — with the sword not resting in its scabbard — but grasped as if for another onset — you may be summoned from the battle-plain — but what then?

Away from conflict, from tumult, and strife — away from sin, temptation, and sorrow — away, in that blessed home of peace and purity, where no *fear* shall again disturb, no *foe* again attack, no *evil heart* again lead astray — you will "rest from all your labors." The trumpet will no more summon to the battle; its last clarion-note will be "Victory!" and amid the glad hosannas of the heavenly multitudes, you will be welcomed as another conqueror — a conqueror through Him whose *grace* was sufficient for you, and whose *strength* was made perfect in weakness.

O most gracious Father, who has invited all who feel their need of Your grace to come unto You — have mercy upon me, for I am in trouble! I am deeply sensible that I am far from exercising that unreserved submission to Your will which I ought to exercise. Help me, I beseech You, so to trust in Your infinite goodness and unerring wisdom, that I may be able to say from my very heart, "*May Your will be done.*" Oh, teach me to be grateful for the manifold comforts allotted me; and support me graciously, that my soul be not cast down and disturbed within me. Keep me from all repining thoughts, and make Your grace at all times sufficient for me, and

perfect Your strength in my weakness. Let my soul be supported by faith, hope, and patience, under all the sufferings I may yet endure. Bless the means that are used, and make them effectual, if it is Your good pleasure — for restoring me to health, that I may again praise You in the assembly of Your saints. Make me willing to glorify You either by life or by death. Give me a simple dependence upon You, and enable me in all things to commit my way unto You, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## IF THE LORD WILLS

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of Him." — 1 John 5:14, 15

There is much to comfort us in these words. When *health* fails, when *prosperity* departs, or when our *homes* become the homes of mourning — we are prone, if we do not watch against the danger — to have our confidence in the power and efficacy of prayer weakened — no, sometimes, for a season, destroyed.

Perhaps we have offered up petitions for health, for plenty, for prosperity in the world — and instead of these things we have had sickness, adversity, and ever-increasing cares and troubles — and we have rashly supposed that our petitions were unheard.

Or, more painful still, perhaps we prayed for the assurance of forgiveness — for a realizing sense of God's love in Christ — for stronger faith — for some precious spiritual blessing or comfort, which we imagined would insure our happiness, peace, joy. But we continued still downcast and sad; *faith's grasp* was feeble; every wave that dashed against us, seemed as if destined to hurl us against the rocks; and our cry of distress was lost amid the roar of the angry elements — "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" Was it not almost needless to continue praying? Whose *case*

was so urgent, whose *danger* so imminent, whose *need* so great — as ours? And yet our *petitions* had met with no response — our *entreaties* for help had been unavailing?

Such questions our unbelieving hearts *frequently* suggest, and they render *necessary discipline* more severe, trying, and long-continued — until we are brought to *honor* God by fully and implicitly *trusting* Him.

Three things ought to be ever kept in view with regard to prayer:

FIRST, the range, the *extent* to which we may go in our petitions at the throne of grace, although vast and soul-satisfying, has yet a *boundary-line*. It is inscribed with these words — "*According to His will.*"

We are at best but children — willful, erring children — ignorant of what would prove a blessing or a curse to us — often anxious for those things which would prove hurtful; and slow to believe that a painful cross, a heavy affliction — is really the *best* thing that God could send us. Our heavenly Father, who has graciously adopted us in Christ, and means to train us to obedience, self-denial, and submission, while, in the fullness of His love, offering the inestimable treasures of His grace — *will only bestow upon us, what He knows to be truly and lastingly beneficial to our souls!* Therefore His promise of blessing is *limited* to things which are "according to His will."

But some anxious, trembling one may say, "Surely, to implore the assurance of forgiveness — to entreat the bestowal of pardon through the blood of Christ, to ask for stronger faith, deeper love, livelier hope — to offer such petitions as these — must be *according to His will.*"

Yes, assuredly! Oh that we would never doubt it — after all that God has done to convince us of His willingness to forgive, to pardon freely, and forever! See page after page of Holy Scripture bright with promises, invitations, entreaties! See the loving Savior, anxious to melt hard and stony hearts — weeping over the impenitent — speaking tenderly to the guilty, the polluted, the vile — giving up His precious life to ransom souls from destruction — grasping, in His last hour, a victim from the power of the enemy, to bear it as a *trophy* of the victory of redeeming love; and

who shall dare say there is unwillingness on the part of God to forgive?

Hear these words — "Who is a God like unto You, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us — He will subdue our iniquities; and will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea!" Listen to the Savior's description of His mission — "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." And what was His language of bitter lamentation? "You will not come unto Me — that you may have life."

Oh, there is no unwillingness on the part of God! But, alas! there is *unbelief* on ours. We will not take God *at His word* — we will persist in rearing barriers where there should be none, and in nourishing doubts and fears — when our hearts might be filled with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

God has given us His word — He bids us lay hold on His promises — He invites us to be reconciled — He urges us to accept forgiveness — He condescends to entreat us in accents of winning tenderness, and sets before us His intense concern for our salvation in these words — "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that *whoever* believes on Him should not perish — but have everlasting life!"

We ourselves, then, are to blame — if we have not the assurance of forgiveness. We will not trust God. We refuse to credit His Word. Of this we may be sure — that in praying for the grace of assurance, we are doing right. Let us pray on and wrestle with God, until there is within us *that* which we long for. So also in regard to faith, and love, and hope. If we have them not in their vigor — let us not rest satisfied until they are increased. In asking these things, we *are* asking what is "*according to His will.*"

In many things, we are *not asking "according to His will."* And therefore something else is given — perhaps *sickness*, because it is better for us, in

present circumstances than unbroken health — is the answer to our prayer. Perhaps *adversity*, because, we are trusting too much to our prosperity — is the gift bestowed. Friends are taken from us, and our hearts are wounded and stricken — because we set them as *idols* on the altar of our affections, where God must reign supreme! Our petitions were not, "according to His will," and He gave us what He saw to be *needful*.

SECONDLY, we must strive to realize the fact than **our prayers have been really heard**. When once we have carefully examined the *nature* of our requests, and been persuaded that, as far as we know, they are "according to His will" — we should simply lay them before the Lord, assured that He not only hears us — but that "we *have* the petitions that we desired of Him."

Not perhaps the very blessings we asked — not health, plenty, peace, prosperity, freedom from sorrow — at the *very time*, and in the *very way* we sought. We must not presume to *dictate* to God. He hears and answers *as a sovereign*. But because the highest, choicest blessing which a Christian can desire, and for which he ought to pray most ardently, fervently, and perseveringly, is — to *love* what God loves, to *choose* what God chooses, to *will* what God wills — because this ought ever to be the uppermost petition on his heart — he may be sure that, if he asks it, he will receive it — and all the other blessings he prayed for — *up to the extent* when their bestowal would hinder the progress of the life of God in the soul.

Christian, rest assured your cry *has* been heard. Do not be disturbed and cast down because you have not received precisely the blessing which *you* desired. It was not good for you. You thought it would render you happy — but it would have had no such virtue. That only can make you really happy — which has the stamp of God's approval on it, and which is "according to His will." Take what He has sent, be it sickness, loss of friends, loss of property — take it, as what your heavenly Father saw to be needful; and pray that He would, by His Holy Spirit, sanctify it to you — that it may increase your trust in Him, and render you more submissive to His will.

LASTLY, we must ever strive to cherish the conviction that earnest, persevering prayer is not merely a *privilege* and *duty* — but that it is, through our Lord Jesus Christ — prevalent with God, and is accomplishing its purpose.

When we fail to see the blessing come down which we earnestly prayed for, or when something very different is given us, we are apt to yield to unbelief — and as, perhaps, trial after trial happens, we say with one of old, "*All these things are against me!*"

Christian, does the child, when gazing on an intricate piece of mechanism, understand how wheel fits into wheel, how the one is dependent on the other, and how the very smallest is necessary to accomplish the final result?

Just so, you cannot understand how the various trials and crosses in your life are all working together — combining in conformity with the will of God in carrying on to its accomplishment the sanctification of your nature — until at length you are fitted for a holier, purer dwelling place with your Father and your God.

Remember, "what you know not now — you shall know hereafter," and let this satisfy you. A time will yet come when, if faithful unto death — you will acknowledge with a grateful heart, that your prayers have been *fully answered*, that everything from God was given in deepest love, and that "with Christ Jesus He freely gave you all things." Despond not, even though sorrow upon sorrow is your portion, and the *heavy billows of affliction* seem ceaselessly to roll over you. Fix the *eye of faith* on the painless home of light and love, and be cheered by the thought that, following the Savior close in *sorrow* here — you shall be privileged to follow Him close in *bliss* hereafter.

Deem it not a "strange thing" that *trial* has happened unto you. Strange it would have been if you had only joy — where your Savior had so much sorrow; if you had a quiet resting-place — where He could find no spot whereon to rest His wearied head; if the world had offered you a place of calm and sweet repose — when it denied a shelter to your suffering, mournful Lord!

No, Christian — not here, not here, can you look for repose, or rest, or freedom from trial — but in that blessed home of tranquillity and joy, where the countless ages of eternity, as they roll on, shall never behold the shedding of one single tear, or catch the echo of one faintest sigh!

O God, our heavenly Father, grant me grace to submit to Your holy will. You know what discipline I need. You see, O Lord, how much of *evil* there is in my heart — what *unbelief*, and *fear*, and *folly* — and You know what is needful to remove them. I would desire, good Lord, humbly to acquiesce in Your doings — believing that You are chastening me for my profit. I would *hear Your rod*, not merely because I cannot resist it — but because I love and trust You. I would sweetly acquiesce and rest in Your will, as well as bow beneath it, and would say, "Not my will — but may Your will be done." I would take gratefully the blessings You are pleased to send, for I am not worthy of the least of them. And when You deny my petition, and withhold what I ask — oh, strengthen me by Your grace to wait Your pleasure, and still to trust You, assured that the time will come when I shall bless You even for unanswered prayers, for trials, and afflictions, and sorrows — which I would gladly have had removed — but which, blessed be God, were made the means of drawing me nearer to You. Hear me, O Lord, and grant me Your blessing, for my dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## THE SWELLING OF JORDAN

*"How will you do in the swelling of Jordan?"* — Jeremiah 12:5

No Scripture reader can have failed to notice that the *journeyings* of the children of Israel — are typical of the Christian's pilgrimage; and that the *promised rest* in Canaan — is typical of the Christian's eternal home. Their deliverance from Egypt, their march through the desert, their passage over Jordan, their abode in Canaan — are all points of resemblance, tracing out, as it were, the *journey from this world of sin and sorrow* — to "the rest which remains for the people of God."



In the words before us, one interesting point of history is referred to, which may serve to illustrate an important and solemn stage in the Christian's pilgrimage — that is, *the passage over Jordan*. Let us meditate for a little on this marvelous event; and may God, by His Holy Spirit, enable us to derive comfort from the thoughts suggested regarding our heavenly home!

*The Jordan lay between the Israelites and the promised land.* Doubtless, as they stood upon its banks, wistfully gazing across its swelling waves, their hearts were filled with gloom and terror. Three days they rested within sight of the flowing stream; no promise — no assurance of help was given. Dark and cold, the river rolled on its course, and ever as the waves rose and heaved and broke at their feet — the question would arise in many a sinking heart, "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" It was only when summoned to cross — only when the time for their departure had come — that Joshua unfolded to them the wondrous way in which the Lord intended to guide and conduct them over. "The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall." Joshua 3:13

As the *Jordan* lay between the Israelites and Canaan — so *death lies between the Christian and his eternal home*. DEATH is oftentimes an object of terror even to the holiest and the best. We *do not* love death; we fear the gloomy passage; our faithless hearts shrink at the prospect of breasting the foaming flood. We would gladly tarry on the banks of the stream, unable to find an answer to the inquiry, "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" Christian, be of good courage; the answer will come in God's good time. These fears will then vanish, and, like Israel of old, you will safely and triumphantly cross the rapid, rising flood.

Mark some of the incidents connected with *their* wondrous passage. *The ark of the covenant was with them*; upborne on the shoulders of the priests, it went before, and led the march of the advancing multitude. So is it with the Christian — Christ, the Ark of the Covenant, is present in the hour of his departure. At *His* bidding the dark waters will divide — they will rise up on either side, and hold back every onward-flowing billow; until, at length, the once timid, trembling, fearful believer, stands, with a

joyful and triumphant heart, upon Immanuel's blissful shore!

Yes, believer; never has a solitary pilgrim crossed the Jordan — unattended by the presence of Jesus. He watches each disciple with intensest interest. He keeps His eye not only on the busy scenes of life — but also on the secret mysteries of death. "Precious in the sight of the Lord — is the death of his saints." Sweet, comforting thought! Do not fear to go down with Him into the *dark river* — it may prove boisterous for a season — its waters may be cold and chilling at their approach, the waves may threaten to drown you — but fear not, He will be with you — "He will hold you by your right hand, saying unto you, Fear not!" Whatever weakness you may be called to pass through, He will be "the strength of your heart;" the Almighty Lord will be with you, and strengthen you; you will see His smile — you will hear His voice — you will feel His hand — and His conscious presence will enfold you as you pass!

We are further told that "*every one* had crossed the Jordan on dry ground." None were left behind — none were swept away by the swelling of Jordan. Neither shall any of *God's true Israel* be lost in death's devouring flood! Whatever fears may have distressed them — whatever doubts may have gathered round them as they neared the brink of the stream — they shall pass over in safety, because their High Priest is with them, and He has promised to conduct them to the heavenly Canaan.

Sick one, dear to Christ! are you afraid of death? Are you inquiring with an anxious heart, "How shall *I* do in the swelling of Jordan?" It is not strange to be thus alarmed; others have experienced the same painful feeling. It is only through *strong faith* in the promises of God, and *trust* in the infinite merits of our Redeemer, that we *can* look on death, and overcome those terrors which the most perfect of mortals must feel at putting off mortality.

You need not blame yourself, if you cannot feel *joy* in leaving this world. Human nature cannot be perfected in this life; it is well if you are *resigned* to the will of God, without murmuring or repining, when He is pleased to call for you. Death is to the best — a dreadful summons — and human nature turns with dread from the gloomy passage. It is also a mournful thought to be separated from those whom we love most dearly

— to leave them amid the sorrows of a sinful world — to leave them struggling with all the *difficulties*, the *hardships*, and the *dangers* that attend a Christian in his journey through the wilderness — and no more to see their faces — no more to hear their voices until they too shall have passed through the *river of death*.

But surely, Christian, you may be comforted by the thought — that a safe and triumphant passage is insured to the *weakest* of Christ's followers. "They shall never perish!" This is the assurance of "the faithful Promiser." It is not life, and it is not death, which shall separate you from your Savior-God. Because *He* lives — you shall live also; *where* He is — there shall you be also. Fear not the swelling tide! All is in the Lord's hands, and He will divide the foaming billows, and take you dry-shod over; and not a heaving, not an undulation of the cold waters shall chill the warmth, or ruffle the calmness of your bosom. Let this be the language of your soul, "Savior-God, my trust is in You. I will cleave to You closer and closer. As the water deepens, I will plant my foot of faith firmer and firmer upon the Rock — until I find myself in glory!"

Yes, believer, *in glory* — away from *doubts* and *fears* and *anxieties* — away from *besetting sins* — away from *pain* and *weariness* and *toil*! Yes, believer, *in glory* — with Him whom your soul loves — with Him who gave His life's blood to redeem you — with Him who *led* you on your earthly pilgrimage — with Him who brought you to the brink of Jordan's stream, and gave you faint glimpses of the heavenly Canaan — with Him who, when the billows began to heave and swell on either side, and your heart trembled with fear, whispered these words, "Fear not; I am still with you. When you pass through the waters — I will be with you; and through the floods — they shall not overflow. I will never leave you nor forsake you!"

And then, to this add a kindred reflection — that on the other side of Jordan, you will greet again the loved ones who have already reached the *land of rest*. You shall find all who 'sleep in Jesus' there. You accompanied them to the edge of the river — saw them enter the swelling tide — heard their shout of victory — and then they vanished from your sight, and you saw them no more. But soon, believer, you too shall pass over, and meet them all again. No more partings — no sad farewells — no

sudden rendings of affection's ties; for there the *icy hand of death* itself is dead! "Now thanks be unto God, who gives us the *victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Heavenly Father, I beseech You, grant that when the time of my *departure* shall come, I may be found prepared. May I be enabled to feel that, though my heart and my flesh fail — yet that You are the strength of my heart, and my portion forever. O blessed Jesus! who went to prepare a place for Your own people in Your Father's house — You who have strengthened and supported many a dying Christian while amid the *swellings of Jordan* — support and uphold me. Let not my *faith* fail — let not my *hope* waver. Enable me to look forward to the solemn hour of my departure with meek and humble confidence, trusting only in the merits of my gracious Lord and Savior, and relying so much on His promised grace, that the last hours of my life may be those of peace, and hope, and joy. O gracious God, pardon and accept me — for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## BEARING FRUIT

"Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." — John 15:8

In regard to the sphere of Christian duty and usefulness, there is no mistake we more frequently commit, than in supposing, when God is pleased to lay His chastening hand on one of His children — that he "is laid aside," removed from his "post," and, for the time, nearly altogether useless and unprofitable.

We can at once believe in the exertion, the energy, and endurance of the *missionary* who goes forth to heathen lands — that, amid suffering, privation, and toil, he may disseminate the truth as it is in Jesus, and advance the cause and kingdom of his Redeemer. We give our hearty admiration to the man who devotes himself to some scheme of benevolence — who labors on year after year in furthering the object on which his heart is set. We accord our willing tribute of praise to him who

seeks to ameliorate the condition of the poor — to instruct and reclaim the ignorant and wretched dwellers in our lanes and alleys — or to gather in the wandering outcasts on our streets to the house of God, where they may hear of pardon and peace through the precious blood of Christ.

These, and such as these, are held, and worthily held, in admiration. Their names are honored, and become as "household words." But how many of God's dear children are bearing heavier burdens, discharging more painful duties, and displaying more vigorous faith — in the retirement of *private life*, or in the chamber of *sickness* and *trial*. God is "glorified" as well in **suffering** — as in **doing**; in the patient *endurance* — as well as in the vigorous *performance* of His will.

There is *even* a *stronger* testimony given to the power and efficacy of Christ's religion, in the un murmuring life of some tried and suffering disciple — than in the bold and courageous efforts of him who, against rage and opposition, carries the words of the everlasting gospel from shore to shore — who dreads not the burning sands of the desert, or the frozen mountains of the north — but with ever-increasing energy presses on — that he may plant the *Rose of Sharon* in the desert wild, and rear the *standard of the cross* amid savage and heathen tribes. The former may tread his path of suffering unnoticed and uncheered by man — while the latter may be animated to almost superhuman efforts — by the inspiring plaudits of thousands who are watching his progress.

But other eyes are fixed upon the solitary pilgrim, whose every step in his heavenward journey is marked with affliction — who, in the loneliness of the midnight hour, when sleep refuses to seal up his eyelids, "communes with his own heart upon his bed — and *is still*." Angels, we believe, from the heights of glory, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation, circle around that solitary one, and rejoice in being commissioned to bear glad tidings — tidings of peace, and comfort, and hope, and joy — to that troubled and wearied disciple.

Yes, it is a blessed privilege to be called to **labor** for Christ; but more blessed is it "not only to believe — but also to **suffer** for His name's sake." It is a sweet and a joyful thing to be a sharer with Christ in *anything*. Love delights in *likeness* and *communion*, not only in things attractive

and pleasant — but in the hardest and harshest things, which have not anything in them desirable, but only that *likeness*. So that this thought is very sweet to a heart possessed with the Savior's love. What — do sufferings, pains, and sorrows make us more like to Him? Do they give us a greater share with Him in that which He willingly underwent for us, and afford the opportunity of manifesting, as He did — a humble, obedient, cheerful endurance — and the giving up our will to our heavenly Father's?

Every step of 'sanctified suffering' is a step nearer to the *crown of glory*. It is a lesson learned in that *school of obedience*, in which, as man, our blessed Lord Himself was perfected. And by every instance of patient endurance, of thankful, rejoicing acquiescence in the severe discipline of our Father's will — we are "bearing" the fruit by which He is glorified.

Suffering child of God! be not disappointed if, with every desire to *do* great things for your Savior — you seem to be denied the power or the opportunity of doing anything. Remember, "they also serve — who only stand and wait;" and how much more do they serve — who are called upon to endure and to suffer? In your chamber of sickness, upon the bed of pain, you may as greatly glorify your Redeemer — as amid the trials of the mission, or the tortures of the stake. In health you had duties to perform, in sickness you have them still. Can you *now* say that you firmly trust God's goodness, and believe Him to be a father — while trembling under His rod? Can you still cling to the truths of His holy Word, as strange and mysterious as they appear to be? Can you receive comfort in thoughts of death and heaven, of immortality and the resurrection, of conformity to Christ's sufferings?

It is easy to *talk* of putting trust in God in the time of health and prosperity, and when our hearts are filled with gladness to extol His goodness and bounty. But can you do so *now*, when sickness has come, and darkness is gathering around your prospects? Are you struggling against the suggestions of the evil heart of unbelief — resigning yourself to God's will — praying Him to choose for you — endeavoring, like a true and faithful servant, to bear with fortitude and resolution the cross laid upon you — in the same spirit as your Divine Master bore the far heavier cross to which He was nailed, in testimony of His infinite love towards

you?

If so, then happy are you. Our heavenly Father is perfecting His own work. His secret purpose is being accomplished, and with His own wise and gentle hand, He who has "began," will bring it to "completion." Shrink not because the path is thorny and solitary; for the *way* is short — and the *end* is glorious! He who perfected His own Son through sufferings, has brought many sons to glory by the same rough road, even by the "way in the wilderness," and in His own good time He will conduct you also to "the *rest* which remains for the people of God."

Fear not the sufferings that may be still in store. He to whom you belong, will give you not only *patience* to endure — but *strength* to fulfill the peculiar duties to which you may yet be called. He will give *grace* amid all the trials through which you have to pass, and *victory* in the contests you may be summoned to enter. Day by day will you receive the impress of the *likeness* of the ever-blessed Savior; and in you, God shall be "glorified," yes, and "shall glorify you." He will give you "the peace which passes all understanding" — the blessed assurance of His own unchanging love, and the hope of dwelling forever at His own right hand in glory!

He will also make you useful in the Church. Your trust, and hope, and confidence in God, under the severe stroke of affliction, or the pressure of infirmity, will speak forcibly to those around you. There will be a silent yet powerful eloquence in those very infirmities with which you are struggling, and it may be your blessed privilege to sow the seed of piety, of love to God and Christ, of holiness and happiness, in the hearts of many who, in the great day, shall be to you "a joy and crown of rejoicing."

But, O tried, suffering one! remember that your "sufficiency" for all these things comes from above! The Spirit must *sanctify* your affliction. He must fulfill in you the work of faith with power. From Him alone, must proceed the grace of patient endurance, of willing acquiescence, of thankful, grateful joy. If you rely on your own efforts — if you think that your "strength of will" can uphold you in severest pain, and keep you from uttering one cry of anguish, and from yielding to fretfulness and repining — so far you *may* succeed; but you are not assuredly gaining the

*end* which God has in view. The submission, the patience, the humility, the quiet endurance, which your heavenly Father seeks to work in you — are far more important than many imagine.

The "submission" is not merely to *pain*; it is a submission to *what the Lord has seen fit to lay upon us*. We must see Him above all, in our sufferings — as the *Author* of them. We cannot advance *one* step until we have been brought to the heartfelt confession, "It is the Lord!" His *hand* must be acknowledged, His *power* and *providence* realized, before we can yield any "fruit" to His praise and glory. Oh, then, pray that you may fully realize and see that *a Father's hand has mingled your cup of bitterness*, and then may you hope to be able from the heart to say, "Shall I not drink it?"

Seek also to be resting on Jesus for all your strength, your hope, your comfort, and deliverance. Believe in Him as your all-sufficient Savior, as your Pattern, and as your Support in every tribulation. Ask of Him in every fresh trial — and under every circumstance of the trial, "Lord, how would You have me to act? What would You have me to do?" Implore of Him increasing submission and quietude of spirit. Endeavor, by earnest and persevering prayer — to obtain that increase of faith which sustains the soul above the afflictions of this poor world, and the wearying contemplation of pain, sorrow, fear, sin, and death. Strive more and more to raise your affections to things above, where your loving Savior dwells, and whence He will before long, return to gather you up with Him to His throne, that you may behold and share His glory!

Seek of Him the Holy Spirit, to intercede within you, and to unite your heart to God's heart. He is a *Counselor* and *Comforter* from Christ, to His suffering ones. He is a *Guide* to lead you into all truth, to reveal to you the whole will of your heavenly Father; and to work mightily the power of God in your soul, quickening you from sin to holiness, and raising you up to all heavenly blessings with Christ.

Thus living, *a daily suppliant at Mercy's gate*, you will obtain grace equal to your day — grace to honor your Divine Master — grace to manifest the power of a living faith — grace to endure as seeing Him who is invisible — grace to be faithful unto death — and, through the merits of Christ, to



receive the crown of life.

Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, who does not willingly afflict the children of men — but rebukes and chastens those whom You love — look down upon me, Your unworthy servant, and have mercy upon me, for Christ's sake. Enable me, O God, amid all my pains and sufferings, to recognize *Your fatherly hand*, and to feel assured that You will make them means of good, and sources of blessing to my soul. I acknowledge, O God, that I have grievously sinned against You, and merit only Your hot displeasure. But for the sake of Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a sacrifice for sin, and who now pleads at Your right hand — do, Lord God, have mercy upon me, and forgive all my iniquities.

And grant, heavenly Father, if it pleases You — that both my *soul* may be healed of the dreadful malady of sin, and my *body* renewed with health — that I may devote the life You spare, to Your service, and to the good of my fellow-creatures.

Whatever You are pleased to give or withhold, oh, pour upon me the rich gift of Your Holy Spirit. Through His indwelling may I be enabled to bring forth fruit to Your glory. Make me patient, humble, and resigned. Grant that no pain may ever tempt me to murmur, or to doubt Your fatherly goodness. Assist me, O God, to nourish penitent, believing, and serious thoughts and affections, and such meekness and patience as my Divine Master manifested while He was a sufferer on earth. Help me, by Your Holy Spirit, so to meditate on Your mercies in Christ Jesus, that, in the midst of all my weariness and pains — Your comforts may refresh my soul.

O Blessed Jesus, be my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. O merciful Lord, You have said that in all our afflictions, You are afflicted. May I realize Your *sympathy* with me. May the remembrance of Your sufferings check my every murmur, and soothe my every pain. Lord, enable me, whether in sickness or in health, to glorify Your holy name. Do with me what is good in Your sight. Let patience have her perfect work. If this sickness is unto death — oh, prepare me for it, that I may depart only to be with You! Whether in life or in death — may I still live in Your presence. And to Your name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be ascribed all

glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## CHRISTIAN JOY

"You have sorrow now — but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy." — John 16:22

These precious words were uttered by our blessed Savior at a most eventful period of His history. It was the night of His betrayal. For the eighth time He had repeated the story of His *coming sufferings*, with deep and affecting solemnity. He had instituted the memorial of His death and passion; and, slowly and sadly, He drew up the curtain which was to reveal to the sorrowing disciples the things which were soon to come upon them.

Sorrow and anxiety filled the hearts of all in that lonely upper room. He who had "received the sop" had gone out, and was already communing with the Savior's murderers; for it was "their hour, and the power of darkness." But even then, when the tide of *anticipated suffering and sorrow* was rushing in upon His own soul — when He was hemmed in on every side by the malice of His enemies — and there was now only the brook Kedron between Him and the awful anguish of Gethsemane — our Lord thought not of Himself — but of those trembling followers whom He was so soon to leave in a dark and desolate world — full of sorrows, perplexities, and cares!

He comforts them by many gracious promises, and bids them to take courage. It must needs be that He should now depart. The Holy Spirit, in mysterious silence, awaited the return of Christ to the courts of heaven. "If I do not go away — the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go away — I will send Him unto you."

And while predicting their future sufferings, He promises a season of great and permanent joy. "Now, therefore," He says, "you have sorrow" — the season of your suffering is at hand; you shall have sorrow, deep

sorrow, during the short period of your not seeing Me; " but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy."

Christian, see in all this the *love*, the *tenderness*, the *care* of Jesus! We might have expected that His own anticipated sorrows would *alone*, at such a time, have occupied His mind — that the dark vista through which He was to pass would have concentrated His every thought, and served to exclude all efforts to soothe or mitigate the sorrows of others. But no! Fully aware of the tremendous responsibilities of His situation — feeling the *weight* of the load laid upon Him, the *bitterness* of the cup given Him to drink — and anticipating, as certain and just at hand — a heavier pressure and a bitterer draught — He still evinced as deep an interest in the *anxieties* and *perplexities*, in the *fears* and *sorrows* of the disciples — as if He himself had not been a sufferer at all.

He knew how they were troubled, and what anxious, desponding, despairing thoughts were arising in their minds, and He could not but be "touched with a feeling of their infirmities." The weight of anguish which overwhelmed *His* soul — no being in the wide universe could bear along with Him. He could not have the alleviation of human sympathy. He must tread the winepress *alone*. He must encounter the enemy, bear his assaults, and overcome *alone*. They could not enter into His sorrows, nor aid Him in the coming struggle; but He — the generous, self-denying, magnanimous One — could fully enter into theirs. There was room in His large heart for their sorrows — as well as His own. He feels their griefs — as if they were His own, and kindly comforts those who, He knew, were about to desert Him in the hour of His deepest sorrow!

And soon was the gracious promise *made good* in the experience of the disciples. The Savior did, indeed, come to *see them again*, and their hearts poured themselves out in one gush, "The Lord has risen indeed!" as if all was summed up in that. *Then* their only difficulty was that their hearts were too narrow for the greatness of their *joy* — and this "joy no man could take from them."

Men might do much — they might cast them into dungeons, and beat them with rods, and treat them as the offscouring of all things; but, with all their malice, they could not touch *that* which was the true treasure of

their hearts. The Savior — true, loving, faithful — was ever near to them. They now knew and realized that, whether in the dungeon, or the wilderness, or the desert — they could find *Him* ever near — and that in His presence they would have all things necessary. And here, therefore, "their joy was fulfilled."

And beyond this, too — in their individual history and experience, as days and years rolled on, and as they entered into closer and more intimate communion with their Lord — revealing to Him their cares and sorrows — drinking in more largely of His grace and spirit — sheltering themselves from the crude blasts of persecution, and the fury of their enemies, in His loving bosom — they entered more and more perfectly into *their joy* — they came to know Him more intimately than they had ever known Him in the days of His flesh. A still closer relation — a more abiding *presence*, a more full experience of His strength, His guidance, His comfort, was given to them.

Christian! the same promise is made to you, and may be realized in your experience; for it was given not only to the first apostles — but to all "who would believe on Him through their word."

"I will see you again!" is the assurance of Jesus to every troubled disciple. When the consciousness of guilt and wrong-doing burdens the soul, and causes it to tremble and be afraid — then does the *vision of Jesus* as the sin-offering, the Lamb of God, the burden-bearer, the all-prevailing Intercessor — impart *peace* and *joy*! The Christian is enabled to look at himself, even when he knows his own sinfulness, as accepted with the Father, because he can believe that he is joined by faith to Christ Jesus. He can take up the language of the apostle, "He loved me — and gave Himself for me!" There is the happy, peaceful consciousness that *sin* is pardoned — that *guilt* is blotted out — that *iniquity* is done away! And, filled with a *joy* with which a stranger cannot understand, the believer starts afresh in the journey of life — having, like Bunyan's *pilgrim*, dropped his burden at the foot of the cross.

Nor is this all. The sense of pardon and acceptance through the blood and righteousness of Christ — of guilt forever cancelled — of sin freely forgiven — may well fill the heart with *joy*. But still there remain the

seeds of evil, the sources of disquietude, in the best of God's children. All our *doings* are defiled with imperfection — the very holiest act we perform, has need to be atoned for by the atoning blood of Christ, before it can find acceptance with God.

And it is only the *vision of Christ* which can remove the burden of self-condemnation and shame which presses on the renewed heart. Oh, how comforting is the thought — that, as weak, sinful, and erring as we are — "Christ is our Righteousness!" Christ has obeyed the law for us — Christ has fulfilled its every tittle of *demand*, as well as its every tittle of *penalty*. He has completely obeyed the law for us, and has become "our righteousness, holiness and redemption."

Oh, Christian! cling to this blessed truth! Look ever to Jesus as your Righteousness, as well as atonement, and you will find that, in the exercise of a living faith, it will become to you the element of a *joy* such as earth can never give nor take away — a *joy* that is well described as "unspeakable and full of glory." It will impart to you the power of trusting ever to a Savior's faithfulness and grace — not in name, not in outward form — but in a true, inward living with Him; going to Him with that which you can reveal to none other on earth — the hidden mystery of your heart; going to Him in the deep of night, in the early morning; stealing times in the midst of a busy life to lift the burdened heart up to Him; seeing Him in all outward things — in the means of grace, and in His living Word; seeing Him even in crosses, temptations, sicknesses, and sorrows; seeing His sovereign hand, and knowing that He is making all things to work together for your good — that every grief and care is but a *necessary instrument* in His hand, engraving upon you some feature which is to reflect His glory.

Christian, even this is but a *foretaste* of those nobler and more exalted *joys* — those far more glorious blessings reserved for those who are "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Just like the first dawn of day, which is the sure harbinger and pledge of the full, meridian, noontide splendor — so this *joy* that fills the heart of the true believer is the very *pledge* of future glory, when all who have believed indeed in Jesus, shall pass into His full presence, never again to lose sight of it — to be that which Peter desired to be, in the burst of his wondering heart, when he

said, "It is good for us to be here!" — when there shall be no more temptation to sin, and no more possibility of falling — when we shall be so near to the "*Sun of Righteousness*," that no *cloud* shall ever shadow it again — that we shall see Him, and know that we shall see Him *forever!*

Sick one, dear to Christ! is your heart full of fear and trembling? Instead of *joy* — are you filled with grief? Oh, look to Christ by the eye of faith! See Him as the portion of *your* soul — your loving, faithful, and compassionate Redeemer; and "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Draw near to Him in sweet and close communion, and you will soon find that "in His presence is fullness of *joy*" — that He can satisfy every desire, and every need, and every aspiration — and raise, and refine, and purify them, even in satisfying them!

Reader, all other *joy* is transitory — only the *joy* of the Christian will endure forever. All other is but for a season; and even here, when least expected, the *golden cup of worldly delight* may be dashed in pieces from the lips. But the Christian's joy is a treasure which none can take away. All outward comforts may fail — friends, prosperity, health, fame — but this promised blessing, this "joy and peace in believing," is beyond the reach of men or demons. When flesh and heart fail — when life departs from the material clay — then the *joys* of Christians are only increased. Not even that irresistible hand which tears us from all that is earthly, and consigns us, bereft of every human honor, joy, and consolation — to the cheerless grave — even the *hand of Death* itself cannot deprive us of the pearl of great price. On the contrary, it robs us only of that which we would not wish to keep — and admits us to the full fruition of those pleasures of which the foretaste is so delightful, that the believer desires "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better!"

And what will constitute the joy of believers in glory? Methinks their *chief* joy will be *seeing Christ* — and being made more and more "*like Him*." I know not what nobler, more illustrious idea can be entertained of the glory and happiness of a saint — than that of sinfulness being eradicated both from flesh and spirit, and holiness perfectly ingrained into his nature, his humanity pure and unsullied — made like to Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled — the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." You may sketch far more gorgeous things,

and crowd the vision with imagery more striking and radiant; but the pinnacle of man's *nobleness* — is resemblance to his Lord! And the pinnacle of his *bliss* — is unreserved consecration to God. He touches the topmost point of dignity — when delivered from all corruption — for then he rises to the state of his original nature — made "in the image of God." A creature can be *glorious* — only as he is *pure*; and happy — only as he is *devoted* to the service of God.

And thus will it be with the redeemed in heaven. It will not be the robe of light, though it be brighter than the sun; not the *palm* and the *harp* that shall inspire them with joy, and render them glorious — though the one shall have grown on the trees of Paradise, and the other been strung by seraphic hands. No! it will be "*seeing Christ*" without an intervening cloud, and being conscious that the heart is now and forever undivided in His service — that every power and faculty of soul and body are employed in His business, and will be so throughout eternity; and that "reflecting, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, we shall (in a far higher sense than we can yet comprehend) be changed into the same image from glory to glory."

O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need — I fly to You for support. Look upon me, O Lord, with the eyes of Your mercy; give me comfort and sure confidence in You; defend me from the danger of the enemy, and keep me in perpetual peace and safety. Grant that the sense of my *present weakness* may add strength to my faith, and seriousness to my repentance; that if it shall be Your good pleasure to restore me to my former health, I may lead the remainder of my life in Your fear and to Your glory — or else give me grace so to take Your visitation, that, after this painful life ended, I may dwell with You in life everlasting.

Be pleased, O Lord, to give me a right discerning of the things belonging to my peace. May I share in the joy which the Savior promised as the portion of His disciples — the joy which no man can take from me. O let not pain, or distress, or trial of any kind — sink me into despondency, or render me impatient or fretful! But may I have grace to improve every visitation, so that I may be brought *nearer* to You, and be more *conformed* to the image of my blessed Redeemer. Give me to feel that

there can be no greater comfort than to be made like unto Christ, by suffering patiently — adversities, troubles, and sicknesses. Help me ever to bear in mind that my Savior Himself first suffered pain, before joy; that He entered not into His glory, before He was crucified. May I be brought to know that my way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ, and my door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ; that I may rise again from death, and dwell with Him in everlasting life!

O gracious and merciful God, wash and cleanse my soul with the blood of Your Son, and the graces of Your Spirit — that it may be delivered from all the defilements which it has contracted in this present evil world, and be found safe and happy in the hour of death, and in the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fit me, O Lord, for living or dying, that it may be unto me *Christ to live, and gain to die*; and that in all things I may find cause to glorify Your name. If You shall be pleased to release me from my present distress, and to add to me a yet further term of life, oh, that I may live to You, to do You better service, and bring You greater glory! Or if You have determined that this sickness shall be unto death — prepare me, O merciful God, by Your grace — for Your blessed self; and grant me a safe and peaceful passage out of this mortal life to a heavenly and immortal eternity. Carry me safely through the *valley of the shadow of death*, and let me find a joyful admission into the everlasting kingdom of my Lord.

Let me be Yours in life and death, and for evermore — through the all-sufficient merits and mediation of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, our most prevailing Advocate and Redeemer. Amen.

## CONTENTMENT

"I have learned to be *content* in whatever state I am in!" — Philippians 4:11

How few among us have made this advancement in piety! How ready are we, when anything thwarts our inclinations, disarranges our plans, or



hinders our interests — to fret and murmur — to sit down in gloomy despondency, and say with the patriarch, "*All these things are against me!*" The reason is, because we have not, like the apostle, been "learning." Contentment is not acquired all at once. It is only by a gradual process, that this spirit is fostered in us — only by striving to bear patiently the lesser ills of life — the daily crosses and vexations which come upon us — that we can acquire the power of bearing up, without complaint, under the more trying and oppressive sorrows which, in the providence of God, fall to our lot in life.

Nor is it by trusting to our own strength, that we can attain this happy frame of mind. God gives grace to those who improve what they have already received. The oftener He sees His child putting forth the strength already imparted — the more willing is He to renew that strength. It was so with the apostle. How varied had been his experience! And how strenuously did he seek, under every change of circumstance — to improve and manifest the grace of God which had been given him! Think of what he had to undergo while "learning" the *lesson of contentment!* In his journeyings and perils — his imprisonments and shipwrecks — his weariness and painfulness — his watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, and nakedness — he must have endured many severe and painful privations. But all the while he was "learning," and all the while realizing more fully that the grace of God was sufficient to enable him to undergo the countless trials which had been allotted. By degrees he had been instructed not to *murmur* at the allotments of Divine Providence — not to be *envious* at the prosperity of others — and not to *repine* when his comforts were removed.

"I have learned to be *content* in whatever state I am in!" And this, Christian, was no easy lesson! To be able to use the language of Paul, marks a great advancement in the divine life. It is often a trying thing to see the wicked prospering — free from trouble and anxiety, unvisited by misfortune or calamity — and yet, amid our suffering, and sickness, and distress — to cherish a contented spirit — to continue patient and trustful and uncomplaining. Not infrequently, alas, the language of the heart is similar to that of David, "Look at them — the wicked! They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth. Did I purify my heart and wash my

hands in innocence for nothing? For I am afflicted all day long and punished every morning!"

Reader, it is the *triumph* of true religion that it can stand such a shock — that it can so fill the heart with *peace*, so animate it with *hope*, and so establish its *faith* and *trust* in God — that trials, reverses, sicknesses, and sorrows — only attract the believer *nearer to the bosom of his God*. And, in truth, it is not strange that they should do so. If I find that my God has comforted me under a small trial — shall I not repair to Him under a heavier one? If He has spoken to me in accents of intenser love while suffering was pressing upon me than at other times — shall I not instantly flee to Him when my troubles return? And if His grace has brought me forth out of one affliction, wiser, better, more earnest, self-denying, humble, and resigned — oh, to whom should I rush with greater eagerness and urgency, when the flood of sorrow is overwhelming me, than to Him who, having "given His own dear Son for me, shall with Him also freely give me all things" needful for my present emergency?

Besides, dear reader, never forget the *necessity* of trial. Assuredly God does not send *trouble* or *sickness* or *poverty* — merely to fret and annoy His children — to render them unhappy and discontented. No! but forasmuch as our natures are sinful, and must be sanctified — forasmuch as we are willful, and must be brought to obedience — forasmuch as evil must be removed before we can enter the kingdom of heaven — God tries His children, not by a steady course of prosperity, nor by a long-continued and uniform adversity — but by transition from the one to the other. He knows that the grace which might be sufficient for the day of *sunshine* — will not bear us up amid *darkness* and *tempest*. He knows that the virtues which appear in the Christian when all is serene and tranquil — might be crushed and deadened amid reverses and disappointments.

And as it is His purpose to *strengthen the Christian character* — to develop it more and more, until it is fitted for His own immediate presence — He makes the believer's path one of varied experiences of joy — and sorrow; of health — and sickness; of prosperity — and adversity. But then, new *grace* is imparted for every new form of *trial*; and new traits of godly character come into view in these rapid transitions of life.

For as the *gold* or the *diamond*, unsubjected to the fiery crucible, might have continued to shine with steady beauty and brilliancy — but not with the peculiar beauty effected by the refiner; so, in Christian life, many a beautiful trait of character would have remained undiscovered, throughout unbroken prosperity or long-continued adversity. There might have been always the *reality* of religion — but not that peculiar manifestation which is produced in the transition from the one to the other. If never tried by sickness and suffering — then never would the Christian learn to say with the apostle, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." And he would therefore fail to produce one of the most precious *fruits* of religion in the soul — the conviction that *God is right in all His ways!*

Consider, too, that many of our afflictions are of our own making. We have brought them on ourselves. They are the fruit of our own doings — perhaps of our *pride* and *selfishness*, our *worldliness*, and *waywardness*, and *folly*. Why, then, be impatient and discontented under those evils which we ourselves have made? Why murmur and repine — because these trees have borne their natural fruit?

Or, it may be, these apparent evils are beyond our control. We have no power to prevent them. Some, indeed, arise out of the very condition of our nature. And can we reasonably expect that the very nature of things should be altered — so as to secure our ease and comfort?

Reflect, too, that **the worst we have to suffer, is far less than we deserve** — and less than in justice we could expect. Christian, when you remember for how many years you lived in forgetfulness of God, and yet during the whole of that period were nurtured by His parental care! — when you consider for how long a time you continued in carelessness and indifference, and yet even then were sought and found by the influence of His Holy Spirit, and brought to the knowledge and love of Christ — when you reflect how God has watched over you since you have received the Savior into your heart — how He has preserved you from *dangers*, secured you in seasons of *temptation*, supported you in times of *trial*, nourished you in the days of *sickness*, comforted you in the hours of *despondency* — oh, surely you have reason to be *content* and *thankful* for the least mercy — and to be *patient* and *submissive* under the sorest trial!

Besides, who is it that measures out the changes in your earthly lot? No cross or trial comes to you — but from your heavenly Father's hand — to whom you owe submission and obedience. He has appointed your present lot, and every *ingredient* in your bitter cup is mingled by His own hand. In whatever state you now are, it is by His guidance that you have been led into it. And did you not promise to trust Him? Go back to the first Ebenezer you erected, when He helped you — when by His Holy Spirit you were enabled to say, "My Lord and my God!" See the inscription — "Lord, I am Yours, to do with me as You desire. Lord, keep me, for I trust in You."

And *now*, because He has led you for a while in a *thorny* path — because some of your *hopes* have been blasted — because everything is not ordered according to *your wishes* — are you to give way to murmuring and discontent? Are you wiser than your heavenly Guide? Would He lay upon you an *unnecessary* burden? It may be a *heavy* one — *long* and painful sickness — days and nights of weariness and anguish. What then? All was "needed." You are pained, yes — but look not at what you are suffering — but at what you have *deserved* to suffer. "Why should a *living* man complain?" Have you received no proofs of God's tender mercy? God always, to His own children, sends His *staff* — with His *rod*; His *grace* — with His *affliction*; and if you have not realized that support in the time of greatest extremity, it is not because it is lacking to you — but because you have not laid hold upon it, and utilized it.

And yet again, Christian, has not God given the greatest pledge of His love and goodness that the most doubting and craving heart could desire — even His beloved Son, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin — and "how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" His own dear Son was given to the death for us. Can we then for a moment doubt that He will order all things for our real good? And when we think of the Savior's sufferings for our sakes — how patiently, how uncomplainingly, He bore His unparalleled sorrows — oh, surely we ought to strive to imitate His example! Surely we have reason to be contented to be conformed and subject to the will of the Captain of our salvation! As He was made perfect through suffering, so must we, that if we suffer with Him, we may be glorified with Him. If, then, a murmuring word or

repining thought should arise in our minds, let us look by faith upon our dying Savior, and ask our own hearts, "Was not *His* cup more painful than *mine*?" And let the remembrance of His sufferings cause us to "count it all joy" to have an opportunity of honoring God by our *patience* and *contentment* with whatever is meted out for us.

Let us also strive to be *contented* with our earthly condition, when we consider that, if changes and vicissitudes *do* come upon us, if they are as necessary as the most valued of our blessings; that God has also furnished daily **helps** — that we may bear them patiently and contentedly. He has given us divine and heavenly consolations in His blessed Word. He has promised the assurance of His love and goodness, and the light of His countenance, to carry us with comfort and dependence upon Him, amid them all. He has set before us bright examples of patience in various trying conditions of life — where we can trace the design and meaning of the visitation — its blessed results in drawing the believer closer to his God — and its final outcome in filling the soul with a perfect and unbroken peace.

And, above all, *contentment* ought to mark the Christian when he looks to the future. He is told that this world is not his home — but his place of trial and preparation for a better state. This world is but his *pilgrimage state* — his journey, and such a journey as must be accompanied with many vicissitudes — a place of warfare — a stormy sea, through which he must pass before he can reach the *haven of rest*. His country, his home, his place of rest and happiness — lies beyond death's rising flood, where there shall be no trouble, nor fears, nor dangers — but eternal and unchangeable comfort — fullness of pure and uninterrupted pleasures — and that for evermore!

What, then, though troubles rise around on every side; child of God, pray for grace to be able to say, "In whatever state I *here* am, may I be content." You have heaven and everlasting joy in reserve for you — and these *light afflictions* are only for a *season*. Then all shall be well — no more disappointments and sorrows, no more dark and stormy days — but the unclouded vision — the enjoyment of the presence of your God — a joy unspeakable and full of glory!

Allow God to deal with you as He thinks best; and though He causes grief — yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Submit yourself willingly to the sovereign hand of your heavenly Father — to assign you prosperity — or to visit with adversity; to bestow health — or to send sickness; and then, although sudden passions of impatience and discontent *may* sometimes, like clouds, arise and trouble you for a while — yet this faith in God, and this hope of future blessedness, rooted in the heart, will, like the sun in yonder heavens, scatter and dispel them *all*, and cause the mild light of *patience* and *contentment* to shine through.

Trust Him for the *future* — as you have proved His faithfulness in the *past*. Be assured, in regard to everything that may *yet* happen you — that all is wisely ordered! You know not, indeed, what the future may bring for you; but be assured that, though the *furnace of trial* is needed — it cannot sever you from Christ your Savior; it cannot change your Father's love; it cannot weary out His care. Believe that, in the unknown and uncertain future, there shall not be one *storm* without His bidding — one *pang* without His presence; and stay your mind on the assurance that "all things shall work together for good — to those who love God."

Heavenly Father, God of consolation, who knows our frame, and how little we can endure, even though we deserve so much chastisement — be pleased to remember me in mercy! O, either lighten my sufferings — or increase my spiritual strength! And if You do not see fit entirely to remove my burden, oh, enable me to bear what You are pleased to lay upon me. Preserve me from all murmuring. Give me, O Lord, *the grace of contentment* — and let no repining thoughts take possession of my soul.

Although You have made me acquainted with grief, and my sickness has become my inseparable companion — yet, O blessed Lord, grant that I may not think it long to wait Your time — when You are pleased to wait so long for the return of sinners, and are ever piteous and of tender mercy! Oh, make me so sensible of Your kindness and love, that I may be not only *contented* — but *thankful* under Your hand!

Teach me, O gracious Father, to see Your love, as well as your justice, in all Your dealings — that I may humble myself under Your mighty hand,

and confess that it is *good* for me to be afflicted.

Give me grace, O Lord, patiently to wait for You — in an assured expectation that I shall one day see cause to number my *afflictions*, as among my *richest mercies*. Teach and help me to glorify You in the time of my visitation — to honor You by a humble submission to Your will — a patient bearing of Your rod — and a faithful reformation of my heart and life — so that You may return to me with the visitations of Your love, and show me the joy of Your salvation, for Your mercy's sake in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## **"Rest and Refreshment in the Valleys"**

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## Introduction

**"After leaving Marah, they came to Elim ('Valleys'), where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees. They camped there beside the springs."** Exodus 15:27 (Elim was an oasis in the desert.)

This volume is intended for the comfort and refreshment for God's own children of sorrow—for those in the varied 'valleys' of earthly tribulation. The "palm trees of Elim" afford their grateful shade not in *Canaan*, but in the *wilderness*. Pilgrims of eternity! weary and travel-worn, fainting under the burden and fear of the day—may you find here in these pages, with their figurative 'palm trees', restful, consolatory thoughts.

*"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose" Isaiah 28:12*

*"I delight to sit in His shade, and His fruit is sweet to my taste." Song 2:3*

*"The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know what to say to all these weary ones." Isaiah 50:4*

## DIVINE IMMUTABILITY

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place (our home) throughout all generations." Psalm 90:1

A glorious palm-shade with its evergreen fronds—a noble key-note to a noble song, the oldest in the Psalter, whose authorship invests it with an interest all its own, for it bears as its inscription, "A prayer of Moses the Man of God." The entire psalm was evidently written by the great leader and lawgiver, not certainly when the Israelites were encamped in safety and peace at Elim, under nature's verdant awning, with the twelve springs at their side (a desert oasis). Rather does it breathe the plaintive tones of a dirge or lament, composed after some appalling judgment toward the close of the wanderings—"days and years wherein they had seen evil" (ver. 15), when death had caused sudden havoc through the tents; compared to the rush of a resistless torrent (ver. 5), or the blighting and withering of the grass at sundown prostrate under the mower's scythe (Num. 14:5, 6). In the lesson thus read on human frailty and mortality, seeing perhaps, both prospectively and retrospectively, the wilderness strewn with the blanched bones of the Pilgrim host, the writer turns from the mutable to the Immutable—from the finite to the Infinite—from the desert's shifting sands to the stable Everlasting Rock—from man to God—"Lord, YOU have been our dwelling-place in all generations!"

Beautiful and significant is the figure employed—all the more impressive, by reason of very contrast, must it have been to the Hebrews, first after their long enslaved, and now entering their nomad, life. The permanent dwelling was to them not even a memory. If entertained at all, it could only be the dream and aspiration of some ideal future. It was the psalm of a homeless, expatriated race, who "wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle."

Most of us know what HOME is. There is music in the name which no words can describe. It is not locality or scenery which makes home. A prison is not a home—a castle or palace with gilded ceilings, if there be no living, loving voices, is not home. Home is wherever the affections gather round treasured objects. It is the center of love; the spot where the spirit, worn and jaded with life's bustle, harassed with its anxieties and disappointments, delights to fold its weary wing—that blessed refuge where cherished tones chase sorrow from the heart, and tender hands smooth the wrinkles which care has been ploughing on the cheek.

The believer has his Home too, the majestic sanctuary of Infinite love. And there is no true dwelling-place or resting-place for the immortal soul but this. Yes! surrounded though we be with lavish profusion of material comforts and blessings, still there is in every heart a restless, unsatisfied craving after a higher good. No finite portion can adequately meet these infinite longings. The homeless child strayed from his father's house—weeping for its lost residence—is a picture of the soul astray from its home and happiness in the all-glorious God.

But once we can take up the sublime utterance of the leader of the Hebrews, "Lord, You have been our dwelling-place," then what a home is ours, with its perfect repose and everlasting inviolable security! Not the desert tent, not the temporary shade and shelter and refreshment of the Elim palm-grove and its springs, but the chief Divine reality which these earthly images foreshadowed. In that enduring mansion all fears are lulled to rest, all misgivings dispelled.

It is a garrisoned home with many rooms in it; each room an attribute of the Eternal. For "the name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it, and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). And though thousands upon thousands have rushed, in bypast ages, to these magnificent chambers, still there is room. Age cannot impair their safety, time cannot crumble down their walls. It is delightful to think of the many, since the hour when Moses penned it, who have already sung this glorious anthem. The captive in his dungeon, the martyr at the stake, the orphan in his loneliness, the widow in her agony, the sick one on his couch, the dying one in his last moments. Yes, and those, too, out amid the battle of life, the daily fever and turmoil of existence, the fret and friction of busy

tempted hours—such heroes of God, as they breast "the loud stunning tide," include it among the cherished "melodies of the everlasting chime!"

As in the case of Pilgrim Israel, we have ever and anon imparted to us, in touching impressiveness, the same world-wide lesson—that we can make no home or refuge of any creature or created good. "They shall perish" is written on the best of earthly palm-trees. It is engraved on many a tombstone—carved on the shattered lintels of many a broken heart. Home!—with not a few it is a ruin, the wreck and debris of a hallowed past, the grave of fond hopes and departed joys and blighted affections. Some who trace these lines may be able thus to sing this oldest strain of the Psalter only through their tears.

God may have been proclaiming to you, through severe and varied discipline, that earth is not your home, that you are but sojourners here, that your dwellings are not freehold but leasehold. He would lead you not to mistake the shelter of the wayfarer for the permanent abiding Mansion; the perishable refuge for the magnificent clefts of the Rock of Ages. He would lead you, as "strangers on earth," to have your "citizenship in heaven." These trials may be only the tones of His own tender voice, issuing the invitation—"Go, My people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until His wrath has passed by" (Isaiah 26:20). He may be putting a thorn in your earthly nest and earthly home, to drive you to the wing and teach you to warble as you soar up to heaven's gate—"Lord, amid the frailty and failing of all created things, I turn to the One only unfailing, unvarying, unchanging portion! My dwelling place shall henceforth be in You. My flesh and my heart fails, but You are the strength of my heart and my portion forever!"

In such a Home, when fully realized and tested as no phantasm and shadow—but a sublime truth, who cannot enjoy, even with regard to earthly things, the feeling of satisfaction and of safety? "You will keep him in perfect peace (lit. 'peace, peace') whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." The child dreads no danger so long as the strong encompassing arm of his father is around him. The winter storm may revel at will outside, but in the paternal dwelling he is safe. There is a special promise given to all who thus confidingly resort to the Everlasting

God as their home and portion. "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your habitation; there shall no evil (no real evil) befall you" (Ps. 91:9, 10). In the most adverse circumstances He will prove to His people their protector; so that, in the words put into the lips of Ezekiel, "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods" (Ezek. 34:25), in the unlikeliest places and seasons they may feel sweetly secure. It is in Himself that His own promise has its most glorious fulfillment—"Your people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Isa. 32:18).

Nor can we omit a closing reference to the last clause of our motto-verse—"in all generations." A noble thought—Jehovah the unchanging dwelling-place of His Church and His people in every age! Even Moses, who had not the long centuries of holy tradition and divine and saintly memory we enjoy, loved to repose on the thought of God, not only as "the God of his fathers," but as the God of all the years, as well as of all the families of earth. Perhaps he penned the psalm some night in the desert—night with its darkness, as in the shadow of the Almighty's wings. He may have delighted to think that the same silent stars which kept vigil over the tents of Mamre, Shechem, and Bethel in the generations of old, were stooping that hour over the sleeping earth.

But more comforting still the reflection, that He who lighted up these altar-fires in the great nightly temple, was ever living and loving; the unchanging sanctuary of His people from age to age. The generations had passed away and perished—He was still, and ever would be, the same. Let ours be the prayer, "Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go!"

And, as in the picture of a blessed earthly home, there must be harmony of will and congeniality of taste and feeling among the occupants, let it be our constant and lofty aspiration that our human wills may gradually be made to agree with the Divine, our hearts filled with love to Him, and love for all on whom His own boundless love is lavished. Having this as the master passion—the dominant principle in our regenerated nature, the motive principle of our spiritual life, we shall know that as children we are within the dwelling-place of our Father, "For he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him."



"Let the beauty of the Lord," is the closing prayer of the psalm, "be upon us:" or as that is rendered in the Targum, "Let the sweetness of the garden of Eden be upon us;" that beauty and sweetness which is better than shade of palm-tree, or breath of flower, or music of fountain—the habitual realization of God's gracious favor and paternal guardianship —"They shall rest in His love" (Zeph. 3:17).

"Plan not, nor scheme, but calmly wait,  
His choice is best.  
While blind and erring is thy sight;  
His wisdom sees and judges right,  
So trust and rest.

"Strive not, nor struggle; thy poor might  
Can never wrest  
The meanest thing to serve thy will.  
All power is His alone: Be still,  
And trust and rest."

"What dost thou fear? His wisdom reigns  
Supreme confessed;  
His power is infinite; His love  
Thy deepest, Fondest dreams above,  
So trust and rest."

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

## **ALL FOR GOOD**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" Romans 8:28.

This verse rises like a tapering palm-tree in the midst of its group. The precious chapter from which it is taken may itself be likened to a grove of these—each separate frond whispering of refreshment and rest in Jesus!

It has been thought by some, that this section of the Apostle's inspired letter was specially designed for the encouragement and consolation of the Christians who were then suffering under the inhuman persecution of the Emperor Nero. We can imagine, when these martyr-spirits were about to be cast to the lions, or when, covered with tar and pitch, they were led forth to the gardens of the Quirinal to have the torch applied to them in order to illuminate the city, how the solacing words of the Divine 'keepsake' would sustain their tortured frames, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (ver. 18). Nor would any word in all the Epistle be more comforting than our motto-verse—"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him." It is placed, so to speak, in the center of the palm-grove—in the center of this wonderful galaxy of Divine truth and consolation. It cheered the old Roman Christians under a great fight of afflictions. It has proved a balm-word of comfort to millions of wounded spirits ever since.

The Apostle here makes the glorious assertion, that whatever befalls God's children, their joys, sorrows, comforts, crosses, losses, all are a part of a Divine plan and arrangement, whose issue and result is their good. There is nothing so incredible to unbelief as this. That bitter pang which tore up my hopes by the root! that unexpected poverty! that anguished sickbed! that crushing bereavement! how can I write 'good' upon these? How can this broken heart ever endorse such a statement as that of the sacred writer?

Yes! but faith should do so; faith CAN do so. Paul would have uttered what no Roman Christian, or any other Christian, would have credited, had he said 'we see.' But observe, his language is the utterance of believing trust—"the confidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). He says, "we know." Behind that dark cloud he speaks with assured conviction of a shining face. At that loom which the world calls 'fate,' with these tangled, confused, mazy threads, he could tell of a Divine Designer who holds the shuttle in His hand, and who understands (what the spectator often does

not understand) that all is for good. He was himself a living testimony to the truth of his assertion. His bonds and imprisonment; how seemingly inappropriate! What a blow to the Church! How fatal to the progress of the truth! Can Paul's Lord be really supervising and controlling all? So may have reasoned some unfaithful hearts at the very time when in his dungeon he was writing this clause in one of his letters—"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil. 1:12).

Are there not many who can tell the same? I believe few can fail to look back on some dark passages in their history—dark at the time—full of mystery—that led even to gloomy and unworthy thoughts regarding God—but who can see them now to be bright with mercy—some wise reason for mysterious dealings come to light, which at the moment was indiscernible. And if such be, with any, a present experience—the cloud, without apparently even the 'silver lining'—be it theirs to trust. 'The good' will yet be unfolded. Yes! take that short comforting parenthesis, and let it fling its ray of comfort against the gloom—"Though now for a little while (IF NEED BE) you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." The rainbow will yet appear in the cloud. God will be His own Interpreter.

Again. How wide is this assertion of the Apostle! He does not say, 'We know that some things,' or 'most things,' or 'joyous things.' But "ALL things." From the minutest to the most momentous; from the humblest event in daily providence to the great crisis-hours in grace.

And all things "WORK"—they are working; not all things have worked, or shall work, but it is a present operation. At this very moment, when some voice may be saying, "Your judgments are a great mystery;" the angels above, who are watching the development of the great plan, are with folded wings exclaiming, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Ps. 145:17).

And then all things "WORK TOGETHER." It is a beautiful blending. Many different colors, in themselves raw and unsightly, are required in order to weave the harmonious pattern. Many separate tones and notes of music, even discords and dissonances, are required to make up the

harmonious anthem. Many separate wheels and joints are required to make the piece of machinery. Take a thread separately, or a note separately, or a wheel or a tooth of a wheel separately, and there may be no discernible beauty or use. But complete the web, combine the notes, put together the separate parts of steel and iron, and you see how perfect and symmetrical is the result.

Here is the lesson for faith—"What I do," says God, "you know not now, but you shall know hereafter." We must, meanwhile, take the bitter with the sweet. The Great Physician knows that all the ingredients in His dealings are for our good. HE mixes them. The cup He gives us to drink; and "shall we not drink it?" God is said to make His chariot—What? Is it the sunshine? Is it the clusters of gleaming stars or radiant planets? No, it is the CLOUDS. But that cloudy chariot has an axle of love. And though clouds and darkness are round about His throne, mercy and truth go continually before His face. Beautifully says our countryman, the distinguished missionary and traveler, Livingstone: "We who see such small segments of the mighty cycles of God's providence, often imagine some to be failures, which He does not. If we could see a larger arc of the great providential cycle, we might sometimes rejoice when we weep. But God gives no account of any of His matters. We must just trust to His wisdom."

Let us be assured of this, He has our best interests at heart. He has what is here called our 'GOOD' in view. It may not be, it will not be, the world's definition of good—riches, honors, glory, worldly prosperity. But it will be better. It is our soul's good, ripening the immortal part of us for glory. He may cause His north wind and His south wind to blow: we may see nothing but the hurricane bending the palm branches and ruffling the tender flowers; but what is the result? "The spices flow out," the fragrance of the Christian graces are wafted around, and the Beloved comes into His garden. "Glory to God for ALL!" were Chrysostom's last words.

"What seems so dark to thy dim sight  
May be a shadow, seen aright,  
Making some brightness doubly bright.

"The flash that struck thy tree—no more

To shelter thee—lets heaven's blue floor  
Shine where it never shone before.

"The cry wrung from thy spirit's pain  
May echo on some far-off plain,  
And guide a wanderer home again."

Oh, if not now, at least in the light of eternity, looking down from the everlasting hills on the long vista of the earthly valley, we shall be able joyfully to attest, "He has done all things well." "Men see not yet the bright light in the clouds," "But it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light!" We may have to wait until we obtain entrance within the Gates; but then, at least, the sentiment will be subscribed—rather will the lips be attuned for the everlasting song—"We have known and believed the love that God has to us!"

"Still we study, always failing!  
God can read it, we must wait;  
Wait, until He teach the mystery,  
Then the wisdom-woven history  
Faith shall read and love translate.

"Leaflets now unpagged and scattered  
Time's great library receives;  
When eternity shall bind them,  
Golden volumes we shall find them,  
God's light falling on the leaves."

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

## **THE SYMPATHY OF JESUS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." Hebrews 2:18

There can be no more gracious whisper from the leaves of the Heavenly Palm than this. What a magnitude of comfort to every sorrowing one, the simple declaration, "He Himself suffered when He was tempted!" Jesus the Incarnate God, "the Living Kinsman" (Job 19:25), had a mysterious identity of experience with His suffering, and with His tempted people; so that nothing can happen to the members but what has happened to the Head. They can feel that no sorrow shades their souls but the same darkened His. "As He is," so are they "in this world" (1 John 4:17). He Himself—the thorn-crowned King—knows every thorn which pierces them, every pang of spirit and pang of body. The loss of beloved friends, the treachery of false ones, temptation to distrust God's providence, to pervert and misapply His Word, to question the wisdom and reason of His dealings, the forecastings of a dark and troubled future; yes, the saddest and most intolerable woe that can crush and overbear the soul—the sense of Divine desertion—the withdrawal of the countenance of His Heavenly Father. Oh, the unutterable solace in the darkest hour of earthly suffering, to look up to the Brother in our nature—the "prevailing Prince" who has "power with God," and to say, "He Himself suffered when He was tempted!"

When we first contemplate this amazing theme, the identity of experience seems to be partial and incomplete. Jesus, we are led to say, was never 'tempted' as we have been. Temptations might assail, but they could never overcome His sinless, spotless, uncontaminated humanity. He never could know, therefore, the sorest part of these our struggles, when through its own weakness the soul has at last to succumb to the hurricane, and is haunted with the terrors of remorse!

Yes! but let us remember it was the very fact of the Infinite purity of the tempted One which imparted, in His case, the saddest element to temptation. How inconceivable the recoil of the refined and exquisite sensibilities of His holy nature from the presence of sin. And, with these unchanged human sensibilities in His glorified state, how deeply must He still sympathize with the case of His assaulted people! How tenderly must He feel for every wound of His soldiers, seeing that He, the Captain of their salvation, was Himself "made perfect through sufferings."

Afflicted believer! rejoice that sorrow and suffering have (if the

expression dare be used) assimilated Christ with you, and you with Christ, in this your trial-hour. With what a divine significance, augmented and intensified by subsequent experience, can He say, "I know your sorrows." If you are bleeding under some peculiarly heavy infliction of the rod, ready to say in the bitterness of your grief, "No one knows, no one can gauge the depth of my anguish," THE SYMPATHY OF JESUS can—He does! "He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." With reverence we say it, God—the Omnipotent, Omniscient God—cannot, with all infinitude of His nature, sympathize. He can compassionate; but He cannot sympathize in the way of feeling with us. Sympathy requires, as its two conditions, identity of nature and identity of experience. "We have such a High Priest;" One who is said to be (not touched with our infirmities), but "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Our beautiful motto-verse gives more comfort still. The words affirm not merely that Christ has identity of experience—a passive sympathy with His tried people—He is also the helper of the tempted, "He is able to support those who are tempted."

If He is summoning any of us to difficult and perplexing duty, or exacting from us some heavy sacrifice, or even apparently placing us in the way of peril and temptation, He will not allow the burden to crush, or the temptation to overcome, or the fiery trial to consume. He will keep us in the crucible as long, but no longer than He sees to be absolutely needful to test our faith and purify Christian graces. All that concerns us and ours is in His hands.

Oh, as we see the Angels of Tribulation with their sevenfold vials issuing forth from the gate of heaven (Rev. 15:7)—how blessed to know that they are marshaled, commissioned by the great Lord of Angels, the once suffering but now exalted Redeemer! In Zechariah's vision (1:8) of "the man on the red horse"—behind Him were angels and providences—the "black and speckled white horses." But He is between them, ordering, regulating, appointing, all that befalls His people, trusting their persons and fortunes not even to an angel's care, without His own guidance, sanction, and direction.

And when the last hour arrives (which, however varied be our other experiences, we must all encounter), is it not here that His sympathy—the sympathy of fellow-feeling—is most of all valued? He can endorse even this closing experience with the words, "I know it." To the living Christian in his season of affliction, He can say, "I am He who lives." But to the dying Christian He can add, "I am He who was dead." "I know well, through the memories of My cross and passion, the conflict of that final struggle-hour! I know, what it is, O Believer, to die! And because I know this, I can make Palms of comfort to spring up and overshadow you on the brink of Jordan as well as in the wilderness! Fear not to pass what I have passed! Feel amid these buffeting billows that they have swept over Me. And with the thought of Me as your Precursor, and of My deathless exalted sympathy, sing, as you plunge into the stream, "Behold, the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth passes over before me into Jordan!" (Joshua 3:11).

"As often, with worn and weary feet,  
We tread earth's rugged valley o'er,  
The thought, how comforting and sweet!  
Christ walked this toilsome path before!  
Our needs and weaknesses He knows,  
From life's first dawning to its close.

"Just such as I, this earth He trod,  
With every human ill but sin;  
And though indeed the very God,  
As I am now, so He has been.  
My God, my Savior, look on me  
With pity, love, and sympathy!"

"Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart."

## **THE WIND TEMPERED**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—



"He stays (restrains) His rough wind in the day of the east wind." Isaiah 27:8

This is a sheltering verse to those who, in a figurative sense, are exposed to the swoop of the hot desert wind. Under one of God's own Palms we can sit and calmly meditate on the blessed promise, here given under expressive imagery, that He will never allow our trials or His discipline to go too far!

"Man is born to trouble." Sorrow is the common heritage of a suffering world. And not only are the "rough wind" and the "east wind" ever and anon racing by, but He does not conceal that it is He who sends them. It is specially spoken of and designated here as "His rough wind." In the blighting of Jonah's gourd, we are told "The Lord prepared a vehement east wind:" and in the bold and sublime language of the Psalmist, He is similarly represented as "walking on the wings of the wind." So too in moral hurricanes. "Who knows not in all these things that the hand of the Lord has wrought this?"

But (and this is the more special truth which claims our attention), if that east wind blows, He will not allow it to sweep too vehemently; and when it receives its mission from Him, He will not allow "the rough wind" to be let loose at the same time from its chambers. He will moderate adversity! "He knows our frame." According to the common proverb, "He will temper the wind to the shorn lamb." He did not make Israel feel at one and the same time lack of bread and lack of water. The manna had been provided when they were suffering from the deprivation of the other priceless boon, water. Look at the first clause of the somewhat enigmatical words which form our motto-verse—"In measure you will contend with it." "In measure!" Or, as in another place, "I will correct you in measure" (Jer. 30:11).

God has no capricious dealings! All will be scrupulously weighed out in the balances of His wisdom and faithfulness. He **CONSIDERS** the soul in adversity (Ps. 31:7). "When He winnows," as Matthew Henry says, "He sends a gentle gale to blow away the chaff, not to blow away the corn." He will cause us to sing of mercy in the midst of judgment, and fulfill His own promise, "As your day is, so shall your strength be."

Who has not sat under this gracious Elim palm and experienced the truth of the assertion? Is it the hour of bereavement?—the time when, above all others, the east wind may be said to blow, nipping early spring buds, or blighting tender blossoms, or strewing autumn leaves. Who has not then to tell of amazing support?—some sweet solaces which have tended to moderate the sweep of the hurricane, break the cruel blow, and disarm trial of much of its severity. Glimpses appear in the midst of the darkness—blue vistas are seen opening in the storm-wreathed sky!

Is it the hour of sickness and protracted suffering? There truly is the east wind—wearing torture, days of pain, nights of weariness, every nerve a chord of anguish. But here, too, it might have been worse. That sufferer (to take one out of many suppositions,) might have been on a foreign shore—away from friends and home and kindly sympathies, dying in unutterable loneliness, with no gentle hand to smooth his pillow. But when, in the midst of cruel bodily pangs, he looks around on faces beaming with kindness—each member of the loving circle animated with one thought and desire—to alleviate pain by offices of tender affection—you can almost picture that ashen and wasted prisoner clasping his hands and muttering in silent gratitude, 'My case might have been far sadder. Thanks be to that gracious and considerate God who restrains His rough wind in the day of His east wind!'

We believe all can own and trace these tender moderations—the prevention of the two winds from blowing simultaneously—God not allowing the bruised reed to be broken, just because it was bruised—laying on the trial with one hand, comforting and binding up with the other—sending whatever harsh wind is needed to bring to the desired haven, not one blast permitted but what is required. "He will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

"Blessed be God," says Chrysostom, "who permitted the tempest; and blessed be God, who has dispersed it and made it a calm." It was not from the lips of one of His own true people, but from a self-outcast and self-exile, that the utterance proceeded, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." His loved and trusting children recognize in Him the Refiner of

silver, who sits by the furnace regulating and tempering the fury of the flames. His fires are for purification, not for destruction.

And at death—seated for the last time under the Elim palms, when the tent is about to be struck for pursuing a more mysterious journey—death, the hour that thousands on thousands have shrunk from and dreaded—yes, the hour which none can contemplate without profound emotion; yet when it does come—when the house of the earthly tabernacle rocks and trembles under the blasts of that inexorable 'east wind,'—the 'rough wind' is restrained. The believer feels the rush of the final hurricane, but he rises above it with the glorious compensating supports and comforts then granted. If his eye is dimming to human smiles, there is a Mightier Presence at his side, which the gathering darkness only renders more visible. When those around him can think, perhaps, only of the terribleness of grappling with the tempest which in a few moments is to reduce all to a heap of ruins; with his last breath he rises above the storm, saying in trembling accents—'Hush your fears! I am walking through the dark valley, but HE is giving me dying grace for a dying hour.' "He restrains His rough wind in the day of the east wind!"

We may appropriately conclude with the words of a sacred singer—  
"Though the clouds are seen ascending,  
Soon the heavens are overcast,  
And the weary heart is bending  
'Neath affliction's stormy blast.

"Yet the Lord, on high presiding,  
Rules the storm with powerful hand;  
He the shower of grace is guiding  
To the dry and barren land.

"See, at length the clouds are breaking—  
Tempests have not passed in vain;  
For the soul, revived, awaking,  
Bears its fruits and flowers again.

"Love divine has seen and counted  
Every tear it caused to fall;

And the storm which love appointed  
Was its choicest gift of all."

"You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress, a shelter in the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall."

## **THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

If the fronds of the palm, by a beautiful Eastern Christian myth to which we have already referred, were said to whisper the name of Jesus, it may surely be averred of the true Heavenly Palm, that the leaves were heard continually to whisper a name, well-nigh, if not altogether, new to God's spiritual Israel—that of FATHER.

And yet, may it not be truthfully asserted regarding many who live under the better dispensation, that there are often distorted views entertained of the nature of God, little in harmony with this Divine Fatherhood? Are there not many who think of Him only as a mighty Architect who has piled infinite space with His handiwork—omnipotent, omniscient—awe-inspiring in His holiness, unrelenting in His justice, implacable in His vengeance. They have fully understood the partial revelation of Him as the punisher of sin, but they have failed to gaze on the glorious complement of His character, as the Gracious and Merciful, the Father and the Friend.

This new paternal relation of Jehovah to His people is manifested in the Person of Him who came to our world the Incarnation of the Divine Spirituality—the unveiler of the essential perfections of Deity. "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He is Himself the articulate answer to the query of His impatient disciple, "Lord, show us the Father,

and that will be enough for us." "He that has seen Me," was the reply, "has seen the Father." As there had been a patriarchal, a legal, an angelic, a prophetic dispensation—so now Christ came as the founder and exponent of a filial one. To take the significant opening words of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews (not as they are rendered in our version, but as they have been rendered in the full force of the original), "God, who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by a Son."

Most delightful surely and comforting is this theme of contemplation—Christ the Revealer of the Father! "The Word," says the beloved Apostle, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (and then follows our motto-verse), "We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Well may He be designated by this appropriate term. For just as 'words' are the outward audible expression of silent invisible thought, so Christ is the expression of the Invisible God, the utterance and embodiment, in human shape, of Him who revealed Himself in the dimness of an earlier dispensation as "Secret," "Wonderful," "Incomprehensible."

"From henceforth," says Christ, pointing to Himself, "you know the Father, and have seen Him" (John 14:7). How He dwells upon the very name! How He delights to interweave it with parable and miracle, and intercessory prayer, and last agony, and first Resurrection-words! Well He knew the tender associations the image would call forth among the millions who pondered the story of His incarnation. He would have the sacred earthly relation transfused into the Heavenly. As He puts His people in the clefts of the Rock, and makes all the glory of His goodness to pass by, the proclamation is made, "My Father and your Father, My God and your God!"

The opening invocation of His own Universal Prayer is "Our Father." He would have them to know and to feel, even in the house of their earthly tabernacle, that they are pacing a Father's halls—a dwelling frescoed and decorated with a Father's love! In seeing Him they see the Father (John 14:7). In asking Him for some needed blessing, they ask the Father. The names are interchangeable. "The Father will give you whatever you ask in

My name."

Oh, how near does all this bring the great God Almighty! How it represents Him, as regarding with especial and individual love, each member of His redeemed family; caring for their needs, sympathizing with their sorrows, bearing with their infirmities; loving them—we had almost said doting on them as a Father. How different from the heathen conception of their deities, living in the isolation of a voluptuous calm; far removed from the concerns of earth, devoid of all personal interest in those from whom, nevertheless, they demanded cruel offerings, and over whom they were often represented as reveling in bloodthirsty vengeance.

"God in Christ," "God with us"—"with us," as truly as Jesus was with the anxious Nicodemus, or with the sisters of Bethany, or with the widow at Nain, or with the disciples tossed on their midnight sea, or with the downcast wayfarers on the road to Emmaus. "God with us"—brought down from the regions of infinite abstraction; challenging our perfect confidence and trustful love. Even in our Gethsemanes of deepest sorrow, we can take the cup as He did in His midnight watch, and say, "O my Father! If it be possible!"

Realizing this glorious truth, we can breathe the timeworn litany, with the consciousness of a new meaning and trust—"O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!" O my gracious Father! I will measure You no longer by any low human standard. Let the gentleness and kindness of Him who walked this earth as Your Image, teach me evermore to repose unhesitatingly in the everlasting kindness of Your Infinite heart. Under this glorious shelter—the shade of this Palm of Elim, "I will lay me down in peace and sleep;" for God is my Father; and GOD is Love! Yes, and even though that love should at times be veiled, and the leaves of the earthly palm tree be saturated with "the dews of the night," I shall strive to remember the new sacred Covenant relation, and with a child's unwavering trust breathe the words the Divine Revealer Himself has taught me—"Yes, FATHER, for this was Your good pleasure!"

"O Father! not my will, but Thine be done,"  
So spoke the Son.

Be this our charm, mellowing earth's ruder noise  
Of griefs and joys;  
That we may cling forever to Thy breast  
In perfect rest."

"I delight to sit in His shade."

## **TRANSCENDENTLY ABLE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephesians 3:20

Could the Israelites at Elim fail to recall their immediately preceding wilderness experience? It was the depressing and discouraging one at Marah, where their longings and hopes were mocked with the bitter pool. But the God of the cloudy pillar made it the occasion of manifesting His wondrous power and boundless resources, showing that "with Him all things are possible." A tree cast into the acrid waters transformed them into sweetness.

In all the difficulties, perplexities, and emergencies of the spiritual life, we may well rest with the consolatory question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"—rejoicing in Him, who, as the true Healing Tree, changes—often reverses—the bitterest experiences. His hand is "never shortened that it cannot save."

Wondrous and beautiful is the expression of the Great Apostle which heads this meditation—that verse with its grand repetition of words—its significant and touching repetition. See how the gradation rises. See how he mounts, as by a golden ladder, to his magnificent climax! Christ is "able to do," Christ is "able to do abundantly," Christ is "able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think."—And then, as if he had not unburdened his soul of the full truth, the "goodly matter" his heart was composing, he adds another stone to the pyramid—"Exceeding

abundantly above all that we ask or think."

Let us rejoice in such a complete Savior as this, sufficient for all temporal and all spiritual necessities: who can bind up the broken body; who can bind up the broken soul; ease the aching head, and quiet the aching spirit; who can reclaim the wandering and save the lost. What earthly friend can help us so? Who else, but He, can fill with His presence and love the gap in the sorrow-stricken heart? But He can; He does! Lover and friend may be put far from us; what we once most cherished and doted on may be stricken with inevitable change; the roof where childhood reveled may be a heap of ruins, or inhabited by strangers; the parents' arms that clasped us as we lisped our infant prayer, or which smoothed our pillows in sickness, may be decaying in the dust; voices that cheered us on the pilgrimage may be hushed in appalling silence.

But here is One who is Father, Brother, Physician, Friend, Home, ALL! His power intervenes and upholds where other resources fail or reveal their inadequacy. No storm can overturn that Home of unblighted love! No envious whisper can estrange that true Friend! No King of terrors can paralyze the Everlasting arms! "The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation exalted." Oh! blessed it is for the broken and downcast in the hour of crushing disappointment, or baffled plans, or defeated hope, or blighted affection: or, more than all, in that moment of greatest agony, when returning from the grave to the silent house of bereavement—entering the lessened fold, and marking the empty place in the flock—blessed it is to feel the Abiding Friend filling the empty place and the aching heart; challenging our trust and reliance in His ability thus to do for us "exceeding abundantly." Life's Elim-palms may be gone, but the Divine Pillar-cloud remains! "I will never leave you; I will (lit.) never, never, never forsake you."

He gives too, not only above what we ask, but above what we think. Whatever our thoughts may be, His thoughts of love transcend them. Able to do for us, and willing to do for us, in a measure exceeding our highest conceptions. What a treasure-house of thoughts is every human bosom! What a strange history it would be (of hope, joy, fear, sadness, and brightness), were each heart unfolded! But it is, indeed, a precious assurance to every child of God, that for every thought of his (be they



anxious, disquieting, misgiving), there is a counterpart comfort. For the multitude of thoughts there is a corresponding multitude of consolations! "Many, O Lord my God, are Your thoughts which are toward us. The things You planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare." No, truly, God's comforting thoughts outweigh and outbalance all our experiences of sadness and sorrow. "For a small moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you!"

"Great our need, but greater far  
Is our Father's loving power;  
He upholds each mighty star,  
He unfolds each tiny flower.  
Ask not how, but trust Him still;  
Ask not when, but wait His will;  
Simply on His word rely,  
God shall all your need supply.

"Can we count redemption's treasure,  
Scan the glory of God's love?  
Such shall be the boundless measure  
Of His blessing from above.  
All we ask, or think, and more,  
He will give in bounteous store;  
No good thing will He deny,  
God shall all your need supply."

"Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you."

## **RIGHT GUIDANCE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle." Psalm 107:7

This is a stray note from one of the grandest Psalms, whether of the Exodus or the Captivity. Its refrain, four times repeated, is the Lord's 'goodness' and His 'wonderful works'—and that, too, despite of all the 'solitariness' and 'hunger' and 'thirst,' the 'distress and labor,' the 'darkness and shadow of death,' which checkered the experience of the pilgrim tribes. The psalm ends, as does many a life-psalm still, with the declaration, "Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord" (v. 43).

Observe, however, it was a retrospective song. In its primary application to the march through the Sinai wilderness it could have been sung but falteringly, when the God of the pillar-cloud often seemed to fail "satisfying the longing soul, and filling the hungry soul with goodness" (v. 9). Is it not often so with us? The pillar, alike of cloud and of fire, is there; but we cannot discern, or we hesitate to follow it. We are prone to harbor guilty conjectures as to the uprightness and wisdom and faithfulness of the divine procedure and plan. Confronted with baffling providences, the reason of which perplexes our best ingenuity, we are tempted at times to ask, 'Why these unanswered—no, defeated prayers?—the urgent plea not only left unheard, but responded to in the way we most dreaded and deprecated—the circuitous route "by the way of the wilderness," instead of the short and apparently safe one direct to Canaan?'

To take an illustration suitable to the words of our motto-verse, many a mother pleads in earnest supplication that God may overrule events and arrangements so as to prevent her son going to some place—some "city of habitation" that might too surely prove a position of peril or temptation. How is her prayer at times answered? Her child is sent to the distant, dreaded city, instead of being continued under the fostering influences and salutary restraints of home. In silence and seclusion, and under the bitter consciousness of frustrated wishes, she is driven to give way to the plaintive soliloquy, "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord, and my cause is disregarded by my God." So thought and reasoned an illustrious name in the roll of Christian parents—Monica, the devout mother of Augustine. He tells us in his "Confessions" that she had besought earnestly—pleaded night and day—that the God she served would not permit her son to fulfill his own wish and intention of leaving his home

and going to Italy. She too truly feared the vices and contaminations of the Roman capital. Yet her prayers were not heard. To Italy he went, and in Rome he sojourned; and the yearning heart he had left behind could only picture, in her hours of lone agony, the moral shipwreck of all that was dearest to her. But the journey, and the resort so dreaded, became to Augustine his spiritual birthplace. That city of moral darkness was made to him a Bethel for the visions of God, where he erected his life altar, and vowed his eternal vow.

There is surely marvelous blessedness in the thought that the bounds of our habitation are divinely appointed! Our lots in life—our occupations, our positions, our dwellings—what the fatalist calls our destinies—what heathen mythology attributed to the Fates—all this is marked out by Him who "sees the end from the beginning." "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." It is He who takes us to the distant dwelling—it may be the distant land. It is He who takes us from solitude—from grove and woodland and murmuring brook—from the green fields of childhood and youth, and brings us among the swirlings and currents of some busy market. It is He who takes us to our sweet shelters of prosperity—our Elim-groves with their sparkling springs of joy. It is He who, when He sees fit, conducts us into the land of drought and among the tents of Kedar. He gives the gourd—He sends the worm.

Oh, it is our comfort to know, in this mysterious, complicated, varied, changeful life of ours, that there is One above and over all, evolving good out of evil and order out of confusion. He sent Onesimus, the runaway slave, to Rome—and Lydia, the seller of purple, to Philippi—and Zaccheus, the tax-gatherer, to Jericho—and Paul, the bigot Pharisee, to Damascus. But these, and other notable examples, were brought there for their souls' everlasting welfare; and the new song was put into their lips—"Praise be to the Lord, for He showed His wonderful love to us when we were in a besieged city."

How many still can tell the same? Their choice of residence seemed to them something purely arbitrary and capricious. A mere trifle seemed, as they thought, to have determined or altered their whole future. But the finger of God had, unknown, been pointing. The inarticulate voice of God had been calling them forth "by the right way, that they might go to the

city of habitation." Human,—it may be base and unworthy purposes—are often thwarted and counteracted by the higher purposes of the Supreme Disposer. How many can say, in the words of one (Joseph,) who, more than most, could, through a strange series of baffling providences, vindicate the ways of the Almighty to men—"So then," said Egypt's princely ruler, as he confronted the fratricides who stood embarrassed in his presence—"so then, it was not you that brought me here, but God!"

His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. "A man devises his (own) ways; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." O that we could believe that at times the denial of our prayers may be the best, the kindest, the fatherly answer to them; that when crossed and defeated in our ambitions after what we think is for our good, we are tempted to pronounce with the patriarch the hasty verdict, "All these things are against me!" we could trust the ALL-LOVING FATHER to guide our steps, not according to our finite and inaccurate wisdom, but according to the counsel of His sovereign but gracious will.

Many of His own children have had to confront what was bitter and painful—leaving the quiet nooks and valleys of life for the storm-clouds of the tempestuous mountain. Let them trust their sure, unfaltering Guide, that He will bring light out of darkness, and show that, often in an apparently adverse lot, there are undreamt-of blessings in reversals either for themselves or for others. "To think," says Lady Powerscourt, "that led by Him we are safe from everything. No evil shall ever touch us—evil at the end, or evil on the way—all is paved with love." There ought, indeed, to be no such thing as 'misfortune' or 'accident' in the vocabulary of the children of God. Theirs may not be the bright way, the pleasant way, the way of their own choosing. It may be the very reverse. It may be thorny and sunless and rugged. But it is His appointing, and therefore must be "the right way."

Meanwhile be it ours to sit in calmness and confidence under the shadow of our wilderness palm, feeling assured that the day is coming when, with ingathered Israel, we shall be able—no longer in the desert encampment, but within 'the gates of the city'—to take up the noble strain of which our motto-verse forms a part—

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,  
For His mercy endures forever.  
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy.  
And gathered them out of the lands,  
From the east, and from the west,  
from the north, and from the south.  
They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way;  
They found no city to dwell in.  
Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.  
Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble,  
And He delivered them out of their distresses.  
And He led them forth by the right way,  
That they might go to a city of habitation.  
O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness,  
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

## **HIGHER USES**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"The Lord needs them."—Matthew 21:3

Greatly would an Israelite, in the "Desert of the Wandering," have been startled and saddened, if, as he sat reclining under the shadow of one of these Elim palms, he had seen an axe suddenly placed at its root; and that which hour after hour had been gladdening him with its screening boughs, laid prostrate with the ground.

Similar, often, is it in the case of the bereaved; when loved ones, under whose shadow they have rested, have suddenly succumbed to the stroke of the Great Destroyer! In a moment, the joy and zest of life seems gone.

Today, it was the gentle rustling of the green leaf overhead. Tomorrow, the place that once knew it knows it no more. "The shadow from the heat" is exchanged for the pitiless rays of the scorching sun and a dreary outlook of drifting sands. "How is the staff broken, and the beautiful rod!"

"What do you mean by this waste?" are the words which in such seasons and experiences ring their dreary echo in the ear. Why that life of consecrated activity so suddenly paralyzed? Why this Isaac laid on the altar of sacrifice? Why is yonder Lazarus laid low in the prime of youthful manhood? Why that loving and useful existence lost prematurely to the Church and the world? The seared and withered leaves of autumn drop in their season to the ground; but why this withering of the early blossom—this abnormal falling of the green and tender foliage? The blighted thorns of the wilderness may be swept away, but why make havoc among that Elim palm-grove?

One reply we have placed at the head of this meditation. They are words once put by the Divine Savior Himself into the lips of His disciples. We need not stop to note upon what occasion. But like many of the gracious utterances which proceeded from His lips, they were intended and designed to be a quieting solace for His people in all time of their tribulation—"The Lord needs them." There are flowers needed to waft their perfume and swing their censers in the gardens of immortality. There are "ministering ones" needed in the Sanctuary above. Yes, if there are no battles there to fight—no armor to prove—no harps "on the willows" forbidding to sing the Lord's song—there are noble positions of active service in which the unresting energies of the glorified are engaged.

Christian mourners! who, it may be, are now lamenting over your withered flowers—the empty places at your table—the music of cherished voices hushed for the forever of time. They formed a part of yourselves; sharers of your thoughts and toils, identified with all your plans in life: soothers and strengtheners in your anxious hours—ministering angels at your beds of pain. Their presence had become apparently indispensable: and now their absence or withdrawal is like the blotting out of the sun from his place in the firmament.

Too truly you may feel, day by day, in the depths of your lonely, aching

hearts, how you could ill afford—how much you had "need" of 'the loved and lost.' But take this as the explanation—let all murmurs be stilled by the higher claim and Claimant. It is a beautiful thought in one of the finest of the sonnets of Dante, as he wails the absence of Beatrice, that "the angels had asked God for her." We do not have to imagine the intervention of angels—"The Lord has need" of the crowned and glorified. At such deathbeds we are too apt, like Jacob with the mysterious Wrestler at Jabbok, in the agony of nature's fond struggle, to say, "We will not let you go!"—But hark! as the wing is pluming for its immortal flight, let the gentle whisper come to us, rebuking all tears, "Let me go, for the Day breaks!"—let me go, for "the Lord needs me!"—"If you loved me, you would rejoice because I said, I go unto my Father!" Glorify God by meek submission to His holy will.

"You have done well to kneel and say,  
'Since He who gave can take away,  
And bid me suffer, I obey.'"

Rejoicing, that the loss you mourn is not that of a treasure hidden in the earth: no, rather, a golden coin stamped in the mint of heaven is withdrawn from its uses in the Church below, for the higher and holier purposes of the Great Master in the Church of the glorified. It is the infant life of the present, passed, it may be at a bound, to its full development in the manhood of heaven. "The Master has come, and calls for you" (John 11:28); and the word accompanying the call is this: "Friend, come up higher!" If it was from strength to strength and from grace to grace on earth, it is now from glory to glory!

"Up above, the tree with leaf unfading,  
By the everlasting river's brink,  
And the sea of glass, beyond whose margin  
Never yet the sun was known to sink.

"Up above, the host no man can number,  
In white robes, a palm in every hand,  
Each some work sublime forever working  
In the spacious tracts of that great land.

"Up above, the thoughts that know not anguish,  
Tender care, sweet love for us below;  
Noble pity, free from anxious terror,  
Larger love, without a touch of woe.

"Up above, a music that entwines  
With eternal threads of golden sound,  
The great poem of this strange existence,  
All whose wondrous meaning hath been found.

"O the rest forever, and the rapture!  
O the hand that wipes the tears away!  
O the golden homes beyond the sunset,  
And the hope that watches o'er the clay!"

"At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out."

## **THE GRACIOUS WORD**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them." Psalm 119:140

This is the precious dew of the Spirit dripping from the branches of the heavenly Palm. As Jonathan, when faint and downcast and weary, found strength and refreshment in partaking of the honey dropping from the trees in the tangled thicket (1 Sam. 14:27); so can every true believer—every true Jonathan ("the beloved of God,") tell as their experience, "Your Word is sweet unto my taste." "Sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb" (Ps.19:10).

In the midst of our duties and difficulties, our cares and perplexities, how many a pang and tear would it save us, if we went with chastened and inquiring hearts to these sacred pages! How many trials would be eased—



how many sorrows soothed, and temptations avoided, if we forestalled every step in existence with the inquiry, "What says the scripture?"—if we preceded every desert encampment with the inquiry what the will of the Lord is? How few, it is to be feared, make (as they should do), the Bible a final court of appeal—a judge for the settlement of all the vexed questions in the consistory of the soul; allaying all misgivings with the resolve, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." May we be preserved from that saddest phase of modern infidelity, the Sacred Volume classed among the worn and barren books of the past, regarded only with that misnamed "veneration" which the collector bestows on some piece of mediaeval armor—a relic and memorial of bygone days, but unsuitable for an age which has superseded the cruder views of these old "chroniclers," and inaugurated a new era of religious development. Vain dreamers! "Forever, O God, Your Word is settled in heaven." "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." "The Word of the Lord is tried."

What a crowd of witnesses could be summoned to give personal evidence of its preciousness and value. How many aching heads would raise themselves from their pillows and tell of their obligations to its soothing messages of love and power! How many deathbeds could send their occupants with pallid lips to tell of the staff which upheld them in the dark valley. How many, in the hour of bereavement, could lay their finger on the promise that first dried the tear from their eye and brought back the smile to their saddened countenances! How many voyagers in life's tempestuous ocean, now landed on the heavenly shore, would be ready to hush their golden harps, and descend to earth with the testimony that this was the blessed beacon-light which enabled them to avoid the treacherous reefs—perilous rocks of temptation—and guided them to their desired haven!

Reason, with your flickering torch, you have never yet guided to such sublime mysteries as these! Philosophy, you have never yet, as this Book has done, taught a man how to die! Science, you have penetrated the mysteries of nature, sunk your shafts into earth's recesses, unburied its stores, counted its strata, measured the height of its massive pillars down to the very pedestals of primeval granite; you have tracked the lightning,

traced the path of the tornado, revealed the distant planet, foretold the coming of the comet and the return of the eclipse. But you have never been able to gauge the depths of the human soul, with its mighty cravings and yearnings, or to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

No; this antiquated Volume is still the "Book of books," the oracle of oracles, the beacon of beacons; the poor man's treasury, the sick man's health, the dying man's life. It has shallows for the child to walk in, depths for giant intellect to explore and adore! Philosophy, if she would admit it, is indebted here for the noblest of her maxims. Poetry, for the loftiest of her themes. Painting has gathered here her noblest inspiration. Music has ransacked these golden stores for the grandest of her strains. And if there be life in the Church of Christ—if her ministers and missionaries are carrying the torch of salvation through the world, where is that torch lighted but at these same altar fires? When a philosophy, "falsely so called," shall become dominant, and seek, with its proud dogmas, to supersede this divine system; when the old Bible of Augustine and Luther, of Baxter and Bunyan, of Brainerd and Martyn, is clasped and closed—the only code of morality worth speaking of will have perished from the earth. Dagon will have taken the place of God's ark; the world's funeral pile may be kindled.

Let us value our Bibles, "dwelling," like Deborah, under these heavenly palm-trees. As they are the souvenirs of our earliest childhood, the gift of a mother's love, or the pledge of a father's affection, so let them be our fondest treasures—the directory of daily life, the friend of prosperity, the solace in adversity, the soothing in suffering, the balm in bereavement; and in the prospect of our own departure let them be the keepsakes and heirlooms which we are most desirous to transmit to our children's children. As we sat under this Elim shade in life's earliest morning, let us be found under it at life's sunset hour; when, stirred by the breath of evening, the fronds whisper to the last, the name of Jesus!

"We praise Thee for the radiance  
Which from the hallowed page,  
A lantern to our footsteps,  
Shines on from age to age.

"It is the golden casket  
Where gems of truth are stored;  
The never-failing Treasure  
Of the Eternal Word.

"It is the chart and compass  
That o'er life's surging sea,  
Mid mists and rocks and quicksands,  
Still guide, O Christ, to Thee.

"Instruct Thy wandering pilgrims,  
By this their path to trace,  
Until, clouds and darkness ended,  
They see Thee face to face."

"I wait on the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope."

## **A REIGNING SAVIOR**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." Revelation 19:6

No Palm in all the grove (specially for the woe-worn pilgrim) has a more gracious or inviting shadow than that whose leaves seem to whisper, "Your God reigns." To change the simile, it forms the foundation truth of all comfort. An old writer speaks of it as the first word spelled in the afflicted man's primer.

Our motto-verse has an interest of its own, in connection with what precedes in the chapter of which it is a part. On the announcement of the destruction of the mystic Babylon in the immediate context, a voice emanates from the celestial throne, "Praise our God, all you His servants, and you who fear Him, both small and great;" and then is heard in response, as it were, "what sounded like a great multitude, and like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.'"

It is striking to note the contrast between the way in which the awful catastrophe, described in the previous chapter, is received on earth and in heaven. On earth there is heard nothing but "weeping and lamentation." The kings and the princes, the mighty men and the merchants, are depicted as robing themselves in sackcloth and casting dust upon their heads. In a bold figure of poetry, an ominous column of smoke is represented catching the eye of the mariners on the distant ocean, as they are speeding along in their vessels loaded with the produce and luxuries of the world. (v. 17)—"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off...and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'"

Such is the case with an awestruck world; but how is it with the Church alike in heaven and upon earth? There the smoke of that tremendous inferno is the signal for a song of jubilee. No tongue is silent. It is taken up by small and great, redeemed and unredeemed; and the tide of triumph increases as it rolls. Every fresh view of this divine judgment affords matter for loftier exultation. At first, the rapt seer heard no more than "a roar of a great multitude in heaven." But the music of the celestial choirs is caught up by the dwellers in the lower sanctuary. It seems "like the voice of a great multitude." Louder still, it becomes "as the roar of rushing waters;" and then, with an ever augmenting volume, it is like "loud peals of thunder"—"Hallelujah! for our Lord God Almighty reigns!"

It is a typical representation of the unfolding of the wisdom and righteousness of all God's dispensations and purposes to His Church—partly unfolded in this world, fully disclosed in the world to come. The song of His people, often raised on earth in feeble, trembling, faltering accents, will be an ever-deepening one, as the "why" and the "wherefore" of these dealings become gradually more manifest.

It is hard and difficult often here, to recognize the divine love and wisdom, and to own the rectitude of the dark dispensation. But "what we know not now we shall know hereafter." In the great day of disclosures—

the cloudless, sinless, sorrowless morning of immortality—the mysteries of Providence will be unraveled; every event will be seen reflected as in a glorious mirror; all the now veiled purposes will be fully revealed, perplexing dealings vindicated. "In Your light, O God, we shall see light." Each lip will then be brought to confess that this reigning Lord has been 'righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made.' Each fresh retrospect will cause the hearts of the Redeemed to bound with holier rapture, and their tongues to thrill with louder notes of exultation. The gradual revelation of God's earthly plan will afford new matter and new motive for praise. Not until the various component parts of the divine dealings are brought together—not until we view them as a whole—can we see their unity and admire their grandeur.

The present life, in its conflicting relations, its discords and confusions, is the tuning of the musical instruments before the great hallelujah chorus—the magnificent harmonies of Heaven. Then that chorus, like the song of adoration of the exulting multitudes in the seer's vision, will become a louder and yet louder ascription of praise, deepening until its streaming waves of sound become like the noise of mighty thunderings. And this verse at the head of our meditation will be the everlasting refrain!

Nor can we omit to add further, that that Sovereign Ruler is the same "Lion of the tribe of Judah" into whose hands, in the beginning of the Apocalyptic visions, was put the sealed roll of Providence (Rev. 5:1-6). It is Christ, the exalted King and Head of His Church, His brows crowned with many crowns, who holds the reins of universal empire! We can claim Him as a Brother, we can love Him as a Friend, we can adore Him as a God! We repeat, that glorious Keystone which crowns the arch is hidden at times behind the clouds. We see it not! Often we lose the divine footsteps—often we look with straining eye for one fringe of light in the darkened firmament. But He is there!—"that same Jesus"—the might of deity slumbering in His arm, the tenderness of humanity glowing at His heart. Jesus is "the Lord omnipotent," and He "reigns"! Jesus reigns!

Then perish every desponding thought. Jesus reigns! Then, though heart and flesh faint and fail, He will be the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. Jesus reigns! He reigns to love, to pity, to plead, to sympathize, to bless; He reigns to sustain the needy, to comfort the

brokenhearted, to reclaim the wandering, to save the lost; He reigns to justify, to sanctify, and finally to glorify; and He will live and reign over Zion triumphant as well as militant "through all generations!"—the object of adoring praise and gratitude to His Church through all eternity—their light, their life, their strength, their portion, their all in all! Oh, can we say, with lowly, joyful confidence, seated under the shelter of so glorious a palm—"Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; the scepter of justice will be the scepter of Your kingdom?"

"Hark! the song of jubilee,  
Loud as mighty thunder's roar,  
O'er the fullness of the sea  
When it breaks upon the shore.  
'Hallelujah! for the Lord  
God omnipotent doth reign!  
Hallelujah! let the word  
Echo round the earth and main.

"He shall reign from pole to pole  
With illimitable sway;  
He shall reign when, like a scroll,  
Yonder heavens have passed away.  
Then the end: beneath His rod  
Man's last enemy shall fall.  
Hallelujah! Christ in God,  
God in Christ, is all in all!"

"The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

## **DIVINE LEADING**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Psalm 23:3

There is a world of comfort contained in the sublime simple words, "He leads me." It was the cloudy pillar of old which conducted the Hebrew host from encampment to encampment; which marked out for them their Elims and their Marahs. "That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with His command through Moses. Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, 'Rise up, O Lord! May Your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you.' Whenever it came to rest, he said, 'Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel.'"(Num. 9:16, 17, 23; also Num. 10:35, 36).

The God of the pillar-cloud still directs the journeyings of His people. He still appoints the bounds of their habitation; and if His leadings do not be to the bitter pool, but often (most frequently) to some gracious palm-grove—in the words of one of the saintliest spirits of the passing generation, in referring to the loveliness of his appointed earthly home, "Oh, for peace to feel that it is but a beautiful tent pitched in the wilderness; and by the exceeding mercy of my God in calling me from darkness to His marvelous light, I may add, pitched on the green margin of the well of living water." (Memorials of Dr. M'Leod Campbell, p. 60) Whether, however, bitter or sweet, joyful or sorrowful, how comforting the assurance that our lives are no accidental concurrence of events and circumstances; we are not like weeds thrown in the waters, to be tossed and whirled in the swirling pools of capricious accident, our future a self-appointed one.

There is a Divine hand and purpose in all that befalls us. Every man's existence is a biography, written chapter by chapter, line by line, by God Himself. It is not the mere outline sketched by the Divine Being, which we are left to fill in; but all the minute and delicate shadings are inserted by Him. Looking no further than our relation to Him as creatures, it is impossible for a moment to entertain the thought of our being beyond the

leadings of God, and to speak of a life of self-government and self dependence. The complex machinery of the outer world, dumb inanimate nature in all its integral parts, is upheld by Him. "He weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." "He counts the number of the stars." He guides Orion and Arcturus in their magnificent marchings. If one of these orbs were to be jostled from its place—plucked from its silent throne in the heavens, it is well known that the equilibrium and perfect balancing of the material system would be fatally disturbed—anarchy and revolution would reign triumphant.

And shall we own Him as the leader of stars and planets, and ignore His sovereignty over the human spirit? Shall we acknowledge that He is Lord in the universe of matter, and not supreme in the empire of thought and human volition? No, "His kingdom rules over ALL." Angel, archangel, cherub, and seraph; man, beast, worm, "these all wait upon You!" He "leads in righteousness." He has an infinite reason for all He does. It is not for us to attempt to unravel the tangled thread of Providence. Israel cried for deliverance from Egypt. Their cry was answered. How? By leading them at once to Canaan? No, as we have seen, by a forty years' period of probation and discipline. God is often, like Jacob of old, blessing the sons of Joseph with crossed hands. We, in our half-blind, short-sighted faith, would presume to dictate to Him, and prejudge the wisdom and correctness of His procedure. We are tempted to say with Joseph, "Not so, my father." But like the old patriarch, "He guides His hands knowingly."

As the sheep of His pasture, He may not be leading you along the bright meadow or sunny slope; He may be lingering amid stunted herbage; He may be turning down some bramble thicket—plunging into gloomy forest glades, while acres of rich sunny pasture are close by. But He sees what you did not see; He sees an adder here; He sees a lion there; He sees pitfalls here; He sees a precipice there. He knows you better, He loves you better, than to set you in slippery places, and cast you down to destruction. He sees, if that fortune had been unbroken, that dream of ambition realized, that clay idol left on its throne—the alienated heart would have gradually, but terribly, lapsed away from Him. Trust Him. "We expect," says Evans, "the blessing in our way, He chooses to bestow



it in His." In the midst of perplexing dealings say, "I know." You cannot say, "I see," but let faith say, "I know, O God, that Your judgments are right, and that You in faithfulness have afflicted me."

What a grandeur and dignity, what a safety and security it would give to life, if we sought ever to regard it as a leading of the Shepherd—God shaping our purposes and destinies, that wherever we go, or wherever our friends go, He is with us! Even in earthly journeyings, if our pathway be the great and wide sea—"He gives to the sea His decree"—winds and waves and storms are His voice. If it be speeding along the highway, nothing but that tiny iron thread of the railway track between us and death—He curbs the wild frenzy of the fiery charger; He puts the bit in his iron mouth; He gives His angels charge over us to bear us up and keep us in all our ways.

If it be our position in the world; He measures out every drop in the cup, He assigns us our niche in His temple, fills or empties our treasuries, makes vacant the chairs of our homesteads. Let us seek to say, in the spirit of Galileo when he became blind, "Whatever is pleasing to God shall be pleasing to me." We can take no more than the near, the limited, the earthly view of His dealings: let us pause for the infinite disclosures of eternity. Look at the farmer laboring in his field. All this deep ploughing is for the insertion of the needful seed. In doing the work, he may appear to act roughly. Ten thousand insects nestling quietly in their homes in the ground are rudely unhoused. All at once their covered dwellings are pulled asunder. Many a happy commonwealth is scattered and overthrown in the upturned furrow—little worlds of life and being demolished by the ruthless, remorseless ploughshare. So, some of our earthly schemes may be assailed—our worldly treasures scattered by the iron teeth of misfortune. But all is preparatory to a higher good, a harvest of rich blessing crowning the soul, as He does the year with His goodness, and making its paths drop fatness!

There is a beautiful saying in the 94th Psalm, "The Lord will not reject His people; He will never forsake His inheritance; Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all upright in heart will follow it" (14, 15). A healing word to all poor afflicted ones. Judgment often at times seems separated—deflected from righteousness. We can discern no

righteousness, no mercy, no good in His dispensations. Like the sun setting at night, all is darkness. But that sun will return. It will rise again tomorrow. Judgment shall return in righteousness. "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

"Hereafter you shall know where God doth lead thee,  
His darkest dealings trace;  
And by those fountains where His love will feed thee,  
Behold Him face to face.

"Then bow thine head, and He shall give thee meekness,  
Bravely to do His will;  
So shall arise His glory in thy weakness,  
O struggling soul, be still.

"Watch on the tower, and listen by the gateway,  
Nor weep to wait alone;  
Take thou thy spices, and some angel straightway  
Shall roll away the stone.

"Thus wait, thus watch, until He the last link sever,  
And changeless rest be won;  
Then in His glory thou shall bask forever,  
Fear not the clouds—PRESS ON."

"The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them, to find them a place to rest."

## **THE FAREWELL GIFT**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." John 14:27

No shadow of the figurative grove of Elim is more grateful to the children

of humanity than this. It is in Jesus alone, and in His finished work, that the beautiful words of the Evangelical Prophet are fulfilled in the case of every pilgrim to the true Canaan—"My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Is. 32:18).

The circumstances in which the Savior uttered the words of our motto-verse were interesting and peculiar, and give an intense poignancy to His declaration. It was at a time, one would have thought, of the deepest unrest and anxiety to His own soul; a time when the saying, "My peace I give to you," would have seemed a strange and doubtful blessing: for the shadows of the cross were gathering around Him. Some consolation, higher than earth could afford, was needed, when the Shepherd was about to be smitten and the sheep to be scattered. In the clouds of that dark, troubled horizon, He set the bow of covenant Peace. His utterance was more than a promise—it is expressed in the formula of a last Will—a Testamentary deed. It is the dying legacy which the Prince of Peace bequeaths to His Church and people in every age. Let us note some of its characteristics.

It is a purchased peace. That palm whispers pre-eminently "the name of Jesus"—"Peace through the blood of His cross." In no other way could it have been procured. By no other could it be bestowed. No voice but the voice which exclaimed in dying accents, "It is finished," can say to the troubled tempest-tossed soul—"Peace, be still!" In the familiar Bible narrative, we see the heathen sailors rowing hard to bring the vessel to land, in whose hold was the fugitive prophet. It was in vain. "The sea was getting rougher and rougher"—wave after wave baffled strength of oar and muscle. What was their expedient? The sacrifice of the one life was demanded and surrendered for the sake of the others!

So it was with the true Jonah. When He was taken and cast into the deep, that deep was hushed into a calm, its fury stilled, every tumultuous billow was rocked to rest—"The raging sea grew calm." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." He has done all, and suffered all, and procured all for us—left nothing to be supplemented by human merit. In the words of an old theologian, "We who have believed do enter into rest, and that by ceasing from our own works, as

God did from His."

It is a perfect peace. It is no simulation—no counterfeit. There is no flaw in these title-deeds. It is a peace founded on everlasting truth and everlasting righteousness, securing alike the vindication of the Divine law and the manifestation of the Divine glory. It is a peace with God above, and peace with conscience within—peace secured by the Redeemer on the Cross, and ratified by the Kingly Intercessor on the Throne. Like the weary bird, after tracking its way across leagues of vast ocean, the believer can enter the opened window of the True Ark, and sing the song of an older heir of covenant blessings, "Be at rest (Peace), O my soul."

It is a permanent peace. As such, it is "not as the world gives." Many of the world's best blessings, those which are considered to minister most effectually to outward happiness and inward peace, ours today, may be gone tomorrow—we have no pledge or guarantee for their continuation. They are fed from the low marshy grounds of earth, dependent on fitful seasons and capricious showers. But the peace of Christ, being from heaven, is a perennial stream; it is fed from surer supply than glacier Alps, and it rolls on in undiminished fullness and volume, in summer's drought and in winter's cold. It is irrespective and independent of all outward accidents. It bears up and sustains in the midst of the harassments of business, the crushing of poverty, the weariness of sickness, the pangs of bereavement, the shadows of death. Well may the author of "The Pilgrim's Progress" give the name of PEACE to the chamber in which Christian lay, and whose window opened toward the sunrise!

It is said of Goethe, the great German, that in one of those dark, unsatisfied hours in which his mighty intellect and soul groped after the true Rest, he thus recorded his undefined longings for that which he had failed to attain—

"Fairest among heaven's daughters,  
Thou who stillest pain and woe,  
Pourest Thy refreshing waters  
On the thirsty here below:  
Whither tends this restless striving?"

Faint and tired, I long for rest.  
Heaven-born peace,  
Come and dwell within my breast!"

These words were found on a scrap of writing paper lying on his writing table. A devoted friend of similar intellectual pursuits, but one who had personally experienced the shade of the Elim grove and tasted its perennial springs, and who therefore knew what alone could quench these ungratified aspirations, wrote on the other side, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

PEACE—true peace. Intellect cannot bestow it; wealth cannot purchase it. Men, in their quest of it, surround and fortify themselves with creature comforts, and away from corroding care; invite the angel of peace to come and over downy couches to sing the longed-for lullaby! The lullaby is sung, "Peace, peace," but often it is only to awaken the echo of dissatisfaction, "No peace."

Speed your flight, O weary wanderer, under the shelter of this heavenly Palm. The bough on which your earthly nest was built may have been felled by the axe or broken by the storm; but "He is our peace." And as driven by the windy tempest your cry is, "O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace!" may it be yours to listen to the glad response, "My peace I give unto you"—"Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold."

"We ask for peace, O Lord!  
Thy children ask Thy peace:  
Not what the world calls rest—  
That toil and care should cease;  
That through bright sunny hours  
Calm life should haste away,  
And tranquil night should fade  
In smiling day—  
It is not for such peace that we would pray.

"We ask Thy peace, O Lord!  
Through storm, and fear, and strife,  
To light and guide us on  
Through a long struggling life;  
To lean on Thee, entranced,  
In calm and perfect rest—  
Give us that peace, O Lord!  
Divine and blest,  
Thou keepest for those hearts that love Thee best."

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You."

## **THE COMPASSION OF JESUS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, 'Don't cry.'" Luke 7:13

The fronds of the desert palm-tree are never so beautiful, as when seen thickly gemmed with the dews of the Eastern night—nature's teardrops.

With reverence may we say the same of the Heavenly Palm. Jesus is never so gracious or attractive as when we are called, as here, to note His look of compassion—His tears of sympathy—denoting the tenderness of divine human affection. Observe, it was the sight of woe (the contemplation of human misery) which at Nain stirred to its depths that Heart of hearts.

"Forth from the city gate,  
As evening shadows lengthen o'er the plain,  
And the hushed crowd in reverent silence wait,  
Passed out a funeral train.

"Chief of the mourners there,  
Slow following, with feeble steps, the dead,  
In the sad travail of the soul's despair,  
Bowed down her stricken head.

"For him she wept forlorn,  
Of care the solace, and of age the stay,  
Whose silver cord was broken, ere the morn  
Had brightened into day."

It would seem as if the Lord of Love could not look upon grief, without that grief becoming His own. In the similar case of Lazarus, it was not the bitter thought of a lost and dead friend which opened the fountain of His own tears. This it could not be; because four days previously He had spoken in calm composure of his departure; and when He stood in the graveyard, He knew that in a few moments the victim of death would have his eyes rekindled with living luster. At Bethany (as here at Nain), it was simply the spectacle of human suffering that made its irresistible appeal to His emotional nature. The rod of human compassion touched the Rock of Ages, and the streams of tenderness gushed forth. "When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews weeping which came with her... Jesus wept." "When the Lord saw" this poor widow, "He had compassion on her." He hears her bitter, heart-rending weeping in the midst of the mourners, and it is worthy of observation—utters the soothing, sympathetic word, before He utters the Godlike mandate.

Nor should we overlook the fact that it was but a word He uttered. This reveals an exquisite and touching feature in the Savior's humanity. It attests how intensely delicate and sensitive, as well as true, that humanity was. When we meet a mourner after a severe trial, we shrink from the meeting; glad, perhaps, when a sad and dreaded call of courtesy is over. There is a studied reserve in making reference to the loss; or, if that reference is made, it is short, in a passing word. The press of the hand often expresses what the lips shrink from uttering.

In that vivid picture we have of patriarchal grief, Job's friends and mourners sat for seven days at his side, and not a syllable was spoken. It was so here with Jesus. He (even He) does not intrude with a long

utterance of sympathy. With a tear in His eye, and a suppressed sob, all He says is, "Weep not." It was the same afterwards with Mary at Bethany. There was not even the one word; nothing but the significant tears.

Behold, then, the beautiful and heartfelt condolence of a Fellow-mourner—"the Brother born for adversity." "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her!" That weeping, forlorn woman had no lack of other sorrowing friends. Her case seemed to be matter of notoriety. Many went out to mingle their tears with hers; but the sympathy of all these could only go a certain way. They could not be expected to enter into the peculiarities of her woe. Human sympathy is, at best, imperfect; sometimes selfish, always finite and temporary.

Not so the sympathy of Him who joined the funeral procession. He could say, as none else can, "I know your sorrows." The condolence of the kindest friend on earth knows a limit—that of Jesus knows none. Who knows but in that gentle utterance of tender feeling, and in the deep compassion which dictated it, the Son of Man, the virgin-born, may have had in view another "Mother," whose hour of similar bereavement was now at hand; when His own death was to be "the sword" which was to "pierce her soul." The calming word, doubtless, further pointed onwards to a happier time, when in a sorrowless world, "God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces."

Remember the Savior and sympathizer of Nain is now the same! He had compassion—He has compassion still. He who stopped the funeral casket on that summer's night in the plains of Jezreel ever lives, and loves, and supports, and pities; and will continue to pity, until pity be no longer needed, in a world of light and purity and peace.

"And thus He always stands,  
Friend of the mourner, wiping tears away;  
Wherever sorrow lifts her suppliant hands,  
And faith remains to pray.

"Wherever the woe-worn flee  
From the rude conflict of this world distress,  
Consoling words He whispers, 'Come to Me,



And I will give you rest!"

"It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain."

## THE LORD UPRIGHT

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him."  
Psalm 92:15

The Psalm from which these words are taken is entitled "A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath Day." It is also supposed to have been a Temple song: that, from the reference to the instrumental music of the Temple—"the instrument of ten strings, the psaltery, the harp"—it may probably have been intended to be used for the public service of the sanctuary. Nor was this use to be on Sabbath only. From verse 2, it has been further surmised that the psalm may have been employed at the daily offering of the morning and evening sacrifice—"To proclaim Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night." Remembering, moreover, in connection with the name of this Volume, how the Temple was decorated with palm as well as cedar (the palm, as previously noted, chiseled by the engravers are all round the sacred walls, interlaced with open flower-work and cherubic figures, while the doors and roof were from the forests of Lebanon), how natural that these two trees should be taken to symbolize the character of the acceptable and accepted worshiper (ver. 12).

It may well be designated, from its whole scope, 'the Psalm of old age.' The writer seems to delight in rehearsing the experiences of a bygone happy, because holy life. He compares, as we have just said, the true Believer—"the Righteous man"—to the gracefulness and beauty of an

Elim-palm, combined with the strength and indestructible vigor of a Lebanon cedar. Not like the trees of many an earthly forest, whose bared tops proclaim that they have outlived their best, and that they are only the ghostly memorials of what once they were; these spiritual trees of the Lord's planting are "full of sap." They know no infirmity, no decay—"They still bring forth fruit in old age" (ver. 14).

Old age without true religion is the saddest of experiences—gathering up the faded flowers of pleasure; attempting to drain the exhausted bowl, or to extract honey from the empty comb. Nothing, on the other hand, is so attractive and lovely as the closing life of a true Christian—an old veteran warrior about to sheathe his sword and pass to his crown. How calm, and tranquil, and subdued! Like wine mellowed by years; or like the decaying, ivy-encircled ruin—grandest in its decay! His outward man may be perishing, but his inward man is renewed day by day. His life is hid with Christ in God—his roots are moored in the Rock of Ages. Lessons of tribulation have wrought patience. Christ becomes more and more precious. Heaven has more of the aspect and association of home. Gleams of its glory come flashing on the aged countenance, as the rising sun tips the mountain-top before it has reached the horizon. Oh, the gray head is indeed "a crown of glory" when thus "found in the way of righteousness;" and when death does come—the stern Reaper with his sickle—it is only to fall like a shock of corn in its season, fully ripe!

Beautiful, too (what our motto-verse may be regarded as embodying), is the dying testimony of such—"The Lord is upright." This is the end of their 'planting' and 'growing' and 'flourishing' (verses 13, 14). The sweet singer, in this last note of praise, repeats the opening stanza, testifying, morning and evening, to Jehovah's faithfulness. The palm-tree waves its joyous tribute by the side of the Elim springs. The cedar, as it battles with the storm on high Lebanon, wafts it on the breath of the tempest. It is a testimony to God's unchanging faithfulness to His covenant promises, and that, too, amid all diversities of rank and age and circumstance. Palms of the lowly valley, cedars of the lofty mountain—rich and poor, young and old, learned and unlearned—are ready to witness that the Lord has proved Himself 'upright,' and that not one of His declarations have failed. He has made the shoes of His people "iron and brass," and to the

very close of the wilderness journey "as their days, so shall their strength be" (Deut. 33:25).

The writer finally adds his own subscription and personal experience to all he has just said. He has been painting no hypothetical picture—describing no mere poetic dream. He is himself ready, with the closing harp-strain, to endorse all his utterances of sober prosaic truth—that the righteous is the happy, joyous, God-protected man he has described him to be. "He is my rock," he adds, "and there is no wickedness in Him." I have tried Him, and He is all He said, and all He promised. "He is my rock." As a rock I have built on Him, as a rock I have stretched myself under His shadow—"O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him."

It reminds us of the close of some of Paul's Epistles—"The salutation of I, Paul, written in my own hand." That blind Apostle-prisoner seems to have employed a secretary to take down at his dictation the rest of his letter. But he cannot refrain tracing upon the parchment the closing salutation or postscript, in his own autograph, thus to seal and ratify all that had been written. So it is here. "He is my rock." Witness my signature. I have tested His faithfulness; I now firmly rely upon it. I warble this farewell attestation "on the harp with solemn sound"—with earnest soul-musing, as it means—not only, as has been said, "with harp-strings, but heart-strings." "I believe, therefore have I spoken."

Delightful and precious are such old age and deathbed testimonies as these to the sustaining grace of God. The world of unrealities is at an end then. The gold is separated from the alloy. We see the real strength of the vessel when left to itself to grapple with the hurricane—in other words, the power of Gospel truth and religious principle. The noblest and most convincing of all Christian evidences is to lead the skeptic to a dying couch, and there, amid weakness and depression (it may even be racking pain,) to let him hear prayer mingling with praise—the alternate breathings of submission and thankfulness, arising from the consciousness of the presence of a gracious though unseen Savior, and the quickening anticipations of an opening heaven!

Can that sustaining Gospel be a lie? Can that dying 'grace' be an illusion?

Can that Redeemer—that Being who seems to be clung to almost as a near and loving friend—be nothing but a myth or phantom of the brain? When the feeble lips are proclaiming, "He is my rock," are they mistaking for a solid footing what is like the desert mirage or the shifting sand? No. The Rock of Ages is a sublime reality. That aged believer has clung to Jesus as an Almighty Savior on earth. He has loved Him, prayed to Him, praised Him, committed his eternal all to Him; and now the music of that same Name refreshes his soul in death. "He is my rock." Oh, that such may be our testimony! Sitting calmly under the Beloved's shadow, when the day is about to break, and all other shadows to flee forever away—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

"When I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyelids close in death;  
When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee."

"A Man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm,  
like streams in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty  
land."

## **FULL SATISFACTION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for  
us." Galatians 3:13

"CURSE!"—"the curse of the law;" a curse resting on the soul of man, and  
on the fair earth which forms his dwelling!

"Man's world is pain and terror,

He found it pure and fair,  
And wove in nets of sorrow  
The golden summer air.  
Black, hideous, cold, and dreary,  
Man's curse, not God's, is there!

"Man's world is bleak and bitter;  
Wherever he has trod  
He spoils the tender beauty  
That blossoms on the sod,  
And blasts the loving heaven  
Of the great, good world of God!"

From that black, blighting, blasting curse, man and his world are redeemed.

"REDEEMED!" In an earthly sense, none knew, or could appreciate so fully the significance of that word, as pilgrim Israel, when, after their wondrous Exodus, they sat under the shadow of these Elim-palms in the Sinai wilderness. The echoes of their great redemption song was still lingering in their hearts, "In Your unfailing love You will lead the people You have redeemed. In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling." (Ex. 15:13).

It was the type and foreshadow of a greater deliverance—a deliverance which has given birth to a grander strain, "You have redeemed us unto God by Your blood!"

And who was this Redeemer? We read in classic story that Pylades laid down his life for Orestes his friend. "But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He, the true Aaron, with the burning coals in His censer of love, has come between the living and the dead, and the plague is halted! He, the true David, when the lion and the bear were rushing on his defenseless flock, encountered them single-handed and alone, and rescued them from "the mountains of prey!" He, the true antitypical scapegoat, has had the sins of His spiritual Israel laid upon Him, and has borne away the curse forever, into a land of forgetfulness!

The arm of the law is powerless. "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!" To turn again to that 'birthday of freedom' so intimately associated with the encampment of the Hebrews at Elim, that must have indeed been a memorable morning when the victorious host stood on the other side of the Red Sea. Terrible, too, these trophies of Divine vengeance that strewed the beach; the bodies of Pharaoh's warriors, with the sword still fastened by their side or clutched with nerveless hands.

Or, to take a similar incident in the future Jewish annals, dreadful must have been that spectacle—the armored legions of Sennacherib—who had, the night before, been gathering up their strength like a proud wave, to dash themselves against the towers of Zion. When the morning dawns, the 180,000 are still there, with sword and spear and helmet and streaming banner; but these banners wave over a silent camp. The trumpet lies beside silent lips; it is a camp of death. Sword and spear are still intact; but the arms that wielded them are impotent. The destroying angel has descended at midnight, and converted the Assyrian tent into a sepulcher!

"The battlefield lies still and cold,  
While stars, that watch in silent night,  
Gleam here and there on weapons bright  
In the dead sleepers' slackened hold."

So it is with the curses of the law. Like the weapons of Pharaoh or the Assyrians, they are still there; each demanding satisfaction, and declaring, "The soul that sins shall die." But the Great Angel has come down in the night of earth's moral and spiritual darkness and paralyzed them. He has, by His own doing and dying, rendered the law powerless to smite. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us!"

Child of God, member of the ransomed family of the true Israel which He has purchased with His own blood, "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed your transgressions from you." Amazing picture! You can take the wings of the morning, and make the sun your chariot—traverse intervening oceans and continents until that sun dips his

burning wheels in the western wave; and when you take a retrospective view of that magnificent circuit, think of it as God's own emblem of the distance to which He is willing to remove your transgressions from your sight and His own!

Or take another scripture, depicting the same wondrous truth in equally impressive figure. It is the midst of a wide, vast wilderness of waters, the boundless horizon stretching on every side; and when the sounding line is let down, it cannot fathom the depth, it fails to reach the bottom. There, in the solitudes of that voiceless ocean, a plunge is heard. The surface is ruffled only for a moment; but the waves resume their usual play—all is calm again. The load, whatever it be, is never more seen. It is buried somewhere in these dark caverns. No spirit of the deep can ever come up from the silent caves to tell its story. Ships cross and re-cross where it fell, but no milestone is left on the unstable highway, to mark the spot. The sea can be tempted by no bribe to give up the secret of its keeping; it is lost from sight, and trace, and memory, forever. That is a picture of what God is willing to do to you, and to me. "You will cast all their sins into the depth of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

The one paramount reflection arising from these thoughts is surely this—How wondrous the love of God in not sparing His own, His only Son, but freely giving Him up to be a curse for us! He, even HE—could give no costlier proof of divine affection. Reader! having given you the greater pledge, you may take it as a guarantee for the bestowment of all lesser blessings. When His providential dispensations at times seem baffling; when there seems no bright light in the cloud, no mercy in His footstep; when you are apt to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this happened to us?" return to that cross—that mysterious smiting! Let it hush every rebellious surmise. Did He wear that crown of thorns for you? Did He pour out His life's blood for you? Did He become a CURSE for you? And will you murmur at anything proceeding from a Father's hands?

"Yes! Mourning one—a thought like this  
May well each faithless doubt remove;  
Take from all tears their bitterness,  
That God is LOVE!"

"I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed."

## **THE SECRET OF SUBMISSION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this." Psalm 39:9

Never was there a more sorrow-stricken Pilgrim than he who uttered these words. He was "wandering in the wilderness in a solitary way"—a dethroned king; a fugitive, clothed in sackcloth, with his head muffled, his feet without sandals, and more terrible memories and trials crushing his soul, which no Israelite at Elim could have shared.

Yet he was not without his sheltering palm in this desert of tribulation. Under one of these he here reposes. When Shimei, the representative of the abandoned house of Saul, base of heart, and foul of tongue, came forth and cursed him, hurling stones and dust on the outcast sovereign—the faithful followers of the King, stung to the quick with the reproaches of the vicious man, would willingly have crossed the gorge and silenced him with their swords.

'Hush,' says the humbled monarch, 'listen not to these taunts. Hear as if you heard them not. This expulsion from my throne and kingdom is not man's doing—the result of uncontrolled human passion or wayward impulse. God has sent this "son of Belial" on his mission of insult. Let him curse on, for the Lord has bidden him.' And he weaves the reflections of this event into one of the most touching and plaintive of his psalms.

Never, indeed, is David more worthy of admiration than in this time of adversity—never truly greater is this Cedar of God than when wrestling with the storm! His keenness of temperament might have roused far other emotions. If he had been naturally reserved, stolid, apathetic, we



would not have been surprised to see him submitting passively to his fate. But with feelings so finely set—cut to the quick with the imputation of unmerited wrong (for "reproach," he tells us, had "broken his heart"), could we have wondered, if, stung to madness—chafed like a lioness robbed of her cubs—we had witnessed uncontrollable irritation, some outburst of vehement rage, some vow of fierce revenge? How different! "I said, 'I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.' I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this."

Nor let any say, the King of Israel was a veteran in trial, that his more sensitive feelings were now blunted, that he made a virtue of necessity, and submitted with cold stoical endurance to the stern fortunes of war. No; we see the saint of God, the resigned believer—his soul even as a weaned child—remaining calm and unmoved like a rock in the midst of the ocean surge, because cherishing the spirit of an older and kindred sufferer—whose very words, indeed, he himself on this occasion repeats—"It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18, and 2 Sam. 15:26).

"YOU did it." Would that we were ever ready to endorse with these words all that happens to us! That prop removed—"You did it;" that gourd withered—"You did it;" that lily gathered—"You did it;" that mysterious blight in my life-prospects—"You did it!" Oh, to rise above the atheism of second causes—the reflections which, if not spoken aloud, at least thought inwardly, are thus often formulated—"If such and such had been done, my child would have been spared; but for some untoward accident—some cruel misfortune—bright stars, now erased from my firmament, would still have been lighting me with their radiance!" Or these reflections may take the still sadder form of surmises on the Divine faithfulness; challenging the wisdom and righteousness of the Divine dealings. 'Where is the justice and judgment which are said to be the habitation of God's throne?—where the mercy and truth which are said to go before His face?'

In the case of David, some might be inclined to think there was room for such questionings and complaints. 'It is hard for me,' he himself might have felt and said, 'to encounter this sweeping blast in my old age. After a

life of devotion to the God of Israel; after seeking to discharge, even though with mournful shortcomings, my duties as His anointed servant, the King of His covenant people, and the musician of His Church—hard it is to have the harp snatched from my hand, or left hanging tuneless and mute in my Cedar-palace, and to be driven a wanderer on alien soil! But no such reasoning escapes his lips. Of all the psalms he ever sung, this life-psalm was the grandest—when he pursues his mournful way, so humble, unselfish, generous, submissive—"not repaying evil for evil, or insult for insult."

Let us seek to have such a heart in us in our afflictions. When the Almighty in a moment overturns our cherished plans, and sends us forth, 'barefoot and weeping,' across the mount of trial, let us feel that all is ordered; and say, looking high above human instruments—O God! here am I, do to me as seems good to You: take me, use me for Your glory. I wish not to evade any cross. The lot may be a bitter one cast into the lap, "but its every decision is from the Lord!" If my cup be filled with unmerited blessings, "You did it;" if emptied and its fragments strewn on the ground, "You did it." Let the world speak of its accident or chance, but let mine be a nobler, truer philosophy—"The Lord gave, the Lord has taken."

Cherishing such a spirit, may we not add, that unlooked-for refreshments and solaces—palm-groves of comfort—will be given to us in the very season and desert of our trial? The aged King of Judah had such in his hour of adversity—temporal refreshment (2 Sam. 16:14), and the better solace of generous and faithful friendships, destined long to survive the season of exile—crowning all with a safe return from beyond Jordan, and a triumphant entrance within the walls of his beloved Zion.

So in the case of His tried people. For them, too, does He spread a table in the wilderness. "The desert and the parched land shall be glad for them" (Isaiah 35:1). "I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs" (Isaiah 41:18). Thus does He cause them to sing of mercy in the midst of judgment; imparting, when they most need it, new and undreamt-of consolations—strength in the hour of weakness, support in the hour of danger, friends in the hour of loneliness,

sympathy, human and Divine, in the hour of sorrow. Above all, whatever be their wilderness experiences and wilderness trials, bringing them at last, in safety, across the border-river to the Heavenly Zion—the New Jerusalem—where the wail of sadness, the dirge of crushed hopes and blighted or buried affections, shall never more be heard.

Oh! with this motto in all time of your tribulation, "YOU did it," trust a faithful, covenant-keeping God. Yes, trust Him—even when, like David, you may have the sackcloth on your loins and the tear in your eye—when you seem to be under the shadow, not of the green palm, but of the mournful cypress. "Commit your way unto the Lord: trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

"Go not far from me, O my Strength,  
Whom all my times obey;  
The strongest prop on earth may fail,  
But go not Thou away,  
And let the storm that does Thy work  
Deal with me as it may.

"Thy love has many a lighted path  
No outward eye can trace;  
And Thee my heart sees in the deep,  
With darkness on its face,  
And communes with Thee 'mid the storm  
As in a secret place.

"Safe in Thy sanctifying grace,  
Almighty to restore,  
Borne onward—sin and death behind,  
And love and life before—  
Oh, let my soul abound in hope,  
And trust Thee more and more!"

"The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him."

## A RISEN CHRIST

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." 1 Corinthians 15:20

Here we have the true Palm (Phoenix) spoken of in the Preface, which, when burned down, springs fresh and beautiful from its ashes, with more vigorous stem and more glorious fronds. On the monuments of the early Roman Christians, in the city of their sufferings and triumphs, well may the fresh-plumaged bird of immortality be seen perched on Him, who, as the Divine Heavenly Palm, has purchased for His people the gift of eternal life.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the pledge and guarantee of that of His people. Hence, the pre-eminent importance assigned by the inspired writers to this great anchor of the Church's faith. The glorious light indeed illuminating the tomb of the Savior throws its radiations on almost every other doctrine of the Christian system. The believer's justification, regeneration, sanctification, resurrection, glorification—each has its halo of glory borrowed from that vacant sepulcher. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14). "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). Paul, to his cultured audience on Mars' Hill, preached "Jesus and the Resurrection." "It is Christ," says he, "who died—MORE THAN THAT, who was raised to life" (Rom. 8:34).

In the concluding benediction of the priceless Epistle to the Hebrews, it is the Redeemer's Resurrection which is specially singled out as the mightiest of God's mighty acts, "the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." It was that Resurrection-hour for which Jesus Himself is represented as longing from all eternity, when pillowed on the Father's bosom. Then He rejoiced "as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder" (Isa. 9:3). He seems to bound

over intervening ages; and with His eye first on His own vacant tomb, and then on the myriads His Resurrection foreshadowed, He is represented as exclaiming—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!" (Hos. 13:14).

No wonder then that the Resurrection of Christ has been for the last 1800 years a joyful day—that our Sabbaths are its solemn commemorations. We repeat, it was the truth of all truths among the early believers. It was not the day of His death they made their Sabbath, but the first day of the week—the day when the sadness of the weeping women at the sepulcher was turned into gladness: and their watchword at meeting (the word of joy and welcome) was not "The Lord has died," but "The Lord has risen." It was with them a day of praise, more than for confession; for psalms of thanksgiving, more than for penitential tears. Conscious that a new and nobler Genesis had dawned on a darkened world, they sung in responsive melody, "This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it."

The pledges of the outer material creation are welcome and joyful. If we welcome with grateful spirit the first budding of early spring in grove and field, because in these we see the promise and pledge that soon nature will be arrayed in her full robes of resurrection beauty—with what feelings ought we to stand by the sepulcher of our Lord, and see the buried Conqueror rising triumphant over the last enemy! Do we not behold in Him the forerunner of an immortal springtime, or rather a glorious harvest, when the mounds of the earth, and the caves of the ocean, shall surrender what they have held for ages in sacred custody: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision;" when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality," and the summons shall go forth, "You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy." "Christ the firstfruits; then when He comes, those who belong to Him!"

You who have priceless treasures in the tomb, think of this! "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." True, that "house of our earthly tabernacle" at death, is a "darksome ruin." That dust is resolved into its kindred dust. The constituent elements of the dismantled

framework are incorporated with new forms of matter. Sad and terrible is dissolution in all its accompaniments. We do not wish to strew that dismal path with flowers. Death, from the earthly view of it, is not lit by one gleam of sunshine. The slow and gradual wasting and decay, the fading of the bloom from the cheek, the weakness of the eye, the wearisome days, the long night-vigils, the mind participating not infrequently with the wreck of the body, memory often a blank, the fondest look and the fondest name eliciting no response! Then the close of all—the knocking at the mysterious gates of a mysterious future—the empty chamber, where "echo slumbers;" the noiseless footfall, the mute crowd of mourners, the grave, the return to the silent dwelling, and the vacant seat—O Death, truly here is your sting; O Grave, truly here is your victory!

But the day is coming when all these memories of woe shall vanish, like the darkness before the morning sun—when the spoil of plundering ages shall in a marvelous way be all restored—when, as in the Prophet's Valley of Vision, bone shall come to bone, and sinew to sinew. The old loving smiles of earth will be seen again in the newly-glorified body, purged from all the dross and alloy of its old materialism—the drooping withered flower reviving, beautiful and fragrant with the bloom of perennial summer.

"Why are you crying?" was the question of the Risen Conqueror, as He gazed on a tearful eye at the Resurrection morn. The Christian's grave need be watered by no tears; for Jesus has converted it into the vestibule of heaven! How different from the mournful legends to be seen and read at this hour on heathen lands, as "to the final farewell" and "the eternal sleep!" How different from the inscriptions entombed in the latest Assyrian excavations in the mounds of Kalakh; of which we are told—"In this temple were performed the mournings and lamentations for the yearly dying Tammuz the 'Son of Life,' whom Ishtar went annually to recover from the House of Death, the Palace of 'the Land of no return!'"

The Christian searches, indeed, in vain, amid the ashes of Jerusalem's desolation, for any material tomb of his Divine Lord. But if the tomb is lost in the wreck of ages, the glorious, invisible inscription still remains—"Fear not: I am He who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for

evermore." And "because I live, you shall live also!"

"Our loved ones in the narrow home we lay.  
But while Death's sharp scythe is sweeping,  
We remember 'mid our weeping  
That a Father's hand is keeping  
Every vernal bloom that falls underneath its chilly sway.  
And though earthly flowers may perish,  
There are buds His hand will cherish,  
Throughout the years eternal—these can never fade away."

"My body also will rest secure, because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."

## **THE CREATOR AND REDEEMER**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods...He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."  
Psalm 95:3, 7

The contemplation of God in all His varied attributes may well form a theme of refreshment to His people in every stage of the wilderness journey. Such a contemplation is presented in these combined verses—the majesty and omnipotence of the Jehovah-Lord, in combination with the tenderness and grace of the Covenant-Shepherd.

Although composed at a much later date, the greater portion of the psalm might have been sung by the pilgrim Hebrews as they were encamped under the grove of Elim. A glance over the contents will show how desert symbols and memories color and tinge its phraseology. But it is a song

suiting for God's spiritual Israel in all ages, both collectively and individually.

After a triumphal prelude or introduction, the psalm divides itself into two parts. The first is a summons by His people to join in this ascription of praise to "the Rock of Salvation;" the second is the utterance or response of God Himself—an earnest and solemn appeal to hear His voice and accept His salvation. It is of the first of these alone we shall now speak.

Two specific grounds or reasons are given for thus "coming before His presence with thanksgiving, and extolling Him with music and song."

(1) Because He is CREATOR. (v. 3) "For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!"

The Psalmist here makes all material nature around him a temple resonant with praise to its Almighty Framer. And we may imagine what a gorgeous shrine the land of Palestine must have been: not as now, cursed and blighted with barrenness, but as it was, with its mountains and vineyards and olive-yards—its gorges ("the deep places of the earth," perhaps referring to the singular depression in the course of its one illustrious river)—the sea bordering its western frontier—its happy villages, climbing to the very tops of the wooded hills—the pastures clothed with flocks—the valleys, also, covered over with corn! It is the God of this Temple whose glory he proclaims—He who gave strength to these mountains, and grandeur to "the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number."

Not only does he celebrate (v. 3) Jehovah as a great Lord, but as a great "King above all (the heathen) gods." In the mythologies of Greece and Rome, a god was assigned to every department of nature—such as Neptune, Pluto, Aeolus, and others, gods of sea and fire and wind and mountain, rain and thunder and the forked lightning. This great King embraced in His one mighty and powerful hand all these diverse agencies



and elements. He was not the God of "the deep places" only, but He was the God of the hills—their strength was "His also." His hands not only fashioned the dry land, but these hands built the rocky caverns of old ocean—"The sea is His;" He "covered it with the deep as with a garment." In the words of the challenge of another sacred singer of Israel—"Who (like Him) has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, or with the breadth of His hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?" (Is. 40:12).

"God's world is bathed in beauty,  
God's world is steeped in light;  
It is the self-same glory  
That makes the day so bright,  
Which thrills the earth with music,  
Or hangs the stars in night."

(2) The second ground or reason which the Psalmist gives for his appeal to worship God with thanksgiving and joyful melody is, because He is REDEEMER. This is contained in our second motto-verse (v. 7), where Jehovah is brought before us in His Shepherd character and relation to His people as THEIR God, their Covenant God—"For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." If the old wilderness of Sinai, as seen from the Elim palms, with its masses and munitions of gigantic rock, furnished the future Hebrew musicians and chroniclers with the favorite and most expressive symbol of Divine power and unchangeableness; Palestine itself, in its grassy hills and sheep-walks, contributed the more endearing emblem for the covenant relation subsisting between God and His people—"The Lord is my SHEPHERD, I shall not lack. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters;" or, as here, "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture."

If we are called on to praise and adore 'God our Rock' for His natural attributes of power, greatness, wisdom, immutability, how far louder and loftier ought the strains of that song to rise to Him who is "the Rock of our salvation"—who tends the "Israel within Israel," the true people of His covenant fold, with all the watchful affection which the Hebrew

shepherd is known to lavish on his fleecy charge—protecting them amid summer's drought and winter's cold, from the lurking wild beast and the human plunderer, and risking his own life in their defense! He who, in the glorious concave of the nightly heavens, as the great Shepherd of the universe, is sublimely spoken of as keeping watch over fold on fold of stars—"golden-fleeced sheep"—"calling them all by their names," has the very same words applied by Divine lips to His spiritual Israel, the flock of His spiritual pasture: "He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out" (John 10:3).

Can we take up the higher note of this anthem? The deist can sing the first—adoring God as the Creator, who made sky, air, earth, and heaven; but can we stand under the shelter of the Heavenly Palm and raise the loftier ascription—"He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hands"? The God of NATURE! Noble, indeed, are the themes and illustrations which that name suggests—the manifested glory of "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords!" The thunder is His voice; the clouds are the dust of His feet; He walks upon the wings of the wind; His pavilion round about Him are dark waters and thick clouds of the sky—at one and the same moment tracing out the pathway for sun and star, and yet painting the green of moss and lichen, and imprinting the varied tints on the petals of every flower.

But, God of GRACE! "The Mighty One of Jacob, the SHEPHERD, the Rock of Israel."—this "new, best name"—speaks of forgiveness. It unfolds to us not only the Rock in its giant majesty, defying the fury of the desert wind, but it discloses to us fissures in that Rock—blessed crevices—taking shelter in which, the breath of hot wind and storm pass by us unscathed! "We are the people of His pasture." It tells of shepherd love and shepherd tenderness. Every nook of the mountain, every grassy knoll—yes, too, and every bleak corner of these pasture-grounds—are known to Him! What more than this can we desire?—pardon, peace, guidance, direction, support, grace, glory! As an old writer quaintly says, "He leads us in, He leads us through, He leads us on, He leads us up, He leads us home!"

Let the sweet music of this psalm quicken our footsteps through every wilderness experience, until the same Divine Shepherd shall conduct us to the heavenly Elim, by the living fountains of waters, in the pastures of

the Blessed!

"Seek farther, farther yet, O dove!  
Beyond the land, beyond the sea,  
There shall be rest for you and me,  
For you and me and those I love.

"I heard a promise gently fall,  
I heard a far-off Shepherd call  
The weary and the broken-hearted,  
Promising rest unto each and all."

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

## **PROOF AND TRIUMPH OF LOVE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Travelers tell us that it is those palm trees whose stems have been broken by the sweep of the tempest which are generally seen to shoot forth the largest and most sheltering branches. The "corn of wheat" in the divine parable, by falling into the ground and dying, brought forth "much fruit." So is it from the death of Jesus that the new and glorious life of God's people is derived—"I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Reader, are you able fully to accept and appropriate this sublime truth? to view it, not as a beautiful figure, a typical fiction, but as a sober reality.

"He loved me, and gave Himself FOR me;" that He surrendered His life's

blood, in order to have the right to say, as He beckons under the shelter of the Elim palm-grove, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

In obeying the gracious invitation, rejoice, too, that the negotiation is completed, the Substitute has been provided, the ransom has been paid. It is not a matter which now remains in suspense and unaccomplished. Many on earth have noble and lofty intentions which have never been fulfilled. Many a high enterprise has been thought of; but the enthusiasm wears past, the opportunity is lost, or the resolve is strangled at the birth. Not so this Great Salvation. What Christ undertook He has performed. He does not utter the unavailing soliloquy and lament in His heavenly palace, over an apostate world, which David did on the occasion of the death of his ruined child, "Would God I had died for you." He has died; He has fulfilled His covenant-pledge as our Surety. Our mortgaged inheritance has been recovered. The prophetic words have become now the utterance of an historic fact—He HAS seen of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied!

Well do we know that this doctrine is in these modern times disliked by many; by not a few rejected. Many prefer coming with Cain's bloodless offerings of thanksgiving (the deist sacrifice) rather than, like Abel, bringing the bleating victim from his fold. They are willing to behold Christ the Son; not Christ the "Lamb of God." They build the temple while they disown the altar. But it is not the philosophic divinity which consists in the glorification of mere virtue—it is not eliminating these peculiar doctrines of the cross, and substituting cold negations—that will pacify conscience. The most familiar of lines embody, in simple language, the only Scripture creed—the only accepted and acceptable 'Song of the pardoned'—

"When from the dust of death I rise  
To take my mansion in the skies,  
This all my hope, this all my plea,  
That Jesus lived and died for me."

Let that which will form your only stable and satisfying trust then, be the ground of your hope and confidence now. Accept Him, unhesitatingly, as your Surety-Savior, "the end of the law for righteousness." "Jacob," says

old Thomas Brooks, "got the blessing in the garment of his elder brother, so in the garment of Christ's righteousness, who is our Elder Brother, we obtain the blessing, yes, all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ." See how He has "blotted out the handwriting that was against you, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross!" See how God, the injured Creditor, has cancelled your obligations! Never again, in point of law, can your multitude of sins appear—they are obliterated forever. "I will forgive," says He (what man often does not), "your wickedness and will remember your sins no more" (Heb. 3:12). Let the mightiest angel in heaven be delegated to go in quest of these pardoned sins! Let him roam creation! Let him search every corner of the earth, and every cavern of the ocean. He will come back from the mission with the tidings—"Search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found." He is faithful who promised—"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist" (Isa. 44:22).

We may appropriately conclude with the simple words of an old hymn-writer of the Fatherland (Angelus, 1657)—  
"Thou Holiest Love! whom most I prize,  
Who are my longed-for, only bliss,  
Who left the glory of the skies  
To tread earth's desert wilderness—  
Who once did suffer in my stead,  
To cancel debt I could not pay:  
Whose blood upon the cross was shed  
To take the world's great guilt away—  
I give Thee thanks that Thou didst die  
To win eternal life for me;  
Oh bring that great salvation nigh,  
And draw me up in love to Thee!"

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

## FUTURE UNFOLDINGS

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."  
John 13:7

A gracious 'whisper' into the ear of an ardent and loving but impetuous apostle, from Him who was Himself the Heavenly Palm. An assurance well calculated to relieve needless anxiety; and impart confidence, trust, and strength to His people, at all times, and under all circumstances.

Here in this present world, we have only a partial view of God's dealings, His half-completed, half-developed plan; but all will stand out in fair and graceful proportions in the great finished Temple of Eternity!

Go, in the reign of Israel's greatest King, to the heights of Lebanon. See that noble Cedar, the pride of its peers, an old wrestler with northern blasts! Summer loves to smile upon it—night spangles its feathery foliage with dewdrops—the birds nestle on its branches, the weary pilgrim, or wandering shepherd rest under its shadow from the midday heat or from the furious storm; but, all at once, it is marked out to fall! The aged inhabitant of the forest is doomed to succumb to the woodman's stroke! As we see the axe making its first gash on its gnarled trunk, then the noble limbs stripped of their branches, and at last the "Tree of God," as was its distinctive epithet, coming with a crash to the ground, we exclaim against the uncalled-for destruction, the demolition of this proud pillar in the temple of nature. We are tempted to cry with the prophet, as if inviting the sympathy of every lowlier stem—invoking inanimate things to resent the affront—"Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!"

But wait a little. Follow that gigantic trunk as the workmen of Hiram launch it down the mountainside; thence conveyed in rafts along the blue waters of the Mediterranean; and last of all, behold it set a glorious polished beam in the Temple of God. As you see its destination, placed in the very Holy of Holies, in the diadem of the Great King—say, can you

grudge that 'the crown of Lebanon' was ravaged, in order that this jewel might have so noble a setting? That cedar stood as a stately prop in Nature's sanctuary, but the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former.

How many of our souls are like these cedars of old! God's axes of trial have stripped and bared them. We see no reason for dealings so dark and mysterious. But He has a noble end and object in view; to set them as everlasting pillars and rafters in His Heavenly Zion; to make them "a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God."

Jehovah, had He seen fit, might, by miracle or otherwise, have studded the march of the Israelites all the way to Canaan with Elim groves. At each fresh encampment, as the guiding cloud gave the sign of rest, an improvised oasis, fringed with trees and musical with springs, might have risen in the midst of the barren sands. The beautiful promise of the evangelical prophet might have had a literal fulfillment—"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon" (Isa. 35:1, 2).

We know how different was their experience! Take one of the many similar entries in the inspired record—"Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran" (Num. 10:12). Their route lay through barren wastes and waterless valleys and under brazen skies—the way infested with serpents and scorpions, their steps tracked by predatory tribes. So also in the case of His people still. Had He seen fit He might have ordained that their pathway was to be without gloom or darkness, trial or tear; no cross, no "deep calling to deep," nothing but seas undisturbed by a ripple; sunny slopes and verdant valleys, and bright clusters of palm, with sunlit fronds of love and faithfulness!

But to keep them humble, to teach them their dependence on Himself, to make their present existence a state of discipline and probation, He has ordered it otherwise. Their journey, as travelers, is at times through mist

and cloudland. Their voyage, as seamen, through alternate calm and storm. They are like the vessel being built in the dockyard. The unskilled and uninitiated can hear nothing but clanging hammers; they can see nothing but unshapely timbers and glare of torches. It is a scene of din and noise, dust and confusion. But all will at last be acknowledged as needed portions in the spiritual workmanship, when the soul, released from its earthly fastenings, is launched on the summer seas of eternity.

"Give to the winds your fears;  
Hope, and be undismayed;  
God hears your sighs and counts your tears,  
God shall lift up your head.  
Through waves and clouds and storms  
He gently clears your way  
O wait His time—so shall this night  
Soon end in joyous day!"

"THEN shall we know," to use the words of an earnest thinker, "that the dark scenes were dark with light too bright for mortal eye; the sorrow turning into dearest joys when seen to be the filling up of Christ's; who withholds not from us His own crown, bidding us drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism; and saying to our reluctant hearts, 'What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter'" (Hinton).

"I do not ask, O Lord, that life may be  
A pleasant road;  
I do not ask that Thou wouldst take from me  
Aught of its load.

"I do not ask that flowers should always spring  
Beneath my feet;  
I know too well the poison and the sting  
Of things too sweet.

"For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead,  
Lead me aright—  
Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed,  
Through peace to light.



"I do not ask my cross to understand,  
My way to see—  
Better in darkness just to feel Thy hand,  
And follow Thee."

"When evening comes, there will be light."

## **A GREAT SALVATION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Corinthians 1:24

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Romans 1:16

In the sense of a great national deliverance, the Israelites at Elim had lately, as we have seen, been the spectators of "the power of God unto salvation." By Him "both the Egyptian chariot and horse had been cast into the sea," and He had "made a way through its depths for His ransomed ones to pass over."

Stupendous as that miracle was, there was one mightier far, of which the other was the emblem. Fifteen centuries after these liberated Hebrews were slumbering in their graves, the Gospel of Christ was made known as this supreme, incomparable spiritual 'power'—"the power of God" (or, omitting the article, which is not in the original, "power of God"—God's own instrumental means of saving men).

We have reason to be "ashamed" of what may be called the dominant world-power—the power of brute force—the monster-power of war—the power associated with Paganism and the savage ages. Let us confront the demon-power with the angel power—the power which has been earth's

greatest curse, with the power which has proved earth's greatest blessing—the power of guilty man to destruction, with the power of Almighty God "unto salvation." Without that Gospel of Christ, the world would have had not one ray of light on the subject of salvation—either from the guilt or the dominion of sin.

Oratory, poetry, philosophy, taste, intellect, reason, were all baffled and confounded. Professing themselves on this great mystery to be wise, they became fools. Mankind had tried for ages and generations to solve the problem; but every oracle was dumb (silent) on the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" The Greek might discourse on the loveliness of nature—he might speak of the theology of mountains and groves and forests and rivers: and we have no wish to depreciate their testimony. Paul had none. He, surely, was feelingly alive to the glories of nature's scenery, who, on Mars Hill, could, to the Athenians, so sublimely discourse on "God who made the world and all things therein, who dwells not in temples" (such temples as these!—pointing up to their adjoining Parthenon), "made with hands" (Acts 17:24); or to the Lystrians, as he spoke of "the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and everything in them; who gives rain from heaven, and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:15, 17).

But listen, you Greeks! Pile, if you will, mountain on mountain; ransack all the glories of material nature; bring every flower that blooms, and every torrent that sweeps in wild music to the sea; summon old ocean from his deep caverns, and the myriad stars that gem the firmament! They may, and do, silently and eloquently, speak on the theme of God's "eternal power and Godhead." But there is one theme on which "they have no speech nor language—their voice is not heard," and that is, How is God to deal with my sinful soul? With regard to this question, "You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep."

Is there, then, no answer elsewhere? Yes, where the volume of Nature fails, the volume of Inspiration interposes. The question is answered. The Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation;" or, as it is expressed in the kindred passage, "Christ crucified is the power of God!" He is the Power of God to atone for sin. He is the Power of God to satisfy

justice, and meet the requirements of the law. He is the Power of God to rob death of its sting, and the grave of its victory. We hear much of the antiquated power of man. The Nile, the Euphrates, the Tiber are washing, to this hour, the colossal memorials of that power. Man's control, too, in these later days, over the elements, is a mighty thing; his making the winged lightning his ambassador, annihilating space, converting the world into a vast whispering gallery—tidings from battle-fields, or secrets in which the fate of empires and centuries are suspended, transmitted by a magic touch from capital to capital; the power of the steam-engine, too, like a fiery spirit, careering majestically over land and ocean.

But what is man's power when brought to bear on the soul, and the sinner, and eternity? A voice is heard saying of, and to, all human might—"Thus far shall you go, and no further: here let your proud waves be stayed." The world, we, repeat, had given it long eras to work out, if it could, the problem of its own self-salvation. But after these centuries of failure; after God had given man his own time and means to exhaust every effort to solve himself, He says—"Now, listen to My own Divine expedient: By lifting up My beloved Son on the cross, I intend to draw all men unto Me!" Verily here is a new power—"a new thing" on the earth. The world is to be conquered; society is to be remolded; time-honored religions are to be overthrown; Pantheons are to be subverted—yes, better than all, souls are to be saved, by the power of a silent transforming principle. "Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire."

Ah! there is no power—no influence that can unloose the fetters of fallen humanity like this! We are reminded of the maniac of old who dwelt among the tombs. No man could bind him. They had tried it; but he had burst their bonds like thread, and roamed that dark graveyard. At last he spied, on the white strand of Gennesaret, ONE of whom he had heard. It was Jesus! See that maniac now—sitting "clothed, and in his right mind." So with the soul still. There are many who, in the mad fever of their passions, have roamed for years amid the place of the dead, "crying and cutting themselves with stones." But the Divine Redeemer, in the glories of His person—in the completeness of His work—has stood before them.

Unreclaimable, untamable, by all human means, they have taken a child's place at the foot of His cross; and there they now are sitting, with the peace of Heaven mirrored in their hearts—"the joy of the Lord their strength."

"See me, see me, once a rebel,  
Prostrate at His cross I lie—  
Cross, to tame earth's proudest able,  
Who was e'er so proud as I?  
He convinced me, He subdued me,  
He chastised me, He renewed me;  
The nails that pierced, the spear that slew Him,  
Transfixed my heart, and bound me to Him.  
See me! see me! once a rebel,  
Prostrate at His cross I lie."

"Let us therefore, make every effort to enter that rest."

## **FEARS QUIETED**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Revelation 1:17, 18

John's loving Lord had been lost from sight, ever since the hour when He was borne upwards to heaven from the heights of Olivet. How the orphaned Apostle must have mourned over the irreparable loss! How often in thought would he re-travel these days of earth's holiest and most sacred friendship—when he had walked by his Lord's side, or leaned on His bosom, or listened to His words of divinest comfort! How often may

he not have breathed the fond wish, in words which have enshrined themselves in many a bereaved heart—

"Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

And yet he would remember, too, the Christ of Nazareth and Galilee is no longer the lowly Man of sorrows, the Pilgrim of pilgrims. He is exalted in heavenly state—a name is given Him which is above every name! When, therefore, he had the first startling intimation of the Divine apparition in Patmos; when he heard the trumpet heralding his Lord's approach, saw the bright blaze of glory projected from His path, and listened to the announcement in whose presence he was—"I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last"—he might have expected, on turning around, to gaze on some dazzling throne, gleaming with flashes of Truth, and Holiness, and Righteousness—tiers of attendant angels and burning seraphim lining the celestial pathway!

How different! He first sees a vision, and then hears a voice. Both are replete with comfort and consolation, and well fitted to dismiss and dispel all fear. The vision—It is the Lord holding a cluster of stars in His hand, and encircled with seven golden candlesticks; in gracious love moving in the midst of the Church militant; feeding each candlestick with the oil of His grace, and keeping every star in its sphere in the firmament. The voice—The vanished hand does touch, the stilled voice is once more heard: "He laid His right hand upon me, and said, Fear not."

It would remind Him of that memorable morning descent, after the night of seraphic bliss on the Mount of Transfiguration, when the heavenly messengers had come and gone, and he and his companion-Apostles were returning back to the dull world again. "Alone!"—"yet not alone!" "When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Bereft they were of their celestial companions; but they had One compensating solace for all they had lost. The stars and satellites and moons had waxed and waned and departed—the candle-lights had been extinguished; but the great Sun still remained to illuminate their path, and perpetuate the bliss of that glorious hour. It was enough—they asked no more. With His love and presence to cheer them, they pursued the path, ready for duty,

for trial, for suffering—animated by the sight of the crown, they descended more willing to bear the cross. So would it be now, in Patmos, as on Hermon.

We have, in this exquisitely tender dealing with John, an assurance of what Jesus still is. First, to His Church universal—"in the midst of it"—keeping the oil from decaying, and the gold from tarnishing, and the stars from abandoning their orbits. Then, also, what He is willing to be to every individual believer—the poorest, the humblest, the lowest, the most obscure—though his heart be a Patmos, lonely and desolate, and his home a desert rock, or a dungeon of captivity, or a hut of poverty, or a chamber of disease, or a bed of death—there He is, to lay His right hand of love on the trembling one, and say, "FEAR NOT!"

Fear not, poor sinner, trembling under the load of your guilt—"I am He who was dead;" My death is your life, My blood your plea, My cross the passport to your crown. Fear not, weak and faint-hearted, borne down under your corruptions, the strength of your temptations, the weakness of your graces, the lukewarmness of your love—"I am alive for evermore;" My grace will be sufficient for you.

Fear not, suffering one—you are contending with a great fight of afflictions; trial after trial, like wave after wave, has been rolling in upon you; your house has been swept, ties have been broken, graves opened—the tears scarcely dry when made to flow again. Fear not! I have "the keys of the grave and of death." Not one deathbed has been ordered, not one grave dug, not one tear permitted, without My bidding. Are you not satisfied when a Living Redeemer has the Keys of Death suspended from His belt? In whose keeping could they be better than in His? Are you afraid to die? Is the thought of death, of your coming dissolution, fearful to you? "Fear not! I was dead!" I have sanctified that grave and that dark valley by crossing it all before you. I am the abolisher of death; and to all my people I have made the gate of Death and the gate of Heaven one!

JESUS LIVES—what a motto and watchword for us! Many of the most loving and beloved of human friends come only, like Moses and Elias on the mount of which we have spoken, upon angel visits—illuminating the night of earth with a passing yet blessed radiance—then leaving us, like

the disciples, amid the chill, gray mists of solitude—our path moist with dewy tears, as we hurry back once more to a cold, unsympathizing world. But blessed antidote to all cares! blessed balm for all wounds! blessed compensation for all losses! blessed solace in all sorrows!—if we can descend from the mountain-heights of worldly bliss to the deepest valleys of humiliation and trial with Him still at our side. Jesus lives!—the Living among the dead—Faithful among the faithless—Changeless among the changeable—the only unfailing, unvarying Friend in a failing, varying world. Jesus lives! Then when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory! Like John, we will fall down at His feet and exclaim, "THIS GOD SHALL BE OUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER!"

"I love to hear that voice of old  
Which o'er Patmos' rocky shore  
Thus sweetly spoke, 'I live; behold,  
I am alive for evermore!"

"My Savior lives!—no mortal ears  
Can listen to more joyous strains;  
High above yonder rolling spheres  
My God, and yet my Brother, reigns.

"My Savior lives! He intercedes  
Still as the Lamb—the Crucified;  
'Father, I WILL'—'tis thus He pleads—  
Ne'er was the boon He asked denied.

"My Savior lives!"—and still His heart  
Responsive beats upon the throne  
To every pang from which I smart;  
He makes my tears and woes His own.

"My Savior lives!"—to see His face  
My endless happiness will be;  
Lord, independent of all place,  
Wherever Thou art, is Heaven to me!"

"Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."

## THE WAY KNOWN

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"But He knows the way that I take." Job 23:10

The shadow of a palm of blessed consolation and comfort, under which sat blessed old Job.

The Book of Job has been well defined to be "the record of an earnest soul's perplexities, where the double difficulty of life is solved—the existence of moral evil, and the question whether suffering is a mark of God's wrath or not. What falls from Job's lips is the musing of a man half-stunned, half-surprised, looking out upon the darkness of life, and asking sorrowfully, 'Why are these things so?'" In his checkered experience he loses at times the footsteps of a God of love. Through anguished tears he gives voice to his soul-trouble, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." "If I go to the east, He is not there; and if I go to the west, I do not find Him. When He is at work in the north, I do not see Him; when He turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of Him" (Job 23:8, 9).

But though to sense and sight all is dark, faith rises to the ascendant, and, piercing the environing cloud, her voice is heard, "But He knows the way that I take." All that Providential drama is arranged by Him—life, with all its lights and shadows, its joys and its sorrows. It is enough for the sufferer to be assured that his path and lot are not the result of wayward and capricious accident. The furnace (to take the new figure employed in the same verse) is lighted by the God whose hand was for the moment hidden; and that same faith can add, "When He has tried me, I will come



forth as gold."

Believer! what a glorious assurance! This way of yours—this, it may be crooked, mysterious, tangled way—this way of trial and of tears, "the way of the wilderness"—"He knows it." The furnace, seven times heated—He lighted it. Oh! how would every sorrow and loss be aggravated and embittered if we had nothing to cling to but the theory of arbitrary appointment and dreary fatalism! But we may take courage. There is an Almighty Guide knowing and directing our footsteps, whether it be to the bitter pool of Marah, or to the joy and refreshment of Elim. That way, dark to the Egyptians, has its pillar of cloud and fire for His own Israel. The furnace is hot; but not only can we trust the hand that kindles it, but we have the assurance that the fires are lit not to consume, but to refine; and that when the refining process is completed (no sooner—no later), He brings His people forth as gold. When they think Him least near, He is often nearest. "When my spirit grows faint within me, it is You who know my way."

Can we realize these truths in our everyday experience? Can we think of God, not as some mysterious essence, who, by an Almighty fiat, impressed on matter certain general laws, and, retiring into the solitude of His being, left these to work out their own processes: but is there joy to us in the thought of His being always near; encircling our path and our lying down? Do we know of One brighter than the brightest radiance of the visible sun, visiting our room with the first waking beam of the morning: an eye of infinite tenderness and compassion following us throughout the day, "knowing the way that we take;" a hand of infinite love guiding us, shielding us from danger, and guarding us from temptation—"The keeper of Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps?" Yes, too, and when the furnace is lit, seeing HIM not only kindling it, but seated by, as "the refiner of silver," tempering the fury of the flames?

The world, in their cold vocabulary in the hour of adversity, speaks of "Providence"—"the will of Providence"—"the strokes of Providence." PROVIDENCE! what is that? Why dethrone a living, directing God from the sovereignty of His own earth? Why substitute an inanimate, deathlike abstraction, in place of an acting, controlling, Personal Jehovah? Why forbid the Angel of bereavement to point his hand up the golden steps of

"the misty stair," to "the God above the ladder," saying, "Our Father on high has done it!"?

How it would take the sting from many a sharp trial, thus to see, what the same patriarch saw, (in his hour of aggravated woe, when every earthly Elim-palm lay prostrate at his feet with stripped and withered branches) —no hand but the Divine. He saw that Divine hand behind the gleaming swords of the Sabeans—he saw it behind the lightning-flash—he saw it giving wings to the rushing tempest—he saw it in the awful silence of his plundered home—"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Thus seeing God in everything, his faith reached its climax when this once-powerful prince of the desert, seated on his ashes, could say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

We joyfully believe the day is coming when we shall write under every mysterious providence, "He has done all things well." Yes, bereaved ones, you shall no more weep over early graves, when you yourselves pass upwards to the realms of glory, and hear from the loved and glorified as they are waiting to greet you at the door of heaven, that by an early death they were "taken away from the evil to come." Meanwhile let us rejoice in the assurance, that "the Lord reigns!"—that He knows and appoints "the way" both for ourselves and for others. Oh, comforting thought! enough to dry all tears and silence all murmurings—"Is there evil in the city," in the cottage, in the palace—is there evil which blights some unknown poor man's dwelling—is there evil which clothes a nation in mourning, "and the Lord has not done it"?

"If all things work together  
For ends so grand and blest,  
What need to wonder, whether  
Each in itself is blest?"

"If some things were omitted  
Or altered as we would,  
The whole might be unfitted  
To work for perfect good.

"Our plans may be disjointed,

But we may calmly rest;  
What God has once appointed,  
Is better than our best."

"Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths."

## **PRAYER**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" Matthew 7:11

There is reposeful rest beyond all others, at the mercy-seat. When the hurricane of temptation and trial—the hot wind of the wilderness is fiercest—who has not felt the peaceful overshadowing of this Elim palm?

Prayer for ourselves, the unburdening the heart of its sins and sorrows into the ear of our Heavenly Father; unbosoming our needs, our weaknesses, our frailties and backslidings; it may be the crimson and scarlet stains of which none but the Heart-searcher is aware. The cry for "more grace;" realizing our own weakness, yet realizing, too, the strong arm on which we are encouraged to lean, when our temporary Elims must be left, and the buffeting storm of the wilderness and the unknown perils of the renewed journey must be faced!

Prayer for others. Delightful it is to feel that our intercessions fetch down blessings on those who are absent from us. Prayer annihilates space; it knows nothing of distance. That friend, that brother, the companion of your youth, is far separated from you—out on the perilous ocean, or away in the distant colony. The sound of the Sabbath-bell no longer falls on his ear; you can go with him no longer to the house of God in company; his place is vacant in the pew; his chair is empty at the table; his voice is

missed at the home-hearth! But you can be present with him. Prayer can bring you to his side. Prayer can whisper a father's benediction over him. Prayer can sprinkle him with better than a mother's tears. Prayer can fetch the angels of God around him as a guard; his shield in danger, his defense in trouble. Far off in her cottage-home, a thousand miles away, a mother, all unconscious at the moment of the danger of her sailor-boy, is uttering her midnight pleadings for the wanderer. They have ascended at the very crisis of destruction. The cry of the trembling form kneeling by her lonely couch has rocked the waves to rest. It is a mother's "effectual fervent prayers" that have turned the storm into a calm!

Prayer is still the golden key by which we can unlock, alike for ourselves and for others, the treasury of heaven, and "move the arm of Omnipotence." Yes, and what we owe, on the other hand, to the prayers which have hovered over our cradles and our early years, followed us into the world, grappling for us in our strong temptations, and which, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, have prevailed, will never be known until that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed!

Gracious indeed is this Palm-tree; to be under its shelter is to be beneath the shadow of God. As the devout Payson expresses it, using a different simile, "The best means of keeping near the Lord is the closet. Here the battle is lost or won."

What an encouragement to prayer is the divine challenge given in the second of our motto-verses; the earthly father yielding to the requests and importunities of his children—the pledge and guarantee of a still greater willingness on the part of the Heavenly Parent to respond, and that too with a royal abundance to our needs! "How much more?" Never let us suppose that God is unwilling to hear. There is no exhausting that infinite fullness treasured up in Him. It is one of Philip Henry's quaint sayings, "When Abraham interceded for Sodom, God granted as long as he asked; Abraham left off first." God is able to do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

'It is said,' observes the saintly Rutherford, "'He answered not a word.'" But it is not said, "He heard not a word." These two differ much. Christ often hears, when He does not answer. His not answering is an answer,

and speaks thus, "Pray on, go on, and cry; for the Lord holds His door fast bolted, not to keep you out, but that you may knock and knock." Can we doubt either His willingness or ability to hear, when we think of Him who is our Advocate with the Father?—the Angel Intercessor with His censer "full of much incense," sprinkling therewith the polluted and unworthy prayers of His people, and causing them to ascend with acceptance before God? "Ask in My name," says that Divine Intercessor Himself; adding, "And I say not unto you that I will ask the Father for you." What does He mean by this asserted suspension or intermission of His pleadings? Simply, because the utterance of His name is sufficient. It is the passport to the Mercy-seat, the Key which unlocks the Treasury of heaven, and obtains the "how much more" from the Father's heart.

"You have prayed for much  
In the time that's past,  
You must still pray on,  
For your needs come fast;  
Now ask what you will  
From His boundless store,  
The Father is able  
To give 'much more.'

"Hold out the empty hand,  
And He will fill it;  
Tell Him your vexing fear,  
And He will still it.  
Now take what you will  
From His boundless store,  
The Father is willing  
To give 'much more.'"

"I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in My name."

## TENDER DEALINGS

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young." Isaiah 40:11

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Isaiah 42:3

The thoughts most prominently brought before us in these two passages from the Evangelical Prophet, are, the vastness of the Divine condescension and the gentleness of the Divine dealings—the timid, the weak, the bruised, the burdened, the fallen, nestling in peace and safety under the Heavenly Palm-shade!

The great ones of the earth generally associate only with the great. They are like the eagle, which holds little converse with the low, misty valley, when it can get up amid the blue skies and granite peaks. It is the powerful—the rich—the strong—the titled, who are the deified and worshiped. The weak, and poor, and powerless get but a small fraction of regard, and are too often left, unpitied and neglected, to endure the rough struggle of existence as best they may. And the world has accordingly shaped its gods after this its own ideal. We see the embodiment of that ideal chiseled in the old slabs of Assyrian marble, where the winged bull or lion is depicted trampling its enemies in the dust—the strong trampling on the weak. But the early Christians had also their truer and nobler symbol, which they have left in crude designs in the Roman catacombs: it is the embodiment of the first words which head this meditation—the often-recurring representation of a Shepherd—the Great Shepherd of the Sheep—the Mighty God—carrying on His shoulder a feeble lamb.

Or, to take the figure employed in the second verse—what a word of encouragement to those who require tender dealing!—who are liable, it may be from constitutional temperament, to become the prey of doubts and fears; sensitive in times of trial, irresolute in times of difficulty, unstable in times of temptation. The whole ministry and teaching of Christ is a significant comment on the prophetic utterance—"A bruised reed He will not break." Simple but expressive emblem! The most fragile object in nature is the shivering reed by the riverside. The Eastern shepherd, tending his flock by the streams where these reeds grow, used them for his rustic flute. When one of them was bruised or broken, he never made the attempt to mend it. Inserting it among the others would only have made his instrument discordant; accordingly, he threw it aside as worthless.

Not so the Great Shepherd. When a human soul is bruised and mutilated by sin, He casts it not away. He repairs it for its place in the heavenly instrument, and makes it once more to show forth His praise. Look at David, the Psalmist of Israel. Who more a "bruised reed" than he? God had inspired his soul—made it a many-stringed instrument in discoursing His praise; but now it lay a broken mutilated thing, with the stain of crimson guilt upon it, tuneless and mute. "I kept silence," says he; "my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."

Does Jehovah desert him?—does He cast the reed away and seek to replace the void by another, worthier and better? Does He mock the cry of penitential sorrow as through anguished tears that stricken one thus implored forgiveness—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness, according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions"? No. Hear him detail his own experience—"I acknowledged my sin to You, and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and You forgave the guilt of my sin." And then he takes up the re-tuned instrument, and sings for the encouragement of others—"Let everyone who is godly pray to You while You may be found." In the case of some aromatic plants, it is when bruised they give forth the sweetest fragrance; so it is often the soul

crushed with a sense of guilt which sends forth the sweetest aroma of humility, gratitude, and love. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Go, bruised one, broken with convictions of sin, or wounded in conscience—go, burdened one, weak and weary lamb of the flock, to this Shepherd of Souls; and as you lie in His bosom, hear His assurance of comfort and consolation—"I will remove your shoulder from the burden"—"O Ephraim, you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help." Think how He allowed the fallen to kiss His feet! Think how He touched the kneeling leper, and washed the traitor's feet! "I am the Lord who heals you"—"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more!" How many in eternity will be able to testify, in the words of one of the psalms in which the minstrel King of Israel records his experience, as he takes a retrospect of his strangely checkered life—"Your GENTLENESS HAS MADE ME GREAT!"

"Hide and guard us in Your tender arms  
Until the wilderness of life be past;  
Save us from temptation's fatal charms,  
Seal us for Your own from first to last.

"Let Your rod and staff in mercy lead us  
In the footsteps of Your flock below,  
Until 'mid heavenly pastures You shall feed us,  
Where the streams of life eternal flow."

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him."



## SLEEPING AND WAKING

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"She is not dead, but asleep." Luke 8:52

"Your brother will rise again." John 11:23

Let these words suggest thoughts of unutterable solace and refreshment to those who may now be seated in tears and sackcloth under the "Palms of the Valley."

Death is but a quiet sleep. The 'Bible,' it has been said, 'with its finger of love, turns what we dread into gold.' Here the Bible, with its finger of life, turns dreaded death into a peaceful slumber. Soon the morning hour shall strike; the waking time of immortality arrive; and the voice of Jesus will be heard, saying, "I go that I may awake them out of sleep."

It has been often noted that there is a beautiful and striking progression in our Lord's three miraculous raisings from the dead. The first in point of time was in the case of the daughter of Jairus, spoken of in our first motto-verse. She was raised immediately after death had taken place; when the body was still laid on its death couch. Her soul had but taken its flight to the spirit-world, when the angels that bore it away were summoned to restore it. The second, in chronological order, was the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. Death had here achieved a longer triumph. The customary time for mourning had intervened; he was being borne to his last home when the voice of Deity sounded over his funeral casket. The third and last of this class of miracles, was the raising of Lazarus of Bethany. Over him death had attained a still more significant mastery. The funeral rites were over; the tomb held in its embrace 'the loved and lost'—four days had these lips been sealed before the life-giving and life-restoring word was uttered.

There is one other gigantic step in this progression—"The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God,

and shall come forth!"

In the first case cited, the time elapsing between the dismissal of the spirit and its recall was measured by moments, the second by hours, the third by days; the fourth is measured by ages—centuries—a MILLENNIUM. But what of that? What though in conventional language we speak of the tomb as the "long home," and death as "the long sleep"? By Him (with whom a thousand years is as one day), that precious, because redeemed dust, shall be gathered together, particle by particle. "I will ransom them," He says, as He looks forward through the vista of ages to this glorious consummation, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction." Blessed, thrice blessed assurance!

As in the case of Jairus, it was his own loved daughter who, in form and feature, was again restored; as the widow of Nain gazed on the unaltered countenance of her own cherished boy; as the sisters of Lazarus saw in him who came forth from the grave, no alien form, strangely altered, but the brother of their hearts; so, we believe, on that wondrous morning of immortality, shall the loved on earth wear their old familiar smiles and loving looks. They shall retain their personal identity.

No, further; as in the case of the ruler's daughter, her parents received her once more into their arms; as in the case of the widow's son, it is expressly said, "they delivered him to his MOTHER;" as in Bethany, we are allowed to look into the home circle again reunited—Jesus, once more, loving "Martha and Mary and Lazarus," and they loving one another—so may we believe that, on the Resurrection day, the affections which gladdened and hallowed homesteads here, shall not be dulled, quenched, annihilated; but rather ennobled and purified. Like the fabled Phoenix (the "Palm-bird") they shall rise from their ashes in forms of new and more glorious life. Brothers, sisters, parents, children, shall be linked in the fond ties and memories of earth, gathering in loving groups under the shade of immortal palms, by the living fountains of waters, and singing together the Song of Eternity.

"We must not doubt, or fear, or dread,  
That love for life is only given,

And that the calm and sainted dead  
Will meet estranged and cold in heaven.  
Oh, love were poor and vain indeed,  
Based on so harsh and stern a creed.  
But that which makes this life so sweet  
Shall render heaven's joy complete."

"And the mother gave, in tears and pain,  
The flowers she most did love;  
She knew she should find them all again  
In the fields of light above.

"Oh, not in cruelty, not in wrath  
The Reaper came that day,  
'Twas an angel visited the green earth  
And took the flowers away."

"He grants sleep to those He loves."

## **THE RETURN TO ZION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake  
them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Isaiah 51:11

These words had doubtless a primary reference to Israel, seated, not  
under the old palms of the Sinai wilderness, but rather, at a later age,  
under the willow-trees of the streams of Babylon; on whose branches a  
poet of the Captivity so touchingly describes the captives as hanging their

muffled harps, and weeping as they remembered Zion.

But they have a grander than local or temporary meaning. Every member of the true Israel of God, as he is seated under the figurative shadow, whether of palm or of willow, whether his experience be joyful or sorrowful, may take heart and courage from the description here given of travelers to a better than earthly Zion; Jehovah's own ransomed ones; whose captivity is turned "as streams in the south," and who are "more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

Taking the passage thus, in its highest spiritual interpretation, these Zionward travelers are beautifully represented, even in the course of their journey, as filled with peace and joy in believing, abounding in hope. Many, while they picture a coming heaven as a place of unmingled happiness and bliss, are apt to picture the way there as one of gloom—every pilgrim reaching it with the furrow on his brow and the tear in his eye; that if any chimes of gladness reach his ears, they come from bells inside the gates of the city, not outside. But these words tell differently and more truly. There are palm trees 'at Elim' as well as "beyond Jordan." The desert is resonant with song.

Gladness and joy are here represented as two attendants—sister spirits, accompanying all the way, hand in hand. Yes! the Christian is, or ought to be, a joyful man. Though it be a wilderness he treads, and though "sorrow and mourning" are also depicted as tracking his footsteps; yet he has elements of tranquil happiness within him, which make the smile, not the tear, the appropriate symbol of his thoughts and emotions. It would be strange, indeed, were it otherwise. At peace with God; sin forgiven; the heart changed; the affections elevated; grace molding, sustaining, quickening, sanctifying; and, rising above all, the assured hope of glory hereafter. He can say, "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound" (Ps. 4:7).

The words, too, seem to tell of an ever-increasing joy. As the portals of glory draw nearer, the song deepens in melody and strength. They come to Zion "with singing;" then "everlasting joy is on their head." Then they obtain a new anointing of "gladness;" and finally "sorrow and mourning"—these two companions of the wilderness, rise on their

somber, gloomy wings, and speed away forever!

Is that happiness in any feeble measure ours? Can we appropriate to ourselves, in lowly, humble confidence, that grandest of titles here given to the desert sojourners, "The Redeemed of the Lord"? Do we have on the pilgrim garb—the Righteousness alike imputed and implanted—the attire of the King's daughter, all-glorious without, "all-glorious within"? and is our chief element of joy in the prospect of the Heavenly Zion—not the negative one, the absence of sorrow and mourning—but that which consists in the vision and fruition of Zion's God, assimilation to His character, conformity to His will, active energy in His service, serving Him day and night in His Temple? With such a hope, we may well be patient under present trial; though 'sorrowful,' we may be 'always rejoicing.' "God our Maker gives songs in the night." Better the night, with songs in it, than no night and no song. Better the wilderness and its Elim-groves, than Egypt with its flesh-pots and its bondage. Better the thorn in the nest to tempt to magnificent flight, than to settle in the downy nest of false security and ease, selfishness and death.

The world has its joys too; but, apart from God, they are a poor counterfeit of the true. They are often insecure, uncertain, fitful while they last; the grave will sooner or later close over them, when they will vanish like the transient flash of summer lightning, never to be recalled, or "as a dream when one wakes." But, Christians! "everlasting joy," like a festive wreath or crown, shall be upon your head! Yours are to be robes ever bright, palms ever green, crowns never fading. Elim with all its refreshment and rest, but none of its transience. "The Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended."

"Here, the great unrest of ages;  
Here, the trouble, toil, and strife:  
There, the peaceful, quiet waters  
Of the crystal stream of life.

"Here, the sighing of the branches;  
Here, the wave-beat on the shore:  
There, the ceaseless strain of angels  
Chanting praises evermore.

"Here, the rocks and shoals and quicksands;  
Here, the home beneath the sod:  
There, the haven where we would be;  
There, the presence of our God."

"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water."

## **THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15

Amid the whisperings from the fronds of these desert Palms, we cannot be wrong in averring that there is one which has a music all its own—pre-eminently valued and cherished.

The consciousness even of human sympathy is most sacred, hallowed, and prized. In these dependent natures of ours, who, in the season of need has not longed for it: and when it comes, has not welcomed it like the presence of a ministering angel? Others working with us, feeling for us—sharing our toils, helping us to carry our burdens; entering into our hopes, our joys, our sorrows; to see the responsive tear glistening in the eye—all this is a mighty strengthener and sustainer amid the difficulties of checkered life. The martyr at the stake has been often nerved for endurance by the whisper of "Courage, brother!" from the fellow-victim at his side. How the Great Apostle in his Roman dungeon—when he was "such an one as Paul the aged" was cheered by the visits of congenial friends, such as Timothy and Onesiphorus! How touchingly does the

illustrious captive invoke God's richest benediction on the latter and on his household, for "often refreshing him and not being ashamed of his chain." On the other hand, how sad those circumstances when deprived of all such support—when left to drift hopelessly away from human brotherhood, and to be like a stranded vessel on life's lonely, inhospitable shore!

If human sympathy be thus gladdening and grateful, what must be the pure—exalted—sinless—unselfish sympathy emanating from the Great Brother-Man—the Heavenly Palm-Tree in the midst of the earthly encampment—the sympathy of Jesus, the adorable High Priest of His Church?

"He was in all points tempted." His is a deep, yearning, real sympathy, arising out of His true and real humanity. He came not with an Angel-nature or an Angel-life. He was not, as many falsely picture Him, half Angel, half God—looking down on a fallen world from the far-distant heights of His heavenly throne. But He descended, and walked in the midst of it, pitching His tent among its families—"He took not on Him the nature of Angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham."

The Great Physician lived in the world's hospital. He did not write out His cures in His remote dwelling in the skies, refusing to come into personal contact with the patients. He walked its every ward. With His own hand He felt the fevered pulses; His own eyes gazed on the sufferer's tears. He stood not by the fiery furnace as a spectator, but there was One in it "like the Son of God." He thought our thoughts. He wept our tears.

Yes, we repeat, that Great Being now in heaven, unseen, invisible to mortal eye, so entered when on earth into the subtlest and tenderest sensibilities of our emotional frames, that the heart of His glorified humanity still thrills responsive to every pang in the souls of the people. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted." "He knows their frame," for He had that frame Himself. Every throb they feel, evokes a kindred pulsation in the bosom of the Prince of Sufferers: "for He that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one" (nature). Though changed in His outward estate from the Pilgrim Redeemer to that of the exalted Priest and King, His sympathetic feelings know no change, for He is "the same

yesterday, and today, and forever."

"His," it has been well said by a thinker of modern days, who struggled manfully upwards from skeptic doubt to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus, "His is a sympathy like that of a parent for a child, which is surely the deeper and the tenderer for being above the sphere of its little passions and mistakes. Whose sympathy with a child is best and truest? that of another child who has all the same follies and errors and petty interests and cares, or that of a mother, who knows them all, but does not on her own behalf share in them; who lives in them, and feels for them only through her love?" Such is the sympathy of Jesus.

There are times when the blessed shade of this Palm is specially needed. There are crisis-hours in our lives when we require, in no ordinary way, strong support: when, like Jacob at Bethel, or John at Patmos, we are all alone in a desolate place—the sun of our earthly happiness set: beloved earthly friends vanished and gone. Then, when we may be giving vent to the vain, hopeless wail of our smitten hearts, "Joseph is not and Simeon is not," the despairing cry for support is answered, although not in the sense perhaps we desired or longed for. The Savior Himself delights to come, showing us the ladder which connects the pillow of stones and the weary sleeper, with the heights of heaven. Or, as in the case of the lonely exile of the Aegean sea, raising us from our prostrate condition, as He lays His right hand upon us, and whispers in our ears His own gentle accents of reassuring peace—"Fear not! I AM" (in My unchanging human sympathy as the Elder Brother) "I am He who lives and was dead!"

"Then One, more fair than all the rest to see,  
One to whom all the others bowed the knee,  
Came to me gently, as I trembling lay,  
And, 'Follow Me!' He said, 'This is the way.'

"At length to Him I raised my saddened heart;  
He knew its sorrows, bid its doubts depart.  
'Don't be afraid,' He said, 'but trust in Me,  
My perfect love shall now be shown to thee.'

"And now henceforth my one desire shall be,



That He who knows me best should choose for me;  
And so, whatever His love sees good to send,  
I'll trust it's best, because He knows the end."

"The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary."

## FATHERLY CHASTISEMENT

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"As a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you."  
Deuteronomy 8:5

Come, child of affliction, and seat yourself under the shadow of this precious verse—this sheltering palm. God disciplines you as a parent. "Can anything," says Harrington Evans, in one of his many brief aphorisms, "dry up tears like this—'my Father'?"

When an earthly parent uses the rod, he may, like Joseph to his brethren, speak and act with apparent roughness; but who can tell the pangs that all the while are rending his heart—the yearning love with which he regards his prodigal at the very moment he is chastising him! The rod is in a Father's hands—"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons." An earthly father may act capriciously—from impulse and passion. God never can, never does. An earthly father may misunderstand his child; he may deal with unnecessary severity; he may use words of harshness when more wholesome and considerate would have been words of kindness.

Not so is it with Him who says, "I will discipline you, but only with justice." He measures out every drop in the cup. He wisely and lovingly adapts His dealings to the case, necessities, and emergencies of His people. "As a father"—yes, we may truly say, more tenderly than a father—"has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him; for He (unlike the kindest earthly parent) knows how we are formed—He remembers that we are dust."

Surely this is, after all, Christianity's noblest and most precious revelation of God. The revelation of Him as a Spirit—the Great Unseen, Unknown, Untraceable, Intangible—everywhere present, beneath, around, about me—with the eye of unerring scrutiny searching the secret labyrinths of the heart—how grand, solemn, awe-inspiring! "Where shall I go from Your Spirit, or where shall I flee from Your presence?" But God the FATHER—my Father—the feeling of awe encompassing the Supreme, melts into affection. That All-Seeing One is the archetype of the dearest of human relations—the earthly parent is the shadowy image of the Heavenly!

Specially in the season of affliction, to which our motto-verse refers, is that name suggestive of tenderest consolation. Who, of all the family, does the parent on earth most love and anxiously care for? Is it not the sick and suffering child? The strong shrubs are left to grapple with the storm; it is the weak and fragile ones that are specially tended and sheltered from biting frost or scorching sun. The ninety-nine are left by the shepherd to roam at will, untended, on the mountainside; but the one, foot-sore, fleece-torn wanderer—the one sick or wounded—he grudges no length of journey to support, or to bear back on his shoulder, rejoicing, to the fold.

Sorrowing one, it is on you this great God lavishes His deepest, profoundest sympathy. You are the battered flower He loves most to tend—you are the drooping member of the flock whose wounds He loves most to bind up. As one whom his "father has compassion" (Ps. 103:13), "as one whom his mother comforts" (Isa. 66:13). Repose in quiet confidence under His Heavenly discipline. If even now He is disciplining you, do not seek to accuse or question the infinite love and wisdom of His dealings; but, remembering in whose hand is the rod, be it yours to say, with un murmuring lips—"YOUR WILL BE DONE."

"The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud  
Is gathering thickly o'er my head, and loud  
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand  
Like one bewildered! Father! take my hand.

"The way is dark, my child! but leads to light;  
I would not always have you walk by sight.  
My dealings now you can not understand,  
I meant it so; but I will take your hand.

"The day goes fast, my Father! and the night  
Is drawing darkly down. My faithless sight  
Sees ghostly visions: fears, a spectral band,  
Encompass me. O Father! take my hand.

"The day goes fast, my child! But is the night  
Darker to Me than day? In Me is light!  
Keep close to Me, and every spectral band  
Of fears shall vanish. I will take your hand.

"The way is long, my Father! and my soul  
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal.  
While yet I journey through this weary land,  
Keep me from wandering. Father! take my hand.

"The way is long, my child! But it shall be  
Not one step longer than is best for thee;  
And you shall know, at last, when you shall stand  
Safe at the goal, how I did take your hand."

"Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure."

## GOD UNCHANGING

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"But You remain the same." Psalm 102:27

This is an antithetical clause; a statement which is placed in contrast with something preceding, in order to bring the truth it contains more strongly and powerfully before us. The sacred writer deepens the shadows of his background, to give a more vivid prominence to a great Pillar of natural and revealed belief, the Immutability of God. The background! it is the dark, fitful, flitting shadows of time and sense. He thus chronicles their history—"They will perish." His foreground! it is the changeless and unchanging Jehovah, "BUT You remain the same."

The highest and most sublime truths in theology are often supported alike by reason and revelation. What says reason with regard to the Divine Immutability? That if God is a changeable Being He cannot be perfect, for mutability is the necessary attribute of imperfection. Again (if we dare to suppose for a moment), that if God were to undergo a change, it must be an Infinite change; moreover, it must be one of these three (I quote the words of an old divine)—(1.) A change for the better. This would suppose present imperfection. Or (2.) a change for the worse; bold and blasphemous impiety, which would reduce the Holy One to a level with the creature. A third supposition—most presumptuous of all—is that of annihilation. This would leave the world without God, which would be a contradiction in terms.

Turn we, now, to what is the testimony of revealed scripture. That testimony, though uttered in many ways, may be comprised in the one assertion, "I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6). Glorious truth! To think, as imagination wings its flight from everlasting to everlasting, that in the existence of the Being whose lifetime is eternity, there has been no "variableness"—that He was the same before the world was; that He is the same now; and will be the very same, ages and ages after the angel has stood on the wreck of matter and proclaimed "Time to be no longer"—as

perfect at the present moment as He can be when an "eternity of eternity" shall have rolled by.

But in what ways may this unchangeableness of God be regarded as a 'Palm of Elim,' imparting a sense of rest and refreshment to those encamping under its shadow? Comforting doctrine, it undoubtedly is. It leads us, among other reflections, to feel assured of His certain foreknowledge of all events—that whatever happens to us must be ordained by Him; and that the fitful changes in a changing world—our relations to one another, our domestic and social ties, our joys and our sorrows, are ordained, watched, and controlled by Him, who sits enthroned alike amid the radiant sunshine and above and behind the cloud-lands of life; bringing good out of seeming evil, order out of apparent confusion; overruling all (ALL), for His own glory and for the best interests of His Church.

He is spoken of as "the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). "This," observes an eminent Christian of a former age, commenting on the words, "is His disposition. An act of love may be very kind, but there is no security for the future. But when the disposition is love—unchanging love—all must be loving because He is love—all must be wise because He is wisdom." "Because God," says the inspired writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 4:17, 18).

There is a view of this peerless truth connected with our motto-verse, pre-eminently comforting, to which we have not yet turned our attention. The passage of which that verse forms a part, has, by Scriptural warrant (Heb. 1:10-12) a special application to the adorable Person in the sacred Trinity, who is pre-eminently the PALM under whose shadow His Pilgrim Israel repose. Christ, the God-man Mediator, may be supposed (in vers. 23-27) to address His Divine Father—"In the course of My life He broke my strength; He cut short My days. So I said: 'Do not take Me away, O My God, in the midst of My days.'" Then follows the Father's answer—"Your

years go on through all generations. In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end" (vers. 24-27). Yes, of Jesus, wearing our glorified human nature—the sympathies of a refined and exalted humanity, we can say, "You are the same."

The absolute unchangeableness of God we could take little hold of—it is high, we cannot attain to it. But "the Man Christ Jesus"—the same as He lived and moved and suffered and died on earth; the same in His compassion, in His words of mercy, in His messages of love, in His tenderness to the penitent, the fearful, the doubting; in His sympathy with the bereaved and lonely; and who no longer with tears to shed, has still the heart to feel—Oh, when the spirit is torn with sorrow, and wounded with thoughts into which the cold world cannot enter; when estrangement severs brother from brother and friend from friend; where can the eye peacefully repose but on this unchanging One? "BUT YOU are the same!" Truly this is "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast," for it "enters within the veil!"

Change is our portion here in this present world. The Psalmist in this passage points to the starry heavens above, and the apparently immovable, immutable foundations of the earth beneath, and inscribes on them the record, "They will perish. Like clothing You will change them and they will be discarded" (as a worn-out garment which the Almighty Maker lays aside, as for no more use). When everything within and around us may be echoing the same sad verdict, it is blessed to be able to turn from the unstable to the stable; from the reed which the blast may bend and the hurricane shiver, to the Great living ROCK which spurns the storm and defies all change! In a word, to lay firm grasp on the glorious antithesis of Israel's Kingly Minstrel. It is God in contrast with man; Immutability in contrast with mutability, the Infinite with the finite, the mortal with the Immortal, Eternity with time. "But You are the same!"

"Our years are like the shadows  
On sunny hills that lie;

Or flowers that deck the meadows  
That blossom but to die;  
A sleep, a dream, a story,  
By strangers quickly told,  
An evanescent glory  
Of things that soon are old.

"O God! the Rock of Ages,  
Who evermore has been,  
What time the tempest rages  
Our dwelling-place serene.  
Before Your first creations  
You were the same as now,  
To endless generations  
The Everlasting Thou!"

"Those who know Your name will trust in You."

## **HEALING FOR ALL**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He healed all their sick." Matthew 12:15

The last words which fell upon the ears of Israel before coming to Elim, and while they were yet encamped at Marah, were these—"JEHOVAH ROPHI," "I am the Lord which heals you." Christ is this Great Physician—the Universal Healer—the Curer of every species and every case of spiritual paralysis. The appeal of the weeping prophet—"Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?"—is silenced in the presence of the Divine Restorer. Amid endless diversities of country, climate, language, manners, civilization—in the polished age, the uncivilized age, the

philosophic age, the war age, the utilitarian age, the human heart is found the same—and the One Physician, the one medicine, "Christ crucified," is able to heal all diseases. "He is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes." To every one! We may follow the sun in his fiery course as he circles the globe, and in vain shall we search for the spot on which he shines, where this Gospel may not be freely proclaimed.

Let none stand in doubt, owing to any peculiarity of circumstance, as to their warrant to appropriate the purchased blessings of Redemption. There is but one condition which, using another figure, the Divine Healer Himself employs, as He invites His Pilgrim people to the true 'Wells of Elim'—"If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." No other condition is there, in partaking of the living springs. The quality of water is not affected by the nature of the vessel which contains it; the water is the same, whether it be taken in a golden goblet or an earthen jar—by the king holding it in his jeweled cup, or the beggar that has no cup but the palm of his hands.

So is it with the water in the wells of Salvation. Around these, the rich and poor, naturally and spiritually, meet together; and whether it be with vessels of great, or vessels of small quantity—"vessels of cups" or "vessels of flagons"—the invitation is the same, "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Whoever comes to Me" (irrespective of all sins, shortcomings, moral disabilities) "I will never drive away."

Look at that scene in the early Church; Peter and John healing the impotent man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. It was an acted parable of the healing influence of the Gospel and the Gospel's Author. That helpless cripple, at the all-powerful name of "JESUS OF NAZARETH," cast aside his crutches, rose from his couch of miserable helplessness, with strength in his powerless limbs, and praise on his long-sealed lips. And next day, when the two apostles were summoned before the high priest, with the rulers, and elders, and scribes, and asked, "By what power, or by what name, have you done this?" Peter nobly replied (and it is a reply applicable to every diseased, helpless, sin-stricken sinner, who has risen from his couch of misery and entered the Temple of grace, walking, and leaping, and praising God), "If we are being asked to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked



how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, by whom God raised from the dead, that his man stands before you healed" (Acts 4:9, 10).

That all-powerful name and that all-powerful theme has lost none of its efficacy. May its music gladden us through life! As we move from encampment to encampment in the pilgrim journey, may "peace through the blood of His cross" be the gracious words which fall on our ears as we strike the tent and prepare to follow the unknown way. May they be the last to cheer us when our footsteps are on the brink of Jordan! Let us listen, in closing, to words from one of the "Hymns of the Fatherland"—

"Weep not, Jesus hears thee,  
Hears your moanings broken,  
Hears when you sigh wearily  
All your grief have spoken.  
Raise your cry,  
He is nigh,  
Everything on earth be shaken,  
You will never be forsaken.  
"Weep not, Jesus hears thee;

He shall come and surely save;  
And each sorrow you shall see  
Lie buried in your grave.  
Sin shall die,  
Grief shall fly.  
You have wept your latest tears  
When the Lord of life appears."

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

## DIVINE POWER

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose

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"He rules forever by His power." Psalm 66:7

The Psalm from which these words are taken is one of the many that were inspired by memories of the Sinai wilderness—the great drama of the Exodus. The words of our motto-verse are ushered in by the proudest of these memories—"Come and see what God has done,...He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in Him....He rules forever by His power." Varied are the figures employed by the sacred psalmist in describing the illustrious event. Jehovah had broken the meshes of the enclosing net (11). From the fire of Egypt's brick-kilns He had rescued them (12). Through the furnace they had emerged purified (10). He conducted them through the raging flood of the Red Sea (6). They had only to "stand still and see the salvation of God" (5 and 12). "For you, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance." (vers. 10-12).

An emancipation effected from the territory of the greatest and proudest of the old world dynasties—an enslaved people, in the might of their God, rising in a night, breaking their chains, leaving every memento of bondage and degradation behind them; and after a miraculous march of forty years, at last entering triumphantly the promised land. All this could not have been accomplished without the cognizance of the surrounding nations. Hence the Psalmist, remembering these glorious 'works of the Lord and His wonders of old,' breaks out into a lofty appeal to the kingdoms of his own age to recognize the hand of Israel's Jehovah. (ver. 1) "Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, 'How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that your enemies cringe before You.'...He rules forever by His power."

What a glorious palm-shade to camp under! What an unspeakably comforting assurance, whether to nations or to individuals, that the same mighty hand which shattered the chains of the Hebrew bondsmen and smote the tongue of the Egyptian sea, may be recognized in every event which happens to His people—every public calamity, every domestic heart-sorrow. Whether it be the bondage and deliverance of a nation, or the preparing and withering of a family gourd, we can write above all, "He rules forever by His power." Whether He smites or heals, darkens or gladdens, gives or takes away, it is ours to say, in the words of this inspiring hymn (vers. 8, 9), "Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of His praise be heard; He has preserved our lives." Life is His. He kindles the spark, and, when He sees fit, He quenches it. Death is but the revocation of His own grant, the lapsing of the lease into the hands of life's great Proprietor. "You turn men back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men.'"

The psalm is thought by some to have been specially composed by David on the occasion of that great festival at the end of his reign, when, after having collected material for his projected Temple on Mount Moriah, 'all Israel' assembled, at the summons of their aged king, and in response to his appeal, "consecrated their service to the Lord." What could be more natural than for the minstrel monarch, at such a time, to return in the first instance to God's wondrous transactions with them as a nation, ever since the hour of the Exodus; and then to pass to a personal retrospect of God's dealings with himself throughout his varied history, from the morning of his life in the valleys of Bethlehem until now, when the sun was setting and the shadows were falling? He too had to tell of varied sorrows. He too had been tried as silver is tried. He too had been brought through fire and through water, and had affliction laid upon his loins, (affliction which few bereaved parents are called to endure). But even on the mingled retrospect, in which all these figures of speech met—the furnace, the net, the fire, the flood, the sack-clothed loins—he could see mercy—rich, undeserved mercy, mingling with, and tempering judgment.

The dark clouds of his stormy life were alternated with glorious sunshine; the dreary spots of the wilderness were far outnumbered by the green. Elim palms stood conspicuous amid stretches of barren sand. And

remembering how graciously God had heard his prayers in the past, supported him in trouble, and made his earthly trials conspire for the good of his soul, we can understand how appropriately he records his votive resolve in ver. 13, "I will come to Your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to You—vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to You and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats. Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me." He gives to God all the glory of his past deliverances and triumphs. He takes none to himself. "Sing forth," he says, "the honor of His name...which kept our feet from slipping."

The psalm and its many devout and instructive sentiments was designed for the Church of God and believers in every age. Its lessons are not local but universal. The safe and triumphant passage of Israel through the Red Sea, and the Jordan of old, are pledges of covenant mercy to His people in all times and in all seasons of affliction. Through every sea of sorrow and trouble He makes a passage for them, gives songs in the night, takes off their sackcloth, and girds them with gladness. It is a striking assertion, "through the flood" (the place where we might have expected nothing but trembling and terror, anguish and dismay)—"there," says the Psalmist, "did we rejoice in Him!"

How many there are who can endorse this as their experience: that "there," in their very seasons of distress and sadness, they have been enabled, as they never did before, to triumph and rejoice. How near their God in covenant is brought! how brightly shine His promises! In the day of our prosperity we cannot see the brilliancy of these. Like the sun at noon, hiding out the stars from sight, they are indiscernible; but when night overtakes, the deep dark night of sorrow, out come these clustering stars—blessed constellations of Bible hope and promise and consolation. Like Jacob at Jabbok, it is when our earthly sun goes down that the Divine Angel comes forth, and we wrestle with Him and prevail.

It was at night, "in the evening," Aaron lit the sanctuary lamps. It is in the night of trouble the brightest lamps of the believer are often kindled. It was in his loneliness and exile John had the glorious vision of his Redeemer. There is many a Patmos still in the world, whose brightest

remembrances are those of God's presence and upholding grace and love in solitude and sadness. How many pilgrims, still passing through these Red Seas and Jordans of earthly affliction, will be enabled in the retrospect of eternity to say—full of the memories of God's great goodness, "We went through the flood on foot, THERE"—there, in those dark experiences, with the surging waves on every side, deep calling to deep, Jordan, as when Israel crossed, it in 'the time of overflowing,' (flood), yet "THERE did we rejoice in Him!" "Sing forth the honor of His name, and make His praise glorious."

There are seasons, indeed, when we cannot tune the harp of broken strings, when the summons of the 5th verse is more appropriately ours, "Come, and see what God has done, how awesome His works in man's behalf!" When we have to say unto Him, "How awesome are Your deeds!" But while justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, mercy and truth go continually before His face. While "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and You, O Lord, are loving." "I will sing of Your love and justice; to You, O Lord, I will sing praise!" "We went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance!"

Occupying now the glorious place of security, which can alone be found in Christ and His finished salvation, let us commit the keeping of our souls, and of all near and dear to us, to Him for the future in well doing; knowing that there will be no floods or fires sent but what He appoints; and, if sent, let us seek to be able to say, "may Your will be done!" That so we may come at last to stand without fault before the throne, with every flood passed, every fire quenched, every tear dried. With room found provided, for all whom death has severed from us, in that "place of abundance" above; and confident then, at least, that the Divine dispensations and dealings were for our good, we shall be able to utter the invitation, "Come, and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me."

"Source of my life's refreshing springs,  
Whose presence in my heart sustains me,  
Your love appoints me pleasant things,  
Your mercy orders all that pains me.

"Well may Your own beloved, who see  
In all their lot their Father's pleasure,  
Bear loss of all they love, save Thee,  
Their living, everlasting treasure."

"I will take refuge in the shelter of Your wings."

## **PROVIDENCE AND GRACE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."

"The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord." Psalm 37:23, 39

Here are two fronds of God's palm-grove bending over His true people.

Comforting, as we have seen, is the great fundamental truth of theology  
—"The Lord reigns"—that all events are ordered and controlled by a  
supreme superintending Providence. But there is a special comfort to  
believers—the spiritual Israel of every age—that their 'steps,'—their plans  
and purposes in life (in a better and nobler than the heathen sense—their  
"destinies")—are overruled by a gracious covenant-Jehovah.

That is a beautiful picture given in Hosea (11:1-5) of God, as a Father,  
watching and guiding the steps of His own children. Israel is first spoken  
of as a child in its parent's arms. The Almighty, all-loving Parent is  
represented, next, as assisting the feeble little one in its first attempts to  
walk, supporting it in case of stumbling—"I also taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms." Then, still farther, He is described as putting  
them in leading-strings, following them step by step—"I led them with  
cords of human kindness." And now, in this psalm, when the child has

advanced to years of spiritual maturity, the inspired writer asserts the continuance and permanency of this same gracious paternal care and supervision—"A good man's steps are ordered by the Lord."

The earthly parent, after a few brief years, leaves the child to its own resources, to walk alone, and care for itself. Not so our Heavenly Father. The man's footsteps, as well as the child's, are 'ordered.' In all the varied circumstances of existence, the Eternal God is still his refuge; and, with the eye of the watchful mother on tottering infancy, "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). "Though he stumbles, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand!" (Ps. 37:24). And as he pursues his onward way, at times ready to faint, ready to fall—stumbling along the rough, stony path—his cry is never unaided, his prayer never unanswered, "Uphold me, and I will be delivered"—"Your right hand shall save me!" Oh blessed assurance, that every event, every so-called contingency—every step from the infancy of grace, to the manhood of glory, every rugged ascent, every thorny thicket, every trial and every tear, is "ordered by the Lord."

The sweet singer of Israel rises, before the psalm is closed, to a similar and yet loftier subject of gratitude and adoration. While he exults in a God of Providence, he keeps his last note for a God of GRACE—"The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord" (ver. 39). It was the theme which cheered and supported himself in the ever-present consciousness of a guilty, though forgiven, past. It was the theme ("the everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part") which thrilled on his dying lips when the checkered glories of earthly sovereignty were passing away forever, and he was about to take up the nobler singing of the skies—"This is all my salvation and all my desire!" He magnifies the name and doings and sovereign love of the same God whom He had trusted as his Shepherd (Ps. 23:1), who had nerved his arm for battle, and tuned his lips for praise, who had led him to the green pastures of grace, and at last brought him to the gates of glory.

"Salvation comes from the Lord!" Let that, too, be the keynote of our life song. All is of grace. When the vessel of our eternal destinies was wrecked and stranded, it was a tide flowing from the sea of His own infinite love which set it once more floating on the waters. He might have left us to

perish. He might have put a vial of judgment into every angel's hand to pour down vengeance on an apostate world; or, taking the figure suggested by this Volume, He might have left our earth the waste-howling wilderness sin had made it; morally and spiritually, without shade of palm, or music of fountain. How different! In the words of the Great Prophet, "The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness (not dirge or wailing) will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing." (Isa. 51:3). "God did not send His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but to SAVE the world through Him."

And what is there to hinder any from making every blessing of that great salvation their own? Not God, for He "has justified!" Not Christ, for He "has died!" We cannot say with the king of Nineveh, "Who can tell if God will turn?" He will turn. He has turned. To each individual sinner He declares, "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone." To all who are willing to listen to His pleadings, He seems to say in the words He puts into the mouth of Isaiah: "I will make an everlasting covenant with You, My faithful love promised to David" (Isa. 55:3). The "faithful" love!

What is sure or abiding under the sun? Our health? The strong frame may in a moment be bowed. Our wealth? By some sudden collapse it may take wings and fly away. Our friends? A word—a look—may estrange some; the grave, in the case of others, may have put its impressive mockery on the dream of earth's immortality. Our homes? The summons comes to strike our tent, and leave behind us the Elim-palms under which we long rested, or the smoldering hearths of a hallowed past, so that "the place that once knew us, knows us no more."

But here is one sure thing. Here is a Covenant which has the pillars of immutability to rest upon. Casting our anchor within the veil, we can outride the storm; the golden chain of grace links us to the throne of God. And when the varied scenes and circumstances of the present are ended, and we are brought to take our stand with the multitude which no man can number—"the harpists on the glassy sea"—it will be to resume the twofold song and theme of earth—the God who reigns, and the God who saves—the anthem of Providence and the anthem of Grace; for there they



sing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb"  
(Rev. 15:3).

"A little while' for patient vigil keeping,  
To face the storm, to wrestle with the strong;  
'A little while,' to sow the seed with weeping,  
Then bind the sheaves and sing the harvest song.

"A little while,' 'mid shadow and illusion,  
To strive by faith Love's mysteries to spell;  
Then read each dark enigma's clear solution,  
And hail Light's verdict—'He does all things well.'

"A little while,' the earthly pitcher taking  
To wayside brooks from far-off fountains fed,  
Then the parched lip its thirst forever slaking  
Beside the fullness of the Fountain-head.

"And He who is at once both Gift and Giver,  
The future glory and the present smile,  
With the bright promise of the glad 'forever,'  
Will light the shadows of 'the little while.'"

"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him."

## **TRANSFORMATION AT DEATH**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"We will all be changed." 1 Corinthians 15:52

Another glimpse, beneath the palm-trees of the distant horizon, bringing  
with it a restful and tranquilizing assurance.

How many are led, from time to time, to anxiously ponder with all

sincerity—'How can we, with all our wretched frailties and shortcomings, our memories of guilt and backsliding—with some, it may be, the remembrance of scarlet and crimson stains—dream of admission into the world of untarnished purity, undimmed and undefiled by the intrusion of one unhallowed thought? How can we, ragged, sin-stricken, woe-worn, desert travelers, be fitted for the angel-life and angel-service of the Heavenly Canaan?'

I answer—A glorious change will pass on your now partially renovated spirits, at death. "What we will be has not yet been made known. But when He appears, we know that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." These, at present, drooping, lagging, "unfit" souls, will, by a transforming process which we cannot now begin to imagine or comprehend, be made fit for the holy presence and enjoyment of a holy God.

Go to the garden, from which winter has just been removing its icy mantle—and over which the first breath of genial spring has been passing. Watch on the gravel-walk or nestling on the rockery, that repulsive insect (a caterpillar)—you half wonder how God, the infinite Architect, in the plenitude of His skill, could not have devised something more beautiful than this little mass of inert life! But bend your steps to that same sunny nook when the balmy breezes of a July morning are wafting by. What do you see now? That forbidding chrysalis has unlocked its secret—that tiny prison-house has sent forth a joyous captive, radiant with beauty. See it with spangled body and golden wings, reveling amid the luscious sweets and the play of sunshine—each flower opening its cup and making it welcome to its daintiest treasures.

What a feeble image of the transformed, metamorphosed spirit, in that hour when, life's winter's storms all past, it bursts its prison-bars—"leaves its encumbering clay;" and, gifted with angel-wings, soars aloft to summer in the bliss of the beatific presence! "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" "God will fulfill His purpose for you." In that last solemn moment—"in the twinkling of an eye"—He will fit you, by "the working of His mighty power," for taking your place among the spirits of the just made perfect, and for being one of the rejoicing multitude who are "without fault before the throne."

Bunyan represents Mr. Feeble-mind and Mr. Ready-to-halt, after all their fearful thoughts, as safe at last. He describes the post as sounding his horn at their chamber doors. "I have come to you," says the postman, addressing the latter—"I have come to you from Christ, whom you have followed on crutches. He expects you at His table to dine with Him in His kingdom;" and then he pictures him, on reaching the brink of the river, as throwing away his crutches. So will it be with many of God's true people, who are indulging needless apprehensions, "because of the oppression of the enemy." If fearful now, the day is coming, the day of the great gathering of souls, when, like the pilgrim Hebrews of old, you will stand triumphant on yonder shore, exulting in the truth of your Heavenly Father's assurance, which you may at present be so slow to credit—"The enemies you see today you will never see again." You may now be wailing, in notes of sadness, your weakness and feebleness. Like some captive bird, you may think that your wings are disabled, your energies paralyzed, your song silenced. But not so. In God's own time the cage will be opened, and on newborn wings of faith and love, you will go singing to the gate of Paradise, and catch up the melody of kindred song wafted from its groves of bliss!

Paul's spiritual experience, as that of many, was reflected figuratively in one of the most memorable incidents of his human life. For successive days and nights he was buffeted with winds and waves and darkness on the Adriatic Sea, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved" (Acts 27:20). But what is his closing entry in that record of imminent peril? "Everyone reached land in safety" (ver. 44).

"O wretched man that I am!"—breathes out in another place "that strong swimmer in his agony," as he is breasting the moral and spiritual current which threatens to bear him down—"who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But knowing that his, at last, will be sure deliverance and triumph, the accents of faith are heard loud above surge and flood—"I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 8:24, 25). As if he said, 'He will deliver me; He will save me. He will "transform this lowly body so that it will be like His glorious body." He will change this vile soul and transform it into His own image from glory to glory. The storm of the

stormiest life will then be changed into a calm!"

"After tired tossing,  
Fighting with foam;  
After waves dashing,  
Haven and home.

"After wound-fever,  
Healing and balm;  
After winds warring,  
Quiet and calm.

"After hard rowing,  
Resting the hand;  
After long sowing,  
Reaping the land.

"After dark dungeon,  
The hill-top free;  
After earth, heaven—  
What will it be?

"When the shaded pilgrim land  
Fades before my closing eye,  
Then revealed on either hand  
Heaven's own scenery shall lie.  
Then the veil of flesh shall fall,  
Now concealing, darkening all.

"When upon my wearied ear  
Earth's last echoes faintly die;  
Then shall angel harps draw near  
All the chorus of the sky.  
Long-hushed voices blend again,  
Sweetly in that welcome strain.

"Here were sweet and varied tones,  
Bird, and breeze, and fountain's fall,

Yet creations travail-groans  
Ever sadly sighed through all;  
There no discord jars the air,  
Harmony is perfect there.

"Here devotion's healing balm  
Often came to soothe my breast,  
Hours of deep and holy calm,  
Pledges of eternal rest.  
But the bliss was here unknown  
Which shall there be all my own."

"Then they were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their  
desired haven."

## **THE INCARNATE SAVIOR**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"Taking the very nature of a servant." Philippians 2:7

"The Word became flesh, and made His dwelling (lit. tented) among us." Yes, He, the true Heavenly Palm (if it be allowable for a moment to mix the metaphor) Himself came down amid the wilderness grove; He, the Pilgrim of pilgrims, in infinite condescension and love, pitched His tent in the midst of the human encampment! How comforting and consoling, our Divine Redeemer thus identifying Himself with our tried, tempted, woe-worn humanity! Moreover, that in stooping to assume our nature, He selected not the exalted condition, but linked Himself rather with poverty and distress and dependence, in order that the poorest and the humblest, the most wretched and forlorn, might catch balm-words of comfort from His lips—the lips of Him who often had nowhere to lay His head.

Let us think of that lowly nature of His, thus embracing in its scope every class and every phase of being, even those who had until now been neglected and disowned. Rome was accustomed to deify the manly virtues exclusively—strength, courage, heroic endurance. Greece wreathed her crowns around the brows of her intellectual heroes—her poets and philosophers, her sculptors and painters. But the weak, the ignorant, the oppressed, had none to vindicate their cause until He came, who pronounced "Blessed"—not the great, or rich, or powerful, or learned—but the meek, the mourner, the poor in spirit, the persecuted, him who had no helper! Hence, groups composed of every diversity of character tracked His footsteps and hailed in Him a friend.

Stern, strong men like Peter; intellectual, thoughtful men like Thomas; loving and meditative men like John. Penitence crept unabashed to His feet, and bathed them confidingly with tears. Sorrow came with sobbing heart and speechless emotion to be comforted. The poor came with their tale of long-endured misery. Infancy came stretching out its tiny arm, and smiled delighted in His embrace. While He rejoiced with those who rejoiced, He wept with those who wept. The fainting multitudes moved Him to compassion; the one petitioner in the crowd who touched His garment-hem, arrested His steps and drew forth His mercy. Every weary, wandering bird, with drooping wing, seemed to come and perch on the thick branches of this gracious Palm of Elim—this mighty Cedar of God. Beautifully has it been said: "In His heart Mercy may be said to have held her court: Holiness could dispense with an Ark and Tables to hold her laws; for in His life its enshrined glory was made so transparent, that even demons confessed Him to be the Holy One of God."

Believer, you who perhaps may be fainting under life's burden and heat, come and once again take refuge in the contemplation of the perfect Manhood of the adorable Son of God! Delight often to think of Him as a partaker of your nature. Though He has been well described, "as the One only true and perfect flower which has ever unfolded itself out of the root and stalk of humanity," yet it was a real—a true humanity. It is because they come welling from the depths of a human heart—because their music vibrates on a human lip—that the words are so unspeakably tender, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give

you rest."

Those who are thus buffeting the storm, exposed to the windy blast of the desert, battling with care, harassed with anxiety, prostrated with bereavement, stricken with conscious guilt, longing for safe rest and deliverance from earth's sins and sorrows—can understand the deep meaning of the central words in the importunate prayer of blind Bartimeus at the gate of Jericho—"Jesus, Son of David (Elder Brother), have mercy on me!" It will be from glorified human lips, too, the welcome will at last be given—"Come, you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom!"

"His the descent from everlasting bliss,  
In manger born, to raise us up on high;  
A woe-worn Pilgrim in earth's wilderness,  
Wedding our finite dust with Deity.

"Around His path no blazoned banners wave,  
No jeweled diadem His brows adorned,  
His cradle borrowed, and a borrowed grave,  
Servant of servants, poor, despised, and scorned.

"Thus was He more than Brother unto all,  
The poor, the lost, the burdened, the oppressed;  
Not one excluded from the gracious call,  
'Come unto Me, ye weary, and have rest!'

"Peace for the guilty, stung with conscious sin,  
Peace for bereaved ones, wailing for their dead,  
Peace amid waves without and storms within,  
The troubled soothed, the mourner comforted."

"For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest."

## **THE REBUKES OF LOVE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." Revelation 3:19

What! speak of rest and refreshment when, it may be, the ringing sound of the axe is heard amid cherished earthly palm-groves all around, and the sands are strewn with lopped branches and scattered leaves! Yes. It is even so. "The wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more! But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:16, 17).

The words of our motto-verse, too, observe, were spoken, not by the lips of Christ the Sufferer on earth, but by the glorified lips of Christ the Exalted King. They are whisperings of the Heavenly Palm, which come wafted to us from the groves of Paradise.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful!" The divine dispensations are often incomprehensible. Jehovah's name to His people is at times that which He gave to Manoah—"Wonderful," "Secret," "Mysterious." That corroding sickness, that wasting heritage of pain, these long tossings on a fevered, sleepless pillow; where can there be love or mercy there? But the silence and loneliness of the sickbed is the figurative "wilderness," where He "allures" that He may "speak tenderly to them, and give them back their vineyards" (Hosea 2:14, 15); rousing them from the low dream of earth, from the base and the worldly, from busy care and debasing concern, to the divine and the heavenly.

Or, that unexpected heritage of poverty—the crash of earthly fortune, the forfeiture of earthly gain, the stripping the walls of cherished and familiar treasure, and sending those nursed in the lap of luxury, penniless on the world—where is there mercy or love here? But it is through this beneficial, though rough discipline, that He weans from the debilitating influence of prosperity, leading them to exchange the pot of earthly stew, for the bread of life—perishable substance for the fine gold of heavenly gain and durable riches.

Or, that cruel blighting of young hope and pure affection—the withering



of some cherished Elim-palm; the opening of early graves for the loving and beloved; holiest ties formed, but the memory of which is all that remains; where is there kindness and mercy in creating bonds only to sever them, raising up friends only to bury them? The plaintive experience and utterance of the lone mother in Israel is that of many—"Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter" (Ruth 1:20).

But the streamlets are dried by Him, in order to lead to the great Fountain-head; the links of earthly affection are broken, in order that stronger and more enduring ones may be formed above; the cracks have been made in the house of clay, only to render more inviting "the building of God—the house not made with hands;" stimulating to live more for that world where all is perfection, where we shall stand "without fault before the throne."

A writer notes, that migratory birds are carried high by contrary winds, and that, by being so carried, their flight is assisted. So is it with trial. "The wind is contrary," but it impels to an upward and a God-ward flight. As it is often in the cloudy and rainy day that the mountains look near us, so often in the soul's gloomiest seasons the hills of God are brought nearest. Tribulation is the first link in the Apostle's golden chain. Dr. Trench, in his "Study of Words," tells us that "tribulation" is derived from the Latin tribulum, which was the machine by which the grain was sifted. Tribulation is the process of sifting, by which God clears away the chaff and the golden grain is retained. See, too, the gracious result of this sifting process. 'Tribulation,' to use the comment of an earnest speaker in applying the reference, 'works, what? We might have expected the natural result, 'impatience.' It is the reverse; by the imparted grace of Him in whose hands the tribulum is, "tribulation works patience"' (Rom.5:3).

Suffering Christian, you may well trust Him who uttered the surprising saying which heads this meditation—who gave the mightiest pledge of love He could give, by giving His own life—that there is some all-wise "needs be" in the trials He has laid upon you. They are designed to bring you nearer to Himself. They are His own appointed gateways, opening up and admitting to great spiritual blessings. Be assured the day will come, when these mysteries in your present lot will extract nothing from your

lips but grateful praise; when you shall joyfully testify—'Had it not been for these wilderness experiences; that lengthy illness, that loss of worldly position, the death of that dear relative or friend, I would still have been clinging to earth as my portion, content with the polluted stream and the broken cistern, instead of drawing water out of the wells of salvation.'

An earthly father often demonstrates a false leniency by never giving the needful rebuke which, timely given, might have averted many a bitter life-sorrow. God rebukes and disciplines just because He loves; and never is His love more tender than when the rod is in His hand and the rebuke on His lips. The rebukes of an earthly father are often poorly timed—the result, it may be, of passion or impulse. "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness" (Heb. 12:10). These withered branches, stripped from some favorite grove in the valley, may yet, afflicted one, form, in your case, the imagery of that sublime picture of the future, where the sainted multitude in the upper sanctuary are seen "clothed with white robes and palms in their hands."

God our Maker, God the Almighty Chastener, is said to give "songs in the night." The birds of earth which "sing among the branches" are silent except in the daytime; but the boughs of these Elim-palms seem most alive with melody in hours of darkness. In the gloom of sorrow, their fronds may appear only to be dripping with rain, when they are in truth laden with the night-distilled dews of heaven!

"How could a moment's pang destroy  
My heart's confirmed repose in Thee?  
Your presence is sufficient joy  
To one reclaimed and spared like me.  
It is enough that I am Thine,  
Almighty to redeem from sin;  
You shall subdue, correct, refine  
The soul which You have died to win.  
I see the desolated ground  
With dews of heavenly kindness fed,  
And fruits of joy and love surround  
The heart which You have comforted."

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

## THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

There is nothing in this world which is not a gift of God. Every palm-tree in the grove of created comforts and blessings—every morsel of the bread which perishes; the sunlight which gladdens us; the atmospheric air which sustains us; the fuel garnered deep down in earth's storehouses to warm us; the succession of seasons; the living streams which fertilize our fields; the waving harvests which crown the year with their plenty; the thousand tints of loveliness and beauty in garden, and dell, and forest; far more, the blessings which rejoice and consecrate social life—the Elim-palms and Elim-springs of gladness in our domestic circles; these are severally and collectively "gifts of God." "Every good and perfect gift is from above." And they are gifts and pledges, too, of love.

"God's world has one great echo;

Whether calm blue mists are curled,  
Or lingering dewdrops quiver,  
Or red storms are unfurled;  
The same deep love is throbbing  
Through the great heart of God's world."

But what are these to the blessing here pre-eminently spoken of—the Gift of gifts, "the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden"? a blessing whose magnitude transcends all thought and illustration—the Son of the Highest to become 'of human virgin born,' the Babe of Bethlehem's lowly cradle; the God of Eternity condescending to be a pilgrim on life's highway—the great Leader of His spiritual Israel, with the rod of grace and power in His hand, with which to open living streams for the lost and perishing? "God so loved the world (and who can fathom or exhaust the

meaning of that 'so'?) that He gave His one and only Son." God's "Gift"—it was, unpurchasable by money—the unmerited benefaction of Heaven—free as the desert palm to the fainting pilgrim, who has only to repair under it for shade—free as the desert pool to the thirsty wayfarer, who has only to stoop at its brim and drink!

And this greatest and mightiest Gift, moreover, consecrates and sanctifies each minor one. As the sun glorifies with his radiance the tamest landscape, and transforms the barren rock into a pyramid of gold; so are all earthly blessings glorified, beautified, sublimated, by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Christ has been aptly compared to the numeral, which, put before the unmeaning ciphers, gives them peerless and untold preciousness.

The very outer world of nature wears a new aspect when seen through eyes spiritually enlightened. Earthly discipline has a new meaning; and when subordinate comforts are blighted, or diminished, or withdrawn, there is ever the imperishable Gift remaining, beyond the reach of change; so that we can say, "Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

While feelingly alive to God's goodness in His various other mercies, can we heartily join in the transcendent estimate of the Apostle—"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!" Truly, with this Gift, "having nothing," we "possess all things." In Christ's glorified person, as the God-Man Mediator, "all fullness dwells." No other earthly blessing, no other trees in the palm-grove, can compensate for the lack of this. But under the shade of these sheltering fronds, whatever else may be denied us, we can say in the words of the Sacred Minstrel, "Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You!"

"Bounteous Giver! to befriend me  
None I have compared with Thee,  
None so able to defend me;  
You are all in all to me.

"What is life? a scene of troubles,  
Following swiftly, one by one;  
Phantom visions—airy bubbles,  
Which appear, and then are gone.

"What at best the world's vain fashion?  
Quickly it must pass away,  
Vexing care and whirlwind passion  
Surging like the angry spray.

"Friends may fail, and bonds may sever,  
Cherished refuges may fall,  
But Thy friendship is for ever—  
It survives the wreck of all."

"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"

## **JEHOVAH JIREH**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"The Lord will provide." Genesis 22:14

The Elim-palms only environed Israel's temporary resting-place—marked one of the many wilderness camping-grounds on the way to Canaan. In the very next words after the recorded tent-pitching by the twelve wells, we read, "Then they left Elim" (Ex. 16:1).

If "Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place," be the watchword for all God's pilgrims still, what, it may be asked, of the untrodden journey? What of tomorrow's march? What of the unknown future?

"The Lord will provide!" That future is in the keeping of the God of the pillar-cloud, and we may well leave it there. These refreshing palm-groves at one encampment may well be taken as pledges of His faithfulness and

loving care, until the last stage of the wilderness journey be reached, and 'the fields of living green' appear in view.

How beautiful the impress of the Divine hand in the works of outer nature. Every blade of grass, every forest leaf, how perfect, in symmetry of form, and in tenderness of color! With what exquisite elegance He has pencilled every flower, delicately poised it on its stalk, or spread a pillow for its head on the tender sod! The God who has "so clothed the grass of the field," will not be forgetful of the lowliest of His covenant family.

It is for us to say, as we lie passive in His hands, "O Lord, come to my aid!" He, portioning out for us as He sees fit, and having His own infinite reasons for what may appear perplexing to us—we, with an unquestioning and unreasoning faith, fully trusting His power, tenderness, vigilance, love. He does not consult our short-sighted wisdom in what He does. The clouds do not consult the earth as to when they shall visit its fruits and flowers—its cornfields and forests, with their watery treasures. The pining plant does not dictate to the cloud-reservoirs as to when they shall unseal their hidden stores. These give a kindly and needful supply "in due season," and the earth has never yet (for six thousand years) had to complain of them as miserly distributors of their Creator's bounty.

So it is with the soul. He who makes the clouds His chariot—who opens and shuts at will the windows of heaven—locking and unlocking the springs of the great deep—says to all His people, 'Trust Me; I will give you all needed present blessings; I will come to you like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. I do not pledge myself as to how or when the rain shall fall—but I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.'

Happy for us, if we are able to respond with a declaration of entire confidence in a present, personal God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being! Behold the sun of the natural heavens, the great central luminary—a dumb unfeeling mass of matter—holding its dependent planets in their orbits, controlling their unerring movements; they, in calm, silent submission, yielding obedience to the will of this sovereign lord! How much more may we hold on our way in the orbit of undeviating

obedience, exulting in Jehovah's ever-present power and love; so that in the most remote solitude, as well as the most dense crowd, we can say, 'Alone, yet not alone, for my Father is with me!'

And if we thus confide in God, He will confide in us. Beautiful are the words of the prophet, "You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness; those that remember You in Your ways." Those that remember You and confide in You, "You meet them!" The Lord comes out halfway to meet the confiding heart.

Let us listen to the words of Him who spoke as never man spoke, "Take no thought" (that is to say, Do not be over-anxious or over-careful) "for tomorrow." That 'tomorrow' is in the hands of One boundless in His resources, infinite in His compassion. He not only distributes the destiny of His people, but He molds and adapts them for their lots and positions in life. Just as in outer nature He adapts the varied classes in the vegetable world for different climates. As the palm was the tree of the desert, the olive that of Palestine, the cedar, of Lebanon—so is it with every tree of righteousness. They too are "the planting of the Lord;" and wherever planted, there, in their varied ways, they may 'glorify' Him.

Do not charge God with insincerity, when He declares, through His inspired Apostle, that all things work together for good to those who love Him. "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." If He leads you along a rough and thorny road, hear His loving voice thus reassuring your faith and lulling your misgivings, 'Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.' He foresees and anticipates every emergency that can overtake you. He can ward off every danger, and disarm every foe. As you may be now surveying the yet-untrodden road, leading 'uphill and downhill, to the city of habitation,' remember the words of Him who has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

"Leave, oh leave your fond aspirings,  
Bid your restless heart be still;  
Cease, oh cease your vain desirings,  
Only seek your Father's will.  
Leave behind your faithless sorrow,  
And your every anxious care;



He who only knows the morrow  
Can for you its burden bear.  
Leave the darkness gathering o'er thee,  
Leave the shadow land behind;  
Realms of glory lie before thee,  
Enter in, and welcome find."

"Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

## **GLORIOUS ATTRIBUTES AND WAYS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, Your justice like the great deep. How priceless is Your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of Your wings. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." Psalm 36:5, 6, 7, 9)

These verses sound like the rustling of many palm-leaves around the wells of the desert.

The King of Israel, himself a prince among pilgrims, when he wrote this psalm, was probably in the wilderness, not of Sinai, but of Judah—near the Dead Sea, from the margin of whose waters wild cliffs rose to the height of 1500 feet. As he gazes up to the heavens, he sees written on their blue vault, "God is mercy," "God is love." He looks to the clouds as they gather, gradually dimming and darkening the azure; but he sees them spanned with the rainbow of "faithfulness." He looks to the mountains, their tops resting amid these clouds and rainbow-tints; and beholds them radiant with "justice"—stable, immutable uprightness. He gazes down into the depths of the lake, sleeping at their base, and reflecting their forms in its calm mirror. He sinks his plummet-line, but

in vain! It is too deep to be measured. "Your judgments (Your providential dealings) are "a great mystery." Jehovah's righteousness, like the great mountains, is visible; plain to see. But His judgments are often like the lake beneath. Their unsounded mysteries lie beyond mortal understanding, far down below!

Next (ver. 7), as a saint of God, he flees for refuge "under the shadow of the Almighty's wings"—a beautiful emblem of security; one used by the Savior Himself, many centuries later, on the occasion of His weeping over Jerusalem—"How excellent is Your loving-kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings."

Then, he adds, "You shall make them drink of the river of Your pleasures; For with You is the fountain of life." Another figure still, perhaps, also suggested by a well-known spring which survives to this day in that desolate waste, amid the rocks of the wild goats, bursting from a shelf or cleft in the mountain—"For with You," as it has been rendered, is the "spring of immortality"—"in Your light we shall see light." He here speaks not of his present blessings, but of his future prospects. He looks forward, anticipating the time when all the past irregularities in God's moral government shall be explained. "We shall see light!" we shall behold Him, not in a glass, darkly; not as now, "through the lattice;" but "face to face"—knowing experimentally the reality of His own divine beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

The psalm begins with a minor note—"The sinfulness of the wicked" (ver. 1). It describes the pang with which the upright believer witnesses the unblushing sin and godlessness around him—speculative infidelity, practical atheism—the iniquity, the deceit, the "devising of evil"—hatching schemes of ambition and sin in their very beds—the world's crooked policy, tortuous ways, and unprincipled ends. All this may well fill the righteous with painful care and sadness. But he looks from man, to God. He looks from this surging sea, troubled and restless by waves of human passion and discord, to the giant mountains of the Divine faithfulness towering grandly overhead. Dominating all, he sees the Divine mercy "in the heavens." Jehovah's mercy in Christ, as a Covenant God, is high above the great flood, and the great mountains and the great clouds.

In this sublime contemplation he rests. He knows—though at times "deep may call to deep;" though these hilltops be muffled in angry tempests, those heavens darkened with murky vapors—yet the day is coming—"the morning without clouds," when all shall be made bright like "the clear shining after the rain." "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne."

The impersonation of justice, in the Greek and Roman mythology, with bandaged eyes and equally-balanced scales, was the faint image of a grander truth. "He judges righteous judgment." "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun!" "By faith," says one who is now experiencing the sublime reality, "you are enabled to say 'All is well!' and if a voice could reach you from the Everlasting, would it not re-echo back, 'All is well?'"

May this lofty psalm, of which these are the keynotes, be sung by us, not in the Church of earth alone, but in the Church of the firstborn: when its beautiful and magnificent imagery will come to be truly fulfilled—resting under the shadow of the Heavenly Palm, the shelter and sanctuary of Jehovah's wings; 'feasting on the abundance of His house,' and 'drinking of the river of His pleasures;' taking up, through all eternity, the joyous strain these opening words suggest—"O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His Mercy endures forever!"

"Blessed day, which hastens fast,  
End of conflict and of sin;  
Death itself shall die at last,  
Heaven's eternal joys begin.  
Then eternity shall prove,  
God is Light, and God is Love!"

"Continue Your love to those who know You, Your righteousness to the upright in heart."

## **THE SECOND COMING**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay.'" Hebrews 10:37

"Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him."  
Revelation 16:15

The Redeemer's Advent! a scriptural assurance full of rest and peace, but which can be felt and realized only by those who are conscious of sitting now under His shadow as the true Heavenly Palm. In other words—the elevating prospect of the Savior's second coming in glory can be enjoyed only by those who know, in their individual experience, the blessedness connected with a genuine and unswerving reliance on the first coming in humiliation. When the latter truth is fully appropriated and exulted in, no theme can prove more tranquillizing or refreshing. "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning" (Ps. 130:5, 6).

The reference in the second of these motto-verses may be the simple and ordinary one, of a man, unmindful of all danger, lying down to sleep with his garments carelessly cast aside; the thief suddenly enters his chamber, takes forcible possession of his clothing, and leaves him naked and defenseless. Or more likely, according to the commentator Lightfoot, the allusion may be to a Jewish custom in the service of the Temple of Jerusalem. Twenty-four wards, or companies, were appointed night by night to guard the various entrances to the sacred courts. One individual was appointed as captain or 'marshal' over the others, called the "Man of the Mountain of the House of God." His duty was to go round the various gates during the night to see that his subordinates were faithful at their posts. Preceded himself by men bearing torches, it was expected that each wakeful sentinel should hail his appearance with the password, "You man of the mountain of the house, peace be unto you!" If through unwatchfulness and slumber this were neglected, the offender was beaten, and his garments were burned—he was branded with shame for failure of duty.

It was in contrast with these slumbering Levites, that the Lord of the Temple may be supposed to pronounce a blessing on His true people, who keep their garments, and are saved from reproach. Their attitude is that of wakeful sentinels, ever standing on their watchtower, pacing their rounds; having on the whole armor of God, "the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," so that "being clothed, they may not be found naked" or "ashamed before Him at His coming."

We repeat, that Second Advent of Christ ought, at least in the case of all His true people, to be regarded by its apostolic name as "The Blessed Hope," the polar star in the sky of the future. It is true, indeed, that in one sense, to the believer, death is equivalent to the coming of his Lord, as being the hour which will usher him into His immediate presence. But death is never spoken of in Scripture as a 'blessed hope.' Even the Christian holds his breath as the King of terrors passes by. He may be ready to 'depart' whenever his Lord gives the word; he may be ready to enter the dark valley, and under the guidance and grace of the Shepherd-Leader, he may fear no evil; but it is a dark valley notwithstanding. The gloomy cypress, not the verdant palm—the tear and the sable mourning, have ever formed the associations and accompaniments of the final hour and scene. It is altogether different, however, with Christ's Advent. That is a joyous anticipation. The believer can long for it—can pray for it. "Make no tarrying, O my God." "Make haste, my Beloved," is his cry underneath this gracious palm-shadow—"be like a gazelle, or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains!"

Nor let us suppose that this watching is some fantastic, transcendental frame of mind, which divorces the Christian from daily work and duty. These vigils may be best kept, not in confined seclusion. He watches most nobly and truly, who does so, not by removing himself from life's rough drudgery and needful calls; but who, in the midst of the ordinary vocations of the world, among the fever and turmoil of busy existence, can catch up the joyous chimes wafted to the ear of faith from the bells of glory.

Let these inspired utterances be ever ringing their varying magnificent melodies in our ears—"In just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay." "I will come back, and take you to be with Me."

"A little while, and you shall not see Me, and again a little while and you shall see Me." "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." If we expected a long absent brother or friend from a distant land, how careful should we be in our preparations to give him welcome! How house and hall would be cleaned and adorned! How would creativity be taxed to decorate his room with every tribute which fond affection could devise! How careful to erase every association or memory of sadness, and prevent the occurrence of one note of discord or disharmony that would mar the joy of that glad return! How should it be with us in the prospect of welcoming the Brother of brothers! How should the home of every heart be "swept and garnished," decorated in best holiday attire, to give the long-absent Lord love's most loyal welcome!

Every day is bringing that Advent nearer, lessening the span of that rainbow of promise. "The little while and you shall not see Me" is widening; the "little while and you shall see Me" is diminishing. The Church is like the shipmen in the Adriatic Sea, who "sensed they were approaching land." The historian of Columbus speaks thus of the great discoverer's approach to the shores of the unknown New World—"The admiral gave orders that the sails should be close-reefed and the lead kept going, and that they should sail slowly, being afraid of shoals and breakers; feeling certain that the first gleam of daybreak would discover land under their bows." Is this true in a nobler sense of "the Better Country"? Are we thus on the outlook to "see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off"?

Let each new month, new week, new day, each recurring providential dispensation add new power to the summons—"Awake, awake! put on your beautiful garments!"—"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." So that when the hour of the Second Advent shall strike, when "the Lord shall come, and all His saints with Him," we may be able to exclaim with rejoicing—"Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, WHEN HE COMES, shall find watching."

"It may be in the evening,

When the work of the day is done,  
And you have time to sit in the twilight  
And watch the sinking sun,  
While the long bright day dies slowly  
O'er the sea,  
And the hour grows quiet and holy  
With thoughts of ME!

"It may be when the midnight  
Is heavy upon the land,  
And the black waves lying dumbly  
Along the sand;  
It may be at the cock-crow;  
When the valley-mists are shading  
The river's chill,  
When the morning star is fading,  
Fading over the hill.  
Let the door be on the latch  
In your home;  
In the chill before the dawning,  
Between the night and morning,  
I may come!

"It may be in the morning  
When the sun is bright and strong,  
And the dew is gleaming beauteous,  
The meadow slopes among,  
When the waves are laughing loudly  
By the shore;  
And the birds are singing sweetly  
By your door.  
It may be in the morning I will come!

"A gentle shadow fell across  
The window of my room;  
While working my appointed task,  
I calmly turned me round to ask,  
'Is He come?'

An angel whispered sweetly  
In my ear:  
'Lift up your head rejoicing—  
HE IS HERE!'"

"Even so! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

## **IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8

The "loss of all things" bringing with it rest—tranquility! This seems a contradiction in terms. Worldly loss generally, and as an almost necessary consequence, leads to unrest, unquiet, trouble. Yet in Paul's case it was sublimely true—the surrender of former grounds and subjects for exultation and boasting led him to the truest, to the only stable rest. We are reminded of another of his seeming paradoxes: "Having nothing, yet possessing all things."

We may readily believe, indeed, that it would be no small effort for him to discard what he once so fondly loved and prized, and to which he so proudly clung. Sad to go to that gallery of pleasant pictures which he himself had hung in the chambers of his soul, and with his own hand to wrench one by one from its place—to tear sculpture by sculpture from niche and pedestal, and to write upon these walls, so lately gleaming with fancied righteousness, "All loss for Christ!"

In the words of the entire passage, he has undoubtedly reference to that



wild night in the Adriatic Sea, to which in former pages we have incidentally referred, when pursuing his voyage to Rome in the Alexandrian ship. The tempest was threatening; the safety of the ship seemed to demand a lightening of the cargo. But that precious corn! must it be sacrificed for the safety of the vessel? It was "gain;" but must it come to be counted as "loss," and tossed overboard? Yes, the tempest decides the question. It must be consigned to the waves, otherwise the vessel will sink. There is no room for debate; the crew make up their minds to "suffer the loss of all." No, more, when the tempest howls with greater fury, and danger and death stare them full in the face, they go a step further. The "loss" is never thought of. They do not now pause in uncertainty and indecision, saying, 'Cannot we save these precious barrels of merchandise?' Imminent danger makes them glad to plunge them into the roaring sea. When the question is between the loss of the wheat, and the loss of the ship, there can be no hesitation. They account them as absolutely worthless—of no value. They are glad to see them pitching against one another in the dark abyss. They look upon them now, not as gain or treasure, but as having proved an absolute hindrance, endangering their safety.

And this was the process in Paul's mind. First, there was a clinging to all these birthright gains and self-righteous confidences. He was unwilling to part with them. Secondly, he underwent the "loss," but it was accompanied with "suffering." It was an intense effort for him to renounce that which he had once so fondly treasured and trusted in. But the third stage of feeling was when he was brought to say, 'I hate them all! they are as rubbish—they are worthless: they are endangering the vessel's safety; they are endangering my soul's interest; let them go, every one of them! They were once "gain to me;" once I endured "suffering" at the thought of losing them; but now, heave them into the raging sea. I count them as refuse, sweepings, husks, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.'

Is this our case? Can we, as voyagers on the sea of life, make such a declaration, that all in which we once trusted and gloried, as a ground of justification in the sight of God, we toss overboard, in order that the giant deed of Christ's doing and dying may stand out alone in solitary

grandeur? "Not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

"Accepted in the Beloved," says Hedley Vicars, "What a healing balm is there here, for a weary, heavy-laden sinner!"

And if being clothed in the imputed righteousness of Immanuel is a blessed truth to live on, what a blessed truth to die on! What a joyous garment this, with which to wrap around us when the billows are high, and we are plunging into Jordan! We can imagine, when that solemn hour arrives; when, perhaps suddenly, we are laid on the pillow from which we are to rise no more; and when, despite our well-grounded confidence in the Gospel, gloomy visions and memories of former guilt will gather around, filling us with trembling and dismay—oh! in the midst of the thick darkness, to feel clothed with a garment, which the rush of waters cannot penetrate, and of which the King of terrors cannot rob us—the robe which we received at the cross, and which we are to wear before the throne!

Yes, children of God, of every age and rank and experience, tune your hearts and lips for the joyous strain. Aged believers, sing it! you whose earthly pilgrim-garments are soiled and travel-worn, but whose robe of righteousness is fresh as in the day of your betrothals with the Heavenly Bridegroom. Young believers, sing it! you who may have but recently stood at the marriage-altar with your Lord, and received at His hands the glistening apparel; who may have a long journey, it may be, still to travel, before you reach the King's Palace. Sorrowing believers, sing it! take down your harps from the willows of sadness. You are in mourning attire; but through your garments there shines this "clothing of wrought gold," which the shadows of death and the grave cannot dim or alloy. Let the whole Church of the living God, divided on other themes—mute with other songs—kindle into holy rapture with this—

"Jesus, Your blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'Mid flaming worlds, in these array'd,  
With joy I shall lift up my head.

"This spotless robe the same appears  
When ruined nature sinks in years;  
No age can change its glorious hue—  
The robe of Christ is ever new.

"And when the dead shall hear Your voice,  
And all Your banish'd ones rejoice,  
Their beauty this, their glorious dress—  
**JESUS THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!"**

"To the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the  
One He loves."

## **CHRIST EVER THE SAME**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8

We may well sit under this shadow of the Beloved with great delight.

Human life, outwardly, inwardly, is a "shifting spectacle;" so says the apostle of it. He compares it to the moving scenes or characters in the old Grecian theater—"the fashion" (or the drama) "of this world passes away." Over the "yesterday" of the past, and the "today" of the present, the clouds of heaven are chasing one another. The waves of its seething, restless sea, are tossing and tumbling in fretful disquietude. And whether these changes have been from prosperity to adversity, or adversity to prosperity; converting life, with some, into a golden bridge, with others, into "a bridge of sighs," they both lead to the one final goal. The path of sorrow as well as the path of glory "leads but to the grave."

Believer, amid the fitfulness and uncertainty of earth and earthly things,

come and seat yourself under this verdant Palm of a Savior's unchanging faithfulness. "Trust not in man, who cannot save." It may be, that some who read these pages may have had, or may be even now having, painful personal proof of that change and uncertainty, that fading and fleeting. You may have felt by experience, how often those joys, which like the bright berries in the summer woods are beautiful to the eye, prove bitter to the taste; how often the loveliest cloud in the life-sky condenses at last into a shower and then falls; how the loveliest rainbow-hue dissolves; how riches take to themselves wings and fly away; capricious fortune forsaking, often just when the golden dream seems most surely realized!

But "HE has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Have you never observed, that while, in the course of a long succession of years, the scenery on a river's bank may be changed, the river itself remains the same? Formerly it was accustomed, it may be, to flow through secluded woods—its waters, murmuring by forest glades, where the wild deer stole down in the silent eve undisturbed by human step. Now hives of industry are lining its course. Ponderous wheels are revolving and the clang of hammers are resounding, where the woodman's axe alone was heard a short while ago. But the river itself, unchanged and unchangeable, carries its unfailing tributary-torrent to the main.

So it is with Him who, as "the River of God which is full of water," rolls its own glorious volume of everlasting love. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall!" "Behold," says the same Immutable One, in another metaphor, "I have engraved you on the palms of My hands." Not on the mountains, colossal as they are, for they shall depart; not on no leaf of Nature's vast volume, for the last fires shall scorch them; not on blazing sun, for he shall grow dim with age; or on glorious heavens, for they shall be folded together as a scroll. But on the hand which made the worlds, the hand which was transfixed on Calvary, the hand of might and love—I have engraved you there. No corroding power can erase the writing, obliterate the name—you are Mine now, and Mine forever!

The travelers come and go in the desert—the canvas tent erected today, is down tomorrow, but the sheltering palms remain. The great Apostle speaks of 'tribulation'—'distress'—'persecution'—'famine,' and other

adverse forces as so many waves dashing against The Rock—trying to "separate"—gathering their united strength to sweep from the secure shelter. But in vain. They are beaten back in succession with Faith's challenge—the reproof, not of bold arrogant presumption, but of lowly believing confidence and heavenly trust—"In the name of a Mightier, we bid defiance to your might!" 'Who shall separate us?' "I stand upon a Rock," says Chrysostom, "let the sea rage, the Rock cannot be disturbed."

Bereaved Christian, you who have been called more specially to experience the sorrows of life; how comforting to know that there is One Prop that cannot give way, One Friend beyond the reach of change, who is working out your soul's everlasting well-being in His own calm world, far above and beyond the heavings and convulsions of ours. One who is the same in storm and sunshine, births and deaths, marriage bells and funeral knells: of whom you can say, amid the wreck of all human confidences, "They shall perish, but You shall endure!"

"This same Jesus!" Oh how sweetly  
Fall those words upon the ear,  
Like a swell of far-off music  
In a night-watch still and drear.

"He who spoke as none had spoken,  
Angel wisdom far above,  
All forgiving, ne'er upbraiding,  
Full of tenderness and love.

"For this word, O Lord, we bless Thee,  
Bless our Master's changeless name;  
'Yesterday, today, forever,  
Jesus Christ is still the same."

"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal."

## **THE SOUL'S PORTION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose" Isaiah 28:12

"You are my portion, O Lord." Psalm 119:57

God is the only true and satisfying portion of the spirit—the realized happiness, for which earthly schools and systems of philosophy hopelessly searched. The soul, endowed with immortality, altogether fails to have its longings and aspirations satisfied with the seen and the temporal; as little as the Israelite, in the desert of the wandering, would have been satisfied with burning patches of unsheltered sand for his camping ground, as compared with the twelve refreshing springs of Elim with their seventy encircling palms. Too truthful and suggestive is the symbolic truth conveyed by a painter in an allegorical picture of human life—children in a churchyard, sporting with soap-bubbles by the side of an opened grave! The bubbles are beautiful—lustrous with rainbow tints; but, one by one, they burst, some in the air, others as they touch the fringing grass; the misty moisture of all falling into that dark hollow at their feet. The world's skeptic poet thus warbles in plaintive monotone—  
"I fly like a bird of the air,  
In search of a home to rest;  
A balm for the sickness of care,  
A bliss for a bosom unblest."

We repeat, the only rest of the soul is in God. You cannot detain the eagle in the forest. You may gather around him a chorus of choicest birds—you may give him a perch on the finest pine—you may charge winged messengers to bring him choicest dainties—but he will spurn them all. Spreading his lordly wings, and, with his eye on the Alpine cliff, he will soar away to his own ancestral halls among the munitions of rocks and the wild music of tempest and waterfall! The heart of man, in its eagle soarings, will rest with nothing short of the Rock of Ages. Its ancestral halls are the halls of Heaven. Its munitions of rocks are the attributes of God. The sweep of its majestic flight is Eternity! "Lord, YOU have been our dwelling-place in all generations!"

"Once," says a gifted American writer, "I looked across a landscape in a season of great drought, and all the elms looked sickly and yellow, as if

verging to decay. But one elm was fresh and green, as if spring showers were hourly falling upon it. Coming nearer to observe, behold! a silent river flowed at the foot of the tree; and its roots stretched far out into its living waters. So is he, in the drought and heat of this earth, whose soul is rooted in God."

The world has its joys and its portions too, and we do not affirm that they are devoid of attractiveness. Had this been the case, they would not be so fondly and eagerly clung to as they are. But this we can affirm, that while they are certain, sooner or later to perish, they are fitful and inconstant even while they last. They are sand-built, not rock-built. They are, at best, but the passing gleam of the meteor; not like the Christian's happiness, the steady luster of the true constellation. On a deathbed, one memory of triumph over sin and of successfully-resisted temptation will outbid and outmatch them all. Yes, the joys of the true believer survive all others.

True Religion is like a castle on a mountain summit, catching the earliest sunbeam, and gilded by the last evening ray. When low down in the world's valleys, the shadows are falling and the lights are already in the windows, the radiance still tarries on these lofty peaks of gladness. That castle, moreover, is full of all kinds of furnishings. God has furnished it with every attractive blessing that can invite the weary wanderer in. He has crowded it with love-tokens, with which He may welcome back His long-absent children—just as a mother (to use again a recent illustration) decorates her room for the welcome of her absent boy. As every available nook is crowded with tokens of affection, so God has filled that castle with love-pledges. Its walls are tapestried with proofs and promises of His grace and love in Jesus.

And having found God in Christ, and Christ in God as our soul's all-sufficient portion, let us dread everything that would lead us away from Him, and forfeit the possession of the Divine favor and regard. It is the short but touching epitaph seen in the catacombs at Rome, and we can annex to it another meaning besides its reference to death—"In Christ, in peace". With Him as our covenant-possession we are independent of all others. "If He gives quietness (rest), who can make trouble?" It is a peace which the world, with all its riches, cannot give; and which the world, with all its sorrows and its trials, cannot take away. "In the world," says

Jesus, "you shall have tribulation, but in Me you shall have peace."

Blessed Savior, to whom can I go but unto You? The wandering sheep may turn scornfully from its restoring shepherd; the eagle may cling to its ignoble cage, and despise its rocky fastnesses; the prodigal may mock a parent's pleas and recklessly cling to his foreign home and beggar's fare; the thirsty pilgrim may turn with averted head from the gushing stream; but You alone the unfailing Portion, You alone the unchanging Friend, let me never be guilty of the ingratitude of forgetting or forsaking You! "Many are asking, 'Who can show us any good?' Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O Lord."

"Let me Your power, Your beauty see,  
So shall my vain aspirings cease,  
And my free heart shall follow Thee  
Through paths of everlasting peace.  
My strength, Your gift, my life, Your care,  
I shall forget to seek elsewhere  
The joy to which my soul is heir."

"Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You."

## HOPE

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord." Psalm 130:7

Hope opens its bright vista-view through the Elim palms—the morning dewdrops drenching their fronds and sparkling with diamond luster in the rising sun!

"Hope!" Who is insensible to the music of that word? What bosom has



not kindled under its utterance? Poetry has sung of it, music has warbled it, oratory has lavished on it its enchanting strains. Pagan mythology, in her vain but beautiful dreams, said that when all other divinities fled from the world, Hope, with her elastic step and radiant countenance and lustrous attire, lingered behind. The weeping Hebrews, in the day of their exile, did not unstring the harps of Zion or break them to pieces. No; they hung them, tuneless indeed and mute, but still undamaged, on the willowed banks of the streams of Babylon. Why? because Hope cheered them with the thought that these silent melodies would once more awake, when God, in His own good time, would "turn again their captivity as streams in the south."

"Hope!" well may we personify you lighting up your altar-fires in this dark world, and dropping a live coal into many a desolate heart; gladdening the sick room with visions of returning health; illuminating with rays brighter than the sunbeam the captive's cell; crowding the broken slumbers of the soldier, by his campfire, with pictures of his sunny home and his own joyous return.

"Hope!" drying the tear on the cheek of woe; as the black clouds of sorrow break and fall to the earth, arching the descending drops with your own beautiful rainbow! Yes, more, standing with your lamp in hand by the gloomy realms of Hades, kindling your torch at Nature's funeral pile, and opening views through the gates of glory! Beautifully says a gifted writer of the sister country—

"Where'er my paths  
On earth shall lead,  
I'll keep a nesting bough  
For Hope—the song-bird, and, with cheerful step,  
Hold on my pilgrimage, remembering where  
Flowers have no autumn-languor, Eden's gate  
No flaming sword to guard the tree of life."

Yes, if hope, even with reference to present and finite things, is an emotion so joyous; if uninspired poetry can sing so sweetly of its delights, what must be the believer's hope, the hope which has God for its object and heaven for its consummation? "I wait for the Lord, my soul does

wait, and in His word do I HOPE." "Let Israel HOPE in the Lord."

This lofty grace, indeed, at times, requires stern discipline to develop its noble proportions. It is often the child of tribulation. The apostle traces its pedigree, "Tribulation works patience; and patience experience; and experience HOPE" (Rom. 5:3, 4). It would appear as if (recurring to the figure already employed), like the rainbow in the natural heavens, Hope specially loves to span the moral firmament with its triumphal arch, in the cloud of tribulation.

But, heaven-born, it is heavenward, too, in its aspiration. It is generally represented by the sculptor's chisel as a beautiful female form, with wings ready to be extended in flight. The safety of the timid bird is to be on the wing. If its haunt is near the ground—if it flies low—it exposes itself to the fowler's net or snare. If we remain groveling on the low ground of feeling and emotion, we shall find ourselves entangled in a thousand meshes of doubt and despondency, temptation and unbelief. "How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!" (Prov. 1:17; marginal reading). "Those who wait (or hope) in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Isa. 40:31). "I will hope continually," says David, "and will yet praise You more and more" (Ps. 71:14).

Again using a similar emblem—the bird in the tempest rushing for shelter under the mother's wing—"You have been my help, therefore under the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice" (Ps. 63:7). The Believer is a "prisoner," but a "prisoner of hope." The gospel is a "gospel of hope." Its message is called "the good hope through grace." The "helmet of salvation" is the helmet of hope. The "anchor of the soul" is the anchor of hope. The believer "rejoices in hope." Christ is in him "the hope of glory." Hope peoples to him the battlements of heaven with sainted ones in the spirit-land. He "sorrows not as others, who have no hope."

When death comes, Hope cheers the final hour—"Now, Lord, what do I wait for? my hope is in You." Hope stands with her torch over his grave, and in the prospect of the dust returning to its dust, he says, "My flesh shall rest in hope." Hope is one of the three guardian graces that conduct him to the heavenly gate. Now abides these three, "Faith, Hope, and Love;" and if it be added, "the greatest of these is Love," it is because

Hope and her companion finish their mission at the heavenly door! They proceed no further; they go back to the world, to the wrestlers in the earthly conflict. Faith returns to her drooping hearts, to undo heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free. Hope goes to her dungeon vaults, her beds of sickness, her chambers of bereavement and sorrow. To take Faith or Hope to heaven, would be to take the physician to the well man, or to offer crutches to the strong, or to help to light the meridian sun with a tiny candle. Faith is then changed to sight, and Hope to full fruition. Love alone holds onto her infinite mission. Faith and Hope are her two soaring wings. She drops them as she enters the gates of glory. The watchman puts out his beacon when the sun floods the ocean; the miner puts out his lamp when he ascends to the earth. Hope's candle-light is unneeded in that world where "the sun will never set again, and the moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end."

"I dwell here in content,  
Thankful for tranquil days;  
And yet my eyes grow dim,  
As still I gaze and gaze  
Upon a mountain pass  
That leads—or so it seems—  
To some far happier land  
Beyond the world of dreams."

"On we haste, to home invited,  
There with friends to be united  
In a surer bond than here:  
Meeting soon, and met forever!  
Glorious HOPE! forsake us never,  
For your glimmering light is dear.

"All the way is shining clearer,  
As we journey ever nearer  
To the everlasting Home.  
Friends who there await our landing,  
Comrades, round the throne now standing,  
We salute you, and we come!"

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

## **THE SUPREME RULE OF JESUS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Zion, your God reigns!" Isaiah 52:7

"I have installed My King on Zion, my holy hill." Psalm 2:6

God's gracious palm-trees of promise are not designed for comfort and refreshment to the individual believer alone. He has an outlook from under their grateful shade on the Church's far horizon. Delightful and elevating is that topic of consolation which our motto-verses suggest!

In the context from which the former of the two is taken, the prophet, in heavenly vision, beholds the swift-footed Gospel messengers speeding from country to country, from race to race, carrying the tidings of salvation round the globe. He sees a whole world brought under the beneficent reign of the Prince of Peace, and can exclaim (ver. 10)—"The Lord will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." The Church does not end her efforts until every mountain and valley is gladdened with the feet of these evangelists, with trumpet-tongue proclaiming the commands of her Great King.

And what is the opening theme of those who are thus swift to act as His delegates? What is their brief watchword for the children of Zion?—"Your GOD REIGNS!" Happier, more blessed words there cannot be. Messiah rules over His Church and over the nations. "Yet have I set My King on My holy hill of Zion." What a comfort to the Church universal; that amid

political complexities: it may be the prevalence and triumph of human tyranny and wrong; all which concerns her is under His omnipotent supervision; that He is controlling every event for her ultimate welfare. 'Kings and potentates,' says M'Cheyne, 'are only like Hiram's workmen in Lebanon cutting down trees to prepare a highway for the King's chariot.'

'The sacramental host,' His true people throughout all the world, need be in no fear—giving way like Israel in Egypt to precipitate panic; for in front and from behind they have an Almighty guardian. And especially His ministers, 'the armor-bearers of Jehovah,' need never fear the ultimate success of their proclamation of the good tidings; the issue of the conflict is in the Lord's hands. They can take as their battle-song the motto inscribed on the altar erected shortly after Israel left their Elim encampment, "Jehovah Nissi" ("The Lord is my banner").

And that which is the theme of encouragement to the Church universal, is equally so to each separate member of that Church. There are times, amid the mysteries of daily life—amid startling providences—baffling dispensations, when the old moorings threaten to give way, or have momentarily given way, and we feel ourselves drifting out on the joyless sea of human doubt and distrust. All is dark around—no rift in the cloud, no star in the midnight sky—and in the anguish of bitter unbelief we are tempted to mutter the querulous complaint, "Where is my God now?" Or, if God lives and reigns, does He live as a God of terror? does He answer to the fire-god of the Phoenician in his Baal-worship; or to the Jupiter-god of the Roman, armed with the thunderbolt and forked lightning? or, in the fantasies of a later philosophy, has He abdicated His throne, and left man and his fortunes to wild chance, to be driven, things of fate, here and there on the fitful waters—the vessel without a pilot, the world without a ruler?

No! the chart of Providence containing the fortunes of the nations, as well as all that concerns His Church and people, is in the keeping of the Christ of Calvary. "The Lord is king!

Let the nations tremble! He sits on his throne between the cherubim. Let the whole earth quake!" It is He who mingles every drop in the cup, and lights every furnace, and orders every trial, and draws every tear. Oh!

what would many have been in those gloomy hours of despair, when the props of existence were shaking underneath them—(what they thought were life's strongholds giving way like the yielding rafters beneath their feet)—what would they have been, but for the sustaining assurance that that roll of human destiny is in the hand of the Lord who died for them?

Especially to the mourner in Zion, how cheering the assurance, that all which concerns him and his, is under His Savior's control and sovereignty! On those gloomy, sterile mountains of trial, on which "every tree is burned up, and all the green grass burned up," glad is this announcement, borne by the messengers of consolation. There are other "good tidings of good"—grander and more glorious gospel promises, embracing the hopes "full of immortality;" but how the soul, amid the ruins of its joy—the dust of its desolation, clings to this elementary truth, that it was no sudden accident or chance which overturned its fondest fabrics, and made "the city lie deserted that was once so full of people." But that every form of outer calamity, fever and disease, lightning and tempest, plague, pestilence, and famine, are so many arrows in the quiver of God. "Zion! your God reigns!"

We may not now, and do not now, see the wisdom and faithfulness of many of His dealings. Many an Elim of blessing may be mistaken for a Marah of bitterness and sorrow. We may even, at times, lose the footsteps of the Sovereign Ruler, and the cry of the smitten heart may be, "Truly You are a God that hides Yourself." But the arm, for the present slumbering, will in due time "awake;" the arm, now concealed, will in due time be "made bare;" the purposes now hidden will be unfolded; and each of the children of Zion will come to be "joyful in their King."

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls  
Whatever thou fearest;  
Round Him in calmest music rolls  
Whatever thou hearest.

"And that cloud itself, which now before thee  
Lies dark in view,  
Shall, with beams of light from the inner glory,  
Be stricken through."

"The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord."

## **THE PERPETUAL PRESENCE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20

What can give rest, if the presence of an Almighty Savior cannot—the habitually felt shade of the Heavenly Palm? Israel had but one Elim. Christ's people have the Divine Reality at each resting place of the journey, until the last stage of all be reached; and then, only to be ushered, from the partial glimpses of faith, into the full vision and fruition of glory!

When Jesus spoke the words of our motto-verse, sorrow was filling the hearts of His disciples at the thought of His departure, when the most sacred of friendships seemed about to be ended forever. But by one glorious promise He turns their sadness into joy. 'I go,' He seems to say, 'and yet I will never leave you. These heavens are about to receive Me: but though My personal presence be withdrawn; though this Risen body is soon to be screened from view behind the veiled glories of the Holiest of all, do not think in reality I am gone—"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age!"'

That farewell saying has lost none of its comfort. How delightful the contemplation! the assurance of the upholding arm of a personal, living, loving Savior; susceptible of every human sympathy; bending over us with His pitying eye; entering with infinite tenderness into every earthly

need and woe; drawing near in all the dark experiences of life, as He did to the disciples on their midnight sea, and whispering the calming words, "It is I" (or rather, "I AM"), "do not be afraid." 'I am the Living One; I am the Controlling One (yes, and to "as many as I love"); I am the Rebuking One, and the Chastening One!' Let us think of this, not as a cold abstraction, or beautiful fantasy, but as a glorious truth, a sublime and comforting verity. He is ever with us!

In the midst of sacred musings over departed friends, when visions of the loved and lost come flitting before us like shadows on the wall, how often do we indulge the pleasing imagination of their still mingling with us in mysterious communion, their wings of light and smiles of gladness hovering over us: delighting to frequent with us hallowed visits and participate again in hallowed joys. This may perhaps be a fond illusion regarding others, but it is sublimely true regarding Jesus. When the gates of the morning are opened; swifter than the speeding light, His footstep of love is at our threshold. When the gates of the evening revolve on their silent hinges, and day merges and melts into twilight, He is there! Amid the bustle of life, in "the loud stunning tide of human care," He is there! By the lonely sickbed, when the glow of health has left our cheek, and the dim night-lamp casts its flickering gleam on our pillow, He is there! When the King of terrors has entered our dwellings—when we are seated amid the awful stillness of the death-chamber, listening in vain for the music of cherished voices, hushed for the forever of time, He is there!

In all these diverse experiences, He draws near in touching tenderness, saying, "Surely I am with you always. I will come in the place of your loved ones. I will be near to cheer and comfort, to support and sustain you. I who once wept at a grave am here to weep with you. I will be at your side in all that trying future. I will make My grace sufficient for you, and My promises precious to you, and My love better than all earthly affection. The one is changeable; I am unchangeable—the one must perish; I am the strength of your heart and your portion forever!"

In the original, the word ALWAYS, in the parting promise, is expressive. It means "all THE days" (all the appointed days). Our times are in the hands of Jesus, He counts not our years but our days; He promises to be with us every day, to the last day of all. And when that last day comes, He



withdraws not His Presence, but changes the scene of it, and says,  
"TODAY shall you be with Me in PARADISE."

"Oh, there is nothing in the world  
To weigh against Your will;  
Even the dark times I dread the most,  
Your covenant fulfill:  
And when the pleasant morning dawns  
I find You with me still.

"There in the secret of my soul,  
Though hosts my peace invade,  
Though through a waste and dreary land  
My lonely way be made,  
You, even You, will comfort me,  
I need not be afraid."

"The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest."

## **CHRIST'S DEITY**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

This is what gives to the palm-grove of heavenly promise all its glory. Let us seek to grasp and realize the full grandeur of the Truth of truths; to have it more frequently before us as a subject of devout contemplation—that the Christ of Nazareth, the Savior of Calvary—He who bled for us as Man upon the cross, and pleads for us on the throne, is the Mighty Jehovah; that He was before all things; that He reared every arch and pillar in the Universe Temple. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who

has created these things, that brings out their host by number; He calls them all by their names." Before these stars were made; before these altar-fires were lighted in immensity; before man or angel or seraph, throne or dominion or principality or power existed, this all-glorious Being lived—one in essence and substance with the Eternal Father!

The supreme divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Key-stone of the arch. Remove it, and the whole superstructure collapses. More than Luther ever said regarding justification, it is the doctrine of a standing or a falling Church. To eliminate it from the creed of Christendom would be like blotting out the sun from the visible heavens. Oh, if Jesus is but a creature, though the highest in rank in the heavenly peerage, I cannot confide to Him my eternal destinies. If He who bowed His head on that cross is a mere man and no more, I cannot look to Him as the Rock of Ages. A creature! as well pillow my head on the unstable wave. But blessed be God, I can plant my foot upon the living Rock of His deity. I can trust in Him, not as a prince, or as a mere man, in whom there would be no support: but invoking Him as JEHOVAH, I can, with devout confidence of a gracious answer, join in the prayer, "O GOD the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!"

Great indeed is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh: the Divine Being who created by His word—who sustains by His providence. Let the Unitarian take His Gospel without Godhead in it—let Infidelity attempt to reduce the Person and mission of the all-glorious Immanuel to that of the mere Founder of a new system of divine philosophy, a new Head of a religious school—it is ours to pay a nobler and truer homage to Him who is unveiled to us in sacred story as "the Word," "the Life," "the Light," "the Truth," "the Omnipresent," "the Heart-searcher," the "Beginning and the Ending," the Creator of worlds—the Ransomer of souls—the Wonderful—the Adored of angels—the appointed Judge—the enthroned King—the I AM of eternal ages!

Be it ours to testify that the struggles and toils of 1800 years have not been made to defend and vindicate a monstrous delusion—that thousands of crowned martyrs now in heaven have not shed their blood to uphold a lie. Be it ours to see in Him the glory of illimitable Godhead enshrined in a human tabernacle—yes, and better still, be it ours to say,

in reverential faith, as we fall at His feet, "This God shall be our God forever and ever!"

In the highest interpretation of the Psalmist's language, well may we call upon all creation to rise and do homage to this its Incarnate Lord. Praise Him in the heavens! Praise Him in the heights! 'O Sun of this great world, both eye and soul,' reflect His glory! Moon! take your silver lyre—strike its chords in the praise of your Maker! Stars, gather your brilliant gems as a crown for His brow! Floods, rise and thunder forth His praise! Every flower that blooms, come and waft your fragrance around the Rose of Sharon! Lispering infancy, come with your Hosannahs! Penitence, come bathed in tears! Sorrow, come in the extremity of anguish to this living God, yet your Brother! Youth, come with your green ears of consecration! Manhood, come in your strength! Old age, come leaning on your staff. Come, saints and prophets of old! Come, noble army of martyrs! Come, you heavenly hosts! cherubim and seraphim, gather in to the universal homage! Let the Church triumphant echo back the strains of "the Church throughout all the world"—"YOU ARE THE KING OF GLORY, O CHRIST! YOU ARE THE EVERLASTING SON OF THE FATHER!"

"Strong Rock of Ages, swathed in clouds of light,  
Whose heights unclimbed, never foot of angel trod:  
Ancient of Days, Almighty—Infinite,  
Older than Nature's eldest born—Great God!  
We praise, we bless, we magnify Your name!  
Through everlasting eras You are still the same."

"I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

## **THE IMPERISHABLE GIFT**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of

repose"—

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand." John 10:28

So speaks the Divine Shepherd to the "sheep in the wilderness," as they rest under the shade of the Palm-trees, and by the Wells of living water.

It is a FREE gift. "I give." Believers have themselves no share in the purchase. Man, in bestowing his gifts, has generally reference to some loving or lovable qualities in the objects of his beneficence. But it was from no attractiveness on their part—no foreseen good works or virtues, that God was induced to procure and bequeath the priceless heritage. It is a generous bestowment of sovereign grace and redeeming love.

"I give"—it is theirs in unqualified, inalienable possession—a glorious freehold. The ransomed in the heavenly paradise are spoken of as having "a right to the tree of life." It is the right of the slave who has had his freedom purchased. It is the right of the son who has been left his patrimonial inheritance. It is the right of the conqueror dividing among his soldiers the honors and trophies of victory which his own valor has won.

And as it was the free sovereign love of the Great and Good Shepherd, the Son of the Highest, which led Him to pay the ransom-price; so it is His sovereign, irresistible grace which preserves His flock every hour from destruction, and will present each member of it at last faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Let us not lapse into a loose and indefinite theology, by speaking of the "inherent power of the new nature." That is nothing. It is a shadow—a name—apart from the power of Christ and the indwelling, upholding energy of the Spirit of God.

Why was Paul enabled to stand firm when the messenger from Satan was sent to buffet him? Why did not the thorn in the flesh get the better of his nobler self? It was because that free grace which had "predestinated" and "called" and "justified," was, in the hour of trial and temptation, made "sufficient for him"—God's strength "perfected in weakness," yes, overcoming weakness. Let us ever admire, with adoring wonder, this

unmerited, undeserved, sovereign freeness, from first to last, of the great salvation.

Jesus is the true Zerubbabel, who has laid the foundation, and who also will finish it. Seek to trace His hand in each part of the spiritual building; beginning, carrying on, completing—the Alpha, the Omega; the Justifier, the Sanctifier, the Glorifier. "Thanks be to God," says the Apostle, "who always causes us to triumph in Christ." The pearl would remain forever in the depths of the ocean unless the diver descended for it; so, unless He who purchased us as gems and jewels for His crown had taken us from 'the depths,' there we would have remained forever. And as He rescues the pearl, so does He 'keep' it in safety, until He finally inserts it in His mediatorial crown.

As His is the glory of the commencing work and the sustaining work, so His is the glory of the crowning and consummating work. The branch cannot live severed from the vine. The limb cannot live severed from the body. The Christian lives only by virtue of "Christ his life." It is not our repentance or our prayers, or our habits of grace, or our long standing in grace, which either save or protect us—but the arm of an omnipotent Redeemer. "The Lord is your Keeper." "He that keeps Israel does not slumber." "Well might we sit down in despair," says a gifted believer, "and say, who is sufficient for these things? had we not the strength of Omnipotence on our side; had we not everlasting arms underneath us, and sandals proven against the roughest path."

Yes, and if, at times, we may be conscious of forfeiting the joys of salvation; it may even be undergoing spiritual darkness; we may feel assured that that darkness generally arises from failing to look above to Jesus and to the grace of Jesus; just as one, turning their back to the sun, sees a shadow projected and that shadow is their own. The remedy for getting rid of the shadow is to turn round to the all-glorious Light of life, with the cry, "More grace! more grace!"

"All is dark on the horizon,  
Clouds returning after rain;  
Faith is languid, Hope is weary,  
And the questions rise again—

'Does the promise fail forever?  
Have You made all men in vain?'

"O Redeemer! shall one perish  
Who has looked to You for aid?  
Let me see You, let me hear Thee,  
Through the gloomy midnight shade  
Utter You Your voice of comfort;  
'It is I, be not afraid.'"

"Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love."

## **THE RECOMPENSE OF TRUST**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"No one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him." Psalm 34:22

"Judaea Capta," are the words engraved on the well-known Roman coin, upon which impersonated captive Judah is sitting under the fronds of a desolate palm-tree.

Beneath the shadow of the Divine Heavenly Palm, the afflicted Christian can mingle his pensive sadness with the joyous strain, "He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Ps. 91:1, 2).

"Trust God." It is easy for us to do so in sunshine. It is easy to follow our Leader, as Israel did the pillar-cloud, when a glorious pathway was opened up for them through the midst of the Red Sea; or when at Elim they pitched under tapering palm and by gushing spring; or when heaven rained down bread on the hungry camp. But it is not so easy to follow when earthly palms wither and fountains fail, and the pillar ceases to guide, and all outward and visible supports are withdrawn. Then,

however, is the time for faith to soar! When the world is loud with its atheist sneer—What of religious supports now? THEN is the time to manifest a simple childlike confidence; and, amid baffling dispensations and frowning providences to exclaim, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Child of Sickness! bound down for years on a lonely pillow—the night-lamp your companion—disease wasting your cheeks and frowning your brow, weary days and nights appointed you; tell me, where is the God in whom you trust? He is here, is the reply. His presence takes loneliness from my chamber, and sadness from my countenance. His promises are a pillow for my aching head, they point me onwards to that better land where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick!"

Child of Poverty! where is the God whom you trust? Can He visit this crude dwelling? Can His promises be hung on these broken rafters? Can the light of His Word illumine that cheerless hearth and sustain that bent figure, shivering over the smouldering ashes? Yes! He is here. The lips of truth that uttered the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor," have not spoken in vain. Bound down by chill poverty, forsaken and forgotten in old age, no footstep of mercy heard on my threshold, no lip of man to drop the kindly word, no hand of support to replenish the empty cupboard; that God above has not deserted me. He has led me to seek and lay up my treasure in a home where poverty cannot enter, and where the beggar's hovel is transformed into the kingly mansion!

Bereaved One! where is the God whom you trust? Where is the Arm of Omnipotence you used to lean upon? Has He forgotten to be gracious? Has He mocked your prayers by trampling in the dust your dearest and best, and left you to pine and agonize in the bitterness of your desolate heart and home? No, He is here! He has swept down my fond idols, but it was in order that He Himself might occupy the vacant place. I know Him too well to question the faithfulness of His word and the fidelity of His dealings. I have never known what a God He was, until this hour of bitter trial overtook me! There was a "need be" in every tear, every deathbed, every grave!

Dying One! the closing moments are at hand; the world is receding, the

dreaded symptoms of the approaching end are gathering fast round your pillow, the soul is pluming its wings for the immortal flight! Before memory begins to fade and the mind becomes a waste; before the names of friends when mentioned will only be answered by a dull vacant look, and then the hush of awful silence; tell me, before the last lingering ray of consciousness and thought has vanished, where is the God whom you trust? He is here! I feel the everlasting arms underneath and round about me. Heart and flesh are failing. The mists of death are dimming my eyes to the things below, but they are opening on the magnificent vistas of eternity. He who has for long been the object of faith's reliance, will soon be revealed in full vision and fruition. "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid."

"Still let me be with Thee, Father,  
and ever be Thou with me:  
When the clouds and tempests gather,  
oh, then, let me trust in Thee:  
Let me hide in Thy quiet shadow,  
let me dwell in Thy secret shrine,  
The home of the souls that love Thee,  
the souls that Thou callest Thine!"

And if any who trace these pages feel themselves still strangers to such simple confiding trust; their inward disquieting thought, 'How can we possibly live out these desert privations: that hot desert wind by day, these drenching dews by night? Where can we get food in these dreary leagues of dry sand, or find palm-shade and brook among these barren rocks and waterless channels?' The message to all such is that addressed of old to the desponding Prophet, who had deserted the palm-tree of Israel and Israel's God for the juniper tree of the desert, "Arise!" God will provide strength for the journey.

"Why are you crying out to Me?" said the Divine voice to Moses, when he crouched a skeptic at God's feet, pointing to the barrier mountains behind and the raging sea in front—"Tell the Israelites to move on!"—"Up, do My bidding; and you shall see how I can make My way in the sea, and My path in the mighty waters." "Forward!" said the rebuked hero, clasping the rod of faith which had been lying forgotten at his side, and rising in



the might of Jehovah. Forward they did go; and what was their confession and anthem on the opposite shore?—"Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power; Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy." "At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still." "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong God like You? You rule over the surging sea: when its waves mount up, You still them!"

"If you could trust, poor soul,  
In Him who rules the whole,  
You would find peace and rest;  
Wisdom and sight are well, but trust is best."

"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

## **THE RICHES OF GOD'S MERCY**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2: 4, 5, 9

This is a fitting song to sing, as the fronds of the Elim-palms are bending over us—the breath of God turning them into Aeolian harps, musical with "the name which is above every name!"

Salvation is here traced up to the riches of God's mercy. It is the offended Sovereign proclaiming amnesty to rebels, lifting the beggar from the ash-heap and setting him among princes. The mercy of God! It is a brief sentence. It can be lisped by a child; but what seraph can fathom the depths of its meaning? The inspired Apostle, baffled in the attempt,

seems here only able to shadow forth its wonders by heaping together superlatives: "Because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Eph. 2:4, 5). Amazing thought! God's mercy stooping over us, and His love loving us, when we were morally and spiritually dead. Did you ever hear of one loving the dead? 'Yes!' a hundred lips reply; 'we have loved the dead! We have wept and sobbed over the cold marble—we have loved to gaze on those rayless eyes, although the light of life has faded from them forever here—with an unutterably sacred affection have we loved the broken, mutilated casket, even when the bright jewel had departed.'

But this is not the case in point, in estimating the marvels of the mercy of God. Let us ask rather—Did you ever love the dead outcast on the street? Did you ever love the beggar, found, wrapped in rags for his shroud, lying on the open highway? No! though you may have pitied him, compassionated him; though you may have shuddered at the spectacle—no tear of love could moisten your cheek. But if human compassion is unable to tell so wondrous a tale, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed out of the hand of the enemy." God has done this—God's mercy has reached the point of loving the dead outcast—Yes! more—loving the dead enemy: "Even when we were dead in sins!"

That mercy of God in Christ embraces, too, the vilest and most miserable. None stand beyond its pale. No gate—no veil—no flaming sword of cherubim bar the way to the mercy-seat. Our sins may have reached up to the clouds, but the heights of the Divine mercy are loftier still: "As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him." In writing to Timothy from Rome, the most joyful word Paul can utter when he thinks of himself, as "before, a blasphemer and persecutor and injurious," is this—"But I obtained MERCY."

Yes! come and learn from this giant in grace, when standing on the borders of the grave, the only foundation of a sinner's, or rather a believer's, hope. With all the memories of his apostleship behind him, a thousand battles of the faith, in which, as a spiritual champion, he had fought and bled and conquered: with the remembrance of Jewish hate and Gentile scorn; the stocks and stripes of Philippi; the buffeting of winter tempests he had braved by land and sea; the moral intrepidity that

made him stand amid Athenian philosophers, in the streets of Imperial Rome, and amid the merchant princes of Corinth, pleading the injured cause of his Great Master; the sacrifice of home, country, friends, religion—for a life of untiring and perpetual exile from most of the world's amenities and joys, like a weary bird having no rest for the sole of his foot, and seeking none; and now with the flash of the executioner's sword before him to close the mighty drama of a consecrated existence: yet hear his final plea—"I obtained MERCY." Could we follow him now, among the bright martyr-multitude before the throne, doubtless we would find the dungeon-prayer caught up in Paradise, and become the song of Eternity—"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever!"

He would remind us, in all this, of the one only ground of hope and confidence and trust we have in the sight of a holy God. He was indeed the last to undervalue the precious fruits of the Spirit, as manifested in the heart and the life of the true believer. In the soul that has been divinely sanctified and purified, there is much to love and admire—those Christian graces—holy affections and holy deeds—flowers in the Beloved's garden, which, like so many incense-censers, are sending up their fragrant perfume to heaven. Such, doubtless, are regarded with divine contentment now; and at the Great Day, they will draw from the lips of the Righteous Judge the divine approval and tribute—"Well done, good and faithful servant!"

But what would all these (the best of them) avail, when we come to regard them as forming our plea at that bar of unspotted rectitude and equity? A poor installment, truly, in the discharge of an infinite debt. If the Apostle himself once indulged some such dreams of personal merit and sufficiency, the further he advanced in the divine life, the more maturely he grew in grace and holiness and purity; in a word, the nearer he approached to God, the more deeply did he feel his need of mercy. His estimate of himself in his closing and riper years is this—"Less than the least of all saints"—"Sinners, of whom I am the chief!"

Be it ours ever to take the publican's place; saying as we look to the true Altar of Sacrifice—"God be merciful to me, a sinner!" We believe there is no limit or hindrance to that ocean of mercy in Christ, except for what is

erected by the pride, or indifference, or unbelief of man. It laves and washes the rockiest shores of the rockiest heart. Paul tells us for our encouragement, why Divine compassion was exercised towards him. "For that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life." "I look," said Simeon of Cambridge on his deathbed, "as the chief of sinners, for the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, to life eternal. And I lie adoring the sovereignty of God in choosing such a one, and the mercy of God in pardoning such a one, and the patience of God in bearing with such a one, and the faithfulness of God in perfecting His work and performing all His promises to such a one."

How many can add, from deeper and darker and sadder experiences, "Great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul out of the lowest hell!"

"Let Your mercy's wings be spread  
O'er me, keep me close to Thee;  
In the peace Your love does shed  
Let me dwell eternally.  
Be my all; in all I do  
Let me only seek Your will;  
Where the heart to You is true,  
All is peaceful, calm, and still."

"How great is Your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear You."

## **ACCEPTANCE OF THE LITTLE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"She did what she could." Mark 14:8

"Faithful with a few things." Matthew 25:21

"Each with his assigned task." Mark 13:34

How many earnest souls there are who give themselves unrest—render themselves unhappy, with the reflection how little they have done—how little—with limited means and resources, material and intellectual—they can do, in the shape of substantial service for the cause of God and His Christ. They have all the desire to do. Their very rest—constrained and unwilling inaction—gives them weariness. They feel like log-bound vessels lazily sleeping on their shadows in the harbor, when others are out nobly wrestling with the storm, conveying priceless stores to needy hearts.

There is an Elim-Palm for such. Both the measure of your ability, and your place and position in life are appointed by God. The Christian poet represents those angels in heaven who "only stand and wait" as "serving"—doing their Lord's will—as truly as the swift-winged messengers who carry to and fro the biddings of His pleasure: and of the Church militant on earth, "Thus says Jehovah," by the mouth of His prophet, "In returning and rest shall you be saved: in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

We can serve God, 'in rest and in quietness'—in the noiseless tenor of a lowly lot, an uneventful existence—as well as in the feverish bustle or prominent position of an active one; drawing water from the wells under Elim-palm trees, as well as in grappling with the hosts of Pharaoh or Amalek. No, we believe we have abundant warrant for the assertion, that those most glorify God who, without the often false stimulus of outward or secondary motives, perform gladly that class of humble, unpretentious deeds, which, requiring no intellectual effort, no brilliant gifts, are unacknowledged by the world's approval—unapplauded by the world's hosannahs. Such assuredly will not be unowned or rejected by the Great

Recompenser, because they have nothing better or costlier to offer. While it is said of "the mountains" (the Church's great ones), that they shall "bring peace to the people;" the "little hills" (the Church's humble, unknown, obscure ones), are to do so also "by righteousness" (Ps. 72:3).

Let none, then, be coveting opportunity for the execution of burdensome labors, or for occupying noticeable positions, as if these enjoyed a monopoly in the divine favor and approval. We repeat, the hewer of wood, or trimmer of lamps in the Temple—if (what might be deemed) his drudgery, were performed from a principle of obedience and lowly faithfulness—served the God of Israel as much as the High Priest with his breastplate gleaming with the Urim and Thummin.

MOTIVE is everything with the Omniscient Heart Searcher; and He is satisfied, if we fulfill, with a good conscience, our appointed place and destiny, whatever that may be. The little fire-fly illuminating the darkness in the balmy plains of the South, is one of the tiniest lamps in God's magnificent Temple of night—a mere glimmering spark compared with other and nobler altar-fires of sun and stars in the same great sanctuary. But that insect does not refuse to rise on its wings of flame, because unable to emit a greater amount of light; it is content to shine with the luster assigned to it in its humble place in the material economy, and the Creator is glorified thereby.

The insignificant "nameless rill" does not refuse to sing its way to the ocean, because, on the opposite side of the mountain or valley, a mightier torrent is thundering along, and bearing in its course a larger and wealthier volume. It carries its appointed tribute to the sea; and He who "sends forth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills" expects from it no more. "She has done what she could," is the Divine payment of commendation. The one lowly talent, conscientiously traded on, will receive its own with interest. The widow's mite and the cup of cold water are accepted, and the intention and desire would be accepted, if there were no mite and no cup to give. See how graciously God owned the unfulfilled purpose of His servant David regarding the erection of the Temple on Zion!—"Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart" (1 Kings 8:18).

"Some eager hearts—some souls of fire,  
Who pant to toil for God and man,  
View, with a look of keen desire,  
The upland way of toil and pain:  
Almost with scorn, they think of rest,  
Of holy calm, of tranquil breast.  
On others, lowlier tasks are laid,  
With love to make the labor light;  
And all their efforts may be shed  
On quiet homes and lost to sight."

Wordsworth, in one of his minor poems, speaks beautifully of "That best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love."

In our Lord's parable of the Talents just referred to, the varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. The master gave his servants "each according to his ability." God, in the dispensing of these sacred trusts, does not act without reason; He distributes the talents according to the known powers and capacities of His servants. He gives equitably, and He expects a corresponding repayment. Some, from peculiar outward circumstances—from their position in the Church and the world—will be able to invest a large capital, and draw in a large return: these are the five talented servants. Others move in a humbler and less influential sphere: they have only two talents, and from them, as the result of trading, their Lord expects no more. In either case, they have done their duty up to the measure of their responsibility; the amount entrusted to them has been doubled; and their fidelity being thus tested and proved, their Master is satisfied.

The Church of Christ is made up of "vessels of large and small quantity;" but the Lord does not unreasonably expect the smaller vessel to hold the contents of the large one. The Church is a garden adorned with trees and plants and flowers; but He does not expect the hyssop to assume the dimensions of the cedar, nor the olive tree to attain the height of the palm tree, nor the myrtle to be laden with the fruit of the vine, nor the lily to waft the perfume of the rose. He does not expect the lowly unlettered Christian to fight like the champion of the faith. He does not expect from

poverty the alms it has not to bestow, nor from the sick-bed sufferer the active energies which bodily prostration forbids.

Let none needlessly mourn that they cannot glorify God by talents He never gave them, and for which, therefore, they are not accountable. Let none say, 'Had I been in another position in life, I might have invested a larger capital for my Lord.' Though you are narrowed and restricted where you are, to the one talent, use it well, and God will accept "according to what a man has, not according to what he has not."

What a noble program and directory of duty is that given by the great Apostle in his great Epistle: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (Rom. 12:6-8).

"Last of the laborers, Your feet I gain.  
Lord of the harvest! And my spirit grieves  
That I am burdened, not so much with grain  
As with a heaviness of heart and brain!  
Master, behold my sheaves!

"Few, light, and worthless—yet their trifling weight  
Through all my frame a weary aching leaves;  
For long I struggled with my hapless fate,  
And staid and toiled until it was dark and late,  
Yet these are all my sheaves!

"Full well I know I have more tares than wheat.  
Brambles and flowers, dry stalks, and withered leaves,  
Why I blush and weep, as at Your feet  
I kneel down reverently, and repeat,  
'Master, behold my sheaves!'

"But I shall gather strength and hope anew,  
For well I know Your patient love perceives



Not what I did, but what I strove to do,  
And though the full ripe ears be sadly few,  
You will accept my sheaves!"

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one the of least of these  
brothers of mine, you did for Me."

## **NONE CAST OUT**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:37

An invitation to every burdened Israelite—every way-worn pilgrim of the  
wilderness, to come for shelter under the branches of the Heavenly Palm!

How these and such like gracious words which proceeded out of the  
mouth of Jesus, must have told on the wondering multitudes He  
addressed, those who never heard kind sayings before—who were led to  
imagine that it was learned scribes, or devout Pharisees, or austere  
Sadducees, or elaborate-robed priests, who alone had any hope of  
salvation! Can we marvel that "the common people heard Him gladly,"  
when He lifted them up from the dust of degradation; when He  
proclaimed boldly—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to  
repentance." I came not to call you rich—you learned—you who pride  
yourselves on your religious formalism and self-righteous austerities—but  
you broken-hearted penitents, weeping prodigals, despairing Magdalenes  
—you the most erring wanderers from the fold, who are really and  
earnestly seeking to return. "If ANY man thirsts, let him come unto Me  
and drink." "If ANY man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and  
out and find pasture."

Reader! say not, 'This invitation cannot be for me. I cannot take my place under the gracious palm-shade, just as I am, with the memory of countless transgressions.' Yes! it is just because you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, that He invites you to come. Come, just as you are. Christ does not require any previous qualifications. It is because you are weary He asks you to partake of the shelter. It is because of your poverty that He so importunately exclaims—"Behold, I have set before you an open door."

When, in a season of scarcity and poverty, thousands thrown out of employment are forced to avail themselves of bread doled out to stop the rage of hunger, they are not heard to say, 'We must have proper clothing first. We must first cover these children's bleeding, frost-bitten feet, before we can venture to appear before the distributors of a city's or a nation's bounty.' No; if they did so, it would invalidate their plea—it would send them home again to a cupboard, and hearth, and wardrobe, as empty as they left it. It is because they appear in tattered rags, and because hunger has written its appeal on their emaciated faces and in the hollow eyes of the hapless children at their side, that the door opens for relief.

There is no desert wanderer, haggard and footsore, who may not come to that grove of "exceeding great and precious promises." God has made provision not for the strong only, but for the weak, the tempted, the sorrowful, the suffering. The feeblest bird may make a perch of these branches. The anointing oil of blessing poured on the head of the true Aaron, flows down to the very skirts of His garments, so that the least and lowliest are made partakers of His covenant grace.

It is well for us, however, to remember that there is but one Redeemer; and "neither is there salvation in any other." A few days previous to the Elim encampment, there was but one way for the Hebrew host through the Red Sea from the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. There was but one way for evading the destroying angel—by the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts of their dwellings. There was but one way, in a subsequent age, for Rahab escaping the general destruction of Jericho—by hanging out from her window the scarlet thread. There was but one way—by washing in the river of Jordan—that the proud Syrian captain of a yet later day,

could have his leprosy healed.

The Hebrews, on that memorable night of the death of the firstborn, might have built up Egyptian pyramid on pyramid to keep out the messenger of wrath. It would have been of no avail. Or the army of a million, passing through the sea, might have piled its coral rocks to make an avenue through the waters. The wild waves would have laughed them to scorn and made them the plaything of its tide! Naaman might have made a toilsome pilgrimage to every river of Asia—from Abana and Pharpar, to the Euphrates and the Indus—but all would have been to no purpose. Nothing but 'the waters of Israel' would prove efficacious in curing his malady.

Let us make sure of a personal interest in the one great Salvation. That Almighty Redeemer remains, to this hour, immutable—all-sufficient—faithful among the faithless—changeless among the changeable. Bernard beautifully sang in the words of his familiar hymn—

"Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts!  
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men!  
From the best bliss that earth imparts,  
We turn unfilled to Thee again."

Yes! you who are weary, sick at heart it may be of the world which has deceived you—bubble after bubble bursting in your hands; that gracious Savior, with outstretched arms, is waiting to welcome you back. With the hoarded love of eternity in His heart, He is ever repeating the "faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance" which heads this meditation—"whoever comes to me I will never drive away!"

"With a heart full of anxious request,  
Which my Father in heaven bestowed,  
I wandered, alone and distressed,  
In search of a quiet abode.  
Astray and distracted, I cried  
Lord, where would You have me to be?  
And the voice of the Lamb that had died  
Said, 'Come, My beloved, to ME!'"

"I went—for He mightily wins  
Weary souls to His peaceful retreat,  
And He gave me forgiveness of sins,  
And songs that I love to repeat;  
Made pure by the blood that He shed,  
My heart in His presence was free,  
I was hungry and thirsty—He fed;  
I was sick, and He comforted me.

"He gave me the blessing complete,  
The hope that is with me today;  
And a quiet abode at His feet,  
That shall not be taken away."

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

## **THE BLESSED HOPE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"That blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13

This is rest under God's Palm-trees of promise, with a glorious vista seen through their branches. Their fronds form, so to speak, a framework for the believer's distant but "blessed hope" (as Middleton translates our motto-verse)—"The glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior."

That 'second coming' was to the early Christians the theme of habitual contemplation—their cherished harbor of refuge in the midst of environing storms: "And to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:10);

"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess.3:5); "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draws near" (Jas. 5:8). Moreover, it is well worth noting, that, in the inspired Epistles, it is not the day of death which is spoken of or looked forward to by the Church with jubilant expectation, but the day of Christ's appearing. Need we wonder at this? Death is no pleasing theme: though the Christian's last enemy, it is an enemy still—the 'King of terrors.' But the "Parousia"—the Advent of the Divine Savior—is identified with final triumph over death; when "the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" (1 Cor. 15:54). Not only so, but that "vile body" (itself a part of the redemption-purchase) will come forth from the dishonors of the grave, fashioned like the glorious body of its glorified Redeemer.

How many anguished, bereaved mourners have had their grief calmed and their tears dried by this sublime antidote of the great Apostle, as he points them on to the second coming of their Lord, and associates that coming with the restoration of their beloved dead! "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14). At that blessed season when "the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God;" amid these revived friendships and indissoluble reunions, "God"—the God on the throne—the Brother-man—"shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17).

Nor is the anticipated joy of that Day altogether a personal and selfish one. No small element of it is the believer's joy at the glory which will then encircle the brow of his adorable Lord. It will be the public enthronement of Jesus of Nazareth. He will come "to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). All the humiliations of His first coming—the manger—the carpenter's home—the unsheltered head—the nights of wakeful anguish—the scorn, and taunt, and jeer—the piercing thorns—the bitter cross—the

ignominious sepulcher—all, all now exchanged for the shout of welcome—"Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him!" (Isa. 25:9). How often among His own people on earth is He dishonored; wounded in the house of His friends—the unstained beauty of the Master tarnished with the blemishes and inconsistencies of the disciples. But not so on that Day. Even these marred, blotted, imperfect images and reflections shall then, at least, become perfect copies and transcripts of their glorious Divine Original: "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). "I saw," says John, "the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

"Let every man that has this hope in him purify himself even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3); amid the rough wear and tear of a workday world, keeping a conscience void of offence; "having the loins girded, and the lamps burning; and being like those who are waiting for the coming of the Lord" (Luke 12:35, 36). "Blessed is he who watches" (Rev. 16:15). Blessed is he, who, in whatever calling he be called, therein abides with God. Thus remaining expectant under the shadow of the desert palms, we can mark the rainbow-arch which spans the sky of the future, connecting the cross with the crown; and say, in lowly believing confidence, with one of the Church's noblest watchers, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day!" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Yes, "He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him." The assembled Jewish worshipers looked for the reappearance of their High Priest, when He was ministering in the Holy of Holies. They waited anxiously in the outer porch to see the veil withdrawn, and the Intercessor of the nation come forth, to pour upon the multitude, with outstretched hands, the old benediction, "May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you His favor and give you His peace." (Num. 6:24-26). Not until then were the imposing services of that high day of Hebrew festival completed.

Do we know and love the significance of the type? Are we on the outlook for our Priest and King returning from the heavenly Presence, to say to

the waiting myriads of His redeemed Church, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"? It was a gladdening sound to the Jewish multitudes in their Temple area, when they heard the music of the silver bells on the hem of the High Priest's garment, giving intimation of his approach, "Blessed are they who know the joyful sound." "Blessed are those servants who, when their Lord comes, shall be found watching!"

"The watchers on the mountain

Proclaim the Bridegroom near,

Go, meet Him as He comes,

With Hallelujahs clear!

The marriage feast is waiting,

The gates wide open stand

Up, up! ye heirs of glory,

The Bridegroom is at hand!"

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning."

## **THE DIVINE WAY PERFECT**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"As for God, His way is perfect." Psalm 18:30

There are times in the experience of many, when the Elim-palms seem to have yielded to the tempest; when, amid adverse and baffling providences, "the foundations of the world are out of course," and all things appear to be rushing into wreck and darkness. The Divine, everlasting vigil seems to have ceased; and echo only answers to the wild cry of despair—"Where is now my God?" Why these worldly losses, these cruel disappointments, these beds of sickness, these gaps in the loved circle? God creating affections only to wither them; severing us, in the twinkling of an eye, from those He had sent to be helpers of our faith, interpreters of His own goodness and wisdom and love—High priests in the domestic temple, whose removal leaves a silent, desolated altar, with incense unkindled and lamps put out, cherished memories alone surviving to read and reveal the loss! Can there be love or wisdom or faithfulness here?

Hush these and such like atheistic doubts; repress these and such like unworthy surmises. "As for God, His way is perfect." This was a lesson impressively taught to Israel as they had now pitched their tents under the desert palms. They, like many of God's Israel still, might have been tempted at first to misinterpret the Divine dealings. At the very outset from Egypt the cloudy pillar appeared to mislead them. Instead of taking them the near and direct route to Canaan, it conducted them round 'by the way of the wilderness.' They had the Red Sea in front, and their pursuers behind. The shout goes up from the Egyptian host—"They are entangled, the wilderness has shut them in!" Even Moses yields to the panic and despondency of the hour. "Why," says the Jehovah he doubted—"Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to move on." Forward they did go, under the guidance of the symbol of the Divine Presence; and what was the song with which they made the opposite shores resound? It was the adoration of the all-perfect ways of God, vindicating the rectitude of His procedure; "You in Your mercy have led forth the people which You have redeemed: You have guided them in Your strength unto Your holy habitation."

This loving and gracious Guide still "leads Joseph like a flock;" even although often, in a spiritual sense, He makes 'the depths of the sea' a



way for His ransomed to pass over. We, too, may have our winding routes through the desert, our Red Seas of trouble, our Marahs of bitterness, our varied seasons of misgiving and despondency and trial. There may seem to be no wisdom in the dealing to which He is subjecting us. His way may truly seem to be "in the sea, and His path in the deep waters, and His judgments unsearchable." But it is for us to listen in submissive faith to His sovereign mandate, "Go forward." Thus following the guidance of the pillar-cloud we cannot go wrong.

It is not for us to judge of the reasons for apparently harsh measures, hidden from our gaze, and known only to the Infinitely Gracious One. Even regarding temporal things, we are constantly taught never to judge prematurely of an incomplete plan. Why disturb those lovely fields, and make crude gashes in those smiling valleys? Wait with your verdict until Science finishes her work, and thousands are seen to speed along the iron highway! Why disturb the virgin marble slumbering in earth's bosom, leaving unsightly seams and scars in its native quarry? Wait until you see that unwieldy block fashioned into a graceful pillar, or into a piece of breathing sculpture! "What I do," says He, "you know not now, but you shall know hereafter."

The dropping or withdrawal of the fronds of some cherished earthly Elim-palm may be to allow heaven's better sunshine, hitherto impeded, to fall full upon you. "Why," says one of the saintliest men of the past generation, "Why are we not amply satisfied and accepting in the wise management of the Great Counselor, who puts clouds and darkness round about Him, bidding us follow at His beck through the cloud, promising an eternal and uninterrupted sunshine on the other side?" "Commit, then, your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass." "Although you say you can not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust in Him." "So long," says an old writer (Bridge), "as one who is learning to swim can touch earth with his feet, he does not commit himself to the stream. So long as the soul can stand on second causes, it does not commit itself to the stream of God's mercy." Let us trust His heart, when we fail to trace His hand.

"Into the future,  
That unknown land,

Fearless we venture,  
Holding His hand.  
Trusting His promise,  
Waiting His will,  
Kept by His power  
Peaceful and still."

You, O God, led Your people of old, by the right hand of Moses, with Your glorious arm, "dividing the water before them to make Yourself an everlasting name" (Isa. 63:12). "Awake, awake," on our behalf, still, "O Arm of the Lord!" Finite wisdom has no place in your dealings. Let us seek no other way, let us surrender ourselves to no other guidance but His; remembering that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."

We may now be, like the panic-stricken Hebrews, confronting the barrier waves; the unsparing foe behind, the desolate wilderness around. But fear not! that sea will, in some gracious way, recede to make a dry-shod pathway; that wilderness on the other side, with dreary sand and jutting cliff, will provide Elim resting-places with overshadowing palms and refreshing springs. At all events, the day is coming, when, if not under the palms of the wilderness—at least in the true Resting-places of the Heavenly Elim—we shall join in the triumphant ascription, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works."

"Soon," says an eminent Christian now experiencing the reality of her own words, "Soon our tale shall be finished; the history of our lives will be put by in the library of God as a volume of His faithfulness;" and heaven will resound with this song, which on earth is often warbled with trembling lips, "As for God, His way is perfect!"

"Times are changing, days are flying,  
Years are quickly past and gone;  
While the wildly mingled murmur  
Of life's busy hum goes on.  
Sounds of tumult, sounds of triumph,  
Marriage chimes and death-knoll bell;  
Yet, through all, one keynote sounding

Angels' watchword—'It is well!'

"We may hear it through the rushing  
Of the midnight tempest's wave;  
We may hear it through the weeping  
Round the newly-covered grave;  
In the dreary house of mourning,  
In the darkened room of pain,  
If we listen meekly, rightly,  
We may catch that soothing strain.

"And thus, while the years are fleeting,  
Though our joys are with them gone,  
In Your changeless love rejoicing,  
We shall journey calmly on.  
Until at last, all sorrow over,  
Each our tale of grace shall tell,  
In the heavenly chorus joining—  
Lord, You have done all things well!"

"Is it well with you?...and she answered, it is well!"

## **PERSEVERANCE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry  
it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6

"We will not die." Habakkuk 1:12

In looking from underneath the shade of the palm-trees, on the long  
untrodden journey before the true Canaan can be reached, the thought  
cannot fail at times to intrude itself — Can we trust to be safeguarded

through this great and terrible wilderness? Can we rely on the God of the Pillar-cloud conducting us to the brink of Jordan and thence to "the shining fields" beyond? Rather, is there no danger of spiritual drought and famine, or spiritual death, overtaking us? May it not be sadly fulfilled, with us, in a spiritual sense, as it was with the Pilgrim Hebrews in a literal, that through apostasy, unbelief, and backsliding, "we shall never enter into His rest"?

No! We have the sure word of promise of "a God who cannot lie," "You shall go over and possess that good land" (Deut. 4:22). "But now, O Israel, the Lord who created you says: 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!'" Isaiah 43:1-3. All is guaranteed to us in what the old writers call "the charter-deed of the Everlasting Covenant." The immutability of the Divine counsel has been confirmed to us by oath.

In the first of our motto-verses the great Apostle speaks with unhesitating assurance—"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." He does not, indeed, declare, that "good work" is never to be impeded. God has never given promise in Scripture, with regard to spiritual experience, of an unclouded day—uninterrupted sunshine. "The morning without clouds" is a heavenly emblem. The earthly one is "a day in which the light shall neither be clear nor dark" (Zech. 14:6).

The analogy of the outer world of nature, at least under these our checkered and ever-varying skies, teaches us this. Spring comes smiling, and pours her blossoms into the lap of Summer. But the skies lower, the rain and battering hail descend, the virgin blossoms droop their heads and almost die. Summer again smiles, and the meadows look gay; the flowers ring merry chimes with their leaves and petals and swing their fragrant censers. But all at once drought comes with her fiery, merciless footsteps. Every blade and bud, gasping for breath, lift their blanched eyelids to the brazen sky; or the night winds rock the laden branches and

strew the ground. Thus, we see, it is not one unvarying, unchecked progression, from the opening bud to the matured fruit.

But every succeeding month is more or less scarred by drought and moisture, wind and rain and storm. Yet, never once has Autumn failed to gather up her golden sheaves; yes, and if you ask her testimony, she will tell that the very storm, and blackened skies, and descending torrents you dreaded as foes, were the best helpers in filling her garner.

Do not be desponding now, because of present passing shadows, but "thank God, and take courage." "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Ps. 37:24). It is written, that "at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7). The sun may wade all day through murky clouds, but he will pillow his head at night on a couch of amber. "Even though you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold" (Ps. 68:13).

The second of our motto-verses forms part of an impassioned appeal of the Prophet Habakkuk in the prospect of impending national calamity. The great military power of that era of the world was menacing the cities and homes of Palestine. "Terrible and dreadful"—their horses "swifter than the leopards, and more fierce than the evening wolves" (1:7, 8). Overwhelmed at the thought of imminent judgment and desolation, the prophet can discern no silver lining in the earthly cloud. He turns from man to God. He takes refuge in that sublime truth—the Immutability of a covenant Jehovah; and breaks out in these beautiful words of calm confidence, "O Lord, are You not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die!" No! though the hosts of the Chaldeans should sweep the battle-plains; though they should leave behind them a track of blood and ashes and smoke; though the cry of suffering thousands should ascend apparently unsupported to heaven, "We will not die." The God of our Fathers will not be untrue to His oath, or unmindful of His covenant. He will not cast off forever, or root out our name and remembrance from the earth.

"I give them," is His own blessed word and guarantee to His true Israel still, "eternal life, and they shall never perish." "What God has spoken, He

is able also to perform." The good work begun, He will also finish. Let this ever be our rallying call when wounded in the fight, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High!"

"He will never fail us,  
He will not forsake;  
His eternal covenant,  
He will never break.

"Onward, then, and fear not,  
Children of the Day!  
For His Word shall never,  
Never pass away!"

"It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

## **DELIGHT IN GOD'S LAW**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:2

These form the opening note of the Psalter: the motto and superscription which first strike the eye, just as we are entering this glorious Temple of Praise. The verse following is a description of the true believer. But it would almost seem, with equal beauty, to describe the Elim-palm we are now to speak of, and under which spiritual Israel ever love to encamp—the precious, life-giving Word—"A tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in his season, and whose leaf does not wither" (ver. 3).

That Palm-tree was planted by God. The whispers of its fronds, if we may

so speak, from the declaration of His own sacred, unchanging mind to His Church. Though this revelation of His will finds its way through human instrumentality, the voice is from heaven; the river, 'clear as crystal,' is from before the throne. There may be diversities of gifts and temperaments in the inspired authors of the Holy Book—there may be apparent discrepancies in the tints of the divine picture; but each historian and prophet, psalmist and evangelist, can say, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer"—that ready Writer being the Spirit of God.

"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." We have "not the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches." That Bible would be incomprehensible on the theory of mere human authorship. Many of the compositors of this great repertory of life and love and consolation, were illiterate, uneducated men—strangers to all the learning and culture of the schools. They were separated from one another by hundreds, indeed, thousands of years. And yet what a unity in their writings! what concord, agreement of thought and doctrine! and that too without the possibility of conspiracy, or preconcerted plan. The Temple with one altar and one God, yet with a thousand windows all shedding the same mellowed divine light. They have woven one beautiful, consistent pattern, one harmonious whole. They point to one and the same glorious method of salvation, and one too, beyond the understanding of reason. "Built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets," we have here a building "fitly framed together." The Bible is more than man's work. It points to its own high original. It bears the seal and signature of heaven.

Let us look to this blessed Bible as a supreme personal blessing. It is the very message we need. How it speaks to the conscience! What a discernor of the moral being! Like the wheels of Ezekiel's vision, it is "full of eyes before and behind." How it ransacks the halls of memory; penetrates the labyrinths of the soul—a faithful mirror reflecting and exposing the chambers of imagery. It meets the longing necessities of our natures. It offers us a complete salvation; a salvation not only from the guilt, but from the power of sin. It comes to us, independent of all churches and conventional distinctions. It meets us on the common ground of humanity—as sinners carrying the same burdens, subject to the same

weaknesses, grappling with the same temptations, bowed with the same sorrows, traveling to the same goal of death, having the same possession of an eternal destiny.

Never any book spoke like this Book. We can say of it, as David, of Goliath's sword, "There is none like it." It is a Volume suited for all, designed for all—young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. In the well-known words of Tertullian, "It is like a vast lake, in which some places are so deep that an elephant may swim in them, and other parts so shallow that a child can wade through them."

And, finally, it opens, as no other Revelation ever did, or ever can, the gates into the Celestial City. It is a glorious fiery pillar, illuminating the company of the true Israel of God through every stage of the journey, until it brings them to the heavenly Canaan. And is not this an object worthy of the Great Father of all?—to prepare this message of love for His sin-stricken, diseased, captive, dying children; that with it in their hands as an infallible directory and guide, they may go up and on through the wilderness, to the Eternal Home, gladdened with hopes which are full of immortality!

"How miserable it would make me now," says a philosophic writer and thinker once borne along the current of skepticism, "to give up the Bible! How I cling to its assurances of pardon and free acceptance, and undeserved love and favor, as my chief and only hope!"

Go, gather all the philosophers of antiquity—Plato, Socrates, Aristotle. Bring together the wise men of Greece, the philosophers of Alexandria, the sages of Rome. Ask if their combined and collected wisdom ever solved the doubts of one awakened soul, as have done these leaves of this hallowed Book! Which of them ever dried the tear of widowhood as these? Which of them ever smoothed the pillow of the fatherless as these? Which of them ever lit the torch of hope and peace at the dying bed as these, and flashed upon the departing soul visions of unearthly joy?

O Pagan darkness! where was your song in the night? In the region and shadow of death where did your light arise? But "we have a more sure word of prophecy to which we do well to take heed." Let us know it, in our



personal and individual experience, as "the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls" (James 1:21). "Engrafted"—the figure is significant and expressive. The graft in outer nature converts the weak tree, or bush, or stem, into a strong one. It transforms deformity into beauty. It puts, in the place of commonplace blossoms, tints of varied loveliness. The dog-rose of the hedge side, from the pauper of his race, becomes the stock and shoot of a royal line; the unfragrant plant of the thicket is made to swing, from his grafted stalks, new censers of sweetest incense on the passing breeze.

Similar, but infinitely more glorious, is the spiritual transformation effected on the soul by the engrafting of God's holy Word. The influence of its precepts, its promises, its motives, its encouragements, renews and revolutionizes the whole moral being. That soul becomes "a new creation," a "tree of righteousness." In the hands of the Divine Spirit, operating through the Scriptures, the beautiful figurative language of the prophet is illustrated and fulfilled—"Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where briers grew, myrtles will sprout up. This miracle will bring great honor to the Lord's name; it will be an everlasting sign of His power and love." Isaiah 55:13

May it be ours, while knowing experimentally this grafting process with its transforming results in "the salvation of our souls"—to value with an ever-increasing estimate the instrumentality by which the new life is generated, and by which it is promoted and sustained. May it be ours to love our Bible through life's morning and midday, so that at the sunset-hour its glorious truths may, like the Alpine summits, be illuminated to our spiritual vision when the valleys are in shadow. Our prop and support amid the checkered scenes of the pilgrimage, may it form our staff in the swellings of Jordan.

"It is so blest to trust Your Word alone;  
I do not ask to see  
The unveiling of Your purpose, or the shining  
Of future light on mysteries untwining,  
Your promise-roll is all my own,  
Your Word is enough for me."

"Remember Your word to Your servant, for You have given me hope."

## **CHRIST THE PROPITIATION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood."  
Romans 3:25

Here is rest under the true Mercy-seat; the antitype of that which, in the earlier dispensation, was surrounded with palm-wreathed carvings on "the Holy Oracle."

The great redemption is finished. The blood of the Divine Surety has been shed. The Lamb for the burnt offering has been sacrificed; access has been provided into "the Holiest of all." Through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh, the approach is available to every true, believing Israelite, by "faith in His blood." How many among the worshipers of a false and spurious Christianity, are looking to Christ through material relics—pieces of the so-called real cross, fragments of the spear or thorn-crown, or seamless robe! We are called to look "through faith." How many more are groping their way to Him through propitiations of their own: penances, and prayers, and fastings, and flagellations. The Propitiation is completed "Whom God has set forth." If the Jewish High-priest, as he stood at the mercy-seat, instead of sprinkling the blood, had stripped the jewels from breastplate and mitre, and flung them on the sacred chest, what would all have availed? Nothing. There was but one offering efficacious there: an offering not composed of 'pearls from the ocean, or gold from the mine'— "When I see THE BLOOD I will pass over you."

The efficacy of the blood of the Great Sacrifice is inexhaustible. Revelation unfolds "an hundred and forty and four thousand" with lustrous robes, washed and made white in it; and still the Propitiation is

"set forth;" still the way into the Holiest and to acceptance is open. Countless pilgrims, weary and heavy-laden, have encamped by the antitypical Wells and Palms of Elim. Still is the shade-giving shelter ample as ever. Still is the invitation unlimited as ever—"Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

The word "Propitiation" in our motto-verse, as is well known, refers to the lid or covering of the Ark of the Covenant, above which were the overshadowing wings of the cherubim. Within the Ark were deposited the two tables of stone, on which were engraved the ten commandments, the words of the Eternal decalogue. Impressive and significant, surely, was that old symbolism! The sinner or worshiper (through his representative in the person of the Jewish High-priest) draws near with blood in his hand—this he sprinkles above the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat; the purple stream falls on the floor at his feet. The law of God is still there with all its demands intact and inviolate; unabrogated, unrepealed. It utters the condemning word, "The soul that sins it shall die."

But between the law and the trembling worshiper there is this propitiation covering; the glorious type of Him, who, to all His true people, is a shelter from the curses of the law—"a refuge and a hiding place from the storm." Thus do we see the old, but ever-binding and obligatory Tables of Sinai's covenant, screened out of sight by the intervening barrier—hidden, as a covenant of works, by the better work of Jesus. We can take up with joyful confidence the prayer of the publican in the parable (Luke 18:10), in which prayer, it is well worthy of note, the very word which here occurs, propitiation, though differently rendered, is also employed—"God be MERCIFUL to me a sinner!" 'Be merciful'—but let mercy reach me by the alone channel through which it can flow—mercy by sacrifice—mercy through the atoning blood of the Immaculate Surety.

Believer! come, seat yourself under the shadow of this heavenly Palm, and exult in your indestructible safety and security! God has set Him forth as a Propitiation (an atoning sacrifice for sin). He (the true 'shield, and lifter-up of your head'), "stands between the living and the dead, and the plague is stopped!"

"Trembling with guilt, oppressed with fear,  
Unfailing shelter I have here.  
Long have I roamed in need and pain,  
Long have I sought for rest in vain;  
Bewildered in doubt, in darkness lost,  
My soul fierce driven and tempest-tos't.  
But forth from dark and stormy sky  
Beneath the mercy-seat I fly.  
There I repose with fears all fled,  
Pardoned, accepted, comforted.  
The present, peace—the past, forgiven,  
The future, vista-views of heaven.  
Jesus! my soul alone relies  
On Thine accepted Sacrifice."

"The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."

## **FULLNESS OF JOY**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound." Psalm 4:7

"The glorious freedom of the children of God." Romans 8:21

These are two gracious Palm-trees interweaving their fronds over the heads of the spiritual Pilgrim, and whispering of rest and freedom, security and peace.

How the captive who, through the grated window of his cell, only sees the light—envies the feeblest songsters of the grove which make a perch on the iron bars! Why? Because they are free. They are living in the element for which God designed them. They can mount in the wide sky, poise

themselves on wing, and make treetop, or rock, their home, as they please. But how can he, imprisoned within these damp dungeon walls, be happy—severed from all that makes life a blessing? As from his bed of straw he notes their plumage, like a lightning-flash, glancing in the bright rays of a sun he cannot enjoy, how sadly and truthfully does he wail out the aspiration, "Oh, that I had wings, for then would I fly away, and be at rest!"

There is a deeper, sadder truth in all this, regarding the nobler spiritual aspirations of the soul. That soul cannot be satisfied with its exile from true home and liberty and rest. Worldly pleasures, riches, honors, are poor inadequate substitutes for what is higher and more enduring. You may as well dream of filling up a gulf with a few pebbles or grains of sand, as fill the capacities of immortal natures with anything finite. Men may do what they can to quench the spark of immortality within them. In the pursuit of earthly happiness and gain and renown, they may throw baits to the soul, and cheat it into a belief that they are giving it a satisfying portion. Just as the eagle may be satisfied for the moment with the carrion thrown into his cage; or the lion may be appeased for the moment with the food thrown into his den.

But the spiritual nature, rational, immortal, fashioned originally after the image of God, will (with the instinct of these kingly inhabitants of the lower creation) always give evidence of felt conscious degradation, if its aspirations be left limited and fettered with the things of sense and time. There are many men and women caressed in the lap of fortune—pillowed and cushioned and charioted in luxury—with their eye resting on gilded magnificence—their ears regaled with luscious music—their tables abundant with splendor—the world gazing upon them with envious eye as "prosperous and happy"—yet, follow them to their secret rooms, where the false appearance of elation is laid aside, and where the silence and solitude shut out the pomp and pageantry of life—how solemn, how humbling, to know, were that closed door and that lonely heart unlocked, that it would be to hear the child of fortune (a captive prisoner in a gilded cell) wailing out the confession, "I have no gladness with it all. I am not satisfied with it all. There is an aching void in this heart the world can never fill!"

Yes! and nothing earthly can fill it, or impart to it the longed-for "gladness." Not change of scene or circumstance—though many seem to think so—like the wounded bird, making its perch on one bough after another, but the wound no easier: or like the suffering invalid, turning from side to side on his weary pillow, thinking every change will be less irksome, while the gnawing pain remains the same. No! One portion alone can satisfy; One escape, One refuge alone is there from "the windy storm and tempest."

An Oriental writer mentions, regarding the turtle-dove, that it never pauses in its flight; that when its wings are weary, it poises itself on one, while the other droops for a little by its side, and when rested, the interrupted flight proceeds. Beautiful emblem of what, at least, we should seek to be and to do. Resting not—making no perch of the world: but, in the pure cloudless ethereal regions of faith and love and holiness, soaring ever higher to our home in the hills of God!

"Oh, had I, my Savior, the wings of a dove,  
How soon would I soar to Your presence above,  
How soon would I fly where the weary have rest,  
And hide all my care, in Your sheltering breast.

"I flutter, I struggle, I pant to get free,  
I feel me a captive while banished from Thee!  
A pilgrim and stranger the desert I roam,  
And look on to Heaven and long to be home!"

"Ah! there the wild tempest forever shall cease;  
No billows shall ruffle that haven of peace,  
Temptation and trouble alike shall depart,  
All tears from the eye, and all sin from the heart!

"Soon—soon may this Eden of promise be mine,  
Rise, bright sun of glory, no more to decline!  
Your light, yet unrisen, the wilderness cheers;  
Oh, what will it be—when the fullness appears!"

"In the Lord I take my refuge. How then can you say to me: 'Flee like a

bird to your mountain?"

## **INVIOABLE SECURITY**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them until the end." John 13:1

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand." John 10:28

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away." John 6:37

These three verses bring before us the indissoluble union between the believer and his Lord. That union, once completed, is indestructible. It is hedged round and buttressed with immutable guarantees. "Our lives are hidden with Christ in God." "If we perish," says Luther, "Christ perishes with us." Identifying Himself with His people, He may be supposed to say, as David said to Abiathar, "Abide with me, for he that seeks your life seeks my life, but with me you shall be in safeguard." And what is this safeguard? It is the Deity of the Redeemer. He who gives me life, and who promises that that life is imperishable, is "the Mighty God." The hope of eternal life, promised before the world began, stands on the Rock of Ages. Divinity gives it strength. He who is able to keep me from falling, is the "only wise GOD our Savior."

It is true, indeed, the life of the most devoted believer has its ebbs and flows, by reason of his own backslidings, corruptions, and unwatchfulness. "Young sailors," says Rutherford, "think the shore and land are moving, while it is they themselves all the while. So we often think God is changing, while the change is all in ourselves." The sheep of Christ may, in some moment of temptation, be found, and are found,

wandering along the dark glen, entangled in brier-thickets, or carried down the swollen stream. But as the shepherd among ourselves puts a mark on the various members of his flock, that he may know his own, so the sheep of Christ bear upon them what the old writers call "the blood-mark of the covenant"—and of these, the Great Shepherd (when they may be themselves uttering the cry of despair), says, in one of our motto-texts, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away." Their soul safety may seem to be imperilled, but it is only as the flow of the majestic river is apparently impeded by the mass of opposing rock in its channel. It is fretted for the moment; but, after clearing the temporary barrier, it dashes onwards, with grander impetuosity, in its way to the ocean.

So with the Christian. Temptations may obstruct and arrest the smooth current of his spiritual and eternal life; but it is only for the moment—He that has begun the good work—He that has begun the new being—will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus. You may as soon dream of stopping a river—damming up the mountain torrent as it plunges over rock and cataract in its way to the shoreless sea—as arrest the flow of that God-given life. Remember the Apostle's golden chain—"Whom He did predestinate them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified!" We may lose sight of the links of the chain, but it never can be broken.

We love this doctrine of the preservation of the saints. We cannot believe in the possibility of a man being regenerated today and unregenerated tomorrow. As Christ's blood has purchased, so will His grace sanctify and His power save. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end." If we are ever tempted to doubt or despond—if ever led to fear that, as wandering sheep, we may be fatally swept down the rapids, or fall a prey to the evening wolves—let us think of a living, life-giving, life-sustaining Intercessor on the throne of Heaven—the Shepherd's eye watching us from the mountains of myrrh, and the hills of frankincense!

Israel could never have coped with the war-disciplined chieftains of Amalek, but for the uplifted hands of their interceding head on the mount at Rephidim. They would have been scattered as chaff, and their bones



left to bleach in the wilderness. Joshua, with all his fiery courage, as column after column swept along the valley beneath, would have been nothing, had not Moses been pleading on the hill. Blessed be God, we have One on the heavenly mount, whose arms never faint—whose hands never grow weary. His words have a perpetual meaning—a perpetual music—"I have prayed for you—I am praying for you—that your faith fail not."

You who are Christ's own, see the secret of your preservation—your perseverance—see the secret of this marvelous triumph of your weakness over Satan's strength—the "worm Jacob" in the strength of his Savior—God "thrashing the mountains, and beating them small, and making the hills like chaff"—the spiritual David, with a few brook-pebbles laying low the giants of sin and unbelief! Yes, indeed, it is a mighty marvel, the security of every member of God's family. This poor delicate plant—beaten with wind and hail, outliving all, and destined to flourish in eternal luxuriance and beauty. This fragile vessel—the sport of ten thousand adverse influences—buffeted by the waves—left for nights on the starless ocean—grazing with its keel the rocks of temptation—yet outriding the storm, and entering peacefully the haven. This vile heart with its legion-foes confederate with Satan—Pleasure in its Proteus shapes—Worldliness with its hydra-headed power—the archers of Mammon with their golden arrows—our own sins—each individual sin we commit, a foul attempt on our part to pluck us out of the Savior's hand—yet the battle is certain to end in triumph.

In earthly battles, victory trembles in the scale often for long hours of bloodied fight; neither side can predict the results. By some apparent accident—some trifle—the fortunes of the day may be decided—the destiny of a country altered, the liberty of a people lost or won. But no such uncertainty hovers over this spiritual conflict—success is sure—no trophy will be lost—no straggler will be left to perish—as with Israel in leaving Egypt, "not a hoof will be left behind." You will not only be conquerors, but "more than conquerors, through Him who loved you!" "I give unto you," says He, "eternal life." Your names are imperishably engraved on this Heart of love—on this priestly Breastplate—and they never can be erased!

He even tells the measure of that love. It is gauged by no human plumb-line. "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you!" We must first attempt to understand the intensity of the love subsisting between the Son and the adorable Father, before we can rightly estimate the depth of affection between Christ and those whom He has from all eternity redeemed with His precious blood. "Nothing would surprise me very much," said a dying believer, "after having found out God loved me. The breadth of that love indicates that it is for the whole world; the length, from eternity to eternity; the depth, to the vilest of sinners; and the height, to raise us to heaven" (Victory Won).

"Everlasting arms of love  
Are beneath, around, above;  
He who left His throne of light  
And unnumbered angels bright,  
He who faced the fiery flood,  
Braved the baptism of blood,  
Who upon the accursed tree  
Gave His precious life for me.

"He who marks each falling tear  
Of His burdened pilgrims here,  
Never slumbering, never sleeping,  
Vigils ever wakeful keeping;  
Faithful He, whatever betide,  
Is my everlasting Guide.  
Safe, howe'er the sky o'ercast,  
He will bring me home at last!"

"He guides them to their desired haven."

## **THE SAFE DEPOSIT**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard

what I have entrusted to Him for that day." 2 Timothy 1:12

We have here what formed, in the hour of waning existence, the rest of a weary spirit—the pillow on which a dying spiritual hero reposed his aching head. This noblest champion of the faith had reached the Border river. But he finds the God of the Elim-palms has not left him at that supreme moment without a shelter. The same Jesus who had whispered in his ear accents of peace and hope and joy, ever since the memorable occasion when "he journeyed towards Damascus," mingles the most divine music of His name with the swellings of Jordan!

Paul, when he uttered these words, was left well-nigh alone; condemned to mourn in secret and solitude over the forsaking of former associates and friends. They had lost courage before the coming tempest, and abandoned the noble vessel to wrestle, as best it could, among the breakers. Cowardly themselves, they had apparently tried to appeal to the old prisoner's fears. 'Why persist in the hopeless cause, and prolong the hopeless conflict? Why maintain an unequal struggle for that which, being in antagonism to the Empire's belief, and to the will of the Caesars, must, sooner or later, fall to the ground? Why perish in the flames or by the sword, for what is doomed to perish with you?' 'No,' was his reply; 'disturb me not. Clinging to that faith in which I have lived, and for which I am now ready to die, is no act of willful, blind fanaticism—the reckless devotion of a visionary dreamer to a doomed and desperate cause. I have nobler and loftier anticipations regarding that for which I suffer. I have a grander confidence in the majesty of truth, than to suppose that it can eventually be crushed and overthrown by the base tyranny and hostility of man. I have appealed to a more righteous bar. That God, who sent His angel to me in the midst of the storm, will not leave me now. He has delivered me, and He will yet deliver me from the lions' mouth. My enemies may do their worst. They may insult my grey hairs; they may load me with chains; they may doom me to the public exposure of the amphitheater; they may burn my body and scatter its ashes on that river; but, "nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day."

Beautiful and significant is the formula, if we may so express it, of this

farewell Creed of the Apostle. He does not say, 'I know what I have believed,' but "I know whom I have believed;" or (as that is better rendered in the margin), "I know whom I have trusted." It is not facts, or doctrines, or confessions, or sects, or churches he speaks of, but his Living Lord—It is not even Christianity he boasts of, but Christ. This dying confession indeed of his faith, is quite what we would have expected from him. The motto of his existence was this—"To me to live is Christ"—"Christ my life." Life to him was a hallowed journey with Jesus at his side. He loved Him, and leaned upon Him as an earthly friend; like the sunflower opening to the radiant beams, and drooping in sadness and sorrow when that sun is away.

Belief, too, was with him, not a mere mental act—the cold calculating subscription of reason. It was the cleaving, trustful homage of a devoted heart; a loyal allegiance of the intellect, the thoughts, the motives, the will, the affections, to the Redeemer, as absolute Lord and ever-present King. Neither parent, nor sister, nor associate in his old Tarsus home, did he ever love like this Jesus of Nazareth. He had tried Him, and he had never found Him to fail. He therefore rejects with scorn the appeals of his timid and treacherous advisers, to purchase immunity from suffering by a base denial of his Lord. That trust of his was no enthusiastic dream. He had not abandoned home or kindred; he had not forfeited all he loved and valued on earth for the bauble of an hour. He had counted the cost; he had tested this "Stone laid in Zion;" he had found Him "a tried stone, a sure foundation." The heights above might combine with the depths beneath; fiendish men might be confederate with fiendish devils, in trying to shatter his confidence and blight his hope; but none would be able to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord!

"Alone! yet not alone"—"The Captain of the Lord's host" was with him—"The Lord," he says, "stood with me and strengthened me." It was not in vain that he was then consummating the life-long act of 'pouring out' his consecrated existence as a libation on God's altar. The Great Angel of the Covenant was there, to accept the offerer and the sacrifice. Perfumed with other merits than his, the incense-cloud went up with acceptance before God.

Yes, with other merits than his. For this; after all, is what mainly arrests us in his dying utterance. Surely, if ever the child of Adam could enter heaven on the ground of his own doings, it was he who penned that brief farewell saying—he whose life-motto was, "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Think of his graces as a Christian, his success as a minister, his labors as an apostle! Who, more than he, had earned his crown? who, more than he, could take his stand at the bar of God loaded with merit? How different! All his own once-boasted righteousness is like the yielding ice beneath his feet. It melted before the blaze of God's throne of purity. In the present hour of approaching dissolution, just when this mighty inhabitant in God's forest seemed (like some trees in their golden autumn tints) grandest in decay; just as his soul is about to wing its eagle-flight to the spirit-land, a crucified Redeemer is clung to with an ever fonder, holier trust. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!"

"Thus holy Paul" (says Thomas Case), "in his own name, and in the name of other of his brethren and companions in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, marched out of the field of this world with colors flying and drums beating, and thus exulting over death as a conqueror—O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?"

A farewell—a dying hour—must, sooner or later, be our experience also; that solemn moment—when, in the words of an old writer, "the silver cord by which life is suspended is worn out at last, and the lamp of life falls to the ground; the lights are extinguished, and the golden bowl which fed them is broken" (Noyes). Amid this wreck of the earthly, are we prepared for our entrance on the heavenly? to leave the Elim encampment and enter the true "City of Palm-trees" (2 Chron. 28:15).

Have we committed our souls and their everlasting interests in safe deposit into the hands of our divine Redeemer? If so, the last enemy is robbed of its triumph. "Death to the believer," said Hedley Vicars, "is, after all, but an incident in immortality." Equally beautiful and characteristic was the devoted M'Cheyne's definition of the same—"a leap into the arms of Infinite Love." A well-known Christian of an older age (Ambrose) speaks of it as "the wind which blows the bud of grace into the

flower of glory." Whether still called to tread the wilderness, or when summoned to the brink of Jordan, may it be ours to take up the simple strains of one of Luther's saintly followers—

"God, my Father, to Your hand  
This spirit I bequeath;  
Guide it through this desert land,  
And through the gates of death.

"By Your gift, this soul was mine;  
Take it to Yourself again;  
So shall it forever Thine  
In life and death remain.

"Resting on my Lord in faith  
I pass securely on;  
Through Him alone I conquer death,  
Through Him my crown is won!"

"Shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation."

## **ALL POWER OF JESUS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"All power in heaven and earth has been given to Me." Matthew 28:18

Such was among the last whispers of the Heavenly Palm—while still rooted in the midst of the earthly encampments, and when about to be transplanted—the all-glorious 'Tree of Life'—into the midst of the Paradise of God!

What more precious farewell truth, what more blessed Keepsake could the Savior have confided to His people than this; that to Him has been committed the Scepter of universal Empire! Many, among the multitude

He was then addressing on one of the mountains of Galilee, had witnessed His poverty, His humiliation, His cruel buffetings, His bitter death. But now these were all past. His head was about to be "crowned with many crowns." As King of His Church, "all things had been delivered to Him by His Father" (Matt. 11:27). He knew that "the Father had given all things into His hands" (John 13:3). He would impart the comfort of this ennobling truth to the orphaned Church He was to leave behind Him. When the chariots of God had borne Him away from their sight, they could still think of Him as boundless in His resources; that He who so often had spoken to them "in righteousness" was still "mighty to save." To these very hands that were pierced on Calvary's Cross had been entrusted the sovereignty of the universe!

John, in his exile, sixty years later, beheld in striking vision a Book or roll "sealed with seven seals." Tears came to the aged eyes of the Evangelist, because no one in heaven or in earth was found "worthy to take the book" and decipher its mysteries. All at once, one of the redeemed from the earth conveys to him the joyous assurance that he need no longer "weep" for "the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed to open the book," and unveil its contents (Rev. 5:7). What was this but the announcement, in significant figure, of the Savior's own last utterance, that He had committed to His keeping the roll of Providence; that roll in which is inscribed not only the fate of kingdoms, the destinies of nations—but whatever concerns the humblest and lowliest member of His Church on earth; with Him rests the unfolding of the roll—the breaking of the seals—the pouring out of the vials—the bursting of the thunders.

Need we wonder that, in taking "the Book" into His hands, the ransomed myriads in the Apocalyptic vision should be seen falling down at the feet of the Lamb, with their "harps and golden vials full of incense;" and exulting in the thought that the Great Ruler of all was a Brother of the human race; that they should attune their lips to the lofty ascription, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Yes, who will not exult in the thought that this vast world of ours is committed to the rule of JESUS—that it was created "for Him"—that "by

Him all things are held together." I look up to the spangled dome of heaven with its myriad constellations. I am told these lamps, hung in the sky, are burning incense-fires to His glory; that they march at His word, and their eternal music is an anthem to His praise. I look at the landscape below; that vast furniture in the Palace of Nature is His providing. It is He who covers it in its robe of light, who wreathes the brow of Spring in living green, and decks the valleys in Summer glory. Not a breeze murmurs through the forests, nor a dewdrop sparkles on its leaves—the sun shoots not one golden arrow through its glades, but by His permission. It is He who pencils the flowers, and intones the thunder, and gives voice to the tempest, and wings to the lightning.

But these manifestations of His power in nature, are subordinate to a nobler sovereignty with which He is invested in the moral and spiritual world. There, too, nothing can happen but by His direction, nothing can befall us but what is the dictate and result of His loving wisdom. Often, indeed, as we have frequently said, that wisdom and love are veiled behind gigantic clouds of permitted evil. But, when we remember the pledge, in His own life's-blood, which He has given of His love to His people, dare we challenge the rectitude of His dealings or arraign the wisdom of His ways?

No! this Savior-God "reigns, let the earth be glad." From the heart stripped of its beloved gourd by the gentle hand of death, to the more terrible cry of perishing thousands by famine, or pestilence, or "the grievousness of war," what truth more sublime, what syllables fall with more soothing music on the soul than these, HE (the Savior, who died for me, who now lives for me), "does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth!"

"Life's mystery—deep, restless as the ocean,  
Has surged and wailed for ages to and fro;  
Earth's generations watch its ceaseless motion  
As in and out its hollow moanings flow.  
Shivering and yearning by that unknown sea,  
Let my soul calm itself, O Christ, in Thee!

"Between perplexities of death and life,



You stand, loving, guiding, not explaining:  
We ask, and You are silent; yet we gaze,  
And our charmed hearts forget their drear complaining.  
No crushing fate, no stony destiny,  
O 'Lamb that has been slain!' we rest in Thee.

"The many waves of thought, the mighty tides,  
The ground-swell that rolls up from other lands,  
From far-off worlds, from dim, eternal shores,  
Whose echo dashes over life's wave-worn strands;  
This vague, dark tumult of the inner sea  
Grows calm, grows bright, O Savior-God, in Thee.

"Your pierced hands guide the mysterious wheels,  
Your thorn-crowned brow now wears the Crown of pow'r,  
And when the dark enigma presses sore,  
Your voice has said, 'Keep watch with Me one hour'  
As sinks the moaning river in the sea,  
In silent peace, so sinks my soul in Thee."

"Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; a scepter of justice will be  
the scepter of Your kingdom."

## **HELP IN EXTREMITY**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are  
parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel,  
will not forsake them." Isaiah 41:17

Has not this been God's way and method of dealing with His people in  
every age!—in the hour of desert privation, when the heavens above them  
were as brass and the earth as iron, to bring them the shade of palm-

grove and the refreshment of fountain?

It was when the disciples were in their hour of extremity, during the storm on Gennesaret, giving themselves up to the hopelessness of despair, that, "in the fourth watch of the night," when darkness was deepest and danger greatest, the great Deliverer appeared on the crested wave—"Jesus went out to them walking on the lake!"

It was when the bereaved of Bethany had, as they imagined, consigned the fond treasure of their affections to everlasting silence; and, as they were sitting in the pillaged home, wondering at the mysterious delay on the part of the one Being who could alone have arrested that winged arrow which had laid low the delight of their hearts; at that crisis-hour, the great Conqueror of death appears, to revive the smouldering ashes of their faith, and reanimate the joy and prop of their existence! Yes, how often still, does God thus delay His comforting mercy to the very last—"the tongue failing for thirst"—that they may see His hand, and His hand alone, in the gracious intervention or deliverance, and be brought to say, with grateful adoring thankfulness, "Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death!"

Even when He does not appear visibly to support; when some treasured comfort is withdrawn; or when deliverance from some threatened earthly trial or threatened evil is not given—it is in order that we may, the more significantly and submissively, cast ourselves on Him. The shelter of the canvas tent is removed. But it only the more endears to us the shadow of the Elim-Palm. Observe the difference between the failing of the world's consolations and refuges and joys; and those of the true Christian. When the worldly man mourns his dried-up brooks or his stripped and dismantled tents, he has lost his all—he has nowhere else to turn; there is nothing left him but the waterless channel—the dreary stretches of blinding sand—the tear of despair—the broken heart—the grave!

But, in the case of the believer, when one comfort is withdrawn, his God has other spiritual comforts for him in store. Miserable, indeed, are those who have nothing but the poor earthly streamlet of this world to look to! Sooner or later this must be their history (as multitudes can bear testimony), "And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up" (1

Kings 17:7), Or the earthly tent!—"In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment." (Jer. 4:20).

But, "happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God"—who can say, in the words of a faithful and venerated member of the Church of Christ recently entered on his rest and reward—"In the crowded city, "You are about my path." In the secret chamber, "You are about my bed." In the trackless desert, "You, God, see me." In the lonely journey, "Surely the Lord is in this place, though I knew it not." In the assembled congregation, "Wherever I cause my Name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you." In the little company at home, "Where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them." In distant cities and foreign lands, "I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone." In looking back on all the places of residence, "Lord, You have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations." And humbly depending on the promise for the great future, "Where I am, there shall also My servants be."

Beautifully have the two greatest religious poets of Germany (Gerhard and Lange) thus sung—

"You were not born that earth should be  
A portion fondly sought;  
Look up to heaven, and, smiling, see  
Your shining, golden lot!  
Honors and joys which you shall share,  
Unending and unenvied there!

"Then journey on to life and bliss,  
God will protect to heaven;  
And every good that meets you is  
A blessing wisely given.  
If losses come—so let it be,  
The God of heaven remains with thee!

"Yes, the light of comfort shall return,  
Joy's sweet sun shall shine again at last,  
I shall sing the gladsome song of morning,  
When the watches of the night are past.

"I shall find again the hopes long vanished,  
Like the swallows when the storms are  
Fountains shall be opened in the deserts,  
Streams by the wayside, while journeying on.

"Flowers of love and promise shall be springing,  
Where the cruel thorn and wormwood sprung,  
And the homeward path lie bright in sunshine,  
Where my sad harp upon the willows hung!"

"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You,  
my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

## **PREVAILING INTERCESSION**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens."  
Hebrews 4:14

We never can recline too often or too devoutly under this Palm-shade of most divine comfort. The great Apostle felt the special delight of reposing under its fronds. He speaks of other favorite trees in the sacred grove under which he loved to repose; but he would seem to reserve this for the last in the enumeration; singling it out with peculiar emphasis amid its peers—"Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). Elevating and delightful, truly, is the contemplation of Jesus seated "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" (Heb. 8:2); pleading the merits of His obedience and death on behalf of His Church and people!

The Temple-service of old was the shadow of these sublime heavenly things. The Jewish High Priest, having offered on the great day of Atonement the sacrificial offering on the altar of burned-offering, attired

himself in a dress of pure white linen—linen robes, and linen girdle, and linen mitre, white from head to foot. Thus arrayed, he carried the blood in one hand, and the censer of live coals in the other, into the Most Holy place. Beating small some fragrant incense, he mixed it with the burning coals. A grateful cloud arose; the whole Temple-court was fragrant with the perfume, and enveloped in smoke.

Significant type, surely, of Him who has entered, through the rent veil of His own crucified body, into the Holiest of all; carrying with Him the memorials of His precious blood-shedding and the fragrant incense of His adorable merits! As the Jewish High Priest sprinkled the blood on the pavement before the mercy-seat, as well as on the mercy-seat; so, our Divine Intercessor sprinkled His blood first on the floor of earth where He shed it, and now He sprinkles it on the throne of heaven. There, with the true incense and fire, He pleads. Attired in the white linen vesture of His perfect obedience and righteousness, He confesses His people's sins—He stands between the congregation in the outer court of earth and the Divine Shekinah glory. He waves the fragrant censer—and the whole heavenly house is filled with the odor of the incense. Him "the Father always hears" (John 11:42). They are His own remarkable words, "In that day you will no longer ask Me anything. I tell you the truth, My Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name" (John 16:23). How prevailing that 'Name' and that plea must be, when we look to the host of petitioners who are warranted to use it!

It is a beautiful part of the vision of the Covenant-angel in Revelation, with "the censer full of much incense" in His hand, that they are "the prayers of ALL saints," which, perfumed with His spotless merits, ascend before God's throne and are accepted! (Rev. 8:3.) It is not merely the pleadings of patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs—men strong in faith giving glory to God; but the groan, the glance, the tear, the tremulous aspiration of smitten penitents, the very lisping of infant tongues; the unlettered morning and evening petitions of the cottage home, where the earthen floor is knelt upon—where the only altar is the altar of the lowly heart, and the sacrifice that of a broken and contrite spirit.

It may be affirmed of the Father, regarding one and all of these pleas of

the Divine Intercessor, in the prophetic words of the Psalmist—"You have given Him His heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of His lips" (Ps. 21:2). Yes, He has a loving regard for each separate child of His redeemed family; He carries the case of each before God. The one hundred and forty-four thousand harpers on the sea of glass—the representatives of the Church of the glorified—do not exclude His tender concern in those who are still suppliants in the outer courts. He has the name of each separate believer imperishably engraved on His heart. He, the Gracious Shepherd, seated on the Everlasting Hills, and looking down on the earthly pastures, "calls His own sheep by name and leads them out." And that personal intercession will never cease, from the hour when the believer is first brought a lowly suppliant to the foot of the cross, until the final petition (unheard by weeping relatives in the death-chamber on earth) ascends from the lips of the Great Intercessor in heaven—"Father, I want those You have given Me, to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory."

The Jewish High Priest acted as the nation's Intercessor for one day only—once every year—and for only a part of that one day. But, day and night is our Intercessor pleading. He never ceases His intercessions; His love never cools; His ardor never decays! The true Moses on the Heavenly Rephidim, His hands never grow heavy; for of Him it is sublimely said, "He faints not, neither is weary."

Even on earth, what a joy and comfort it is, in seasons of difficulty, to turn to a tried and loving friend, in whose tenderness and affection we can place unhesitating reliance! What an ease to unbosom in a brother's ear the difficulty that is harassing us, and solicit his wise and faithful counsel! Jesus is this blessed resort—"the Wonderful Counselor" (Isa. 9:6 marg.).

"O gracious Lord, ascended up on high!  
You Great High Priest within the Temple veil;  
To all that call upon You ever nigh,  
'Prince who has power with God, and must prevail.'

"Let down Your golden censer from above;  
And let our waiting souls the blessings share,

Which You have promised to all those, who love  
To gather round the hallowed gates of prayer!"

"What is it? What is your request? It will be given you."

## **A PARDONING GOD**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of  
repose"—

"You forgave the guilt of my sin." Psalm 32:5

What an oasis in the bleakest of moral deserts is this! God the Forgiver—  
Yes, the Forgiver of great sins!

The psalm from which our motto-verse is taken, and the fifty-first, are the  
two liturgies of a penitent backslider, the loud and agonizing cries of a  
disinherited son longing for a father's forgiveness. The Father heard  
them; and made good in his experience, as in the experience of all  
wanderers, His own promise, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto  
you." If David had been influenced by a consideration of the enormity of  
his sin, before coming in broken-hearted penitence and conviction to  
make confession, he might well have seen in it a wall of separation—an  
unbridged chasm, proclaiming eternal severance from his God.

Listen to his plea. Listen to the backslider's suit. It is a strange and  
remarkable one, "Pardon my iniquity, FOR IT IS GREAT." Most  
transgressors would think the greatness of their iniquity the very reason  
for the Divine Being withholding pardon. We might have expected to hear  
this presumptuous transgressor wailing out, through tears of despair,  
'Lord, if my sin had been less heinous and aggravated, then I might have  
dreamt of forgiveness. If I had been untaught from my youth—untutored  
and undisciplined in Your ways, there might have been excuse or  
palliation for my offences, and room to hope on Your part for  
compassion. But I, guilty abuser of privileges, quencher of heavenly light,  
faithless requiter of abounding mercy, cannot expect, cannot ask You, to  
forgive these crimson iniquities. I must be content to be an outcast from

Your presence and love forever.'

No! He makes the very greatness of his sin his plea for the extension of God's mercy! With man it would have been different. The enormity of the crime would have closed the door of human sympathy and human hope. But God's ways are not our ways, nor God's thoughts our thoughts. "Let me fall into the hands of GOD, for great are His mercies, but let me not fall into the hands of man." "After Your loving-kindness, have mercy upon me. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, FOR it is great!" "From that hour," in the words of an old writer, "God kept David in the hollow of His hand, the very hand that was once so heavy upon him."

Reader, are you conscious that your iniquities have thus separated between you and your Heavenly Father? Are you conscious that you are not now as once you were? that you enjoy no longer, as you once did, sensible nearness to the mercy-seat? that you are restraining prayer before God? that the fine edge of conscience is blunted? that, in one word, you have lost ground in the Christian life? Arise, confess your sin, mourn your backsliding, and cry for pardon. Making a full and unreserved confession, He will not spurn you away. He is waiting to be gracious. In the words of the women of Tekoah, "He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him." The Father devises means for the reclamation of His erring prodigal. He pities the backslider; just as the general on the field of battle pities the wounded who are carried bleeding by their comrades to the rear. "Go, proclaim this message toward the north: 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the Lord, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the Lord, 'I will not be angry forever.'"

How many lapsed and fallen ones—driven by some sudden hurricane—some sudden assault of temptation well-nigh to despair, have experienced the blessedness of this true repentance! Yes, strange as the expression may seem, the "blessedness of repentance." You have seen, when the rain and the storm had spent their fury on some landscape; when the thunder-cloud had passed, and blue vistas had again opened in the sky, and the sun had shone forth, silvering the dripping branches—



how the woodland grove rang with the song of birds—all the sweeter and more gladsome seemed the notes of music, succeeding the gloom which had so long repressed them. Such is the image of the happiness and joy of the soul in the hour of its restoration; on being brought up from the miry clay, and again set on the Rock of Ages. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise!"

"Oh, when Angel trumpet is pealing,  
Can the record be effaced?  
How evade the dread revealing  
Which the pen of Heaven has traced?"

"Go, in penitence bewailing,  
Go, and now bemoan your guilt,  
Trust the promise, never failing,  
'I will save you, if you wilt.'

"Hasten, every soul despairing,  
At the cross of Jesus fall;  
Though with legion sins repairing,  
He will freely pardon all."

"You Have turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give You thanks forever."

## **A GRACIOUS MESSAGE**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'"  
Revelation 22:20

No one had so enjoyed the privilege of sitting under the shade of the Divine Heavenly Palm as the writer of this Book of Revelation, the apostle John. No wonder that he should sigh and long for a renewal of the personal presence and fellowship of his ascended Lord —and that the well-known keynote of his last writing—the farewell inspired legacy to believers of the future, should be, "The Lord is coming!" Again, and again and again (four times in the one chapter from which our motto-verse is taken) do these notes sound in the ears of a waiting, expectant Church. First, in verse 7, "Behold, I come quickly." Second, in verse 12, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Third, in verse 17, where 'the Coming One' had beautifully announced Himself as "The Bright and Morning Star;" the response—the longing prayer rises in blended harmony from the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come." Once more, in verse 20, the last audible voice of the Great Redeemer, until that voice be heard on the Throne—gives, too, the assurance of His speedy coming. We close the Divine record with this "blessed hope," like a rainbow of promise spanning the sky of the future, "He which testifies these things says, 'SURELY I COME QUICKLY.'"

We may appropriately compare these repeated references in the last Book of the Bible, to the ringing of the chimes with quickening peal, as the worshipers are gathering to take their places in the Heavenly Temple.

The prospect of that promised Advent put music of old into the lips of Patriarchs and Psalmists, Apostles and Prophets. "Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad...before the Lord: for He comes, He comes to judge the earth." "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you." The Apostle Peter, like a watcher on cliff or tower, eager to catch the earliest beam of sunrise, speaks of "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God." "Looking for that blessed hope," says Paul, "even the glorious appearing of the Great God our Savior." "I am persuaded," says the same in one of his dying utterances, "that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." By the Great Lord Himself, believers are represented as servants, cheerfully working on, during their Master's absence; but all alert for the sound of His footsteps, that, "when He comes and knocks, they may be ready to

open unto Him immediately."

As we now listen in the message at the head of this meditation to the last voice of the Great 'Testifier'—the last toll of the Advent bell, let it sound to us like strains of seraphic music floating on a midnight sea. Let it proclaim in our ears blended comfort and warning; tempering prosperity, mitigating adversity, moderating the world's ambitions, stimulating to holiness, preparing for heaven.

Whatever may be the antecedent or intervening events described in the other parts of the Apocalypse—events in which, whether as regards the Church or individuals, we are, doubtless, deeply interested—let "the Second Coming" tower above them all, like some colossal Alp, with plain and valley and lowlier mountain between, but rising peerless in the blue horizon, its top golden with heavenly sunlight; and from its eternal snows and hidden springs, sending forth ten thousand streams of hope and joy.

Bright and Morning Star! Harbinger of eternal day! Who will not bid You welcome? Who will not help, in the noblest sense, to "Ring in the Christ that is to be"?

"The Spirit says, COME!" The Divine Agent, whose own "coming" as the Paraclete or Comforter, was declared by the departing Savior to more than compensate the Church for her Redeemer's absence, hails the advent which is to crown and consummate His own work as "the Glorifier of Christ."

"The Bride says, COME," the ransomed Church on earth, longing for the bridal day of perfected bliss—the ransomed Church in heaven, saints, martyrs, departed friends, who have fallen asleep in Jesus—take up the antiphonal strain, and cry "COME!"—A groaning creation, weary of the bondage of sin and sorrow, and longing for liberty, cries "COME!" Can we take up one of the multiplying echoes, and, uniting our prayer with the sons of God, give willing response to the Apostle's closing invocation: "And let him who hears say COME?" Can we include ourselves in the words of another 'Watcher' for this Day-spring. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then

we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord!" "Therefore," he adds, Waiting Pilgrims! seat yourselves in calm expectancy under the shade of this choice Elim-Palm—let the glorious outlook cheer, refresh, and solace you—"Therefore, encourage each another with these words!"

"His voice on earth we did not hear;  
His steps below we could not trace;  
But when His glory shall appear,  
We too shall meet Him face to face.

"So surely as the leaves and flowers  
In summer time come back again—  
So surely as in sultry hours  
The dark clouds bring the pleasant rain.

"Shall He, who, in His lowly love,  
Came down that we might be forgiven,  
Break, glorious, through the clouds above,  
And take His children home to heaven."

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning."

## **PERFECT TRUST**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

"I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous." Psalm 119:75

As we are seated, it may be, in loneliness and sadness, with, perhaps, a dreary sense of mystery, under one of the wilderness palms, God thus

addresses us in the first of these motto-verses. Happy for us, if we can respond to the whispering fronds above us, in the words of the second.

Not such, however, is generally (or, at all events, in the first moments of trial), the utterance of cheerful consent on the part of the smitten, or wounded, or broken spirit. On the contrary, in the midst of dark dispensations, how apt are we to impugn the Almighty's faithfulness, question the wisdom of His procedure, and set up our wills in opposition to the Divine. Nor are these misgivings confined to the case of personal and domestic afflictions. To take no infrequent illustration, in which not individual interests, but the welfare of the Church seems involved. Here is an honored Ambassador of Christ; a faithful witness of the truth, unwearied in his endeavors to awaken the careless, comfort the mourner, soothe the suffering, and befriend the dying. Though others might be arrested in the midst of health and laid on beds of languishing, I thought that, for the world's good, and the glory of the Master he serves, a rampart of defense would have been thrown around a life of earnest love, and zeal, and unselfishness.

Yet, while other weaklings and "Ready-to-halts" are spared, this standard-bearer, this Asahel, swift of foot and daring in deed—has fallen in the field—just when his courage, and heroism, and example, were most needed, to nerve his comrades and turn the tide of battle. Many decayed and gnarled trunks are left, to occupy their place in the forest, while the strong of stem, and green of leaf, and majestic in shadow, are rooted up. Old crumbling pillars are allowed to remain, while polished shafts, fresh from the quarry, have been struck and shivered with lightning! Where is He who guides with unerring rectitude the destinies of the universe? "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" "Surely the Lord does not see, neither does the God of Jacob regard!"

Or, to take the case which comes most deeply home to the individual heart. Where is the mercy or tenderness in that sudden banishing of life's summer dream—that demolition of the most cherished vision of earthly bliss? I was taught to imagine that His dealings to His own were those of a Father, not retributive or judicial, but paternal: that I could see no hand, and hear no lullaby but love. Why has the promised parental solicitude been superseded by the harsh voice and the rebuking rod? Why

has the All-loving belied His own saying, "As one whom his mother comforts"? "You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer; from of old is Your name. Where is Your zeal and Your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us" (Isaiah 63:15, 16).

What is the answer to these and suchlike unworthy conjectures? "Be still and know that I am God." To the eye of sense, however baffling and mysterious be the ways of the Supreme—it is not for us to judge, and surmise, and conjecture, but to believe; not to question, but, like Job, to kneel and to adore. If we allowed our own short-sighted wisdom to sit in judgment on the Divine procedure, each one of us would at times be tempted to turn away in sullen discontent from many a providential message.

The disciples on their way to Emmaus were cherishing such a spirit. With their back to their Lord's cross, and their faces bent on the ground, they muttered in despair, "We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Little did they dream, amid these pensive musings and carnal reasonings, that the Messiah of their nation and of the world was walking by their side!

Martha and Mary were cherishing such a spirit, when they rushed to the uplands of Bethany and gazed with wistful eye across to the Moab mountains, "as to a world beyond the grave," for a tarrying Lord. If their inmost souls had been disclosed—if we could have listened to their words, we would have heard them thus pouring out their disconsolate soliloquy—'We thought He would not so have lingered; that His omniscient eye and omnipotent love would have discerned and pitied our tempest-tossed bark in its sea of sorrows. It is unlike His kind heart thus to mock our grief. It is unlike His righteous wisdom thus to single out His and our loved brother for a premature grave. We had felt fondly convinced that darkened and desolate as other homes in Judea might be, the last light He would have extinguished would be that in the Bethany dwelling—the last star expunged from the firmament—one so bright with promise!' No! hush, unbelieving one: "Did I not tell you, that if you would BELIEVE, you would see the glory of God?"

Oh, for an unquestioning faith! We often reason, and conjecture, and

'think,' when, in the circumstances, it is alike our duty and our privilege to listen simply to the voice of Jehovah; not venturing to arraign the faithfulness and love of even the most inscrutable dispensations; but rather, in reverent submission to say, amid crossed wills and frowning providences—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak, He will speak peace to His people and to His saints."

"I think if you could know,  
Oh soul, that will complain,  
What lies concealed below  
Our burden and our pain.

"I think if you could see  
With your dim mortal sight,  
How meanings dark to thee  
Are shadows hiding light.

"Truth's efforts crossed and vexed,  
Life's purpose all perplexed—  
If you could see them right,  
I think that they would seem,  
all clear, and wise, and bright.

"Well may Your happy children cease  
From restless wishes prone to sin,  
And, in Your own exceeding peace,  
Yield to Your daily discipline.

"We need as much the cross we bear  
As air we breathe—as light we see,  
It draws us to Your side in prayer,  
It binds us to our strength in Thee."

"Those who know Your name will trust in you."

## **GOD ALL SATISFYING**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:26

Every theory of human happiness, as we have more than once noted in the preceding pages, is defective and incomplete, which falls short of the aspirations of natures born for the infinite. No satellite, with its borrowed light, will compensate for the loss of the sun. You may tempt a man, as he is hurrying on his immortal way with the world's portions; you may hold out to him the golden sheaves of riches, you may seek to detain him amid the sunny glades of pleasure, or on the hilltops of fame (and he may be but too willing for a while to linger); but satisfy him, they cannot!

When his nobler nature acquires its ascendancy, he will spurn them all. Brushing each one in succession away, as the stag does the dewy drops of the morning, he will say, 'All are insufficient, I wish them not. I have been mocked by their failure, I have found that each has a lie in its right hand. It is a poor counterfeit, a shadowy figure of the true. I need the Infinite of Knowledge, Goodness, Truth, Love!' "In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me: 'Flee like a bird to your mountain'"?

The fact is, it is the very grandeur of the soul which leads it thus to pant after God. Small things satisfy a small capacity, but what is made receptive of the vast and glorious can only be satisfied with great things. The mind of the child is satisfied with the toy or the trinket; the mind of the untutored savage with bits of painted glass or tinsel; but the grown man, the sage, the philosopher, desire higher possessions, purer knowledge, nobler themes of thought and objects of ambition. Some insects are born for an hour, and are satisfied with it. A summer afternoon is the duration of existence allotted to myriads of tiny ephemera. In their case, youth and old-age are crowded into a few passing minutes. The descending sun witnesses both their birth and death; the lifetime of other animals would be to them an immortality.

The soul, being unlimited in its capacities, has correspondingly lofty aspirations. Vain would be the attempt to fill up a yawning gulf by



throwing into it a few grains of sand. But not more vain or ineffectual than trying to answer the deep yearnings of the human spirit by the seen and the temporal. Men go sighing on—drinking their rivers of pleasure, and climbing their mountains of vanity. They feel all the while some undefined, inarticulate, nameless longing after something nobler; but it is a miserable travesty to say that it has been found, or can be found, in anything here on earth. "Who will show us any good?" will still be the quest of the groping seeker, until he has learned to say, "Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O Lord."

You may have seen in our mountain glens, in the grey twilight, birds winging their way to their nests. There may be bowers and gardens of fragrance and beauty close by, inviting to sweetest melody, nature's consecrated haunts of song. But they tempt them not. Their homes are in the distant rock, and there they speed. So with the immortal spirit. The perches of this world will not satisfy it. There is no stable repose in these for its weary wing and wailing cry. It goes singing up and home to God—it has its nest in the crevices of the Rock of Ages. When detained in the nether valley, often is the warbling note heard, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest." And when the flight has been made from the perishable to the imperishable, from the lower valleys of sense, to the hills of faith, from the creature to the Creator, from man to God—as we see it folding its buoyant pinion and sinking into the eternal clefts, we listen to the song—"Return unto your rest, O my soul!"

O God! All mighty, All wise, All good—You are, in Yourself, all I need, all I require; in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, in time and through eternity. The snow-clad hills may cease to feed the brooks; that sun may cease to shine, or nature grow weary of his loving beams; that moon may cease on her silver lyre, night by night, to discourse to "the listening earth;" the birds may become mute at the voice of the morning; flowers may droop, instead of ringing their thousand bells at the jubilant advance of summer; the gasping pilgrim may rush from palm-grove and stream, and prefer the fiery furnace-glow of the desert sands—but "this God shall be my God forever and ever." And when death is sealing my eyes, and the rush of darkness is coming over my

spirit—even then will I take up the old exile's strain—the great sigh of weary humanity—and blend its notes with the song of heaven—"My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God." "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Your likeness!"

"You know, Lord, the weariness and sorrow  
Of the lonely heart that comes to You for rest,  
Cares of today, and burdens for tomorrow,  
Blessings implored, and sins to be confest.

"You know all the future—gleams of gladness  
By stormy clouds too quickly overcast,  
Hours of sweet fellowship, and parting sadness,  
And the dark river to be crossed at last.

"Therefore I come, Your gentle call obeying,  
And lay my sins and sorrows at Your feet;  
On everlasting strength my weakness staying,  
Clothed in Your robe of righteousness complete."

"I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.'"

## **SALVATION TO THE UTTERMOST**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"He is able also to save them to the uttermost." Hebrews 7:25

What, to many, would all the other "three score and ten palm-trees" avail, if they had not this one to rush to for shelter?

The pressing, urgent question with thousands of anxious souls—overwhelmed with the weight of aggravated transgression, is this, "Can the God-Man-Redeemer be a Savior for us? A shelter for others, can these Palms afford sure refuge for the guiltiest?" It is the old controversy that Satan has with not a few, whom he first goads on to presumption, and

then, when entangled in his meshes, he seeks to drive to despair. Many such has that relentless guard shut up in the deepest dungeons of "Doubting Castle"—gloomy cells, where the sunlight is forbidden to enter—and rung over them the knell of extinguished hope. The crushing thought of personal unworthiness—the memories of guilty bygone years, rise up before them like avenging angels.

What! this Savior and this salvation for me—it cannot be! I have plunged madly into sin—not, like others, because I have never been warned—never counseled—never known the tenderness of a mother's prayers, nor the sanctity of a father's entreaties, nor the privileges of a hallowed home. I have been oblivious of all these. Even now, I seem to listen (though in years long gone by), to voices which I have lived basely to scorn—to counsels I have trampled on—the retrospect all the sadder by the reflection that the lips which spoke them are hushed in the grave—and the arms that of old caressed me, as on Sabbath night I knelt by the beloved knee, are decaying in the tomb! What! Christ receive me, with all that diary of a misspent, godless, defiant life unveiled to His omniscient eye!—deeds of depravity—outbursts of fiery passion—malignant purposes of revenge; my own bark sunk—and worse it may be than this, miserable wrecks, for which I am guiltily responsible, strewing the shores. Mine is not, as it is with many, a mere upper layer of iniquity; but it is deposit on deposit—strata piled on strata—the mournful consolidation of a life of sin. Ten thousand echoes ring "lost!" along the dreary corridors of the past. "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God!" There may be room and welcome for every weary traveler at Elim and its grove, except for me!

No, not so! As aggravated as your case is, it is never hopeless; you cannot hear your spiritual death-knell tolled, so long as you can read the golden letters which head this meditation—"Able to save completely." You may have been a sinner to the uttermost. You may have gone the sickening round of all life's follies—run riot of its whole enchanted circle—O Israel, you may have destroyed yourself—there may not be one redeeming feature in your case—not one apparent gleanings left for the grape-gatherer. You may be a stripped, defenseless, degenerate vine—fit only for the axe and the cumberer's doom. But hear the words of God—"In Me is

your help." "I know the thoughts which I think towards you—thoughts of peace and not of evil!"

It is told of Bilney, in the time of the Reformation, that on obtaining Erasmus' translation of the Greek Testament, he hurried away with it and shut himself up in his room in Cambridge. On opening its pages, his eye caught the words—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." He laid down the book, and meditated on the astonishing declaration. "What! Paul 'the chief of sinners,' and yet Paul is sure of being saved!" He read the verse again and again, exclaiming, "Oh assertion of Paul, how sweet are you to my soul!"

Downcast Pilgrim, in the dreariest of moral deserts! if, with true and sincere penitence of heart, you plead for pardon, "with the Lord there is unfailing love, and with Him is full redemption" (Ps. 130:7). What a wondrous utterance is that—a lustrous jewel sparkling in a dark setting—found in the 18th verse of the opening chapter of Isaiah's prophecy! One would have supposed, after the dreadful indictment contained in the preceding verses, that any hope of forgiveness must be closed against the rebellious race—"The people laden with iniquity." But, all at once, the tolling of the funereal bell ceases; and the joyful chime that has borne hope and comfort in many an hour of spiritual desolation falls upon the ear—"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord—Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Or, take another declaration of similar import: "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." "I—even I"—the very Being you have most deeply injured—whose Spirit you have grieved—I, the Almighty Creditor, am ready to grant and sign a full discharge—"Whoever comes to Me, I will never drive away." The Stronger than the strong man armed, sounds the silver trumpet of jubilee, "He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound," and blessed have been the millions who have heard that joyful sound! "How useless it is," says an earnest thinker lately lost to the world, and who knew from deep-felt experience the truth of his own words—"How useless it is to tell the

desponding, or those distressed by consciousness of guilt, of any remedy but a Savior's blood. It is here that the true test and proof of the Gospel lies. It is light to the blind, strength to the weary, and consolation for the brokenhearted."

"All in weakness, all in sorrow,  
Savior God! I Thee implore;  
Lifting up the sad petition  
You have often heard before,  
In the former days of darkness,  
In despairing times of yore.

"For a present help in trouble,  
You have never ceased to be;  
Since, at first, a weeping sinner  
Fell before You trustingly;  
And Your voice is ever sounding,  
Come, you weary ones, to Me!"

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

## **ASLEEP IN JESUS**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." 1  
Thessalonians 4:14

Another glimpse which Faith, while seated under the Palms of the Valley, takes of "the Land that is very far off," but which at times, too, is brought so very near! We may first state the special occasion of the words at the head of this meditation.

As the great Apostle was now at Corinth, his beloved son Timothy had brought him from Thessalonica encouraging tidings of the Church he had

there founded. But in that good report there were mingled also tidings of death. Some of those to whom he had comparatively recently ministered, had paid the debt of nature and passed from the earthly scene. Their bereaved friends were, moreover, undergoing needless sorrow, because the deceased had been removed before the coming of Christ. The Thessalonians, in common with other infant churches, entertained unfounded expectations regarding the imminence of the Second Advent. They imagined it so near at hand that they would live to behold it; and when they saw their loved relations or fellow Christians taken away, they mourned specially at their being deprived of sharing in the joy of welcoming a returning Lord. This Epistle, from which our motto-verse is taken, was written (among other reasons), to comfort and console the sorrow-stricken. It is interesting and remarkable that the first letter of Paul is thus a letter to the bereaved! It is an "afflicted man's companion." The Spirit of the Lord, by inspiration, was upon him. The Lord anointed him "to heal the brokenhearted."

And what does he say to these drooping, saddened spirits? He tells them not to be disheartened, but to rejoice. "Bothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." 1 Thes. 4:13-14. There is no more expressive symbol of higher and diviner truths than the sleep of the body and the subsequent waking in the morning.

It is beautiful to see the surging waves of daily life rocking themselves to rest—to note, say, in some vast city, when night has drawn its curtains around, light after light put out in the windows, the street lamps paying solitary homage to the stars as they look down from their silent thrones! What a hush pervades the recent 'stunning tide of human care and crime!' Why? Because sleep is locking up ten thousand eyes of those who are dreaming away care and sorrow, fatigue and toil. But again, as the gates of morning open, and when from the silent monitors of fleeting time, the hour summoning to labor strikes, in a moment the ring of countless hammers breaks the trance of night. All is again astir. Sleep has refreshed the workman's wearied body; sleep has put new pith and sinew

in that brawny arm. The whole world has arisen like a giant refreshed, and sleep has been the elixir that has soothed its wounds and healed its pains.

We need not wonder, then, that this priceless blessing to the weary, has been taken by God Himself to describe the quiet rest of His own people in the grave. David, the man after God's own heart, after he had served his day and generation, "fell asleep and was gathered to his fathers." "Our friend Lazarus sleeps," said Christ. Stephen, when struck down by his murderers, "fell asleep." Following the same imagery, "Those also," says the Apostle, "who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

But what does Paul mean by this sleep? Is it the sleep of the soul? Is it that the spirit, at the moment of dissolution, falls into a state of inactivity or insensibility, in which it remains until startled at last by the trumpet of God? No! Let us return to the analogy of earthly sleep. We know that when the body is in a state of profound rest, when the eye is closed in seeming unconsciousness on the pillow, it is only apparently so. The mind is in a state of constant activity; all its powers are vigorous as ever. Memory is there, bringing up old and treasured scenes. Imagination is there, combining these in strange fantastic medley. Gorgeous visions come and go—magnificent combinations, in comparison with which waking realities are dull, prosaic, and commonplace. So it is with the soul at death. While the body "sleeps" in its grassy bed, the spirit is roaming in regions of activity and life. It departs "to be with Christ, which is far better."

"There is no death—the stars go down  
To rise upon some fairer shore;  
And bright in heaven's jeweled crown,  
They shine for evermore.

"There is no death—an angel-form  
Walks o'er the earth with silent tread,  
And bears our best-loved things away;  
And then we call them dead."

The words of our motto-verse may bear the beautiful rendering, "Those

also, who are laid asleep by Jesus!"—a rendering which, among others, suggests two comforting thoughts, two most gracious whispers from these Palm-trees of heavenly consolation.

(1.) That the hour of our death is appointed by Jesus. We are laid asleep by Him. Just as the mother knows the best hour to lay her little one in its couch or cradle; undresses it, composes it to rest, sings its lullaby, and the cherub face, lately all smiles, is now locked in quiet repose. So Christ comes to His people at His own selected season, and says, 'Your hour of rest has arrived. I am to take off the garments of mortality. Come! I will robe you in the vestments of the tomb.' He smooths the narrow bed, composes the pillow, and sings His own lullaby of love, 'Fear not, my child, for I am with you, sleep on now and take your rest!'

Be comforted with this blessed truth, that the hour of death cannot come a moment sooner than Jesus appoints. He knows the best time to bid you and yours the long "good-night." Interesting it is (and a Bible truth too) to think of troops of angels hovering over the death-pillow, and watching with guardian care the sleeping dust. But more comforting still, surely, is it to think of the Lord of angels closing the eyes and hushing to slumber—Christ Himself leading to the grave—the robing room of immortality—"unclothing," that His people may be "clothed upon," and that "mortality may be swallowed up of life."

A second suggested thought is, that the body belongs to Christ. The soul, indeed, is more specially His. It wings its arrowy flight up to the Spirit World. Angels carry it into Abraham's bosom, and from that hour it is "forever with the Lord." But what of the material framework? What of the marble tenement? Is it left to crumble in dishonor and corruption? Now that the jewel is gone, is the treasure-chest to be disowned? Now that the vestal fire is quenched, is the temple left to decay in oblivion? No, it is the body to which Paul in these words refers. It is the body that is "laid asleep by Jesus." Every particle of that dust of the sepulcher was purchased by His blood. The Apostle elsewhere speaks of "body as well as spirit which are His" (1 Cor. 6:20).

You who have treasures in the tomb, come and seat yourselves under the shadow of this Elim-palm. Rejoice in the assurance that these earthly



tabernacles are in the custody of Him who has the keys of the grave and of death. The loving hand of Divine parental love was the last to close their eyes; and in the prospect of waking on an eternal morrow, you can go to their graves, and thinking of them as having migrated to the Better Land, away forever from the harsh jarrings and discords and tumults of the present, can write the epitaph—"So HE grants SLEEP to those He loves."

"It is an uncut jewel,  
All earth encrusted now;  
But He will make it glorious,  
And set it on His brow!  
'Tis but a tiny glimmer  
Lit from the light above,  
But it shall blaze through endless days  
A star of perfect love."

"I will lie down and sleep in peace."

## **THE LAST MUSING**

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:54

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."  
Psalm 23:4

"Rest." "Refreshment."—How can such words be employed regarding Death? How can the shade of Elim-palm be spoken of with reference to that dark valley, in connection with which the willow and the cypress have always been accepted as the appropriate symbols? In the oldest Epic poem of the world, indeed, the grave is spoken of as the place where "the

weary are at rest." But with death itself, there is usually associated no such restful, reposeful thought. Though the last enemy—it is still an enemy! Nevertheless, thanks be to God, there is here, too, a palm-grove for His true people. These fronds have no louder or more tender whispering of the name of Jesus, and His exceeding great and precious promises, than at a dying hour! A traveler in Palestine remarks literally, what we may take allegorically, that "the finest and best palm-trees are along the banks of the Jordan."

"I am persuaded that... death shall not separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Bunyan represents even the timid pilgrim Much-Afraid, as "going through the stream singing." Yes, there is a real companionship in that closing scene. There is a Tree which can make these bitter waters of Marah sweet. The column of cloud and fire, which has gone before in the wilderness, will not forsake in the swelling of the Border river of death.

And this is no mystical figure—no mere poetical or sentimental illusion. It is a wondrous fact. Thousands who have passed through the final conflict can bear witness to it—the felt nearness of the Savior. No one who has had any experience of deathbeds but can testify, that there is often the sublime consciousness of a PRESENCE there—as if the dying pilgrim rested on a living Arm, and the place became a Peniel, where, like the patriarch, the wrestling soul saw God face to face!

How can we, with lowly confidence and hope, look forward to a similar hour? It is by having Christ as our portion now, if we would have Him as our portion then. What was it that gave David this confidence in the prospect of treading the final Valley? It was the conscious nearness—the realized presence of Jehovah his Shepherd, in life. He was even then rejoicing in this companionship and love. See how near he felt Him to be! Observe the phraseology of the second of our motto-verses—the form of utterance. It is not "I will fear no evil, for You are to be with me," nor is it "for God is with me," but "You are with me." He seems to look up with trustful faith to Him who was even then at his side. He speaks not of a remote Being, who would meet him at the valley-entrance—a mere guide through the gloom of that strange gorge at the end of the journey, but

who at other times is unknown and distant. It is the Friend he has known and confided in so long. It is the Shepherd of whom, in the opening strain of the song, he said, that Shepherd is mine—"The Lord is my Shepherd." It is He whose guiding hand had led him by "the green pastures," and "the still waters," and "the paths of righteousness."

And was the Psalmist deceived? Did this song of life prove a delusion when the hour of death came? Could he sing it so long as his journey was carpeted with flowers, and radiant with sunshine? but did his faith forsake him, and his rod and staff give way, and his song melt into a wail of terror, when the shadows fell around? We have his last words recorded. We have the very hymn which this Hebrew minstrel sang, when the valley-gloom was beginning to darken his path, and the sound of the waters of death fell on his ear: "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. This is all my salvation, and all my desire!"

So also was it with him who uttered the triumphant exclamation of the former verse placed at the head of this meditation. He who had so fondly loved and prized the shelter of the Elim-grove in life, could exult, even amid the lowering clouds which shrouded the closing hours of a consecrated existence—"I am not ashamed: for I know Whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day!" And God is ever faithful who promised, "As your days, so shall your strength be." "You are with me," says Lady Powerscourt, "is still the rainbow of light thrown across the Valley."

Nor will that solemn, mysterious hour be allowed to overtake us until the Lord of life sees fit. This is surely a comforting reflection (which we had occasion also to dwell upon in the immediately preceding meditation), that life and death are in His hands: that what appears to us to be the most wayward and capricious of occurrences—the departure of a human being from this world—is directly under His sovereign control; that He gives the lease of existence; and, when He sees fit, revokes the grant. Sweetly sings one of the minstrel-band of German hymn-writers—

"My God, I know not when I die:  
What is the moment or the hour,

How soon the clay may broken lie,  
How quickly pass away the flower;

"My God, I know not how I die:  
For death has many ways to come,  
In dark mysterious agony,  
Or gently as a sleep to some.

"My God, I know not where I die;  
Where is my grave; beneath what strand?  
Yet from its gloom I do rely  
To be delivered by Your hand!

"Then comes it right and well to me,  
When, where, and how, my death shall be!"

Death has no terrors, when it comes thus as a message from death's great Conqueror. He sends His angels—glorious beings who delight to do His pleasure—to the bedsides of His saints, to bear their spirits on wings of light and love upward to heavenly mansions.

"For them the silver ladder shall be set—  
Their Savior shall receive their last breath:  
They travel to a fadeless coronet,  
Up through the Gate of death!"

"Father, I will" (is His last and closing intercessory prayer in behalf of every member of the Church on earth), "that those also, whom You have given Me be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory."

Death is but the entrance and portico of "our Father's house." As we stand under the porch, the archway over our head projects a shadow. We are for a moment out of life's sunshine. But the next! the door opens; and better than the blaze of earthly sun is ours. The darkness is past, and the true light shines. In an instant, from the gloomy Valley of the Weeping Willows, we are among THE PALMS OF PARADISE!

"In the stillness and the starlight,

In sight of the Promised Land,  
We thought of the bygone pilgrimage,  
And the burning, blinding sand.

"How gracious, too, had been the dews,  
Which from God's presence fell;  
And the hallowed hours of resting  
By Palm-grove and by Well.

"But now we pitched our final tent,  
The desert journey done,  
For the glorious hills of the Better Land  
Gleamed in the setting sun.

"A river—the Border river—  
Was seen in the dying light,  
The rush of its swelling waters  
Was heard in the deepening night.

"We sit under Heavenly palm-trees  
In the dawn of Eternal day,  
And look toward the desert hilltops,  
Where the misty shadows play.

"The great and dreadful land  
Of wilderness and drought,  
Lies in these shadows behind us,  
For the Lord has 'brought us out.'

"The great and dreadful river  
Which we stood by night to view,  
Is left far off in the darkness,

For the Lord has 'brought us through.'"

"Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave."

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

"Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." Psalm 116:7

# **Words of Comfort to the Christian Pilgrim**

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## **Introduction**

It is the purpose of this volume to set before the believer some of the gracious promises of God's Word, and to suggest some thoughts which may prove consolatory and encouraging to the Christian pilgrim, as he journeys onward to his heavenly home. May the Divine blessing attend an earnest and humble effort to minister comfort to the downcast, strength to the weak, and courage to those who have set their faces Heavenward!



## PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God." Genesis 28:20-21

When he uttered these words, the patriarch was a solitary, friendless exile. He had left his father's home--his heart big with sorrow, and his eyes suffused with tears. The path of life, all dark and uncertain, lay before him, and the close of his first day's journey found him weary and benighted, with no better accommodation than the cold earth for a bed, and a stone for his pillow. More than 400 miles of wild and inhospitable deserts were to be traversed, and he was quite uncertain what reception he might meet with at Haran. Most wisely, therefore, did he resolve to enter into covenant with God, and supplicate the Divine protection and blessing at the outset of his journey. His desires were moderate, his wishes few--"to be kept in the way"--"to have bread to eat and clothing to put on"--these were the requests he humbly put forth when erecting the remembrance-stone at Bethel.

What a suitable preparation for his journey! Reader, have you thus besought the Divine blessing?--have you thus covenanted with God, and dedicated yourself to Him? You have entered on your pilgrimage--an unknown path lies before you; are you still a traveler through the 'desert of the world' without a Guide?--journeying you know not where, with no Friend to "keep you in the way"--no "covenant" blessings, which alone are worth possessing. Oh, think how it fared with Jacob. He trusted God. He entered on a long and painful course of discipline--dark clouds gathered round him--the storm and tempest beat--he passed through years of mingled joy and sorrow--he could sing of "mercy and of judgment"--was he disappointed in the end?

Listen to his language, when, once more returning, with joy and gladness, to his native plains, and pitching his tent in security and peace--"God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said unto

me, Return unto your country, and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you; I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which you have showed unto your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I have become two bands." From the days of his youth he had been an exile from his father's house--his best years had been spent in a strange land, amid toil and hardship. But we find him now, at the end of twenty years, once more within sight of his native land. "There, by his side, rolls the river, once so familiar to his eye--there lie the plains and the hills, over which, when a boy, he had so often roamed, and what is his testimony? Does he dwell on the years of bitterness and toil that have rolled over him, since last he climbed these hills, and wandered by this stream?" Have the terms of the Bethel covenant remained unfulfilled? and does he think with regret upon his chequered pathway? Ah, no; not a word of complaining is heard; not a feeling of dissatisfaction finds place in his soul--the faithfulness, the care, the love of his covenant God--the blessings strewed so profusely on his pathway--are all he can now think of. He speaks of nothing else. "With my staff," he says, "a poor, friendless, destitute wanderer, I left my paternal home. Well do I remember this flowing stream. Well do I recollect the time when last I crossed it, my staff my only support, and almost my only property. But now, how altered are my circumstances!--oh the unerring faithfulness--the amazing goodness and mercy of my God!--'I have become two bands;' I have flocks and herds, men-servants and women-servants; the outcast has become a prince! God's promise is fulfilled. He has kept me by the way, and therefore I have prospered." "I am with you," was the Bethel promise, "and will bring you again into this land." Truth has accomplished what mercy covenanted.

Reader! God's servants have ever found Him faithful to His word. "He cannot deny Himself." That covenant has never been broken on His part. However chequered may have been their history, like Jacob, they have at length had reason to declare, "I have never been forsaken--the Lord has never left me." And why? He is ever the same. Has He said that He will never leave His people nor forsake them? the word He has spoken must be fulfilled. "Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle which He has spoken shall pass until all be fulfilled." Enter, then, into covenant with God. Take Him as your Guide "by the way," and you too

will one day be able to say, "He promised to keep me, and He has kept me. He said that He would strengthen me in the hour of trial, and He has strengthened me. He said that He would be a present help in trouble, and in trouble He has been my help. He told me that if I would acknowledge Him in all my ways, He would direct my paths, and He has directed them. He said that He would be my refuge in storms, and, when storms have assailed me, He has been my refuge. Though heart and flesh should faint and fail me, the Lord will be the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

Reader! let this be your prayer--"O God, the Strength of the needy, the Helper of all those who flee to You for support, give to be my Guide in life. Pour upon me the riches of Your Grace, and so sanctify and bless me, that I may serve You henceforth in body and soul, and live in Your holy love and fear unto my life's end."

"Our night may be a starless night,  
Our path a tangled maze;  
But yet, our eyes shall soon behold  
The morning's golden blaze;  
Keeping our gaze upon the East,  
Leaving the night behind,  
With the will to find the light increased  
And strengthened in our mind;  
The sun shall rise, the gloom depart,  
Lost in the strength of day,  
For earnest love and truthful heart  
Are sure to find a way."

## **PROMISED BLESSINGS**

"As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,

day and night  
will never cease." Genesis 8:22

Centuries have elapsed since this promise was given, and to many it now appears as an idle word. The bright and beautiful opening blossoms of spring--the rich glow of summer verdure, the profusion and bounty of harvest--the frost and cold of winter--are regarded merely as matters of course--inspiring neither hope nor fear--awakening no emotion of gratitude or consolation in the soul. Not so was it at the time when they were first uttered. Then, the whole earth had just been swept by the devouring deluge--then everything seemed unfixed and uncertain--the fountains of the great deep had been broken up--the sea, once confined within its boundaries, had rolled in upon the land--the windows of heaven had been opened, and the waters that are above the skies swelled those that were below. Each gathering cloud might mantle the world in final ruin. Each falling drop might open the sluices of another deluge. All was uncertainty. What had happened yesterday might occur again--the hills and valleys might once more be submerged--the mighty deep might again burst its accustomed limits, and the whole earth become a desolation and a wreck. Where was the security to Noah and his sons? Who could assure them that the scarcely-subsidied sea would not again devastate the land, and pour its rushing torrents over the face of nature?--Only that God who made heaven and earth--who guides and governs all things according to His will and pleasure.

And so it was. He gave back to the earth the blessing which had been removed from it for a time, and restored the feeling of peace and safety to the little remnant that was still left. And ever since, the seasons have returned in their order, the sun has gone forth on his mighty journey--the earth has been refreshed by the gentle showers of heaven--and the husbandman has gathered in the rich treasures of harvest.

What a proof of the faithfulness of God! He remembers His promise, and, mindful ever of His grace and truth, "He gives us all things richly to enjoy." In every returning harvest, in every passing year, He has been saying to the children of men, "My covenant I will not break, nor alter that which has gone out of my lips."

What a proof of the infinite power of God! Man may alter the surface of the earth; he may sow, and plant, and reap, but all his genius and science cannot clothe the field with golden corn, or fashion one leaf of the forest tree. The power of creation God alone has retained; it is sacred and incommunicable; and His glory will He not give to another.

What a proof of the goodness of God! Men have despised and defied Him; they have sought to banish Him from His own creation; yet, still he has continued to shower down His blessings. He has given them "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." Wherever, on the wide surface of the world, there is the cry of need, or the utterance of necessity, there is a hidden yet intelligible voice that points to the supply. "Man requires sustenance, and the earth springs with teeming produce, and spreads its wide and unremitting supply of manna for his maintenance! Man asks for bread, and the dews have furnished their ministry, and the sower has gone forth and sown, and the gracious rains have descended, and the sun, that mighty, vegetative principle, has poured his light and warmth! A working has been going on, still and unseen, but certain in its result. The seed cast into the ground has not lain dormant--first, has appeared the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear, and then, waving with myriad golden spears, the hosts of the harvest have awaited the rejoicing husbandmen, and the needs of man have been supplied." Reader, you see in all this the incessant illustration of a goodness of God--a confirmation of the truth, that, "though the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, yet His kindness shall not depart, neither shall the covenant of His peace be removed."

Four thousand years have well-near elapsed since God thus spoke to Noah. Generations on generations have all passed away, and yet it is as true now as then, that "God has appointed the moon for seasons, and the sun knows his going down." Christian, see, in the return of harvest, and the succession of seasons, an evidence of the faithfulness, the power, and the goodness of your covenant God.

"Father of mercies, from whom comes down every good and every perfect gift, and who keeps covenant unto all generations, impress me with a sense of Your faithfulness, of Your power, and of Your unmerited

goodness; and enable me to show my gratitude by a sober, faithful, and charitable use of all Your mercies, to the good of my brethren, and the glory of Your blessed name."

"Since You, the everlasting God,  
My Father has become,  
Jesus, my Guardian and my Friend,  
And heaven my final home--  
I welcome all Your sovereign will,  
For all that will is love,  
And, when I know not what You do,  
I wait the light above.  
Your covenant, in the darkest gloom,  
Shall heavenly rays impart,  
Which, when my eyelids close in death,  
Shall warm my chilling heart."

## **THE RAINBOW IN THE CLOUD**

"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." Genesis 9:16

Nature again smiles, and emerges from beneath her watery covering. The promise of Him who cannot lie is given, that a second flood shall no more destroy the earth. And what is to be the sign--the enduring remembrance-token? "I will set My rainbow in the cloud." There it had been, perhaps, before, encircling the heavens with its belt of golden hues, but now it was destined to awaken new thoughts, and to inspire grateful emotions in the heart of man--now, it was to testify of God's promise--to be a lasting memorial of His covenant through all generations. Often, as the stormy cloud should gather in the heavens, threatening to pour its pent-up waters on a sinful world, when the "rainbow" appeared, it was to be as the voice of God declaring, "the waters shall no more destroy all flesh." No, in condescension to human weakness, the Almighty was henceforth to regard it as a remembrancer to Himself of His gracious promise, "I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant."

"The rainbow in the cloud" was a pledge of temporal blessings. But to the believer, it is also a striking type of spiritual. Is there no rainbow of promise which gilds another sky--which tells of wrath averted, of security insured? Yes; Jesus is the "rainbow in the cloud" of heaven's wrath, assuring the believer, that a fiercer storm, than any that ever devastated the world, has passed away. When, to the eye of faith, He appears in the spiritual skies, every fear is dispelled--God "will not return to destroy;" and, as the rainbow appears with blended colors, all melting into each other with the most perfect harmony, so, in Christ, justice and mercy, holiness and love, power and goodness, all combine to form one glorious and resplendent arch.

The rainbow tells of the perpetuity of the covenant. Four thousand years have passed, and still it spans the heavens. Christian! you see in this, an emblem of the immutability of your God, in redemption. He Himself regards it as such--"Thus says the Lord, If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant"--that is, with Christ and His people, of whom David was the type. Thus, the God of nature is alike unchangeable as a God of grace.

The rainbow is a token of God's covenant with His people. "For this," says He, "is as the waters of Noah unto me; for, as I have sworn, that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord, that has mercy on you." Here, and here alone, is the security of the Christian, the unalterable purpose of a covenant God. He has given them also a "rainbow in the cloud," to which, in every season of impending danger, they may direct the eye of faith.

Reader! is yours a dark and cheerless day? Is your horizon obscured by threatening clouds? Remember, there is the "rainbow in the cloud," the token of the unalterable covenant of God. Like the mariner in a stormy sea, you may be appalled at the indications of a coming tempest, you may be listening with alarm to the roar of the angry waves and the hoarse

howling of the wind. Lift up the eye of faith--see, yonder opening in the clouds--yonder faint ray of light--yonder splendid "rainbow in the cloud." It is to you the covenant-token that relief is at hand, for "the Lord will look upon it." It is His own promise. Your sorrowing eye, and the eye of your Father in heaven, will meet in one spot--on Jesus Christ--and then, as the Lord remembers His covenant, and thinks upon you for good, you will be enabled to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon your God." Yes, the darker the cloud, the more brilliant will be the reflection--the heavier the trial, the sweeter the promise; for, amid God's most mysterious dealings, you may discover marks of His power, His love, and His faithfulness.

There are views of Christ which can only be obtained beneath a cloudy sky, and amid many showers of tears. Believer, strive, when the darkness begins to gather around you, to look upwards, and soon reviving faith will discover the "rainbow of promise;" the storm will be hushed, the lowering portentous clouds will roll away, and you will take up the language of the Psalmist--"Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds."

Think, too, of that glorious day, when there shall be a serene and cloudless sky--a sky, which can no more become darkened and obscured--when you will not need this emblem, for you will have the reality of God's faithfulness and love.

Here, while on earth, you have no rainbow without a cloud. But then shall rise that glorious Sun which shall never set, whose radiant beams shall no more be broken by misty shadows. Soon, believer, throughout eternity's calm brightness, you will gaze upon the rainbow of your Redeemer's glory; and, as you gaze, you will shine, even as He shines. For "we shall be like Him, when we shall see Him as He is."

"O God of all grace and mercy, who is able to supply every loss, to heal every wound, to dry up every tear, and to dispel every cloud--Grant that when my sorrows abound, my consolations may much more abound. May I be still and know that You are God, acknowledging Your right to do with me as You will, and confiding in the wisdom and goodness of Your dispensations."



"The sun's bright rays are hidden,  
The rains in floods descend—  
The winds with angry murmurs,  
The stoutest branches bend.  
A gloom, the face of nature  
As with a pall does shroud;  
Its influence all are feeling,  
But--look beyond the cloud!

"For, lo! at length appears  
A little streak of light,  
Increasing every moment  
Until all again is bright.  
So, however dark our prospects,  
However by grief we're bowed,  
It will not last forever--  
We'll look beyond the cloud!"

## **DUTY AND INTEREST**

But a man of God came to the king and said, "O king, do not hire troops from Israel, for the Lord is not with Israel. He will not help those people of Ephraim! If you let them go with your troops into battle, you will be defeated no matter how well you fight. God will overthrow you, for he has the power to help or to frustrate."

Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what should I do about the silver I paid to hire the army of Israel?"

The man of God replied, "The Lord is able to give you much more than this!" 2 Chron. 25:7-9

Amaziah, King of Judah, had sinfully leagued himself with idolaters. From principles of worldly policy, he had formed an alliance with the kingdom of Israel, then at enmity with God. The prophet of the Lord was

thereupon commissioned to warn him of the consequences, in these words--"But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, these troops from Israel must not march with you, for the Lord is not with Israel." Still, he was left free to act as he pleased. "Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow." The king hesitated. He had given, out of his treasury, a hundred talents of silver for the promised help; and now, he would receive no equivalent. No assurance even is granted by the prophet that the loss should be repaired. He is simply told, that the silver and the gold are God's, to give or to withhold--"The Lord is able to give you much more than this." Amaziah at length yields to the voice of warning. He separates himself from the army that came out of Ephraim, and obtains a remarkable victory in the Valley of Salt.

Reader, this narrative is most instructive. We have only given the outline. Read it in your Bible, prayerfully. You may discover points of striking resemblance between the case of Amaziah and your own; and, at some period, you may remember having asked the same question, "What shall I get for the hundred talents?" The claims of the world often conflict with those of religion, and a struggle ensues. Duty says, "Do this;" inclination, self-interest, worldly policy demand, "But what shall I have in return for the sacrifice?" See, the man who has been induced by the Spirit of God to yield himself to the service of Christ, has he no sacrifices? Must he not surrender old habits, desires, and companions--habits, which had become ingrained in his nature, and friends in whose society he once took delight. Yes; there are sacrifices. He must exchange the smile of the world for its withering frown; he must abstain from pleasures, once congenial to his taste--pursuits, which promised high advancement, and objects, on which his every desire was fixed. And this he must do, trusting simply to the assurance--"The Lord is able to give you more than this."

Unbelief may whisper, "But is He also willing?" Experience might afford convincing proof that He is; but such doubts are unworthy of being entertained for a moment. God must be trusted. He asks for a childlike confidence. He says, as of old to Amaziah, "Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow." If you are resolved to continue the

unholy alliance with the enemies of God, then, hold to these pleasures of the world, retain your love for old habits and pursuits; but remember the fatal consequences. Reader, do you know anything of this feeling--this conflict between duty and self-interest? You listen to the Sabbath bell, as it rings out a loving invitation to the house of God. Do you ever feel the risings of a wish to absent yourself on some trivial pretext--the state of the weather, the visit of a neighbor, or the few miles of distance. Ah! it is the old Amaziah doubt, "What shall I get for my sacrifice?" You have a family altar. The sacred hour of devotion comes round; business, pleasure, urge their demands--there is a hesitation, a struggle between duty and worldly interest, and the question returns, "What shall I get for my sacrifice of time?"

A poor sufferer lives in your neighborhood; he has few to speak the word of comfort--few to read to him the promises of God--duty bids you visit his solitary chamber, and bear glad tidings to the tried, afflicted one; but your worldly affairs press hard upon you, and again you ask, "What shall I get for the loss I may sustain?"

Christian! trust God; and be assured, that whatever labor you may undergo--whatever sacrifices you may make--"the Lord is able to give you much more than this." Does God require the performance of any duty? Then, let it be done at whatever cost, for there your true interest lies. Duty called Moses to relinquish his high position in Pharaoh's household--his apparent interest lay in keeping it; but he looked onward to the future--he took the balances in his hand, and fairly weighed, what he must now forego, against what he should hereafter receive--what he must now endure, against what he should hereafter enjoy--and, eventually he secured his true and best interest.

Reader! follow his example, and his reward shall be yours. Be assured, you cannot be a loser, by resolving, at all hazards, not to lose the favor and the friendship of God. He can give you all you need, for "all things are His." Yes, and if you act thus, He will give you peace and comfort, hope and joy here--and glory, honor, and immortality hereafter.

"Grant, O Lord, unto Your servant, the spirit to think and to do always such things as be rightful. Give me grace to trust You, and to feel assured,

that the path of duty is the path of true and lasting happiness. Teach me Your will, and incline my heart unto Your testimonies, that in all my works begun, continued, or ended in You, I may glorify Your name, and, finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life through Jesus Christ my Lord."

"Is this the way, my Father?" "Yes, my child. You must pass through the tangled, dreary wild, If you would reach the City undefiled— Your peaceful home above."

"But enemies are round!" "Yes, child, I know That where you least expect you will find a foe, But victor you shall prove o'er all below— Only, seek strength above."

"My Father, it is dark!" "Child, take my hand; Cling close to Me--I'll lead you through the land; Trust My all-seeing care--so shall you stand Midst glory bright above."

"My footsteps seem to slide!" "Child, only raise Your eye to Me, then in these slippery ways I will hold up your goings; you shall praise Me for each step above."

"O Father, I'm weary!" "Child, lean your head Upon My breast; it was My love that spread Your rugged path; hope on still, until I have said, Rest--rest forever above." –Monsell

## **GUARDIANSHIP**

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

Deut. 32:10

Thus Moses describes God's care of ancient Israel. How accurate the description! In the land of Egypt--groaning under oppressive slavery, and writhing under the lash of heartless taskmasters--God found His chosen people. And, when His eye of love was fixed upon them, He "led them about," from the Red Sea shore to the Promised Land--sometimes along a straight, sometimes a circuitous path--and all the while "He instructed them" by many a providential dealing, and many a token of loving-kindness. He instructed them--by mercies, by warnings, by judgments, by frequent interpositions of His power, and, by remarkable proofs of His determination to bless the obedient, and to punish the transgressor.

Yes, "He kept them as the apple of His eye"--He shielded them in the hour of peril--He manifested Himself strong in their behalf--He placed around them the broad shield of omnipotence, until at length He brought them to the goodly land promised to their fathers.

Christian! see the emblem of yourself in Israel. Where did God find you? He found you in a "desert land." Yes, earth with all its loveliness and beauty is a desert place, until the sinner has been found by God. There is much, it is true, to attract the eye and to gratify the sense, but fair and lovely though it be, in a moral and spiritual view it is "a desert land." The soul can find in it no sustenance--no refuge; and, as in a "waste howling wilderness," it is surrounded, on every side, by dangers, and exposed to countless perils. But, oh! it is a blessed thing to know, that God seeks out, and finds the wanderer, in the desert; and, when He has found him, "He leads him," not always by a direct path, to the promised land, but by a circuitous route, and in the right way, to "a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God."

Reader! has God permitted you to encounter the sharp stroke of affliction? Has He taken from you the earthly prop, upon which you were used to lean all too fondly? Remember! God is leading you about. These unexpected trials--these heart-rending bereavements--are just so many turnings in your pilgrimage. No thorn has been scattered on your path, but what is common to the one family of God. "This honor have all the saints." The Shepherd is leading you, as all the flock are led, with a skillful

hand, and in the right way. It is yours to stand, if He bids you, or to follow, if He leads.

And, O Christian! is it well you don't know the future path, along which God is leading you. How disheartened would Israel have been, had they known the long and weary pilgrimage which was before them--the need, and suffering, and privation of their forty years travel! Even so would it be with you, if you could look into the dark and mysterious future, and see the rough and stony places in life's path--the thorns and briars in the hills of difficulty--if you could mark, how often and how painfully you were to be wounded and stricken--if you could gaze on those grassy mounds, which will yet cover the ashes of the loved and cherished, and behold yourself, at the close of life's journey, it may be, a worn and weary pilgrim, tottering on the verge of the grave, feeble and exhausted, with the perils you have encountered. Oh! it is better far to leave all to God--  
"Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain."

Although, in leading His people, "God gives no account of any of His matters," yet, if we put ourselves confidingly into His hands, the longer He leads us, the more we shall be inclined to trust Him. It is even thus He "instructs us"--instructs us in His love, and faithfulness, and goodness; He instructs us in our own weakness and His all-sufficiency--our impotence and His omnipotence--our corruption and His grace--our own frailty and His steadfastness--our unbelief and His unwavering faithfulness to His word.

And, mark the believer's security, "He keeps him as the apple of His eye." Such is God's watchful guardianship over His saints--such His unceasing vigilance. Yes! humble, unknown, obscure believer, dwelling in a lowly cottage, in some sequestered glen, far removed from the hum of human voice or occupation, if only you can say of God, that He is your reconciled Father in Christ, you are more to be envied than princes of the earth, for you are in possession of a blessedness, such as no monarch can bestow, no wealth can purchase, no earthly power procure. Be sure that God, even your God, does not, for a solitary instant, forget or overlook you; your

most trivial actions are not without interest in His sight--not a hair falls to the ground without your Father; He orders all things, for the sake of His own great name, and for the discipline of your soul, to prepare you for the glories and the blessings of eternity.

Christian! God has found you--God is leading you--God is instructing you--oh, then, leave to Him to choose your path in life! Rest, calmly and unhesitatingly, upon the sure word, "kept by the mighty power of God," and, the nearer you come to the land of your inheritance, the stronger will grow the conviction that God is faithful to all His promises. As He carries you, securely, over the rough and stony places of life's journey, you will sing of "mercy and of judgment;" and, when descending the brink of the dark waters of Jordan, which divide Canaan from the wilderness, you will take up the language of the Psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me."

And oh! thrice-animating prospect! As you stand upon the cloudless summits of the heavenly Zion, welcomed by angelic bands, greeted with the loud hosannas of the redeemed, methinks this will prove the theme of your song, "He found me in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led me about, He instructed me, He kept me as the apple of His eye."

"Oh God! who has sent Your own Son into the world to seek and save the lost, and who has prepared for those who love You, such good things as pass man's understanding; pour into my heart such love towards You, that, loving You above all things, I may obtain Your promises of guidance and strength in this world, and of joy and happiness at Your right hand in the world to come."

"Oh! for that bright and happy land  
Where, far amid the blest,  
The wicked cease from troubling, and  
The weary are at rest.

"Where friends are never parted,

Once met around Your throne;  
And none are broken-hearted,  
Since all, with You, are one!

"Yet oh! until then, watch o'er us keep,  
While far from You away;  
And soothe us, Lord, often as we weep,  
And hear us when we pray."

—J. S. Monsell

## JEHOVAH

Gen. 22:14--"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh."  
(The Lord will provide)

The most severe trial of Abraham's faith had just ended--his well-beloved Isaac was saved from the sacrificial altar, and another offering was presented in his stead. Well, then, might the patriarch raise a stone of remembrance, with the inscription engraved on his own heart, "The Lord will provide."

Exod. 17:15--"And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi." (The Lord is my Banner)

Moses, the leader of Israel, with the rod of God in his hand, was seated on the top of a hill, in the valley of Rephidim. Beside him stood Aaron and Hur, supporting his arms in the attitude of prayer. Beneath, the hosts of Israel and Amalek were engaged in stern and bloody conflict. Victory, hitherto, had leaned to neither side for any length of time. When the hands of Moses were raised, then Israel prevailed; and, when they were let down, Amalek prevailed. But now it was no longer uncertain. The three united suppliants implored Divine help--"and Joshua destroyed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." No wonder a feeling of security was experienced by Moses, and that future danger was no longer dreaded--no wonder that the motto of his remembrance-stone was



this, "The Lord my Banner."

Judges 6:24--"Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom." (The Lord is my Peace)

A dark cloud had gathered upon Israel--they had forgotten the wonders of the Lord, and His mighty doings in their behalf. The hosts of Midian prevailed against them, and the last ray of hope seemed to have vanished. Their cry for help and deliverance, sent up in the hour of extremity, was answered by the Lord, in reminding them of their transgressions, and of His patience and forbearance. No promise of immediate help was given. But now, as ever, "man's extremity became God's opportunity"--an angel appeared unto Gideon, "as he threshed wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites," and revealed the purpose of the Lord, to make him the deliverer of Israel. Poor, and without influence, Gideon feared to occupy this high and responsible position, but he was cheered by the promise, "I will be with you." A sign was granted, to assure him that he was the appointed messenger of God. Upon the offering which he presented to the angel, fire descended from heaven, "and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread." Need we wonder that, when entering on the great undertaking, his heart, oppressed and downcast, at the thought of Israel's woes, and of the horrors of war, which wrung from them the cry of bitterest anguish, the altar-stone should be inscribed by Gideon, "Jehovah-shalom"--"The Lord send peace!"

Ezek. 48:35--"And the name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah-shammah." (The Lord is there)

The prophet Ezekiel, when declaring the division of the land among the twelve tribes, and the extent of the glorious city, gave this as its great and glorious distinction, "Jehovah-shammah"--"The Lord is there."

Jer. 23:6--"And this is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah-tsidkenu." (The Lord our Righteousness)

The prophet Jeremiah, when foretelling the advent of Messiah, the righteous Branch, who was to make satisfaction for the sins of His people, and by His obedience, and sufferings, and death, reconcile them to an

offended God, speaks of Him by a name dear to every believer, "Jehovah-tsidkenu"--"The Lord our righteousness."

Christian! have you no stones of remembrance? Along the pathway of your life are there no memorials of Jehovah's love? Ah, yes! You, too, can tell of seasons of danger and distress--when prayer prevailed on high--when, from the depths of your troubled soul, the cry ascended heavenward, "Lord send help out of Zion," and deliverance was given. The enemy came in upon you like a flood; but even then, when the contest was fiercest, and the battle raged hottest, "the Spirit of the Lord" lifted up His standard, and the victory was yours. Surely, in such an hour, this was the language, of your soul, "Jehovah-nissi"--"The Lord my banner."

Or, look backward again. Remember that time, when some heavy trial was impending over you, some sore bereavement was dreaded, at the prospect of which, your very heart failed you, and the sunshine of your life was wrapped in deepest gloom. But your God in mercy spared the blow--the trial came not--the bereavement was stayed, and again the voice of rejoicing was heard in your home. And, if an anxious thought still lingered in your heart, and the shadow of the cloud still darkened at times your pathway, oh! was not this, to you, a cheering and consolatory thought, that come what may, He who listened to your prayer for deliverance, would also listen to your prayer for grace, and that the covenant between you and your God, permitted you to utter these blessed words "Jehovah-jireh"--"The Lord will provide?"

Yes, believer! and times there may have been in your past history, when the burden of sin was peculiarly oppressive, when your soul was bereft of comfort and peace, and as, with trembling step and aching heart, you pursued your weary journey, the language of your burdened spirit was that of David, "My soul is cast down within me." For you, there was no comfort in the Word, no joy in the means of grace, no happiness in prayer. Like a benighted traveler, you were groping in darkness, and, all the while, the whispered inquiry and taunt of the great adversary was, "Where is now your God?"

But your trial hour came to a close. The Comforter's voice again was

heard; the light of your Father's countenance shone upon you; and, once more glad and joyous, the prayer of Gideon became yours, "Jehovah-shalom"--"The Lord send peace."

Reader! you have entered the sanctuary; you have taken your place at the communion table. Has the language of your soul been this--"Jehovah-shammah"--"The Lord is there?" Trusting no longer in yourself, but coming to the mercy-seat, poor, hungry, and penitent, was this your prayer?--"O God, have mercy upon me a miserable sinner. Pardon and accept me, for the sake of Him whom You have revealed as 'Jehovah-tsidkenu,'--"The Lord our righteousness.'"

"Why should I fear the darkest hour,  
Or tremble at the tempest's power?  
Jesus vouchsafes to be my Tower!

"Though hot the fight, why quit the field?  
Why must I either flee or yield,  
Since Jesus is my mighty Shield?

"When creature comforts fade and die,  
Worldlings may weep, but why should I?  
Jesus still lives, and still is nigh!

"I know not what may soon betide,  
Nor how my needs may be supplied;  
But Jesus knows and 'will provide.'

"Though sin would fill me with distress,  
The throne of grace I dare address,  
For Jesus is my Righteousness.

"Though faint my prayers and cold my love,  
My steadfast hope shall not remove,  
While Jesus intercedes above.

"Against me earth and hell combine,  
But on my side is power Divine--

Jesus is all and He is mine."

## CONTENTMENT

"It is better to have little with fear for the Lord than to have great treasure with turmoil." Proverbs 15:16

The verdict of the world is very different. Notwithstanding the often-repeated declarations of Scripture, myriads are daily hastening to become rich. Onwards they rush with unabated ardor, to reach the object of their ambition; and, despite failure, misfortune, and frequent disappointment, they return afresh to the struggle. And, alas! how often do they receive, as their miserable reward, premature old age, and the unquenched cravings of avarice and passion! Wise was the prayer of Agur--"give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs" for the pangs of poverty excite complaining, and the possession of riches is sure to arouse the envious. He, who would walk securely along the pathway of life, will choose the middle course; and his prayer will be "Teach me, O Lord, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content."

Christian! religion does not forbid you to acquire RICHES--nor to be industrious in your worldly calling. But, if your plans should prosper--your barns be filled with plenty, and your treasures be increased--remember, there is danger in your fullness. Your heart may be weaned from God, and all your best and purest affections may be perverted. "The fear of the Lord" alone can keep you safe. Then will you regard yourself as a steward, bound to devote your substance to the glory of God, and to promote His cause and kingdom on the earth.

And, should your lot be one of POVERTY, still, "the fear of the Lord" will keep you from repining. Think how many are in sorer straits, who have to bear heavier burdens, and on whose every plan seems to have been written the inscription, "Failure and disappointment." Because your path has for a season been a thorny one--because some of your hopes have been blasted--because everything is not ordered according to your wishes, are you to sit down, murmuring and dissatisfied? Are you wiser than your heavenly Father? Would He lay upon you an unnecessary

burden? No, has He not told you--has not your own experience proved; that riches alone cannot confer happiness?--that better is the crust of bread and the cup of water, with God's blessing, than all the riches of the earth without His favor? Seek, by His grace, to learn contentment with your lot, to regard it as the appointment of your heavenly Father. When your cup is full, pray that it may be carried with a grateful hand; when the stream of earthly happiness is dried up, lean on the arm of your covenant God, and say, "All was needed." Look forward, Christian, whatever be your circumstances, to your portion in eternity. Let the language of your soul be--

"From darkness here, and dreariness,  
We ask not full repose;  
Only be Thou at hand, to bless  
Our trial hour of woes.  
Is not the pilgrim's toil o'erpaid  
By the clear rill and palmy shade?  
And see we not, up earth's dark glade,  
The gate of heaven unclosed?"

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath;" but, having the "fear of God," and being numbered among His chosen ones, you are secure of happiness. Heaven and its joys await you; the pleasures which are at God's right hand shall be yours; the riches of eternity you shall inherit, when thrones and dominions, and all that earth contains, shall crumble into ashes. Submit yourself, then, without a murmur to the hand of God, to assign you prosperity, or to visit with adversity. Seek thus, not only to secure your own peace and comfort, but to be a blessing to all around you; for, a contented mind sheds a halo on every side, and diffuses happiness wherever it exists. And, do not forget, that true contentment consists "in a ready and cheerful compliance with the will of God--in our patient continuance in our honest employments and callings--in our thankful use of external blessings, and our honest endeavors to procure them--in the diligent effort to do good in our stations, so long as we continue in them; and not, either in shunning all contact with the world, or murmuring because some other position has not been assigned us." Let this, then, be the spirit of your daily prayer-- "Give us, O Lord, Your heavenly grace, that we may learn, in whatever state we are, therewith to be content. May

we so learn to do and endure Your will, that at length, through the discipline here undergone, we may be fitted for Your heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"O faithless, unbelieving heart!  
So slow to trust that tenderest Friend,  
Who aye will needful strength impart,  
Who loving, 'loves unto the end.'

"No longer doubt, nor fear nor grieve,  
Nor on uncertain evils dwell;  
Past, present, future, calmly leave  
To him who will 'do all things well.'"

"Father, I know that all my life  
Is portioned out for me;  
And the changes that will surely come,  
I do not fear to see;  
But I ask You for a patient mind,  
Intent on pleasing Thee.

"I ask You for a thoughtful love,  
Through constant watching, wise,  
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,  
And to wipe the weeping eyes;  
And a heart at leisure from itself,  
To soothe and sympathize.

"I would not have the restless way,  
That hurries to and fro,  
Seeking for some great thing to do,  
Or secret thing to know;  
I would be treated as a child,  
And guided where I go.

"Wherever in the world I am,  
In whatsoever estate,  
I have a fellowship with hearts

To keep and cultivate,  
And a work of lowly love to do,  
For the Lord on whom I wait.

"So I ask You for the daily strength,  
To none that ask denied,  
And a mind to blend with outward life  
While keeping at Your side—  
Content to fill a little space,  
If You be glorified.

"And if some things I do not ask  
In my cup of blessing be,  
I would have my spirit filled the more  
With grateful love to Thee,  
And careful less to serve You much,  
Than to please You perfectly.

"There are briars besetting every path,  
Which call for patient care;  
There is a cross in every lot,  
And an earnest need for prayer;  
But a lowly heart that leans on You  
Is happy everywhere.

"In a service which Your love appoints  
There are no bonds for me,  
For my secret heart is taught 'the truth'  
That makes Your children 'free;'  
And a life of self-renouncing love,  
Is a life of liberty."

## DILIGENCE

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Eccles. 9:10

We have here a solemn warning, peculiarly impressive to some, yet applicable to all. To the AGED CHRISTIAN, these words seem to say, "You are nearing the grave, and you have still much to do. Seek to realize the position in which you stand. You are 'a worker, together with God,' in the world--placed here to advance His glory--to promote the interests of His kingdom--to improve every talent entrusted to your care. The time, in which you can labor and show diligence, is rapidly passing away. Opportunities of doing good are not to be recalled at will. If not seized upon at the moment, they are gone forever. The sunshine is declining--the shadows are falling longer and deeper around you--the evening of life is closing in--the last, the eleventh hour will soon be here; therefore take heed, and 'whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.'"

To the YOUNG, a similar warning is given, "Look abroad on the world--see, there, the field for labor, the field you are called upon to assist in tilling. Are there no hungry to be fed? no naked to be clothed? no ignorant to be instructed? Have you time for pleasure and gaiety--time for worldly interaction and the festive scene--but none for works of charity and labors of love? How is it with your own spiritual condition? Are you growing in grace? increasing in the love of prayer? more earnest in studying God's Word? in seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit? Remember who it was that suggested the momentous question, 'What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'"

He, who is indifferent about his own state before God, will scarcely be interested in regard to the condition of his fellow-men. To struggle in behalf of others, we must first struggle for ourselves--real religion knows nothing of that spurious charity which would attend to all to the neglect of self, and seek to promote the salvation of the souls of others, while the man allows his own to perish. Every man's own soul is, to him, a treasury



of heavenly treasures--the salvation of that soul ought to be to him "the one thing needful." See yon swimmer struggling amid the foaming billows--he gazes round him with an anxious eye--he grasps the floating spar--his shipmates are wrestling with the angry waves--but what to him is the danger of others compared with his own?--he sees the distant shore--oh! that he might plant his foot on the stable rock--he presses on--leaves behind him the struggling crowds; his first and chief anxiety is to reach the shore--to save his own life.

Or, see that crowded hall where thousands have assembled to hear the message of the gospel--a cry is raised that the building has given way--the immense assemblage is moved--onwards the excited thousands rush--friends, acquaintances, all are left behind--escape is the only, the all-pervading thought; and, as they hurry along, every eye is fixed on the doorway, and every heart beats with the desire for self-preservation. Even so, with regard to the salvation of the soul. "Escape for your life," is the warning given; the time is short and uncertain--if you do not secure it before you go to the grave, afterward it will be impossible.

And, if there is much to be done for ourselves, there is much, too, for others. How numerous the claims from the domestic circle! Parents! those children who surround you, look up to you for instruction; and this you are to enforce, by the uniform illustration of a holy and devoted life, and by the fervor of persevering and importunate prayer. Have you a family altar? Is the Sabbath hallowed in your dwelling? Have you endeavored to obey the Savior's injunction, "allow them to come unto me, and forbid them not?"

Reader! whoever you are, there is a work assigned you. Something may be done for God--some department of Christian benevolence there is, in which you are called to put forth the activities of your nature. It does not require very splendid talent to be useful. The great thing needed, is a sincere and earnest desire to do good. God requires of you, not according to what you have not, but according to what you have. Oh, how many are there, living on from day to day in selfish indolence, instead of laboring "to do what they can," in the circle in which they move, for the good of men, and for the glory of God! How many are spending their lives without one effort to make "a bad world better!" They are satisfied if they led, as

they imagine, harmless lives--forgetting, that sins of omission as well as sins of commission--duties neglected as well as duties performed, are noted down in the book of God's remembrance.

Christian reader! are you doing "what your hand finds to do" in the work of the Lord? Thank God! there is no one without opportunity--no one without encouragement. The man, to whom God has entrusted the talent of wealth, may help in sending the gospel--the good news of a Savior's love--to those who have never yet heard of the name of Jesus. He may send the devoted missionary to bear the tidings of salvation to far-distant lands, and what is his encouragement? "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it." This is his encouragement--better far and more enduring than the monumental grave-stone--that every soul converted, is reclaimed to God--every soul brought to the saving knowledge of Christ, becomes an heir of eternal life--every soul rescued from the dominion of Satan, from the tyranny of sin, is a glorious monument of Divine power and Divine grace, that will stand imperishably through eternity to honor God.

The Christian whose power is more limited, may still contribute to this glorious work according as the Lord has blessed him, yes even although he treads the path of poverty, and can spare but little of his worldly substance--he may give kind and sympathizing words--he may cheer and encourage others in well-doing--he may be a friend to the friendless and a strengthener of those who are ready to faint--he may address the words of warning to those who are careless and indifferent about their religious interests--and, above all, he may exercise a powerful and persuasive influence, by a daily, consistent Christian walk--by showing to all around him, "brotherly kindness and charity," and by manifesting in every word and action, "meekness, forbearance, patience, humility, long-suffering."

To give diligence in all this, he must be a man of watchfulness and prayer--he must feel and realize that the cause of Christ has been, as it were, committed to his care, and that he must lose no opportunity, while life is prolonged, to uphold and to extend it. Just in proportion as he apprehends what Christ has done for his own soul, will he be constrained "henceforth to live, not unto himself, but unto Him who died for him, and

rose again," and feel that he is bound to lay out his time and talents for the promotion of his Master's glory, and the good of his fellow-men. And knowing that life is short--and the time for showing fidelity in the vineyard of his Lord rapidly passing away, he will put forth all his energies--and strive with ever-increasing diligence, to do the work of Him who has sent him.

Reader! remember the animating promise, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." The rewards of eternity--while all purchased by the blood of Christ--will be conferred according to the amount of diligence and fidelity shown upon earth. And while it is, indeed, a glorious thing, to have an entrance into that bright world of bliss, which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man;" yet, oh, surely the true child of God should desire, not only to enter, but to enter joyfully--to enter "abundantly"--to secure the most radiant prize--the choicest crown of glory--to have a place near the celestial throne, a lofty station in the Savior's kingdom.

To be privileged to enter the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, is an honor far too great for sinful man; and, he who is permitted to mingle with the glorious company who stand upon the sea of glass, will find eternity too short to utter all his Savior's praise. But, as an eminent servant of God has said, "it is indolence, and not humility, which would make contentment with the lowest, a reason for not aspiring to the highest. To tell you, therefore, that "in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom"--it is telling the wrestler, that the glass is running out, and the game is not won--it is telling the warrior, that the shadows are thickening, and the victory is not complete--it is telling the racer, that night is drawing on, and the goal is not reached. It is just blowing an alarm-peal--just the upbraiding of lethargy--just the animating to effort. Is it a time to be idle, when each moment's delay may take a pearl from the crown--sway from the scepter? Is it a time to be inactive, when every second leaves me a step lower than I might have ascended in the scale of triumph and of majesty? Is it a time to sit with folded hands, when the grave is opening, and there is work to be done which can only be done here, and the day is approaching, on which rewards shall be bestowed, and perhaps, as yet, I am but last in the

rank of candidates?"

Rather, ought we not to rouse ourselves to redoubled diligence--to manly, vigorous effort--to toil, endurance, suffering, and shame, if need be, for the cause of Christ? saying, "Whatever our hand finds to do," God helping us, "we will do it with our might," for "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand."

Reader! labor to do God's work, and be this your daily prayer--

"Now may grace be imparted to each one of us--so to believe and to rejoice in Christ Jesus--so to follow His footsteps, and to imitate His example--that, finally, we may all meet together, as His ransomed people, in the heavenly kingdom!"

"Oh! grant that I may love You first,  
The source of all my heart desires;  
While forth upon my brethren burst  
The kindly beams Your love inspires.

"Give me strong faith, to know, to feel,  
And to believe You ever near;  
Watching my wayward spirit's weal,  
Receiving each repentant tear.

"So, safely through this world's turmoil,  
Unhurt, untainted, may I roam,  
Until o'erpast each mortal toil,  
I find in heaven a welcome home."

## DAILY STRENGTH

Deut. 33:25--"As your days, so shall your strength be."

The Christian is frequently compared to a pilgrim--traveling onwards through a dreary wilderness, to the promised land of Canaan--and his experience is varied and chequered. The path before him may be steep and arduous--he may have to pass through rough and stony places--through dark, thick forests, and rapid streams, and raging hurricanes--his days may be such, as to require great strength, and energy, and perseverance. Oftentimes, when he strives to anticipate the future, his heart sinks within him, his courage fails, and he is apt to give way to despondency and doubt. But, such a promise as that given to Asher, and to all the true Israel of God, may well suffice to calm the believer's fears, and reanimate his fainting spirit.

It is true, that changes and vicissitudes will come--true, that the heart, which today is cheerful and happy, may tomorrow be wounded and bleeding--true, that the full cup, now held with gladness, may be dashed in pieces, before the lips have tasted the refreshing draught--true, that the bright hope, which, like a guiding star, allures the traveler onwards, may speedily be enwrapped in pitchy gloom--but what of that?

To the child of God, there is a supply of strength to meet the hour of trial. He is not permitted to escape from the burden, the cross, the difficulty--but he is enabled to make his way through them all--to struggle with and finally to overcome them. Many a time, when the believer has been well-near crushed under the oppressive weight--when, conscious that ordinary strength would not avail, he has cried unto the Lord, and a fresh supply of grace has been given to meet the emergency--so that he could say with David, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God--many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

It would be easy for God, to make the path heavenward, plain and

unobstructed to His children--easy, to remove all care, anxiety, and sorrow--but such is not His purpose. Earth is the training-school for Heaven. He wills that they should be tried--that "through much tribulation they should enter the kingdom"--that their spiritual natures should be refined and purified in the furnace of affliction--and that thus, by the very struggles and pains of their earthly pilgrimage, they should become more and more fit for serving Him in this world, and more and more fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. Even as the racer in a course has to undergo preparation, and, by regimen and exercise, becomes better fitted for the severe trial that awaits him--even as the mariner, by successive voyages on the stormy ocean, becomes more skillful and daring--even as the soldier who has passed through a long and dangerous campaign, becomes bold, courageous, and self-denying--so the Christian, by each difficulty he is called on to encounter, by each trial he is summoned to bear, by each virtue he is required to call into exercise, becomes more vigorous, earnest, faithful, and Christ-like. His soul is gradually training and strengthening--by duty, trial, and endurance here--for glory, honor, and immortality hereafter.

And if, at any time, amid the rough and rugged parts of life's journey, his feet are not kept from falling nor his eyes from tears, the reason most probably is, that he has already failed to improve the strength and grace imparted--that, like a sword lying in the scabbard, his religion has not come into active, daily exercise, amid the lesser duties, trials, and struggles which have marked his previous history. For if, when overwhelming griefs and soul-agonizing troubles come upon us, we would be calm, patient, and submissive, we must have long and sedulously exercised the graces of the Christian character, amid the minor anxieties and the lesser sorrows of daily life.

Reader! imagine not, that only when in severe trials and pressing emergencies, are you required to make religion your stay, and to exercise the spirit which it enjoins--imagine not, that in the time of sickness or the solemn hour of death, you can lay hold of gospel promises at will, and derive from them consolation and support, if, in the season of health and the day of your prosperity, they are not in all your thoughts. If you do, you will be miserably disappointed. To be "strong in the Lord and in the

power of His might," when the dark storm gathers overhead, and the rumbling thunder is heard, you must have used the grace given for past emergencies, and exercised the powers which He has already graciously conferred.

Remember, "growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," does not consist so much "in extent of knowledge, as in depth of knowledge--knowing things better--not so much in new duties as in old duties better done, the drudgeries of life gone through in a brighter, happier, and more Christian spirit--knowing that life is made up, in a great measure, of little and common and trivial things, but still doing these little and trivial things with a more single eye to the Lord--with more self-distrust, and therefore with more dependence upon God--with greater humility--with more prayer so that self is gradually but surely extinguished, and we become strong, both to do and endure the will of God."

Yes, believer, you are insensibly, it may be, yet most assuredly increasing your spiritual strength, by each single act of faith and charity and self-denial--by showing in your daily walk, more love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance--by your Christian deportment; in your family circle and in the haunts of business, amid all the occupations and requirements of life. In the right performance of one duty, you will become better fitted for the performance of the next. Every fresh victory over pride--over vanity--over avarice, over selfishness--over fretfulness, makes us stronger for the time to come, and insures the fulfillment of the promise, "As your days, so shall your strength be."

Christian! mark again these words. They do not give the pledge, that we shall not feel the burden and heat of the day. All they promise is, that we shall get safely through. They do not say, that we shall not feel the weight of our duties, trials, temptations, conflicts; all they say is, that we shall have strength to bear their weight, and journey on with our load. The grace imparted, will then be "sufficient" for us--not superabundant, but sufficient for our actual necessities--strength equal to our day.

Christian! distress not yourself about impending evils. You think, you have not strength for the hour of sickness. Use the strength you now

have, in the day of health, and the promise will not then fail you. You fear, you have not strength for the thorny path of adversity--tread humbly and thankfully the path of prosperity, and you will not then be refused consolation and support. You fear that you are unprepared to meet the King of Terrors, and to enter the gloomy valley. Live to the glory of God, and, as beseems your Christian profession, and, when you are summoned to depart, His rod and staff will then uphold and comfort you. It is by putting forth the strength already gained, that you may hope to stand your ground, when greater exertion and more vigorous effort are demanded. Strength to encounter the tempest will be given when the tempest rages--strength to breast the foaming surges will be given when the hurricane has actually come--strength to grapple with the last enemy will be given when he comes forth to meet you. Yes, Christian! be assured, grace and strength will be imparted when you need them, as certainly as they will be withheld before you need them. He who guides you, knows your necessities, and, in the day of trouble, will not leave you comfortless. Journey on, then, with firmness--relying on the promise of Him who is faithful and true!--your day is coming--you will, before long, enter into your final rest, and repose from all your labors--you will take possession of the promised inheritance, and will then acknowledge with a grateful heart, "As my days, so my strength has been." Let this be your daily cry--

"O Lord, increase my strength, and give me grace, to use it daily for the promotion of Your glory, and for the healthy development of my own soul, that, in Your good time, I may be prepared for another and a better world."

"Source of my life's refreshing springs,  
Whose presence in my heart sustains me,  
Your love appoints me pleasant things,  
Your mercy orders all that pains me.

"If lonely hearts were never lonely,  
If all they wish might always be,  
Accepting what they look for only,  
They might be glad--but not in Thee.

"Well may Your own beloved, who see



In all their lot their Father's pleasure,  
Bear loss of all they love, save Thee,  
Their living, everlasting Treasure.

"Well may Your happy children cease  
From restless wishes prone to sin,  
And, in Your own exceeding peace,  
Yield to Your daily discipline.

"We need as much the cross we bear  
As air we breathe, as light we see—  
It draws us to Your side in prayer,  
It binds us to our strength in Thee."  
—A. L. Waring

"Dreary and long our course may be,  
But, O our God, it leads to Thee!

You are the Light by which we roam,  
You are our everlasting Home.

"Earth and its pains we still may feel,  
But You are ever near to heal;  
Still as our day, our strength shall be,  
For all our cares are borne by Thee.

"Your mighty arm to smooth our way,  
Your Light to turn our night to day,  
Onward with firmer steps we roam,  
On to our everlasting Home.

"Afflicted soul, to Christ draw near,

Your Savior's gracious promise hear;  
His faithful word declares to thee,  
That 'as your day, your strength shall be!'  
"Let not your heart despond, and say,  
How shall I stand this trying day?  
He has engaged, by firm decree,  
That 'as your day, your strength shall be!'  
"Your faith is weak, your foes are strong,  
Perhaps the conflict may be long;  
Yet shall at last your sorrows flee,  
And 'as your day, your strength shall be!'  
"When hovering death appears in view,  
Christ's presence shall your fears subdue;  
He smiles, and sets your spirit free,  
For 'as your days your strength shall be!'  
"When in that after-world of rest,  
Where ransomed souls are fully blest,  
How time in retrospect shall prove,  
The word which told you 'all is love!'"

## PROGRESS

Prov. 4:18--"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day."

If, in the Word of God, the Christian is likened to a pilgrim, we find also his life compared to a journey; and, perhaps, one reason for this comparison is, that he is always making progress in the way. There is no standing still. Days, and months, and years, hurry on with resistless impetuosity. The child soon passes into the youth; the youth into the man; the man into the aged veteran leaning on his staff.

There is another progress made by every one of us. There is a path in the formation of CHARACTER, equally inevitable, which must be trodden, whether the result be good or bad. The events which happen--the companions with whom we associate--the deeds of daily life--the very thoughts which pass through the mind--all combine in leading on the man, and in forming his character. This is especially true with regard to the believer in Christ; and how often is he exhorted to press forwards and onwards! "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ." "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." "Press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not." "Furthermore, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more."

It is impossible for the believer to pause in his heavenward journey. He is either advancing or going backward--not, while the pulse though feeble yet beats--not, while the eye though dim yet moves, is there a single period when he can say, "Here will I rest." "Forwards and onwards" must ever be his motto; and, as he grasps with firmness the banner of the Cross, and gazes upon it in its blood-stained beauty, and sees those golden letters "by this conquer" inscribed upon it, he must follow where it leads--engaging in fresh conflicts, surmounting fresh difficulties, and

gaining fresh laurels, and the loftiest flight of his ambition must be, to heave his last sigh beneath its shadow--assured that his path is to terminate in glory--that his death will be the death of victory, and that victory the victory of heaven.

Christian! behold the path of the just--of those who, all guilty in themselves, are justified in Christ. It is, as a "shining light." Yes, the believer was "once darkness," but now he is "light in the Lord." Once, he was ignorant of God in Christ, now he can say "Abba, Father." Once, he dwelt in the darkness of sin, but now he has been called into God's "marvelous light." Once, he trod the path of obscurity and gloom, now he follows "the Light of the world." No longer blinded by the god of this world--no longer governed by that spirit which hides all that is invisible, real, and eternal--he "lets his light shine before men"--he "holds forth the word of life." Christian! have you ground to believe that such is your path?

If so, it is also as a progressive light. Even as the dawn of morn creeps gradually on the earth--gray streaks of light brightening the eastern horizon, revealing the dark and distant outline of the lofty hills--gradually illuminating glen and valley, and sweeping away the lingering mists of night--so, from the first dawn of spiritual light upon the soul--even amid gloom and shadow, there is an onward progress--faith, and hope, and love are invigorated--the spiritual understanding is matured--richer consolations are enjoyed, and the heart expands to the warm rays of the "Sun of Righteousness."

And this path is most surely to conduct to the "perfect day." What certain harbingers of the rising sun are the first streaks of dawn! Thick mists may hover over the earth--dark clouds may shroud her--wild storms may sweep along the plains; still, in silent and undeviating progress, the sun will rise--and, as surely as he rises, so will he attain his meridian splendor. Equally certain may we be, that the first dawn of spiritual light is the undeviating precursor of a perfect day of glory. The day of grace once begun, must advance. There may be many hindrances--clouds of dark and mysterious providences; but nothing shall impede its course--nothing shall arrest its progress. The Sun risen on the soul, with healing in His wings, shall never stand still--onwards it will roll in its glorious

orbit, penetrating with its beams every dark recess, until all mental shadows are merged and lost in its unclouded and eternal splendor.

See the Christian, after he has descended into the gloomy valley, and crossed the billows of the Jordan! He stands upon Immanuel's shore, amid the splendors of that everlasting day, whose sun shall set no more. Grace, the day-dawn, has now yielded to glory "the perfect day." The weary pilgrim has emerged from the shadows of his pilgrimage, and has entered that world, of which it is said, "There shall be no night there." Does he dwell on the perils and dangers through which he has passed--the pains, and sufferings, and privations of his journey--the toils, and trials, and anxieties of his life--as if they had been too numerous, painful and agonizing? Ah, no!

Methinks, as he enters within the portals of the eternal city, with its wall of sapphire, and its gate of pearl--as he gazes on the eternal throne, and Him who sits upon it, and takes up his golden harp--this, as it has been beautifully said, will form the burden of his song--"Bless the Lord, O my soul, for His converting grace--His providential dealings--His unceasing care and love. Savior God, You have led me by the right way--I now see by what Your dispensations towards me were regulated, and in what happiness they have ended. I was chastened of the Lord, that I might not be condemned with the world. Though I then did sow in tears, yet now I reap in joy. Often did you turn my gloomy night into sunny day. Many a dark cloud of my pilgrimage have You fringed with Your golden beams. By Your light I have walked through darkness many a long and lonely stage of my journey. Blessed Savior! I praise You for Your sustaining grace--for Your cheering presence--for Your unwavering faithfulness, for Your tender love--I praise You for the pains and sorrows, the afflictions and bereavements of my earthly lot. All were needed. With not one stormy cloud--not one night of suffering--with not one ingredient in my cup of sorrow could I safely have dispensed. Now I can see with what infinite wisdom and tender love You were appointing all, and guiding all, and overruling all the varied turnings, and windings of my earthly journey. Now I find, by blessed experience, the truth of those words which I so often heard in the days of my flesh, that my 'labor has not been in vain in the Lord.'"

Reader, be this your prayer– "Give, O God, to lead and guide me by Your counsel here, and afterward receive me into glory."

"Soon--and forever,  
The breaking of day  
Shall drive all the night-clouds  
Of sorrow away.  
Soon--and forever,  
We'll see as we're seen,  
And learn the deep meaning  
Of things that have been.  
When fightings outside us,  
And fears from within,  
Shall weary no more  
In the warfare of sin;  
Where tears, and where fears,  
And where death shall be never,  
Christians with Christ shall be  
Soon--and forever."  
–Monsell

"Let Reason vainly boast her power  
To teach her children how to die–  
The sinner, in a dying hour,  
Needs more than Reason can supply–  
A view of Christ, the sinner's Friend,  
Alone can cheer him in the end.

"When nature sinks beneath disease,  
And every earthly hope is fled,  
What then can give the sinner ease,  
And make him love a dying bed?  
Jesus! Your smile his heart can cheer,  
He's blest, even then, if You are near.

"The gospel does salvation bring,  
And Jesus is the gospel theme;  
In death redeemed sinners sing,

And triumph in the Savior's name—  
'O death, where is your sting?' they cry,  
'O grave, where is your victory?'

"Then let me die the death of those  
Whom Jesus washes in His blood,  
Who on His faithfulness repose,  
And know that He indeed is God;  
Around His throne we all shall meet,  
And cast our crowns beneath His feet."  
—Kelly

## **ASSURANCE**

"And that is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return." 2 Tim. 1:12

How calm and tranquil was the spirit that dictated these words--how full of joyful anticipation! And, under what circumstances were they penned? Not in the morning of life, when hope sheds her brightest radiance--not in the full vigor of manhood, when death appears still far distant. No; the hand of Time was upon the great apostle. He was about to lay his hoary head upon the block, and to terminate his long and faithful ministry--his unexampled labors and sufferings for the cross of Christ--amid the cruel agonies of martyrdom. From that eventful hour, when the dazzling light from heaven shone upon his pathway, year after year had been devoted to the service of Him whose religion he had sought so eagerly to extirpate, and every year had seen him more ardent and zealous--bolder and more abundant in labors. If we want to know what his life was, we have only to turn to 2 Cor. 11:24-27—"Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the

deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm."

That was his daily, outward life; yet we shall greatly mistake the life of that glorious apostle if we suppose it to have been a gloomy and unhappy one. It was filled with blessedness--the blessedness which arises from inward peace, from communion with God in Christ, and from self-sacrifice and consecration to His service. But, we notice chiefly the fact, that it is no beginner who utters these hopeful words. No; it is Paul, "the aged"--Paul, bending beneath the burden of many years--the veteran spiritual warrior; for he tells us, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." It was thus, at the close of life's journey--on the very brink of the Jordan, when its dark waters were rushing by his side--that he encouraged the young Timothy, feeble in constitution, whom he so tenderly loved as his son in the gospel--who was entering into the service from which he was about to be removed, and who was exposed to the perils and hardships from which he was escaping, "to watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of his ministry."

It was at this momentous crisis, that his faith approved itself--not the leaf, driven by the tempest--not the reed, shaken with the wind--but an oak, more deeply rooted, by the raging blasts of a thousand storms, and unmoved, when the last mighty whirlwinds were sweeping through its branches. He stands before us, in the attitude of calm Christian assurance, with the fire of heaven lighting up his eye, even while the chain of persecution is fretting his aged frame, and the fire or sword of martyrdom is waiting for its prey. The shades of eventide are beginning to gather, but the gleam of a brighter sky is seen beyond, and, with the assured conviction, that the object of his life is fully accomplished, these are his impressive words, "I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return."

We may imagine him in his lonely, gloomy cell, reviewing his past



eventful life, casting his eye on the perilous path he had traversed, and on the Ebenezers with which it was marked. He seems to say, "Time was when I had other hopes and prospects--when another ground of confidence was mine--when, if I had trusted in the world's promises, I had a brilliant prospect before me--wealth, honor, fame--all these were the gilded toys which urged me onward; but, another vision was presented--Jesus, whom I persecuted, spoke to me. His service was void of all earthly honor; I had nothing to anticipate but suffering and shame--the bitter hostility of foes--the unkind desertion of friends--I had sinful habits to break--guilty passions to subdue, and countless dangers to brave--but He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.' I took Him at His word--I embraced Him as my Savior--I placed myself at His disposal, 'Lord, what will You have me to do?' Though the very chief of sinners, He welcomed me; and then I learned the depth and sincerity of His love--the strength and security of His friendship; then I learned the deep enormity of sin--so stern and crushing, that it bowed down a Head of spotless innocence; then I learned that, had I stood alone upon the earth--the God-man must have wrestled, and toiled, and wept, and died, to preserve me from sinking beneath the vengeance of Heaven, and from being stricken by the wrath of the Almighty. I beheld my sins through the bleeding wounds of my Savior, and realized my own share in the dark tragedy of Calvary. Faith brought Christ into my heart, and I believed on the Son of God. He told me at the outset, that I would have the flesh to crucify, and corruption to mortify--that I would have a battle to fight, enemies to conquer, a wilderness to traverse, and a race to run. And I have found His every word come true--the warning and the promise, the danger and deliverance, the toil and the tranquility, the outward suffering and the inward calm; and now I declare, as with my dying breath, that my estimate of Jesus has undergone no change--that what I said, in prospect of trial and suffering for His sake, I am still ready to say--now that the trial, fierce and fiery as it is, has been partly undergone, and even now is at its sharpest. For His cause I suffer these things, 'nevertheless, I am not ashamed.' He is still my all in all--the Faithful and True. 'As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I--but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the

faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' I have entrusted my soul to Him, and I am persuaded that it is safe in His keeping. I am not making a plunge into eternity in the dark--I am not flinging myself into the fires of martyrdom blindfold; but I have weighed the grounds of my conviction--I have looked at the soundness of the Rock, to see whether it will bear me--I have tasted that 'the Lord is gracious,' and, therefore, 'and I am sure that God, who began the good work within me, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.'"

Oh, strong assurance! most comforting persuasion! Christian! do you desire to have the same confidence in Jesus in a dying hour? Then live to Jesus as did the apostle. Give Him your confidence, your love--and He will prove himself faithful to the end. It may not be, that you shall exhibit the same strong faith, or give expression to the same feelings of unshaken reliance on the Savior, but you will have peace, you will have security. Let the shadows gather round you, dark and gloomy--let the night close in upon your weary footsteps, threatening and tempestuous--still the eye of faith will discover the Soul-guardian--the Treasure-keeper--the Friend that sticks closer than any brother.

Do you long for the grace of assurance?--do you feel, at times, a doubt of your soul's safety? So did the apostle. He dreaded, lest "after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway." Assurance is not a grace given to the believer, and never again weakened or removed. His experience is varied, his journey is not all sunshine. There are times of cloud, and storm, and tempest--yes, even when his heart is glad and joyous--when, with a holy rapture, he can exclaim, "You have anointed my head with oil, and made my cup to run over," there are unseen yet powerful agencies at work, to depress and sadden his soul. Today, he is bold and ardent--tomorrow, weak and feeble; today, he realizes the assurance, "I have blotted out your transgressions as a cloud, and your iniquities as a thick cloud from before me;"--tomorrow, he is sunk in the very depths of despondency, and cries out, "wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Long years of training and discipline are needed, before the Christian can hope to take up the language of the great apostle.

But, fear not, trembling one!--Still "cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you," still cling to the assurance, "I will not leave you nor forsake you." Oh! look back on the page of your experience, as did the apostle, and "be not afraid." See your pilgrimage-path, studded thick with Ebenezers, testifying to your Savior's faithfulness and mercy. Think of His manifold gracious interpositions in the past--sustaining you in trial, supporting you in perplexity, helping you, when vain was the help of man. Take these things as the pledges of faithfulness in the future, and let this ever be your prayer--

"Lord, give me grace to trust You at all times--in joy and in sorrow--in sickness and in health--and, in Your good time, enable me truly to say with Your servant of old, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.'"

"The leaves around me falling,  
Are preaching of decay;  
The hollow winds are calling,  
'Come, pilgrim, come away!'  
The day, in night declining,  
Says, 'I must too decline;'  
The year, its life resigning,  
Its lot foreshadows mine.

"The light my path surrounding,  
The loves to which I cling,  
The hopes within me bounding,  
The joys that round me wing;  
All melt, like stars of even,  
Before the morning's ray,  
Pass upwards into heaven,  
And chide at my delay.

"The friends gone there before me,  
Are calling from on high,  
And joyous angels o'er me,  
Tempt sweetly to the sky.

'Why wait?' they say, 'and where  
Mid scenes of death and sin?  
Oh, rise to glory here,  
And find true life begin.'

"I hear the invitation,  
And fain would rise and come,  
A sinner to salvation,  
An exile to his home.  
But while I here must linger,  
Thus, thus, let all I see  
Point on with faithful finger,  
To heaven, O Lord, and Thee."  
—H. F. Lyte

"Lord, when we bend before Your throne,  
And our confessions pour,  
Teach us to feel the sins we own,  
And shun what we deplore.

"Our contrite spirits pitying see,  
And penitence impart;  
And let a healing ray from Thee  
Beam hope upon the heart.

"When we disclose our needs in prayer,  
No we our wills resign;  
And not a thought our bosoms share,  
Which is not wholly Thine.

"Let faith each meek petition fill,  
And waft it to the skies;  
And teach our hearts 'tis goodness still  
That grants it or denies."

**WORRY**

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:34

"I would like you to be free from concern." 1 Cor. 7:32

We associate the Savior's injunction and the apostle's wish together, because both set before us the same great truth, and indicate the same line of Christian conduct. Let not these words be misunderstood. Neither the Savior nor His apostle would desire men to be "free from concern" in regard to their highest--their eternal interests. The words are addressed to believers--to those who have been led to look for pardon, peace, and safety in Christ, the Redeemer; and what is meant by worry is not prudent attention, but anxious corroding care, and that chiefly in regard to temporal matters. Our Lord enjoins, not the dismissal of fore-thought, but that we should suppress all painful anxiety as to what the future may be storing up for us, and rest assured that we will find all our strength and energy needed when the hour of trial actually arrives.

Indeed, He commended forethought--for in the preceding verse He had said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and in like manner the apostle exhorts Christians--to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure"--to "forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before"--to "labor that they may enter into the heavenly rest." In a matter of such infinite moment as our hope for eternity, we ought not--we cannot be, without thought or anxiety. We should be anxious to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ"--anxious to "show diligence to the full assurance of hope"--"anxious to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling"--anxious to "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life."

Even with regard to our temporal interests, we may be sure the Savior does not forbid thought--prudence--care. God has placed us in the world, and assigned to us all duties which require daily thought and attention. From the king to the peasant, there is no lot in life where prudent carefulness can be either dispensed with or rightly suppressed. The Word of God enjoins everywhere--diligence, industry, painstaking perseverance--and, without them, there can be nothing but ruin and wretchedness. "The literal dismissal of all thought for the morrow, would

involve the neglecting the culture of the soil--we would cease to sow, and, therefore, we would starve"--it would involve the neglect of those remedies which are needful for the preservation of health--neglect of precautions absolutely required to ensure our property and our lives--neglect of necessary provision against a time of sickness and old age. The artisan--the laborer, would live only for the day, and leave the morrow to shift for itself--No; this never could be our Savior's meaning.

It is the duty of the Christian to labor honestly and earnestly in the calling in which God has placed him--to use all lawful and innocent means to obtain a competent livelihood--and to be thankful that his heavenly Father has enabled him, by patient industry, or even by hard and toilsome labor, to earn his daily bread. Such is not the care about which we are warned--such is not the thoughtfulness which should be banished from the mind. We may be careful in "providing things honest in the sight of all men"--careful in laying out to the best advantage the portion of worldly good with which God has blessed us--without infringing on the precept here given; no, the apostle elsewhere declares, that "if any provides not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

But, then, while so doing, we must bear in mind, our entire--our constant--daily dependence upon God. We must seek to realize that without His blessing, all our care, and thought, and diligence will be fruitless--and we must, to rid ourselves of sinful fears and apprehensions about the future, "cast all our care upon Him, knowing that He cares for us." We are to enter upon no undertaking--form no plan, make no arrangements for the morrow, with out committing them into His hands, in firm reliance on the declaration of Scripture, that "the blessing of the Lord makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."

How many, alas! disregard and wholly neglect this in their daily lives! They scheme and plan for the future, as if all depended on their own energy and forethought--as if they themselves could turn the current of future events. No wonder "they rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows." Mark the furrows on the brow--listen to the anxious inquiry--see the restless running to and fro--the setting aside, sometimes the total disregard, of higher and nobler interests, for the things of time.

Now, it is this carking care--this wearing worry, which is forbidden by Christ, and is inconsistent with a true and lively faith.

Not all the blighting of cherished hopes--the frustrating of plans, and the failure of the most carefully arranged schemes, will teach some men how utterly powerless they are over tomorrow. The merchant enters into perilous speculations, and tomorrow the crash of disappointment comes--he is left ruined and penniless. The wealthy citizen invests his thousands in some fair and flattering scheme--tomorrow it is found false and deceptive--all his "carefulness" has been of no avail. The farmer, elated by a time of unusual prosperity, extends more widely his operations, and undertakes far more than he is able to accomplish--tomorrow comes, and the sunshine has departed--misfortune and calamity are now his portion. The laborer, dissatisfied with the wages of today, abandons his work, sure that he will largely increase his gains in some other quarter. Tomorrow his hopes are unrealized--he encounters only disappointment and loss.

The true Christian, however, who has committed his interests to God, and left the issue in His hands, should be, "without worry." He has the promise of his heavenly Father, that "all things shall work together for his good." If tomorrow brings heavier duties or severer trials, tomorrow will also bring a larger measure of grace and patience. No combination of adverse events--no stroke of calamity, however unexpected, can deprive him of that gracious care which follows every step of his earthly pilgrimage. He need have no anxious apprehension about the future, for it is in the hands of Him who "does all things well and wisely;"--of Him who knows "the end from the beginning," and sees what is best for the welfare of His children.

Christian! the great and important matter is, to act our part well and faithfully in the present, leaving the disposal of the future entirely to God. It is ours to be careful in discharging the duties of today--it will be His to impart strength for the contingencies of tomorrow. We cannot indeed expect to pass through life without our share of trouble, but we may at all times confidently rely on the assurance, "as your days, so shall your strength be." And, the anxious apprehension about impending evils, can only have the effect of weakening our trust in God, and unfitting us for the discharge of present duty. Surrounding ourselves with gloomy

forebodings and anticipating evils which may never cross our path, we will become faint and disheartened, and our anxieties will but increase the more. Let us "cast all our care upon Him who cares for us," confident that, let tomorrow bring what it may, He will sustain us in every difficulty--comfort and relieve us in every emergency, and "make His grace sufficient for us." The interests of God's people are His constant care--and by His most sure word He has undertaken to "supply all their need." He will not, it is true, impart grace before it is needed--but neither will He fail to communicate it when it is actually needed.

If only we would look to the past, and reflect on God's dealings with us, we will find that such has been His procedure. Oh! how often, in the day of sorrow and distress, has He given the very comfort we stood in need of--the measure of strength by which we were enabled to bear the trial! How often, in the time of sickness, has He relieved our pain when most severe--and mitigated our sufferings, when "vain was the help of man!" How often, too, have His gracious promises come to us in the very extremity of our need--and, "in the multitude of our thoughts within us, His comforts delighted our souls!"

May we not then say, "The Lord has been mindful of us, and He will bless us still?" "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," will not withhold that daily care we need for our comfort. He who adopted us into His family--accepted us in the Beloved--and made us partakers of the promises which are in Christ Jesus--He who has loved us with an everlasting love, will watch over us in every hour of danger, and overrule and control all for our final good. We know not what the future may bring--but we know that it is His to order everything in heaven and in earth, and that, in every emergency, we may look to Him for support. Every need He can supply--every difficulty He can remove--every fear dispel, and, trusting to His guardianship--relying on His care, we may, regarding the unknown and inscrutable events of tomorrow unhesitatingly say, "The Lord will provide."

Yes, Christian, many troubles may surround you--many dangers may threaten you--your hearth may become dreary and desolate, and every earthly comfort be removed--still, amid all these outward ills, anchor your soul on the sure word of promise--"I am with you always, even to the



end;" and let this be your prayer—

"O Lord, give me Your heavenly grace, that I may cast all my care upon You, knowing that You care for me; and, by whatever path You lead me, oh! save me from all doubt of Your love, and bring me closer to Yourself."

"Though some good things of lower worth  
My heart is called on to resign,  
Of all the gifts in heaven and earth,  
The best, the very best is mine:  
The love of God in Christ made known,  
The love that is enough alone,  
My Father's love is all my own.

"My soul's Restorer, let me learn  
In that deep love to live and rest—  
Let me the precious thing discern  
Of which I am indeed possessed—  
My treasure let me feel and see,  
And let my moments as they flee,  
Unfold my endless life in Thee.

"Let me not dwell so much within  
My wounded heart with anxious heed,  
Where all my searches meet with sin,  
And nothing satisfies my need—  
It shuts me out from sound and sight  
Of that pure world of life and light  
Which has nor breadth, nor length, nor height.

"Let me Your power, Your beauty see,  
So shall my vain aspiring cease,  
And my free heart shall follow Thee  
Through paths of everlasting peace—  
My strength Your gift, my life Your care,  
I shall forget to seek elsewhere  
The joy to which my soul is heir.

"I was not called to walk alone,  
To clothe myself with love and light;  
And for Your glory, not my own,  
My soul is precious in Your sight—  
My evil heart can never be  
A home, a heritage for me;  
But You can make it fit for Thee."  
—A. L. Waring

"When waves of trouble round me swell,  
My soul, be not dismayed;  
But hear a Voice you know full well—  
'Tis I, be not afraid.'

"When black the threatening clouds appear,  
And storms my path invade,  
That Voice shall tranquillize each fear—  
'Tis I, be not afraid.'

"There is a gulf that must be crossed,  
Saviour! be near to aid;  
hisper, when my frail bark is tossed—  
'Tis I, be not afraid.'

"There is a dark and fearful vale,  
Death hides within its shade;  
Oh! say, when flesh and heart shall fail—  
'Tis I, be not afraid.'"

## **ABIDING WITH GOD**

1 Cor. 7:24--"Brethren, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God."

Such was Paul's memorable decision in reply to certain questions proposed to him by the Church of Corinth. It had become matter of doubt with the early converts--who were few in number, and thinly scattered

throughout society--who were, besides, exposed to much and bitter persecution from their relatives and neighbors--what was the true line of Christian conduct. "Was the believing wife to forsake the unbelieving husband? or the believing husband to forsake the unbelieving wife? Was the believing child to desert the unbelieving parent?--the believing slave to sever all connection with an unbelieving master? Were they to break asunder all family and social ties--to form themselves into a separate and distinct community, and live apart from the world's society--presenting a united front to the world's persecutions?" The apostle says, "No; Christianity was never intended to interfere with existing relationships; it was no part of the religion of Christ to alter the forms of civil government. On the contrary, it even set itself to the support of existing institutions, by requiring of its disciples that they should be content, whatever their condition." Christian men were to remain in those relationships in which they were, and in them to develop the inward spirituality of the Christian life. No doubt, Christianity would gradually tell upon the politics, as well as the morals of a land. It would, if thoroughly followed out, abolish war and slavery, and every form of oppression; but not by exciting prejudice, or attempting to overturn existing institutions. The slave, who had with joy embraced a religion which taught the worth and dignity of the human soul--a religion which declared that rich and poor, king and peasant, master and slave, were equal in the sight of God--the slave, who had come to know that there was such a thing as brotherhood and Christian equality, and who might thus be tempted and excited to throw off the cruel and oppressive yoke by force, was not taught to labor for the acquisition of his freedom. No; but he was told of a higher feeling--a feeling that would make him free, even with the chain and shackle upon his limbs. He was told of the possibility of being a high and lofty Christian, even though in bondage--told of his true dignity as a man, as a child of God, an heir of glory. Were he to have his choice, then, indeed, Paul bids him prefer liberty. But the great Christian rule was this, "Let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God."

Now, this great truth cannot be too frequently insisted upon, that it matters not what a Christian's walk in life may be, he has opportunities, if he only takes advantage of them, of truly serving and honoring his Divine Master. And one great reason why religion does not advance more

rapidly, may be found in this, that Christian men and women, albeit they are earnest and sincere, do not realize the fact, that they can labor for God, and advance His cause, even in the midst of the most common and menial occupations--that Christianity does not call a man away from his occupation or residence; but in these to adorn the doctrine of God his Savior in all things.

The Savior likened His kingdom to good seed. It was to spring up and grow, raising up other plants to scatter forth seed also, until the whole land should become one fruitful field. He likened it to a grain of mustard seed--the least of all seeds--which when it is grown, becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. He likened it to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened. It was by the leaven coming into contact with the meal that the whole became leavened; and so the followers of Christ, coming into contact with the children of the world, are to commend His religion, and spread its influence wider, by their pure, earnest, and Christlike temper and bearing. Their daily lives, so to speak, are to be perpetual pleadings with man for God; and, by exhibiting the softening power of Christ's grace, by holding up the mirror of a life bright with purity and love and goodness, they are to attract those around them, and win them to the Savior--they are to let their "light so shine before men, that they seeing their good works, may glorify their Father in heaven."

It is true that, in every age, some have imagined that religion must best thrive in retirement, far from the din and bustle of the world--that, in some convent's quiet gloom, away from the dwellings of careworn men, the soul would attain a deeper devotedness and higher sanctity, and cultivate closer and more uninterrupted communion with things above. But experience has proved all this to be mere fancy. The growth of character which is there promoted is stunted and unhealthy. Outward temptations may be avoided; but, from the sinful heart there is no escape. The eye may never gaze on the world's wealth and grandeur, and, by penance and fasting, the body may be bruised and broken; but, to the eye of the soul, other and equally seductive pleasures may be presented, and, while the flesh is writhing beneath the lash, the heart may be lifted up

with spiritual pride, and the faith of the enthusiast be a faith on works, and not on Christ.

Besides, the world is our appointed sphere of action; there, we are not merely to cease to do evil, but learn to do well; there we are to be proof against temptation, and to fight the good fight; there, we are to maintain, not a negative, but a positive character; and, as the servants of Christ, we are to be blameless, not through freedom from temptation, but through overcoming it by His imparted grace. Christian! you are called to carry your religion into the world; and in the performance even of its lowest and most trivial duties, to serve God. You are to strive by His help to "make a bad world better;" and, so to live in it, that men may honor you, and, when you die, that they may miss you. Do not think, that yours is a calling in which you cannot "abide with God." If it is lawful, however humble it may be, therein you may conform to the apostolic injunction, and be a faithful and diligent servant of Christ.

Religion does not demand the forgetfulness of our worldly duties. It is not to be confined to the Sabbath day or the house of prayer, but is to be diffused through all our week-day employments and occupations. It is true, that these must be attended to--true that business, with its manifold requirements, must be attended to--true, that we must labor diligently for our daily bread--true, that we must associate with our fellow-men, and take part in the secularities of life. But into all these religion may, and if we would "abide with God" must, accompany us. We may ply the busy hand through the hours of labor--prosecute our daily employment--relax our feelings amid the enjoyments of the domestic circle--indulge in the prattle of infancy, and in all the joyousness of an innocent heart--yet carry religion with us into all, and diffuse it as a coloring through all the substance of life. Our commonest daily occupation may thus be sanctified--the spirit of our inner life may run through all our words and actions, and while "diligent in business," we may yet be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." We may discharge every duty--partake of every innocent joy--engage in every honest and lawful occupation, in the spirit of the Lord, whose "food and drink it was to do the will of God." There is not one of us--no matter what be his situation in life--but may thus "abide with God." And, so far from religion being incompatible with a due regard

to the just interests and engagements of the present life, it will ever be found that a proper attention to them is secured by religious principles; for, it is by a "patient continuance in well-doing," that we are to "seek for glory, honor, and immortality."

Reader! be active, be industrious, be diligent in your ordinary pursuits. This is your Father's will. Be an example of blameless integrity and of self-denying benevolence--be faithful in the discharge of all the duties which are lawfully required of you, belonging to the station which God's providence has called you to fill. Do all this from a purer and higher principle than worldlings do it, on the high principle of approving yourself to your "Father in heaven." Do it with a view to glorify God on earth--that the religion you profess may be honored--that Christ may be glorified--that the cause of the gospel may be advanced. While you aim, as you may lawfully aim, at success in the business of this life--never forget that your birthright is eternal life--that heaven is the home for which you are summoned to prepare--that immortality is the prize for which you ought to be seeking. And be this your prayer--

"O God, You who alone work in Your people, both to will and to do of Your good pleasure, grant me grace, at all times, to abide with You. In all my wanderings here upon the earth, may I seek Your glory, and steadfastly look up to heaven as my eternal home."

"Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness thickens--Lord, with me abide.  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O You, who change not, abide with me.

"Not a brief glance, I beg, a passing word;  
But as You dwell with Your disciples, Lord--  
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,  
Come, not to sojourn, but abide with me.

"Come, not in terrors, as the King of kings,  
But kind and good, with healing in Your wings,  
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—  
Come, Friend of sinners, and abide with me.

"You on my head in early youth did smile,  
And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile  
You have not left me, oft' as I left Thee;  
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me."  
—H. F. Lyte

"Why thus longing, thus forever sighing,  
For the far off, unattained and dim,  
While the beautiful, all round you lying,  
Offers up its low, perpetual hymn?

"Would you listen to its gentle teaching,  
All the restless yearnings it would still;  
Leaf and flower, and laden bee, are preaching.  
Your own sphere, though humble, first to fill.

"Poor indeed you must be, if around you  
You no ray of light and joy can throw  
If no silken cord of love has bound you  
To some little world through weal and woe.

"If no dear eyes your fond love can brighten,  
No fond voices answer to your own;  
If no brother's sorrow you can lighten,  
By daily sympathy and gentle tone.

"Not by deeds that the crowd applauds,  
Not by works that give the world renown,  
Not by martyrdom, or vaunted crosses,  
Can you win and wear the immortal crown.

"Daily struggling, though enclosed and lonely,  
Every day a rich reward will give;

You will find, by hearty striving, only,  
And truly loving, you can truly live."  
—Anon.

## GRATITUDE

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits to me?" Psalm  
116:12

The Christian, as he journeys onwards in the pathway of life, ought frequently to look back, and standing, as it were, on the shadowy side of the hill, review the way by which God has led him. If we would keep alive our gratitude--if we would have it to increase more and more, until, like a holy flame, it burns within us--we must often, in thought, retrace the varied turnings and windings of our earthly pilgrimage. We are so prone, amid our daily duties and our converse with the world, to forget and overlook the benefits received, that only by a careful and frequent retrospect, can we continue, from day to day, cherishing a spirit of true and ever-increasing thankfulness to God. But, the oftener we make the review, the greater cause will we have for saying, with David, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that you have brought me hitherto?"

Christian! you cannot indeed reckon up all the benefits you have received from the hand of God--for they are numerous as the stars of heaven or the drops of the mighty ocean. Your common mercies--alas! too lightly valued--the air you breathe--the return of the gladsome sunlight--the succession of the seasons--and the quiet and gentle stillness and repose of night--all these, with their unnumbered host of attendant blessings, are scattered on your path. But, select a few of the benefits you have received, if only to awaken fresh gratitude.

You have enjoyed, it may be, years of unbroken HEALTH--or, if you have been visited by sickness, you have been, through God's infinite mercy, restored. While others have been tossing for weary months upon the bed of languishing, and many been hurried into eternity, as in the suddenness of a moment, unprepared and impenitent--you are still in the land of the



living and the place of hope. Look into the full graves around you--think of the myriad sick-beds, with their suffering tenants, and, surely the language of the Psalmist is yours, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me?"

Consider, too, your FAMILY MERCIES. To some who read these pages, the past may have brought bereavement and sorrow. It must be so, in this ever-changing world--

"The air is full of farewells to the dying,  
And mournings for the dead."

But, there are others who have been spared such sorrows, Reader! your wife, your children, are this day by your side--the family hearth has been unbroken, the family circle undiminished--diseases, which have thinned the ranks of other little groups, and darted the arrow into other family bands, have passed by your door. Or, if some are absent from you, having gone forth into the world to fight the battle of life, you have reason to hope that they are well, and are prospering in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, and, in thus preserving these loved ones, have you not had cause to mark the good hand of an all-wise and watchful Providence, secretly and wonderfully working for your happiness and comfort?

Reflect, too, on the manifold SPIRITUAL MERCIES you have enjoyed--mercies, from so many withheld--the Word of God in your home--the house of God to worship in--the means of grace--the hallowed rest of the Sabbath--seasons of holy communion--times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Think, too, of the communications of grace from above--comforting, sustaining, preventing grace--grace for the family and the closet, the church, and the world--and, will you not again say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits!"

Christian! let us help you to give an answer to the question. If you are truly grateful, you will love the Lord. This is the best return you can make for His innumerable blessings--His unmerited favors--it is what He chiefly demands, without which, all other returns are valueless and of no account. This is "the first and great commandment"--the sum and substance of all religious and grateful obedience, that we "love the Lord

our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind."

If you are truly grateful to God, you will honor Him with your hope and trust--you will make Him the object of devout address and prayer for time to come. In nothing does God declare Himself more honored by His children, than in being regarded with firm trust and confidence--and, not only is it true that the more we ask, the more we shall receive--but the oftener we ask, the more readily and cheerfully will the blessing be bestowed. Nothing is more pleasing and delightful to Him who is the Fountain of all grace, than to have humble, trusting souls coming to His footstool, and, by earnest prayers offered up in faith, drawing forth out of the inexhaustible stores of His bounty, what they stand in need of, to strengthen them for daily duty, or to support them under painful trial.

If you are truly grateful to God for His benefits, you will strive to walk before Him in the land of the living. It will be your effort to serve God in all the duties of a sincere and exemplary--of a holy and grateful obedience. You will make the pious regularity of your life, testify to your sincere gratitude. You will endeavor to maintain always on your mind a lively sense of His abiding presence, in order that you may make it your chief and constant care, to approve yourself in His sight.

If you are truly grateful, you will be careful to pay your vows unto the Lord. Such was the resolution of the Psalmist, and, surely, it is an indispensable return for the countless benefits received. Reader! here there is much room for heart-searching--the promise, made upon a sick-bed, where is its fulfillment? the resolution, formed when the star of hope again glimmered on your pathway, where is it now? the secret purpose, awakened in the soul by some providential deliverance, has it ever reached its accomplishment?

Finally, gratitude to God for His benefits, will tend to increase your delight in His service. Your gratitude and obedience are sure to rise and fall together. Gratitude to God for benefits received, recommends us to His favor, and ensures the bestowal of others yet more precious and soul-satisfying. Gratitude keeps His hand ever open--dispensing His gifts yet more profusely. Christian! be this then your prayer--

"O God, endue me with a spirit of true and pious gratitude for all Your benefits--temporal and spiritual; maintain and increase the same in my heart. Grant me the blessing of a thankful spirit, and dispose me ever to take delight in Your service."

"And will You now forget me, Lord?  
Oh, no! it cannot be;  
No earthly tongue can ever tell  
What You have been to me.

"Through all the chequered scenes of life  
Your love has sheltered me;  
And will You now forsake Your child?  
Oh, no! it cannot be.

"In life, or death, I take my stand,  
Where I have ever stood,  
Beneath the shelter of Your cross,  
And trusting in Your blood.

"And then, when youth, and health, and strength,  
And energy have fled,  
The shades of evening peacefully  
Shall close around my head."

## **PRAYER**

"So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it."  
Hebrews 4:16

To the Christian pilgrim, no promises are more encouraging, than those which assure him of an answer to believing prayer. His times of need are so numerous--his neediness so pressing--his hours of anxiety and fear so frequent, that this thought alone sustains his soul, "I have a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God." Is it a time of prosperity? then he has need to pray, "Lord, allow me not to forget You." Is it a time of

adversity? then he has need to pray, "Lord, let me not be forgotten by You." Is it a time of health? then he has need to pray, "Lord, give me grace to use it for Your Glory." Is it a time of sickness? then he has need to pray, "Lord, make me patient and submissive to Your will." At all times, indeed--even when no words are uttered--when imploring no special blessing from on high--the Christian ought to cherish the spirit of prayer. That time, assuredly, is the time of severest need, when no need is felt, and no desire is cherished for a yet larger increase of grace and strength.

True, times there often are in the Christian life, when the soul, burdened--distracted--filled with earthly things, cannot enter into sweet and prayerful communion with its God--when the consciousness of sin and of unworthiness causes it, with fear and trembling, to "stand afar off." But blessed be God, there is, for such a "time of need," a gracious promise--"And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words."

Yes, in the fullness of His grace and tenderness, He reveals the Savior to the soul, as the all-prevailing Intercessor--the Advocate at God's right hand. He turns the eye away from self and sin, to the Lamb of God whose blood is all-sufficient to cleanse and purify. He inspires the earnest supplication, "Lord, undertake for me." He clothes the weeping penitent in the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, so that it may appear with acceptance before him who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" and He draws persuasively to a Throne of Grace--Himself "praying for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words." Precious encouragement! Jesus at the Father's right hand--the Holy Spirit breathing in us the longing--the desire--the humble petition--Jesus presenting the merits of His perfect sacrifice--the Spirit enabling us to rest by faith on the blood of sprinkling; Jesus with His eye of love on the kneeling suppliant--the Spirit animating the soul with hope, and reinfusing "peace and joy in believing."

Christian! remember the throne to which you are invited is peculiarly the throne of grace. God has His throne of justice--His throne of holiness--His throne of providence, but this is the throne of grace. He occupies it as the God of grace, and He holds out from it the scepter of grace. All the

blessings He bestows from it are blessings of grace. They are not to be purchased, but are given "without money and without price." They are not conferred because of any merit or worthiness of ours, but are the free, generous gift of divine grace. Not to the rich and mighty only are they offered, but to the poorest, the humblest--the most abject. Oh, is not this the very throne we need? We are poor and wretched--blind and helpless--sinful and vile. We have no righteousness of our own--no merits of our own--no plea of our own. But, blessed be God, here we may have every need supplied. It was erected for poor and needy suppliants just as we are. And, from age to age, myriads of helpless and heavy-laden souls have gathered round it, and poured forth their desires to "the Hearer and the Answerer of prayer." Toiling painfully through a world of woe, they have here found rest--faint and thirsty in the valley of tears, they have here been refreshed and invigorated--wandering solitary through earth's dreary wilderness, they have here enjoyed holy and heavenly communion with the Father of their spirits--opposed and beset by hostile enemies, they have here found strength, and support, and protection. Yes, the weak have been strengthened--the downcast encouraged--the helpless relieved--the sorrowful comforted--the poor enriched, by drawing near to a throne of grace.

And it is, besides, ever near at hand. Go where the Christian may, he is never distant from a throne of grace. In the quiet of his chamber, or amid the bustle of daily toil--on the bed of sickness, or engaged in the anxieties of business--in the sanctuary, or in the market place--on the Sabbath, or during the week--in his home, or in the street--wherever he may be, he can, at any moment, lift up his heart to the Lord, assured that he shall be heard; and, if good for him, his request shall be granted. "It shall come to pass," says the Lord, "that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry. The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near unto those who are of a broken heart, and saves such as be of a contrite spirit."

Yes; the humble cottager, when he gathers round him his little flock, and, at the family altar, kneels in his lowly dwelling, is worshiping in heaven--

the very scene where ten thousand times ten thousand bright and beautiful beings weave the high chorus of enraptured adoration. The wanderer on the waters, whose voice seems drowned amid the din of the tempest, is speaking audibly within the veil, where is cast that 'anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,' by which a universe might hold, and never know shipwreck. The soldier, who, amid the thunders of the battle field, or by his lonely watch-fire, breathes forth a prayer indited by the Holy Spirit, his utterance is heard above, far away from the tented field and the crash of war--where the pilgrim rests from all his labors. On the land and on the sea, at home or abroad, in the publicity of business, or in the privacy of retirement, "the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry."

Christian! if you would have strength for duty--patience for trial, and deliverance out of trouble--if you would have that inward peace which the world can neither give nor take away--if you would tread the Pathway of Promise cheerfully and hopefully, you must give yourself unto prayer. It is alike your blessed privilege, and your solemn duty. It brings you into the nearest and most intimate communion with your God you can have upon earth. It gives new life to the drooping spirit--it imparts new vigor to faith--new fervor to love--new intensity to zeal. It raises the desires and affections above the things of the present world, and fastens them on the things which are above. It draws down from the heavenly storehouse the richest blessings of the covenant of grace. It secures, in every time of need, the help of Him who is all-mighty--the guidance of Him who cannot err--the protection of Him who rules in heaven and on earth--the love and sympathy of Him, who "spared not His own Son but gave Him up unto death for us all," and who, with Him, will also "freely give us all things."

Oh, then, whatever be your need, come "with boldness" to the Throne of grace--not the boldness which would attempt to dictate to God--not the boldness which would prescribe to Him who "knows what things we have need of before we ask Him"--but the boldness of a loving, trustful child who confides in a Father's tenderness--who is conscious of a Father's love, and who is ready to unburden itself of all its cares, and griefs, and anxieties, assured that He will "withhold no good thing." Come thus to

the mercy-seat, and you will not be sent empty away. You will "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"--reviving, quickening, restraining, sanctifying grace--grace for sunshine and for storm--grace for health and for sickness--grace for joy and for sorrow--grace for the family and for the world--grace for living and for dying. Let nothing keep you at a distance from the throne of grace--not even your sins and shortcomings--your unbelief--your coldness--your ingratitude. Mourn over these; let tears of penitence flow at the remembrance of them--but stay not away--seek the renewal of the "blood of sprinkling"--go to Him who is "a merciful God, full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity." Detail your every anxiety in the ear of Divine sympathy--plead for mercy through the merits of Christ's atoning blood, and rely with humble faith on God's promises of pardon. Repair with every difficulty to Divine wisdom, and seek the supply of every want out of the Divine resources.

Remember, the gate of access is ever open, and the winged prayer will, in an instant, bring the Savior near--in all the intensity of His love--in all the fullness of His grace--in all the omnipotence of His strength--in all the sweetness of His sympathy, and assurance of His death-destroying might, into your faint and failing heart. Your experience will be that of David, "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me. You have kept my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice."

Let this, then, be the language of your soul--

"O merciful God, who have graciously promised Your Holy Spirit to those who ask You, grant that I may enjoy His blessed influence. May He teach me how to pray, and stir me up to greater earnestness, that, loving You above all things, and relying ever upon Your grace, I may be able to rejoice in the hope of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

"My God! is any hour so sweet,  
From blush of morn to evening star,  
As that which calls me to Your feet--  
The hour of prayer?"

"Blessed is the tranquil hour of morn,

And blessed that hour of solemn eve,  
When on the wings of prayer upborne,  
The world I leave.

"Then is my strength by You renewed,  
Then are my sins by You forgiven;  
Then do You cheer my solitude  
With hope of heaven.

"No words can tell what sweet relief  
There for my every need I find;  
What strength for warfare, balm for grief—  
What peace of mind.

"Hushed is each doubt, gone every fear,  
My spirit seems in heaven to stay;  
And even the penitential tear  
Is wiped away.

"Lord! until I reach that blissful shore,  
No privilege so dear shall be  
As thus my inmost soul to pour  
In prayer to Thee." —Anon.

## **DIVINE TEACHING**

Psalm 25:5—"Lead me in your truth, and teach me."

The Bible is the Christian pilgrim's guide-book. It points out the path he is to follow; it reveals the mountains of difficulty, and the valleys of doubt and fear along which he is to traverse; it tells him of the dangers he has to encounter, and the enemies that lie in ambush to assail and overcome him. It encourages his heart, by directing the eye of faith to Him who has already trodden every step of the wilderness journey, and to the noble band of followers whom He has safely conducted to the heavenly Canaan. It traces man's progress, from the corruptible to the incorruptible--from the feeble and dishonored to the mighty and the glorious--from the



companionship of the worm to the presence of God and the enjoyment of celestial communion. It gives him the assurance of strength for the journey, and blessing at its close--of redemption begun, carried forward, and completed.

Blessed be God! the time has gone by, when the pages of this sacred volume were shut by the tyranny of man--when the light was hidden, which God intended should give comfort and peace to myriads. The poorest in our land can now make it his morning and his evening companion--he can there satisfy the yearnings of his heart, and find a rich and sufficing and gracious provision for all his needs. He can cling to it in his darkest and saddest times--in his hours of trial--in the day of his strife and his struggle with inbred corruption, and with the powers of darkness--and he may bear witness at the close of his experience, that "nothing has failed him of any good thing which the Lord has promised," and, with glowing language, though it be with the faint and the faltering voice of a dying man, bear his testimony in the confession, "Your Word, O God, is Truth."

But the Bible is a sealed book--it is dark, unmeaning, profitless, without Divine teaching. Our eyes must be opened by a heavenly agency, before we can perceive, much less embrace, its truths as we ought--before we can adopt and apply them--as our guide and stay, amid the wilderness of this world--our hope and expectation of life and immortality in the world that is to come. Ours must be the prayer of the Psalmist, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law." We must read our Bibles with the prayer to the God of all grace, that He would reveal to us the wisdom, and love, and blessedness contained in the sacred volume--that He would impress them on our hearts, and enable us to make them "our song in the house of our pilgrimage." If thus we pray, and read, and look for the Spirit, He will meet us in the Book of God--He will shine upon the sacred page--He will testify of Christ to us, we will find Jesus in the Bible--our Savior, our God, our Lord, our All in All. Truths will flash in upon our minds we never knew before--comfort will be derived from promises we had often read with little interest, and, gradually, the volume of inspiration will become more plain--in every season of doubt or emergency, we well know where to look for guidance, and strength, and

comfort.

Christian! is it thus you read the Word of God, with the prayer that God would teach you, that He would unfold the riches of His grace in Christ, that He would open up the wondrous page of revelation to your heart, and give you grace to believe those deeper truths, whose meaning you are now, while in the infancy of your being, unable fully to comprehend? We doubt not, you can recall many "wondrous things," already revealed to your soul--revealed, not by the mere perusal of the words, but by the inspiration and teaching of God's Holy Spirit. You can remember that sweet PROMISE which calmed your troubled heart, and made you erect an Ebenezer in your pathway. Was it not "wondrous" in its power?

You can remember, when the world and the things of the WORLD were drawing you farther and farther from God--when your gourd withered in a night--when, perhaps, some cherished idol was dashed in pieces--how these words appeared on the sacred page, invested with new and mightier power, "It is I, be not afraid."

You can remember when TEMPTATION assailed you, or when summer friends deserted you, or when the enemy came in like a flood--how "wondrous" were the disclosures of God's Word--how exactly suited to your case--how comforting to your soul. Not until then, had the verses struck you--not until then, had the words been invested with living power. You had read them often, but you needed not their comfort--only when that wound was open and bleeding--only when that cross became heavy and painful--only when that grief was sorest and most overwhelming, did you take them to your heart; and then, impressed by the Spirit of the living God, they were full of peace and comfort, "immediately there was a great calm."

Believer! continue to implore that Spirit's help, and still "wondrous" things will come to you in your hours of need. Still, the longer you live, you will get the promise, when it is required--the comfort, when nothing else can soothe--the assurance, when doubt and disquietude are doing their worst to harass and agitate your soul--and, onwards still, through all eternity, these "wondrous" things will be revealed. You will read in the open volume of God's Word, explanations of difficulties--the wisdom of

appointments--the love and tenderness of a Father in all your Father's dealings. You will realize then how needful was the discipline you had to undergo on earth--how needful the heavy trial, and the heartrending bereavement--the blighting of fond hopes and the failure of cherished plans. No longer will be heard the murmur, "All these things were against me," but the willing, grateful acknowledgment, "All these things wrought together for my good." "Faithful is He that promised." He knew the path which would certainly conduct to glory--the path which He Himself had trodden, and He led me by "the right way."

Yes, Christian! there will be bright unfoldings in yonder world. Ardently as you loved your Savior on earth, oh, what will be your ardor!--what the overflowing of your love in heaven!--when you find His every promise fulfilled--His every assurance realized--His every word made good--and the whole of your earthly experience stamped with the seal of Divine faithfulness and Divine love! No more doubts or fears--no more unbelieving questionings--no more dark and mysterious moments--no more sad and sorrowful days, but, "fullness of joy and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore."

Believer, these joys yet await you. They may not be far distant. But your journey is not ended, your home is not reached. If, then, you would have comfort by the way--if you would have courage, and skill, and strength, to surmount the obstacles which may lie in your path--oh, let your daily prayer be--

"Lead me in Your truth, and teach me. Lord--'teach me' that You have loved me, and given Yourself for me--that You have bought me with Your blood--that I am Yours. 'Teach me' that You are my Wisdom, my Righteousness, my Sanctification, my Redemption, my Help in difficulty, my Refuge in danger, my Ark of safety across the swelling Jordan, and my All in All throughout eternity. 'Teach me' that Your Spirit is my Comforter, my Counselor, my Guide. 'Teach me' that the promises of Your Word are mine--its precepts, and testimonies, and statutes, all mine--its entreaties, and warnings, and preservatives, all mine--mine by the free gift of the Father--mine by the purchase of the blood of God's dear Son--mine by the teaching of the Holy Spirit the Comforter--mine by a perpetual covenant, never to be violated or forgotten--mine whereby to

live, and mine wherein to die."

"There are those who sigh that no fond heart is theirs;  
None loves them best. Oh vain and selfish sigh!  
Out of the bosom of His love He spares—  
The Father spares the Son, for you to die.  
For you He died. For you He lives again;  
O'er you He watches in His boundless reign."  
—Keble

"Lord, many times I am aweary quite  
Of mine own self, my sin, my vanity;  
Yet be not You, or I am lost outright,  
Weary of me.

"And hate against myself I often bear,  
And enter with myself in fierce debate;  
Take not my part against myself, nor share  
In that just hate.

"Best friends might loathe us, if what things perverse  
We know of our own selves, they also knew:  
Lord, Holy One! if You, who know worse,  
Should loathe us too!"  
—R. C. Trench

## **FAITHFULNESS**

"Remain faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Rev. 2:10

The pathway to heaven is not alike to all. There are those who become speedily ripe for glory--those who reach the close of their journey, before, to human appearance, it has been well begun; while others have to bear the burden and heat of the day, to toil onwards for many stages, and to see the shadows of the evening slowly gathering in upon their weary footsteps. But to all, the words are addressed, "Remain faithful even

when facing death"--"be faithful, even should your life be periled--be faithful until the hour of your departure comes." Life is not always to be reckoned by the number of its days; it is possible for the longest to be really briefer than the shortest, for--

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;

In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heart-throbs.

He most lives

Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

Yet, as we know not how long the journey may be, we should remember that we are called to be "faithful unto death." It is time that tries a man's love to the Savior--time, with its changes and sorrows, its varying labors and temptations. It is the long dark night that puts to the test the watchful servant, and the winds and storms that beat upon him. It is not the fierce onset that tries the soldier, it is the march through the burning sands--it is passive courage and endurance the soldier requires. And so, it is the passive virtues the Christian has to exercise to the close of life that try his fidelity.

Not far has he journeyed, when he finds, that the road to Canaan is through an enemy's country, that a wilderness intervenes, in which there is many a brier and many a thorn, and that his courage and endurance will be severely tested. Foes lie in wait, to tempt him from his allegiance, at every turn in his path. Wherever he is--in the mart of commerce--when he toils in the workshop--when he returns to his home--when he rests on his bed, in the bustle of the day, and in the silence of the night--in the bosom of his family--in society--alone--in the fields--in the church--in his secret retirement--he can never elude the enemy--he carries the foe in his own breast, the conflict ceases not--there is no intermission of time--no season of rest--there are no truces sounded--no flag is ever unfurled that can be trusted; if he halts, it is at his peril; if he pauses, it is to be wounded; if he temporizes, it is to prove himself unfaithful.

It is a conflict "until death;" until the end, it is true, "we wrestle." The oldest Christian cannot relax his vigilance--cannot lay aside his weapons, if he would be a "faithful soldier of Christ Jesus." Faith must be in constant exercise. He must "put on the whole armor of God:"--

righteousness as his breastplate, the hope of salvation as his helmet, the sword of the Spirit, bright and shining--keeping ever near his Captain--looking ever to Him, relying ever on His guidance, and following ever His footsteps. Oh! it is not so easy to remain "faithful," surrounded as we here are by countless enticements to infidelity. It is easy, to live the lives of some Christians--easy, to wander languidly over the soft and flowery meadow--easy, to float dreamily down the smooth and placid stream of time; but, not easy, to climb the rough and craggy cliff--not easy, to stem the tempestuous billows, and resist the downward current. And this is what the faithful Christian has to do. He has to be in the world, yet not of the world; he has to come out of it--not by monastic seclusion, but by mastering its temptations--to be diligent in its duties, yet not absorbed by them--appreciating its innocent delights, yet not ensnared by them--gazing upon its attractions, and yet rising superior to them. If he would be "faithful," he must live surrounded by objects which appeal to the sight, and, yet "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." He must pray, often seeing no answer to prayer, and still pray on--he must war in this warfare, finding fresh foes continually rising up, and still war on--harassed with doubts and fears, he must walk on in darkness, though he see no light, staying himself daily upon his God.

Christian! to be thus faithful is no easy task. It is not in your own might that you will continue steadfast. Like the great apostle, you must look for your "sufficiency" in God. See what Divine strength enabled him to achieve! "He kept the faith" at Antioch, even when the infatuated crowd attempted to drown his voice with their clamor, and "interrupted him, contradicting and blaspheming." He "kept the faith" at Iconium, when the "envious Jews stirred up the people to stone him." He "kept the faith" at Lystra, when the fate of Stephen became almost his, and he was dragged, wounded and bleeding outside the ramparts of the town, and left there to languish, and, for anything they cared, to die. He "kept the faith" against his erring brother Peter, and "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." He "kept the faith" when "shamefully treated at Philippi," and made the dungeon echo back the praises of his God. He "kept the faith" in Thessalonica, when "lewd fellows of the baser sort accused him falsely of sedition." He "kept the faith" at Athens, when, to the world's sages, he preached of Him whom they ignorantly worshiped as "the

Unknown God." He "kept the faith" at Corinth, when compelled to abandon that hardened and obdurate city, and to shake off the very dust from his garments as a testimony against it. He "kept the faith" at Ephesus, when he pointed his hearers, not to Diana, but to Jesus Christ, as their only Savior. He "kept the faith" in Jerusalem, when stoned by the enraged and agitated mob--when stretched upon the torturing rack and bound with iron fetters. He "kept the faith" in Caesarea, before the trembling conscience-stricken Felix, when he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." He "kept the faith" before Agrippa, and, by his earnestness, compelled the king to say, "you almost persuade me to be a Christian;" and, even in the closing hours of life--when the last storm was gathering over his head--when lying in the dark and dismal Roman cell--he wrote these triumphant words, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith--henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

"Look in and see Christ's chosen saint  
In triumph wear his Christ-like chain--  
No fear lest he should swerve or faint--  
His life is Christ, his death is gain."

Christian! the same strength to continue faithful is promised you--for, to every true believer the assurance is given, that if they abide steadfast by the Cross, they shall fear no evil. The conflict, in which they are to engage, is arduous and incessant, but they are not left without encouragement. They have solid armor--they have a mighty Champion--victory is insured to the brave. Others have stood on the same battle-field--they have contended with the same foes--and, having continued "faithful unto death," they now enjoy their triumph. Not one faithful warrior ever perished--none who ever enlisted beneath the Savior's banner ever fell upon the field, for, upon that banner there is written, in unfading characters, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper." Our foes are not mightier than the foes they mastered who are now in glory; but our strength is still the same, they overcame by the same blood of the covenant--they triumphed through the same Lord. Let us, then, enter the

lists with the enemy, fearless--confiding in Him who has all power in heaven and in earth.

Christians! sheathe not the sword, and it shall never be wrested from you--lay not down the shield, and no fiery dart shall ever penetrate it--face the foe, and he shall never trample you down or drive you back. Listen to your Captain--how He animates you onward, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Remember! "here is the time of the enemy, eternity is the time of the conqueror--here is the time of the cross, eternity is the time of the crown--here is the time of the sword, eternity is the time of the palm--here is the time of the tempest, eternity is the time of peace."

Amid your daily struggles--your fightings within and fears without--in the dark hour of sorrow--in the cheerless night of sickness--in the stern conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil--let the eye of faith gaze on the incorruptible crown, the golden harp, and the tree of life--above all, contemplate the blood-stained banner of the Cross which floats over you, and, as you think of its victories, how your glorious Leader once spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in it, and how prophets and apostles, martyrs and saints, the young, the aged, and the dying, have found Him true and faithful--then be up and doing, be courageous like men, abide steadfast by the Cross as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Lift up your eyes, O Christian, and see your day of glory beginning to dawn. For a season, you must remain here; but, yet in a little while, and the helmet shall be exchanged for the crown of glory, the sword for the palm of victory, and death shall strip you of your armor, while angels throw around you the bright robes of triumph. Never forget the banner under which you serve--never forget that life is the scene of perpetual warfare. Here, children of God! here you are, and must continue warriors, on high you will be conquerors--here you stand upon the battle-plain, on high you will share the honors of victory--here you struggle for a prize, on high you will receive it; and, if at any time your spirits seem to flag in the midst of the strife, and the conflict--if, through manifold temptations, your hearts begin to grow cold in the cause and service of your Lord--then, call to mind your Savior's animating words, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."



Christian! "be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not." Toil on, patiently and manfully, in the Master's work--do battle with evil, both within and without. Be gaining daily some new victory over sin. Deny yourself. Be a willing cross-bearer for your Savior's sake, and, then, the long, long rest will come--rest, in heaven, from sin and sorrow, from conflict and temptation. Anticipate that rest, and, let the thought of it nerve you for your daily struggle, and stir you up to fight the battle, to which the Captain of your salvation has called you. "Then, in the border land, to you, as to the pilgrims of old, angel voices will come from the heavenly city--the air of the country of Beulah will be sweet and pleasant, and, as you near your home, its glories will expand to your wondering heart. With Hopeful in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' look up at the Celestial Gate, and see men in bright clothing ready to receive you--see, the shining crown prepared, which is to grace your brow, and the golden harp ready, from whose chords you are to bring the melody of praise, and the seat awaiting you, which you are to occupy as eternal ages roll on."

Christian! be patient--be faithful, "until the coming of your Lord;" let your soul anchor itself on the unshaken Rock of the Divine faithfulness. It is not life, and it is not death, which shall be able to separate you from your Redeemer--all shall be overcome. The triple band of the world, the flesh, and the devil, shall be vanquished in the might of the Triune God; and, when your spirit has departed for the realms of everlasting recompense, angel spirits will chant the anthem over your bier, "Rest, warrior, rest," and surviving relatives take comfort in the thought, "He overcame the world, and the victory was by faith."

Then, "all will be peace--no tempest will beat upon you there, no storms will disturb you there, no foe will assail you there. The tear will be dried, the throbbing heart will be hushed, and the harp, which has often sounded no note, but when fitfully swept by the passing breeze, will be strung for the rich and sweet music of the skies. Then will you take your place triumphant upon the summit of Mount Zion--amid that countless army of the Faithful, who have retired forever from the field of conflict, where every man has been a soldier, every soldier a hero, and every hero a conqueror. With them, you will repose beneath the fig-tree, and enjoy the fruits of peace; and those fruits will be all the sweeter, by the contrast

of the perils through which you have passed on the way. In the enjoyment of victory, you will think of the conflict--while waving the palm, you will think of the sword--while there in peace and happiness, you will think of the danger and the peril through which you pressed to reach that blessed world of safety." Believer! be this your prayer--

"O God! enable me, by Your grace, to fight the good fight--to continue faithful unto death, that I may at length receive the crown of life."

"Lay down the shield, and leave the sword,  
For now your work is done;  
And swiftly towards the glowing east,  
Ascends the rising sun.  
Angelic guards wait with the day  
Your crown of light to bring;  
'O grave, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?'

"Bravely first you upheld the shield  
The path of conquest trod;  
And followed in the battlefield  
The banner of your God.  
The hour of rest approaches near,  
And waiting heralds sing,  
'O grave, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?'

"They come, they come, and high in air  
Is borne the Victor's wreath,  
Who overthrew, in glorious war,  
The world, the grave, and death.  
There, there they wait to welcome you,  
And high their triumphs ring,  
'O grave, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting.'"

## **GOD'S PRESENCE**

Exodus 33:14--"And He said, My presence shall go with you."

The children of Israel had grievously sinned--the cloudy pillar had disappeared--the anger of the Lord was kindled, and the courage of Moses failed. Earnestly he pleaded in behalf of the erring people, and at length he prevailed. The Lord assured His servant, that His gracious presence would still accompany him, in leading Israel to Canaan, the promised rest.

God's presence! Reader! reflect on this high honor. That He who reigns supreme amid the hosts of heaven--who is King of kings and Lord of lords, should condescend to become the friend, the companion of sinful, erring man. Was ever pilgrim more honored? ever traveler in better company? Yet God has ever been, and ever will be, the companion of those who fear Him. Enoch walked with God. Abram was addressed in these words--"Walk before Me, and be perfect." Christian! have you not also realized the fulfillment of the gracious promise? "Yes," methinks I hear you say, "It has been the mainstay--the very life of my faith and trust, in the hour of trial--it has enabled me to lift up my head on high, and to exclaim, even from the deep waters, 'Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.'"

To the true believer, there is no promise so precious and encouraging--it nerves him for conflict--fills him with peace, and animates him with hope. With God by his side, what enemy need he fear? what path refuse to enter? Is he stripped of worldly prosperity? He has One who can a thousandfold make up for the loss. Is he called to resign the loved and the cherished, and to pass through the troubled waters of affliction? "I am still with you," calms the anguish of his soul, and is as balm to the wounded spirit. Whatever else maybe taken from him, he knows that if "he keeps near to God, God will keep near to him;" that, amid flame and flood, amid storm and calm, in pain and health, in peril and safety, "the eternal God will be his refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Reader! do you sometimes feel that God is not near to you--that your confidence, your faith, your strength have failed you? Ah! may not this be the reason? You have wandered from God. His presence is near, but you perceive it not, The world--its joys, and pleasures, and cares, have come

between, and darkness is spreading, all around and within you. Oh! hasten to your Father and your God; away from these passing vanities, and, again, He will take you by the hand, and lift up upon you the light of His countenance. Let our past experience of "the joy of His presence" constrain you to "count all things else but loss"--that you may have the fulfillment, the realization of this sweet promise.

For, if ever you have truly known what it is to have "God by your side," then you know how precious, how delightful is the companionship. It can make the cottage bright and warm; it can sweeten the hard crust, and make even a cup of water blessed; it can inspire the soul with peace and triumph, in the dark night season of sorrow; and breathe sweet music over the scene of sadness and of gloom. Has it not, in times past, hushed the tempestuous billows, with the gentle command, "Peace, be still?" Has it not filled the dungeon with the voice of praise, and made the inner prison re-echo with the songs of joy? Has it not enabled many a tried believer to say--

"Let good or ill befall,  
It must be good for me;  
Secure of having You in all,  
Of having all in Thee."

Christian! Be it yours to "walk with God;"--strive to behold Him, by faith, amid your joys and sorrows--in the family, and in the world--in the secrecy of the closet, and in the daily walks of life. See Him, as He fills your cup and makes it run over. See Him, as He dashes it from your lips, not in anger, but to draw you to Himself. See Him, in the smiles and love of the unbroken family circle, and in the sorrow and sadness which you must feel, as you gaze on the empty chair, or the picture on the wall. See Him, leading you onward, step by step, never failing nor forsaking you, but "faithful unto all His promises." Let this be the language of your soul--

"What though the world deceitful prove,  
And earthly friends and joys remove,  
With patient, uncomplaining love  
Still would I cling to You!

"Oft', when I seem to tread alone  
Some barren waste, with thorns o'ergrown,

Your voice of love, in tenderest tone,  
Whispers, 'Still cling to me!'

"Now that the sun is gleaming bright,  
Implore we, bending low,  
That He, the uncreated Light,  
May guide us as we go.

"No sinful word, nor deed of wrong,  
Nor thoughts that idly rove;  
But simple truth be on our tongue,  
And in our hearts be love.

"And while the hours in order flow,  
O Christ, securely fence  
Our gates, beleaguered by the foe—  
The gate of every sense.

"And grant that to Your honor, Lord,  
Our daily toil may tend,  
That we begin it at Your word,  
And in Your favor end."

—Translation of an old Mediaeval Hymn

## REST

Exodus 33:14--"I will give you rest."

True rest is only found in the presence, the favor, and the love of God. Apart from Him, the soul is like the troubled sea--it is driven to and fro with perplexing doubts and fears. Only in the consciousness of His "presence" is there security, peace, rest. So Moses knew and felt. The "Shechinah," the visible symbol of the Divine presence, had been withdrawn--there was no longer the assurance of guidance and protection. But, along with the promise of His "presence," God also given the promise of "rest."

Thus was the leader of Israel strengthened and encouraged--He trusted God, and verily he was not put to confusion. In the depths of his soul, there was always a consciousness that God was with him--that he had a Friend ever near--a Companion in the journey of life--a Counselor, in whom in every difficulty he could confide, and to whom he could reveal every anxiety, and doubt, and fear. And, when he reached the end of his pilgrimage, the promise was fully realized. When near the borders of the promised land, he received the Divine mandate, to ascend and survey, from Pisgah's summit, the earthly inheritance of Israel. Obedient to the summons, this aged servant of the Lord commenced his last earthly journey. With quiet, unshaken confidence in the God who had led him hitherto, he prepared to resign his spirit into His hands.

Reader! mark the fulfillment of the promise, "I will give you rest." See the venerable patriarch, "whose eye was not dim, and whose natural force was not abated," beholding with admiring eye, "the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea," with the blue waters of the Mediterranean, glittering in the distant sunbeams, "and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar." He meditates, and then exclaims, "Your presence, O God, has indeed gone with me. Your promise has been fulfilled. You are true and faithful. Here, then, is the land where my fathers sojourned--the land, for the gaining of

which, I led the people across the waters of the Red Sea--when Jehovah made bright the shining of His glorious arm--the land, of which He told me it was a good land and large, flowing with milk and honey, full of fertility and beauty--the land, where the hosts whom I have conducted, are destined to dwell in magnificence and might, beneath the banner of the Lord." And, oh! what peace, what rest of soul he enjoys in the prospect of the future--how his eye kindles, as the thought of the glorious Antitype--the heavenly Canaan--rises within him, and he feels that he shall shortly and assuredly be there! And how peacefully he bows his head and dies!

Believer, the promise of "rest" is also yours--rest, in the assurance of God's favor here, and rest in the full enjoyment of heaven hereafter. Do not think, because toil and trial, danger and difficulty are before you, that the promise will fail. Remember, amid outward ills there may be inward quiet. When the surface of the lake is ruffled by the rough wind, far down in its depths there is perfect calm. Even so in your spirit, when on its surface there is a tossing to and fro, deep down in its secret chambers there is the "peace" of God--the rest of a forgiven soul--the quiet of a beloved, confiding child.

Judge not, that all are at rest who meet you with gleaming eye, and joyous countenance, and merry laugh. Ah? no, their soul "knows its own bitterness." Could you read the pages of their hearts, you would find the record of many woes--secret, painful, agonizing griefs, known only to themselves--unforgiven sins, distracting fears, perplexing doubts, which ever and anon, amid the ceaseless whirl of gaiety, send an arrow through the soul. The "rest" which is found in the "presence" of God, alone can be said to have any reality. Then, amid the sorest trials and heaviest bereavements--amid pain and sickness--amid the wildest, the fiercest gusts of outward fortune--it is no strange thing, to mark the continuance of a holy, of an almost unearthly peace. On the cheek wasted by disease, or on the pale and pain-contracted brow, or on the Christian pilgrim, just standing on the brink of Jordan's stream, has not seldom been witnessed the calmness of a heavenly "rest;" and, from lips quivering with anguish--yes, convulsed in the throes of death, have fallen words of meek resignation, and even joyful hope, that told, how the peace of the spirit

can triumph over all outward pain.

"No smile is like the smile of death,  
When, all good musings past,  
Rise, wafted with the parting breath,  
The sweetest thought, the last."

And, O believer! think of the future fulfillment of this sweet promise--when the battle of life will be ended, the conflict over, the stormy ocean crossed, the haven of eternal repose at last entered--"there remains a rest for the people of God." Yes! there is a "rest" in heaven--not the rest of inactivity--not the indolence of a Pagan elysium, or a carnal Mohammedan paradise; but the quiet of a soul reposing on its God, and delighting ever in His service. Labor is rest to the loving spirit--congenial work is not toil; and in heaven, though the redeemed "rest not day nor night," yet theirs is a peaceful, congenial activity. The work, which on earth gave rise to the feeling of effort, then passes into pleasure; and the soul's repose is in goodness--a goodness, which has become a very necessity, and in which, holy thoughts and works are as devoid of effort as song to a bird, or fragrance to the summer flower. There is endless repose, yet endless activity--unwearied, yet delightful employment in the service of God. No more shall the redeemed grieve and mourn--no more shall tears of sorrow and disappointment fall, or the heart be surcharged with affliction and distress. The anxious troubles and the bitter cares of life are never felt in the realms of glory; for there, no seductive pleasure misleads--no ambition unduly excites--no carking thoughts fetter and cramp the soul.

Then will you enjoy a peace and tranquillity--a heavenly "rest," which even an angel's voice could not describe, and be with Him, who has been the source of all your earthly happiness--Him, by whose sorrow you were made to rejoice--Him, by whose grace your nature was renewed--Him, who was your Advocate when you offended--who blessed you all your life long--who communicated to you His Holy Spirit--who showed towards you a patience which nothing could exhaust, a love which passes understanding--who, though you outraged, and dishonored, and forgot, and turned away from Him, would never turn away from you, until He had conducted you in safety to His everlasting kingdom.



Believer! fear not the passage to that "rest." The apostle was willing to brave the swellings of Jordan, because of the beauty of the land that lies beyond it. "I have a desire," he says, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." He was ready to pass through the fiery ordeal, because conscious of the truth, that the skirts of his garment only should be injured, while the soul, safe as in the citadel of God, should only shine with greater luster, rising on imperishable pinions, and resting not, until it should soar and sing with the seraphim beside the throne.

Journey on, then, child of God, grasping firmly the promise, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."

Be calm in the contemplation of your departure; leave every future step of your earthly pilgrimage in the hands of Him who will lead you by "the right way." Seek to have more of the mind of Christ. Be earnest in prayer. Let the Word of God be your daily study--"a light to your feet, and a lamp to your path." Live ever to the glory of God--and, by the faithful, conscientious discharge of the duties of your calling, be "an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Thus advance onward in the "Pathway of Promise;" and, when the close of the journey is reached, the voice of Him "whom having not seen, you love," will then whisper these encouraging words, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isaiah 43:1-3

"Rise, my soul, and stretch your wing,  
Your better portion trace;  
Rise from transitory things  
Towards heaven, your native place."

"God of all grace, by whose good hand upon me I have hitherto been guided in my pilgrimage, hold me up, and so I shall be safe. Allow me no more to wander from Your ways, or to grow weary in keeping Your

commandments. Make me watchful against temptation, strong in faith, diligent in duty, patient in trial, and fervent in prayer. And, in Your own good time, may I be permitted to enter into that rest which remains for the people of God."

"Only, O Lord, in Your dear love,  
Fit us for perfect rest above;  
And help us, this and every day,  
To live more nearly as we pray."

"Spirit, leave your house of clay;  
Lingering dust, resign your breath;  
Spirit, cast your chains away;  
Dust; be you dissolved in death!  
Thus the Almighty Savior speaks,  
While the faithful Christian dies—  
Thus the bonds of life He breaks,  
And the ransomed captive flies.

"Prisoner, long detained below;  
Prisoner, now with freedom blest—  
Welcome, from a world of woe;  
Welcome, to a land of rest!  
Thus the choir of angels sing,  
As they bear the soul on high;  
While, with hallelujahs ring  
All the region of the sky.

"Grave, the guardian of our dust;  
Grave, the treasury of the skies;  
Every atom of your dust  
Rests in hope again to rise.  
Hark! the judgment-trumpet calls—  
'Soul, rebuild your house of clay,  
Immortality your walls,  
And eternity, your day.'"  
—Montgomery

"One sweetly solemn thought  
Comes to me o'er and o'er;  
I'm nearer my home today  
Than I've ever been before!  
Nearer my Father's house,  
Where the many mansions be;  
Nearer the great white throne,  
Nearer the jasper sea!  
Nearer the bound of life,  
Where I lay my burden down;  
Nearer leaving my cross!  
Nearer wearing my crown!"

## **THE CHRISTIAN'S PATHWAY**

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## INTRODUCTION

Those who are anxious to progress in the divine life, will not neglect the more *private* exercises of piety, without which those of the *sanctuary* will be in a great measure ineffectual. *Prayer* is the believer's vital breath; the *Scriptures* are his spiritual food; and it is only as the study of their sacred truths is combined with fervent supplication for every promised grace — that his course will correspond with the beautiful representation, in which the path of the just is compared to the *shining light* — which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

To aid the Christian in his *secret devotions*, is the object of this small volume. The writer humbly trusts that it will especially be of some service to him while engaged in the pleasing and important duty of meditating upon the divine testimonies. It is his sincere prayer that the perusal of these daily portions may be accompanied with a blessing from on high, so that, like the whole of the inspired volume from which they are taken, they might prove "profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness — so that the man of God may be complete,

equipped for every good work."

## 1. The Important Command

"Speak unto the children of Israel — that they go *forward*." Exodus 14:15

To *enter* upon the way of life is one thing; to *advance* therein is quite another thing. It is to be feared that many are satisfied if they have some grounds for hoping that the good work has been *commenced* within them; but such need to be reminded that one of the most conclusive evidences of a change of heart, is an ardent desire after an *increased* measure of spiritual prosperity. No true Christian can be satisfied with his *present* attainments; his great concern will be to press *onward* toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. If we would realize the true blessedness of a pious life — it is indispensable that we "*go forward*."

The inhabitants of a certain country, we will *suppose*, are in a very woeful plight, suffering the greatest distress, and also exposed to the most imminent danger. They are told of another land in which, as soon as they stand upon its shores, they will be safe; and that if they only travel onward — they will meet with the richest treasures, and an abundant supply of all that can minister to their happiness. They set out on their voyage there, and at length they reach it in safety. But, after having just entered upon its borders, and feeling that they are now delivered from the dangers to which they had previously been exposed — they settle down, satisfied with their present lot, and feeling thankful for it. By remaining, however, where they are, instead of pushing their way into the heart of the country, they continue to be strangers in a great measure to its teeming fertility.

So it is with many, in reference to their spiritual interests. They have been brought to see the danger of the *state of nature*, and they have felt deeply concerned about being delivered from it. Another state, that of *grace* and *salvation*, has been set before them in the gospel, which they hope they

have reached. But how many, having just reached it, remain towards its *outskirts*, almost entirely ignorant of what is to be found farther on. They trust that they have passed the gulf of separation which divides the *city of destruction* from the *haven of security and peace*; but that is all. Of the *fatness* of the land on which they have entered, little or nothing do they know.

How important then is the command, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Such, reader, is the word of exhortation we would now address to you. *Go forward*, and the prospect will brighten, the air will become more balmy, and the sky more clear and cloudless every step you take. *Go forward*, and the soil will become increasingly fertile; instead of roaming amid sandy waste-lands and rocky crags — you will find *green pastures* in which you shall lie down, and *still waters* beside which you shall be led like the Psalmist of old. *Go forward*, and you will possess a land of unknown wealth, and you shall enjoy therein a goodly heritage indeed!

Whatever progress we have made in the divine life, our duty is still to *press onward*. To the most advanced believer it can be said, "There remains very much land to be possessed!" Let our motto, then, be, "*Farther, farther yet!*" and may we only regard our past successes — as incentives to renewed exertion!

## **2. The Promised Presence**

"Do not be afraid, for *I am with you*. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand!" Isaiah 41:10

The *Divine presence* is the believer's strength in weakness — his support in suffering — his consolation in the hour of death. The blessed assurance, "I am with you," is sufficient to enliven every scene — and sweeten every condition. Its realization opens springs of joy in the cheerless wasteland of this desert world; it dissipates the thickest

darkness, soothes the anguish of the keenest affliction, and lightens the heaviest load of poverty and distress!

One of the last promises which the Savior gave to His disciples was, "Surely, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age!" He had just given them the great commission to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature — an enterprise difficult and dangerous in the extreme. The whole world frowned upon them; they had to encounter the combined prejudices of the Jew and Greek, of the savage and civilized. But it soon became evident that greater was He who was with them — than all those who were against them. Through Him who had spoiled principalities and triumphed over them, they waxed valiant in fight, and went forth conquering and to conquer. O what a spirit did they manifest, and what wonders did they perform! All opposition, they trampled under their feet. All secular power and policy, they defeated. All the wit, and learning, and eloquence which stood in their way — was baffled by them. In persecutions, and reproaches, and necessities — they took pleasure. To forsake and forfeit all they had — they regarded as *gain*. To be in constant labor and travail — was their ease. To incur disgrace — was their highest glory. *Prisons* were converted by them into *palaces* in which they sang, even in the dead of night, the high praises of their God and Savior.

And whence this victory in suffering? Whence this moral elevation above all the ills of life? Whence this triumphing in tribulation, and rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God? It was derived from the *presence* of their adorable Lord and Master! Having Him by their side — they were strangers to fear, and they went forth, unarmed, unpatronized — to upset the kingdom of darkness, and subdue the world to the obedience of Christ!

And to all His people now, especially when they have any arduous duties to discharge — the same promise is given. When entering upon any responsible undertaking, the believer, deeply conscious of his own incompetency, is often filled with trembling. But listen, Christian, to what the voice from the excellent glory proclaims — "Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand." Should you not then "thank God, and take courage!"



### 3. Divine Recognition

"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand — I shall not be moved." Psalm 16:8

It is a very solemn and emphatic statement which is made by the apostle Paul, when he says in one of his epistles — "Having no hope, and without God in the world." This is the state not merely of those in *pagan* lands, whose understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the blindness of their hearts — but of *all* the unregenerate, without any exception of rank or character. There is a dreadful spirit of atheism pervading the minds of the great mass of mankind. Follow them wherever they go, and the conviction is forced upon every impartial observer, that this is their true condition. Upon all their feelings and sentiments, all their purposes and pursuits, all their dealings in public, and all their social fellowship in private, may be inscribed, "*Without God in the world.*" They have no sense of the divine presence; no realizing impression of Him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They live as if they were indeed the inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world; as if it were the result of mere *accident*, and that whatever transpires, whether in the history of nations or individuals, had no other cause than that of *blind, unaccountable chance*. Were the wretched dogma of the atheist demonstrated to be true, they could hardly exclude all sense of Deity more completely from their minds, than is done by them at present.

With the pious Psalmist, it was quite the reverse. He realized the presence of God continually; he felt that He was ever near, encompassing his path and his lying down, and besetting him behind and before. He endured, like Moses — as seeing Him who is invisible. If he looked up to the heavens — he saw Him there; if he surveyed the earth — he found Him there; if he retired into the secrecies of his own bosom — he felt Him there. God was emphatically in all his thoughts. And those thoughts were not a source of pain to him — but of the highest and purest pleasure. They

were the congenial atmosphere of his spiritual being. They were the moral element which his soul inhaled, and by which he was invigorated, refreshed, and comforted.

Reader, do you know what it is to have a *habitual sense* of the presence of God? Is the desire of your soul to His name, and to the remembrance of Him? Is it your grief that you are living so far from Him; that you do think so little of Him; and that you have no more to do with Him? O, be anxious to possess an abiding consciousness of the great truth — that the eye of God is ever upon you! "You, God, see me!" was the solemn — yet sweet and supporting conviction of Hagar; and may you realize the same devout feeling. Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing — set the Lord always before you. Having Him at your right hand, whatever difficulties and dangers may surround your path — you shall never be moved!

## 4. The Voice from Heaven

"Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him." Isaiah 3:10

The human family is divided into a great variety of social and artificial *distinctions*. The various *grades* of which society is at present composed are, doubtless, necessary; it is evident that they are of divine appointment, and flow from the circumstances and relations in which mankind are now placed. But, in the sight of God — there are but *two classes*, into which the multifarious elements of universal humanity can be resolved. There are only the *righteous* — and the *wicked*; those who *serve* God — and those who serve Him not. Concerning one of these classes the voice from heaven proclaims that it shall be *well* with them; while above the other it pronounces a solemn woe, and they are assured that *recompense* shall be given to them.

That it shall be well with the righteous, appears from many considerations. He is *reconciled* to God, and has *peace* with Him, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In their natural state — all men are God's enemies;

the carnal mind is enmity against God; with such, therefore, it must bode dreadful. What makes the condition of a wicked man to be so fearful, is the solemn fact that *God is against him!* And what makes that of the righteous to be so blessed, is that *God is for him!* "If God is for us — who can be against us?" All the divine attributes are arrayed against the impenitent sinner — but when he becomes a saint, they all join to take his part. Such being the case, having the eternal Jehovah in all his boundless perfections on his side, it cannot be otherwise than *well* with him.

It shall be well with the righteous, not merely in *life* — but in *death*. It is appointed, by the irrevocable decree of heaven — that all men must die. There is no discharge in that war — no release from that mortal struggle!

*Wealth* has no bribe which death will receive.

*Wisdom* has no art by which death can be avoided.

*Power* has no defense against death.

*Beauty* has no charm to death's eye.

The voice of *eloquence* is lost to death's ear.

Even *religion* has no security from death's stroke!

Here the mightiest conqueror is vanquished — and the proudest of monarchs finds himself a slave! *From its ruthless grasp* — no age, no condition can escape! Those who are in the bloom and freshness of youth cannot escape — for "man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity." The great and prosperous cannot escape — for "the rich man also died — and was buried." The wicked cannot escape — he is *driven, yes, dragged* away in his wickedness; the most fearful of all deaths is his — that of dying in his sins! Neither can the righteous escape — he must go the way of all the earth, and become a tenant of the silent grave!

But, at that solemn season, it shall be well with him. When the last sands of the numbered hour are running out; when his earthly friends will be compelled to leave him; when the cold dews of death will be standing in large drops upon his pallid brow; when every nerve and vein may be

racked and wrenched in fearful agonies by *the irresistible power of the grim tyrant*; even then it shall be well with him. The dying strife will soon be over, and through death's gloomy portals — he will enter upon that blessed state where all is peace and bliss forever!

O, my soul, seriously ask yourself the question, what is my spiritual state and character? Am I one of the *righteous*, who is reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and who seek to walk before him in all well-pleasing? Do I know of the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered?

"If sin is pardoned, I'm secure,

Death has no sting beside;

The law gives sin its damning power,

But Christ, my ransom, died!"

Very soon will the solemn summons be issued; even now the Judge stands at the door; and when the midnight cry is heard, "Behold the bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him!" — shall I be found among those who are ready to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb? Of one thing let us be well assured — that it is only as we are clothed in that righteousness which is unto all and upon all those who believe; that it is only as we are covered with the wedding garment — that spotless, stainless, seamless robe, which alone can hide our spiritual deformity — that we shall be acknowledged as those who are worthy to have an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

"Blessed Jesus! this is my petition and this is my request, that I may be found in You, not having my own righteousness, which at best is only filthy rags. Make me righteous through Your righteousness, and lovely through Your loveliness. Being found by You in peace, without spot and blameless, I shall be able to lift up my head amid the groans of dissolving nature, and, leaving a weltering world on fire, I shall mount aloft, shouting with all your saints — *Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we*

*will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."*

## **5. The Mystical Union**

"*Christ in you* — the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27.

The believer's present and everlasting well-being, is secured in virtue of his *union* with the Lord Jesus. If Christ is in him — then no evil can befall him; he can welcome the greatest sorrows and sufferings; he can triumph in tribulations, and rejoice in anticipation of the glory to be revealed. If Christ is in him — he can say to *Satan*, "Do your utmost; exert all your hellish rage; I do not fear you!" If Christ is in him, he can say to *death*, "Come, O messenger of my Father's love — I cannot escape your *stroke* — but your *sting* being extracted, I am not dismayed!" If Christ is in him — all will be well: in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, in time and throughout eternity!

"My Beloved is mine — and I am His!" Song of Songs 2:14. This is the language of the Christian in the book of Canticles. How great is the blessedness involved, in such an assurance! My beloved Jesus is mine . . .

in the dignity of His *person*;

in the suitability of His *offices*;

in the immensity of His *love*;

in the efficacy of His *atonement*;

in the riches of His abounding *grace*!

His *righteousness* is mine — to justify me,

His *Spirit* is mine — to sanctify me,

His *power* is mine — to defend me,

His *wisdom* is mine — to guide me, and

His *heaven* is mine — to receive me!

And what does Christ say to the believer in return? "I am yours — and all that I have is yours! I have boundless and unsearchable *riches* — and those riches are for you! I have *happiness* to bestow, such as the mind in its largest grasp has never been able to conceive — and that happiness is for you! I have crowns and scepters at My disposal — and all those *honors* are for you! Yes, to him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on My glorious throne!"

The Christian's exaltation and bliss is not a matter of doubtful disputation. And what makes it so certain? It is the blessed truth that the union which exists between him and Christ — is an *indissoluble* union! All other relations, however close and endearing, must be broken. That union of husband and wife, and soul and body — has no power to resist the assault of death, the *great destroyer*. But hear what the voice from heaven proclaims: "Blessed are the dead who *die* in the Lord!" Not merely did they *live* in Him — but they *die* in Him; the union remains undisturbed!

All *earthly* ties must then be severed. But death, which breaks every other bond — only strengthens the bond between the Christian and Christ! Death, which *quenches* every other love — only *kindles* that of the believer for Jesus, into a purer and intenser flame! Death, which snatches every other object from our grasp — only brings us to the full enjoyment of Him, who is the fountain of life, the great center and source of all blessedness.

Christian, rejoice in your union with Jesus! The *changes of time* cannot touch it; the *storms of life* cannot injure it; the *sword of persecution* cannot sever it; the *damps of death* cannot affect it; the *malice of hell* cannot move it. It is a union which will last forever. It follows, therefore, that you, if a partaker of it — will be *rich* forever, *safe* forever, *dignified* forever, and *blessed* forever!

## 6. Serving the Lord

"Lord, what will you have me to do?" Acts 9:6

To prove the sincerity of our love to the Lord Jesus is something vitally important. Such as we are, as regards our *feelings* towards Him — that we are as to our *acceptance* at the high court of heaven. Without love to Christ — we cannot be the friends of Christ; and if we are not His friends — we are His enemies, and the day is coming when it will be said in a voice louder than ten thousand thunders, "Those enemies of Mine, who would not have Me *reign* over them — bring them here, and slay them in My presence!"

It is by *obedience* to His commands, and a spirit of *consecration* to His service — that we are to show that we are His true friends and followers. "If you love Me — keep My commandments." In reference to *all* that He commands, we should seek to possess a spirit of cheerful, unreserved, and universal compliance. When He calls us — our language should be, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" Should He bid us depart, even to earth's remotest bounds, this should be our instant reply, "Here I am Lord — send me!" Were He even to demand our lives as an offering; if He required our heart's blood to be poured as a libation at His feet; we should strive to say, with His servant of old, "Yes, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice!" Such, doubtless, will true love to Christ ever be in its *tendency*; and, *sustained by all-sufficient grace*, such it will be, if necessary, in actual *operation*. It will make us to be martyrs in *spirit* — even if we are not called upon to be martyrs in real *fact*.

In general, however, the Savior's requirements are not difficult to be complied with; and without being either missionaries or martyrs, we may promote His cause, and glorify His adorable name. We can sincerely serve the Lord Christ — without moving in an extensive sphere, or occupying any prominent and public position. What we need is a spirit that will lead us to devote ourselves to His service, according to the opportunities we enjoy. All true Christians will do something, even the poorest and youngest. It often happens that the *influence* of many are

very great, when they appear to have little, or none at all. "That child," said *Pericles*, pointing to his boy at play, "rules the world; and," he added, "I will tell you how: he rules his mother; his mother rules me; I rule the Athenians; the Athenians rule Greece; and Greece rules the world." Such was the power, for good or for evil, which that little one possessed. Yes, the feeblest and most insignificant can do something, more in general — far more than they themselves imagine.

But, whatever be the measure of our ability, it is certain that the Savior deserves the utmost of our services. When we think of what He has done for us, and what we have done for Him — shame and confusion of face should be felt even by the most active and devoted. How appropriate is the inquiry, and how worthy of being seriously pondered,

"And is this all that you can do,

For Him who did so much for you?"

Who can think of the *sacrifices* Christ made, of the *sufferings* He endured, and of the cruel *death* which He died — without consecrating talents, opportunities, wealth, influence, all the faculties of our souls, and all the members of our bodies, to the service of Him who displayed love so amazing, so divine; love which originated the whole interposition of mercy on our behalf; love which still glows in His breast, uncooled by distance, and undiminished by the matchless splendors which now surround Him; love, concerning which, when imagination is wearied, and all language is utterly exhausted, we can truly say that it is — as *ancient* as eternity, as *boundless* as eternity, as *endless* as eternity!

"Eternity, too short to speak His praise,

Or fathom this profound of love to man!"

## **7. The Patriarch's Piety**



"Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him." Genesis 5:24

The general strain of the chapter in which these words are found, is calculated to fill the mind with mournful reflections. It contains a record of the antediluvian patriarchs; and although the period of their earthly existence was greatly protracted, we are here shown that they were a *mortal* race after all. The concluding statement in reference to each is, "*And he died.*" They were, doubtless, men of note in their respective generations; but whatever the sphere in which they moved, and the stirring scenes through which they passed — yet all that is said of them is, that they lived so many years, begat sons and daughters, and then died. Their biography is closed in succession with the same brief epitaph, "*And he died.*" All their love and hatred, all their doings and sufferings, terminated there.

But while the mind is oppressed with emotions of sadness in perusing these annals of the early inhabitants of the world — we feel no little relief when we reach *Enoch*, of whom something truly refreshing is recorded. All is melancholy and monotonous in the previous accounts; but when the inspired historian comes down to him, for the first time, the dry uniformity of the narrative is broken, and a flood of glory is poured upon his memory, which has made it precious to the church of God in all ages.

"*Enoch walked with God!*" What a beautiful representation! Seldom have words so brief, embodied anything so important and comprehensive. The sacred writer might have enlarged upon the diversified particulars of the patriarch's conduct. As a devoted biographer he might have told us of his various excellencies, whereby he shone so brilliantly in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He might have told us of his abhorrence of all that was evil, and how his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the filthy lives of the ungodly. He might have told us how he soared above the world with all its vanities and pomps, and how he carried into all the engagements of life, a spirit which seemed to breathe only of heaven. He might have told us how his own will was swallowed up in the divine will, and how entire was his consecration to the divine glory. In accurate detail, and in imposing array — he might thus have delineated the various features which characterized his

memorable career. But, at whatever length he might have enlarged, could he in reality have said more than is contained in the simple record before us? All the other particulars are clearly embraced in *this one, comprehensive, emphatic, and most instructive statement.*

By the *course of life*, which this eminent saint pursued, he honored God; and, according to His accustomed method, God, in return, honored him. He took him to Himself, not through the ordinary course of death — but by a supernatural and glorious translation. And you, reader, if your present course is that of walking humbly with your God — shall not go unrewarded. He will receive you to His own bosom, although not in the same manner; and you shall be numbered with Enoch and all the saints, in everlasting glory! Let then the daily breathing of your soul be —

"O, for a closer walk with God,

A light to shine upon the road,

A calm and heavenly frame;

That leads me to the Lamb!"

## **8. The Comfort of Love**

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." Romans 5:5

The *various graces* which dignify and adorn the Christian's character, are only so many modifications of his *love to God*. What is *repentance* — but love giving vent to its emotions in tears of godly sorrow. What is *faith* — but love receiving the testimony that God has given concerning His Son, and resting implicitly upon it for life and salvation. What is *zeal* — but the fire of love, the Christian being led, under the influence of redeeming love — to live no longer to himself — but to Him who died for him, and rose again. What is *holiness* — but love assimilating the whole character to the

likeness of Him who is its great object. What is *resignation* — but love receiving the cup of sorrow from a Father's hand, and saying in gentle accents, "May Your will be done." And so with all the other fruits of the Spirit; we behold in them a living embodiment of this crowning grace of *love to God* — and a practical manifestation of its diversified operations.

This love exists in very different degrees in the hearts of true Christians. In some — it is full of life and vigor; while it is in a low and languishing condition, in others. As regards the latter, how important is it, that their love should be kindled afresh; for, if the preceding representations are correct — where love *decays*, it will affect the spiritual life in all its branches.

It is true that an apparent weakening of the mere feeling, or sensible enjoyment of love, is no decisive evidence of its actual decline. There is a distinction to be observed between the *passion* of love and the *principle* of love; and it is quite possible for the one to be strong and deep — while the other seems to be somewhat faint and feeble. In proof of this, a familiar illustration may be employed.

Let us think of an affectionate father, who has to labor hard to gain a livelihood for his family. After he has finished his daily duties he returns home to his humble dwelling; his children gather around him, and their innocent prattle, and the many winning ways in which they court his smiles, call forth his tenderest affection. On the following morning he goes forth to his work, and bears cheerfully the heat and burden of the day; and why? It is that he might have something to supply the needs of his wife and little ones. Now it is very probable that he did not *feel* his love operate during the labors of the day in so sensible a manner, as he did the evening before. Having had many things to do, he may have passed several hours without once thinking of them. But this is no proof that he does not then love them; the fact that for their sakes he willingly undergoes so much toil, evinces quite the contrary. And were he, even in the midst of his exertions, to hear of any injury being done to them, he would instantly feel emotions as strong, if not stronger, than ever!

Now so it may be, with the child of God. There are times when he does not *feel* his love operating in so lively a manner as formerly; he has not

that *glow* and *fervor* which he experienced at other seasons; but even then, his love may have suffered no diminution. The *passion* may be less excited — but the *principle* may continue in all its vitality.

These remarks are not designed for the cold and carnal professor of religion — but for the encouragement of the feeble-minded, who are apt to suspect the genuineness of their piety, simply because their *feelings* are not always as animated as they would desire.

At the same time, there is such a thing as real *declension in the Christian's love*, and in all his other graces. The charge brought against the Ephesian believers is one, it is to be feared, that can be brought against many who bear the name of Christ in the present day — "Nevertheless I have something against you, because you have left your first love." They had not openly turned their backs upon God and His cause; they had not, it may be, neglected His ordinances, or profaned His courts by any outward improprieties; but His love in their hearts had greatly cooled, and they were now very declined from what they once were.

Reader, has the love of God been shed abroad in your heart? And if you have some grounds for concluding that such has been the case — it is most important for you to ascertain whether it is now in a *flourishing*, or *decaying* state. Be this your frequent, fervent prayer, "Lord, increase my love; may I be more firmly rooted and grounded therein from day to day; and thus prepare me for that blessed world where all Your people not merely *see* You as You are — but where they *love* You as they ought!"

## **9. The Present Help**

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."  
Psalm 46:1

While God has promised never to forsake His people — He has especially manifested Himself to them in seasons of *distress*. The sacred volume is

full of instances confirmatory of this encouraging truth. Take the case of Paul, when he was summoned to stand before Nero. That emperor, it is well known, was a cruel, bloody monster, and his palace was looked upon by the people just as they would have looked upon a leopard's den. Before him, however, the apostle was ordered to appear, and he had to appear alone. He must have had many friends in the imperial city; but, if "a friend in need — is a friend indeed," their friendship, when brought to the test, was found sadly lacking. They probably gathered around him when there was no special danger to be apprehended; but now they thought it prudent not to identify themselves publicly with him and his cause.

They were friends, unfortunately, of the swallow brood, who retire in the winter and return in the spring — a race which is yet by no means extinct. They were of that class whose appropriate emblem is the shadow on the sundial. When the sky is clear the shadow is there; but in the cloudy and dark day it disappears. But, if they proved faithless, there was One who continued true. He did not desert His faithful servant in the trying hour; and enjoying His presence, neither the ravening wolf on the throne, nor the thirsty bloodhounds around him, made the apostle for a single instant to falter or fear. "At my first answer no man stood with me — but all forsook me: I pray God it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom."

In the experience also of the Old Testament saints we have innumerable examples of an equally striking nature. From such we may select the case of *David* on the occasion of the unnatural rebellion of Absalom. It was with him, then, in all respects, a most trying time. His own *son* had risen up against him; his chief *counselor* betrayed him; the hearts of thousands of his people were seduced away from him. See him, not as when in the freshness and vigor of his early days, he encountered the lion and the bear; not as when he stood undismayed, although single and alone, before the uncircumcised Philistine, who had defied the armies of the living God: but behold him — old and grey-headed, the fire of his youth damped by the infirmities of advanced years. Under such circumstances, after being driven from his own palace, view him ascending the steeps of

Olivet, with his head uncovered and his feet bare, weeping bitterly as he goes along. There he is — an exile in his own kingdom, wandering from place to place in imminent peril of his life. But, although troubled on every side, and deeply perplexed — yet he was not in despair. His enemies spoke against him, saying, "God has forsaken him; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him!" But it was not so; he had *an Almighty helper* at hand, and hence he could say, "I am as a wonder unto many; but you are my strong refuge." In his distress he called upon the name the Lord, who heard the voice of his supplication, and thus proved Himself to be a *present help in time of need*.

Reader, make Him your only trust; in all your troubles — repair to Him! Cast your every burden, whether light or heavy — upon Him. His name is a strong tower; the righteous man runs there — and is safe. And if you will make the Most High your habitation, and take shelter beneath the shadow of His wings, you will be safe — safe now, and safe forever!

## **10. Spiritual Declension**

"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." Revelation 3:2

The personal piety of many, there is great reason to fear — is in a very feeble and languishing condition. It has lost much of its hold upon their hearts and consciences — as an elevating, purifying, and satisfying reality. How few there are, who know what it is — to delight in God, to rejoice in the dying love of Christ, and to exult in a clear and unclouded prospect of heaven! How little is there of spirituality of mind, of mortification of sin, of habitual watchfulness, and of wrestling prayer! There may be no gross or glaring immorality — but in the absence of what would be deemed *publicly disgraceful in religious professors*, there is, in instances not a few, a manifest decline in vital and experimental godliness.

There is something exceedingly *insidious*, pertaining to a state of spiritual declension; and hence it is a common thing, for those who are under its

influence — to be in a great measure unconscious of the fact. It is said of Ephraim, "Strangers have devoured his strength — and he knows it not! Yes, grey hairs are here and there upon him — yet he knows it not!" Hosea 7:10. So it is, alas! with many a professor in the present day. Instead of his soul being in a vigorous and thriving state, there has been a woeful decline — yet he knows it not. Others know it; they cannot fail to observe what an altered man he is now when compared with what he was a few years ago. They clearly perceive that the *world* has been gaining the ascendancy over him; that the conversation and company of the people of God are now but little relished; and that he is far less attentive to his pious duties than he was formerly. But while this is so palpable to others, it is, if not altogether, yet to a considerable extent — unknown to himself.

This may be accounted for by the fact, that declension generally comes on in a *gradual* manner. Had the person passed all at once into such a state, the transition would have been so great, that he could not fail to perceive it. But it stole over him *imperceptibly*, and thus he knew it not.

Another cause of this ignorance, is the *neglect of self-examination*. There are very few who rigidly scrutinize their own hearts, and it is, therefore, no wonder that their piety should decline without their knowing it. It is with many in spiritual things, as it is with some in reference to their temporal affairs; they take it for granted that all is going on well. Many a tradesman, had he examined his books in time, might have been preserved from bankruptcy; and many a spiritual bankruptcy might have been avoided, had the secrecies of the inner man been thoroughly scrutinized, with a full determination to know how matters really were.

Reader, seek to know yourself — for all wisdom centers there. Be honest with yourself, and do not allow plausible appearances to impose upon you. Be continually jealous over yourself, and that with a godly jealousy. The fruits of *self-confidence* have been truly disastrous; while a befitting *dread of self-deception* has produced the happiest results. With the Royal Psalmist, then, let your daily prayer be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139:23-24

## 11. The Great Concern

"We labor, that we may be accepted of Him." 2 Corinthians 5:9

Before we shall ardently desire, and strenuously seek any object, we must be brought to see its worth, and feel its importance; and what object can be compared with that after which the apostle aspires in these words? To be "accepted of Him," was the one thing about which he was concerned, being fully convinced that without it — all else would be in vain.

Reader, it will matter but little what you may possess — if you live and die destitute of this great blessing! Were you to attain everything that mankind regard as enviable; were all the treasures of the globe to be heaped upon you; were you endowed with all *knowledge*, so that the wisest sages should think it an honor to sit at your feet; were the most magnificent *titles* to be conferred upon you, and your *fame* to ring to earth's remotest bounds; were you raised to the heights of *universal empire*, having all the nations of the world as your willing subjects; in a word, had you all that the most unbounded ambition in her loftiest heights and most extravagant wishes ever panted after — what would the whole be if, instead of being accepted of God, you were disowned and rejected by Him, and exposed to His everlasting wrath!

But, enjoying His favor, which is life; and His loving-kindness, which is better than life — it matters but little whether we are rich or poor; whether the sun of prosperity shines — or the clouds of adversity lower; whether we are reveling in health — or stretched upon beds of languishing; whether we are toiling as slaves — or wearing crowns and diadems. After a few more rising and setting suns — *it will not matter a single straw* — what our earthly lot may have been! The only matter of importance then — will be whether we have been accepted of God.

This high privilege is now attainable! To be accepted of Him is not an impossibility. Every barrier which stood in the way has been removed. The ever-blessed Son of God assumed our nature, and was made under



the law — to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. He is the only medium of access to the Father, and all who are reconciled to Him are accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

For the *rebel angels* no such way has been provided. No messenger of mercy has been commissioned to wing his way with an offered reconciliation to them. No multitude of the heavenly host ever burst in the brightness of their glory upon their dark and desolate abodes, chanting the glad anthem of peace and goodwill. That song was sung for us! The peace was to be *on earth*, and the good-will unto sinful men. It was for *us* that Jesus suffered; for *us* He languished, groaned, and died! "He was wounded for *our* transgressions; he was bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was laid upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed!"

Reader, we would have you to be intensely solicitous about securing the precious treasure of which we have been speaking. Let its *importance* on the one hand, and its *attainableness* on the other hand — stimulate and encourage you in its pursuit. It is placed within your reach; it lies at your very door. O neglect, despise, refuse it not, lest you should be guilty of the dream of those who judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life; a dream which will require eternity to comprehend, and eternity to deplore!

## **12. Communion with God**

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3

It is said of Moses that "the Lord spoke to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Now there is an important sense in which the words may be applied to every true believer. He is favored with intimate and endearing fellowship with his Heavenly Father. View him on his bended knees, in the secrecy of his closet, having shut out the world for a while,

with its manifold anxieties. How sweet the privilege he enjoys — that of making all his requests known by prayer and supplication unto God! Is he conscious of his own *weakness*, of the *temptations* which surround him, and the many *foes* which beset him? His earnest cry is, "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" Well, God is there, being ever near to those who call upon Him in truth, and says to him in return, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

Does he feel sorely *perplexed* as to the course he should pursue, when conflicting claims are pressing upon him? He looks upward, and says in the language of the Psalmist, "Teach me your way, O Lord; and lead me in a plain path because of my enemies." And what answer does God unto him? "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way which you shall go; I will guide you with my eye." "I will lead you in paths that you have not known; I will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight; these things will I do unto you, and not forsake you."

Is he oppressed under a deep sense of his exceeding sinfulness, his iniquities being set in fearful array against him, staring him in the face, and covering him with shame and confusion? He knows, however, what it is to look to Him whom he has so often found to be gracious; he therefore prays, "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities!" And God remembers him with the favor which he bears to His people, and in the plenitude of His compassion He proclaims, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins!" "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and your iniquities, will I remember no more."

Sometimes the child of God is in great trouble concerning his *temporal needs*, his earthly prospects being dark and gloomy. But knowing that He who is the God of *grace*, is also the God of *providence*, he draws near to the divine footstool for himself and family, and he there cries, "Remember us, O God, for good; oh! leave us not destitute." And He who

hears the young ravens, hears him, and says to him, "Fear not, my poor child; no evil shall befall you, and no plague shall come near your dwelling. Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who trust in the Lord will never lack any good thing."

Sometimes, looking forward to the future, he says, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." And the voice from heaven proclaims, "I created you and have cared for you since before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime — until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!"

And so with all his needs, and all his wishes — he draws near to God, and God draws near to him, and thus sweet fellowship is enjoyed between them.

There are some who are disposed to sneer at the idea of spiritual communion with God. But let them sneer as they may; let them regard it, if they are so disposed, as a dream of enthusiasm. The believer, however, is not to be laughed out of his enjoyments. *Fellowship with God* is a privilege with which he would not part for ten thousand worlds! Of all precious things, it is to him the most precious. He regards it as the dawn of eternal day, and feels it to be glory begun below! *Fellowship with God* is to him, like the grapes of Eshcol which were brought down to the wilderness; it is a draught from those crystal streams which make glad the city of the Most High; it is a flower plucked from the amaranthine bowers of the Paradise above. In a word, *fellowship with God* is the prelude and pledge of the fullness of joy which is at God's right hand, and in which consists the very essence of that transporting bliss which will be realized by saints and angels forever and ever! And while he gazes upon the toilsome pursuits of men for the things which perish in their using, his language is —

"Let others stretch their arms like seas,

And grasp in all the shore;

Grant me the visits of your grace,

And I desire no more!"

Christian, is there any *ambition* in your breast? Here is a noble field for its display! O how unspeakable the honor of holding familiar fellowship with the King of kings! And this honor has, not only the more favored servants of God — but *all* the saints! This is the *hidden manna* they have to eat — of which the world knows nothing. This is the joy they possess, which a stranger cannot understand. This is the honor they realize, which comes from God alone. They may be poor and afflicted; they may be frowned upon by an ungrateful and ungodly world; but this makes amends for all — "they have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

### **13. The Contented Spirit**

"But godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6

Reference is made in one of the epistles, to "Whatever is noble, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." And among the several virtues which deserve to be thus characterized, that of *Christian contentment* can be particularly specified. The believer is frequently exhorted to cultivate such a feeling, and there are many considerations by which the duty may be enforced.

One thing is very evident — that *there is no condition in the present world, which is free from trouble!* Let us pitch our tent wherever we may — we shall be sure to find something to annoy us! And if there is no situation without some inconvenience, had we not better make up our minds to be satisfied with that condition in which we are now placed?

We are too much in the habit of judging by outward appearances. Things are often very different in *reality* — to what they appear to be. The sun appears to *rise* and *set* — but we know that it does neither the one nor the other. The earth appears as if it were a vast extended plain; and when we used to hear in our childhood that there were people who lived on the

under-side of it — we were greatly puzzled. But since then we have learned that *above* and *below* are only relative terms, and the *mystery* concerning the people on the other side of the earth, walking, as we imagined, with their feet upwards — does not puzzle us any longer. In winter, again, all the plants and flowers appear to be dead; experience, however, has taught us to think otherwise. Notwithstanding the *deadness* which appears on every hand during the winter — we look forward with confidence to the coming spring, and we expect to see animation where all before was torpor, and life where everything had borne the aspect of death. So wide is the difference between objects in their *outward appearance*, and what they are in *reality*.

As it is with *things* — so it is also with *people*. If we judge according to appearance, we shall be led to regard the most *prosperous* — as the *happiest* individuals. But we are assured by universal experience that to be *great* is one thing, and that to be *truly happy* is altogether another thing! Under the glittering robes of the proudest nobilities — there are hearts pierced with anguish, and wrung with grief! In splendid palaces there are not a few broken hearts to be found. To sit upon thrones may seem to be something very fascinating; but, as the poet remarks, "Uneasy lies the head — which wears a crown!" This is a truth which receives from every passing year, fresh confirmation. Let us not then regard those who occupy the high places of the earth, with feelings of envy. Instead of *envying* them — it befits us rather to *pity* them and *pray* for them!

Reader, learn to distinguish between things that differ; and be well assured that things as they *appear* outwardly, and as they are *really* — do often differ, and that very substantially! Such knowledge will tend, under the divine blessing, to make you more *contented with your present lot*, notwithstanding its trials and privations. It is not unusual — to be exposed to things which are grievous and hard to be borne. This is not some strange thing that is happening to us alone — but what is constantly happening to our brethren. Let us lay aside, therefore, all murmurings and complainings, and ever remember that *God's arrangements* are the wisest and the best!

## 14. The Savior's Commendation

**"*She has done what she could*, and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I assure you, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be talked about in her memory." Mark 14:8-9**

*Pious women* are set forth in the word of God, in a very pleasing light. Among those who were devoted to the Savior during His sojourn upon earth, a prominent place is assigned to certain pious women. Who was it that ministered to Him of their substance? Who was it that sat at His feet, and received with eagerness, the gracious words which fell from His lips? Who was it that washed His blessed feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of their head? Who was it that followed Him wherever he went, through evil and good report? Who was it that attended Him in His dying moments, when His disciples had forsaken Him and fled? Who was it that showed such anxious concern about His precious bodily remains, after He had bowed His head and given up the Spirit? These questions, to which only one reply can be given, reflect no little credit upon the *softer gender*, and the respect they paid to the Savior should lead us to give due honor to them. Of woman it is said —

"She ne'er with traitorous kiss her Savior stung,

Nor thrice denied him with a lying tongue:

She, when apostles shrank, could danger brave,

Last at his cross — and earliest at His grave!"

Of the many striking testimonies contained in the gospel narratives concerning women, that which is given of Mary in the words before us, is not the least interesting or instructive. It was not much that she could do — but *she did what she could!* She could not stem the prejudices of the people; she could not silence the clamors of the priests; she could not prevent the base treachery of Judas; she could not rescue her Lord from the custody of the guards; she could not protect Him from the cruelty of

Herod; she could not save Him from the ignominy of the cross; she could not pull out one thorn from the crown which pierced His sacred brow; she could not remove nor lighten the load which sunk Him down to death. But what she could do — she did; she anointed His head with her costly ointment, and thus paid Him the highest tribute of her reverence and love.

We are to remember, that it is not the *total amount* of what we do — which God looks at — but rather its proportionate or relative amount. Solomon, for example, built a house for Him, which was the wonder of the world. Such was his offering to that great and glorious Being, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain; an offering which casts that of Mary, when viewed in its intrinsic value, completely into the shade. She, again, with her precious ointment, very costly as it is called, far outdid the poor widow, with her two mites, which made a penny. But *in God's great register* — the three are set down at the same valuation! *Solomon* did what he could; *Mary* did what she could; the *widow* did what she could. To Him they were alike fragrant, and were equally accepted by Him. O let us aspire after the honor of doing in connection with the Savior's cause — what we can! The poorest among us — can do that! The highest archangel that stands before the everlasting throne — can do no more!

"If the *willingness* is there," says the apostle, "the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." "O Lord, grant me that willing heart — a heart prepared to serve You to the utmost extent of my ability, limited though it be. You do not despise the day of small things — but have often employed the feeblest means and the most insignificant instruments, for the accomplishment of Your vast designs — that no flesh should glory in Your presence. Keep me from being an unprofitable servant; and, remembering that You are not a hard master, may I be stimulated and encouraged by the hope of hearing from Your lips those gracious words — You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of Your Lord!"

## 15. The Faithful Promiser

"For he is faithful, who promised." Hebrews 10:23

The *faithfulness of God* is a favorite theme with the inspired writers. No attribute of the divine character, is more prominently set forth or more devoutly celebrated. Of this the glowing strains of the Royal *Psalmist* may be adduced as a specimen. "I will sing," he says, "of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known your *faithfulness* to all generations." "All heaven will praise your miracles, Lord; myriads of angels will praise you for your *faithfulness*." "O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, Lord? *Faithfulness* is your very character?" It was thus he ascribed faithfulness unto God; and by harping again and again upon the same string — he shows what sacred joy he realized in its contemplation.

Not merely are we furnished with general representations of this interesting subject — but we have innumerable instances set before us, which clearly confirm the above statements. In the history of the church from the earliest ages, what *striking monuments of the divine faithfulness* appear.

There was *Abraham*, to whom God promised a child in his old age. His faith was severely tested by the mighty obstacles which stood in the way, and his patience also by the lengthened period which intervened between the prediction and its fulfillment; but at length the child of promise appeared.

Think of the *Israelites in Egypt*. They were long there in a state of cruel bondage — but their deliverance at the appointed time took place. And just so — with their possession of the promised land, of which God had said that He would give it to them. That there was a performance of all He had declared, the dying appeal of Joshua to the assembled tribes most convincingly shows: "I am now going the way of all the earth, and you know with all your heart and all your soul that none of the good promises the Lord your God made to you has failed. Everything was fulfilled for you; *not one promise has failed*."



Above all, there was the great crowning promise — that of the coming of Christ. Prediction had been given after prediction, and prophets, and kings, and righteous men looked and longed from age to age for His appearing. But, although the promise tarried — yet it did not fail. In the fullness of time — God sent forth His Son for the rescue of our lost and ruined race!

The *works* of God speak the same language in reference to this particular, as His revealed *word*. Day and night in their orderly succession; the revolutions of all the stars and planets moving with undeviating uniformity in their appointed courses through the skies; the seasons as they come and go, following each other as they have done, even from the beginning of the creation — all bear testimony to God's faithfulness! *Spring* with its life and loveliness, the buds appearing on the leafless branches, the peeping plants and the blooming flowers; and *summer* and *autumn* with their teeming abundance, the valleys covered with grain, the pastures with flocks, and the little hills rejoicing on every side — in most impressive language do they proclaim this blessed truth!

Rejoice, then, in the Lord, you righteous ones, and give thanks at the remembrance of His faithfulness. Abundant grounds have you for placing unbounded confidence in Him. What He has promised He is able to perform, and He will do for you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think. He may lay *affliction* upon you; as a wise as well as a gracious Father, He may have to *chastise* you for your evil doings, visiting your transgressions with the rod, and your iniquities with stripes. But this is the sweet assurance he gives — "Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor allow my faithfulness to fail."

## **16. Harmony Restored**

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3.

There are three expressions employed by the inspired writers concerning the Christian's walk, in reference to God.

Sometimes we read of walking *after* God, as in the prophecies of Hosea. "They shall walk," it is said, "after the Lord." This supposes God to be the *leader* of His people, and they follow Him, even as the sheep follow their shepherd. It also implies that He is their *pattern*, and that it is their duty to be imitators of Him, according to the injunction of the apostle — "Be, therefore, followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us."

Again, we read of walking *before* God. He is behind us to observe all our movements and watch all our ways. The command given to Abraham was — "I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be perfect." And the Psalmist, after acknowledging the obligations he was under to his great Benefactor for having delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling, made this resolution — "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

But we also read of walking *with* God; it being said of one of the most eminent of the antediluvian saints — "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." And Micah says — "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you — but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

It is evident that walking together presupposes a state of *friendship*. Where enmity exists between individuals, there is an invincible barrier to everything like true fellowship. If people under the influence of hostile feelings are compelled to meet, it will be with reluctance; the hour that brings them into contact will be dreaded when distant, and hated when it comes, and the moment that terminates their meeting, will be hailed as the harbinger of delight. In such a case there cannot of necessity be that warm and welcome fellowship which attends the meeting of those whose minds are cemented by affection and esteem; there will be the entire absence of that cordiality and confidence which a habit of free and friendly communion implies.

Now this state of feeling between man and man, is a true parallel to that which exists between man and God. All men in their unregenerate condition are enemies to Him. There is in the human heart a natural repugnance to God — a repugnance which justifies to the very letter the

strong language of the apostle — "For the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Now to have communion with God while such enmity lasts, is altogether impossible. It must be not merely lessened — but abolished and destroyed. Not partially subdued — but uprooted and slain — before spiritual fellowship can be realized.

It is a blessed truth, that we, however sad our state is by nature, can be brought to enjoy the divine friendship and favor. The adorable Redeemer has been set forth as a propitiation, and through faith in His blood — God and man can once more become friends! There is no other way of reconciliation, nor has there been any other since the period when the fruit of the forbidden tree was plucked, which brought death and innumerable woes into our world. It is by the exercise of simple faith in the one Savior, and the one sacrifice which He offered — that our guilty persons can be accepted, and our wicked hearts be renewed. Justified through His atoning merits and washed in His precious blood, we shall have peace with God, and be enabled to look up to Him as our Father and Friend.

O my soul, has your enmity been slain? Can you be addressed as one with those to whom the apostle said — "And you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works — yet now has he reconciled." O Lord, give me to feel that the quarrel has been made up; that the old dispute has been forever settled; and may I walk henceforth in the light of Your countenance, and rejoice in Your name all my days.

## 17. The Cheering Assurance

"God has said — Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 8:5

All the promises of God are *faithful* and *true*, and have never been forfeited yet. They are called *precious* promises, and while there are many particulars which render them such, their absolute *certainty* is one of the chief.

"*God* has said" — He is not a man that He would lie, or change His mind. He with whom saying and doing, promising and performing — as far as sureness is concerned — are one and the same. Man, weak, fickle, faithless man, may deceive us; but if we make the *Great Unchangeable* our trust, disappointment is a thing altogether impossible.

But what has He said? "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." The believer is thus assured that God will be with him at all times, and under all circumstances, and that He will especially be with him in every time of need. His presence shall go with him when he is called to the performance of any arduous duties; it shall go with him when he has to pass through the furnace of affliction; and, above all, it shall go with him when he has to enter the dark valley, and bid a final adieu to all things here below. "Don't be afraid, for *I am with you*. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." Isaiah 41:10

We might confidently conclude that God will be then with the Christian, even had no express intimation been given us on the subject. It is not likely that He who was with him during the whole of his voyage, to preserve him from the winds and waves, the rocks and quicksands — will forsake him when the vessel is entering the port. It is not likely that He who shielded him during the heat of the battle — will desert him when the victory is about to be won. It is not likely that He who was with him through his wanderings in the desert, supplying all his needs, delivering him from all his enemies, and directing him during the entire course of

his pilgrimage — will abandon him when he treads the verge of Jordan, and beholds beyond its foaming billows the brightness and the beauty of the promised land. The thing is not for a single moment, to be supposed! God's love and compassion, as well as His faithfulness and truth, forbid the entertainment of such a thought.

Reader, will you accompany us to the chamber where the Christian awaits his death? It is a favored spot, being privileged beyond the common walks of life. Draw aside that curtain, and you see a countenance which, notwithstanding its paleness, is lighted up with joy and peace in believing. His friends are weeping around him — but he is calm and composed. And from whence does this arise? Is it from the softness of the couch on which he languishes? Is it from the attentions and sympathies of surrounding friends? Is it from a retrospective survey of his past life? Is it from indulging a fond hope that health and strength may yet return? Not so! It arises from the Divine presence! This is the secret of his happy frame of mind — "For You are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

"Grant, O, Lord, Your gracious presence to me. May I feel that You are near, in health and in sickness, in affluence and in poverty, in life and in death. Having You, no one can pass my humble door and say — There dwells a friendless person. Having *You*, I have *all* — a sure defense, a constant guide, a never-failing portion. I shall then be able to take down my harp from the willows, and sing in joyful strains —

"In your presence I am happy,

In your presence I'm secure;

In your presence all afflictions

I can easily endure:

In your presence, I can conquer,

I can suffer, I can die;

Far from you, I faint and languish

O my Savior, keep me nigh."

## 18. The Day of Trouble

"Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Psalm 50:15

We are told that the word of the Lord is *tried*; and what is true of it as a whole, is especially true of this portion of it. It has been tested in thousands of instances, and in all cases the result has been alike satisfactory.

In the 107th Psalm, we are furnished with several representations, which strikingly show how this promise has been fulfilled. We have, first, an account of a company of ***desolate wilderness wanderers***, surrounded by a boundless expanse of burning sand. In the course of their wanderings they lose their way, and they roam to and fro in search of a place where they can encamp in safety. Their situation is most deplorable; they are on the point of perishing, and on the verge of despair. But there is one alternative left them, and of that they wisely availed themselves; it is that of calling upon Him who has promised to be a very present help in time of need; and they did not call in vain. "Some wandered in the desert, lost and homeless. Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died. 'Lord, help!' they cried in their trouble, and He rescued them from their distress. He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live."

The second instance is that of a number of ***poor captives***, who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and are bound with fetters of iron. In a condition so helpless, what can they do? Even they can lift up their cries to Him, who hears the groanings of the prisoners, and who executes judgment for the oppressed. This they did; they cried to God for help, and that help was not withheld. "Lord, help! they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He led them from the darkness and

deepest gloom; He snapped their chains."

We have a third instance in the case of certain **afflicted** ones, who were brought so low that they abhorred all manner of food, and were near to the gates of death. They also do what the others did, and the result is still the same. "Lord, help! they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He spoke, and they were healed — snatched from the door of death!"

And, finally, we have the poor **mariners**, when overtaken by a terrific storm. "Some went off in ships, plying the trade routes of the world. They, too, observed the Lord's power in action, His impressive works on the deepest seas. He spoke, and the winds rose, stirring up the waves. Their ships were tossed to the heavens and sank again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror. They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end. 'Lord, help!' they cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress! He calmed the storm to a whisper and stilled the waves. What a blessing was that stillness as He brought them safely into harbor!"

We have thus, successive witnesses adduced for the purpose of showing that the saying before us, is "a faithful saying." "Call upon me in the day of trouble," is the command; "I will deliver you," is the subjoined promise. But has it been according to His word? Yes — is the instant and unfaltering reply of these various classes. "He delivered us, when we called upon Him!" is the language of the wanderers in the wilderness desert. "He delivered us also!" say the poor captives, liberated from their dismal dungeons. And the afflicted ones, raised from the borders of the grave, and the sinking mariners, rescued from the yawning billows, add likewise that He heard their cry, and came to their timely deliverance!

And with Him whom they sought, there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. He is still the same — with His ear as ready to hear, and His arm as powerful to deliver! Not merely was He formerly — but He is still near to all who call upon Him in truth. Reader, invoke His aid; cry unto Him, even from the lowest depths in which you may be plunged; and be fully assured that God's children never seek Him in vain.

## 19. Light out of Darkness

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to all those who keep his covenant and obey his decrees." Psalm 25:10.

Many of the Lord's dispensations are deeply *mysterious*. His way is often in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. Though "*clouds* and *thick darkness* surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." He does all things well — a consideration which should make us fully satisfied with His arrangements, however *mysterious* and *troubling* they may now appear. If we only wait patiently for Him, He will, in His own good time, bring us to see that they all work together for the present and everlasting well-being of His people.

How wonderful were the divine dealings as they are set forth in the history of *Joseph*. He was hated by his brethren; he was sold to mercenary men; he was taken to a distant and friendless land; he was calumniated by a shameless and chasteless woman; and at length he was incarcerated in a gloomy dungeon. What must his feelings have been, during his long confinement in prison? How often would he be likely to ask, "Why were my brothers permitted to sell me to strangers, and thereby pierce with anguish my father's heart, and expel me from my fondly cherished home? Why was that vile woman permitted to rob me of my character, by her slanderous accusations? Why was the butler, whose dream I so readily solved, unmindful to redeem his promise?"

Many questions of this kind, we can easily suppose, would be likely to start up in his mind. How *strange*, how *dark* — would the ways of God appear to be! We have every reason to believe that he submitted without murmuring, to all that he had to endure; but, undoubtedly, he knew not what to make of it; nor would we have known — had we been in his situation. Let, however, a few years revolve, and the *clouds* are dispersed, and the *mystery* is made known. Look at him as the governor in the whole land — as the monarch's distinguished favorite — as the appointed



almoner of God's bounty to perishing thousands — and, especially, as the preserver and support of his aged and revered parent, who had received him as life from the dead. When *Joseph* is thus viewed — all the divine purposes are unfolded and made plain!

The language of Jacob was — "You have deprived me of my children! Joseph has disappeared, Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin, too. All these things are against me!" O mistaken saint! instead of being *against* you — they are all, from first to last, *for* you! And, old as you are, you shall live to see that such is the case!

See Jacob settled in the land of Goshen, living in the enjoyment of peace and plenty, his last days being by far the happiest of his whole life. And if there was anything to mar his enjoyment — it would be the recollection, not of the troubles through which he had passed — but the hard thoughts he may have entertained of that gracious Being who had overruled them all, for bringing about so blissful a consummation.

And what effect, O timid and troubled Christian, should the consideration of these things produce upon you? Should not fear be banished from your mind? Should not *patience* and *submission* be exercised? Should not a feeling of simple, child-like *confidence* be nourished? Should not a lively *hope* be indulged? O never yield to despondency, even under the most gloomy circumstances! Continue to trust in Him — who can bring light out of darkness, and who has declared that what we don't now know — we shall know hereafter.

## 20. The Heavenly Race

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? **Run in such a way as to get the prize.**" 1 Corinthians 9:24.

In running the race which is set before us, it is not sufficient for us to make a good start; unless we hold on, in spite of every hindrance — all will be in vain. Who are they, who will be saved? None but such as *endure*

unto the end. Who are to receive the crown of life? None but those who are *faithful* unto death. Who will attain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Only those who are pressing onward toward the mark, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth, with quenchless ardor, unto the things which are ahead!

It is, alas! no uncommon thing for people to run well for a time — and then to turn back to the beggarly elements of this world. Such there were formerly, and such there are still. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." "All those who are in Asia," says the apostle, "have deserted me." It appears that he had a high opinion of *Demas* at one period, for in the close of his epistle to the Colossians, he is ranked among the saints; and we find *Demas* sending his greetings to the distant brethren in the Lord. But before long, Paul had occasion to change his note, and with deep emotion, he says, "*Demas* has forsaken me — having loved the present world!"

The resolution of Peter, was, in itself, an admirable one — "Though all should forsake you — yet I never will!" Reader, make the same resolve — but not in the same spirit. Let it be your firm determination, in reliance upon Him who gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might increases strength — to cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart. Every encouragement have we to do so. That grace, which is all-sufficient, is promised; and having your heart established therewith, you have nothing to fear. Looking unto Jesus, trusting in Him, and strengthened by Him — you shall reach the goal in safety!

Where are now the mighty cloud of witnesses? Where are the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles? Where are those heroic spirits, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens?" Where are those faithful martyrs, "who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonments, who were stoned, who were sawn asunder, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented"? Where are they now? They are before the Throne, with, crowns upon their heads, and waving palms in their hands, ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb! O think of that blessed band!

Let the thought that they were sustained by God in the midst of all their struggles, and that their faith and patience have issued in so large a reward — impart both encouragement and stimulus to you — to hold fast the beginning of your confidence, steadfast unto the end!

## 21. The Heart Established

"For it is a good thing that the heart is established with grace." Hebrews 13:9

The benefits which flow from the possession of grace, are numerous and exceedingly important. It is only as our hearts are established with grace — that we shall be preserved from departing from the living God; that we shall successfully resist the temptations of our spiritual adversaries; and, especially, that we shall be able to exercise a spirit of uncomplaining submission under the afflictive dispensations of divine providence. The inquiry of the prophet is — "Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" To complain, however, under what is trying and painful — is what human nature always did, and is, doubtless, what it ever will do. How is it with nature, under crosses? It is like a goaded and wounded animal — it skulks, and groans, and growls. But how is it with grace? She kisses the hand that is uplifted; the stroke she meekly and uncomplainingly receives, and says with him of old — "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good unto Him." The language of nature is — "This evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for him any longer?" But what is the language of grace? It is — "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" The evil referred to, being not *moral* — but *penal* evil. The language of nature is that of Job's wife — "Curse God, and die!" But what is the language of grace? It is that of the afflicted patriarch himself, when, with uplifted hands and eyes, he exclaimed, "Though he slays me — yet will I trust in him!"

It is quite certain, that there can be no murmuring when grace is in lively operation. If it cannot do as *Job* did, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord;" it will do as *Aaron* did,

of whom it is said, that "he held his peace." It will silently *submit* — if it cannot *bless* and *adore*.

But we cannot do better than point to the *Great Head*, as an example of patience and suffering affliction. Never were there sorrows like unto His. But if His sufferings were great, He was full of grace, and it was not by measure, that the Spirit, in His diversified gifts and graces, was given to Him. And how did that great grace operate under the extremity of grief which He bore in our stead? It was in a spirit of entire resignation to the divine will. Had He to endure the opposition of His enemies, and the fickleness of His friends? Had He to endure the malice of hell, and, especially, the dread indignation of heaven? But, in the midst of all, there was no murmuring. "When they hurled their insults at Him — He did not retaliate; when He suffered — He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly."

Christian, are you for bearing your sufferings — as the Savior bore His? If you are, seek that grace which, not only was strikingly exemplified by Him — but which also dwells in unbounded plenitude in Him. It has pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell; and happy are those who can say, "Of his fullness have we received, and grace for grace."

At an examination of the deaf and dumb, in one of those excellent institutions, where such of our afflicted fellow-creatures are taught, the following incident is recorded as having taken place. To one of the children, a gentleman present put the question, Who created the world? The little creature wrote in reply on his slate, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Who redeemed mankind? was the next question; and no sooner was it asked, than the answer was given — "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish — but have everlasting life." And who was it, was the third question, who made you deaf and dumb? At this unexpected inquiry, the little one was deeply affected, and burst into a flood of tears; but, after having in a measure recovered himself, he wrote with a trembling hand, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." Dear boy! he had learned an important lesson — and well would it be for you, reader, to learn the same; so that under every affliction and distress, whether in mind, body, or estate, your language might be, "Even

so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight." Possessing such a spirit, you will derive from the most painful dispensations, those peaceable fruits which they were intended to produce — and God will be glorified thereby!

## 22. Rejoicing in God

"They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance; in your name shall they rejoice all the day; and in your righteousness shall they be exalted." Psalm 89:15, 16.

The happiness of the believer, consists in the enjoyment of God's approbation. In His *favor* is life — and in His *frown* is death. The one is realized in full perfection by the saints in heaven; the other in, perhaps, equal perfection by the lost in hell. The one are rejoicing under His smiles, and the other are withering under His frowns; and it is in this that their respective happiness and misery emphatically consist. But God is now angry with the wicked every day, and He is also pleased with His people, over whom He rejoices with joy, even as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. Thus, while the smiles of God constitute the happiness of heaven, the believer, while walking in the light of His countenance, has his heaven begun below. His joy is of the same nature, and emanates from the same source, as that of the perfected spirits above. Should we not be anxious, therefore, to partake of the Christian's joy? "Many are asking — 'Who can show us any good?' Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."

Glad, indeed, may be he who is blessed with such a blessing. How reasonable is it that he should rejoice in the divine name — who possesses the divine favor. His outward circumstances may be anything but prosperous; he may meet with numerous reverses, and be exposed to the greatest distress. But what says the prophet? "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the

flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

It is a common prejudice against true religion, that it is associated with gloom and sadness, and that its requirements are incompatible with happiness. Those who entertain such a view allow that it leads to heaven hereafter — but they regard it as being little better than *penance* here. They admit that it conducts its possessors to the realms of bliss — but it is by a way, they imagine, as gloomy as the shadow of death. Some pious people, by their austere spirit and mournful aspect, have, doubtless, helped to foster such an impression; but it is evident that *the tendency of true religion is to make its subjects at once, both holy and happy*. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

And what a ground for rejoicing is furnished by the statement — "In your righteousness shall they be exalted." This is the best robe in which returning prodigals are clad; it is the wedding garment which qualifies the believer for sitting down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; it is the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints. Clothed in this pure and spotless dress, we shall be highly exalted — exalted from a state of alienation — to be friends, yes, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ — exalted from the tribulations and frailties of time — to the thrones and palaces of eternity. Such is the blessedness realized by, and such the glorious destiny in reserve for, all who know the joyful sound. O my soul, do you know it? Has the gospel come to you, not in word only — but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance? If so, you may well rejoice, even with exceeding joy!

## **23. The Sure Hope**

"And has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."  
2 Thessalonians 2:16

The Christian's hope well deserves the appellation given to it here. It rests upon a good foundation, being built, not on the shifting sand — but on

the rock of ages! O blessed hope! a hope that is sure and steadfast. It cannot be overthrown by all the malice of men, or all the rage of devils. The *tempests of time* cannot destroy it, neither can the *waters of death* quench it. It defies the war of elements, triumphs amid the wreck of matter, and smiles at the crash of worlds! Its most glorious anticipations will be realized on that great day, when the hope of the wicked will be extinguished in the blackness of darkness forever.

"And hope," says the apostle, "makes not ashamed;" but it is only to this good hope that the words will apply. Those who possess it will not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. Men may raise expectations which will never be accomplished; but "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." How decisive are the declarations of His word as to the absolute certainty of those things which He has promised to His people. "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Having such assurances, our language may well be, "It is enough!" How clearly do they show that the expectation of the righteous shall not be cut off, and that his hope will never be as the giving up of the Spirit.

Reader, it befits you to look well to the nature and grounds of your hope. For it to disappoint you at last, will be sad indeed. We ask then —

"What is your hope? Will it stand the test

Of nature's expiring hour?

Like armor of proof, will it shield your breast,

Against the grim tyrant's power?

Will it gladden your soul, and dispel the gloom,

The horrors of darkness which veil the tomb,

When the damps of death to your brow shall start,  
And the life-blood ebbs from your freezing heart?  
Away with it else! — it is worse than vain  
To cherish a hope that will fail you then!  
But you hope in Christ! to a dying hour  
This hope sweet assurance brings,  
When worldly preferments, and wealth, and power,  
Shall all be forgotten things.  
Yes, you hope in Christ, though a feeble worm,  
And your soul shall be safe, and your confidence firm;  
You shall traverse in triumph the gloomy abyss,  
Which divides the eternal world from this;  
And consigning in hope your frail flesh to the sod,  
Your soul shall ascend to your Savior and God!"

## **24. Trusting in Christ**

"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."  
Ephesians 1:12

Trusting in Christ is, in the most emphatic sense, one of "the things which accompany salvation." All who are strangers to it have no part or lot in those spiritual blessings which are in Him. How important is it, then, that we should have proper views of its nature; for to err in reference to such a



subject cannot fail to affect our eternal safety.

Our trust in Christ, in order to be availing, must be ***exclusive***. Of this many appear to be ignorant, or unmindful, for they think it necessary to mix up some supposed *worthiness* of their own with His finished work. But this will never do. Like the feet in Nebuchadnezzar's image, partly of iron and partly of clay — such diverse ingredients, possessing no property of coherence, cannot possibly stand. No, the word has gone forth and shall not return; the counsels of eternity have settled it, and every page of the inspired volume in the most explicit manner declares it — that "no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have — Jesus Christ."

Let us see to it, then, as we value our soul's salvation, that Christ is our only trust. *Merits* of our own we have none. Of this the true believer is fully conscious, and hence his language is —

"Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to your cross I cling;

Naked, come to you for dress;

Helpless, look to you for grace;

Guilty, to the fountain fly;

Wash me, Savior, or I die!

Not the labor of my hands

Can fulfill your law's demands;

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone;

You must save, and you alone!"

In the next place, our trust in Christ must be *implicit*. This feature may be illustrated by a familiar comparison. A physician is sent for, to visit a sick person, and after examining the case, he writes out a prescription. The patient, however, tells him that he will not take a single spoonful of the medicine unless he is informed of what it is composed, how the various ingredients are likely to act, and what effects they are intended to produce. If the explanations are satisfactory, and the course to be pursued meets his approbation, he promises to follow the advice given. The physician informs him that he is not accustomed to do anything of the kind, and that no reasonable man would expect it from him. "I always take it for granted," he says, "that I know what to prescribe for my patients better than they do themselves; and if you have no confidence in me, the sooner my visits are discontinued the better." Now such language commends itself at once as just and appropriate; for every person possessed of the least grain of common sense must acknowledge that to place implicit trust in his medical adviser, is one of the first duties which a patient owes to him. And that earthly physician's claim is demanded by Christ, the great Physician of souls. He requires of us to trust Him — to trust His skill, His wisdom, His power, His tenderness, His fidelity — and that with a full and unquestioning acquiescence. And what ample grounds have we for doing so!

We would further observe that our trust in Him should be *continuous*. An unspeakable importance belongs to what the apostle calls, "the beginning of our confidence;" but such an act must be again and again repeated. The Christian's life is throughout a life of faith; by whatever his pathway may be distinguished, this is one of its most prominent features. And as trust is either an essential element of faith, or its inseparable adjunct, it follows that it is to be exercised during the believer's whole career. Through life and in death his language should be, "Into your hands I commit my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Happy is the man who thus trusts in Him; he will not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. Reader, may His happiness be yours; and rest not until you can say, "I know whom I have trusted, and am

persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

## 25. The Needful Duty

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."  
2 Corinthians 13:5

We are frequently called upon to look **backward** — to look to the rock from whence we were hewn, and the whole of the pit from whence we were dug; and such a retrospect will be likely to fill us with deep *humility* on the one hand, and with, fervent *gratitude* on the other.

At other times we are exhorted to look **forward**; and in proportion as we are under the influence of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen — we shall undoubtedly do so; it being the special province of that divine principle, not merely to make *hidden* objects visible — but to bring *distant* objects near.

We are likewise often directed to look **upward**. Owing to our proneness to cleave to the dust, and earthly things, the voice from heaven proclaims in our ears, "If you then are risen with Christ — seek those things which are above."

But in the words before us we are commanded to look **inward**; it is an exhortation which calls upon us to turn our attention from all outward objects, in order to cultivate a closer acquaintance with ourselves.

In enforcing this duty two expressions are employed. The first is, "Examine yourselves;" let a diligent and impartial search be made into your spiritual state and character. But it is added, "test yourselves;" in allusion, probably, to the manner in which metals are tested for the purpose of ascertaining whether they are pure or alloyed. We, in like manner, should bring our motives, principles, tempers, language, and actions — to the test, that we may find out whether they are false or true,

counterfeit or genuine.

The test by which we are to prove ourselves is the word of God. This is one of the special purposes to which the scriptures should be applied. They have many other uses, all of which are of the most important kind. An excellent — but somewhat eccentric minister observed on one occasion in the application of his discourse, that his subject might be improved in four different ways. First, as a *whetstone*; secondly, as a *loadstone*; thirdly, as a *milestone*; and fourthly, as a *touchstone*. And what he thus quaintly said of the special topic on which he had been insisting, can be applied to divine truth at large. It is a **whetstone**, sharpening our dullness, and giving a keener edge to all our feelings and exercises. It is a **loadstone**, drawing us from our distance from God, and attracting our desires and affections from the objects of time and sense — to heaven and heavenly things. It is a **milestone**, not merely pointing out the way of life — but telling us of the progress we have made in our journey; whether we are advancing towards the shining city, or whether we are going backward, or standing still. And it is especially a **touchstone**, evincing what we really are; whether our coin is of celestial currency, or whether it can be said of us, "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord has rejected them."

Reader, dread above all things — the thought of self-deception. How dreadful it would be — for you to *imagine* that you are justified before God — and yet to *remain* under the condemning sentence of His righteous law! To take it for granted that you are renewed by the washing of regeneration — and yet to have no part or lot in the matter, being still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity! To suppose that you are traveling to *heaven* — and yet to be approaching, day after day, nearer and nearer to *hell*! May God, in His infinite mercy, preserve you from such a state!

## 26. The Arduous Struggle

"Conflicts on the outside, fears within." 2 Corinthians 7:5

Says Peter, "if the righteous is saved with *difficulty*." The words clearly show that the Christian's pathway is beset with difficulties; and that it is not that easy work, which many seem to imagine, to get to heaven. How startling is the announcement — "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms!" Christian! all the armed legions of hell are against you! And if, with all their combined energies, they can keep you out of heaven — out of heaven you will assuredly be! No diligence will be lacking on their part to draw you astray, and prevent you from ever reaching that blessed abode. And were you properly to realize the solemn fact that such mighty and malicious foes surround you, and that their sleepless aim and object is to effect your destruction — it would be impossible for you to be lukewarm or unconcerned! "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the **devil**, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour!"

And then there is the **flesh**, with its deceitful lusts, which war against the soul. There is the **world** also, with its pomps and pleasures, its smiles and frowns! The world in various ways endeavors to win our affections; or by its cares to engross our thoughts. And saved we cannot be — unless we overcome the world, unless we crucify the flesh, and unless we resist and defeat the devil.

It is said in the book of Revelation, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven." There will, doubtless, be innumerable wonders there. "I believe," says one, "that heaven will be a place of eternal surprise." We may be quite certain that it contains countless objects which cannot fail to excite such a feeling. But, whatever its wonders may be — to see a *sinner* there will be, perhaps, the greatest of all. If we only think of the many storms he has to weather, the determined enemies he has to subdue, the many formidable oppositions and difficulties which he has to encounter; and he, in himself, weaker than the bruised reed, which the feeblest breath might destroy: it will truly be a marvelous thing to see such a one —

"Safely landed on that peaceful shore,

Where pilgrims meet to part no more."

When the spirit of righteous Abel was admitted through the everlasting gates, it might with truth have been said, "There appeared a great wonder in heaven." And in reference to all who followed him — followed him in the conflict here, and in the triumphant entrance there — the same words could be repeated. God grant that you, reader, may appear as an object of eternal wonder in that blessed world! But that cannot be unless you are made a monument of His wondrous grace on earth, being brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel. You will then be even now, as was the Psalmist, "a wonder unto many;" and especially will you be a wonder unto yourself! If you have any grounds to believe that such is the case, it is your reasonable service to magnify His adorable name, who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." All His works, which are great and marvelous, praise Him; but His saints, with all their powers of heart and tongue, should bless Him. Then,

"Give to our God immortal praise;

Mercy and truth are all his ways:

Wonders of grace to God belong,

Repeat his mercies in your song!"

## **27. Gracious Dealings**

"I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you have afflicted me in faithfulness." Psalm 119:75

The character of the Divine Being as "excellent in counsel, and wonderful in working," has been strikingly exemplified in His dealings with many of His suffering saints. Of this we have a memorable instance in the case of the patriarch *Job*. Great indeed were his trials, and the previous state of prosperity which he enjoyed, rendered them exceedingly difficult to be

borne. And they all came upon him *suddenly!* He was cast down in a single day from the summit of prosperity — to the lowest depths of poverty and distress. His *property* was destroyed; his *children* perished in the hour of carnal festivity; his *body* was covered with a loathsome disease, which led his own friends to loathe and despise him. Some of his former companions went to comfort him; but, misunderstanding his case, they became his tormentors. His wife also, who, it might be supposed, as the only one left of his family, would afford him some comfort; but she advised him to curse God and die. The favor of all around him he had once enjoyed; nobles and princes maintained the most respectful silence in his presence; when he passed along the streets the old and young stood up to testify their esteem; when the ear heard and the eye saw him, they blessed him. But now contempt is poured upon him from every quarter; the vilest people scorn him; they make him their song and by-word, and even spit upon him as he passes by! His friends and kinsfolk forget him, and his very servants no longer answer to his call. But, above all, the hand of God was upon him; His power was crushing him, and His ears seemed closed to all his cries. Such was the state to which he was reduced, notwithstanding his preeminent piety; for he is called perfect and upright, one who feared God and eschewed evil.

"You have heard," says James, "of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." In the season of his calamity he might have asked, and not without apparent reason, "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more?" But to whatever doubts he may have given way, "the end of the Lord" showed that he was not forsaken, however sorely he was chastised. All that he passed through, worked together for his good, and issued in a state of prosperity greater than that with which he was at first favored; for "the Lord restored his fortunes. In fact, the Lord gave him twice as much as before!"

Christian, cherish high thoughts of God in all His dealings towards you. Should your trials be great, still hold fast your confidence, and yield not to a complaining or desponding spirit. Remember that it is for the profit of His people, that God afflicts them; and, however hard to be borne at the time, they have been brought to see at length that they had cause to

reckon their severest sorrows as the chief of their mercies. They were thereby weaned from the world; their affections were more ardently fixed upon heavenly things; their souls were purified, even as gold in the fire; the preciousness of Christ was realized as it had never been before; and they were led to live, not merely nearer to Him — but more entirely upon Him, and also much more for Him! May our afflictions produce such happy results; we shall then have abundant reason to bless God for *His chastising hand*.

## 28. Growth in Grace

"May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Sanctification differs from justification in many respects, especially in its progressive character. We are as fully **justified** the first moment we believe in Christ as we shall ever be; such is the perfection of the act of justification, that it will not receive any addition — even in heaven.

But with **sanctification** it is far otherwise. It has, it is true, a completeness of parts, for in all its subjects every fruit of the Spirit is found, and a principle of resistance to every evil is implanted. Still the work, even in the holiest saint in the present life, is defective. He has to mourn continually over the remains of indwelling corruption, and at times he exclaims in bitter anguish, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

It is, therefore, a blessed thing for this sanctifying process to be carried on, and for all the powers of the mind to be brought more and more under its influence. Hence our daily prayer should be that the Lord would increase our faith, our love, our humility, our patience, and make us abound in all those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the divine praise and glory.

Strange to say, some have denied the *progressiveness* of this important



work. "We are told by certain people," says Mr. Jay, "that there is no such thing as growth in grace. As if Christians could not be more wise, more humble, more patient, more zealous — than they are. As if Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians was a falsehood, when he told them that their faith *grew* exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of them towards each other *abounded*. As if Peter enjoined an absurdity, when he admonished believers to *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As if God himself mocked or trifled, when he said, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall wax *stronger and stronger*.'" Let us, however, not merely believe the doctrine of progressive sanctification — but be anxious to realize it in our own experience. We shall thus be enabled practically to refute such an unscriptural notion.

O Lord; if the good work is commenced in my soul — carry it on by the effectual working of Your blessed Spirit. Deliver me from the power and practice of every sin — and incline my heart more and more unto Your testimonies. Enlighten my *understanding*; rectify my *motives*; elevate my *desires*; spiritualize my *affections*; and thus prepare me for that holy state where nothing which defiles can enter, and where all the pure in heart dwell forever in Your immediate presence.

## **29. Christian Consistency**

"Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." Philippians 1:27

"By their fruits," says the Savior, "you shall know them." It is not by our *profession*, however blazing, nor by our *zeal*, however ardent, that we can evidence whose we are and whom we serve; but rather by abounding in whatever things are lovely and of good report. It is by an exhibition of the practical fruits of righteousness, that we are to "let our light shine before men, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven!" Matthew 5:16

There are many things connected with the Christian's pathway which worldlings cannot comprehend. Of the high and hidden walks of spiritual experience they know nothing. What is said of the workings of the divine life in the soul, is regarded by them as foolishness and fanaticism. Its internal principles, its constraining motives and impulses, its heavenly aspirations, its rapturous bliss and agonizing struggles — are things with which these strangers cannot comprehend. But still there is much that they are able to understand. Whatever is consistent in character; whatever is honest and straightforward between man and man; whatever is kind and compassionate in behavior; whatever is forbearing and forgiving under insults and injuries; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing — but contrariwise, blessing. Such features, when unostentatiously exhibited, excite their attention, and, generally, call forth their praise. The manner in which the ordinary duties of life are discharged, is something so tangible that it lies within the province of their own observation. These things they can understand; and it is of the highest importance that all who make a profession of religion, should be distinguished by such practical qualities as these.

What if a small band of Christians were placed in some locality, by whom the principles of the gospel were fully carried out; what a powerful effect, we may suppose, would their simple presence produce! Let them be connected with those around them by the ordinary engagements of life — but without employing any direct means to promulgate their Christian views. There they are — "blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation." Their hearts are filled, not merely with love to God — but with sincere and ardent affection for all by whom they are surrounded, whose welfare they seek to promote in every possible way. All the evil propensities of their nature are subdued; selfishness, pride, resentment, censoriousness, have no place among them; and their entire spirit and deportment are influenced and controlled by those noble, and generous, and god-like sentiments and feelings which Christianity inculcates and inspires. The holy religion they profess, would appear in its true character and beneficent tendency, and men would be constrained by the good works which they beheld, to glorify God.

It was a favorite prayer of the excellent Mr. Berridge, that he might be conducted "safely and honorably through the world." Reader, let such be your daily petition and request. Be willing to endure any privations rather than dishonor that blessed name by which you are called, and thus give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. And may the Lord strengthen you with all might, according to His glorious power — "that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God!"

### **30. The Glorious Appearing**

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body!" Philippians 3:20-21

in Scripture, the people of God are frequently represented as looking for the Savior's appearance. And when we think of the joys and honors which they will then realize — the wonder is that they do not long for that blessed hope with a far more intense and ardent longing! How transporting will be their bliss when, at the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God — they shall meet their Lord in the air, to welcome Him as He descends with the streaming myriads of angels, who swell the triumph of His train! While all the unbelievers on earth shall mourn, and smite their breasts — they will be enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is true that the Redeemer has promised to appear to His people on earth — and often have they gone forth to meet Him in the chambers of His ordinances. They have met Him in His house; and while feasting there upon His grace, their griefs have been forgotten, and their strength has been renewed. They have met Him at His table, while, at the breaking of the bread, He has manifested Himself to them — as He does not unto the world. They have met Him at His footstool, and He has sweetly communed with them from the mercy seat. But in the great day it will be

said, in another and far higher sense, "Behold the Bridegroom comes! Go forth to meet Him!" It will be to meet Him, not in the means of grace — but on the throne of His glory! To meet Him, not for a transient visit — but to dwell forever in His immediate presence, to gaze upon His matchless beauties, and to join with saints and angels in chanting His endless praise!

Christian, will your *love to Christ*, stand this test? Are you looking and longing for His return? Are you often asking, "Why is His chariot so long in coming?" O should such an event, so glorious in its nature, so blissful in its results, be unlonged for? Shall He be an unwelcome intruder when He comes? Such He will be — to the world of the ungodly — the language of whose hearts is now, "Delay Your coming; stop Your chariot wheels; we do not need You, for other matters occupy our thoughts, and engross our affections" But if such will not bid Him welcome when He comes, far otherwise ought it to be with us, who profess to be His followers and friends. Should not our whole lives be spent in anticipation of that great event! Should not our daily, hourly cry be, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

## **31. The Blissful Consummation**

"Receiving the end of your faith — *the salvation of your souls.*" 1 Peter 1:9

Many blessings are now possessed by the Christian; but salvation, in its *full* realization, is yet future. It embraces the whole of what God has in reserve for His people through eternity! Does heaven include the enjoyment of those pleasures, which no *sin* can ever pollute, which no *sorrow* can ever becloud, which no *time* can ever impair, which no *change* can ever affect, which no *calamity* can ever destroy? Does it include whatever the infinite *love* of God can prepare, whatever the infinite *wisdom* of God can devise, and whatever the infinite *power* of God can secure? Whatever it includes, is embodied in this expression. If only the salvation of our souls be secured — all the *blessings of grace* are ours here — and all the *ineffable treasures of glory* will be our heritage

hereafter!

An aged saint was once asked by a Christian friend, "What are you now doing?" "Waiting, sir," was his reply. "And for what are you waiting?" "For the appearing of my Lord." "And what makes you long for His appearing?" "O, sir," did he say, his languid eyes brightening as he uttered the words, "I expect great things then!" Well might he have said so, and well may every true believer adopt the same language. He does expect, and he has ample grounds for expecting "great things then!"

In the full and final salvation of our souls — all those great things are embraced. It is nothing less than complete deliverance from the bondage of corruption; entire emancipation from the power of every foe; the body of sin and death forever left behind; the good work, begun in the day of conviction, fully finished; every grace, however defective at present, grown to perfect maturity; all this, and unspeakably more, is involved in that end of his faith, for which the child of God is encouraged to look forward.

"Better," says the wise man, "is the *end* of a thing than the *beginning*." To the *commencement* and subsequent *progress* of the Christian's faith, no small importance appertains; but the *end* of his faith will be the best of all. Welcome shame and sorrow, if such an end shall at length be ours! The ungodly world may despise us; even our nearest friends may forsake us; yet we can well afford to bear their opposition without a single murmur, if we are only permitted to cherish the hope — that our course will eventually terminate in so blissful a consummation!

# THE MORNING WATCHES

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## Introduction

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation." Psalm 5:3

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul." Psalm 143:8

This little book is designed as a companion to the "Night Watches." It is hoped, by the Divine blessing, they may together form a humble auxiliary in promoting what is pronounced in the best of all manuals of devotion to be "a good thing" — the showing forth of God's "loving-kindness *in the morning*," and His "faithfulness *every night*" (Psalm 92:2.)

Though more strictly designed for *private* devotion, and therefore expressed in the first person, it is hoped, by the substitution of the plural pronoun, that the following pages may be appropriate for the *family* altar.

## First Morning

### FOR PARDON OF SIN

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my *iniquity* — for it is *great*." — Psalm 25:11



O God, I bless You that You have permitted me to lie down in sleep, and to awake this morning in safety. You have dispersed the darkness of another night — may no shadow of sin obscure the sunshine of Your favor and love. May the returning light of day be to me the type and emblem of that better radiance with which you visit the souls of Your people, when they are enabled, in Jesus, to behold *a pardoning God seated on a throne of reconciliation and grace*.

I come to You, acknowledging my transgressions in all their heinousness. I have nothing to plead in extenuation. Warnings have been abused, providences slighted, grace resisted, Your Spirit grieved. It is of the Lord's mercies I am not consumed — that You have not long before now consigned me, with all this load of unpardoned guilt, to that place where pardon is unknown.

But I do rejoice to know that "there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" — that *I can bring my great sins to a great Savior*. May I be enabled to feel that this all-glorious *name of a reconciled God in Christ* is "a strong tower," into which I may "run, and be safe." Give me grace, in self-renouncing lowliness, to disown every other ground of confidence or hope of mercy; and to cast myself, a broken-hearted, humbled penitent, at the feet of Him on whom was laid the burden of all my transgressions. May mine henceforth be the blessedness of those "whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

May life's joys be sweetened, and life's sorrows sanctified, and life's terminating hour gladdened, with the assurance: "I am at peace with my God." May Your favor brighten every scene, and the sweet sense of Your reconciling love be interfused with all my occupations. If sorrow should cloud or darken, may I be brought to feel that there can be no true sorrow or disquietude to the soul which has found its rest in the finished work of Jesus, and which has attained that blessed peace here, which is the prelude of glory hereafter.

Give me grace to walk more closely with You in the time to come. Being forgiven much — may I love You all the more. May my life be one habitual effort of *self-crucifixion* and *sin-crucifixion*, seeking to consecrate my soul's best energies to Him who is willing to "blot out as a thick cloud" all

my transgressions. Overrule the discipline of Your providence for promoting within me this *death of sin*, and this *life of righteousness*. Amid earth's many disquietudes, its crosses and its losses — enable me with joy to look forward to that blessed hour when there shall be no more *sin*, and therefore no more *sorrow* — whenevery tear shall be wiped from every eye, and when I shall be permitted to know all that is comprehended in the holy beatitude, how "blessed" indeed are "the pure in heart," who are to "see God."

Direct, control, suggest, this day — all my designs and thoughts and actions — that every power of my body, and every faculty of my mind, may unite in devotedness to Your sole service and glory. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **2nd Morning**

### **FOR RENEWAL OF HEART**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." —  
Psalm 51:10

Almighty God, who has mercifully preserved me during the unconscious hours of slumber, I desire to dedicate my waking moments and thoughts to You. Pre-occupy my mind with hallowed and heavenly things. May I be enabled throughout this day, by the help of Your Holy Spirit, to exclude all that is *vain* and *frivolous* and *sinful* — and to have my affections centered on You, as my best portion and chief joy. As Your Spirit of old brooded over the face of the waters, may that same blessed Spirit descend in all the plenitude of His heavenly graces, that the gloom of a deeper

moral chaos may be dispersed, and that mine may be the beauty and happiness and gladness of a soul that has been transformed "from darkness — to light; and from the power of sin and Satan — unto God."

Forbid, blessed Lord! that I should be resting in anything short of this new creation. May my old nature be crucified; and, as one alive from the dead, may I "walk with Jesus in newness of life." May the new life infused by Your Spirit urge me to higher attainments and more heavenly aspirations. May I be enabled to see the world in its true light — its *pleasures* fading, its *hopes* delusive, its *friendships* perishable. May I be more solemnly and habitually impressed by the surpassing magnitude of "the things not seen." May I give evidence of the reality of a renewal of heart by a more entire and consistent dedication of the life. May my soul become a temple of the Holy Spirit; may "Holiness to the Lord" be its superscription. May I be led to feel that there can be no true joy but what emanates from Yourself, the fountain and fullness of all joy — the God in whom "all my well springs" are.

Whatever maybe the discipline You are employing for this inward heart-transformation, let me be willing to submit to it. Let me lie passive in the arms of Your mercy, saying, "Undertake for me." May it be mine to bear all, and endure all, and rejoice in all — adoring a Father's *hand*, and trusting a Father's *faithfulness* — *feeling* secure in a Father's tried *love*.

Blessed Jesus! anew would I wash in the opened Fountain. The new heart, like every holy blessing I can ask, is the purchase of that blood which You so freely shed. May it be sprinkled on my guilty conscience. May I ever know what it is to be living on a living Savior, bringing my all-emptiness to His all-fullness; the unworthiness of my infinite demerit — to the worthiness of His all-sufficient, all abounding, grace and mercy.

Shine upon my ways. May I this day get nearer heaven. May I feel at its close that I have done something for God — something to promote the great end for which existence was given me — the glory of Your holy name. Bless all my beloved friends. Unite us together in bonds of holy fellowship here; and at last, in Your presence, may we be permitted to drink together of the streams of everlasting love. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **3rd Morning**

### **FOR SANCTIFYING GRACE**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"I am the Lord who sanctifies you." — Exod. 31:13

Most blessed God, You have permitted me in Your great goodness to see the light of another day. May I be enabled to receive every returning morning as a fresh token of Your love — a renewal of my lease of existence — a fresh grant of mercy from the Author of all being. May I seek, this day, and every day, to consecrate the life spared by Your bounty more and more to Your praise.

*Lord, I come anew with my burden of sin.* It is Your marvelous forbearance that does not make every succeeding morning my last. I bless You that there is still the cleansing blood, the "Wonderful Counselor," the all-gracious Spirit. Give me to know, before I go forth into the world, what it is to have the sense of Your reconciled love. Whether in public or in private, in the communion of life or in the seclusion of solitude, may I realize Your presence. May it be to me the sweetest and most blessed of all thoughts, that a covenant God is "compassing my path" — that by Him I am defended, guided, supported — *safe!*

Heavenly Father, it is the unholiness of my heart which mars the joys of my communion with You. It is my especial prayer that You may impart largely to me of the sanctifying influences of Your grace and Spirit. Let sin be crucified more and more. Let SELF be subjugated more and more. Under the transforming power of new affections, may You become all in all. May it be mine to know, in growing experience, the happiness of true

holiness. May I jealously avoid all that is likely to estrange me from You, and zealously cultivate all that is calculated to draw me nearer towards You. "Your favor is life" — O show me that to lose Your favor is death indeed!

This blessed work of inward sanctification is Yours. Alas! I feel my constant proneness to wander from You, and to seek my happiness in that which is perishable. My best resolutions, how frail! — my warmest affections, how languid and lukewarm! — my holiest moments, how distracted with vain thoughts and worldly cares! — my whole life, how stained with sin! But strengthen me with all might, by Your Spirit, in the inner man. My daily cry would be, "More grace! more grace!" There is no sufficiency in myself; but have You not promised to make Your grace sufficient? May I make it my grand ambition to be marking, day by day, my Zionward progress — my growing conformity to the holy character of a holy God.

For this end, overrule all the dispensations of Your providence. May I hear a voice in each of them proclaiming, "Be holy." May I be led to bear them all, and to rejoice in them all, if they thus be the means of bringing me nearer Yourself.

I commend to Your fatherly protection all my beloved friends, and all for whom I ought to pray. "Sanctify them through Your truth." May they all be presented unblameable before You in the day of Christ's appearing.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with me now and ever. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

**4th Morning.**

## FOR SUPPORT IN TEMPTATION.

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe." — Psalm 119:117

Most gracious God, give me grace to begin a new morning with You. Before entering on the world, I invoke Your blessing. Before I hear the voice of earthly friend, or mingle in earthly society, may I have a conscious filial nearness to You, my Father in heaven. O You, who are better, tenderer, dearer, than all on earth, give me the sweet assurance of Your presence and favor. With this, all the day's joys will be joys indeed — with this, the sting will be extracted from the day's sorrows. In quiet confidence I will repose on Your covenant faithfulness. I need no other benediction, Lord, if I have Yours. Other portions may fail me, but I am independent of all, if "You are the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

I adore and bless Your holy name for every past token of your kindness and forbearance. The retrospect of life is a retrospect of love. I am a wonder to myself that You have spared me — that mercy is remembered when nothing but wrath is deserved. "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had long before now dwelt in silence."

On that same arm I would desire still to lean. *I am compassed about with a great fight of afflictions, and the sorest and saddest of all are my sins. But I fly to You, helper of the helpless.* Give me to know what it is to dismiss all my own guilty misgivings, and to rest by simple faith on a tried Redeemer. It is mistrust of Him that has been the cause of many a bygone fall. I have been dwelling more on the strength of my temptations than on the strength of my Savior. Oh, "You hold me up, blessed Jesus! and I shall be safe." Whenever in the way of sin, give me to realize the all-sufficiency of Your grace. May every hurricane of temptation drive me more under the shelter of the Rock. May the loss of every earthly prop lead me to Yourself — the only abiding refuge. No step in the wilderness journey would I take without You. No loss would I mourn when sustained

at Your bidding. No enemy would I fear if You are on my side. *You* hold me up, and then indeed I shall be safe — safe for time — safe for eternity.

And the same support I ask for myself, I beseech You to give to all near and dear to me. May the Lord God be their "sun and shield." May they experience no temptation "above what they are able to bear;" or, with the temptation, grant them grace that they may be able to bear it. And when all earthly dangers and toils and trials are over, may we all be enabled to meet in glory, and trace there, with adoring gratitude and joy, the way in which *Your* mercy through life "has held us up."

Anew I commend myself, body and soul, to You this day. For Your dear Son's sake, forgive all my sins. My sole trust is in the atoning blood. May I feel this to be the best preservative against temptation and sin, that all I am, and all I have, is not my own, but belongs to the Lord who died for me. Hear these my unworthy supplications, and grant me an answer in peace, for His sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **5th Morning**

### **FOR HELP IN TROUBLE**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me." — Psalm 138:7

Most blessed Lord, who have again permitted me to approach a throne of grace, shine this day into my heart. Anew may I enter on another day's duties and trials, with a soul calm and peaceful amid all other

disquietudes, by being at peace with You.

I bless You that I can ever "sing of mercy" as well as of "judgment." Your dealings might have been all in unmixed wrath, but the severest of them are tempered with gracious love. Oh that they may have their designed effect of driving me to the only true rest for the soul, in the bosom of its God! May the breaking of cistern by cistern only endear to me the more the great Fountain-head.

How often do You send tribulations, that Your people may see more of Your gracious hand! How often, when the waters are troubled, do we recognize the presence of the great Covenant-angel himself, and experience the plenitude of His upholding grace and mercy! Lord, my earnest prayer is, that every trial may serve to unfold to me more of the preciousness of Jesus. As prop by prop, which used to support me on earth, may be giving way, may I know what it is to lean my whole weight *upon* Him, and leave my whole case *with* Him, repairing to Him as the friend that "sticks closer than any brother" — into His sympathizing bosom to confide my every need — from His inexhaustible treasury to draw every consolation — and on His upholding arm confidingly and habitually to rest.

What, O blessed Savior, are my troubles to Yours! What are my bitterest tears and most aching heart in comparison with what You so freely endured for me! May the remembrance of this *Your* fellowship in my suffering, and *my* fellowship in *Yours*, reconcile me patiently to endure whatever You see fit to lay upon me. Give me grace ever to see that my bitterest trial is my sin, that my heaviest cross is the cross of my wandering treacherous heart. When I think of that blessed time when God shall terminate the tears of a weeping world, may this be my loftiest ground of rejoicing — that there will be then no more sin to cause them.

Humbly I would lie at my Savior's feet, disowning all trust except in Him — exulting in His finished work, and meritorious righteousness, and all-prevalent intercession. I rejoice to think of the redeemed multitude before His throne, "whom no man can number," and to feel that His ability and willingness "to save unto the uttermost" are still the same.



Command, O Lord, Your richest blessing this day on all whom I love. May all my relatives be related to You in the common bonds of the gospel. Though separated by distance from each other on life's highway, may we enjoy the consolation that we are all treading the same invisible road Zionward — that earth's dearest and tenderest ties will, at the end of the checkered journey, be strengthened and perpetuated in the full vision and fruition of You our God.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with me this day and ever. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **6th Morning**

### **FOR COMFORT IN BEREAVEMENT**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Turn to me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted." —  
Psalm 25:16

"O God, I come to You this morning, rejoicing in the simple but sublime assurance that "the Lord reigns." Your judgments are often "a great deep." May it be mine ever to own Your sovereignty, and to rest satisfied with the assurance, "He has done all things well."

It is indeed my comfort to know that "my times" are not in my own hands, but in Yours. When in vain I seek to explain *the mystery of Your inscrutable doings*, may I be enabled implicitly to trust Your unswerving rectitude and faithfulness. The kindest and best of earthly parents may err — they may be betrayed into unnecessary harshness and severity — but You, O unerring Parent, will not, and cannot inflict one unneeded

stroke. I can own Your wisdom where I cannot discern it. I can trust the footsteps of love where I cannot trace them.

I look back with adoring wonder on all Your marvelous dealings towards me in the past. "When my foot slipped, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up." How many tear-drops have been dried by You! How many sorrows have been soothed by you! How many dangers have been averted by you! Instead of wondering at my trials, I have rather reason to marvel at Your forbearance. What are my heaviest afflictions in comparison with the deservings of sin? Lord, if they had been in proportion to my guilt, I could not have had one hour of joy.

Give me grace not only to bear all, and to endure all, but to glory in all which Your chastening love sees fit to appoint. Affliction is your own appointed training-school for immortality. If I need such training, Lord, withhold it not. Rather subject me to the severest ordeal of fatherly discipline, than leave me to vex You more with my guilty departures and backsliding. I will confide in the tenderness of Your dealings — that You will conduct me by no rougher path than is really needful. You have given Your Son for me! After *such* a pledge of Your love, may it never be mine to breathe one murmuring word.

For all in sorrow, Lord, I pray that they may take their sorrows to the "Man of sorrows." May they be willing to forget their own light afflictions as they behold His bleeding wounds. Blessed God, what a source of joy to the whole family of the afflicted, that the exalted Head and elder Brother has Himself tasted sorrow's bitterest cup! Lord Jesus, You who have suffered so much for me, grant that by patience and uncomplaining submission I may be enabled to "glorify you in the fires."

All my beloved friends I commit to Your care. May the Lord be their everlasting portion. Forbid that I should have to mourn in them what would be bitterer than the pang of all earthly bereavement — that they are bereft of Your favor. Make them Yours, and in the midst of life's vicissitudes and changes, may we all look forward to that better time, and that better world, where sorrow and sighing shall forever flee away. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## 7th Morning

### FOR LIGHT IN DARKNESS

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"To the upright there arises light in the darkness." — Psalm 103:4

Eternal, everlasting God, I bless You for the privilege of access into Your presence. What am I — a guilty, unworthy sinner, deserving only of condemnation — that I should be permitted, with holy boldness, to approach the footstool of Your throne and call You "my Father in heaven!"

I rejoice to know, when "my heart is overwhelmed, and in perplexity," that I can ever look to You as a "Rock that is higher than I" — that, amid all the ebbings and flowings in the tide of my own fitful frames and feelings, You, great Rock of ages, remain fixed and immovable. You have never failed me in the past. When "deep has been calling to deep," and many "waves and billows have gone over me," "the Lord has commanded His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song has been with me, and my prayer to the God of my life." And I will trust You in the future. In the midst of baffling and mysterious providences I will be still — hushing every murmur, and breathing in lowly resignation the prayer, "divinely taught," "Your will be done."

It is my comfort to know that the darkest cloud is fringed with covenant love. I can repose on the blessed assurance that *present* discipline is *needed* discipline, and that all which is mystery now will be cleared up hereafter. May it be mine cheerfully to follow the footsteps of the guiding Shepherd through the darkest, loneliest road, and amid thickening

sorrows may I have grace to say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

Lord, increase my faith — let it rise above all difficulties and all trials. Let these drive me closer to Him who has promised to make me "more than conqueror." Let them quicken my longings for the true home of my soul above. May it be my grand ambition here to be a "pilgrim" in everything — to be pitching my tent day by day nearer heaven, imbibing every day more of the pilgrim character, and longing more for the pilgrim's rest. May I be enabled to say, with an increasingly chastened spirit, of a passing world, "Here I have no continuing city." May this assurance dry all tears, and reconcile to all sorrows — "I am journeying to the place of which the Lord has said, I will give it you."

Blessed Jesus, hasten Your coming and Your kingdom. Scatter the darkness which is now covering heathen nations. Stand by Your missionary servants. May they exercise a simple faith on Your own sure word of promise. "Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," may every mountain of difficulty be made a plain, and "the glory of the Lord be revealed."

God of Bethel, I commend to You all my beloved friends. Shield them by Your protecting providence. Give them every needed blessing in the present life, and in the world to come life everlasting. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **8th Morning**

### **FOR HOPE IN DISCOURAGEMENT**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God." — Psalm 43:5

O God, in Your infinite mercy You have again spared me to approach Your blessed presence. May each morning find me better prepared for the glorious waking-time of immortality, when "the day shall break," and earth's shadows shall forever "flee away." May I seek to rise this day in newness of life, breathing more of the atmosphere of holiness, and partaking more of the character of heaven.

You are always, by the salutary dispensations of Your providence, reminding me that "earth is not my rest." It is well, Lord, that it should be so; that, by Your own gracious and needed discipline, the world be disarmed of its insinuating power, and I be weaned from what is precarious at the best, and which ultimately *must* perish.

O my God, I feel heavily burdened by reason of sin. I mourn my guilty proneness to temptation. How anything and everything seems often enough to drive me from you, and to lead me to seek my happiness in created good, rather than in Yourself, the infinite fountain of all excellence! How sad have been my backslidings! — how have solemn vows been broken! — how have abandoned and forsworn sins threatened again to have dominion over me! How little tenderness of conscience has there been! — how little dread of an uneven walk! How often, on the heart which I have consecrated to You as an altar for the perpetual sacrifice of praise, and gratitude, and love, has there been burning incense to strange gods!

Lord, when I look to my inner self I have good cause indeed for misgivings and despondency. Conscience repeats, over and over again, a sentence of condemnation, and I have nothing to extenuate my guilt or excuse my sin. Where can I flee? Where can I look but to You, O Lamb of God, sin-bearing and sin-forgiving Savior!

Enable me to be living more from moment to moment on Your grace — to rely on Your guiding arm with more childlike confidence — to look with a more simple faith to Your finished work, disowning all trust in my own doings, and casting myself, as a poor needy pensioner, on the bounty of

Him who has done all, and suffered all, and endured all, for me. Thus relying on the unseen arm of a covenant-God, when the hour of darkness and discouragement overtakes me — when trials multiply, and comforts fail, and streams of earthly blessings are dried up — may I have what compensates for the loss of all, "Your favor, which is life, and Your loving-kindness, which is better than life." "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

Be the God of all near and dear to me. May all my relatives be able to claim a spiritual relationship with You, that so those earthly bonds of attachment, which sooner or later must snap asunder here, may be renewed and perpetuated before the throne.

Pity all who are in sorrow. Comfort the feeble-minded. May "the joy of the Lord be their strength." May valuable lives be prolonged. May those appointed unto death be prepared for their great change. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **9th Morning**

### **FOR WISDOM IN PERPLEXITY**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You." — Psalm 143:8

O eternal Lord, whose nature and whose name is love, I bless You that I am again invited into Your presence. What am I, that I should be permitted to speak to the infinite God! I might have been left through eternity a monument of Your righteous vengeance. I might have known

You only as "the consuming fire." But "Your ways are not as man's ways;" mercy is remembered when wrath might have come upon me to the uttermost.

I desire to begin this day, blessing and praising You for "Your unspeakable gift," Jesus the Son of Your love. Adored be your name, that the guilt of my sin, which the holiness of Your law could not permit otherwise to be cancelled, has to Him been transferred — that, as the scape-goat of His people, He has borne the mighty load into the land of oblivion, never more to be remembered. May I be enabled to show forth my lively gratitude to You for this wondrous token of Your Love, not only by lip homage, but by heart and life devotion. Sanctify and seal me in body, soul and spirit; and present me at last "faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy."

O my God, I rejoice to know that my interests for time and eternity are confided to Your keeping. Though often "wonderful in counsel," You are ever "excellent in working." You are "God only wise" — "righteous in all Your ways, and holy in all Your works." I commit my way and my doings unto You. "You hold me up, and I shall be safe." May I trust Your wisdom and faithfulness even amid crosses and losses, and frowning providences. Make them all work together for my good.

If my path be in any way now hedged up with thorns, "undertake for me," "Guide me with Your counsel." Let me take no step, and engage in no plan, unsanctioned by Your approval. Let it be my grand aim and ambition, in all the changes of a changing life, to hear Your directing voice, saying, "This is the way, walk in it;" and then shall all life's trials be sweetened, and life's burden lightened, by knowing that they are the appointment of infinite wisdom and unchanging love, and that, though man may err, God never can.

May Your Holy Spirit lead me this day into all the truth. May all its duties be pervaded by the leavening power of vital godliness. While in the world, may I seek to feel and to exhibit that I am not of it. May I give evidence, in my walk and conversation, of a renewed nature, and of a nobler destiny.

Hasten, blessed Jesus, Your coming and Your kingdom. "How long shall

the wicked triumph?" "Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; feed them also, and lift them up forever."

Let the voice of salvation be heard in the household of all I love. May theirs be the dwellings of the righteous. May this be their name, "The Lord is there." May they know Him who has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And "now, Lord, what do I wait for? my hope is in You." Hear and answer these unworthy supplications, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **10th Morning**



## FOR STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"My strength is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Cor. 12:9

O high and mighty God, inhabiting eternity, draw near to a poor unworthy sinner, who ventures anew this morning to approach the footstool of Your throne. Give me now the gracious aids of Your gracious Spirit, that out of much weakness I may be made strong. It is Your own gracious assurance, that "those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." I would rely on the faithfulness of a promising God. May my own utter emptiness drive me to all fullness. May my own conscious weakness wean me from all earthly props, and confidences, and refuges, to "abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Lord, I confess this day with shame and confusion of face my many infirmities, my coldness and lukewarmness, my distrust of Your providence, my insensibility to Your Love, my murmuring at Your dealings, my tampering with sin, my resisting of Your grace. How often, like the slender reed, have I bent before the blast of temptation, my best resolutions proving "as the morning cloud and the early dew!"

And yet gracious Father, You have not broken "the bruised reed" — You have not "quenched the smoking flax." I am here this morning a marvel to myself that You are still sparing me. "Your ways are not as man's ways." Had it been so, You would long since have grown weary. But it is the prerogative of the everlasting God that "*He* faints not, neither is weary." You are this morning giving me fresh grants of mercy, renewed proofs and tokens of unmerited love. I am receiving "at the Lord's hand double for all my sins."

I rejoice to know, blessed Jesus, it is Your burdened ones You have specially promised "gently to lead." You will conduct me by no rougher road than is necessary. "Undertake for me." May the wilderness journey

be this day resumed and renewed with a more simple, and childlike, and habitual leaning on You. Put this new song into my mouth, "The Lord is my Rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust." Say to me, in the midst of my weakness, "Fear not, you worm Jacob." With the pillar of Your presence ever before me, "I will go from strength to strength."

Keep me this day from sin. May no evil thoughts, or vain imaginings, or deceitful lusts, obtrude on my walk with God. May an affecting sense of how frail I am, keep me near the atoning sacrifice. May the "horns of the altar" ever be in sight. Blessed Jesus, my helpless soul would hang, every moment upon You.

Look down in Your kindness on all connected with me by ties of earthly kindred. May the blessing of the God of Bethel rest on every heart and household I love. May we all be journeying Zionwards, and be so weaned from earth as to feel that Zionwards is homewards. If pursuing different paths, and separated, it may be, far from one another, may the journey have one blessed and happy termination. May we meet in glory, and meet with You. And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **11th Morning**

### **FOR GRATITUDE IN MERCIES**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" —  
Psalm 116:12

O God, I adore You as the Author and Giver of every good and every

perfect gift. You are daily loading me with Your benefits. Every returning morning brings with it fresh causes for gratitude — new material for praise. I bless You for Your temporal bounties — "how great has been the sum of them!" While others have been pining in poverty, or wasted by sickness, or racked in pain, or left friendless and portionless, You have been making showers of blessing to fall around my dwelling. I laid me down last night and slept — I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I might never have seen the morning light. Mine might have been the midnight summons to meet a God in whose righteous presence I was all unfit and unprepared to stand. And yet I am again spared, a monument of Your goodness. Oh, enkindle a flame of undying gratitude to You, on the clay-cold altar of my heart. I mourn and lament that I am so little and so feebly affected by the magnitude of Your mercies, and especially by the riches of Your grace and love manifested in Jesus — that my affections are so little alive to the incalculable obligation under which I am laid to Him who has "loved me with an everlasting love." I am doubly Yours. Creation and redemption combine in claiming all I am, and all I have, for You and Your service. Good Lord, preserve me from the sin of insensibility to Your unwearied kindness — of taking Your mercies as matters of course, and thus living in a state of independence of You. May my whole existence become a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving — may all my doings testify the sincerity and devotion of a heart feeling alive to every gift of the great Giver; and, especially, may I be so brought under the constraining influence of redeeming love, as to consecrate every power of my body and every faculty of my soul to Him who so willingly consecrated and shed His very life's blood for me.

Lord, this day shine upon me with the light of Your countenance; may every mercy I experience in the course of it be hallowed and sweetened by the thought that it comes from God. And, while ever mindful and thankful in the midst of present mercies, teach me to keep in view the crowning mercy of all — the hope of at last sharing Your presence and full fruition, and of joining in the eternal ascription with the ransomed multitude above, who cease not day nor night to celebrate Your praises.

Bless all near and dear to me. Defend them by Your mighty power. Give *them*, too, gratitude for mercies past, and the sure and well-grounded

hope of a glorious inheritance in that better world, where mercy is unmixed with judgment, and joy undarkened by sorrow. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **12th Morning**

### **FOR CRUCIFIXION OF SIN**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"I die daily." — 1 Cor. 15:31

Heavenly Father, who have permitted me, in Your great mercy, to see the light of another day, enable me to begin and to end it with You. Let all my thoughts and purposes and actions have the superscription written on them — "Holiness to the Lord."

Give me to know the blessedness of reconciliation — what it is, as a sinner, and the chief of sinners, to come "just as I am, without one plea," to that blood "which cleanses from all sin." I desire to take hold of the sublime assurance that Jesus is "able to save unto the uttermost" — that He has left nothing for me as a suppliant at Your throne — a pensioner on Your bounty — but to accept all as the gift and purchase of free, unmerited grace.

While I look to Him as my Savior from the *penalty*, may I know Him also as my Deliverer from the *power* of sin. I have to lament that so often I have yielded to its solicitations — that my heart, a temple of the Holy Spirit, has been so often profaned and dishonored by the "accursed thing," marring my spiritual joy, and sorely interrupting communion with the Lord I love. Give me grace to exercise a godly jealousy over my traitor

affections — to live nearer You — to have the magnet of my heart more centered on Yourself — to keep the eye of faith more steadily on Jesus — to live more habitually under "the powers of the world to come." You know my *besetting* sin — the plague of my heart, which so often leads to a guilty estrangement. Lord, cut down this root of bitterness. Let me nail it to Your cross. Let me be ever on the watchtower, ready to resist the first assault of the enemy. Let it be to me at once a precept and a promise — "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Oh show me that my strength to repel temptation is in Jesus alone. Put me in the cleft of the rock when the hurricane is passing by. May I be as willing to surrender all for my Savior — my heart sins and life sins — as He willingly surrendered His all for me. May I be enabled to say, "Lord I am Yours."

Every idol I utterly abolish. Save me, blessed Savior from a deceitful heart and a seductive world. Let me see more and more the beauties of holiness. Let me ever be basking in the rays of Your love — approaching nearer and nearer You, the "Sun of my soul." May Your loveliness and glory eclipse all created beams and may I look forward with bounding heart to that time when all that helps to lighten up earth's pathway shall be obscured in the shadow of death, and I shall be ushered into the glories of that better and brighter scene, where "the sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself, but where the Lord my God shall be my everlasting light."

And what I ask for myself, I desire in behalf of those near and dear to me. "Sanctify them wholly." May they, too, crucify sin, and "die daily." May this be the happy history of all of us — "Being made free from sin, and having become the servants of God, we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **13th Morning**

## FOR GROWTH IN HOLINESS

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Grow in grace." — 2 Pet. 3:18

O God, draw near to me in fullness in Your great mercy. Another peaceful morning has dawned upon me. May it be mine to know the happiness of those who walk all the day in the light of Your countenance.

O best and kindest of Beings, teach me to know, amid the smiles and the frowns, the joys and the sorrows, of an ever-changing world, what it is to have an unchanging refuge and portion in You. I can mourn no blank, I can feel no solitude, when I have Your presence and love. If I have nothing beside — stripped and divested of every other blessing — I have the richest of all, if I am at peace with God.

I desire to dwell with devout contemplation on the infinite loveliness of Your moral nature. Lord, I long to have this guilty, erring soul, molded and fashioned in increasing conformity to Your blessed mind and will. Let my great concern henceforth be, to love and serve and please You more and more. May all Your dealings with me, of whatever kind they be, contribute in promoting this growth in holiness. May *prosperity* draw forth a perpetual thank-offering of praise for unmerited mercies. May *adversity* purify away the dross of worldliness and sin. May every day be finding the power of sin weaker and weaker, and the dominion of grace stronger and stronger. Living under the powers of a world to come, may I look forward with joyful expectation to the time when sin shall no longer impede my spiritual growth — when Satan shall be disarmed of his power, and my own heart of its deceitfulness — when every faculty of a glorified and exalted nature shall be enlisted in Your service in a world of eternal joy.

O blessed Advocate within the veil — You who are even now interceding for Your tried and tempted saints, "that their faith fail not" — Impart to me a constant supply of Your promised grace. Not only sprinkle my heart

with Your blood, but conquer it by Your love. Fill me with deep contrition for an erring past — inspire me with purposes of new obedience for the future. May I know, in my sweet experience, that "Your yoke is easy and Your burden light" — that, growing in holiness, I am growing in happiness too. Give me an increasing tenderness of conscience about sin — lead me, with more filial devotedness, to cultivate a holy fear of offending so gracious a Father. Habitually realizing my new covenant relationship to You, may I ever be ready to exclaim, with joyful sincerity "O Lord, truly I am Your servant!"

Revive, blessed God, Your own work everywhere. "Take to Yourself Your great power, and reign." Remove all hardness and blindness of heart — all contempt of Your Word. May it have free course and be glorified.

Bless my dear friends. However far separated from one another, we can ever meet at the same throne of the heavenly grace, pleading the same "exceeding great and precious promises." May we all be following the same path of grace now, and meet amid the endless joys of glory hereafter. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **14th Morning**

### **FOR VICTORY OVER THE WORLD**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Everyone born of God overcomes the world." — 1 John 5:4

O eternal, everlasting God, You are glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Your glory. You, the almighty keeper of Israel, never slumber. There is

not the moment I am away from your wakeful vigilance. In the defenseless hours of sleep, as well as amid life's activities and toils, You are ever the same — "compassing my path and my lying down, and intimately acquainted with all my ways."

I rejoice to think that I have the assurance of such unwearied watchfulness and care, in a world "lying in wickedness." Blessed Jesus, in the world You have forewarned me to expect tribulation, but, nevertheless, I will "be of good cheer, for you have overcome the world." You have traversed its wilderness-depths — You have passed through the shadow of its darkest valley. I cannot dread what You have trodden and conquered.

But, alas! I have to mourn that the world which crucified You should be so much loved by me — that its pleasures should be so fascinating — its pursuits so engrossing. Wean me from it. Break its alluring spell. Strip it of its counterfeit charms. Discover to me, its hollowness — the treachery of its promises — the precariousness of its best blessings — the fleeting nature of its most enduring friendship. I take comfort in the thought, "The Lord God is a sun and shield." The world has deceived me, but You never have. Guide me by Your counsel. Savior-God, let me come up from the wilderness leaning on Your arm, exulting, amid its legion-foes, that greater is He who is with me than all those who can be against me.

O You who, in Your last prayer on earth, did so touchingly say of Your pilgrim people, "These are in the world;" still bend Your pitying eye upon me, as I travel, burdened with sin and sorrow, through the valley of tears. So "sanctify me through Your truth," that, though *in* the world, I may not be *of* it — not conformed to its sinful practices and lying vanities. Bring me to say, with regard to all in it that was once so fascinating, "My soul is even as a weaned child." With my face Zionward, may I declare plainly that I seek "a better country."

Grant that this day, in all my worldly communion, I may have the realizing sense of Your presence and nearness. May I set a watch on my heart, and keep the door of my lips. May cherished feelings of love and devotion to You be intermingled with all life's duties and engagements. May I know that a simple faith in Jesus is the great secret of victory over



the world. Oh, may the trembling magnet of my vacillating affections be ever pointing to Him, and then I shall be made "more than conqueror."

Through His all-prevailing merits and advocacy, hear my prayer. In His most precious blood, forgive all my sins. By His indwelling grace, sanctify my nature, that my whole body, soul, and spirit may be preserved blameless until His coming. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **15th Morning**

### **FOR DEEPER VIEWS OF SELF**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Search me, O God, and know my heart." — Psalm 139:23

O eternal, everlasting God, who have once more enlightened my eyes, and allowed me not to sleep the sleep of death, bestow upon me this day the riches of Your grace and love. Morning after morning is dawning upon me, with new tokens of Your mercy. Oh, may these be bringing me nearer the glorious day which is to know no night — that eternal noon-tide when all shadows and darkness are forever to flee away!

Lord, I am unworthy to come into Your presence, and yet I have to mourn that I do not feel this deep unworthiness as I ought. I am unwilling to see into the unknown depths of my sin. I do not know myself. I have no depressing consciousness of the desperate wickedness of my own evil heart. I have buried many past transgressions in oblivion. I have deluded myself with the thought, that many were too trivial and unimportant to incur Your disapproval. Even any imperfect good which Your grace has enabled me to perform, I have been too prone to take the merit to myself,

instead of ascribing all the praise to You. There has been pride in my humility. There have been mingled motives in my best services. My best resolutions have been fitful and transient. My purest and most unselfish actions could not stand the scrutiny of Your eye. The holiest day I ever spent, were I to be judged by it, would condemn me.

O You who "searches Jerusalem with lighted candles," "search my heart." Bring me to the publican's place of penitential sorrow, exclaiming, in self-renouncing humility, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

I would seek to make a more entire and undivided surrender of all I am and have to You. Give me such a dreadful and affecting sense of my vileness, that I may never feel safe but when close to the atoning Fountain, drawing out of it hourly supplies. May mine be a daily heart and self and sin crucifixion — an eternal severance from those bosom traitors which have so long separated between me and my God. Make me more zealous for Your honor and glory — "Cleanse the thoughts of my heart, by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit" — "Let no iniquity obtain dominion over me." But may it be my daily ambition to become more like You, reflecting more of the image, and imbibing more of the spirit, of my Divine Redeemer, that thus the atmosphere of holiness and of heaven may be diffused all around me. May my own soul be pervaded with lofty and purified aspirations. May I be enabled to exhibit to the world the felt happiness of close walking with God.

And gracious Father, "send forth Your light and Your truth" to a darkened world. May Your own ancient people be speedily gathered in with the fullness of the Gentile nations, that all ends of the earth may see the salvation of God.

Bless all my dear friends, near or distant. May they have the heritage of those who fear Your name. Defend them now by Your mighty power, and at last number them with Your saints in glory everlasting. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## 16th Morning

### FOR BRIGHTER VIEWS OF JESUS

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"That I may know Him." — Phil. 3:10

Blessed Jesus! — Sun of my soul! — Light of my life! — Shine upon me this morning with the "brightness of Your rising." May I enjoy this day union and communion with You. May a sense of Your favor pervade all its duties, sanctify its blessings, and lighten its trials. May it be to me the sweetest and holiest of all thoughts, that You are ever with me — that, though unseen to the eye of sense, the eye of faith can discern Your gracious presence and the manifestations of Your nearness and love. May the realized assurance, that You are thus at my side, dispel every misgiving, and dry every tear. May I hear You, even now, saying to me, "Lo, I am with you" — I am with you *now* — I shall be with you "*always*" — and when the world is ended "I will" that you "be with me where I am, that you may behold my glory!"

O adorable Savior, how sadly is Your beauty obscured from my view, by reason of my own sin! How feebly do I apprehend the mystery of Your love — the glories of Your person — the perfection of Your atonement! Hide me in the clefts of the rock, and while there, "I beseech You, show me Your glory." May every fresh glimpse of "the great love with which You have loved me" rebuke the lukewarmness of my own. May I covet a closer walk with You. May my existence be one continued Emmaus journey — its hours passing joyfully by, because happy in the presence and converse of a risen Redeemer. Blessed Jesus, "abide with me," for the day is "far spent." Let me walk with You in newness of life. May I breathe Your spirit of holy submission — of cheerful obedience — of patience under injuries. May I not repine at bearing the cross, so meekly borne for me; nor murmur at my trials, when I think of Yours. May I be enabled to make every lineament of Your spotless character my daily study, so as

gradually to be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory — looking forward to that blessed time when I shall see You without one stain of remaining sin to dim the contemplation, and when I shall be permitted to bathe in the ocean of Your eternal love.

I thank You for the mercies of the past night. Allow me to consider every new day a fresh gift of Your dying grace — to regard all its hours as redeemed hours — every moment as "bought with a price." May these days, and hours, and moments, thus stamped with the cross, be consecrated more than ever to Your praise.

Again I beseech You, "abide with me." "Where You go I will go, and where You dwell I will dwell." Abide with me from morning to evening, and from evening to morning again. "Without You I cannot live" — "without You I dare not die." Living or dying, Lord, I would seek to be Yours.

Forgive all my many sins, and when the feeble glimpses of a feeble love on earth are at an end, bring me at last to enjoy brighter views of You in glory everlasting. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **17th Morning**

### **FOR NEARER VIEWS OF HEAVEN**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"They shall behold the land that is very far off." Isaiah 33:17

O God, in the multitude of Your mercies I am again permitted to see the light of a new day. With another rising morn scatter all the clouds of sin and unbelief from my soul. Unfold to my view bright glimpses of Yourself

— sweet foretastes of those joys which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard."

Here, Lord, I have "no continuing city" — change is my portion in this the house of my pilgrimage — I would not desire to live here always. I am "willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." Wean me from this uncertain world. Bring me to live under the powers of a world to come. I rejoice to think of the happy myriads already in glory — "clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands" — safe in the presence of the Master they love, with every tear-drop wiped away. I rejoice to know that the blood and grace to which they owe their crowns are still free as ever. Oh, may I be enabled, with some good measure of triumphant assurance, to say, "Henceforth there is laid up for *me* a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." May the thought of that endless, sinless, sorrowless immortality reconcile me to all earth's severest discipline. Let me not murmur under the heaviest cross in the prospect of such a crown. Let me not refuse to pass cheerfully through the hottest furnace which is to refine and purify me for this "exceeding weight of glory;" but bear with calm serenity whatever You see fit to lay upon me. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

Lord, grant that the approach of eternity may urge me to greater diligence in Your service. May I have my loins girded and my lamp burning. May I spend each day, and *this* day, as if it were to be my last. When the shadows of evening gather around me, may I feel that I have spent a day for God. Nearer a dying hour — may it find me nearer heaven.

What I ask for myself I would seek in behalf of all my beloved friends. Sprinkle each heart with the blood of the covenant. May every eye be directed to Jesus, and every footstep be pointing heavenward. Though severed from one another now, may we not be found gathered in different bundles on the great reaping-day of judgment.

Lord, unite Your own people more and more. Why should we be guilty of such sad estrangements, crossing and recrossing one another on life's highway with alien and jealous looks, when professing to be sprinkled with the same blood, to bear the same name, and be heirs of the same inheritance? Let me live near to Jesus, and then I shall live near all His

people, looking forward to that blessed time when we shall see eye to eye and heart to heart — no jarring or discordant note to mar the everlasting ascription of "blessing, and honor, and glory and power, to Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **18th Morning**

### **FOR WEANEDNESS FROM THE CREATURE**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"There is none upon earth that I desire besides You." — Psalm 73:25

O Lord, blessed fountain of all happiness and joy, draw near to me this morning in Your great mercy. All creature-comforts are emanations from You. Your favor is life — Your displeasure is worse than death. In losing You, we lose our all — in having You, we can lack nothing.

I have to acknowledge, with shame and confusion of face, that I have not thus been seeking my true enjoyment in You. I have been in pursuit of fleeting shadows, which one by one have eluded my grasp. I have been worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is "God over all, blessed forevermore." Lord, bring me to see that nothing short of Yourself can satisfy the longings and desires of my immortal nature. Wean me from what is perishable. Let me reverentially acquiesce in whatever means You may employ to bring my wandering heart back to You, O you who are the alone-satisfying portion of my soul. Rather, Lord, would I submit to the hardest discipline than listen to the withering words, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." Let me feel that Your presence and love can compensate for the loss of all earthly joys. As prop after prop which has gladdened my pilgrimage totters and falls, may I

know what it is to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty." As You are ever proclaiming over creature-confidence, "Dust you are, and into dust shall you return," may I know what it is to cleave to One who is better and surer than the nearest and dearest on earth — the Friend that never fails, and never wearies, and never dies — "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day and forever."

Blessed Savior, I cast my every care on You. You are noting now on Your throne, the pangs and sorrows of every burdened heart. All other love is imperfect. All other sympathy is selfish but Yours. May my affections be consecrated to You. May it be my joy to serve You — my privilege to follow You, and, if necessary, to suffer with You. May every cross lose its bitterness by having You at my side. May I feel that nothing but absence from You can create a real loss in my heart. Your presence takes the sting from all afflictions, and imparts security in the midst of all troubles. Living or dying, may I be Yours.

Sprinkle me this new morning with the blood of the covenant. May I feel all throughout the day the joy of being reconciled to God. May my heart be made a little sanctuary of praise. May I breathe the atmosphere of heaven. May God Himself be so enthroned in my affections, that I may be enabled to say, in comparison with Him, of all that the world can give, "There is none upon the earth that I desire beside You."

Heavenly Father, I leave all that belongs to me to You — "Undertake for them." Bless them and make them blessings. "Hide them under the shadow of Your wings" until earth's "calamities be over." Hear this my morning supplication; and when you hear, forgive. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **19th Morning**

## FOR LOWLINESS OF MIND

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"He gives grace to the humble." — 1 Pet. 5:5

O God, You are "the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity." There is no being truly great but You. All other excellence and glory is derived — Yours is underived. All else is finite — Yours is infinite. The burning seraph nearest Your throne is the humblest of all Your creatures, because he gets the nearest view of the majesty of Your glory.

Lord, fill my soul this morning with suitable views of Your greatness, and a humbling estimate of my own nothingness. I would lie low at Your feet — in wonder and amazement that dust and ashes should be permitted to approach that Being whom angels worship with folded wings, and in whose sight the very "heavens are not clean." Repress every proud, self-glorifying imagination.

Let me feel I cannot abase myself enough in Your presence. "Lord, I am vile; what can I answer You?" My best thoughts, how polluted! — my best services, how imperfect! — my best affections, how lukewarm! — my best prayers how cold! — my best hours, were I judged by them, how would I be condemned!

I desire to take refuge at the cross of a crucified Savior. Here, Lord, give me that grace You have promised to the lowly. Self-renouncing and sin-renouncing, I would seek to be exalted only in Jesus, crying out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" In broken-heartedness of soul, I mourn the past. Distrustful of the future, I look only to You. Full of my own unworthiness, I turn to the infinitely worthy One. I seek to be washed in His blood — sanctified by His Spirit — guided by His counsel — depending on Him for every supply of grace — and feeling that without Him I must perish.

May I take the humility and gentleness of Jesus as my pattern. Like Him,



may I be meek and lowly in heart. Give me grace to avoid ostentation and pride, haughtiness and vanity, envy and uncharitableness. "In lowliness of mind may I esteem others better than myself." Let me realize every moment that I am a pensioner on Divine bounty — that I am alike "for temporals and spirituals" dependent on You — and that it well becomes me to be "clothed with humility." Oh, let me meekly and submissively lose my own will in Yours, in childlike teachableness, saying — "What will You have me to do?" May no murmur escape my lips at Your dealings. May this lowliness of spirit lead me rather to wonder at Your sparing mercy, that the great and holy Being I have provoked so long by my rebellion has not "cut me down."

Bless all connected to me by endearing bonds. May nature's ties be made doubly strong by those of covenant grace. Bless Your cause and kingdom in the world. May Your Spirit descend "like rain upon the mown grass, and showers that water the earth."

I commit myself to You, and to the word of Your grace. Guide me this day by Your counsel. May I spend it as if it were to be my last. And when my last day does arrive, may it be to me the eve of a happy eternity. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **20th Morning**

### **FOR SIMPLICITY OF FAITH**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Only believe." — Mark 5:36

O eternal, ever-blessed Fountain of all light — Source of all happiness —

"God of all grace" — look down upon me this morning with that love which "You bear to Your own," as I venture anew into Your sacred presence. Let me enjoy a sweet season of fellowship with You. Let the world be shut out, and may I feel alone with God. "Under the shadow of Your wings would I rejoice."

I come in the nothingness of the creature, standing alone in the fullness of Jesus. I come, "just as I am, without one plea" — as a sinner, and as the "chief of sinners" — to You, almighty Savior. I seek to disown all creature confidence, and, with all the burden of my guilt, to cast myself, for time and for eternity, at Your feet. "Lord, save me, else I perish." I cannot stand in myself. I can stand only in Him who has stood so willingly a Surety for me — who is still at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, presenting my name, and my prayers, and my plea, before the throne. I *have* no other confidence, and I *need* no other. Jesus, I am complete in You. Let me not look inwardly on myself, where there is everything to sink me in despondency and dismay; but let me look with the undivided and unwavering eye of faith to Your bleeding sacrifice. I rejoice to think of the many robes in the Church triumphant Your blood has already made white. I rejoice to know that the same blood is free as ever — the same invitation is addressed as ever — the promise and the Promiser remain "faithful" as ever — "Him who comes to me I will in no wise cast out."

Lord, I come — I plead Your word. I come, irrespective of all I am, and all I have been. Magnify Your grace in me. Show me my utter beggary and wretchedness by nature — that every step to glory is a step of grace; and while, with childlike faith, I rest on the finished work of Jesus, may I have the same simple trust and confidence in all His dealings towards me. May I feel that the Shepherd of Israel cannot lead me wrong — that His own way must be the safest and the best. Lord, "undertake for me" — "I will follow You to prison and to death." Take me — lead me — use me, as You see good. If I need chastisement, give me chastisement. If I need rebuke, let me not complain under the rod. Let me trust a Father's word — a Father's love — a Father's discipline. "Though You slay me, yet will I trust in You."

And as for myself, so for all dear to me. I pray that it may please You, of

Your infinite mercy, to visit them with Your salvation — to guide them by Your counsel — to overrule all life's changes and vicissitudes and trials for their well-being, and at last to bring them safe to Your eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ — to whom, with You, O Father, and You, O eternal Spirit, three in one in covenant for our redemption, be ascribed, all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, world without end. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **21st Morning**

### **FOR CONSISTENCY OF WALK**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." — Col. 1:10

O Lord, You are the heart-searching and the thought-trying God. To You all hearts are open — from You no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of my heart this day, by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit. I would seek to begin its hours with You. May all its business and employments be perfumed with the fragrance of "the morning sacrifice."

O You who are the great origin and end of all things, be to me the Alpha and the Omega of my daily being. May I feel existence to be a blank without You. May I feel that I can only be truly happy when a sense of Your favor and friendship, and love is sweetly intermingled with life's duties — thus lessening every burden — hallowing every trial — diminishing every cross!

I come to You once more, an unworthy sinner, to cast myself at my Savior's feet. What am I, that You should have borne with me so long! The ax "laid at the root of the trees" might long ago have cut me down;

but I, a guilty cumberer, am still spared. The retrospect of existence, while a retrospect of patience and forbearance on Your part, is one of mournful rebellion and ingratitude on mine. I have had a "name to live," but how much spiritual death in my best frames! I have had a form of godliness; how little have I lived out and acted out its power! More careful have I been to *appear* to be a Christian than really to *be* a Christian. How much unevenness in my walk — how much proclaimed and professed by the lip has been undone and denied in the life!

I come this morning to ask anew for mercy to pardon, and grace to help me. Especially give me the grace of a holy consistency, doing all for Your glory, having boldness to speak for You in the world. May my walk and conversation be the living evidence and expression of the sincerity and reality of the inner life.

For this end may I live more on Jesus. May my life be "hidden with Christ in God." May I grow more and more out of myself and *into* my living Head. Self-humbled and self-emptied, may I be ever resorting to the all-fullness of an all-sufficient Savior. May this be my habitual feeling — "Without Him I can do nothing." May this be my constant prayer — "Help me, Savior, or I die."

May I be enabled this day, in His strength, to do something for God. However lowly my lot, however humble my abilities, may I feel, Lord, that You have work for me in Your vineyard. Let me not bury my talent in the earth; may I "occupy it until You come," that "You may receive Your own with interest."

Have mercy on Your whole Church. Pour out on all its members and office-bearers the spirit of meekness and zeal, of power and love, and of a sound mind. May "Holiness to the Lord" be written on its portals!

Hasten the blessed period when the love of Jesus, being enthroned in every heart and every Church, "we all shall be one." And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **22nd Morning**

### **FOR SINGLENES OF EYE**

"O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto You."

"This one thing I do." — Phil. 3:13

My Father in heaven, teach me, in childlike faith and confidence, to draw near this morning to Your throne of grace. Give me the blessed influences of Your Holy Spirit, that I may wait on You undisturbed by worldly distractions, and enter on the duties of another day with my mind "stayed on God."

Blessed Jesus! — You who so freely gave Yourself a ransom for many — save me, else I perish! I have no peace but in Your pardoning, reconciling love. May Your blood and righteousness be to me "a glorious dress," arrayed in which I may now and forever stand fearless and undismayed. I bless You, O God, if I have in any degree felt the preciousness of the Savior and His adaptation to all the needs and weaknesses of my sinful, and sorrowful, and tempted nature. I thank You if You have already hidden me in the clefts of the smitten Rock. My prayer is, that You may keep me there — that I may lean upon Jesus more than ever, and seek my happiness more exclusively in His service. May I every morning be drawn more closely by the cords of His love, and be led to fight more faithfully under His banner.

Oh for greater singleness of aim! — more self-emptying and self-abasing — that He may be all in all! Lord, I am conscious often of mingled motives, that would not stand the test of Your pure eye and Your holy Word! How often do I forfeit the joys of assurance by admitting rival claimants to the throne of my affections! How often are the surpassing interests and glories of eternity dimmed and obscured by the engrossing things of time and of sense! How mixed with imperfection and

earthliness and self-seeking are my best attempts to serve You! If weighed in the balance, how would my holiest services be found lacking!

Give me more of this unity and simplicity of purpose. Give me to make salvation more the one thing needful. Let all other love be subordinated to Yours. Be my "chief joy." May Your service be my delight. May my heart become a little sanctuary, where the incense of praise and love and thanksgiving is ascending continually. May it glow with holy zeal to promote Your cause, and testify of Your grace. Remembering all that You have done for me, may I be animated to make a more entire consecration and surrender of all I am and have to Your glory.

Let me feel that whatever my rank or station or circumstances are, I have some mission to perform for You. How often do You choose "the foolish things of the world to confound the things that are mighty!" Let me not think my talent too trifling to trade upon. May I "occupy it until my Lord comes." Let me not squander fleeting moments, or forego fleeting opportunities. "The night is coming, when none of us can work." Enable me now, bowing at Your mercy-seat, to replenish anew my empty vessel with the oil of Your grace, that the lamp of faith may be kept burning brightly all the day. All that I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **23rd Morning**

### **FOR FILIAL NEARNESS**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Abba, Father." — Rom. 8:15

Most blessed God, I rejoice that I can look up to You, the mightiest of all

beings, and call You by that name, which may well dispel all misgivings, and hush all disquietudes — "My *Father* who is in heaven."

Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Your sight. The kindest of earthly parents could not so long have borne with ingratitude and waywardness like mine. Long before now You might righteously have driven me an exile and a castaway from Your presence. But the voice of parental mercy is not silenced. The hand of parental patience and love is "stretched out still." In the midst of deserved wrath, this is Your own gracious declaration, "I will be a Father to you!"

I mourn my grievous departures — my repeated declensions — my heinous ingratitude. Oh, let me no longer live in this state of guilty estrangement — forfeiting all the joys of a Father's tenderness, the sunshine of a Father's smile. May I know what it is for the soul, orphaned, and portionless, and friendless by nature, to repose in the security of Your covenant-love. May I be enabled to enjoy more and more, every day, holy filial nearness to the mercy-seat — there unburdening into Your ear all my needs and trials — my sorrows and perplexities — my backslidings and sins. Give me grace to bow with childlike submission to a Father's will — to bear without a murmur a Father's rod — to hear in every dealing, joyous or sorrowful, a Father's voice — and when death comes, to have every fear dispelled by listening to a Father's summons — "Today you shall be with me in paradise."

Jesus, blessed Elder Brother! "in whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," may I be enabled to imitate Your example of holy resignation to Your Father's will. May the cup of bitterest earthly sorrow be taken into my hands with Your own breathing of devout submission — "This cup which You give me to drink, shall I not drink it? Even so, Father, for so it seems good in Your sight." It is my comfort, blessed Lord, to know, that while the best of earthly parents may err, You, the unerring God, never can. In Your most mysterious dealings there is wisdom. In Your roughest voice there is mercy.

Adorable Redeemer, all these filial blessings and adoption-privileges I owe to You. It is Your precious blood-shedding which has "set me among the children" — it is that which still keeps me there. Anew this day would

I repair to Your cross — anew would I supplicate that the Holy Spirit, the Divine Comforter, would be sent forth into my heart, enabling me to cry, "Abba, Father." May the thought of this blessed trust in You, support me amid life's fitful changes and transient friendships, and may I be enabled to dwell with holy delight on that glorious time, when, no longer an exiled pilgrim in a strange land, I shall be received at the gates of glory with a Father's welcome — "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours."

I commend myself and all near and dear to me, this day, to Your fatherly care and keeping. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **24th Morning**

### **FOR RESTORATION TO FAVOR**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." — Psalm 51:12 <http://-Ps.li/>

O God, another morning has dawned upon me. "Better Sun of righteousness" — with the brightness of Your rising may all the shadows of guilt and sin be dispersed. I come, weak and weary, guilty and heavy-laden, to You, beseeching You to bend Your pitying eye upon me — to deal not with me as I have deserved, nor reward me according to my iniquity. Blessed Jesus, look upon me. In You may I be pitied, pardoned, and forgiven!

I have erred and strayed from Your way as a lost sheep. I have wandered from the home of my God. I have been seeking my happiness in what is shadowy and unreal. The world and its delusive hopes have been



preferred to You. My heart, which ought ever to be a little altar and sanctuary of praise, has burned with false incense. Your love and glory have not maintained their paramount place in my affections. I have righteously forfeited "the joys of Your salvation." My only marvel is, that, as a wandering star, You have not left me to drift onwards to the blackness of darkness forever. O leave me not to perish! I mourn my wanderings. In leaving You, I feel I have left my Best Friend. I have caused an aching void in this heart, which the world, with all its joys and riches and pleasures, can never fill. I cannot have one hour of happiness, if mingled with the thought that I am estranged from You, my God. Blissful hours of Your favor I once enjoyed, come sorrowfully to my remembrance; and, though the cup of earthly happiness be full to the brim, I have still to breathe the prayer — "Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord did shine!"

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Leave me not in this state of distance and alienation. "O Lord, I beseech You, deliver my soul." Snap these chains of earthliness that are still binding me to the dust, that, on the wings of faith, I may soar upwards, and find rest and quietude where alone it can be found — in Your renewed love and favor. May past backslidings drive me more to Your grace. Nothing in myself, may I find and feel that my all in all is in You. Reveal to me my own emptiness, and the overflowing fullness of Jesus. May I every day see more of His matchless excellencies — His incomparable loveliness — the sweets of His service — that I may never feel tempted to wander from His fold, and carefully avoid all that would risk the forfeiture of that favor in which indeed is "life."

Lord, let me know *this* day something of this happiness. Let me not be content with the *name* to live. Let religion be with me a real thing — let it be everything — life-influencing, sin-subduing, self-renouncing. Let me diffuse all around me the happy glow of a spirit that feels at peace with God.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? "My hope" for myself, my friends, and all for whom I ought to pray, "is in You." Listen to these my supplications; and all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## 25th Morning

### FOR A PILGRIM SPIRIT

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." — Heb. 11:13

O God, again, in the multitude of Your mercies, You are permitting me to approach the footstool of Your throne. I am another day nearer death — oh, may I be a day nearer You! With a new morning's dawn may I hear the pilgrim summons — "Arise, for this is not your rest." Before I mingle with the world, give me to feel I am not *of* it, but born *from* above, and *for* above; and cherishing more of a pilgrim spirit, may my prayer and watchword be — "I desire a better country."

Lord, I bless You for the rich provision You have made for the wilderness journey — for all Your mercies, temporal, providential, and spiritual. Forbid that the many gifts of Your love should draw me away from Yourself, the bountiful Giver, or obliterate the solemn impression — "I am a stranger with You and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." May I "use the world without abusing it." By the varied discipline of Your providence, may I be led to feel that all my well-springs are in You. May the world's fascinations be becoming more powerless — sin more hated — holiness more loved — heaven more realized — God more "the exceeding joy" of my soul. Driven from all creature supports and earthly refuges, may Jesus be the prop and staff of my pilgrimage. When the world is bright, may I rest upon Him, and seek that He sanctify my prosperity. When the wilderness is dreary, and the way dark, may He hallow

adversity. When friends are removed, may I feel that I have One left more faithful than the best of all earthly friends; and when death comes, and the pilgrim warfare ceases, leaning confidently on that same arm, may I enter the pilgrim's rest.

O adorable Savior! — You who were once Yourself a pilgrim — the lonely, weary, homeless, afflicted One — who had often no arm to lean upon, and no voice to cheer You — an outcast wanderer and sojourner in Your own creation — I rejoice to think that You have trodden all this wilderness-world before me — that You know its dreariest paths. I take comfort in the assurance that there is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, a fellow-Sufferer, who has drunk of every "brook in the way" — shed every tear of earthly sorrow — heaved every sigh of earthly suffering — and who, being Himself the "tried and tempted One," is able and willing to support every pilgrim who is tried and tempted too.

I beseech You this day to look down in great kindness on all my beloved friends. Seal to them a saving interest in Your great salvation. Wash them all in Your blood — sanctify them all by Your Spirit. May not one be missing on "the day when You make up Your jewels."

Pity a fallen world. Your Church is slumbering — the enemy is all vigilant — souls are perishing. Arise, Lord, and plead Your own cause. Promote greater unity and love and concord among Your own people. Let us be nearer Jesus, and then we shall be nearer one another. Give us all more of the single eye to Your glory. Make us more self-sacrificing — more heavenly-minded — more Savior-like. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **26th Morning**

### **FOR PREPARATION FOR DEATH**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Prepare to meet your God." — Amos 4:12

O eternal, everlasting God — Author of my being — my continual, unwearied Benefactor — I desire to come anew this morning into Your presence, thanking You for Your sparing mercies. Instead of making my last night's pillow a pillow of death, I am again among the living to praise You. Oh that I were enabled to live every day, and to rise every morning, as if it were to be my last, as if my next waking were to be in the morning of immortality!

Lord, how little am I influenced and impressed by the solemn records of death all around me! Friend after friend is departing — the circle of acquaintance is narrowed. The proclamation is ever sounding with fresh emphasis in my ears, "You also be ready;" and yet how prone to disregard the solemn admonitions! how apt to peril my preparation on the peradventures of a dying hour! Blessed God, my prayer is, that I may have my loins girded and my lamp burning. Let me not wait to have my vessel replenished until the voice of the Bridegroom is heard and I am summoned to meet Him. May I now so repose my every confidence in Jesus, that the hour which to the unwary and unwatchful is one of darkness and terror, may be to me the eve of the blessed Sabbath of eternity — the threshold and the portal of a world of endless joy.

Lord, let me feel that "the sting of death is sin" — that, not until I get the blessed sense of all my sins cancelled and forgiven in the blood of the Surety, can I be ready for my departure. "To me to live, may it be Christ," that so "to die" may be great and eternal "gain." Let me be enabled, by faith in death's great Conqueror, to cultivate that holy familiarity with a dying hour, that I may be enabled, when it comes, to fall sweetly "asleep in Jesus," and to hear His voice of love saying, "It is I, don't be afraid."

Look in mercy on the multitudes who are content to live on, unfit and unprepared for their great change. Awaken them to a sense of their guilt and peril. Show them their affecting need of Jesus — that time is wasting and eternity is hastening — that, "as the tree falls, so must it lie."

I pray for the heathen who are perishing for lack of knowledge. Countenance and bless all the efforts of Your Church to disseminate among them the gospel of the grace of God. May Your missionary servants, who have gone with their lives in their hands to the dark places of the earth, experience a peace which the world knows not of. May they have many souls as their glory and joy and crown at the day of Christ's appearing.

Oh give us all grace, in our varied stations and relations in life, to do something for You. Let us not bury or hide our talents; but as members of a ransomed priesthood, may we lay our time, our opportunities, our substance, on Your altar, and seek to "show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **27th Morning**

### **FOR A JOYFUL RESURRECTION**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust." — Isa. 26:19

Gracious God, You have again dispersed the darkness of another natural night. Every rising earthly sun is bringing me nearer the gladdening day-break of immortality. O grant that, when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised, I may be ready to listen undismayed to the summons, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him."

My prayer is, that I may now be made partaker of the blessedness of the first resurrection from a death of sin. As one "alive from the dead," may I

rise and walk with a living Savior in "newness of life," that thus I may at last share also in the more glorious resurrection of His ransomed saints, when His "dead men shall live," and together with His body "they shall arise," obeying the joyous mandate of their risen Head, "Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust."

Blessed Jesus, I do rejoice to think of Your own triumphant rising from the tomb. I rejoice to be able to visit in thought Your vacant sepulcher, and to hear the glad tidings, "He is not here, He is risen!" "The Lord is risen!" — it is the blessed pledge and earnest of my own redemption from the power of the grave — that "because Christ lives, I shall live also." O may "my life be now hidden with Christ in God, so that when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, I may also appear with him in glory." Keep me ever in the frame I should wish to be found in when my Lord comes. May the lamp of faith and love be brightly burning. May it never be mine to be awakened, by the midnight cry, to the dreadful consciousness, "My lamp has gone out." May I rather be among the number of "waiting servants," who, when their Lord comes and knocks," are ready to open to Him immediately."

Impart to all near and dear to me this day the same spiritual and eternal blessings I ask for myself. May they, too, be united to Jesus — "planted in the likeness of His death," that they may be found also "in the likeness of His resurrection." May we all seek to bear an increasingly holy resemblance in love one to another, and to our great living Head, in whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named; and if for a little while separated by death, may we, on the great day of His appearing, be reunited in bonds that shall know no dissolution.

Hasten that blessed time when our world, so long groaning and travailing in pain, shall put on her resurrection attire, and exult in the glorious liberty of Your children. "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly." "Why delay the wheels of Your chariot?"

Lord, I commend myself to You. Prepare me for living, prepare me for dying. Let me live near You in grace *now*, that I may live with You in glory *everlasting*. Let me be reconciled submissively to endure all that Your sovereign wisdom and love seem fit to appoint — looking forward,

through the tears and sorrows of a weeping world, to that better day-spring, when "I shall behold Your face in righteousness," and be "satisfied, when I awake in Your likeness." And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **28th Morning**

### **FOR THE CONQUEST OF SATAN**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." — Rom. 16:20

O God, I bless You for the returning mercies of a new day. "I laid down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of the ten thousands who have set themselves against me." Give me, I beseech You, Your fatherly protection and blessing, that all my thoughts may be ordered by You, and all my plans and purposes overruled by You, and all my joys hallowed by You, and all my sorrows sanctified by You. Keep me near Yourself. While I seek to realize, every hour of this day, the power and subtlety of my spiritual adversaries, may I rejoice in the assurance that greater is He who is with me than all those who can be against me — that, "though a host should encamp against me," with God on my side, "I need fear no evil."

I mourn the prevalence of sin, both in the world and in my own heart. Your creation still groans and travails under its power. "The Prince of the power of the air still works in the children of disobedience." "The whole world lies in the Wicked One." Often is Satan still "desiring to have me, that he might sift me as wheat" — "standing at my right hand to resist

me" — to oppose my plea and damage my cause — sending some "thorn in the flesh to buffet me" — marring my peace, disturbing my joy, and hindering and impeding my spiritual growth and advancement. But, Lord, it is my comfort to know that there is in heaven a "stronger than the strong man" — that no time can impair or diminish the comfort of the assurance, "I have prayed for *you*, that your faith fail not." When Satan assaults, blessed Jesus, I will think of Your continual intercession. "Your hand is never shortened, that it cannot save."

May I ever have grace given me to "resist the devil, that he may flee from me" — to keep watchfully guarded every loophole of the heart. May I abstain from all appearance of evil, avoiding every place and every company where his unholy influences are likely to prevail. "Lead me not into temptation," and, if tempted, Lord, make a way of escape, that I may be able to bear it.

O adorable Intercessor within the veil, it is my comfort to know that, in Your season of humiliation on earth, You were "not ignorant of his devices." You also, of him, "suffered, being tempted," and You are therefore the more able "to aid those who are tempted." I rejoice to think that, exalted on Your mediatorial throne, You shall reign until Satan and every other enemy be put under Your feet, and until the kingdoms of this world (so long usurped by him) shall become the "one kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Heavenly Father, take this day all my beloved friends under Your guardian care. May they dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. May they, too, be able to take up the triumphant challenge — "God is for us, who can be against us?" and when their earthly work and warfare is accomplished, may we all meet in that sinless world where Satan's seat no more can be found, and Satan's temptations shall no longer be felt or feared. And all that I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."



## 29th Morning

### FOR THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." — Joel 2:28

O God, I desire this morning to approach with lowly reverence the footstool of Your throne, adoring and praising You for the rest of the past night, and the comforts and blessings of a new day. O holy, blessed, eternal Trinity, three persons, one God, have mercy upon me, and grant me Your benediction and love.

Most blessed Spirit of all grace, more especially would I at this time invoke Your presence and nearness. I acknowledge, with shame and confusion of face, how often I have grieved You by resisting Your gracious influences. How often have You pleaded with me by the voice of *Providence*, and yet I have turned a deaf ear to Your repeated warnings and remonstrances! You have spoken to me in *prosperity*, when the full cup demanded in return a heart full of gratitude. You have spoken to me in *adversity*, when, by the emptied cup and the broken cistern, You would have driven me from all earthly things, to the everlasting God Himself, as my only satisfying Portion. You have spoken to me by the terrors of the *law* and by the tender accents of *gospel* love, and yet I have continued to "spend my money for that which is not bread, and my labor for that which satisfies not." Long before now I might have exhausted Your patience. "It is of the Lord's mercies I am not consumed."

But "take not, O gracious God, Your Holy Spirit from me." Come, blessed Enlightener, Quickener, Sanctifier, and *inspire this dull cold heart*. Touched as with a live coal, may the flame of a holy love to You be rekindled on its altar. "Return, O Holy Dove, Messenger of rest," from the true ark of God. Give me grace to hate the sins which drove You away from this guilty breast. Breathe upon me and say, "Peace be to you; receive the Holy Spirit." Invigorate my languishing affections. May I

realize my dependence on You for every pulsation of spiritual life. Without You I perish.

While I pray for this Blessed Agent in behalf of my own soul, Lord, it is my earnest prayer that He may be poured out upon all flesh — that that time may soon come, when the rain of His gracious influences shall descend on a barren church and parched world. Hasten the Pentecost of the "latter day." Earth is at present but as the prophet's "valley of dry bones." Come, blessed Spirit of all grace, "breathe upon these dry bones, that they may live."

And may the same blessed and benevolent influences be shed on every heart that is dear to me. The Spirit of the Lord is not restricted. O my Father in heaven, have You not promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask You? I pray that all my beloved friends may become members of that mystical body of which Jesus is the living Head, so that the oil of anointing grace poured upon Him by the Spirit, and flowing down to the skirts of His garments, may be shared by His humblest and unworthiest members, O that each and all of our hearts may become living temples, in which the Holy Spirit dwells! May nothing that is unholy find admission there, but, "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance," may we be daily and habitually living in the expectation of eternal glory. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **30th Morning**

### **FOR THE UNION OF YOUR PEOPLE**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"That they all may be one." — John 17:21

O God, the eternal Fountain of all excellence and glory! — through the one "new and living way" I desire this morning to approach You. Powerless in my own pleadings, I look up to the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, to that "Prince who has power with God," and at all times "prevails." Guilty, I come to this guiltless Redeemer. Diseased, I come to this great Physician. Outcast, I come to Him who has promised that He will by no means "cast out." May His presence always be with me. May I know Him, and believe in Him, and rejoice in Him. May I feel that I need no other Savior — that He is all I require for life or for death — for time or for eternity.

I rejoice to think of the glorious multitude around Your throne — the trophies of Your grace — already wearing the white robe and the immortal palm. I rejoice to think of the blessed unity which pervades their glorified ranks: no note of discord disturbing their lofty harmonies — all seeing eye to eye, and heart to heart.

I lament the sad and mournful estrangement of Christian from Christian in Your Church below — that so many, treading the same heavenly journey, with the same glorious portals in view, should be following separate and diverse footpaths — that so many brethren in the Lord whose interchanges ought to be all love, should be looking coldly and censoriously on one another. How much ungodly jealousy, and heart-burning, and mutual recrimination, among Your professing people! How little of the spirit which of old provoked the testimony even of heathen gainsayers — "See how these Christians love one another!" O blessed "Author of peace and lover of concord," in Your mercy, pour out on Your Church on earth, a greater spirit of unity and brotherly-kindness, and charity. In Your mercy, heal the bleeding wounds of Your mystical body — casting over them the mantle of love. Bring us all, blessed Jesus, as individuals and as churches nearer Yourself, and then shall we be nearer one another. It is because of our distance from You, the great Sun of Righteousness, the Source of light and life and peace, that we, as wandering stars are revolving in such devious and distant orbits. Give us to feel that we are all members of one mighty family, of which You are the glorious Head — that, though following diverse tracks, we are sheep of the same pasture, owning the same "Chief Shepherd" — that, though

enrolled in different ranks, we are allies in the same great army, fighting under the banner of the same great Captain of salvation. O forbid that, in these "latter days" — in these times of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy, when "the enemy is coming in like a flood" — we should waste our strength on petty and puny dissensions! May we be led to merge the few points in which we differ, in the many in which we can unite.

Preserve me, good Lord, this day, from all uncharitableness. May I "judge not, that I be not judged." May I have Your favor resting upon me in all the day's duties, and Your love softening and sanctifying all its trials. May all my beloved friends be one with me in Jesus — one now, and one in glory everlasting. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

## **31st Morning**

### **FOR THE COMING OF YOUR KINGDOM**

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You — and wait in expectation."

"May Your kingdom come." — Luke 11:2

O eternal, ever-blessed God, whose merciful kindness is new to me every morning — give me throughout this day that peace which the world cannot give. As the beams of the material sun are lighting up anew my earthly chamber, may the inner chamber of my soul be illuminated by a better and brighter radiance. Jesus! blessed Fountain of light, and life, and glory, disperse all the darkness of unbelief and sin. May Your presence and love hallow all my joys, and mitigate and sanctify all my sorrows.

Before I enter on the day's duties, sprinkle once again the lintels and doorposts of my heart with Your own most precious blood; may my inmost thoughts, and purposes, and desires, and affections be consecrated to that God whose property they are. May I have an increasing experience of the sweets of Your favor, and friendship, and love. With You, blessed Lord, I am rich, whatever else I lack; without You, I am poor, though I have the wealth of worlds beside. Take what You will away — but take not Yourself. Nothing can fill and satisfy the longings of my immortal nature but You — all worldly happiness and creature joys are poor substitutes for the inexhaustible source of all joy. Let me know what it is, amid the wreck of earthly refuges and hopes, to exult in the persuasion, "The Lord lives; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted."

While I pray that Your kingdom may come in my own heart, I would especially pray for its extension throughout the world. Arise, O God, and let Your enemies be scattered. May the blessed day soon arrive when a rejoicing and emancipated world shall own no longer habitations of darkness and horrid cruelty — when Jew and Gentile shall welcome the Prince of Peace to the Throne of Universal Empire — and "all ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God." "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly." Let the cry soon break over Your now burdened Church, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife has made herself ready." Grant, Lord, that *I* may be in readiness to meet You. May my loins now be girded, and my lamp brightly burning, that, at the Bridegroom's summons, I may be able joyfully to respond, "Lo, this is my God! I have waited for Him."

Grant this day to all near and dear to me, as well as to myself, the special tokens of Your blessing and love. Fold my beloved friends in the arms of Your mercy. Teaching them to do Your holy will, say of them and to them, "The same is my mother, and sister, and brother." Guide us all by Your counsel here. May we feel that the way in which You are leading us is the kindest and the best that covenant love can devise; and when our appointed time on earth is finished, receive us into everlasting habitations through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be

ascribed, as is most due, all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, world without end. Amen.

"Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

# HOSPICE OF THE PILGRIM

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## **PREFACE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you REST." –Matthew 11:28

"The heart never rests until it finds rest in You."

"You only are rest."

"Let my heart, a great ocean swelling with  
billows, be calm in You."



"Fix there, then, your resting-place, O my soul!"  
–Sentences from Augustine.

Who, in their memories of Switzerland and Italy, can fail to recall the HOSPICES for storm-beaten travelers which stud the higher and more perilous passes? One specially dwells in recollection, possibly because it was the first seen--the familiar hospice in the Pennine Alps; bringing still before us, though half a century has elapsed, the experience of pitiless sleet and darkness outside; and of log-fires, shelter, and genial fellowship inside. Others of more primitive form are constructed of pine or blocks of rough-hewn granite; at times with a motto or word of welcome surmounting their porches.

Such are surely typical, with a singular significance, of gospel realities--GOSPEL HOSPICES; and peculiarly of One whose motto of golden lettering occupies the prominent place in the pages which follow. It is the monograph of inspired monographs--words which, amid the priceless sayings of Jesus, "the Church throughout all the world" most lovingly clings to, and would be the last to part with--a strain of heavenly music which seems only endeared by repetition, as if the rehearsal brought out ever new and hitherto slumbering harmonies. The heart of humanity throbs responsive to this solitary solution for unrest.

How often has this verse, in many forms and phases, been recognized as an inspired teacher! Its rhythmic syllables have been enshrined in Art, and Music, and Sacred Song.

Into how many millions of aching hearts this saying of Jesus has found entrance, and brought with it the olive-branch of peace? It has formed for six thousand years the response to the cry of weary, care-worn humanity--a cry embracing every nation and every climate, from the yearnings of heathendom to the longings and aspirations of the present hour. From the tumultuous sea of the world's unrest the cry has gone up like a dirge of baffled souls-- "Oh, where can rest be found?"

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

This verse has been cherished by fevered toilers in life's weary struggle. Yet in that stern, diversified battle--it may be with the humbling memories, the unrest and agony of conscious sin--in the season of pain and suffering and bereavement, in the loneliness of the supreme hour of all--how often has that word turned the storm into a calm! the weary and heavy-laden, the tearful and the fearful, sobbing themselves to rest in the peace of Christ!

The traveler groping in tempest, with every star apparently swept from the sky, yet looking wistfully amid the blinding hail and drifting snows for some HOSPICE of shelter, is at last able to record his experience--"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me--refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto You, O Lord--I said, You are my Refuge [Hospice] and my Portion in the land of the living" (Psalm 142:4-5).

As will be seen, the invitation, recorded alone by the first evangelist, is taken as the golden prop which supports many of those other restful words ("rest-texts"), which we owe to the lips of Him who spoke as never man spoke--"The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." The Rock of Ages is one, but its clefts are many; each with its own silent answer to the quest, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest" (Ps. 55:6). The Sun of heaven is one, but encircled with many attendant stars and satellites. The Gospel Hospice, with its conspicuous motto of 'welcome', is one, but its chambers of repose and refuge are many. In accordance with the true plural rendering of the Hebrew in one of the most precious portions of the Psalter, we can say, as we enter the gracious Hospice for all pilgrims, "Return unto your Rests, O my soul!"

"And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7.)

## **PASSPORT AT THE GATE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Whoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." Matthew 12:50

These seem appropriate opening words, addressed to us by the Great Rest-Giver, on entering the Pilgrim-Stronghold. Mother, sister, brother, are names suggestive of the most hallowed Hospices of earthly affection. Earthly love in its depth and constancy is identified with them. When other trusted friendships fail--when other trusted fellowships, like strong mooring cables, suddenly snap asunder, and we are left drifting aimlessly in unsympathetic isolation--the relationships of home and kindred are rendered more sacred and endearing than ever. The world, at times ungenerous, may do its worst; but nothing can diminish or impair the love of father, mother, sister, brother.

The earthly is a parable of the heavenly. Christ offers a divine homestead to all those that do, or--what is all He asks or expects from imperfect natures--who seek to do the will of His Father in heaven. He offers and promises that in Himself the reality of these varied relationships, individually and combined, shall meet. No, more than all--at times through misconception, at times from sadder causes, son may be estranged from parent, brother from brother, sister from sister. But there is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother, or than any human relative. "Come unto Me!"--He offers a sure and abiding Hospice to the orphaned and fatherless, a stormless haven to the tempest-tossed. There is no contingency in His words--"And you shall find rest unto your souls."

If one of the most comforting themes brought into greater prominence in recent times be the Fatherhood of God, so also is this its counterpart and complement--the Brotherhood of Christ. He is linked in communion with universal humanity--"God, yet my Brother; Brother, yet my God." Wondrous thought! that the ties most endearing on earth, the sanctities of the family and home, have their highest and truest expression in the love of the Brother of brothers, the Friend of friends. He knew, surely, the finer impulses of the soul which these varied earthly relationships suggest, who reserved His last benediction for His beloved human

mother, and the brother-heart of His dearest apostle.

I may be enabled to appropriate these privileges and enduring fellowships by striving to fulfill the Savior's one stipulated condition--of having my own way and will coincident with the divine, my nature more and more brought into delighted consecration to the service of Him whom it is alike my duty and honor to obey. If there be a fervent desire to do it, that "will" can be done anywhere--everywhere. "In all places I will come unto you and bless you"--in life's public ways, or in life's sequestered by-paths; in its "loud stunning tide" and noisy crowds, or in its enforced silences; in the fever-heats of mart and exchange, or in quiet retirement of the study, or in seclusion of the sick chamber; in the glare of day, or in the hush of night. Nor does the doing of that Father's will involve or exact great efforts or conspicuous deeds. Little services, little self-denials, the conscientious discharge of little responsibilities are acceptable (shall we say, most acceptable?) in the eye of Him who looks not on the outer appearance, but who looks on the heart.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

"The deeds that He would have me do

Are wrought by love and prayer;

A world of lowly charities

Awaits His servant's care.

I need not seek some high emprise,

Or lofty work for God,

While crowds of simple duties rise

Like daisies from the sod."

Drudging commonplace work, worthily performed, with the right motive and spirit, is transfigured into divine service. Many a common coin may thus be stamped with the image and superscription of heaven. Many a

voice feeble with pain and sorrow, may be made to resound with divine music.

One other thought our verse of today suggests. The purest and closest of human relationships--the affection subsisting between mother, sister, brother, taken here by Christ Himself, in the aggregate, as types of "a greater love"--are in themselves, and at the best, precarious, finite, perishable. Death may have defrauded, or at any moment may defraud, the earthly pictures of their charm, leaving only blank memories behind. But the "doers of God's will"--"pilgrims of the night"--in their impregnable, unassailable Hospice, are authorized to make the challenge, embracing this world and the next--"Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" In Him the earthly and heavenly affections, with their golden links welded together, will be strengthened, perpetuated, intensified in the unblighted Home and Hospice above--the life immortal.

Meanwhile let me live under the sovereignty of the lofty motive power, the purest and grandest of all spiritual forces, to walk and act so as to please God; inspired with the ambition, not of "serving Him much," but of "pleasing Him perfectly;" following the example of One whose motto was--and never more so than when the shadows of a deeper than this world's darkness were gathering around Him--"Not My will, but may Yours be done!"

O Christ! help me to some feeble reflection of this Your divine consecration; that, accepting the accompanying promise You do here make, I may serve myself heir to these peerless relationships. Knowing by increasing experience that Your service is self-rewarding and self-satisfying, may I be able to say, in Your own prophetic word-- "I delight to do Your will, O my God--yes, Your law is within my heart."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE PILGRIM VISION**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Blessed are the pure in heart--for they shall see God." Matt. 5:8

To see God! What a Hospice! every window ablaze with Deity!

The Psalmist's ardent aspiration, as he anticipated through the troubled dream of life the morning of immortality, was this--"I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Your likeness" (Ps. 17:15). "Yet in my flesh," said a yet older pilgrim, weary and heavy laden, "shall I see God" (Job 19:26).

But the promise has not a future and heavenly anticipation only. That realizing sight and sense of the invisible, is a present beatitude bestowed on the "pure in heart." To them the unveiling of the divine glory is a special prerogative. It is this transparency of soul which imparts the capacity for "seeing God." We cannot see the splendor of the material sun through the pane of glass blurred with dust and cobwebs. The Divine Being can alone be discerned through the translucent windows of the holy renewed nature. "I shall behold Your face in righteousness." It was the prophet-spectator whose lips were touched with the live altar-coal who could say, "I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

"Come to Me," says Jesus, as He invites to this Hospice, "and I will give you rest." There is a wonderful rest in the conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. The soul that is the haunt of passion or impurity, seeking rest, can find none. To the owner of a throne, with gilded halls, and lordly surroundings, and an illustrious pedigree--if there be degraded memories and a blemished life--happiness is impossible. We can understand Paul's noble protestation before King Agrippa. Rather "these bonds" with a pure conscience; than a crown on the brow, scarred with dishonor (Acts 26:29).

O Great Rest-Giver, impart this purity of soul, that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. Alas! it is too often nebulous vapors of our own creating--the noisy jars and turmoil of life, its feverish and fretting cares--which dim the Infinite Vision. "But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." The higher the spiritual Pilgrim

ascends above mist and valley, the more is his moral sight cleared, and he insures the serenity of the soul at peace with God.

Try to build around you a fortress that will render as impossible, as may be a disloyal thought, a lapsed purpose, an unworthy aim, an aggrieved and corroded conscience. Let Purity and Love be the two ministering angels which keep the fire burning on the shrine of the heart-temple. Aspire after loyalty to truth and duty. Seek to be able to cherish the memory, not of defeat and failure, cowardliness and surrender--but the happier retrospect of vanquished temptation, struggle ending in victory, the conquests of goodness. Thus under a serene sky may the vision and blessing of the pilgrim patriarch be yours, who, as he paused on his journey, called his Hospice "Peniel"--"for," said he, "I have seen God face to face."

Or the similar realization by faith of a near and ever-present God--the shadow of the Almighty--which nerved Moses in the midst of his wilderness trials, and gave him grace to suffer and be strong. "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." It was in his case the ratification of the outset promise--"My Presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."

While blessed are all those who enjoy this soul-sight, this luminous spiritual vision, it was enjoyed pre-eminently, O Christ, by You! Your heart was the home of unsullied purity. You were the true "Lily of the Valley," without speck or stain on its petals; and, being such, You did know, as none other could, the delight, and "rest," and reality of Your own beatitude. Creature-purity can at the best be a feeble approximation to that of You, the Sinless One; the dim luster of candle or glow-worm compared to the glory of the meridian sun; the finite as compared to the infinite. But seeking as a life-long, habitual aim, to be gradually conformed to Your image, with some good measure of lowly confidence may this be my avowal, combining an earthly and a heavenly meaning--"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

# THE DOOR OF ENTRANCE

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"I am the door--by Me if any man enters in, he shall be saved." John 10:9

Where or what is the entrance-gate to these "peaceful habitations," these "quiet resting-places"? (Isa. 32:18)

To this question varied have been the answering voices echoed through the ages. Many--most of these are false, delusive, unsatisfactory--men, like the citizens of Sodom, "wearying themselves to find the door." Naaman's preference for his Syrian rivers--the streams murmuring amid the groves and gardens of Damascus, and his rejection of the waters of Israel--Jordan and the tributary brooks that fitfully fed it--is a just reflection and picture of the many gropings after the false rest, and the many evasions of the true rest. Some strive to enter through the gateway of ethical system and philosophic code and tenet. Others, through the gateway of human merit. Others through ceremonial observances--fasts and vigils, penances and pilgrimages, rites and ceremonies, creeds and dogmas, party badges and contrived shibboleths. These, and such as these, are alike spurious and unavailing.

Christ is the true and only true Door of entrance. "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth;" and "neither is there salvation in any other." There was but one way for the Israelites of old to avert the sword of the destroying angel. They might have resorted to measures of their own devising. Massive blocks of stone, immense as those of the familiar pyramids, might have been piled in front of their dwellings--walled up, for that part, to heaven. They would avail nothing as a substitute for the blood-sprinkled lintels and door-posts.

Again--in the lofty poetry of the prophet, Lebanon might have been transformed into a high altar, its forests of oak and cedar converted into fuel, and the cattle roaming their glades laid thereon as a burnt-offering (Isa. 40:16). All would have been inadequate and worthless. As there was



but one door to the ark, one gate to the cities of refuge, so there is, to every seeker and climber, only one entrance to the spiritual Hospice, with its challenge and rebuke to whatever is false and artificial--"This gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter." "Come unto ME," says the Divine Rest-Giver; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

"To whom, O Savior, shall we go?  
We gaze around in vain.  
Though pleasure's fairy lute be strung,  
And mirth's enchanting lay be sung,  
We dare not trust the strain.  
You have the words of endless life;  
You give victory in the strife--  
In life, in death, alike we flee,  
O Savior of the world, to Thee."

And gracious to every pilgrim is the assurance, that through this solitary entrance all are warranted and all are welcome; no moat or iron gateway to prevent reaching direct the open portal. Thousands have entered in and been saved, and yet there is room.

Other hospices of the world are restricted to privileged classes--the favored few. Not so here. "If ANY man." The sun and the light of heaven are not more free than the offer of salvation. The King has flung wide the gates to the most fainting and toil-worn. No flaming sword of cherubim bars the way. No adversary can obscure or erase the motto and superscription on its portico--"Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it."

O God, I come, weary and heavy laden, to this sheltering Refuge. If, until now, I have been a stranger to safety and peace, let me hear Your voice, and let faith accept the offer--"Come in, you blessed of the Lord, why do you stand outside?" "Enter in and be saved." The invitation and the promise have lost none of their divine efficacy and gracious music since they were first uttered. There is no other call so reliable; there is no other security so strong. There is no such "finality" in any other of earth's utterances. Time writes its wrinkles all around. What seems most enduring is subject to flux, vacillation, disintegration, decay. The globe

itself, as in long past epochs, so even now, is subjected to geological and climatic variations--inappreciably, but none the less surely, to strange alternations of heat and cold. The apparently most stable things are not stable. "The world goes spinning down the ringing grooves of change." The old "hearts of oak," Britain's pride, have given way to iron-sheathed leviathans with their sleeping thunders. The mechanical agencies and triumphs of modern discovery may possibly, before a few decades elapse, have to abdicate in favor of other kingly forces and motive powers, some new dynamics hidden in nature's laboratory.

"Our little systems have their day--  
They have their day, and cease to be."

But while other gates of brass may be broken, other bars of iron wrenched asunder, there can be no change in the portals of the Gospel Hospice. He who is Himself the Entrance Gate, and who stands holding it in His hand, who opens and no man shuts, whose unwearied invitation is "Knock, and it shall be opened," is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

"Open to me the gates of righteousness--I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord!"

Take me to the fold, is the inarticulate cry of the wanderer of the flock. Take me to the ark, is the inarticulate longing of the dove, as, conscious of its homelessness, with weary wing and wailing cry it roams the wilderness of waters. Take me to the Hospice-gate, is the yearning of the belated traveler battling with blinding hurricane of hail or snow. Take me home, take me to my father, is the plaintive monotone of the child that has lost its way in the noisy thoroughfare, unheeded by the passers-by.

Humanity has ever borne attestation to this soul restlessness--that the world at its best, with its glittering prizes, glowing visions, and winged ambitions, cannot satisfy. But HE can satisfy; He does satisfy. "And He said unto them, Did you lack anything? And they answered, nothing" (Luke 22:35). How many can joyfully appropriate the words of Bunyan in his great allegory, "When I came at the gate that is at the head of the way, the Lord of that place did entertain me freely, and gave me such things

that were necessary for my journey, and bid me hope to the end!"

Many refuges may prove too often refuges of lies, counterfeits, figures of the true. But shielded, guarded, shepherded by Christ, safe in His keeping--safe within the wicket-gate of the Fold and the portals of the Pilgrim-Hospice, may I be able in reposeful confidence to say-- "My flesh and my heart fails--but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE CHAMBER CALLED PEACE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you--not as the world gives, give I unto you." John 14:27

No diviner or more soothing music than this--the great lullaby of lullabies.

What a Hospice the words must have been for those to whom they were first addressed! The pilgrim apostles, laboring and heavy laden, were about to be overtaken by whelming tempest. Thunder clouds they had little anticipated were at the moment gathering ominously around them. In that valley of the shadow of death they were entering there was no blue opening, no rift in the sky. Their best Friend, as they had been forewarned, was soon to be removed. The voice would soon no longer be heard which was used to say in seasons of depression and sadness, "Come apart into a desert place and rest awhile." They would be left alone to buffet the storm.

But, before the valley-gloom is encountered, the gracious Rest-Giver, in a divine, spiritual sense, utters the conventional greeting--so well known to all Orientals, and specially the Jews--Peace! "Peace I leave with you, My

peace I give unto you."

It was a true Hos-peace, "a House of Peace," whose gates He was opening to them. He who came to give peace on earth welcomes the weary ones in. The customary Jewish salutation conveyed little meaning. It had degenerated into mere formal parlance--no more. "Mine," says Christ, "My promised gift, is no mere verbal form of expression, but a reality."

And, though first spoken to the disciples, it was a farewell promise--a parting legacy for all--for you and for me. Death-bed sayings are always affecting and sacredly treasured. Here is a keepsake intended for the Church and for believers of every age; all the more precious because uttered within shadow of Gethsemane.

The walls of this Gospel Hospice are built of peace of Christ's own procuring--"peace through the blood of His cross." The pilgrim who reaches the threshold of "the chamber called peace, whose windows open to the sunrising," is safe, restful, secure, happy.

"All my favorite passages in the Holy Scriptures," says one of the greatest of our poets in the days of her simplest devotion (Mrs. Barrett Browning), "are those which promise and express peace--such as, 'The Lord of peace, Himself give you peace always and by all means;' 'My peace I give unto you--not as the world gives give I;' and, 'He gives His beloved sleep.' They strike upon the disturbed earth with such a foreignness of heavenly music." The last of these she makes the refrain in the most familiar of her verses--

"His dew drops mutely on the hill,  
His cloud above it saileth still--  
More softly than the dew is shed,  
Or cloud is floated overhead,  
He gives His beloved sleep."

"O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant me Your peace!" Your peace is "not as the world gives." The world's rest, the rest of creature comforts and external blessings, is fitful, uncertain, unstable--ours today, gone tomorrow. Often its greeting is, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

And yet, if it be not an apparent paradox, "not as the world gives" implies another, almost opposite characteristic; and the thought ought to be one of comfort to many. Let none, in the pursuit of peace, be downcast or discouraged by reason of harassment, mental and moral discords and disharmonies. These are often preludes to truest cadence. If I might venture to expand the thought and illustration of a gifted writer (Professor Elmslie, "Memoir and Sermons," page 291), the world's peace is often not worth the having, just because it takes the shape of an easy-going quiescence--no more. It is alike artificial and superficial. The peace of Christ, on the other hand, that which is best and noblest, frequently comes after conflict and out of conflict. It is a peace which has its travail and birth-pangs--a peace which at times has its pedigree in defeat, baffling enigma, mysterious discipline, bewildering doubt, barely vanquished temptation. Two of the small but beautiful lakes among the Allan hills, near Rome, so peaceful and serene, with myrtle and olive trees mirrored in the quiet waters, occupy the craters of extinct volcanoes. Their cradles of rest were rocked by unrest. First, struggle, upheaval--forces of terror and destruction, a seething caldron, then peace. First, wild convulsion and paroxysm; this followed by nature's loveliest pictures and features of repose--"quiet waters," the song of nightingales in the adjacent woods, trails of vine, a cascade of wild roses, a golden canopy of moss and lichen on the surrounding rocks.

"Not as the world gives," says the great Peace-Giver. "I have chosen you in the furnace [the crater] of affliction." "After you have suffered awhile, establish, strengthen, settle you." "These are those who have come out of Great Tribulation."

Yet, true as this often is, it is equally true that when once the boon of this unworldly peace is secured, how reliable and permanent it is! "The peace of God which passes all understanding, shall keep [as in a stronghold or Hospice] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." "Keep;" it is the guarantee of security. The promised gift is alike present and future--a peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away; peace ringing its silver bells in unlikeliest places--in peasant hut and lonely garret, and amid hum of busiest industry, yes, too, even amid uncongenial and repelling environments; peace in joy, peace in sorrow;

peace in the varied vicissitudes of life; peace, above all, in the solemn hour when the spirit is about to wing its arrowy flight to the Great Beyond. Peace floods the death-chamber with its own mellowed celestial radiance. The Hospice catches the earliest sunbeam, and is gilded with the last evening ray.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE HOSPICE OF TRUST**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter." John 13:7

Most gracious Refuge, specially built on the Hill Difficulty, designed for Faint-hearts and Feeble-minds--weary ones, in their nights of toil and darkness. This saying of the Savior can be condensed in two words, "Trust Me."

There is much in life's pilgrimage and its complexities which must be left to faith, and much that is baffling to sight; much demanding the surrender of our own wills and the merging of them in a Higher. "All these things are against me," said the stricken patriarch. He lived to cancel and reverse this impeachment of the divine faithfulness, and to recognize the love and mindfulness which in an impatient moment he had disowned.

The great apostle of an after age descried the kindling fires of persecution. Too surely anticipating the battles of the faith, he could see little with the eye of sense save conflict and suffering. But faith takes him within the Gospel Hospice. Amid present insecurity, it whispers of nobler things in reversion. Faith puts into his lips this song in the night, "We know that all things work together for good." He trusted his Lord's

"hereafter" promise, and he lived to make this entry in the diary of his own personal experience, "The things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."

It is for us to honor God by implicit reliance on His word.

"You may not see that all is good—  
The bow is broken in its strength;  
But what is now misunderstood  
Will have its 'wherefore' solved at length."

"Providence," says Flavel, "is like a curious piece of tapestry, made up of a thousand shreds, which, single, we know not what to make of, but put together and stitched up orderly, they represent to the eye a beautiful history."

"His plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold.  
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart;  
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold."

When the pillar-cloud, as with Israel of old, conducts, not by the short and easy way to Canaan, but by the circuitous route and through the depths of the sea, it is for us to offer no remonstrance, but, with un murmuring submission and unreasoning faith, to hear the directing Voice, the "marching orders"—"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." The Savior's promise will be abundantly ratified "beyond the flood." But even in this world it is partially fulfilled.

Not a few can endorse the Psalmist's averment, "They went through the flood on foot; there [in the very pathway of trial] did we rejoice in HIM." And if not at the time of chastening and affliction, "yet nevertheless afterward" the need-be is often unfolded, the peaceable fruits of righteousness are yielded and made manifest. But for the diverse sorrows of David, and of the subsequent Babylon minstrels, the best and most affecting portions of the Psalter would have been lost to us.

The eyes of the pilgrim disciples on the way to Emmaus were "closed, so that they knew Him not." Their hopes had suddenly undergone a great eclipse. The "Sun of their soul" had set in darkness. Tears of blissful

communion were a memory--no more. They gazed on the cloud, but there was no trace of the rainbow. They could but echo the dirge wailed by others, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." But in due time He revealed Himself--"Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." Hastening to the upper room in Jerusalem, they joined in the briefest but gladdest of songs which thrilled on the lips of those there assembled, "The Lord is risen indeed!" (Luke 24:34.) The Divine dealing is often not at once but gradually explained. The clouds of mid-day and afternoon slowly but surely take on their crimson and silver linings in the western sky.

"You noble few, who here unbending stand  
Beneath life's pressure! yet bear up awhile,  
And what your bounded view, which only saw  
A little part, deemed evil, is no more;  
The storms of wintry time will quickly pass,  
And one unbounded spring encircle all."

"And it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"He that has seen Me has seen the Father." John 14:9

What is God? That is the great, the primal and final problem of humanity. It formed the unsolved enigma of the ages until Christ came. It cannot be frittered away by any modern Pantheistic theories in which the existence of a personal Deity is discarded and denied. No one can venture to say he has found rest until he attains some definite knowledge of the character of the Being with whom he has to do. Moses was only the unconscious interpreter of the world's anxious, yearning souls when he made the



request, "I beseech You, show me Your glory." The answer has been given. A Hospice, precious above others, has the Rest-Giver provided for the weary traveler--"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

In another sense, indeed, we have seen and are daily seeing the world's Creator and Benefactor. Outer nature is no silent oracle. "The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." They are the most familiar of platitudes when we speak of the Almighty as imaged and manifested in sea and earth and air and sky, in mountain and grove and valley; His praise intoned in song of bird, and music of stream, and deep bass of ocean; above all, in the music of the spheres--the stellar glories of the skies--day and night joining in the antiphonal strain.

But there are at times, also, stern and conflicting, dissonant and discordant voices, anomalies ever and again occurring, alike in the material and moral economy--the scathing lightning, the havoc-making earthquake, the devouring famine, the death-shrieks of the perishing, the sea's "wandering graves;" not to enlarge on many other forms under which we group what are called "startling providences," perhaps, specially, the baffling mysteries of suffering and pain. Our only explanation often is, "Verily, you are a God that hides Yourself;" "Your judgments are a great deep!"

Yes, God, this great God, to many a soul would Himself be the mystery of mysteries, His name "secret" (wonderful), but for the gracious announcement and declaration of the Incarnate Savior, "He that has seen Me, has seen the Father." The person and character of Christ have been well compared to a viaduct spanning the otherwise dreadful chasm separating us from the Unknowable and Incomprehensible of the agnostic, and rendering the God with whom we have to do alike knowable and known. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," for I am the Image, the Reflection, the Revelation of the Invisible; the true Antitype of the pillar of enfolding cloud which screened from the Israelites of old the Presence of Deity; God in Christ, and Christ in God! As "words" are the audible expression of silent thought, so is He "THE WORD" (the Word

which was made flesh), the spoken revelation of the Supreme--"Who has spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb. 1:2).

Then follows the complementary query, "What is Christ?" Ponder the details of His life and ministry as these are evolved in the four Gospels. He is, above all else, "the Forgiver." While holiness and purity and hatred of moral evil constituted the essentials of His ethical teachings, while uncompromisingly denouncing sin in its every hydra-shape, and stripping it of its sophistries--who can trace these three crisis-years in earth's history without being impressed by the conviction that Love, in its varied phases, formed the noblest expression of His character, and like a divine aroma perfumed His every word and deed?

As we follow His footsteps on the shores of the Syrian lake, or in the temple-courts of Judea, or by the footpaths and groves of Olivet, or as He comes from His oratory beneath the silent stars, what do we behold? A Divine Pardoner; a gracious Being who impressed all with whom He came in contact with the spell of His goodness--succouring the needy, rescuing the perishing; imparting comfort and solace to the sorrowing, the troubled, the bereaved--confirming hesitating wills; pardoning faithless desertion; offering hope to the penitent; help to the disgraced, welcome to the prodigal, salvation to the lost. Such, says He, is GOD--"My Father and your Father; My God, your God." And as this Father-God "sent" His Son to earth for the redemption of mankind, let all His sufferings, from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, and specially the latter, their crown and consummation, be the measure and exponent of the Father's love--"God so loved the world."

Blessed Savior, in You, as the Revealer of the Almighty, I can lay my heaviest burden down. I can look up to the mightiest of all beings, and say, "From henceforth I know Him, and have seen Him." I can address Him by the endearing name You were specially called to unfold. Secure in this Gospel Hospice, I can read on its lintels the gracious lettering-- "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"I am the resurrection, and the life--he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11:25

"If a man dies, shall he live again?" has been the perplexed and perplexing question, the anxious, unsolved problem of the ages. When these eyes close in their mortal sleep, when dust has returned to dust, ashes to ashes, earth to earth, shall there be, can there be, a requickening from decay to vitality? or is all to end in annihilation--dreamless oblivion? There is much to dim and darken. The very analogies of nature, beautiful as they are and so often quoted, are in themselves partial, unsatisfactory. Under the blaze of rigid, exacting truth, they are defective and misleading. The corn-grain, apparently without a spark of animation, as inert as the clods under which it is laid, is not dead but living. "Our Lord," says Luther, "has written the promise of the resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in spring time." Yes; but these leaves come from no dead branch, or sapless trunk, or decayed root, but are nurtured by living though unseen forces within the apparent skeleton tree. The chrysalis, with the seeming torpor of death, has within it, also, the embryo, the same slumbering forces of life; its lustrous wings are not born of the worm and corruption. Not so that pulseless, rayless, inanimate mortal human body, the speedy prey of dissolution. There is resurrection, rejuvenescence for the flowers of spring which rim the loved one's grave; but all else below seems to refute the fond dream of an afterlife, when, year after year, decade after decade, nothing save "everlasting silence reigns."

"But come with Me," says Christ, "and I will ease you of this burden also. I will reveal to you the secret hidden from ages and generations. I can take, as no other can, the bereft to the tombs of their loved ones, and whisper My own requiem and lullaby--In Christ, in peace. Rest with Me." You who are bearing this heaviest and most crushing of life-sorrows, be comforted! You can write on every churchyard gate, you can carve on

every stone in these realms of silence, "My flesh also shall rest in hope."

Laying aside the natural arguments for the immortality of the soul (perhaps one of the strongest of which is the instinctive feeling within each of us of a hereafter), all uncertainty is swept away by the great word, and, subsequently, by the great deed, of our Divine Redeemer. He proclaims Himself here, when standing amid the memorials of death, as "the Resurrection, and the Life." He proved and substantiated the assertion--first, in a subsidiary way, by the revivifying of His deceased friend; and, afterwards, far more by His own gigantic triumph over Death and Hades, when He came forth from the sepulcher a moral Conqueror. By that rising He has converted the graves of His people into "cemeteries" (sleeping places), "hospices" (houses of peace). The everlasting hills, to every pilgrim, are gilded with the light of unsetting suns. Our "loved and lost" are only lost to be loved again--

"Though down the long, dim avenues of the past  
Their swift feet fled,  
In His eternity the rooms are vast--  
There wait they to be ours at last--  
They are not dead!"

Glorious assurance! In Him, my once dying but now ever-living Lord and Head, Death is vanquished and the Grave spoiled. The last enemy only ushers into a blessed continuity of life. Christ, having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

A writer narrates that Marcia, a Roman matron, was inconsolable, mourning the irreparable loss of a son of great promise. Seneca, one of the sagest of pagan philosophers, whose counsel she sought, advised her to forget her grief "as the lower creation do." His panacea was 'oblivion'. "Go, bury your sorrow." "Let the dead bury their dead." Hear Him, who has opened a Hospice at the very mouth of the dark valley, speaking by the lips of His apostle--"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14).

No wonder the first Christians, on the walls of their catacombs, loved to portray the fabled Phoenix, the bird of Immortality, perched on the true Heavenly Palm; and that their loved greeting was not, "The Lord has died," but, "The Lord has risen."

"Hallelujah! dry the tear,  
'Jesus Christ is risen!'  
Sound o'er every silent coffin—  
'Jesus Christ is risen!'

Thrice blessed pledge, you mourners, keep,  
Who for your loved departed weep,  
Because He lives, they only sleep,  
Hallelujah!"

May it be your earnest desire now, as risen with Christ, to seek those things that are above, where He sits at the right hand of God, that—  
"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **REST IN SERVICE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"If any man serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am there shall also My servant be--if any man serves Me, him will My Father honor." John 12:26

The service of Christ in its very activities is Rest. It is the answer to the weary cry and quest of humanity, "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us." "Come unto me," is the address of many siren voices, titillating tones of questionable or forbidden pleasure, leading only to unrest, disquiet, heart-weariness, life-

failure--tinted soap bubbles with a momentary iridescence, then collapsing.

"Come unto Me," is the invitation addressed by Jesus; and in that are included many voices of healthful happiness and joy which God Himself approves. But even pleasures, in themselves lawful, fail to insure perfect satisfaction and peace. If they are legitimate and commendable, it is only as means to an end. They are resting-places, but not substitutes for the only true Rest and Hospice in God and His Christ. "You will keep him in perfect peace [literally, peace, peace], whose mind is stayed on You" (Isa. 26:3).

Blessed Savior, Your service alone is perfect freedom! The green pastures and the still waters are only to be found "by the Shepherd's tent." They who have gone the round of all the world's fascinations, are often the first to write on the retrospect, "Not enough." Theirs is the wooden Alpine chalet, for summer joys and summer skies; not the Hospice, with rock foundations and granite walls, the shelter for all seasons--"In summer and winter it shall be." They who have sought the Redeemer with loving purpose, tested Him, proved Him, are able to make the avowal of the Queen of Sheba regarding the true Solomon, "The half was not told me."

Let the philosophic skeptic produce, out of his cold negations, a new Christ better than the Christ of history; a diviner Force, to mold and regenerate humanity, than the Christ of Nazareth; some other and better than He to walk with untiring feet along every path of sorrow, every Via Dolorosa; who, better than He, could impart strength to the palsied arm, courage to the fearful, hope to the hopeless; drying weeping eyes, stilling the throbbings of aching hearts, taking anguish out of loneliness, strewing the wilderness and solitary places with lovelier flowers than those of Eden, opening Hospices all along the pilgrim way up to the very gates of glory--then, but not until then, will we listen to the rejection of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

O Jesus, Son of the Most High God, may it be my habitual desire, in accordance with the words of our meditation, and as evidence of heart-consecration to Your service, to "follow You;" to set You ever before me as my Ideal of all excellence, and to be gradually, however imperfectly,

transfigured into Your divine likeness! Let the prayer and resolve of one who knew, more than most, the bliss and security of the Pilgrim-Hospice, be mine--"Let me set forth anew, O Lord, as a pilgrim on the earth, with my rod and staff; and so set my heart on You, that in all places You may be my dwelling-place and home--I in You and You in me" (Memorials of a Quiet Life). May I submissively accept even burdens, if it be Your will that I should carry them, feeling and saying in the spirit of Galileo when he had become blind, "Whatever is pleasing to God is pleasing to me." Then will all trials be made light and all crosses easy.

"There are briars besetting every path,  
That call for patient care;  
There is a cross in every lot,  
And an earnest need for prayer;  
But a lowly heart that leans on You  
Is happy everywhere."

Let the wondrous thought included in the Savior's utterance of today prove a further quickener and inspiration--that in thus serving Him, following Him, loving Him, the Father, too, is honored and glorified. Let others be content with seeking rest and peace in the chase of trooping shadows, which perish with the using; be it mine, with rest in possession and glory in prospect, to say-- "As for me, I will behold Your face in righteousness--I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Your likeness."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **HOSPICE WATCHERS**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Occupy until I come." Luke 19:13

"Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he comes shall find watching." Luke 12:37

These two verses describe the character and the position of Christ's faithful servants, who, when the sign of the Son of man shall be seen in the heavens and the cry heard, "He comes, He comes to judge the earth," will be found safe in the Gospel Hospice, "occupying" and "watching;" ready with the exulting challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

It is a double message, meanwhile, from the Rest-Giver to those pilgrims who have borne, and are still bearing their burdens; who have accepted life as an appointed scene of discipline--every trial appointed; and who are looking forward with calm expectancy to that day which will reveal and explain all mysteries and solve all doubts; not over-solicitous to have the burden weighing on them removed or the cross uplifted, if it be His will to retain it. "Occupy until I come." "Occupy!" Work. Be busy. Recognize the present as the time, not for reverie, but as the season and realm of duty. It is the voice of Jesus, reminding of privilege and responsibility. "Occupy!" Be not like the lone marsh, the inky pool, with no outflow for its waters, with the miasma brooding over it, and whose margin the very birds seem to avoid. Rather be like the flowing stream "bounding over rock and wild cascade," "occupying" its living, life-giving mission to fertilize and bless.

"Found watching." This is the complementary call. As the first is all exhortation to active, unremitting energy--working out salvation with fear and trembling; the latter is the inculcation of the passive virtues--waiting and watching, patience and trust. The one is the exhortation for the girded loins--zeal and activity; the other for the burning lamps--readiness for the opened door and the Bridegroom's summons, keeping vigil for the present, if need be, in the gloom under the olive-trees of sorrow--"Tarry here and watch with Me;" trusting the faithfulness of Him who there bore heavier and more mysterious burdens. Seen in the light of that great day of God, these burdens will lose their heaviness; they will be burdens no more.

Prepare me specially, gracious Savior, for that blessed hope, even Your own glorious appearing. "Until I come." It is a luminous rainbow, bright with the prismatic colors of gospel promise, spanning the evening of life and the Church's future. Let me often love to repair to the battlements of



this Hospice and gaze at it through rain and cloud. "At evening-time it shall be light." When the advent-hour shall strike, it will be the world's true curfew-bell, announcing that the fires are to be put out--the fires of sin, the fires of tribulation; and that the peace, so fitful, troubled, intermittent here, will be merged into that of eternity. The motto-saying of our Volume will have thus a new and everlasting significance-- "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest FOREVER."

"I am come," says a gifted writer, as the night-shadows were passing into daybreak--"I am come to that stage of my pilgrimage that is within sight of the River of Death; and I feel that now I must have all in readiness, day and night, for the messenger of the King."

Happy those who thus, with trimmed lamps and replenished vessels, will be able, as they join the festal train on the great bridal day of the Church triumphant, to say-- "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **BEYOND THE VALLEY**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32

It is the Shepherd's voice. Under that favorite and expressive emblem He is set before His Church as Himself the Burden-Bearer. The wandering sheep is on His shoulders, and He carries it back to the fold and to its rest rejoicing. The verse seems in this place to be put in contrast with the cares and solitudes against which He had warned His people in the immediately preceding context. As a substitute for earthly-mindedness, they are called (to use the suggestive word of a German commentator) to "heavenly-mindedness,"--lifted above the fretting and depressive anxieties of a present evil world, to that kingdom of the Father which is

not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are hostile to rest. With all the rare endowments of nature and "wealth of circumstance," few knew better than Dante what it was to be "weary and heavy laden;" how little outward things, and least of all worldly aggrandizement, could minister to the mind diseased, and meet the heart-longing for repose. In his great poem he puts these words into the lips of another—

"For all the gold that is beneath the moon,  
Or ever has been, of those weary souls  
Could never make a single one repose."

"The world passes away, and the lust thereof--but he that does the will of God abides forever."

Note two of the characteristics of those whom the Great Rest-Giver addresses.

It is a LITTLE flock--despised by the world, unthought of by men; in many ways unworthy of the Shepherd's cognizance and regard. Each "little," each finite life is like the mathematical point, having position but no magnitude. The finite compared to the Infinite! It is like a tiny drop in the shoreless sea! But God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. "Fear not, worm Jacob." What may be scorned and unpitied of men, enlists the tenderness, sympathy, and love of the Shepherd of the sheep. "It is not," says He, "the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14). It is His own beautiful prophetic saying--"I will turn my hand upon the little ones" (Zech. 13:7).

It is a TREMBLING flock. The existence of fear and misgiving is acknowledged; the apprehension, it may be, at times of the forfeiture of promised spiritual blessing; the encountering of peril and difficulty and danger. "The wolf comes and scatters the sheep." But ultimate safety is not the less insured, though possibly reached with torn fleece and bleeding feet. The Speaker interposes the quieting assurance, "Fear not." He gives His pledge to fetch every wanderer home. The covenanted kingdom is safe, for it is "the Father's good pleasure" to bestow it. A

Father-God and a Shepherd-Savior have put their names to that kingdom's title-deeds. We have there a double guarantee, that nothing can defraud us of our covenant rights, nothing cross us out of our purchased inheritance. Occasionally there may be and will be tempests to buffet and floods to pass through. But He who purchased the flock and tended it, followed it in all its devious wanderings in "the dark and cloudy day," will at last fold it secure in the pastures of the blessed. In the words of an old divine, "He leads us in; He leads us through; He leads us on; He leads us up; He leads us home."

O gracious Savior, Your strong arm will bear me safely. Let me be responsive to Your call and obedient to Your guidance and direction.

I will listen to Your "Come unto Me," and to the sure word of promise, embracing this world and the next-- "Fear not--for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are mine."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE GATE WIDE OPEN**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37

None are so weary or heavy laden as those oppressed with doubt as to the ability and willingness of Christ to receive and save them. As "the heart knows its own bitterness," so the soul knows the pressure of its own moral burdens and impediments--specially among these the burdening memory of some heinous and presumptuous transgressions--sins against light and love; sins in defiance, and forgetfulness of privilege and responsibility; sins, it may even be, involving the loss of self-respect, and entailing the shame of remorse. Many are ready enough to own that the

door of that Hospice of Pardon has been opened to countless multitudes. But, can its gates, is the despairing thought of not a few thus saddened with humbling retrospects, be unlocked to us? What of the soul "once enlightened," made a temple of the Holy Spirit, but that temple, through temptation and unwatchfulness, desecrated and defiled, some foul scar on its pure alabaster pillars, known only to Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire--the infinitely Holy One?

Yes, if sin be unrepented of; if sin be persevered in, if blot be added knowingly to blot, and scar to scar, the reins recklessly surrendered to feeble, frail, faltering wills; if the prodigal be still groveling and content to grovel amid the husks and garbage of the far country--there can be little said to hush feverish unrest, and inspire with the hope of welcome and forgiveness. But the pivot on which the words of our present meditation seem to turn is, "Him that comes unto Me." In that coming is implied self-renunciation and sin-renunciation; sorrow for the past, and the promise and purpose of new obedience. Not, let it be imagined, that in such cases of heart-felt renewed consecration we claim future impeccability; that when a "conversion," in the true sense of that often-misused and travestied word, takes place, there can be no further coming short of lofty Christian ideals--no further failures, it may even be grievous woundings, in the spiritual battle. To say so would be not only, on no Bible authority, to minimize the real and persistent character of that warfare Paul again and again describes; but it would also in the case of many close the door of hope, and tend to put despondency into earnest and sensitive though frail and fallible natures.

Blessed be God for His own balm-word for all such--"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand." But this we may with confidence aver, that if there be present, honest, prayerful resolves for the future, anxiety and misgiving may be set aside. Christ's word of welcome and heart-cheer is enough. No barrier is placed by Him at the approach to the Hospice. There is the offer of unqualified forgiveness. There is a perch for the feeblest, most ruffled wing on this mighty Cedar of God.

Weary ones, your pillow of thorns is made by Him a pillow of peace. He who touched the kneeling leper, and washed the traitor's feet, shows His

unwillingness to quench the smoking flax. He stands with the ineffable love of eternity in His heart. He will "in no wise cast out." There is room on His shoulders for every wandering sheep. There is room in His heart for every prodigal child. There is room in His Hospice for every storm-beaten pilgrim. He could have uttered no stronger assurance of His love for sinners and His willingness to welcome and receive the weariest, the most outcast and lost. The sin which for us is "a burden too heavy for us to bear," is not too heavy for Him. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all." "This man receives sinners" was His distinctive characteristic.

"Turn to the seventh chapter of Hebrews and twenty-fifth verse," said the blind girl to her spiritual adviser and friend. He did so. The words are-- "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost." "Lay my hand," she added, "on that verse--upon it I should like to die."

There may be sins in conscience and memory at the cognizance of which the best and kindest friends would "cast out" from Christ forever. Their crushing, despairing verdict would be--"He will by no means receive." But His ways are not as man's ways, nor His thoughts as man's thoughts. His thoughts toward us are "thoughts of peace and not of evil." He reveals Himself with the garnered treasures of redemption, ready to dispense them to the chief of sinners.

"Pardon my iniquity," cried one of old, who was no stranger to the pangs of an accusing conscience. And what was his plea? Was it, "Pardon my iniquity because of its triviality; because of inborn weakness, or fierce temptation, or some exceptionally extenuating circumstances"? No. It was the reverse. Conscious that he was in the hands of the All-Merciful-- "Pardon my iniquity," he exclaims, "for it is great!" In the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the father "fell on his neck, and kissed him," the meaning in the original Greek is "kissed him much."

Lord, I am unworthy to come under Your roof! Lord, I am unworthy to gather up the crumbs from Your table! My sins at times confront me like the swords of avenging angels. But He who is All-worthy gives the free, full, gracious invitation.

At Your call I come! Blessed be Your name, let it be gladly repeated, that call is hampered with no conditions. "All you that labor and are heavy laden" takes in the wide circumference of humanity. In the freeness and sovereignty of Your redeeming grace, unbar to me the sheltering portal! And while in the sad, solemn memories of bygone apostasy I may be led at times to look with trembling apprehension to the future, let the thought of Your divine power and sympathy arm and strengthen me amid environing temptations. "Iniquities," was the wail of a stricken soul under the conscious sense of weakness, helplessness, unrest--"iniquities prevail against me," or, as that has been rendered, "are too strong for me." Here is God's gracious response and recipe--"Let him take hold of My STRENGTH, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me" (Ps. 65:3; Isa. 27:5).

"You know all our conflict, all the failing  
Of flesh and spirit, lured by evil powers,  
The sore temptations these poor hearts assailing  
In our unguarded hours.

"But we shall fear no evil--living, dying,  
Our souls are in Your care; You will defend  
The faithful servants on Your word relying,  
Even until the end."

"Lord, I believe--help my unbelief."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **A HOSPICE IN MYSTERIOUS DEALINGS**

"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"This sickness is for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be

glorified thereby." John 11:4

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."  
John 11:11

Deepest of all mysteries, burden of all burdens--the early death of loved ones. "To what purpose is this waste?" Life perishing in its prime--the apparent flinging to the void a garnered store of intellect, goodness, friendship, worth! We can understand the aged decaying inhabitant of the forest, that has fulfilled its appointed years, succumbing to the axe or swept down by the storm. But why touch the vigorous sapling, or the tree in the glory of its early summers?

Such were the thoughts that must have hovered over the casket of the beloved brother at Bethany, the center and brightener of a beautiful home. Many of the circumstantials, too, specially the sequel of the trial, were passing strange. When the Master was sent for at His distant place of sojourn, why the inaction? We imagine that when the messenger speeds with the tidings, "Behold, he whom You love is sick," not a moment would be lost in recrossing Jordan and hastening up the gorges of Judea to restore His friend. To delay an unanswered quest would be unlike His kind heart and customary prompt procedure.

He would teach His church in every age that there is a tarrying love which, in certain circumstances, is as true as the instantaneous intervention, the immediate response. In the present case, he lingers "two days" before support is given. The weary and heavy-laden sisters, faint with watching and waiting and weeping, expect, hour after hour, their burden to be removed. Their Lord indefinitely continues it. Two days and two nights are they subjected to a trial as bewildering as their own personal bereavement--the trial of baffled hopes and unanswered prayers. "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves--but He was asleep" (Matt. 8:24). The Hospice-gate of Hope seems mysteriously barred. "Has God forgotten to be gracious?"

His people have ever been at times subjected to similar dealings--the seemingly unkind postponement in their hours of anxiety and soul-

struggle--whether the prolonged, the apparently unnecessary discipline of pain, when every nerve becomes a chord of agony, or the equally acute torture of prolonged vigils by the couch of loved ones, or the anxieties and forecastings of the future.

O faithless hearts in that Judean village, to doubt for a moment in your passionate grief your Lord's unwavering love and fidelity to His promises! O faithless hearts among ourselves, that would still echo the spirit of Martha's and Mary's plaintive monotone, the unworthy reflection--"Lord, if You had been here, this our brother had not died!" If You had been here, this sore calamity would not have befallen us!

Hush the reclaiming word! He is here. He who put the burden on keeps it on. As sure as at last He stood in the grave-yard of Bethany--shed sympathetic tears and spoke sympathetic words, gave the needed answer to prayer and the needed rest to weary souls--so will He, in the case of all, vindicate at last the wisdom and righteousness and love of His procedure. Behind the cloud-lands of life He is evolving good out of evil and order out of confusion.

He will repeat, as the reason for each mysterious dispensation--He will write, if need be, the record on every sick-bed, the epitaph on each early grave--"For the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

"What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **REST IN THE CRUCIFIED**

"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the



Lord." John 20:19, 20

That was a weary and heavy-laden band gathered on the evening of the first great Easter. These disciples were like the sea driven by the wind and tossed. Hope alternately rose and fell. Tidings reached those who had partially revived their spirits, but such were conflicting and unauthenticated. "How different," would they not say one to another, "our present experiences, from the memories of three past years of tranquil peace and unbroken love, when we sat at His feet listening to His elevating teachings, or beheld the halt and the lame and the blind cured by healing word or touch; or when, on the stormy deep, we listened to His 'Peace, be still;' or when we mingled with the crowd in which many a heart, aching with deeper-seated than bodily disease, was hushed by the assuring invitation, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.'"

Peace is the yearned-for boon of every weary soul. Some may recall the story of Dante, seated in contemplative mood outside the convent gate. One of the inhabitants to whom he had entrusted the manuscript of the "Inferno," observing his pensive dejection, asked what it was for which he was longing. To the twice repeated question the, reply was given-- "Peace!" What was thus whispered by the lips of the great poet, Christ alone can meet and answer.

How He answers it may best be gathered from the sequence which forms the remarkable feature in the words of our present verse and narrative. There was no interval for questioning thought--the words of the recording evangelist are at once added--"And when He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side." It was the revelation of a crucified Savior. It was, in His own Person, the truth that was to be afterwards sounded forth, first by accredited apostles, and which, through the succeeding ages, was to form the central doctrine of Christianity and Christian teaching--"Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

There is a second sequence, a second act in this divine Easter drama. The affrighted disciples, who, we are told in the context, "were assembled for fear," and had in their terror locked or barred the chamber door, were reassured. At the vision of this crucified One, with the spear-thrust and nail-marks, "the death of the cross," their terror was exchanged for

gladness. "THEN were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

Gracious Hospice! "He loved me, and gave Himself for me"--Christ, not the Example and Pattern (though that, as we know, He was conspicuously also), but "Christ crucified, the Power of God unto salvation to every one that believes."

Show me, Lord, by faith, Your wounded hands, Your riven side! The peace secured and bestowed in this Hospice is "peace through the blood of the cross."

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE PILGRIM'S SECURITY**

"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matt. 6:33

How many labor and are heavy laden because they reverse the order of their Lord's exhortation; giving priority to the things of earth, and making "the one thing needful" secondary and subordinate; allowing daily worries, cares, perplexities, trifles, to dim and obscure nobler verities! They are more concerned to rear gilded palaces on the shifting sands of the present, than first to make sure of the Hospice with its foundations drilled in the solid and enduring Rock. They allow the flare of earthly torches and the glimmer of artificial lights to blur the stars of heaven. How different existence would be were its first and chief object to live under the inspiration of doing God's will and seeking to please Him! The life of self-abnegation and self-consecration is the happy as well as the heavenly one--the life lived by those who are in the world and yet not of

it, who walk and act as seeing Him who is invisible; their thoughts, interests, occupations interpenetrated with the sense of the Divine presence and love, conscious of unswerving fidelity to Truth and Righteousness.

"Come unto ME," says Christ, and seek first My kingdom. Where religion, the law of His kingdom, in the best sense of the word, as an active, living, energizing force, is our recognized guide, giving direction to character and conduct, a wealth of happiness inevitably follows. When love to God strikes the key-note, the varied harmonies of earth assume a beautiful concord and cadence; the ordinary chords of life vibrate in sweet unison. Religion intensifies the enjoyment of common mercies. Hers is the heavenly chemistry which transmutes all things into gold.

The man who walks with God is like Moses in his descent from the mount--his face shines with the reflected glory. The "rest" of Christ takes shape and form. Not infrequently it is so literally--the very outer lineaments are transfigured. We can most of us probably recall some such sunny, radiant countenance bright with the smile of a foretasted heaven--this in striking contrast with that which is scarred with selfishness, debased with vice, gloomy with the tyranny of demon-passion. "The purified righteous man," says Clement of Alexandria, "has become a coin of the Lord, and has the impress of his king stamped upon him." The soul itself becomes a Hospice, the home and haunt of peace, "filled with all joy and peace in believing."

Hear the apostle's definition and description of the heirs of the Kingdom and lovers of God's righteousness--"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, (in other words, Let Religion sway and dominate the actions, the life, the whole being); "and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"All these things shall be added unto you." Added! It seems like a promise of ever augmenting and augmented blessings--like the mountain streamlet, tiny and inconspicuous at first, but deepening as it hastens on its course to refresh and irrigate and beautify, at last expanding into "peace like a river"--the full flood of God.

O You gracious Rest-Giver, prevent me forfeiting Your promised peace by becoming a prey to the groveling cares or the absorbing fascinations and pleasures of a present evil world! Let me listen to the monitory voice, "The kingdom of God is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

With this peace reigning and ruling within me, I can say with Paul— "I have all, and abound."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE UNKNOWN MORROW**

"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow--for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."  
Matt. 6:34

Who does not long for some Hospice from which to contemplate, calmly and undismayed, the veiled and shrouded morrow? The present may have its anxieties; but in the case of many, probably most, it is the unsolved riddle of the future that presses most heavily. That turning in the gorge I cannot see. Will the rushing stream be increased in volume? Are there no bridges to span its headlong course, no boulders even to afford a safe footing?

"Come unto Me," says He who was Himself the Pilgrim of pilgrims in earth's Valley of Humiliation. In the midst of these anxious forecastings, "I will give you rest," rest, first of all, in the very thought which engenders these forebodings--that the morrow is unknown; that you are mercifully spared the anticipation of trials which might otherwise project a life-long shadow on your bright present, and make the future one long experience of sadness.

Then, above all, rest in the gracious conviction that the morrow, unrevealed to you, is known to Him. He sees what you cannot see--"the end from the beginning." With Him there is no chance or contingency, no haphazard or peradventure. "Trust Me," He seems to say, "in the fulfillment of a double promise, spoken ages ago, that in this Hospice I have a store of sandals for the feet, and a pilgrim staff for the way. 'Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days so shall your strength be.' These (in other words, My exceeding great and precious promises) will be adequate for all needs and difficulties, helping you over the rugged road and unbridged torrent."

Indulge, then, no needlessly anxious thoughts. Do not allow life to degenerate into a round and vortex of weary care. God gives no prevenient store of grace. He provides no program of tomorrow's evils and trials, its needs and necessities. But when the morrow comes, the promised strength comes with it, and the traveler pursues his way with the words which the great Rest-Giver whispers in his ear, "I will make My grace sufficient for you."

"Trust Him when dark doubts assail you;  
Trust Him when your strength is small;  
Trust Him when to simply trust Him  
Seems the hardest thing of all."

Let even outer Nature, in her unfaltering laws and sublime sequences, teach the same lesson of confidence in the divine faithfulness:

"And I will trust that He who heeds  
The life that hides in mead and wold,  
Who hangs yon alder's crimson beads,  
And stains these mosses green and gold,  
Will still, as He has done, incline  
His gracious care to me and mine."

Blessed Savior, on Yourself may I be enabled to cast, not some cares, or the more pressing cares, but all my cares. "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."

From the windows of this Gospel Hospice I will see the future, even though somber with cloud, spanned with the bow of covenant promise, and read the lettering of "dewy gold," – "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **HOSPICE FOUNDATION**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."  
John 3:16

In this brief verse we have a Gospel within a Gospel, the Hospice of hospices--no fragile temporary structure, but formed, so to speak, from monoliths of primeval granite. Before the world was, that Hospice was planned--an eternal, unassailable stronghold. Love was the Rock on which it was built--"God so loved the world." How careful the great Rest-Giver is to trace all up to the sovereign love of the Father--not the tenet of a false and repellent theology, that Christ's atoning sacrifice was the cause of God's love to our world (an inversion and perversion of gospel terms), but rather that God's love was the originating and impelling cause of Christ's death. There was "a covenant of peace between them both." "It is not," says a writer, "that the atonement replenishes the wasting Fountain, but that the unwasting and unwearying Fountain makes the atonement." The measure of the Father's love (He could give no higher) was the gift of His own dear Son--His "Only Begotten."

In thus addressing Nicodemus, Christ may possibly have had an historical reference to the "only begotten" of the head of the Jewish nation, and of the surrender of the heir of covenant promise by the Father of the faithful, typical of a Greater, who willingly laid His Isaac on the altar of burnt-offering--"He that spared not His own Son" (Rom. 8:32). In

the immediately preceding context there is allusion made to another memorable incident in the annals of Pilgrim-Israel, and one with which the Rabbi was equally familiar--the lifting up by Moses of the bronze serpent. The host, bitten by fiery snakes, lay gasping on the sands of the wilderness, their eyes glazed with the film of death. They looked at the strange symbol on the standard--they "looked and lived." It was to the Divine Speaker, in His memorable night-colloquy with this anxious inquirer, an emblem of Himself on the cross--a symbol of redemption for the spiritual Israel of all ages who gaze with the eye of faith on the uplifted Son of man.

These two incidents in the story of the Hebrew nation enshrine the most glorious words and message ever delivered to the world; while both events are strong in the assertion of the sacrificial element--Christ the Surety-Savior, Christ, the sufferer in our room and stead, the one only Source of pardon and acceptance and peace. "Come unto ME." "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." "God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Jesus, in our general motto-verse, offers and promises to His weary ones Rest. God the Father, in the verse we are immediately considering, offers and promises to the weary ones everlasting Life. The two are convertible terms--the same gift, only under different figures. The world is weary--a caravan of pilgrims staggering under their burdens--Rest is the welcome boon for such. The world is dead and dying; its millions are perishing--Life is the welcome gift for such. Take which emblem we please. "Come unto Me," says Christ, "and the reality is yours. I died to make it so." Both boons, moreover, are alike present and future--the Rest of grace here, preparatory to the Rest of glory hereafter; the gift of Life here, preparatory to the everlasting Life hereafter.

Lord, I come, weary and heavy laden, seeking rest. I need no other Hospice than this, bearing on its lintels so full and glorious a motto. I accept Your overtures of grace. Let me delight to ponder, let me be enabled in some feeble measure to grasp the wealth of meaning contained in the unfathomed and unfathomable. So loving of this doomed and dying world--the motive, the Father's Love; the resultant end, "Glory, Honor, Immortality, Eternal Life." In the contemplation of the peerless theme,

we seem to be caught up into the third heavens with their infinite depths of blue, the paradise of love.

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **HOSPICE OF THE MOURNER**

"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Blessed are those who mourn--for they shall be comforted." Matt. 5:4

This is a comprehensive Evangel in itself--good news for the weary, a true Hospice for every heavy-laden pilgrim. The one word "mourn" takes in the twofold burden of sin and sorrow--the double load common to the children of humanity.

The beatitude is spoken by Him whose specially foretold mission was to "comfort all that mourn" (Isa. 61:2). No wonder, therefore, it has an early place in His teaching; that it is one of the first Hospices whose gate He flings open with a "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Is it sin--that burden which an old pilgrim says is "too heavy for me"--the consciousness of shortcoming--sins of omission, sins of commission; the treason of the will, the truant affections, the memories of a blurred and blotted past? Cast this burden on your Savior-God. His precious blood besprinkles the lintels and door-posts of the Hospice. That covenant-token gives Him the right to bid you welcome. The forgiveness of God in Christ is surely the most soothing of divine gospel opiates. Owen tells us that when he was brought back from the gates of death, the first text he preached from was this--"But there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared."

Is it sorrow--the burden of affliction? Is the word spoken to those enduring in its thousand shapes poverty, sickness, bereavement? None so needing shelter and rest as these. But God's comforts, like the stars of



heaven, are brightest in a dark sky. As the sun requires to set before the stellar glories of the skies are visible, so with the soul. How many can testify, I never saw the surpassing comfort of the divine promises until death, in the removal of brother, or sister, or child, left my world without a sun!

"O joy that do you seek me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be."

It is doubtless this latter class--the afflicted--of whom the words of our verse today are mainly spoken. And how often in strange ways, in the case of such, do we find this beatitude of Christ realized and exemplified--blessedness surrounding the weary and heavy-laden pilgrim, and making him calm, restful, happy! It is one of the great compensations in the Christian life, that the mourner and sufferer are most conscious of the sweet drops that mingle in the bitter cup which their Father has prepared. Call to remembrance, in the circle of your acquaintance, some child of affliction--say of sickness and pain. Were not these the lips most lavish in acknowledgment of God's goodness and love? You would naturally expect otherwise--that the man who is seated luxuriously at life's banquet, and has nothing apparently to break the trance of outward happiness--material enjoyment--would be most profuse in his gratitude. How often is it the reverse! How often he takes the gifts with thankless, it may be peevish unconcern!

While, on the other hand, it is frequently they who gather the scattered crumbs, and must be content with the cup of cold water, who enjoy God's commonest mercies--a glimpse from their secluded couch of the blue of summer sky, and breath of summer fragrance and gush of summer song--these accepted as pledges and parables of diviner realities.

Thus does the gracious Rest-Giver fulfill the old promises spoken of Himself by the evangelical prophet--"I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners" (Isa. 57:18). "The Lord has anointed Me to bind up the brokenhearted...to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for

mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:1, 3). The valleys of Baca and the tents of Kedar are thus often made musical with the songs of Paradise; the bed of languishing becomes as the house of God and as the gate of heaven. One of Samuel Rutherford's sayings, rendered into metre, beautiful alike for its imagery and simplicity, is on many such lips—

"With mercy and with judgment  
My web of time He wove,  
And aye the depths of sorrow  
Were lustered with his love."  
"Blessed are those who mourn!"

Then remember, He who utters this balm-word is Himself the King of sorrows, the Mourner of mourners. He knows, by the experience of His own suffering humanity, every pang that rends the heart. He was announced in the same great prophecy, hundreds of years before his incarnation, as "the Burden-Bearer." It sounds more like a gospel statement than a long antecedent prediction--"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Seeing that "He has suffered being tempted," there is an elevating speciality surely for our sorrowing seasons in the words emanating from His lips--"Come unto Me, and be comforted."

Lord Jesus, impart to me a true mourning for sin, a true submission in trial. The storm-clouds may be gathering--they may have gathered, as I am holding on my darksome way; but with this Hospice in sight, I shall listen to Your own gracious invitation--"Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you--hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isa. 26:20).

"Come unto Me, and rest,  
You weary heart, distress  
With wasting toil, and strivings vain and endless;  
Mourning from day to day  
For blessings passed away;  
Come unto Me; I will not leave you friendless.

"I watched your cisterns fail,  
I saw you spent and pale,  
With parched lips, and heart with anguish bursting,  
When from the desert sod,  
Your cry went up to God.  
Come unto Me; I will not leave you thirsting."  
-S. Doudney

"The days of your mourning shall be ended."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **VOICES OF THE GLORIFIED REST-GIVER**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last--I am He that lives, and was dead--and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of Hades and of death." Rev. 1:17-18

John was at this moment, in no ordinary sense of the word, one of the weary and burdened. He was left alone of the apostolic band. Many of his fellows and friends had died a martyr's death. Untold cruelties had stained the imperial purple; clouds brooded over the Christian cause. No sympathetic human voice was near to cheer him in his loneliness, as he wandered along the shore of that prison-island. Can we wonder if, in his solitary hours, he grouped himself among the heavy-laden? Can we wonder if these waves of the Aegean Sea were a type of his own inner feelings--so far as earth was concerned, seeking rest and finding none? His earthly home and Hospice was a desolate and terrible one.

But the Rest-Giver, He who of old permitted him in tranquil love to pillow his head on His bosom, was near with the well-known lullabies which he had heard amid the pauses of the storm on Tiberias, and at the timid gathering in the upper room on the first Easter evening--"Fear not;"

"I am alive!" Among the prognostications of coming evil and disaster conveyed in vision of opened seals and emptied vials--Hades and Death specially active participators in the drama--He reveals Himself as the great Lord of life, watching, as such, the destinies of the Church--not a seal broken, not a vial outpoured, without His bidding--walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and alone pronounced "worthy" to open the roll of Providence.

Life and Death alternate and palpitate, strangely in this verse. DEATH, the mystery and portent of mankind; death, which lies like a cold avalanche on the heart of humanity; death, with its ghastly tapers lighting the long corridors of the past; death, the most irresistible of all natural forces, is here confronted by a Force mightier still--"I am alive for evermore;" "I have the keys of that gloomy gate, opening to the vast unknown, suspended at my belt. 'Fear not!' I Myself know death. I have felt it. I have passed through its portals. I was dead; but I have conquered it and its defiances, spoiled it of its power, and left the King of Terrors a vanquished foe. I have converted the very home of death, the grave, into a veritable Hospice, a 'cemetery,' a sleeping-place or bed of rest, preparatory to a waking up in endless life. 'Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for they rest.'"

"There is no death--the leaves may fall,  
The flowers may fade and pass away;  
They only wait through wintry hours  
The coming of the May!"

O weary and heavy-laden ones, who, it may be, through fear of death are all your lifetime subject to bondage, fear it not. Your Lord was dead. Fear not the chill tenets of the prophets of annihilation, who meet the yearnings of humanity with the requiem of despair-- "Sleep the sleep that knows no waking."

Your Lord lives. Leave to paganism to carve on its sepulchral slabs--"The land of no return." He is alive forever more. He will come again in His advent glory to take you to Himself, and to transplant you among the ingathered company of His ransomed.

"Therefore dread I not to go  
O'er the silent river.  
Death, your hastening oar I know;  
Bear me, you Life-giver,  
Through the waters to the shore,  
Where mine own have gone before!"

He gives us, meanwhile, the sublime guarantee— "Because I live, you shall live also."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE MEEK AND LOWLY PILGRIM**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart--and you shall find rest unto your souls." Matt. 11:29).

This is the sequel to our motto-verse, the expansion of the rest-saying of the loving Rest-Giver. None who have entered into the spirit of these words, but must recognize and find in them a gracious Hospice--a chamber of the "House Beautiful."

"No man," says Luther, "if he were the gentlest and kindest in the world, could have such a gentle bearing as Christ had." He further tells of a legend regarding the Apostle Peter, that his eyes were always red with weeping and on being asked the cause; the reply was--"I weep when I recall the most sweet gentleness of Christ with His apostles." Possibly the remembrance of that sweet gentleness and forbearance towards himself was the most touching of all.

Note the Savior's special message, in the meditation of today, to His

burdened and weary ones. He virtually says--"Exchange burdens. Part with your own and take Mine. Make trial of My yoke, and bear it for My sake. It will be heavy without Me; but with My grace and blessing it will be easy and light. I do not promise in the rest I confer to 'remove your shoulder from the burden,' to give you immunity from care, and trial, and exactions; but I will do better--I will impart strength and endurance to bear."

The existence of many is a pursuit after spurious and counterfeit rest, misnamed happiness--an aimless, vapid life of pleasure engrossed with objects which bring with them no sense of satisfaction or compensation--a dull, weary round in the world's monotonous tread-mill. This is not the rest Christ promises to His weary ones. Often the world's burdens, too, are weighted with unworthy accompaniments--wounded pride, injured self-love, disappointed ambition, the harboring of proud, vain-glorious thoughts. Here is a recipe for tranquillity of soul which the gospel may well claim as all its own--"For I am meek and lowly in heart." It has well been called the birth-song of Christianity--"He has put down the mighty from their seats, and has exalted the humble and meek."

It was by these principles the new creed won its way on earth--not by material agencies. The martial spirit, the greatest of the old-world forces, had its day and its collapse. The serene, gentle spirit, nurtured among the hills of Nazareth, fought a bloodless war and conquered, with the sole weapons in His armory--weapons which He Himself assayed--"meekness and lowliness." Rich and poor, master and slave, owned the magic of "this new thing on the earth;" they took His yoke upon them, and, by strange paradox, all who tried found in the bearing of it rest.

Further--gather from this gracious saying the bliss of endurance, submission, forbearance, love; lifted above the fret and fever of the world, the clash of debasing rivalries. Be not aspiring after great things, or envious of others, tempted to quarrel with outer circumstances--in other words, showing dissatisfaction with the appointments of God, making base surrender of duty to self-interest.

The quiet mountain-lake is a beautiful thing, sleeping on its shadows, no ripple to disturb the placid mirror. But what is more inspiring and

invigorating is the stream which issues from it, hurrying impetuously onward, battling its way over rock and boulder, to water and fertilize the plains below. Build your Hospice in the faithful study of Christ's spotless character and example, in its humility and self-sacrifice, combined with active consecration in doing His Father's will. "I am meek--I am lowly." These are the two silver and golden bells--curfew-chimes ringing to deepest and truest rest. They together constitute the true "patent of nobility." In the possession of calm, elevated peace in Himself, as on a mount of transfiguration, the tumults of passion are hushed, and with the favored disciple on Hermon you are able to exclaim--"It is good for us to be here." Moreover, included in this is the blessed privilege, taught by the meek and lowly Master, of helping other weary ones to bear their burdens and carry their crosses.

"I know we are not here  
For our own selfish ease;  
The kingliest One the earth has known  
Lived not Himself to please.  
And they who have truly learned of Him  
How a burden can give rest,  
And joyfully share the great human care,  
Have learned life's secret best."

Beautiful and touching is the plea of the apostle immediately following--  
"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

"I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE REASSURING VOICE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Be of good cheer; it is I--be not afraid." Matt. 14:27

It surely was an exceptional season of fear and unrest with the disciples, that night-storm on the Sea of Galilee.

The saddest feature of the moment was that faith--the strong resolute faith of other times--had now deserted their better natures. They could see nothing but perilous environment, the surging billows and the darkness--for "it was the fourth watch of the night," about three o'clock, when the gloom was deepest, and no flush of morn as yet had tinted the wild hills of Gadara. Strangely different from their experience on a former occasion! He was then with them. Though asleep on "a coil of ropes for His pillow," He was there. They had the comfort of His Presence. They could awake (as they did awake) the weary slumberer; and the voice of the God within the toil-worn man rebuked the waves and turned the storm into a calm. Now it was different--their despairing monotone rather was, "How has He left us at the moment we most needed Him?" "Surely the Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me!" No, more, when He at last appeared on the crest of the waves, instead of recognizing Him with a shout of adoring welcome, they in their superstitious fear imagined that a demon of the deep, an apparition premonitory of death, had come from the spirit-world. Their cry was a cry of trouble.

To such unworthy turbulence and misgiving truly they need not have given way. We know from the context where He had been all night--on some adjoining mountain engaged in prayer--engaged in prayer for them, watching through the darkness their tempest-tossed bark, in sympathetic touch with their palpitating hearts, and eager to speak His word of power. At last it is spoken. He who comes down from the mountain oratory to tread the waters, pronounces His gracious rest words--the reassuring "It is I" (literally, I AM). It is preceded and followed by "Fear not"--"Be not afraid." There can be no mistake. "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto You? You rule the raging of the sea--when the waves thereof arise, You still them."

It is a parable of profounder spiritual realities. In the unrest of the soul, amid the swirls and eddies of life's ocean, Jesus comes to His people--



most often, too, when darkness is deepest. The sensible tokens of His love and mercy seem withdrawn. In their misgiving and incredulity they wail out the plaintive cry, "Where is now my God?" He seems, in accordance with the narrative of the storm, "as if he would pass them by." "My way is hidden from the Lord, my judgment is passed over from my God."

"Be still!" Let patience have her perfect work. He will in His own time and way change the storm into a calm. We are, alas! often ourselves responsible for our unworthy despondencies. We turn our backs to the Sun of Righteousness. There is a shadow projected, but that shadow is our own. We conjure up some phantasms of unbelieving doubt. We say, like the disciples, "It is a spirit," and we "cry out for fear." Let us look away from ourselves, the surging waves and billows within us and around us, and keep the unwavering eye of faith on Him who is waiting to give rest to the weary, and peace to the troubled, and hope to the desponding. To revert to our figure, He has His Hospice built at every turn of the perilous way. He fences it with these same two buttresses--"Fear not; IT IS I; be not afraid."

"O Redeemer! Shall one perish  
Who has looked to You for aid?  
Let me see You, let me hear You,  
Through the gloomy midnight shade,  
Utter You Your voice of comfort--  
'It is I; be not afraid!'"

In all time of our tribulation He will be true to His promise--"I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him." As the Hospice is most valued by the tempest-beaten traveler, so every trial is a fresh reason for resorting to "the Refuge from the storm, the Covert from the tempest." And when the last trouble of all, the hour of departure arrives, the Hospice-gates will be opened by the Divine Promiser of Rest, and the triplet-comfort fall for the last time on the ears of the weary and heavy laden-- "Fear not; it is I; be not afraid."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

# THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY HOSPICE

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" Matthew 7:11

No hospice is more identified with peace, safety, security than that of a heavenly Father's love. When, therefore, the Bestower of Rest would inculcate, in the case of all weary and burdened ones, constant, unwavering trust, He strengthens and accentuates this feeling from its analogy with the tenderest of earthly ties. There is one important difference. Earthly parents, with the rarest exceptions, lavish affection on their offspring. But "being evil," with natures imperfect, they are apt at times to be indiscreet and unwise. Not so with our Father in heaven. He gives only what He knows to be best. It may not appear so to us. But our interests are in better and safer keeping than our own. There is often real kindness in His denial of blessings--in blessings withheld as well as in blessings bestowed. He blesses us often as the Jewish patriarch did his son's sons, "with hands crossed," speaking apparently with strange ambiguous voice. Life's hopes are thwarted, life's visions unrealized, life's mission unfinished, life's best years curtailed. Be patient. He who sees the end from the beginning, who knows the apparent contradictions of existence, and can view them in their due place and proportion, has some wise reasons muffled and concealed. As with that same father of Israel, "He guides His hands wittingly." Over every paternal dealing we can write--"He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness."

And while He has thus but one end in view--our good--He has but one condition in the bestowment of blessing--that we "ask Him." The treasury--His repertory of promise--is full and free. We have only to use the golden key of prayer, unlock its contents, and make them our own. The very act of prayer and the faith and confidence it implies, the casting ourselves unreservedly at the mercy-seat, will itself help to the solution of

many baffling problems and the removal of unbelieving doubts. It was prayer, "wrestling" at the brook Jabbok, which terminated the night-conflict, and at break of day sent the struggling pleader on his way rejoicing, the inheritor of a new name and a new blessing. Prayer is the magical charm with which every pilgrim is supplied in issuing forth from the Gospel Hospice on his journey. Prayer is the polish with which every pilgrim soldier keeps bright and shining the whole armor of God.

O blessed Savior, give me this perfect rest in the assurance of a heavenly Father's protection, guidance, and care. I will look from the provided Hospice along the future, whether that future be bright with sunshine or mantled in gloom. I will see in Him to whom I owe all I have for time and for eternity a rich Provider, a wise Provider, a loving Provider, "the Father of all mercies, and the God of all grace."

"Beneath Your watchful, loving eye,  
I supplicate for peace and rest,  
Submissive in Your hand to lie,  
And feel that it is best.

"Though often, like letters traced on sand,  
My weak resolves have passed away,  
In mercy lend Your helping Hand  
Unto my prayer today."

An earthly father may err, and does err; but— "As for God, His way is perfect."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE HOSPICE OUTLOOK**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." John 14:3

"Come unto Me" is now echoed in a voice from Heaven.

He who gave the invitation to the weary and heavy laden, in a world of unrest, issues the same under a different formula, regarding the world of everlasting rest. He will return to receive His people to Himself, pronouncing the promised beatitude, "Come, you blessed of My Father." No longer sin-laden, sorrow-laden pilgrims; but with every dimmed eye dried, every burden laid down, every foe conquered, He will conduct them to what the old writers call "the rest without a rest," the rest from sin and trial, the rest from the great fight of afflictions. The pilgrim lies down at night, weary and fatigued, in the earthly Hospice. When he awakes, he is in the heavenly one. His window looks no more out on cloud and storm and blackness. He is bathed in the light of Paradise. Yet he awakes not to dreamy inaction--rather will it be to participate in the unresting activities of the ransomed, "serving Him day and night in His temple." "They rest not" (Rev. 4:8).

What an elevating thought, that the divine Rest-Giver is now, in His unresting love, preparing a Home, rearing a Hospice for His pilgrims on the true Alps of God, the everlasting hills of glory, where tempests of affliction never brood, and wintry Death no longer sways his icy scepter; no baffled hopes or frustrated plans--"the rest that remains." When they leave the world, to use another metaphor, it is not to an unknown land they are sailing. They are going, as millions before them have gone, to colonize the better country.

Be it specially noted, too, He is "preparing a place" for His redeemed. It is true, most true, in a conventional phrase, that heaven's main characteristic is "not locality, but character." The pure in heart shall see God. The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. But neither must we dispense with the literal comfort of our Lord's words, that He has gone to make ready some special dwelling-place, where He will receive His people to Himself. What or where is the favored spot in the realms of space we cannot, by the boldest flight of a sanctified imagination, tell. For His risen saints, in their glorified

resurrection-bodies, and for His own glorified Self, the center of their adoring homage, there must be some thing more than an ethereal, unmaterialistic heaven--a mere spirit-world. "In my Father's house are many mansions"--mansions suited and adapted for the tastes, capacities, idiosyncrasies of His vast family; the unreached ideals of earth fully attained in the perfected household above.

Lord Jesus, prepare me for the place which You have gone to prepare for me. Amid the often fretful calls of existence, let me catch the joyous chimes wafted from the bells of glory. There may be, and will be, tearful partings here. There are angel-welcomes and saint-welcomes there, and His own welcome best of all. "I will come again!" Let me have my heart's best chambers meanwhile lustrated and plenished for the advent of the Elder Brother. Let no discordant note mar the joy of that welcome. "A little while, and you shall not see me--and again, a little while, and you shall see me!" The first little while is now running its course in the sand-glass; its hours and moments may soon, and must, sooner or later, be numbered and completed. May I be ready, always ready, for the "again, a little while, and you shall see Me,"--when the advent morn shall dawn, and the gates of the heavenly hospice be thrown open for waiting pilgrims.

"Rest comes at length; though life be long and dreary,  
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;  
Faith's journey ends in welcome to the weary,  
And heaven, the heart's true home, is ours at last!"

"Make haste, my Beloved, and be like to a roe or to a young deer upon the mountains of spices."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE PILGRIM'S CONFIDENCE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things."  
Matt. 6:32

What a rest is this for weary, burdened wayfarers! It is the assurance not only of a "needs be" in whatever befalls them, but that all are the appointments of their heavenly Father.

"Your heavenly Father!" We cling lovingly to the belief of "God over all;" God "in all places of His dominion;" God from center to circumference of space and being; the Divine Regent, pervading with His presence the great organic system He has formed; in the poetry of Scripture, the clouds His chariot, the light His clothing; His power girding the hills and setting fast the mountains--yet with tender care for the minute and lowly, making grass to grow for the cattle, penciling the flower, sculpturing the snow-wreath, watching the sparrows fall, and feeding the young ravens; the unslumbering Shepherd, keeping watch and ward continually, whether under the infinite blue of day or under night with its starry galaxies.

We can leave science and philosophy to speak of Nature as in her decrees stern, unbending, controlled by forces simple and complex, all her own; the subject, the slave of inexorable law, from which, save by exceptional miracle, there can be neither evasion nor deflection--the revolution of the seasons, the alternation of day and night, gravitation, the processes of growth and decay, etc. But there are, at all events in the moral world, gainsay who will, forces independent of material ones, above and beyond material law. We are under the supervision and guidance of a personal God, "for in Him we live and move and have our being." Though mysteries and perplexities are only too patent on every side, yet we can rely on the assurance that His are no arbitrary dealings, swayed by caprice, marked and misdirected by human blindness and ignorance, but the dictates of unerring wisdom and of unchanging everlasting love. His nature and name are not that enshrined in the Scripture word "Zephaniah" (the Lord is darkness), but rather that of "Uriel" (God is my light). "God is light, and with Him is no darkness at all." The heavy laden, the bereaved, the orphan, the widow, and "him that has no helper," are shielded and canopied by the divine Fatherhood--the Pillar of Cloud in the day of prosperity, the Pillar of Fire in the night of adversity. Mark the

Savior's words. They are not "My heavenly Father," but "your heavenly Father." He would have each child to know His individual, particular affection and pity, and, despite of baffling providences, to cleave to the unforgetting love of God. Happy those who are thus content to accept with confidence the needed "all things" here spoken of; who have listened to the Savior's invitation, and unhesitatingly accepted it, "Come unto Me." Safe within the Hospice built on Himself, the Rock of Ages, they can sing the lullaby of an old pilgrim traveler, unmoved amid the moanings of the tempest--"In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion--in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock."

"What seems so dark to your dim sight  
May be a shadow, seen aright,  
Making some brightness doubly bright.  
The flash that struck your tree, no more  
To shelter you, lets heaven's blue floor  
Shine where it never shone before.  
The cry wrung from your spirit's pain  
May echo on some far-off plain,  
And guide a wanderer home again."

"I am as a wonder unto many; but You are my strong refuge" (Hospice).

"Why did I murmur underneath the night,  
When night was spanned by golden steps to Thee?  
Why did I cry disconsolate for light,  
When all Your stars were bending over me?"

O blessed Redeemer! what do I require more than this, Your own blessed word, that all which befalls Your people is meted out by One who is too kind to mingle an unnecessary or superfluous drop in their cup of sorrow? He who died for me says so; and He says it of "My Father and your Father, of My God and your God." At times He uses the chisel to bring the quarried block into shape. He sees the possibilities of form and beauty in that rough mass of stone or marble, though involving at the time breaking and maiming.

"So I think that human lives  
Must bear God's chisel keen,  
If the spirit yearns and strives  
For the better life unseen;  
For men are only blocks at best,  
Until the chiseling brings out all the rest."

I thankfully repair to this Gospel Hospice. I need no other. Its windows look above and beyond all stormy clouds on the azure sky of heaven. Its walls enshrine this special promise of a Father's combined omniscience and love. Pointing to it I can devoutly and confidently say– "Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **THE FINAL WELCOME**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Matthew 25:34

Gracious invitation of Christ to His ransomed Church. Many had been the calls to rest issuing from His throne of grace. This (retaining the same formula, "Come") is His final summons from the throne of glory, as his weary and heavy-laden people lay down their burdens forever, and are about to enter their eternal Hospice and Home.

1. Note the name of the Rest-Giver. He no longer speaks of Himself, as He once did in His state of humiliation, as a Pilgrim, needing rest as much as His people--the homeless Wayfarer of Galilee--but "a King", the Head of His redeemed--Lord of all, who had by His doing and dying purchased the regal right to say--"Inherit the kingdom." It is a gift which makes those on whom it is conferred "kings and priests unto God." Being a gift,



it is from first to last of grace--all merit is excluded. In Milton's beautiful words--

"With solemn adoration down they cast  
Their crowns, inwove with amaranth and gold."

"Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe."  
Hebrews 12:28

2. What enhances its value is that it is the gift of a Father's love. "Come, you who are blessed by my Father." The Hospice with its many mansions was prepared by the Father "from the foundation of the world." The divine Fatherhood, the great Father-heart of God, so precious in the Church below, will attain its full meaning in the Church of the First-born. Christ's own words will then reach their grandest, their everlasting significance, "My Father and your Father, My God and your God." "I in them and You in me, that they may be made perfect in unity!"

3. The rest of the heavenly Hospice is further to consist in the Presence and Love of the great Rest-Giver Himself. He says not, "Go, you ransomed ones; heralded by angels, to your thrones and your crowns; go apart from Me, and mingle in the ranks of ministering seraphim. My connection with you terminates, now that your earthly burdens are laid down. I go to My Father, and you see Me no more." No! It is, "Come, you blessed, come with Me. I will show you the path of life. Remember the words that I spoke, My closing words on earth. The promise will be in its widest, its eternal sense, ratified now--'If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there you may be also.'" It would be no true rest to them, if the pilgrim-prayer could not still be offered as they stand on the threshold of bliss--"If Your Presence go not with us, carry us not hence." His response is, "Come!" "My presence shall go with You, and I will give you REST."

4. One other thought. It will be rest after labor, and rest-recompense for labor done under the inspiration of that divinest and most heaven-born of forces--Love to the Master. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth--Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." "Come," is the Savior's word and

form of welcome--and then He specifies the varied good deeds wrought by His people, and which He owns and accepts as done for Himself. Rich and poor too can participate in the same tribute-offering. Varied ministries of service, necessarily different in kind and degree (what we may designate by the conventional terms of high and low), will be equally valued by Him who tests all, not by material bulk or value, but by motive. Through this consecrated medium of love, the cup of cold water given to the needy will be owned and accepted at the great gathering of souls, whether that water be conveyed in golden goblet or in earthenware vessel.

No rest on earth is sweeter or more welcome than that earned by unselfish, self-sacrificing toil--the consciousness of honest labor followed by well-earned approval and reward, the well-sustained fight followed by the spoils of victory. What will be the elements of joy in that rest which is the result of loving work done for the great Loving Being to whom we owe our eternal all?

Blessed Savior, may I be able now with the ear of faith to hear these whisperings from the better world, where rest will be turned into rapture. And may it be mine at last, under the sway and dominion of a love which is eternal, casting my blood-bought crown at Your feet, to say-- "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **MISGIVING REBUKED**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Said I not unto you, that, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?" --John 11:40

Faith in Christ is an equivalent for Rest. He, the gracious Bestower of

Rest, says "Come to Me--believe Me--trust Me, and your heavy burden, whatever it is, will at my appointed time be explained, lessened, or removed; and if not any of these, strength will be given to enable you to bear it."

There was much when the above words were spoken, to stagger and paralyze faith, and therefore to foster unrest. A beloved brother dead and a Savior absent! Unlike the daughter of Jairus, who was still laid on her coffin within the house, Lazarus had been three days committed to the sepulcher when the Great Physician appeared. The triumph of death in his case was complete. On all human calculations the doom seemed beyond reversal.

"Hush!" says the Redeemer. "Is anything too hard for the Lord? Man's extremity is My opportunity. Believe Me. Look beyond human frailty and the limitations of human power. 'With God all things are possible.' In the darkest seasons of depression, when faith and sight seem waged in unequal conflict, and victory inclining to the latter, dismiss unworthy impeachments of the divine Wisdom. You shall yet, it may even be in the midst of crossed and unanswered prayers, see the glory of God."

"We sadly watched the close of all,  
Life balanced in a breath;  
We saw upon his features fall  
The dreadful shade of death.  
All dark and desolate we were,  
And murmuring nature cried—  
'Oh, surely, Lord, had You been here,  
Our brother had not died!'

"But when its glance the memory cast  
On all that grace had done,  
And thought of life's long warfare past  
And endless victory won,  
Then faith, prevailing, wiped the tear,  
And looking upward, cried—  
O Lord, You surely have been here;  
Our brother has not died!" —Burns

Blessed Savior, give me grace to enter this secure Hospice revealed in the meditation of today, and to trust You in dark dispensations. Bestow upon me the rest of faith, confiding in You where I fail to discern Your footsteps, saying with one of these faithless yet faithful mourners--"But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give it You." Sooner or later the cloud will have its silver lining; and my Bethany, whatever it be, now shrouded in funeral gloom, will be bathed in sunshine. The web woven with impaired vision and trembling fingers will then be seen to be no piece of disordered and inharmonious patchwork. "There is no complete answer to the question," says a leader of religious thought, "within the range of our present knowledge. We feel here that we only see the fringe of a vaster system of government than we can yet take measure of." "Glory to God for all," were Chrysostom's last words.

"There are days of silent sorrow  
In the seasons of our life,  
There are wild despairing moments,  
There are hours of mental strife,  
There are times of stony anguish,  
When the tears refuse to fall;  
But the waiting-time, my brothers,  
Is the hardest time of all.

"But at last we learn the lesson  
That God knows what is best;

For with wisdom comes patience,  
And of patience comes rest;  
Yes, a golden thread is shining  
Through the tangled woof of fate,  
And our hearts shall thank Him meekly  
That He taught us how to wait."

—Psalms of Life

"Said I not unto you?" I can fill up, with all His spoken promises, that blank cheque. I shall recognize troubles and sorrows only as the steps leading upward to the Heavenly Hospice. I shall look forward by anticipation, and see life's sanctuary, the temple of existence, no longer a

half-completed structure, a half-developed plan, with pillars broken, and aisles unroofed, and windows bared to the storm, but standing out, the completed "building of God," in the fair and finished proportions of eternity. Meanwhile I can sing even through tears this "song in the night"— "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Commit your way unto the Lord--trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **REST OF FORGIVENESS**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Luke 7:48

And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."  
Luke 7:50

These words were spoken to one of earth's most weary and heavy-laden, a child of despair, who sought the presence and solace of the Great Rest-Giver in the house of Simon of Galilee. The harsh, censorious, unsympathetic guests at the Pharisee's table made no attempt at kindly intervention. They would spurn her away unsuccoured, as if her touch were defilement. They would leave her a battered flower, crushed and broken with the pitiless rain and storm. Not only so; they were even tempted to repudiate and reject the divine character of the new Teacher on account of His apparent ignorance of her previous life--His apparent tolerance of impurity. "If His were indeed the Omniscience claimed, He must have known who it was that was now crouching abashed behind Him, and raining tears of remorse on His feet." It has been surmised that the words of our leading motto-verse and its invitation were uttered shortly before; that this outcast had heard them; that on hearing them the first ray of hope was kindled in her anguished soul. She followed the

footsteps of the Redeemer. His words, "Come unto Me," had rung in her ear ever since like a chime of reposeful music; and she dared ask from Him--the gentle Dispenser of Pardons--that "absolution" which a cruel world and a conventional code of morality denied.

"With silent step  
I enter, and along the lighted hall  
Pass swiftly, until I reach Your place, and stand  
Behind You weeping; soft Your shadow falls  
And covers me from trouble and reproach,  
That none may chide my tears or bid me go."

Yes, she was not mistaken. The Sun of Righteousness and Mercy shone, and the flower lifted its drooping leaves. With sobbing heart and speechless emotion, she came to the Mighty Burden-Bearer, as implied in the original "kissing much His feet" and was hushed to rest in the peace of a divine forgiveness. "Go in peace," or, as it is literally, "Go into peace"--go enter within My Hospice.

There is a panacea in the words of our meditation for all who in diverse ways have guilt on the conscience. Transgressions in the past may be many and aggravated. Love and loyalty to God and truth and holiness may have been sadly ebbing. "My iniquities have separated between me and my God." In moments of faithlessness and despair, there may have been temptation to rush to the dungeons of Doubting Castle, rather than to the Gospel Hospice, and hear rung only the knell of extinguished hope. Blessed be His name! there are accents of love and reconciliation heard, telling that the separating gulf is bridged and the Hospice-gates flung wide open for welcome.

"Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,  
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea,  
And laden souls, by thousands meekly stealing,  
Kind Savior, turn their weary steps to Thee."

I would make it my prayer--"Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man!" O Christ, O Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, where would

I be but for You, with the plenitude of Your grace, the wealth of Your forgiveness? There is no bound to Your ocean mercy. It laves and washes with its ample tide the dreariest, rockiest shores of humanity. The Bible's great refrain from first to last is– "He is able also to save unto the uttermost." The uttermost! Who dare set limits to the uttermost a Savior-God can do, the possibilities of His infinite love?

"Through life, through death, through sorrowing and sinning,  
Christ shall suffice me as He has sufficed.  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;  
The beginning and the end of all is Christ."

"Come," He seems still to say--"come unto ME! Others may reject the gracious offer. Others may be tempted to cower in terror over an irreparable, irrevocable past, as if condemned to stand hopeless outside the pale of mercy. O weary, restless soul, You are doubting My ability and willingness to reach your case. Doubt it not."

"Go, in penitence bewailing,  
Go, and now bemoan your guilt;  
Trust the promise, never failing,  
'I will save you if you wilt.'

"Hasten, every soul despairing,  
At the cross of Jesus fall;  
Though with legion sins repairing,  
He will freely pardon all."

There was a beautiful Jewish legend, that for many centuries after the rite was instituted, the red or scarlet thread bound round the neck of the scape-goat turned white. It was the significant token of forgiveness, the words of the great prophet, spoken on the threshold of his prophecy, put in visible emblematic shape--"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord--though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Other Hospices," the divine Pardoner seems to say, "may be closed, but read the superscription over My Gospel Refuge and Stronghold. See the blood sprinkled on its lintels and door-posts, which gives Me the unchallenged

prerogative to say— Neither do I condemn you--go, and sin no more."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"If a man loves Me, he will keep My words--and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 14:23

What a hospice is this! What a wondrous relationship the words of the divine Bestower of Rest unfold--that love toward God in the soul of the believer has the most gracious of responses! Two of the adorable Persons in the ever-blessed Trinity are represented as Guests entering in and dwelling there. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

It would seem as if the emblem were dear to Him who employs it; for it is the very same that is repeated, in still more touching and winning language, not in the days of His humiliation, but from the throne of His exaltation. Standing, as a patient KING, outside the closed portal of the heart, with the dews of night at His feet and frosty skies above, the lock of the door matted with ivy and corroded with rust, "Behold," says He, "I stand at the door, and knock--if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). In the words of a sacred poet--

"His bleeding feet still loiter at your door,  
His head against the iron bar is pressed,  
Impassioned tears rise in His eyes once more,  
He longs to give you REST."

Both figures significantly convey the pleadings of a love that never fails, an importunity that never wearies, as well as a fellowship most intimate



and endearing.

O blessed meeting-place! The human heart becomes itself a Hospice--a house of shelter and refreshment, where the festal table of rich spiritual blessing is sacramentally spread, and where the storm raging without only enhances the gracious rest and security within. "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6).

"Accept these gifts beyond compare,  
And leave behind earth's toil and strife;  
Ascend the heights, and breathe the air  
Of God's own everlasting life.

"If you will serve Him, you of Heaven  
The honored and approved shall be;  
Accepted, welcomed, loved, forgiven,  
Earth knows of no such pedigree."

"My Father will love him." We are told of Thomas Aquinas, the scholar and saint of the thirteenth century, that when lying ill he had continually in his mouth these words of Augustine--"Then shall I truly live when I shall be quite filled with You alone and Your love" (Vaughan's Life).

There is but one condition here made by the Divine Speaker regarding "the mountain guest-chamber,"--"If a man loves Me, he will keep My words."

Gracious Redeemer, Author of Peace and Giver of Rest, help me to accept this stipulated provision. Enable me to hear and to obey Your voice, to reverence Your will, reflect Your holiness and purity, Your charity and unselfishness, Your patience and endurance, the beauty of Your life of self-consecration. The words of Jesus I am asked to "keep," are not the words of a dead teacher or prophet; not the obsolete sayings of the Christ of an historic past--a Figure which flitted in mystery across the world's stage nearly two thousand years ago, and then vanished like other great men of the olden time. They are the utterances of a divine,

sympathetic, ever-living, ever-loving Being--the God-Man, the Man-God. They are arrows, polished shafts sent as fresh today as then from His golden quiver. The words of man may fail and falter, and before long be forgotten. But "the words I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life," welling fresh from a perennial Fountain.

"We will come unto him," further says our verse, "and make our abode with him." An ecclesiastical writer mentions that Ignatius, in the early years of the second century, "borrows an image from the sacred pageant of some heathen deity, where statues, sacred vessels, and other treasures are borne in solemn procession." "So," are the words of that venerated Christian regarding the true followers and worshipers of his Lord, "are they all marching in festive pomp along the Via Sacra--the way of love--which leads to God. They all are bearers of treasures committed to them; for they carry their God, their Christ, their shrine, their sacred things in their heart." Happy those who in some lowly measure are able to join this festal throng, bearing with them consecrated treasures, and seeking to take up their abode in the heart of the "Father-God!"

Conscious, it may be, of past shortcoming and unworthiness, may I be yet enabled, with humble confidence, to make the avowal--"Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You." "He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him."

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

## **REST IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." John 14:16

A gracious Hospice opened by Christ to His disciples in the near prospect of His departure, was the promise of a divine Comforter, whose advent would more than compensate them for His own personal absence and loss; not a temporary visitant, like the angels who from time to time gladdened both dispensations; not like the Abrahams, and Elijahs, and Isaiahs, and Davids, and Baptists--brilliant passing meteors shining for a season and then lost in the darkness--no satellite with reflected or derivative light, but an abiding Presence and glory "above the brightness of the sun."

This heavenly Paraclete was to "teach them all things;" to "guide them into all truth;" to energize, with superhuman wisdom and power--a continued strength and inspiration for His people in the time to come. And, best of all, He was to be the ever-present Revealer of an absent Lord, magnifying Him in the affections of His Church and people--"He shall glorify Me for He shall receive from Me, and shall show it unto you."

At Pentecost there was the full realization of the promise. The windows of heaven were then opened, and showers of blessing descended. The gathered disciples were "baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire," each brow haloed with flame--a radiance of unearthly brightness. It was the predicted "times of refreshing." The prophetic announcement was fulfilled--"He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth." Multitudes were enabled to call Christ "Lord, by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

Living as we do under "the dispensation of the Spirit," we have in His bestowal and name a true Refuge and House of Rest. He is emphatically

the Spirit of peace, brooding with halcyon calm over the chaos of unrest. COMFORTER is surely the most precious of balm-words for the weary and heavy laden, the sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened. Filled with all joy and peace in believing, we "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

"Filled with the Spirit"--that is the secret and explanation of the rest this Hospice affords. Its every window is thrown open to catch the divine breath and echoes from the everlasting hills. There replenished and recruited with His varied gifts, the traveler is ready to prosecute his upward and onward way, with the new song on his lips--"Your Spirit, O God, is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." The chalice of joy given by the divine Agent is so full of the living water of which He is the emblem, that there is no room in it for the poison-drops of sin, the contamination of any baser earthly admixture. Rather, in His hands, life is like the vessels of Cana, not only filled to the brim, but the contents are gradually transfused and transfigured into the wine of heaven. Commonest blessings and joys are in Him sanctified, and become sacramental.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me, and drink. This spoke He of the Spirit" (John 7:37, 39).

May it be mine personally to appropriate this richest boon and legacy bequeathed by the departing Savior to His Church and people; recognizing in the presence and supporting grace of "the Comforter" the chief well of refreshment for pilgrims "passing through the Valley of Baca." It is an additional encouragement, too, in pleading for the peerless gift, that the divine Father is harmonized with the divine Son in the loving and bountiful bestowment. Does an earthly parent delight in lavishing tokens of affection on his offspring? "How much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit unto those who ask Him?"

Happy those who are able, in some feeble measure, yet with lowly confidence, to join in the apostle's testimony-- "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **HOSPICE OF PRAYER**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you." John 16:23

A gracious promise and a gracious welcome from the loving Rest-Giver. Wide is the range of blessing here given--"Whatever you ask." One condition alone is made, and which is thus elsewhere expressed--"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). Surely the Inviter's own words are a pledge that all will be given that is really for our good; and all will as assuredly be withheld which would be detrimental to our best and truest well-being.

The unique prayer of Jabez, though one of the most ancient in inspired story, has, in its expressed limitations, a significance and beauty which make it the property of no one dispensation, but of the Church and the believer in every age--"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested" (1 Chron. 4:10). The God of the old pilgrim-father is ever and alone the judge of what are "blessings indeed"--blessings not counterfeit but real. At times to us this is difficult to believe. The promise of our verse today seems to our short-sightedness and unwisdom often strangely belied. The gates of the Hospice-sanctuary appear barred, and our purposes thwarted. The evils we dread and deprecate overtake us; the blessings we fondly invoke and implore are denied. Let us hush all misgivings; let us check all misconstruction of the divine will and wisdom by accepting the righteous ordinations of that Will, remembering from whom these answers come. "Whatever you shall ask the Father." "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight."

A further guarantee the verse supplies is the divine Medium, through which alike our prayers are offered and the Father's will is conveyed--"In My name." It is the name that is above every name--the name of "the Wonderful Counselor," the divine Brother-Man, the King of heavenly hosts, yet the King of earthly pilgrims. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower [a Hospice]; the righteous runs into it, and is safe." Him the Father hears always. In the prophetic words of the psalm, "You have given Him His heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of His lips." He is the true "Arbitrator between us, who lays His hand upon us both." He is the true Antitype in that double Rephidim picture--Moses on the mount and Joshua in the plain, pleading for us and fighting for us; only, unlike the type, there is no suspension in His intercession, His hand never "growing weary." He is the true Covenant Angel with the "much incense" of His adorable merits.

There seems, at first sight, contradiction in an immediately subsequent verse of this same valedictory chapter. "You shall ask," says He, "in My name--and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me" (verses 26, 27). But it only lends intensity and emphasis to the Speaker's previous statement. It is as much as to say, "Though I be your ever-living, ever-loving Intercessor, the Prince who has power with God and must prevail, in another sense I need be no such Intermediary, I need to exercise no such intervention. Simply asking blessings through Me will be a passport to the Father's heart. You have only in your pleadings to name My name. It will be enough. Your love for Me will be sufficient to secure His love to you. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

O blessed shelter and pausing-place for the climbers of every Hill Difficulty! There is no rest for the weary equal to that secured by prayer. In the very act of devotion there is a sense of calmness and peace. A writer (Wells) happily illustrates this in citing the classic story of Orestes fleeing to the temple of Apollo, the god of light. Safe and inviolable in the sacred shrine, his fears and agitations are lulled as he lies prostrate in devotion before the altar. A beautiful and truthful picture of the believer on his knees at the mercy-seat, looking up in silence and trustfulness to the Father of Lights, with whom is no darkness at all! In that hour of

quietness and confidence he gets strength. The apostle seems in the same way to carve an appropriate motto above the door of this gracious Hospice, this refuge of peace, when he says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

## **FINAL REST AND BEATIFIC PRESENCE**

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

At dawn the disciples saw Jesus standing on the beach, but they couldn't see who he was. He called out, "Children, have you caught any fish?"  
"No," they replied. John 21:4-5

Weary and burdened with new apprehensions and desponding thoughts were these pilgrims of Galilee. Even Peter, despite of former protestations, now chafing under deferred and disappointed hope, seems to say, "I can wait no longer; I shall resume the old daily occupation I had readily surrendered for a nobler, diviner mission. I am going fishing." And the others followed suit. It was a night of unremunerated toil. When their boat was drawing near to the western shore, a Figure stood out in the tender mystery of the dawn--the dim morning light that was breaking over the hills of Naphtali. At first the jaded toilers knew Him not. The very tones of His voice seemed unfamiliar, even though the well-known greeting, "Children," reached their ears. But the Bidder of welcome was in due time recognized. The word passed from lip to lip, "It is the Lord!" A meal was ready spread on the shore; while a miraculous draught corroborated their surmises, and crowned the unrecompensed labor of "a night on the deep." The net was dragged ashore with its encumbering load, and the Lord of love was once more surrounded with loving hearts. It was parable and miracle in one.

After our night, too, on the world's sea of trial, life's varied and chequered appointments, there is to be a blessed day-dawn for all those that "love His appearing." In the morning of immortality, Jesus will meet us on the heavenly, as He did His disciples on the earthly shore, with the same gracious welcome. The prize which strewed the margin of the Lake of Galilee will have its emblematic counterpart in the recompense for faithful, though in the case of some it may be fruitless, labor. As with the miraculous draught, then at least nothing will be lost, nothing lacking in the final gathering--no baffled hopes, or frustrated toil, or impeded work. "And for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken."

In His own beatific Presence, too, the feast will be spread. That Presence and Love will consecrate and glorify the banquet--this not for a fleeting hour, but for eternity. Paul, in his great eighth chapter of Romans, ascends to the highest Hospice built on this side of heaven; and reaching these serene heights, where the toiling pilgrim breathes the air of the everlasting hills, he exclaims--"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" In that "morning without clouds" will the challenge attain its highest meaning and significance.

Lord Jesus, Giver of Rest and Peace, let me hear Your voice even now on the celestial shore, saying, "Come unto Me, you weary ones, and I will refresh you." Let me see in their spiritual symbolism (it may be yet dimly discernible) the lighted coal-fire, the fish laid thereon, and bread. Let the thought of that glad morning reconcile to all present experiences--storms, and buffetings, and night-watchings. Let the restful lullaby close alike this meditation and our volume-- "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

"What time I am awake I am still with You."

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest. This is the place of repose."  
Isaiah 28:12

"The night is over, the sleep is slept,  
They are called from the shadowy place;  
The Pilgrims stand in the glorious land,  
And gaze on the Master's face."



Blessed be the Lord, that has given REST unto His people, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised. (1 Kings 8:56.)

## **MEMORIES OF BETHANY**

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## **Introduction**

To mourners in Zion, with whom Bethany has ever been a name consecrated to sorrow, these memories are inscribed.

## **OPENING THOUGHTS**

Places associated with great minds are always interesting. What a halo of moral grandeur must ever be thrown around that spot which was

hallowed above all others by the Lord of glory as the scene of His most cherished earthly friendship! However holy be the memories which encircle other localities trodden by Him in the days of His flesh—Bethlehem, with its manger cradle, its mystic star, and adoring cherubim—Nazareth, the nurturing home of His youthful affections—Tiberias, whose shores so often echoed to His footfall, or whose waters in stillness or in storm bore Him on their bosom—the crested heights where He uttered His beatitudes—the midnight mountains where He prayed—the garden where He suffered—the hill where He died—there is no one single resort in His divine pilgrimage on which sanctified thought loves so fondly to dwell as on the home and village of BETHANY.

Its hours of sacred converse have long ago fled. Its honored family have slumbered for ages in their tomb. Bethany's Lord has been for centuries enthroned amid the glories of a brighter home. But though its Memories are all that remain, the place is still fragrant with His presence. The echoes of His voice—words of unearthly sweetness—still linger around it; and have for eighteen hundred years served to cheer and encourage many a fainting pilgrim in his upward ascent to the true Bethany above!

There, the Redeemer of the world proclaimed a brief but impressive Gospel. Heaven and earth seemed then to touch one another. We have the tender tones of a Man blended with the ineffable majesty of God. Hopes "full of immortality" shine with their celestial rainbow-hues amid a shower of holy tears. The canceling from our Bibles of the 11th chapter of John would be like the blotting out of the brightest planet from the spiritual firmament. Each of its magnificent utterances has proved like a ministering-angel—a seraph-messenger bearing its live coal of comfort to the broken, bleeding heart, from the holiest altar which SYMPATHY (divine and human) ever upreared in a trial-world! Many has been the weary footstep and tearful eye that has hastened in thought to BETHANY—"gone to the grave of Lazarus, to weep there."

While "the town of Mary and her sister Martha" furnishes us, thus, with a garnered treasury of Christian solaces, it exhibits also one of the loveliest of the Bible's domestic portraits. If the story of Joseph and his brethren is in the Old Testament invested with surpassing interest, here a Gospel home-scene in the New, of still deeper and tenderer pathos—a picture in

which the true Joseph appears as the central figure, without any estrangements to mar its beauty. Often at other times a drapery of woe hangs over the pathway of the Man of Sorrows. But Bethany is bathed in sunshine—a sweet oasis in His toil-worn pilgrimage.

At this quiet abode of congenial spirits He seems to have had His main "sips at the fountain of human joy," and to have obtained a temporary respite from unwearied labor and unmerited enmity. The "Lily among thorns" raised His drooping head in this Eden-home. There we can follow Him from the courts of the Temple—the busy crowd—the lengthened journey—the miracles of mercy—the hours of vain and ineffectual pleading with obdurate hearts. We can picture Him as the guest of a peaceful family, spirit blending with spirit in sanctified communion. We can mark the tenderness of His holy humanity. We can see how He loved, and sympathized, and wept, and rejoiced!

As the tremendous events which signalized the close of His pilgrimage drew on, still it is Bethany with which they are mainly associated. It was at Bethany the fearful visions of His cross and passion cast their shadow on His path. From its quiet palm-trees He issued forth on His last day's journey across Mount Olivet. It was with Bethany in view He ascended to heaven. Its soil was the last He trod—its homes were the last on which His eye rested when the cloud received Him up into glory. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness seemed as if they loved to linger on this consecrated height.

We cannot doubt that many incidents regarding His often sojournings there are left unrecorded. We have more than once, indeed, merely the simple announcement in the inspired narrative that He retired from Jerusalem all night to the village where His friend Lazarus resided. We dare not withdraw more of the veil than the Word of God permits. Let us be grateful for what we have of the gracious unfoldings here vouchsafed of His inner life—the comprehensive intermingling of doctrine, consolation, comfort, and instruction in righteousness. His Bethany sayings are for all time—they have "gone through all the earth"—His Bethany words "to the end of the world!" Like its own alabaster box of precious ointment, "wherever the Gospel is preached," these will be held in grateful memorial.

John, of all the Evangelists, was best qualified to do justice to this matchless picture. Baptized himself with the spirit of love, his inspired pencil could best portray the lights and shadows in this lovely and loving household. Preeminently like his Lord, he could best delineate the scene of all others where the tenderness of that tender Savior shone most conspicuous. He was the disciple who had leaned on His bosom—who had been admitted by Him to nearest and most confiding fellowship. He would have the Church, to the last period of time, to enjoy the same. He interrupts, therefore, the course of his narrative that he may lift the veil which enshrouds the private life of Jesus, and exhibit Him in all ages in the endearing attitude and relation of a Human Friend. Immanuel is transfigured on this Mount of Love before His suffering and glory! The Bethany scene, with its tints of soft and mellowed sunlight, forms a pleasing background to the sadder and more awful events which crowd the Gospel's closing chapters.

## **THE HOME SCENE**

The curtain rises on a quiet Judean village, the sanctuary of three holy hearts. Each of the residents have some strongly-marked traits of individual character. These have been so often delicately and truthfully drawn that it is the less necessary to dwell minutely upon them here. There is abundant material in the narrative to discover to us, in the sisters, two characters—both interesting in themselves, both beloved by Jesus, both needful in the Church of God, but at the same time widely different, preparing by a diverse education for heaven—requiring, as we shall find, from Him who best knew their diversity, a separate and peculiar treatment.

MARTHA, the elder (probably the eldest of the family), has been accurately represented as the type of activity; bustling, energetic, impulsive, well qualified to be the head of the household, and to grapple

with the stern realities and routine of actual life; quick in apprehension, strong and vigorous in intellect, anxious to give a reason for all she did, and requiring a reason for the conduct of others; a useful if not a noble character, combining diligence in business with fervency in spirit.

MARY was the type of reflection; calm, meek, devotional, contemplative, sensitive in feeling, ill suited to battle with the cares and sorrows, the strifes and griefs of an engrossing and encumbering world; one of those gentle flowers that pine and bend under the rough blasts of life, easily battered down by hail and storm, but as ready to raise its drooping leaves under heavenly influences. Her position was at her Lord's feet, drinking in those living waters which came welling up fresh from the great Fountain of life; asking no questions, declining all arguments, gentle and submissive, a beautiful impersonation of the childlike faith which "bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things."

While her sister can so command her feelings as to be able to rush forth to meet her Lord outside the village, calm and self-possessed, to unbosom to Him all her hopes and fears, and even to interrogate Him about death and the resurrection, Mary can only meet Him buried in her all-absorbing grief. The crushed leaves of that flower of paradise are bathed and saturated with dewy tears. She has not a word of remonstrance. Jesus speaks to Martha—chides her—reasons with her. But with Mary, He knew that the heart was too full, the wound too deep, to bear the probing of word or argument; He speaks, therefore, in the touching pathos of her own silent grief. Her melting emotion has its response in His own.

In one word, Martha was one of those meteor spirits rushing to and fro amid the ceaseless activities of life, softened and saddened, but not prostrated and crushed by the sudden inroads of sorrow. Mary, again, we think of as one of those angel forms which now and then seem to walk the earth from the spirit-land; a quiet evening star, shedding its mellowed radiance among deepening twilight shadows, as if her home was in a brighter sphere, and her choice, as we know it was, "the better part, that never could be taken from her."

"What Mary fell short in words she made up in tears. She said less than Martha, but wept more; and tears of devout affection have a voice, a loud

prevailing voice—no rhetoric like that." (Matthew Henry)

Of LAZARUS, around whom the main interest of the narrative gathers, we have fewer incidental touches to guide us in giving individuality to his character. This, however, we may infer, from the poignant sorrow of the twin hearts that were so unexpectedly broken, that he was a loved and lamented only brother, a sacred prop around which their tenderest affections were entwined. Included too, as he was, in the love which the Divine Savior bore to the household, for "Jesus loved Lazarus." Is it presumptuous to imagine that his spirit had been cast into much the same human mold as that of his beloved Lord, and that the friendship of Jesus for him had been formed on the same principles on which friendships are formed still—a similarity of disposition, some mental and moral resemblances and idiosyncrasies? They were like-minded, so far as a fallible nature and the nature of a stainless humanity could be assimilated. We can think of him as gentle, retiring, amiable, forgiving, heavenly-minded; an imperfect and shadowy, it may be, but still a faithful reflection and transcript of incarnate loveliness. May we not venture to use regarding him his Lord's eulogy on another, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

Nor must we forget, in this rapid sketch, what a precious unfolding we have in this home portraiture of the humanity of the Savior! "The Man Christ Jesus" stands in softened majesty and tenderness before our view. He who had a heart capacious enough to take in all mankind, had yet His special likings (sinless partialities) for individuals and minds which were more than others congenial and kindred with His own. As there are some heart sanctuaries where we can more readily rush to bury the tale of our sorrows or unburden our perplexities, so had He. "Jesus wept!"—this speaks of Him as the human Sympathizer. "Jesus loved Lazarus"—this speaks of Him as the human Friend! He had an ardent affection for all His disciples, but even among them there was an inner circle of holier attachments—a Peter, and James, and John; and out of this sacred trio again there was one pre-eminently "Beloved." So, amid the hallowed haunts of Palestine, the homes of Judea, the cities of Galilee, there was but one Bethany.

It is delightful thus to think of the heart of Jesus, in all but sin, as purely

human, identical and identified with our own. He was no hermit, dwelling in mysterious solitariness apart from His fellows, but open to the charities of life—in all His refined and hallowed sensibilities "made like unto His brethren." Friendship is itself a holy thing. The bright intelligences in the upper sanctuary know it and experience it. They "cry one to another." There is no solitary voice—no isolated existence. Unlike the planets in the material firmament, shining distant and apart, the angels are rather clustering constellations, whose gravitation-law is unity and love, this binding them to one another, and all to God.

No! with reverence we say it—may not the archetype of all friendship be found shadowed forth in what is higher still, those mystic and ineffable communings subsisting between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a past eternity? We can thus regard the friendship of Jesus on earth—like all ennobled, purified affections—as an emanation from the Divine; a sacred and holy stream, flowing directly from the Fountain of infinite love. How our adorable Lord in the days of His flesh fondly clung even to hearts that grew faithless when fidelity was most needed! What was it but a noble and touching tribute to the longings and susceptibilities of His holy soul for human friendship, when, on entering the precincts of Gethsemane, He thus sought to mitigate the untold sorrows of that awful hour—"Tarry here and watch with Me!"

But to return. Such was the home around which the memories of its residents and our own, love to linger. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—all three partakers of the same grace, fellow-pilgrims Zionward, and that journey sanctified and hallowed by a sacred fellowship with the Lord of pilgrims. The Savior's own precious promise seems under that roof of lowly unobtrusive love to receive a living fulfillment: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Though many a gorgeous palace was at that era adorning the earth, where was the spot, what the dwelling, half so consecrated as this? Solomon had a thousand years before, two miles distant, in presence of assembled Israel, uttered the exclamation, "But will God in very deed dwell with men upon earth?"

He was now verily dwelling! Nor was it under any gorgeous canopy or magnificent temple. He had selected Three Human Souls as the shrines



He most loved. He had sought their holy, heavenly converse as the sweetest incense and costliest sacrifice. How or where they first saw Jesus we cannot tell. They had probably been among the number of those pious Jews who had prayerfully waited for the "consolation of Israel," and who had lived to see their fondest wishes and hopes realized. The Evangelist gives no information regarding their previous history. The narrative all at once, with an abruptness of surpassing beauty, leaves us in no doubt that the Divine Redeemer had been for long, a well-known guest in that sunlit home, and that, when the calls and duties of His public ministry were suspended, many an hour was spent in the enjoyment of its peaceful seclusion.

We can imagine, and no more, these often happy meetings, when the Pilgrim-Savior, weary and worn, was seen descending the rocky footpath of Olivet, Lazarus or his sisters, from the flat roof of their dwelling, or under the spreading fig-tree, eager to catch the first glimpse of His approach. When seated in the house, we may picture their converse: Themes of sublime and heavenly import, unchronicled by the inspired penmen, which sunk deep into those listening spirits, and nerved two of them for a future hour of unexpected sorrow. If there be bliss in the interchange of communion between Christian and Christian, what must it have been to have had the presence and fellowship of the Lord Himself! Not seeing Him, as we see Him, "behind the lattice," but seated underneath His shadow, drinking in the living tones of His living voice. These "children of Zion" must, indeed, have been "joyful in their King."

One of these hallowed seasons is that referred to in the 10th chapter of Luke's gospel, where Martha, the ministering spirit, and Mary the lowly disciple, are first introduced to our notice. That visit is conjectured to have occurred when Jesus was returning to the country from the Feast of Tabernacles. The Bethany circle had not yet dreamt of their impending trial. But, foreseen as it was by Him who knows the end from the beginning, may we not well believe one reason (the main reason) for His going there was to soothe them in the prospect of a saddened home? So that, when the stroke did descend, they might be cheered and consoled with the remembrances of His visit, and of the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

And, is not this still the way Jesus deals with His people? He visits them often by some precious love-tokens—some special manifestations of His grace and presence before the hour of trial. So that, when that hour does come, they may not be altogether incapacitated or overwhelmed with it. Like Elijah of old, they have their miraculous food provided before they encounter the sterile desert. When they come to speak of their crushed hearts, they have solaces to tell of too. Their language is, "I will sing of mercy and judgment!"

We may be led to inquire why a character so lovely as that of Lazarus was not enlisted along with the other disciples in the active service of the Apostleship. "Why should Peter and Andrew, John and James, be summoned from their boats and nets on Lake Gennesaret to follow Jesus, and this other, imbued with the same spirit and honored with the same regard, be left alone and undisturbed in his village home?"

"To every man there is a work." Some are more peculiarly called to active duty, and better fitted for it; others for passive obedience and suffering. Some are selected as bold standard-bearers of the cross, others to give their testimony in the quiet seclusion of domestic life. Some are specially gifted, as Paul, to appear in the halls of Nero or on the heights of Mars' Hill, and, confronting face to face the world's boasted wisdom, maintain intact the honor of their Lord. Others are required to glorify Him on beds of sickness, or in homes of sorrow, or in the holy consistent tenor of their everyday walk. Some are called as Levites to temple service; others to give the uncostly cup of cold water, or the widow's mite. Others to manifest the meek, gentle, unselfish, resigned, forgiving heart, when there is no cup or mite to offer!

Believer! rejoice that your path is marked out for you. Your lot in life, with all its "accidents," is your Lord's appointing. Dream not, in your own short-sighted wisdom, that, had you occupied some other or more prominent position—had your talents been greater, or your worldly influence more extensive—you might have glorified your God in a way which is at present denied to you. He can be served in the lowliest as well as in the most exalted stations! As the tiniest leaf or smallest star in the world of nature reflects His glory, as well as the giant mountain or blazing sun, so does He graciously own and recognize the humblest effort of lowly

love no less than the most lavish gifts which splendid munificence and costly devotion can cast into His treasury. Let it be your great aim and ambition to honor Him just in the position He has seen fit to assign you.

"Let every man," says the Apostle, "wherein he is called, therein abide with God." However limited your sphere, you may become a center of holy influences to the little world around you. Your heart may be an incense-altar of love and affection, kindness and gentleness to man—your life a perpetual hymn of praise to your Father in Heaven; glorifying Him, like Martha, by active service; like Mary, by sitting at His feet; or, like Lazarus, by holy living and happy dying, and leaving behind you "the Memory of the Just" which is "blessed."

## LESSONS

As yet the home of Bethany is all happiness. The burial-ground has been untraversed since, probably, years before the dust of one, or perhaps both parents had been committed to the sepulcher. Death had long left the residents with an unbroken circle. Can it be that the unwelcome intruder is so near at hand? that their now joyous dwelling is so soon to echo to the wail of lamentation? We imagine it was but lately visited by Jesus. In a little while the arrow has sped; the sacredness of a divine friendship is no guarantee against the incursion of the sleepless foe of human happiness. Bethany is a mourning household. The sisters are bowed in the agony of their worst bereavement—the prop of their existence is laid low—"Lazarus is dead!"

At the very threshold of this touching story, are we not called on to pause, and read the uncertainty of earth's best joys and purest happiness; that the brightest sunshine is often the precursor of a dark cloud. When the gourd is all flourishing, a worm may unseen be preying at its root! When the vessel is gliding joyously on the calm sea, the treacherous rock may be at hand, and, in one brief hour, it has become a shattered wreck!

It is the touching record of the inspired historian in narrating Abraham's

heaviest trial—"After these things, God tested Abraham." After what things? After a season of rich blessings, gilding a future with bright hopes! Would that, amid our happy homes, and sunshine hours, and seasons of holy and joyous communion between friend and friend, we would more habitually bear in mind "This is not to last!"

In one brief and unsuspected moment, our Lazarus may be taken away in death. The messenger may now be on the wing to lay low some treasured object of earthly solicitude and love. God would teach us—while we are glad of our gourds—not to be "exceeding glad;" not to nestle here as if we were to live always, but rather, as we are perched on our summer boughs, to be ready at His bidding to soar away, and leave behind us what most we prize.

It tells us, too, the utter mysteriousness of many of the divine dispensations. "LAZARUS IS DEAD!" What! he, the head, and support, and stay of two helpless females? The joy and solace of a common orphan-hood—a brother evidently made and born for their adversities? What! Lazarus, whom Jesus tenderly loved? How much, even to his Lord, will be buried in that early grave! We may well expect, if there be one homestead in all Palestine guarded by the overshadowing wings of angels to debar the entrance of death, whose tenants may pillow their heads night after night in the confident assurance of immunity from trial, it must surely be that loved resort—that "Arbor in His Hill of

Difficulty," where the God-man delighted often to pause and refresh His wearied body and aching mind.

Will Omnipotence not have set its mark, as of old, on the door-posts and lintels of that consecrated dwelling, so that the destroyer, in going his rounds elsewhere, may pass by it unscathed? How, too, can the infant Church spare him? The aged Simeon or Anna we dare not wish to detain. Burdened with years and infirmities, after having gotten a glimpse of their Lord and Savior, let them depart in peace, and receive their crowns. These decayed trees in the forest—those to whom old age on earth is a burden—let them bow to the axe, and be transplanted to a nobler climate. But one in the vigor of life—one so beautifully combining natural amiability with Christian love—one who was pre-eminently the friend of

Jesus, and that word profoundly suggestive of all that was lovely in a disciple's character. Death may visit other homes in that sequestered village, and spread desolation in other hearts, but surely the Church's Lord will not allow one of its pillars so prematurely to fall!

And yet it is even so! The mysterious summons has come!—the most honored home on earth has been crudely rifled!—the most loving of hearts have been cruelly torn; and inscrutable is the dealing, for "Lazarus is dead!"

He, the young and strong, who cherished  
Noble longings for the strife,  
By the roadside fell, and perished  
On the threshold march of life."

And worse, too, than all, "the Lord is absent!" Why is Omniscience tarrying elsewhere, when His presence and power above all, are needed at the house of His friend? The disconsolate sisters, in wondering amazement, repeat over and over again the exclamation, "If Jesus had been here, this our brother had not died!" "Has He forgotten to be gracious?" "Surely our way is hidden from the Lord, our judgment is passed over from our God."

Ah! the experience of His people is often still the same. What are many of God's dispensations?—a baffling enigma—all strangeness—all mystery to the eye of sense. Useless lives prolonged, useful ones taken! The honored minister of God struck down, the unfaithful watchman spared! The philanthropic and benevolent have an arrest put on their manifold deeds of kindness and generosity; the grasping, the avaricious, the mean-souled—those who neither fear God nor do good to man, are allowed to live on from day to day! What is it but the picture here presented eighteen hundred years ago—Judas spared to be a traitor to his Lord; while—Lazarus is dead!

But let us be still! The Savior, indeed, does not now lead us forth, amid the scene of our trial, as He did the bereft sisters, to unravel the mysteries of His providence, and to show glory to God, redounding from the darkest of His dispensations. To us, the grand sequel is reserved for

eternity. The grand development of the divine plan will not be fully accomplished until then; faith must meanwhile rest satisfied with what is baffling to sight and sense.

This whole narrative is designed to teach the lesson that there is an undeveloped future in all God's dealings. There is an unseen "why and wherefore" which cannot be answered here in this present world. Our befitting attitude and language now is that of simple confidingness—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Listening to one of these Bethany sayings (we shall by and by consider), whose meaning will be interpreted in a brighter world by Him who uttered it in the days of His flesh—"Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

"O you who mourns on your way,  
With longings for the close of day,  
He walks with you, that Angel kind,  
And gently whispers—'Be resigned;  
Bear up—bear on—the end shall tell,  
The dear Lord orders all things well.'"

Our duty, meanwhile, is that of children, simply to trust the faithfulness of a God whose footsteps of love we often fail to trace. All will be seen at last to have been not only for the best, but really the best. Dark clouds will be fringed with mercy. What we call now "baffling dispensations," will be seen to be wondrous parts of a great connected whole—the wheel within wheel of that complex machinery, by which "all things, (yes, ALL things) are now working together for good."

"Lazarus is dead!" The choicest tree in the earthly Eden has succumbed to the blast. The choicest cup has been dashed to the ground. Some great lights in the moral firmament have been extinguished. But God can do without human agency. His Church can be preserved, though no Moses be spared to conduct Israel over Jordan, and no Lazarus to tell the story of his Savior's grace and love, when other disciples have forsaken Him and fled.

We may be calling, in our blind unbelief, as we point to some ruined

fabric of earthly bliss—some tomb which has become the grave of our fondest affections and dearest hopes—"Shall the dust praise you, shall it declare your truth?" Believe! believe! God will not give us back our dead as He did to the Bethany sisters; but He will not deprive us of anything we have, or allow one garnered treasure to be removed, except for His own glory and our good. Now it is our privilege to believe it—in Heaven we shall see it. Before the sapphire throne we shall see that not one unnecessary thorn has been suffered to pierce our feet, or one needless sorrow to visit our dwelling, or tear to dim our eye. Then our acknowledgment will be, "We have known and believed the love which God has to us."

"Oh, weep not though the beautiful decay,  
Your heart must have its autumn—its pale skies  
Leading perhaps to winter's cold dismay.  
Yet doubt not. Beauty does not pass away;  
His form departs not, though his body dies.  
Secure beneath the earth the snowdrop lies,  
Waiting the spring's young resurrection-day."

Be it ours to have Jesus with us, and Jesus for us, in all our afflictions. If we wish to insure these mighty solaces, we must not suffer the hour of sorrow and bereavement to overtake us with a Savior until then a stranger and unknown. Luke tells us the secret of Mary's faith and composure at her loved one's grave—She had, long before her day of trial, learned to sit at her Redeemer's feet. It was when in health Jesus was first resorted to and loved. In prosperity may our homes and hearts be gladdened with His footstep; and when prosperity is withdrawn, and is succeeded by the dark and cloudy day, may we know, like Martha and Mary, where to rush in our seasons of bitter sorrow; listening from His glorified lips on the throne to those same exalted themes of consolation which, for eighteen hundred years, have to myriad, myriad mourners been like oil thrown on the troubled sea. Jesus is with us! The Master is come! His presence will extract sorrow from the bitterest cup, and make, as He did at Bethany, a very home of bereavement and a burial scene, to be a hallowed ground!

## THE MESSENGER

Is the absent Savior not to be sought? Martha and Mary knew the direction He had taken. The last time He had visited their home was at the Feast of Dedication, during the season of winter, when the palm-trees were bared of their leaves, and the voice of the turtle-dove was silent. Jesus, on that occasion, had to escape the vengeance of the Jews in Jerusalem by a temporary retirement to the place where John first baptized, near Aenon, on the wooded banks of the Jordan. It must have been to Him a spot and season of calm and grateful repose; a pleasing transition from the crude hatred and heartless formalism which met Him in the degenerate City. The savor of the Baptist's name and spirit seemed to linger around this sequestered region. John had evidently prepared, by his faithful ministry, the way for a mightier Preacher, for we read, as the result of the Savior's present sojourn, that "many believed on Him there."

If we visit with hallowed emotion the places where first we learned to love the Lord, to two at least of those who accompanied the Redeemer, the region He now traversed must have been full of fragrant memories; there it was that Jesus had been first pointed out to them as the "Lamb of God;" there they first "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth."

On His way there, on the present occasion, He most probably passed through Bethany, and apprized His friends of His temporary absence. Lazarus was then in his customary vigor—no shadow of death had yet passed over his brow; he doubtless parted with the Lord he loved happy at the thought of before long meeting again. But soon all is changed. The hand of sickness unexpectedly lays him low. At first there is no cause for anxiety. But soon the herald-symptoms of danger and death gather fast and thick around his pillow; "his beauty consumes away like a moth." The terrible possibility for the first time flashes across the minds of the sisters, of a desolate home, and of themselves being the desolate survivors of a loved brother. The joyous dream of restoration becomes fainter and fainter. Human remedies are hopeless.



There was One, and only ONE, in the wide world who could save from impending death. His word, they knew, could alone summon luster to that eye, and bloom to that wan and fading cheek. Fifty long miles intervene between the great Physician and their cottage home. But they cannot hesitate. Some kind and compassionate neighbor is soon found ready to hasten along the Jericho road with the brief but urgent message, "Lord! behold he whom You love is sick." If it only reaches Him in time, they know that no more is needed. They even indulge the expectation that their messenger may be anticipated by the Lord Himself appearing. Others might doubt His omniscience, but they knew its reality. They had the blessed conviction, that while they were seated in burning tears by that couch of sickness, there was a sympathizing Being far away marking every heart-throb of His suffering friend. Even when the stern human conviction of "no hope" was pressing upon them, "hoping against hope," they must have felt confident that He would not allow His faithfulness now to fail. He had often proved Himself a Brother and Friend in the hour of joy. Could He fail—can He fail to prove Himself now a "Brother born for adversity?"

Although, however, thus convinced that the tale of their sorrows was known to Jesus, a messenger is sent; the means are employed! They act as though He knew it not; as if that omniscient Savior had been all unconscious of these hours of prolonged and anxious agony! What a lesson is there here for us! God is acquainted with our every trouble; He knows (far better than we know ourselves) every pang we heave, every tear we weep, every perplexing path we tread; but the knee must be bent, the message must be taken, the prayer must ascend!

It is His own appointed method—His own consecrated medium for obtaining blessings. Jesus may have gone, and probably would have gone to restore His friend, even though no such messenger had reached Him—we dare not limit the grace and dealings of God. He is often (blessed be His name for it!) "found by those who sought Him not." But He loves such messages as this. He loves the confiding, childlike trust of His own people, who delight in the hour of their extremity to cast their burdens upon Him, and send the winged herald of prayer to the throne of grace on which He sits.

Would that we valued, more than we do, this blessed link of communication between our souls and Heaven! More especially in our seasons of trouble, (when "vain is the help of man,") happy for us to be able implicitly to rest in the ability and willingness of a gracious Redeemer. Prayer brings the soul near to Jesus, and fetches Jesus near to the soul. He may linger, as He did now at the Jordan, before the answer be granted, but it is for some wise reason; and even if the answer given is not in accordance with our pre-conceived wishes or anxious desires, yet how comforting to have put our case and all its perplexities—in His hand, saying, "I am oppressed; undertake for me! To You I unburden and unbosom my sorrows. I shall be satisfied whether my cup be filled or emptied. Do to me as seems good in Your sight. He whom I love and whom YOU love is sick; the Lazarus of my earthly hopes and affections is hovering on the brink of death. That leveling blow, if consummated, will sweep down in a moment all my hopes of earthly happiness and joy. But it is my privilege to confide my trouble to You; to know that I have surrendered myself and all that concerns me into the hand of Him who 'considers my soul in adversity.' Yes; and should my schemes be crossed, and my fondest hopes baffled, I will feel, even in apparently unanswered prayers, that the Judge of all the earth has done right!"

"It is said," says Rutherford, speaking of the Savior's delay in responding to the request of the Syrophenician woman; "It is said He answered not a word, but it is not said He heard not a word. These two differ much. Christ often hears when He does not answer. His not answering is an answer, and speaks thus: 'Pray on, go on and cry, for the Lord holds His door fast bolted—not to keep you out, but that you may knock and knock.'"

"God delays to answer prayer," says Usher, "because he would have more of it. If the musicians come to play at our doors or our windows, if we delight not in their music, we throw them out money presently that they may be gone. But if the music please us, we forbear to give them money, because we would keep them longer to enjoy their music. So the Lord loves and delights in the sweet words of His children, and therefore puts them off and answers them not presently."

Observe still further, in the case of these sorrowing sisters of Bethany,

while in all haste and urgency they send their messenger, they do not ask Jesus to come—they dictate no procedure—they venture on no positive request—all is left to Himself. What a lesson also is there here to confide in His wisdom, to feel that His way and His will must be the best—that our befitting attitude is to lie passive at His feet—to wait His righteous disposal of us and ours—to make this the burden of our petition, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" "If it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Reader! invite to your gates this celestial messenger. Make prayer a holy habit—a cherished privilege. Seek to be ever maintaining inter-communion with Jesus; consecrating life's common duties with His favor and love. Day by day before you take your flight into the world, night by night when you return from its soiling contacts, bathe your drooping plumes in this refreshing fountain. Let prayer sweeten prosperity and hallow adversity. Seek to know the unutterable blessedness of habitual filial nearness to your Father in heaven—in childlike confidence unbosoming to Him those heart-sorrows with which no earthly friend can sympathize, and with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. No trouble is too trifling to confide to His ear—no need too trivial to bear to His mercy-seat.

"Prayer is appointed to convey  
The blessings He designs to give;  
Long as they live should Christians pray,  
For only while they pray, they live."

## **THE MESSAGE**

"Lord, he whom You love is sick."

The messenger has reached—what is his message? It is a brief, but a beautiful one. "Lord, behold he whom You love is sick." No labored eulogium—no lengthened oration could have described more significantly the character of the dying villager of Bethany. Four mystic words invest

his name with a sacred loveliness. By one stroke of his pen the Apostle unfolds a heart-history; so that we desire no more—more would almost spoil the touching simplicity! "He whom You love!" We might think at first the words are inverted. Can the messenger have mistaken them? Is it not more likely the message of the sisters was this—"Go and tell Him, 'Lord, he whom we love,' or else, 'he who loves You is sick?'"

No! it is a loftier argument by which they would stir the infinite depths of the Fountain of love! They had "known and believed the love" which the Great Redeemer bore to their brother, and they further felt assured that "loving him at the beginning, He would love him even to the end." Their love to Lazarus—(tender, unspeakably tender as it was—one of the loveliest types of human affection)—was at best an earthly love—finite, imperfect, fitful, changing, perishable. But the love they invoked was undying and everlasting, superior to all vacillation—enduring as eternity.

It is ours "to take encouragement in prayer from God only"—to plead nothing of our own—our poor devotedness, or our unworthy services; they are rather arguments for our condemnation. But His promises are all "Yes, and amen." They never fail. His name is "a strong tower," running into which the righteous are safe. That tower is garrisoned and bulwarked by the attributes of His own everlasting nature. Among these attributes not the least glorious is His LOVE—that unfathomable love which dwelt in His bosom from all eternity, and which is immutably pledged never to be taken from His people!

Man's love to his God is like the changing sand. God's love is like the solid rock. Man's love is like the passing meteor with its fitful gleam. God's love like the fixed stars, shining far above, clear and serene, from age to age, in their own changeless firmament. Do we know anything of the words of this message? Could it be written on our hearts in life? Were we to die, could it be inscribed on our tombs, "This is one whom Jesus loved?" Happy assurance! The pure spirits who bend before the throne know no happier. The archangels—the chieftains among principalities and powers, can claim no higher privilege, no loftier badge of glory! Love is the atmosphere they breathe. It is the grand moral law of gravitation in the heavenly economy. God, the central sun of light, and joy, and glory, keeping by this great motive principle every spiritual planet in its orbit,

for "God is love."

That love is not confined to heaven. It may be foretasted here on earth. The sick man of Bethany knew of it, and exulted in it. Though in the moment of dissolution he had to mourn the personal absence of his Lord, yet "believing" in that love, he "rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory." His sisters, as they stood in sorrowing emotion by his dying couch, and thought of that hallowed fraternal bond which was about so soon to be dissolved, could triumph in the thought of an affection nobler and better which knit him and them to the Brother of brothers—and which, unlike any earthly tie, was indissoluble.

And what was experienced in that lowly Bethany home, may be experienced by us. That love in its wondrous manifestation is confined to no limits, no age, no peculiar circumstances. Many a Lazarus, pining in need, who can claim no heritage but poverty, no home but cottage walls, or who, stretched on a bed of protracted sickness, is heard saying in the morning, "Would God it were evening! and in the evening, Would God it were morning!" Yet if he has that love of God reigning in his heart, he has a possession outweighing the wealth of worlds!

What a message, too, of consolation is here to the sick! How often are those chained down year after year to some aching pillow—worn, weary, shattered in body, depressed in spirit—how apt are they to indulge in the sorrowful thought, "Surely God cannot care for me!" What! Jesus think of this wasted frame—these throbbing eyes—these powerless limbs—this decaying mind! I feel like a wreck on the desert shore—beyond the reach of His glance—beneath the notice of His pitying eye!

No, you poor desponding one, He does cherish, He does remember you!—"Lord, he whom You love is sick." Let this motto-verse be inscribed on your Bethany chamber. The Lord loves His sick ones, and He often chastens them with sickness, just because He loves them. If these pages be now traced by some dim eyes that have been for long most familiar with the sickly glow of the night-lamp—the weary vigils of pain and languor and disease—an exile from a busy world, or a still more unwilling alien from the holy services of the sanctuary—oh! think of Him who loves you, who loved you into this sickness, and will love you through it, until

you stand in that unsuffering, unsorrowing world, where sickness is unknown! Think of Lazarus in his chamber, and the plea of the sisters in behalf of their prostrate brother, "Lord, come to the sick one, whom You love."

Believe it, the very continuance of this sickness is a pledge of His love. You may be often tempted to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with me, why has all this befallen me?" Surely if my Lord loved me, He would long before this have hastened to my relief, rebuked this sore disease, and raised me up from this bed of languishing? Did you ever note, in the 6th verse of this Bethany chapter, the strangely beautiful connection of the word therefore? The Evangelist had, in the preceding verse, recorded the affection Jesus bore for that honored family. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." "When He had heard therefore that he was sick," what did He do? Flee on wings of love to the support of His loved friend? hurry in eager haste by the shortest route? We expect to hear so, as the natural deduction from John's premises.

How, we might think, could love give a more truthful exponent of its reality than hastening instantaneously to the relief of one so dear to Him? But not so! "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was!" Yes, there is tarrying love as well as succoring love. He sent that sickness because He loves you! He continues it because He loves you! He heaps fresh fuel on the furnace-fires until the gold is refined. He appoints, not one, but "many days where neither sun nor stars appear, and no small tempest lies on us," that the ship may be lightened, and faith exercised; our bark hastened by these rough blasts nearer shore, and the Lord glorified, who rules the raging of the sea. "We expect," says Evans, "the blessing or relief in our way; He chooses to bestow it in His way."

Reader! let this ever be your highest ambition—to love and to be loved by Jesus. If we are covetous to have the regard and esteem of the great and good on earth; what is it to share the fellowship and kindness of Him, in comparison with whose love the purest earthly affection is but a passing shadow! Ah! to be without that love, is to be a little world ungladdened by its central sun, wandering on in its devious pathway of darkness and gloom. Earthly things may do well enough when the world is all bright

and shining—when prosperity sheds its bewitching gleam around you, and no symptoms of the cloudy and dark day are at hand; but the hour is coming (it may come soon, it must come at some time) when your Bethany-home will be clouded with deepening death-shadows—when, like Lazarus, you will be laid on a dying couch, and what will avail you then? Oh, nothing, nothing! if bereft of that love whose smile is heaven. If you are left in the agony of desolation to utter importunate pleadings to an Unknown Savior, a Stranger-God—if the dark valley be entered uncheered by the thought of a loving Redeemer dispelling its gloom, and waiting on the Canaan side to show you the path of life!

Let the home of your hearts be often open, as was the home of Lazarus, to the visits of Jesus in the day of brightness; and then, when the hour of sorrow and trial unexpectedly arises, you will know where to find your Lord—where to send your prayer-message for Him to come to your relief.

Yes! He will come! It will be in His own way, but His joyous footfall will be heard! He is not like Baal, "slumbering and sleeping, or taking a journey" when the voice of importunate prayer ascends from the depths of yearning hearts! If, instead of at once hastening back to Bethany, He "abides still for two days where He was"—if He lingers among the mountain-glens of distant Gilead, instead of, as we would expect, hastening to the cry and support of cherished friendship, and to ward off the dart of the inexorable foe—be assured there must be a reason for this strange procrastination; there must be an unrevealed cause which the future will in due time disclose and unravel. All the recollections of the past forbid one unrighteous surmise on His tried faithfulness. "Now, Jesus loved Lazarus," is a soft pillow on which to repose—raising the sorrowing spirit above the unkind insinuation, "My Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me."

If He lingers, it is to try and test the faith of His people. If He lets loose the storm, and allows it to sweep with a vengeance apparently uncontrolled, it is that these living trees may strike their roots firmer and deeper in Himself—the Rock of eternal ages. Trust His heart, where you cannot trace His hand. Not one promise of His can come to nothing. The channel may have continued long dry—the streams of Lebanon may have failed—the cloud has been laden, but no shower descends—the barren

waste is unwatered—the windows of heaven seem hopelessly closed. No, no! Though "the vision tarry," yet if you "wait for it" the gracious assurance will be fulfilled in your experience—"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him."

The fountain of love pent up in His heart will in due time gush forth—the apparently unacknowledged prayer will be crowned with a gracious answer. In His own good time sweet tones of celestial music will be wafted to your ear! "It is the voice of the Beloved!—lo, He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills!"

If you are indeed the child of God, as Lazarus was, remember this for your comfort in your dying hour, that whether the prayers of sorrowing friends for your recovery be answered or not, the Lord of love has at least heard them—the messenger has not been mocked—the prayer-message has not been spurned or forgotten! I repeat it, He will answer, but it will be in His own way! If the Bethany-home be ungladdened by Lazarus restored, it will exult through tears in the thought of Lazarus glorified. And the Marthas and Marys, as they go often unto the grave to weep there, will read, as they weep, in the holy memories of the departed, that which will turn tears into joy—"Jesus loved him."

## **THE SLEEPER**

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps."—The hopes and fears which alternately rose and fell in the bosoms of the sisters, like the surges of the ocean, are now at rest. Often and again, we may well believe, had they gone, like the mother of Sisera, to the lattice to watch the return of the messenger, or, what was better, to hail their expected Lord. Gazing on the pale face at their side, and remembering that before now the tidings of his illness must have reached Jesus, they may have even expected to witness the power of a distant word—to behold the hues of returning health displacing the ghastly symptoms of dissolution. But in vain! The curtain has fallen! Their season of aching anxiety is at an end. Their worst fears are realized—"Lazarus sleeps."



How calm, how tranquil that departure! Never did sun sink so gently in its crimson couch—never did child, nestling in its mother's bosom, close its eyes more sweetly!

"His summoned breath went forth as peacefully  
As folds the spent rose when the day is done."

Befitting close to a calm and noiseless existence! It would seem as if the guardian angels who had been hovering round his death-pillow had well-near reached the gates of glory before the sorrowing survivors discovered that the clay tabernacle was all that was left of a "brother beloved!"

From the abrupt manner in which, in the course of the narrative, our Lord makes the announcement to His disciples, we are almost led to surmise that He did so at the very moment of the spirit's dismissal—the Redeemer speaks while the eyelids are just closing, and the emancipated soul is winging its arrowy flight up to the spirit-land!

Death a SLEEP!—How beautiful the image! Beautifully true, and only true regarding the Christian. It is here where the true and the false—Christianity and Paganism—meet together in impressive and significant contrast. The one comes to the dark river with her pale, sickly lamp. It refuses to burn—the damps dim and quench it. Philosophy tries to discourse on death as a "stern necessity"—of the duty of passing heroically into this mysterious, oblivion-world—taking with bold heart "the leap in the dark," and confronting, as we best can, blended images of annihilation and terror.

The Gospel takes us to the tomb, and shows us Death vanquished, and the Grave spoiled. Death truly is in itself an unwelcome messenger at our door. It is the dark event in this our earth—the deepest of the many deep shadows of an otherwise fair creation—a cold, cheerless avalanche lying at the heart of humanity, freezing up the gushing fountains of joyous life. But the Gospel shines, and the cold iceberg melts. The Sun of Righteousness effects what philosophy, with all its boasted power, never could.

Jesus is the abolisher of Death. He has taken all that is terrible from it. It

is said of some venomous insects that when they once inflict a sting, they are deprived of any future power to hurt. Death left his envenomed sting in the body of the great Victim of Calvary. It was thenceforward disarmed of its fearfulness! So complete, indeed, is the Redeemer's victory over this last enemy, that He Himself speaks of it as no longer a reality, but a shadow—a phantom-foe from which we have nothing to dread. "Whoever believes in Me shall never die." "If a man keeps My sayings, he shall never see death." These are an echo of the sweet Psalmist's beautiful words, a transcript of his expressive figure when he pictures the Dark Valley to the believer as the Valley of a "shadow." The substance is removed! When the gaunt spirit meets him on the midnight waters, he may, like the disciples at first, be led to "cry out for fear." But a gentle voice of love and tenderness rebukes his dread, and calms his misgivings—"It is I! do not be afraid!"

Yes, here is the wondrous secret of a calm departure—the "sleep" of the believer in death. It is the name and presence of Jesus! There may be many accompaniments of weakness and prostration, pain and suffering, in that final conflict; the mind may be a wreck—memory may have abdicated her seat—the loving salutation of friends may be returned only with vacant looks, and the hand be unable to acknowledge the grasp of affection—but there is strength in that presence, and music in that name to dispel every disquieting, anxious thought. Clung to as a sheet-anchor in life, He will never leave the soul in the hour of dissolution to the mercy of the storm. Amid sinking nature, He is faithful who promised—"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "You are with me!" says Lady Powerscourt—"this is the rainbow of light thrown across the valley, for there is no need of sun or moon where covenant-love illumines."

A Christian's death-bed! It is indeed "good to be there." The man who has not to seek a living Savior at a dying hour, but who, long having known His preciousness, loved His Word, valued His ordinances, sought His presence by believing prayer, has now nothing to do but to die (to sleep), and wake up in glory everlasting! "Oh! that all my brethren," were among Rutherford's last words, "may know what a Master I have served, and what peace I have this day. This night shall close the door, and put my

anchor within the veil." "This must be the chariot," said Helen Plumtre, making use of Elijah's translation as descriptive of the believer's death—"This must be the chariot; oh, how easy it is!" "Almost well," said Richard Baxter, when asked on his deathbed how he did.

Yes! there is speechless eloquence in such a scene. The figure of a quiet slumber is no hyperbole, but a sober verity. As the gentle smile of a foretasted heaven is seen playing on the marble lips—the rays gilding the mountain tops after the golden sun has gone down—what more befitting reflection than this, "So gives He His beloved SLEEP!"

"Sweetly remembering that the parting sigh  
Appoints His saints to slumber, not to die,  
The starting tear we check—we kiss the rod,  
And not to earth resign them, but to God."

Or shall we leave the death-chamber and visit the GRAVE? Still it is a place of sleep; a bed of rest—a couch of tranquil repose—a quiet dormitory "until the day breaks," and the night shadows of earth "flee away." The dust slumbering there is precious because redeemed; the angels of God have it in custody; they encamp round about it, waiting the mandate to "gather the elect from the four winds of heaven—from the one end of heaven to the other." Oh, wondrous day, when the long dishonored casket shall be raised a "glorified body" to receive once more the immortal jewel, polished and made fit for the Master's use!

See how Paul clings, in speaking of this glorious resurrection period, to the expressive figure of his Lord before him—"Those also who SLEEP in Jesus will God bring with Him!" Sleep in Jesus! His saints fall asleep on their death-couch in His arms of infinite love. There their spirits repose, until the body, "sown in corruption" shall be "raised in incorruption," and both reunited in the day of His appearing, become "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God."

Weeping mourner! Jesus dries your tears with the encouraging assurance, "Your dead shall live; together with My body they shall arise." Let your Lazarus "sleep on now and take his rest;" the time will come when My voice shall be heard proclaiming, "Awake, and sing, you who

dwell in dust." "My lover said to me, 'Rise up, my beloved, my fair one, and come away. For the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone. The flowers are springing up, and the time of singing birds has come, even the cooing of turtledoves. The fig trees are budding, and the grapevines are in blossom. How delicious they smell! Yes, spring is here! Arise, my beloved, my fair one, and come away.'" "Weep not! he is not dead, but sleeps. Soon shall the day-dawn of glory streak the horizon, and then I shall go that I may awake him out of sleep!"

Beautifully has it been said, "Dense as the gloom is which hangs over the mouth of the sepulcher, it is the spot, above all others, where the Gospel, if it enters, shines and triumphs. In the busy sphere of life and health, it encounters an active antagonist—the world confronts it, aims to obscure its glories, to deny its claims, to drown its voice, to dispute its progress, to drive it from the ground it occupies. But from the mouth of the grave the world retires; it shrinks from the contest there; it leaves a clear and open space in which the Gospel can assert its claims and unveil its glories without opposition or fear. There the infidel and worldling look anxiously around—but the world has left them helpless, and fled. There the Christian looks around, and lo! the angel of mercy is standing close by his side. The Gospel kindles a torch which not only irradiates the valley of the shadow of death, but throws a radiance into the world beyond, and reveals it peopled with the sainted spirits of those who have died in Jesus."

Reader! may this calm departure be yours and mine. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: They REST." All life's turmoil and tossing is over; they are anchored in the quiet haven. Rest—but not the rest of annihilation

"Grave! the guardian of our dust;  
Grave! the treasury of the skies;  
Every atom of your trust  
Rests in hope again to rise!"

Let us seek to have the eye of faith fixed and centered on Jesus now. It is that which alone can form a peaceful pillow in a dying hour, and enable us to rise, superior to all its attendant terrors. Look at that scene! The

proto-martyr Stephen has a pillow of thorns for his dying couch, showers of stones are hurled by infuriated murderers on his guiltless head, yet, nevertheless, he "fell asleep." What was the secret of that calmest of sunsets amid a blood-stained and storm-wreathed sky? The eye of faith (if not of sight) pierced through those clouds of darkness. Far above the courts of the material temple at whose base he lay, he beheld, in the midst of the general assembly and Church of the First-born of Heaven, "JESUS standing at the right hand of God." The vision of his Lord was like a celestial lullaby stealing from the inner sanctuary. With Jesus, his last sight on earth and his next in glory, he could "lay himself down in peace and sleep," saying, in the words of the sweet singer of Israel, "When I awake, I am still with You."

"It matters little at what hour of the day  
The righteous falls asleep. Death cannot come  
To him untimely who is fit to die.  
The less of this cold world the more of heaven;  
The briefer life, the earlier immortality." -Milman.

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps." This tells us that Christ does not forget the dead. The dead often bury their dead, and remember them no more. The name of their silent homes has passed into a proverb, "The land of forgetfulness." But they are not forgotten by Jesus. That which sunders and dislocates all other ties—wrenching brother from brother, sister from sister, friend from friend—cannot separate us from the living, loving heart on the throne of heaven. His is a friendship and love stronger than death, and surviving death. While the language of earth is

"Friend after friend departs,  
Who has not lost a friend?"

The emancipated spirit, as it wings its magnificent flight among the ministering seraphim, can utter the challenge, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" The righteous are had with Him "in everlasting remembrance." Their names "written among the living in Jerusalem;" yes, "engraved on the palms of His hands."

One other thought—Jesus had at first kindly and considerately disguised

from His disciples the stern truth of Lazarus' departure. "Our friend sleeps." "They thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep." They understood it as the indication of the crisis-hour in sickness when the disease has spent itself, and is succeeded by a balmy slumber—the presage of returning health; but now He says unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." How gently He thus breaks the sad news! And it is His method of dealing still.

He prepares His people for their hours of trial. He does not lay upon them more than they are able to bear. He considers their case—He teaches by slow and gradual discipline, leading on step by step; staying His rough wind in the day of His east wind. As the Good Physician, He metes out drop by drop in the bitter cup. As the Good Shepherd, His is not rough driving, but gentle, guiding from pasture to pasture. "He leads them out;" "He goes before them." He is Himself their sheltering rock in the "dark and cloudy day." The sheep who are accustomed to the hardships of the mountain, He leaves at times to wrestle with the storm; but "the lambs" (the young, the faint, the weak, the weary) "He gathers in His arms and carries in His bosom."

He speaks in gentle whispers. He uses the pleasing symbol of quiet slumber before He speaks plainly about the mournful reality, "Lazarus is dead." Truly "He knows our frame—He remembers that we are dust." "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him!"

But let us resume our narrative, and follow the journey of the dead man's "Friend." It is a mighty task He has undertaken; to storm the strong enemy in his own citadel, and roll back the barred gates! In mingled majesty and tenderness He hastens to the bereft and desolate home on this mission of power and love.

We left the sisters wondering at His mysterious delay. Again and again had they imagined that at last they heard His tardy step, or listened to His hand on the latch, or to the loving music of His longed-for voice. But they are mistaken; it was only the beating of the vine-tendrils on the lattice, or the footfall of the passer by. The Lord is still absent! Their earnest and importunate heart-breathings are expressed by the Psalmist

—"O Lord our God, early do we seek You; our soul thirsts for You, our flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Your power and Your glory, as we have seen You." Be still, afflicted ones! He is coming! He will, however, let the cup of anguish be first filled to the brim that He may manifest and magnify all the more the might of His omnipotence, and the marvels of His compassion. The thirsty land is about to become streams of water. The sky is at its darkest, when, lo! the rainbow of love is seen spanning the firmament, and a shower of blessings is about to fall on the "Home of Bethany!"

## **LIGHTS AND SHADOWS**

The sounds of lamentation had now been heard for four days in the desolate household. In accordance with general practice, the friends and relatives of the deceased had assembled to pay their tribute of respect to the memory of a revered friend, and to solace the hearts of the disconsolate survivors. They needed all the sympathy they received. It was now the dull dead calm after the torture of the storm, the leaden sea strewn with wrecks, enabling them to realize more fully the extent of their loss. Amid the lulls of the tempest, while Lazarus yet lived, hope shrunk from entertaining gloomy apprehensions. But now that the storm has spent its fury, now that the worst has come, the future rises up before them crowded with ten thousand images of desolation and sorrow. The void in their household is daily more and more felt. All the past bright memories of Bethany seem to be buried in a yawning grave.

We may picture the scene. The stronger and more resolute spirit of Martha striving to stem the tide of overmuch sorrow. The more sensitive heart of Mary, bowed under a grief too deep for utterance, able only to indicate by her silent tears the unknown depths of her sadness. Thus are they employed, when Martha, unseen to her sister, has been beckoned away. "The Master has come." But desirous of ascertaining the truth of the joyful tidings, before intruding on the grief of Mary, the elder of the survivors rushes forth with trembling emotion to give full vent to her sorrow at the feet of the Great Friend of all the friendless!

He has not yet entered the village. She cannot, however, wait His arrival. Leaving home and sepulcher behind, she hastens outside the groves of palm at its gate. It requires no small fortitude in the season of sore bereavement to face an altered world; and, doubtless, passing all alone now through the little town, meeting familiar faces wearing sunny smiles which could not be returned, must have been a painful effort to this child of sorrow. But what will the heart not do to meet such a Comforter? What will Martha be unprepared to encounter if the news brought to her is indeed confirmed? One glance is enough. "It is the Lord!" In a moment she is a suppliant at His feet. Doubt and faith and prayer mingle in the exclamation, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!"

That she had faith and assured confidence in the love and tenderness of Jesus we cannot question. But a momentary feeling of unbelief (shall we say, of reproach and upbraiding?) mingled with better emotions. "Why, Lord," seemed to be the expression of her inner thoughts, "were You absent? It was unlike Your kind heart. You have often gladdened our home in our season of joy—why this forgetfulness in the night of our bitter agony? Death has torn from us our loved brother—the blow would have been spared—these hearts would have been unbroken—these burning tears unshed, if You had been here!"

Such was the bold—the unkind reasoning of the mourner. It was the reasoning of a finite creature. Ah! if she could but have looked into the workings of that infinite Heart she was ungenerously upbraiding, how differently would she have raised her tearful suit!

Her exclamation is—"Why this unkind absence?" His comment on that same absence to His disciples is this—"I was glad for your sakes that I was not there!"

How often are God and man thus in strange antagonism, with regard to earthly dispensations! Man, as he arraigns the rectitude of the Divine procedure, exclaiming—"How unaccountable this dealing! How baffling this mystery! Where is now my God?" This sickness—why prolonged? This thorn in the flesh—why still buffeting? This family bereavement—why permitted? Why the most treasured and useful life taken—the blow



aimed where it cut most severely and leveled lowest?

Hush the secret atheism! This trial, whatever it be, has this grand motto written upon it in characters of living light—we can read it on anguished pillows—aching hearts—yes, on the very portals of the tomb—"This is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby!" At the very moment we are mourning what are called "dark providences" "unfortunate calamities"—"strokes of misfortune"—"unmitigated evils"—Jesus has a different verdict—"I am glad for your sakes."

His absence at Bethany—the still more unaccountable lingering for two days in the same place after the message had been sent, instead of hastening directly to Lazarus—all was well and wisely ordered. And although Martha's upbraidings were now received in forbearing silence, her Savior afterwards, in a calmer moment, read the rebuke—"did not I say unto you—if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

It is indeed a comforting assurance in all trials, that God has some holy and wise end to subserve. He never stirs a ripple on the waters, but for His own glory, or the good of others. The delay on the present occasion, though protracting for a time the sorrows of the bereaved, was intended for the benefit of the Church in every age, and for the more immediate benefit of the disciples. They were destined in a few brief weeks also to be desolate survivors—to mourn a Brother dearer still! He who had been to them Friend, Father, Brother, all in one, was to be, like Lazarus, laid silent in a Jerusalem sepulcher. The Lord of Life was to be the victim of Death! His body was to be transfixed to a malefactor's cross, and consigned to a lonely grave! He knew the shock that awaited their faith. He knew, as this terrible hour drew on, how needful some overpowering visible demonstration would be of His mastery over the tomb. Now a befitting opportunity occurred in the case of their friend Lazarus to read the needed lesson. "I was glad for your sakes, ...to the intent you might believe."

Would that we could feel as believers more than we do—that the dealings of our God are for the strengthening of our faith, and the enlivening and invigorating of our spiritual graces. Let us seek to accept more simply in dark dealings the Savior's explanation, "It is for your sake!" He gives us a

blank-check for our every trial, endorsing it with His own gracious word, "This, this is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."

The words of Martha, then, surely teach as their great lesson, never to be hasty in our surmises and conclusions regarding God's ways. "Lord! IF You had been here?" Could she question for a moment that that loving eye of Omniscience had all the while been scanning that sick-chamber—marking every throb in that fevered brow—and every tear that fell unbidden from the eyes that watched his pillow? "Lord! if You had been here?" Could she question His ability, had He so willed it, to prevent the bereavement altogether—to put an arrest on the hand of death before the bow was strung?

O faithless disciple, why did you doubt? But you are before long to learn what each of us will learn out in eternity, that "all things are for our sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God."

But the momentary cloud has passed. Faith breaks through. The murmur of upbraiding has died away. He who listens makes allowance for an anguished heart. The glance of tender sympathy and gentleness which met Martha's eye, at once hushes all remains of unbelief. Words of exulting confidence immediately succeed. "But I know that even now whatever You will ask of God, God will give it You."

What is this, but that which every believer exults in to this hour, as the sheet-anchor of hope and peace and comfort, when tossed on a tempestuous sea—a gracious confidence in the ability and willingness of Christ to save. The Friend of Bethany is still the Friend in Heaven! To Him "all power has been committed;" "as a prince He has power with God, and must prevail." Yes, gracious antidote to the spirit in the moment of its trial; when bowed down with anticipated bereavement; the curtains of death about to fall over life's brightest joys. How blessed to lay hold on the perfect conviction that "the Ever-living Intercessor in glory has all power to revoke the sentence if He sees fit"—that even now (yes now, in a moment) the delegated angel may be sent speeding from his throne, to spare the tree marked to fall, and prolong the lease of existence!

Let us rejoice in the power of this God-man Mediator, that He is as able as He is willing, and as willing as He is able. "Him the Father hears always." "Father, I will," is His own divine formula for every needed blessing for His people. How it ought to make our sick-chambers and death-chambers consecrated to prayer! leading us to make our every trial and sorrow a fresh reason for going to God! Laying our burden, whatever it may be, on the mercy-seat, it will be considered by Him, who is too wise to grant what is better to be withdrawn, and too kind to withhold what, without injury to us, may be granted.

Let us imitate Martha's faith in our approaches to Him. Ah, in our dull and cold devotions, how little lively apprehension have we of the gracious willingness of Christ to listen to our petitions! Standing as the great Angel of the Covenant with the golden censer, His hand never shortened—His ear never heavy—His uplifted arm of intercession never faint. No difficulty bewildering Him—no importunity wearying Him—"waiting to be gracious"—loving the music of the suppliant spirit.

Would that we had ever before us as the superscription of faith written on our closet-devotions, and domestic altars, and public sanctuaries, whenever and wherever the knee is bent, and the Hearer of prayer is invoked—"I know that even now whatever You will ask of God, God will give it to You."

## **THE MOURNER'S COMFORT**

"Your brother shall rise again!"

Martha's tearful utterances are now met with an exalted solace. "Your brother shall rise again." It is the first time her Lord has spoken. She now once more hears those well-remembered tones which were last listened to, when life was all bright, and her home all happy. It is the self-same consolation which steals still, like celestial music, to the smitten heart, when every chord of earthly gladness ceases to vibrate. And it is befitting too that Jesus should utter it. He alone is qualified to do so. The words

spoken to the bereaved one of Bethany are words purchased by His own atoning work. "Your brother—your sister—your friend, shall rise again!"

This brief oracle of comfort was addressed, in the first instance, especially to Martha. It had a primary reference, doubtless, to the vast miracle which was on the eve of performance. But there were more hearts to comfort and souls to cheer than one; that Almighty Savior had at the moment throngs of other bereaved ones in view; myriads on myriads of aching, bleeding spirits who could not, like the Bethany mourner, rush into His visible presence for consolation and peace. He expands, therefore, for their sakes the sublime and exalted solace which He ministers to her. And in words which have carried their echoes of hope and joy through all time, He exclaims—"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies!"

If Bethany had bequeathed no other "memory" than this, how its name would have been embalmed in hallowed recollection! Truly these two brief verses are as apples of gold in baskets of silver. "Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life." Himself conquering death, He has conquered it for His people—opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

The full grandeur of that Bethany utterance could not be appreciated by her to whom it was first spoken. His death and resurrection was still, even to His nearest disciples, a profound mystery. Little did that trembling spirit, who was now gazing on her living Lord with tearful eye, dream that in a few brief days the grave was to hold Him, also, as its captive; and that guardian angels were to proclaim words which would, to Martha, have been all enigma and strangeness, "The Lord is risen!"

With us it is different. The mighty deed has been completed. "Christ has died; yes, rather has risen again!" The resurrection and revival of Lazarus was a marvelous act, but it was only the rekindling of a little star that had ceased to twinkle in the firmament. A week more—and Martha would witness the Great Sun of all undergoing an eclipse; in a mysterious moment veiled and shrouded in darkness and blood; and then all at once coming forth like a Bridegroom from his chamber to shine the living and luminous center of ransomed millions!

Christians! we can turn now aside and see this great sight—death closing the lips of the Lord of life—a borrowed grave containing the tenantless body of the Creator of all worlds! Is death to hold that prey? Is the grave to retain in gloomy custody that immaculate frame? Is His living temple to lie there an inglorious ruin, like other crumbling wrecks of mortality? The question of our eternal life or eternal death was suspended on the reply! If death succeeds in chaining down the illustrious Victim, our hopes of everlasting life are gone forever. In vain can these dreary portals of death be ever again unbarred for the children of fallen humanity. Jesus has gone there as their surety-Savior. If His suretyship be accepted—if He meet and fulfill all the requirements of an outraged law, the gates of the dismal prison-house of death will, and must be opened.

If, on the other hand, there is any flaw or deficiency in His person or work as the Kinsman-Redeemer, then no power can snap the chains which bind Him; the tomb will refuse to surrender what it has in custody; the hopes of His people must perish along with Him! Golgotha must then become the grave of a world's hopes!

But the stone has been rolled away. The grave-clothes are all that are left as trophies of the conqueror. Angels are seated in the vacant tomb to verify with their gladdening assurance His own Bethany oracle, "The Lord has risen indeed!" "He is indeed the resurrection and the life; he that lives and believes on Him shall never die!"

Yes! however many be the comforting thoughts which cluster around the grave of Lazarus, grander still is it to gather, as Jesus Himself here bids us, around His own tomb, and to gaze on His own resurrection scene! It was the most eventful morning of all time. It will be the focus point of the Church's hope and triumph through all eternity.

"The Lord is risen indeed!" It proclaimed the atonement complete, sin pardoned, mediation accepted, the law satisfied, God glorified! "The Lord is risen indeed!" It proclaimed resurrection and life for His people—life (the forfeited gift of life) now repurchased. That mighty victor rose not for Himself, but as the representative and pledge of countless multitudes, who exult in His death as their life—in His resurrection as the pledge and guarantee of their everlasting safety—"I am He who lives," and "because I

live you shall live also."

Anticipating His own glorious rising, He might well speak to Martha, standing before Him as the representative of weeping, sinful, woe-worn humanity, "He who lives and believes on Me shall never die." "In Me, death is no longer death; it is only a parenthesis in life—a transition to a loftier stage of being. In Me, the grave is the vestibule of heaven, the dressing-room of immortality!"

Reader, yours is the same strong consolation. "Believe," "Only believe" in that risen Lord. He has purchased all, paid all, procured all! Look into that vacant tomb; see sin cancelled, guilt blotted out, the law magnified, justice honored, the sinner saved!

Yes, and more than that, as you see Death's conqueror marching forth clothed with immortal victory, you see Him not alone! He is heading and heralding a multitude which no man can number. Himself the victorious prototype, He is showing to these exulting thousands "the path of life." He tells them to dread neither for themselves, or others, that lonesome tomb. The curse is extracted from it; the envenomed sting is plucked away. In passing through its lonesome chambers they may exult in the thought that a mightier than they has sanctified it by His own presence, and transformed what was once a gloomy portico into a triumphal arch, bearing the inscription, "O death, I will be your plague; O grave, I will be your destruction!"

## **THE MOURNER'S CREED**

How stands our faith? These mighty thoughts and words of consolation—are they really believed, felt, trusted in, rejoiced over? Christian, "Do you believe this?" Are you really looking to this exalted life-giving Savior? Have you in some feeble measure realized this resurrection-life as your own? Have you the joyful consciousness of participating in this vital union with a living Lord? In vain do we listen to these sublime Bethany utterances unless we feel, "Jesus speaks to me," and unless we be living

from day to day under their invigorating power.

He had unfolded to Martha in a single verse a whole Gospel; He had irradiated by a few words the darkness of the tomb; and now, turning to the poor dejected weeper at his side, He addresses the all-important question, "Do you believe this?" Her faith had been but a moment before staggering. Some guilty misgivings had been mingling with her anguished tears. She has now an opportunity afforded of rising above her doubts—the ebbings and flowings of her fitful feelings; and cleaving fast to the Living Rock. It elicits an unfaltering response—"Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

Remarkable confession! We would not so much have wondered to hear it after the grave had been rifled, and the silent lips of Lazarus had been unsealed; or had she stood like the other Mary at her Lord's own sepulcher in the garden, and after a few brief, but momentous days and hours, seen a whole flood of light thrown on the question of His Messiahship. But as yet there was much to dampen such a bold confession, and lead to hesitancy in the avowal of such a creed. The poverty, the humiliations, the unworldly obscurity of that solitary One who claimed no earthly birthright, and owned no earthly dwelling, were not all these, particularly to a Jew, at variance with every idea formed in connection with the coming Shiloh?

Was Martha's then a blind unmeaning faith? Far from it. It was nurtured, doubtless, in that quiet home of holy love, where, while Lazarus yet lived, this mysterious Being, in an earthly form and in pilgrim garb, came time after time discoursing to them often, as we are warranted to believe, on the dignity of His nature, the glories of His person, the completeness of His work. It was neither the evidence of miracle or prophecy which had revealed to that weeping disciple that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. With the exception of Micah's statement regarding Bethlehem as His birthplace, we question if any other remarkable prediction concerning Him had yet been fulfilled; and so far as miracles were concerned, though she may and must have doubtless known of them by hearsay, we have no evidence that she had as yet so much as witnessed one. We never read until this time of their quiet village being the scene of any manifestations of His power. These had generally taken place either

in Jerusalem or in the cities and coasts of Galilee. The probability, therefore, is that Martha had never yet seen that arm of Omnipotence bared, or witnessed those prodigies with which elsewhere He authenticated His claims to Divinity.

Where then did her faith come from? May we not believe she had made her noble avowal mainly from the study of that beauteous, spotless character—from those looks, and words, and deeds—from that lofty teaching—so unlike every human system—so wondrously adapted to the needs and woes, the sins, the sorrows, and aching necessities of the human heart. All this had left on her own spirit, and on that of Lazarus and Mary, the irresistible impression and evidence that he was indeed the Lord of Glory—"the Hope of Israel, and the Savior thereof."

And is it not the same evidence we exult in still? Is this not the reason of many a humble believer's creed and faith—who may be all unlettered and unlearned in the evidences of the schools—the external and internal bulwarks of our impregnable Christianity? Ask them why they believe? why their faith is so firm?—their love so strong? They will tell you that that Savior, in all the glories of His person, in all the completeness of His work, in all the beauties of His character, is the very Savior they need!—that His Gospel is the very errand of mercy suited to their souls' necessities; that His words of compassion, and tenderness, and hope, are in every way adapted to meet the yearnings of their longing spirits. They need to stand by the grave of no Lazarus to be certified as to His Messiahship. His looks and tones—His character and doctrine—His cures and remedies for the needs and woes of their ruined natures, point Him out as the true Heavenly Physician.

They can tell of the best of all evidences, and the strongest of all—the experimental evidence! They are no theorists. Religion is no subject with them of barren speculation; it is a matter of inner and heartfelt experience. They have tried the cure—they have found it answered—they have fled to the Physician—they have applied His balm—they have been healed and live! And you might as well try to convince the restored blind that the sunlight which has again burst on them is a wild dream of fancy, or the restored deaf that the world's joyous melodies which have again awoke on them are the mockeries of their own brain, as convince the



spiritually enlightened and awakened that He who has proved to them light and life, and joy and peace—their comfort in prosperity—their refuge in adversity—is other than the Son of God and Savior of the world!

Reader, is this your experience? Have you tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious? Have you felt the preciousness of His gospel, the adaptation of His work to the necessities of your ruined condition?—the power of His grace, the prevalence of His intercession, the fullness and glory and truthfulness of His promises? Are you exulting in Him as the Resurrection and Life, who has raised you from the death of sin, and will at last raise you from the power of death, and invest you with that eternal life which His love has purchased?

Precious as is this hope and confidence at all times, specially so is it, mourners in Zion! in your seasons of sorrow. When human refuges fail, and human friendships wither, and human props give way, how sustaining to have this "anchor of the soul sure and steadfast"—union with a living Lord on earth, and the joyful hope of endless and uninterrupted union and communion with Him in glory!

Are you even now enjoying, through your tears, this blessed persuasion, and exulting in this blessed faith? Do you know the secret of that twofold solace, "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings?"—the "fellowship of His sufferings" telling of His sympathy with your sorrows below—the "power of His resurrection" assuring you of the glorious gift of everlasting life in a world where sorrow dare not enter. Rest not satisfied with a mere outward creed and confession that "Jesus is the Savior." Let yours be the nobler formula of an appropriating faith—"He is my Savior; He loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." Let it not be with you a possible salvation, but a salvation found; so that, with the tried apostle, you can rise above the surges of deepening tribulation as you glory in the conviction, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

Sad, indeed, for those who, when "deep calls unto deep," have no such "strong consolation" to enable them to ride out the storm; who, when sorrow and bereavement overtake them—the lowering shadows of the

dark and cloudy day—have still to grope after an unknown Christ; and, amid the hollowness of earthly and counterfeit comforts, have to seek, for the first time, the only true One.

Oh! if our hour of trial has not yet come, let us be prepared for it—for come it will. Let us seek to have our vessels moored now to the Rock of Ages, that when the tempest arises—when the floods beat, and the winds blow, and the wrecks of earthly joy are seen strewing the waters—we may triumphantly utter the challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

"Say, you who tempt  
The sea of life, by summer plea impelled,  
Have you this anchor? Sure a time will come  
For storms to try you, and strong blasts to rend  
Your painted sails, and shred your gold like chaff  
O'er the wild wave. And what a wreck is man,  
If sorrow find him unsustained by God!

## **THE MASTER**

Martha can withhold no longer from her sister the joyful tidings which she has been the first to hear. With fleet foot she hastens back to the house with the announcement, "The Master has come, and calls for you." Mary hears, but makes no comment. Wrapped in the silence of her own meditative grief, "when she heard that, she arose quickly and came unto Him."

"To her all earth could render nothing back  
Like that pale changeless brow.  
Calmly she stood  
As marble statue.  
In that maiden's breast  
Sorrow and loneliness sank darkly down,  
Though the blanched lips breathed out no boisterous plaint

Of common grief."

The formal sympathizers who gathered around her had observed her departure. They are led to form their conjectures as to the cause of this sudden break in her trance of anguish. She had up until that moment, with the instinctive aversion which mourners only know, and which we have formerly alluded to in the case of Martha, been shrinking from facing the gladsome light of heaven, caring not to look abroad on the blight of an altered world. But the few words her sister uttered, and which the other auditors manifestly had not comprehended, all at once rouse her from her seat of pensive sadness, and her shadow is seen hurrying by the darkened lattice. They can form but one surmise: that, in accordance with custom, she has betaken herself to the burial-ground to feed her morbid grief. "She goes unto the grave to weep there." Ah! little did they know how much nobler was her motive—how truer and grander the solace she sought and found.

There is little that is really profitable or hallowed in visiting the grave of loved ones. Though fond affection will, from some false feeling of the tribute due to the memory of the departed, seek to surmount sadder thoughts, and linger at the spot where treasured ashes repose, yet—think and act as we may—there is nothing cheering, nothing elevating there. The associations of the burial-place are all with the humiliating triumphs of the King of Terrors. It is a view of death taken from the earthly entrance of the valley, not the heavenly view of it as that valley opens on the bright plains of immortality. The gay flowers and emerald sod which carpet the grave are poor mockeries to the bereft spirit, shrouding, as they do, nobler withered blossoms which the foot of the destroyer has trampled into dust, and which no earthly beauty can again clothe, or earthly spring reanimate. They are to be pitied who have no higher solace, no better remedy for their grief, than thus to water with unavailing tears the trophies of death; or to read the harrowing record which love has traced on its slab of cold marble, telling of the vanity of human hopes.

Such, however, was not Mary's errand in leaving the chamber of bereavement. That drooping flower was not opening her leaves, only to be crushed afresh with new tear-floods of sorrow. She sought One who would disengage her soiled and shattered tendrils from the chill comforts

of earth, and bathe them in the genial influences of Heaven. The music of her Master's name alone could put gladness into her heart, and invite her to muffle other conflicting feelings and hasten to His feet. "The Master has come!" Nothing could have roused her from her profound grief but this. While her poor earthly comforters are imagining her prostrate at the sepulcher's mouth, giving vent to the wild delirium of her young grief, she is away, not to the victim of death, but to the Lord of Life, either to tell to Him the tale of her woe, or else to listen from His lips to words of comfort no other comforter had given.

Is there not the same music in that name—the same solace and joy in that presence still? Earthly sympathy is not to be despised; no, when death has entered a household, taken the dearest and the best and laid them in the tomb, nothing is more soothing to the wounded, crushed, and broken one, than to experience the genial sympathy of true Christian friendship. Those, it may be, little known before (comparative strangers), touched with the story of a neighbor's sorrow, come to offer their tribute of condolence, and to "weep with those who weep." Never is true friendship so tested as then. Hollow attachments, which have nothing but the world, or a time of prosperity to bind them, discover their worthlessness. "Summer friends" stand aloof; they have little patience for the sadness of sorrow's countenance and the funereal trappings of the death-chamber; while sympathy, based on lofty Christian principle, loves to minister as a subordinate healer of the broken-hearted, and to indulge in a hundred nameless ingenious offices of kindness and love.

But "thus far shall you go, and no farther." The purest and noblest and most unselfish of earthly friends can only go a certain way. Their minds and sympathies are limited. They cannot enter into the deep recesses of the smitten heart—the yawning crevices that bereavement has laid bare. But JESUS can! Ah! there are capacities and sensibilities in that Mighty Heart that can probe the deepest wound and gauge the profoundest sorrow. While from the best of earthly comforters the mind turns away unsatisfied; while the burial-ground and the grave only recall the deep humiliations of the body's wreck and ruin—with what fond emotion does the spirit, like Mary, turn to Him who possesses the majesty of Deity with all the tenderness of humanity! The Mighty Lord, and yet the Elder

Brother!

The sympathy of man is often selfish, formal, constrained, commonplace, coming more from the surface than from the depths of the heart. It is the finite sympathy of a finite creature. The Redeemer's sympathy is that of the perfect Man and the infinite God—able to enter into all the peculiarities of the case—all the tender features and shadings of sorrow which are hidden from "the keenest and kindest human eye."

Mary's example is a true type and picture of what the broken heart of the Christian feels. Not undervaluing human sympathy, yet, nevertheless, all the crowd of sympathizing friends—Jewish citizens, Bethany villagers—are nothing to her when she hears her Lord has come! Happy for us if, while the world, like the condoling crowd of Jews, is forming its own cold speculations on the amount of our grief and the bitterness of our loss, we are found hastening to cast ourselves at our Savior's feet; if our afflictions prove to us like angel messengers from the inner sanctuary—calling us from friends, home, comforts, blessings; all we most prize on earth—telling us that ONE is near who will more than compensate for the loss of all—"The Master has come, and calls for you!"

It is the very end and design our gracious God has in all His dealings, to lead us, as he led Mary, to the feet of Jesus. Yes! you poor weeping, disconsolate one, "The Master calls for you." You individually, as if you stood the sole sufferer in a vast world. He wishes to pour His oil and wine into your wounded heart—to give you some overwhelming proof and pledge of the love he bears you in this your sore trial. He has come to pour drops of comfort in the bitter cup—to ease you of your heavy burden, and to point you to hopes full of immortality. Go and learn what a kind, and gentle, and gracious Master He is! Go forth, Mary, and meet your Lord. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning!"

We may imagine her hastening along the foot-road, with the spirit of the Psalmist's words on her tongue—"As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God—for the living God!"

## SECOND CAUSES

With a bounding heart, Mary was in a moment at her Master's feet. She weeps! and is able only to articulate, in broken accents, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." It is the repetition of Martha's same expression. Often at a season of sore bereavement some one poignant thought or reflection takes possession of the mind, and, for the time, overmasters every other. This echo of the other mourner's utterance leads us to conclude that it had been a familiar and often-quoted phrase during these days of protracted agony. This independent quotation, indeed, on the part of each, gives a truthful beauty to the whole inspired narrative.

The two sisters, musing on the terrible past, gazing through their tears on the vacant seat at their home-hearth, had been every now and then breaking the gloomy silence of the deserted chamber by exclaiming, "If He had been here, this never would have happened! This is the bitterest drop in our cup—all might have been different! These hot tears might never have dimmed our eyes; our beloved Lazarus might have been a living and loving brother still! Oh! that the Lord had delayed for a brief week that needless journey, or anticipated by four days his longed-for return; or would that we had dispatched our messenger earlier for Him. It is now too late. Though He has at last come, His advent can be of little avail. The dreadful destroyer has been at our cottage door before Him. He may soothe our grief, but the blow cannot be averted. His friend, and our brother, is locked in sleep too deep to be disturbed.

Ah! is it not the same unkind surmise which is still often heard in the hour of bereavement and in the home of death?—a guilty, unholy brooding over second causes? "If such and such had been done, my child would still be alive. If that means, or that remedy, or that judicious caution had been employed, this terrible overthrow of my earthly hopes would never have occurred; that loved one would have been still walking at my side; that chaplet of sorrows would not now have been girding my brow; the Bethany sepulcher would have been unopened—"This my

brother, would not have died!"

Hush! hush! these guilty insinuations—that dethroning of God from the Providential Sovereignty of His own world—that hasty and inconsiderate verdict on His divine procedure.

"If You had been here!" Can we, dare we doubt it? Is the departure of the immortal soul to the spirit-world so trivial a matter that the life-giving God takes no cognizance of it? No! Mourning one, in the deep night of your sorrow, you must rise above "untoward coincidences"—you must cancel the words "accident" and "fate" from your vocabulary of trial. God, your God, was there! If there are perplexing accompaniments, be assured they were of His permitting; all was planned—wisely, kindly planned. Question not the unerring rectitude of His dealings. Though apparently absent, He was really present.

The apparent veiling of His countenance is only what Cowper calls "the severer aspect of His love." Kiss the rod that smites—adore the hand that lays low. Pillow your head on that simple, yet grandest source of composure—"The Lord reigns!" It is not for us to venture to dictate what the procedure of infinite love and wisdom should be. To our dim and distorted views of things, it might have been more for the glory of God and the Church's good, if the "beautiful bird of light" had still "sat with its folded wings" before it sped to nestle in the eaves of Heaven.

But if its earthly song has been early hushed; if those full of promise have been allowed rather to fall asleep in Jesus, "Even so, Father; for it seems good in Your sight!" It was from no lack of power or ability on God's part that they were not recalled from the gates of death. "We will be silent—we will open not our mouths, because You did it."

Afflicted one! if the brother or friend whom you now mourn be a brother in glory—if he be now among the white-robed multitude—his last tear wept—forever beyond reach of a sinning and sorrowing world—can you upbraid your God for his early departure? Would you weep him back if you could from his eternal crown?

Fond human nature, as it stands in trembling agony watching the ebbing

pulses of life, would willingly arrest the pale messenger—stay the chariot—and have this wilderness re-lighted with his smile. But when all is over, and you are able to contemplate, with calm emotion, the untold bliss into which the unfettered spirit has entered, do you not feel as if it were cruel selfishness alone that would uncliothe that sainted pilgrim of his glory, and bring him once more back to earth's cares and tribulations?

We sadly watched the close of all,  
Life balanced in a breath;  
We saw upon his features fall  
The awful shade of death.  
All dark and desolate we were;  
And murmuring nature cried  
'Oh! surely, Lord! had You been here,  
Our brother had not died!'  
But when its glance the memory cast  
On all that grace had done;  
And thought of life's long warfare passed,  
And endless victory won,  
Then faith prevailing, wiped the tear,  
And looking upward, cried,  
'O Lord! You surely have been here,  
Our brother has not died!'

We have already had occasion to note the impressive and significant silence of the Savior to Mary. We may just again revert to it in a sentence here. Martha had, a few moments before, given vent to the same impassioned utterance respecting her departed brother. Jesus had replied to her; questioned her as to her faith; and opened up to her sublime sources of solace and consolation. With Mary it is different. He responds to her also—but it is only in silence and in tears! Why this distinction? Does it not unfold to us a lovely feature in the dealings of Jesus—how He adapts Himself to the peculiarities of individual character. With those of a bolder temperament He can argue and remonstrate—with those of a meek, sensitive, contemplative spirit, He can be silent and weep!

The stout but manly heart of Peter needed at times a bold and cutting rebuke; a similar reproof would have crushed to the dust the tender soul



of John. The character of the one is painted in his walking on the stormy water to meet his Lord; of the other, in his reclining on the bosom of the same Divine Master, drinking sacred draughts at the Fountain-head of love!

So it was with Martha and Mary, "the Peter and John of Bethany;" and so it is with His people still. How beautifully and considerately Jesus studies their case—adapting His dealings to what He sees and knows they can bear—fitting the yoke to the neck, and the neck to the yoke. To some He is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, uttering His thunders," pleading with Martha-spirits "by terrible things in righteousness." To others (the shrinking, sensitive Marys) whispering only accents of gentleness; giving expression to no needless word that would aggravate or embitter their sorrows.

Ah, believer! how tenderly considerate is your dear Lord! Well may you make it your prayer, "Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are His mercies!" He may at times, like Joseph to His brethren, appear to "speak roughly," but it is in secret kindness. When a father inflicts on his wayward child the severest and harshest discipline, none but he can tell the bitter heart-pangs of yearning love that accompany every stroke of the rod.

So it is with your Father in Heaven; with this difference, that the earthly parent may act unwisely, arbitrarily, indiscreetly—he may misjudge the necessities of the case—he may do violence and harm to his offspring. Not so with an all-wise Heavenly Parent. He will inflict no unessential or unneeded chastisement. Man may err, has erred, and is ever erring—but "as for God, His way is perfect!"

## **THE WEEPING SAVIOR**

"Jesus wept." John 11:35

The silent procession is moving on. We may suppose they have reached

the gates of the burial-ground. But a new scene and incident here arrest our thoughts! It is not the humiliating memorials of mortality that lie scattered around the caves and grottoes and grassy heaps sacred to many a Bethany villager. It is not even the newly sealed stone which marks the spot where Lazarus "sleeps." Let us turn aside for a little, and see this great sight. It is the Creator of all worlds in tears! The God-man Mediator dissolved in tenderest grief! Of all the memories of Bethany, this surely is the most hallowed and the most wondrous. These tears form the most touching episode in sacred story; and if we are in sorrow, it may either dry our own tears, or give them the warrant to flow when we are told—Jesus wept!

Why those tears? This is what we shall now inquire. There is often a false interpretation put upon this brief and touching verse, as if it denoted the expression of the Savior's sorrow for the loss of a loved friend. This, it is plain, it could not be. However mingled may have been the hopes and fears of the weeping mourners around him, He at least knew that in a few brief moments Lazarus was to be restored. He could not surely weep so bitterly, possessing, as He then did, the confident assurance that death was about to give back its captive, and light up every tear-dimmed eye with an ecstasy of joy. Why, then, we again ask, this strange and mysterious grief? Come and let us surround the grave of Bethany, and as we behold the chief mourner at that grave, let us inquire why it was that "Jesus wept!"

(1.) Jesus wept out of sympathy for the bereaved. The hearts around Him were breaking with anguish. All unconscious of how soon and how wondrously their sorrow was to be turned into joy, the appalling thought was alone present to them in all its fearfulness, "Lazarus is dead!" When He, the God-man Mediator, with the refined sensibilities of His tender heart, beheld the poignancy of that grief, the pent-up torrent of His own human sympathies could be restrained no longer. His tears flowed too.

But it would be a contracted view of the tears of Jesus to think that two solitary mourners in a Jewish graveyard engrossed and monopolized that sympathy. It had a far wider sweep. There were hearts, yes—myriads of desolate sufferers in ages then unborn, who He knew would be brought to stand as He was then doing by the grave of loved relatives—mourners

who would have no visible comforter or restorer to rush to, as had Martha, and Mary, to dry their tears, and give them back their dead; and when He thought of this, "Jesus wept!"

What an interest it gives to that scene of weeping, to think that at that eventful moment, the Savior had before Him the bereaved of all time—that His eye was roaming at that moment through deserted chambers, and vacant seats, and opened graves, down to the end of the world. The aged Jacobs and Rachels weeping for their children—the Ezekiels mourning in the dust and ashes of disconsolate widowhood, "the desire of their eyes taken away by a stroke"—the unsolaced Marys and Marthas brooding over a dark future, with the prop and support of existence swept down, the central sun and light of their being eclipsed in mysterious darkness!

Think, (as you are now perusing these pages,) throughout the wide world, how many breaking hearts there are—how loud the wail of suffering humanity, could we but hear it!—those written childless and fatherless, and friendless and homeless!—Bethany-processions pacing with slow and measured step to deposit their earthly all in the cold custody of the tomb! Think of the Marys and Marthas who are now "going to some grave to weep there," perhaps with no Savior's smile to gladden them—or the desolate chambers that are now resounding to the plaintive dirge, "O Absalom, Absalom, would God I had died instead of you; O Absalom, my son! my son!"

Think of all these scenes that that moment vividly suggested and pictured to the Redeemer's eye—the long and loud miserere, echoing dismally from the remotest bounds of time, and there "entering into the ear of the God of Sabbath," and can you wonder that—Jesus wept! Blessed and amazing picture of the Lord of glory! It combines the delineation alike of the tenderness of His humanity, and the majesty of His Godhead. His Humanity! It is revealed in those teardrops, falling from a human eye on a human grave. His Godhead! It is manifested in His ability to take in with a giant grasp all the prospective sufferings of His suffering people.

Weeping believer! your anguished heart was included in those Bethany tears! Be assured your grief was visibly portrayed in that moment to that

omniscient Savior. He had all your sorrows before Him—your anxious moments during your friend's tedious sickness—the trembling suspense—the nights of weary watching—the agonizing revelation of "no hope"—the closing scene! Bethany's graveyard became to Him a picture-gallery of the world's aching hearts; and yours, yes! yours was there! and as He beheld it, "Jesus wept!"

Jesus wept! His tears are over,  
But His heart is still the same;  
Kinsman, Friend, and Elder Brother,  
Is His everlasting name.  
Savior, who can love like Thee,  
Gracious One of Bethany!

When the pangs of trial seize us,  
When the waves of sorrow roll,  
I will lay my head on Jesus—  
Pillow of the troubled soul.  
Surely none can feel like Thee,  
Weeping One of Bethany!

Jesus wept! And still in glory,  
He can mark each mourner's tear;  
Loving to retrace the story  
Of the hearts He solaced here.  
Lord! when I am called to die,  
Let me think of Bethany!

Jesus wept! That tear of sorrow  
Is a legacy of love;  
Yesterday, today, tomorrow,  
He the same does ever prove.  
You are all in all to me,  
Living One of Bethany!

(2.) Jesus wept when He thought of the triumphs of death! He was treading a burial ground—moldering heaps were around Him—silent sepulchral caves, giving forth no echo of life! It is a solemn and

impressive thing, even for us, to tread the graveyard; more especially if there are there treasures of buried affection. The thought that those whose smile gladdened to us every step in the wilderness, who formed our solace in sorrow, and our joy in adversity—whose words, and society, and converse were intertwined with our very being—it is solemn and saddening, as we tread that land of oblivion, to find these words and looks and tears unanswered—a gloomy silence hovering over the spot where the wrecks of treasure and loveliness are laid! He would have a bold, a stern heart indeed who could pace unmoved over such hallowed ground, and forbid a tear to flow over the gushing memories of the past!

What, then, must it have been at that moment in Bethany with Jesus, when He saw one of those purchased by His own blood (dearest to him) chased by the unsparing destroyer to that gloomy prison-house? If we have supposed that the tears of Martha and Mary were suggestive of manifold other broken and sorrowing hearts in other ages, we may well believe that graveyard was suggestive of triumphs still in reserve for the tomb, numberless trophies which in every age were to be reaped in by the King of Terrors until the reaper's arm was paralyzed, and death swallowed up in victory.

The few silent sepulchers around must have significantly called to the mind of the Divine spectator how sin had blasted and scathed His noblest workmanship; converting the fairest province of His creation into one vast Necropolis—one dismal "city of the dead!" The body of man, "so fearfully and wonderfully made," and on which He had originally placed His own impress of "very good," ruined, and resolved into a mass of humiliating dust! If the architect mourns over the destruction of some favorite edifice of his, which the storm has swept down, or the fire has wrapped in conflagration and reduced to ashes—if the sculptor mourns to see his breathing marble with one crude stroke hurled to the ground, and its fragments scattered at his feet—what must have been the sensations of the almighty Architect of the human frame, at whose completion the morning stars and the sons of God chanted a loud anthem? What must have been His sensations as He thought of them, now a devastated wreck, moldering in dissolution and decay, the King of Terrors sitting in regal state, holding his high holiday over a vassal world!

In Bethany He beheld only a few of these broken and prostrate columns, but they were powerfully suggestive of millions on millions which were yet in coming ages to undergo the same doom of mortality. If even our less sensitive hearts may be wrung with emotion at the tidings of some mournful catastrophe that occupies, after all, but some passing hour in the world's history, but which has carried death and lamentation into many households—the sudden pestilence that has swept down its thousands—the gallant vessel that was a moment before spreading proudly its white wings to the gale, the joyous hearts on board dreaming of hearth and home, and the "many ports that would exult in the gleam of her mast"—the next moment hurrying down to the depths of an ocean grave, with no survivor to tell the tale! Or the terrible records of War—the ranks of bold and brave patriots laid low in the carnage of battle—youth and strength and beauty and rank and friendship blent in one red burial!

If these and such like mournful tales of death, and the power of death, affect at the moment even the most callous among us, causing the lip to grow pale, and demanding the tribute of more than a tear, oh! what must it have been to the omniscient eye and exquisitely sensitive spirit of Jesus, as, taking in all time at a glance, He beheld the Pale Horse with its ghastly rider trampling under foot the vast human family; converting the globe in which they dwelt into a mournful valley of dry bones, filled with the wrecks and skeletons of breathing men and animated frames!

The triumphs of death are, in ordinary circumstances, to us scarcely perceptible. He moves with noiseless tread. The footprint is made on the sands of time; but like the tides of the ocean, the oblivion-power washes it away. The name of yonder churchyard is the "land of forgetfulness!" Not so with the Lord of Life, the great Antagonist of this usurper! The future, a ghastly future, rose in appalling vividness before Him. Death (vulture-like) flapping his wings over the multitudes he claimed as his own—vessels freighted with immortality lying wrecked and stranded on the shores of Time!

Yes! we can only understand the full import of these tears of Jesus, as we imagine to ourselves His Godlike eye penetrating at that moment every churchyard and every grave—the mausoleums of the great—the grassy sods of the poor—the marble grave-stone of the noble and illustrious—the

myriads whose requiem is chanted by the bleak winds of the desert or the chimes of the ocean!—The child carried away in the twinkling of an eye—the blossom just opening, and then frost-blighted—the aged sire, cut down like a shock of corn in its season, falling withered and seared like the leaves of autumn—the young exulting in the prime of manhood—the pious and benevolent—the great and good, succumbing indiscriminately to the same inexorable decree—the erring and thoughtless, reckless of all warning, hurried away in the midst of scorned mercy!

Oh! as He beheld this ghastly funeral procession moving before Him, the whole world going to the same long-home, and He Himself left the sole survivor, can we wonder that Jesus wept?

(3.) Jesus wept when He thought of the impenitence and obduracy of the human heart. This may not be at first sight patent as a cause of the tears of Jesus, but we may well believe it entered largely as an element into this strange flood of sorrow. He was about to perform a great (His greatest) miracle; but while he knew that, in consequence of this manifestation of His mighty power, many of those who now stood around Lazarus' tomb would believe, he knew also that others would only "despise, and wonder, and perish;" that while some, as we shall afterwards find, acknowledged Him as the Messiah, others went immediately into Jerusalem to scheme with the Pharisees in plotting His murder—"But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done."

When He observed the impenitence of these obdurate hearts at His side, He could not subdue His tenderest emotion. We read that, when He saw the sisters weeping, and the Jews that were with them weeping, Jesus wept. These Jews could weep for a fellow-mortal, but they could not weep for themselves, and therefore for them, Jesus wept!

One soul was precious to Him. He who alone can estimate alike the worth and the loss of the soul, might have wept, even had there been but one then present found to resist His claims and forfeit His salvation. But these tears extended far beyond that lonely spot in a Jewish village, and the few impenitent hearts that were then flocking around. These obdurate Jews were types of the world's impenitency. There was at that moment summoned before Him a mournful picture of the hardened hearts in

every age—those who would read His gospel, and hear of his miracles, and listen to the story of His love all unmoved—who would die—as they had lived, uncheered by His grace and unfit for His presence.

Ah! surely no cause could more tenderly elicit a Redeemer's tears than this—the thought of His Redemption scorned, His blood trampled on, His work valued as worthless. If we have thought of Him shedding tears over the ruin of the body, what must have been the depth and intensity of those tears over the sadder, more fearful ruin of the soul? Immortal powers, that ought to have been ennobled and consecrated to His service, alienated, degraded, destroyed! Immortal beings spurning away from themselves, both the day of grace and the hopes of heaven!

Bitter as may have been the wail of mourning and sorrowing hearts that may then have reached His ear from future ages, more agonizing and dismal far must have been the wailing cry which, beyond the limits of time, came floating up from a dark and dreary eternity—those who might have believed and lived, but who blasphemed or trifled, neglected and procrastinated, and finally perished!

If we think of it, it is not the loss of health, or the loss of wealth, or the loss of friends, which forms the heaviest of trials, the deepest ground of soul sadness. We put on the sable attire as emblems of mourning; but if we saw things as a weeping Jesus sees them, there is more real cause for sackcloth and ashes for the heart at enmity with God, and despising His salvation, trampling under foot His Son, and enacting over again the sad tragedy of Calvary.

Reader! are you at this moment guilty of living on in a state of presumptuous impenitence—salvation unsought—Jesus a stranger—His name unhonored—His Bible unread—His promises unappropriated—His wrath undreaded—defeating all His marvelous contrivances of love, and remonstrance, and forbearance—meeting a prodigal expenditure of His patience with cold and chilling indifference and neglect—casting away from you the reservoir of the riches of eternity which He has been holding out for your acceptance?

In that sacred Bethany ground, as you mark these falling tear-drops



which dim His eye, there may have been a tear for you! Eighteen hundred years have since elapsed, but He to whom "a thousand years are as one day," marked even then your present ungrateful apostasy or guilty alienation—there was a tear then which stole down that cheek on account of unrequited love!

Is that tear to flow in vain? Are you to mock His tender sympathy still with cold formalism, or persisted-in impenitency? Are you to think of Bethany and its tear-drops and still go on in sin? Ah, never was sermon preached to an erring or impenitent sinner half so eloquent as this. Paul was not given to weeping, and it makes his fervid love of souls all the more striking when we find him confessing that he had wept like a child over those who were "enemies to the cross of Christ." We have often felt Paul's burning tears over hardened sinners to be touching and impressive. But what are they, after all, in comparison with those of Paul's Lord? He, the Great Sun of the World—the Sun of Righteousness, was to set in a few brief days behind the walls of ungrateful Jerusalem in darkness and blood—His last rays seem now lingering over the crest of Mount Olive—His tears seem to tell that He has clung until He can cling no more to the fond hope that an impenitent nation and guilty city will yet turn at His reproof, believe and live.

And still does He linger among us. Though the night comes, the beams of mercy are still tardily lingering, as if hesitant to leave the backsliding to their wanderings, or the impenitent to their own midnight of despair. O Reader! leave not this subject—leave not the graveyard of Bethany until you think of Jesus as then weeping for you! Yes! for you—your pitiable condition—your perverse ingratitude—your slighting of His warnings—your grieving of His Spirit—your unkindness to Him—your obstinate disregard of your own everlasting interests.

Let it be the most wondrous and heart-searching of all the memories of Bethany, that for your soul—that traitor, truant, worthless soul—which like a stray planet He might have allowed to drift away from Himself into the blackness of eternal darkness—helpless, hopeless, ruined, lost!—Yes! that for you, JESUS WEPT!

## THE GRAVE STONE

"Take away the stone," He said. John 11:39

They have now reached the grave. It was a rocky sepulcher. A flat stone (possibly with some Hebrew inscription) lay upon the mouth of it. In wondering amazement the sorrowing group follows the footsteps of the Savior. "Behold how He loved him," whisper the Jews to one another as they witness His fast falling tears. Can His traveling thus to the tomb be anything more than to pay a mournful tribute to an honored friendship, and behold the silent home of the loved dead?

No! He is about, as the Lord of Life, to wrench away the swaddling-bands of corruption, to vindicate His name and prerogative as the "Abolisher of death"—to have the first-fruits of that vast triumph which, ages before the birth of time, He had anticipated with longing earnestness—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague; O grave, I will be your destruction!"

Does He proceed forthwith to speak the word, and to accomplish the giant deed? He breaks silence. But we listen, in the first instance, not to the omnipotent summons, but to an address to the bystanders—"Take away the stone," He said. What need of this parenthesis in His mighty work? Why this summoning in any feeble human agency when His own independent fiat could have effected the whole? Would it not have been a more startling manifestation of Omnipotence, by a mandate similar to that which chained the tempests of Tiberias, or the demoniac of Gadara, to have hurled the grave stone into fragments? Might not He who has "the keys of the grave and of death" Himself unlocked the portals preparatory to the vaster miracle that was to follow? No, there was a mighty lesson to be read in thus delegating human hands to remove the intervening barrier. The Church of the living God may, in every age, gather from it instruction!

What, then, does the Savior here figuratively, but significantly, teach His people? Is it not the important truth that, though dependent on Him for all they are, and all they have, they are not thereby released and

exempted from the use of means? He alone can bring back Lazarus from his death-sleep. Martha and Mary may weep an ocean of tears, but they cannot weep him back. They may linger for days and nights in that lonely graveyard, making it resound with their bitter dirges, but their impassioned entreaties will be mocked with impressive silence. Too well do they know that spirit is fled beyond their recall—the spark of life extinguished beyond any earthly rekindling!

But though the word of Omnipotence can alone bring back the dead; human hands and human efforts can roll away the adjoining stone, and prepare for the performance of the miracle; and after the miracle is performed, human hands may again be called in to tear off the cerements of the tomb, to ungird the bandages from the restored captive, to "take off the grave clothes and let him go."

This simple incident in the Bethany narrative admits of manifold PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS. Let us look to it with reference to the mightier spiritual miracle of the Resurrection of the soul "dead in trespasses and sins." Jesus, and Jesus alone, can awake that soul from the deep slumber of its spiritual death, and invest it with the glories of a new resurrection-life. In vain can it awake of itself; no human skill can put animation into the spiritual skeleton. No power of human eloquence, no "excellency of man's wisdom," can open these rayless eyes, and pour life, and light, and hope into the dull caverns of the spiritual sepulcher. "Prophecy to the dry bones!"—We may prophesy forever! We may try to wake the valley of dry bones by ceaseless invocations, but the dead will hear not! No bone of the spiritual skeleton will stir, for it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

But though it be a Divine work from first to last which effects the spiritual regeneration of man, are we from this presumptuously to disregard the use of means? Are prayer, and preaching, and human effort, and strenuous earnestness in the work of evangelism; are these all to be superseded, and pronounced unavailing and unnecessary? No, though man cannot wake to life his dormant spiritual energies—though these lie slumbering in the deep sleep of the buried dead, and nothing but Lazarus' Lord can break the spiritual trance—yet man can use the appointed means. He dare not be guilty of the monstrous inconsistency and crime of

willingly allowing impediments to stand in the way of his spiritual revival which his own efforts may remove! He cannot expect his Lord to sound over his soul the gladdening accents of peace, and reconciliation, and joy, if some known sin be still lying, like the adjoining grave-stone, which it is in his power to roll away, and at his peril if he allows to remain!

Christ is alone the "abolisher of death," and the "giver of life;" but notwithstanding this, "Roll you away the stone!" Do not neglect the means He has appointed and prescribed. If you neglect prayer, and despise ordinances, and trifle with temptation, or venture on forbidden ground, you are only making the intervening obstacle firmer and stronger, and willfully stripping yourselves of the gift of life.

Naaman must plunge seven times in Jordan, or else he cannot be made clean. To cleanse himself of his leprosy he cannot, but to wash in Jordan he can. The snake-bitten Israelite must gaze on the brazen serpent; he cannot of himself heal one fevered wound, but to gaze on the appointed symbol of cure he can. In vain can the weapons of war effect a breach on the walls of Jericho; but the army of Joshua can sound the appointed trumpet, and raise the prescribed shout, and the impregnable walls in a moment are in the dust. Martha and Mary in vain can make their voices be heard in the "dull, cold ear of death," but at their Lord's bidding they can hurl back the outer portals where their dead is laid. They cannot unbind one fetter, but they can open with human hand the prison-door to admit the Divine Liberator.

Let it not be supposed that in this we detract in any way from the omnipotence of the Savior's grace. God forbid! All is of grace, from first to last—free, sovereign grace! Man has no more merit in salvation than the beggar has merit in reaching forth his hand for alms, or in stooping down to drink of the wayside fountain. But neither must we ignore the great truth which God strives throughout His Word to impress upon us, that He works by means, and that for the neglect of these means we are ourselves responsible.

Paul had the assurance given him by an angel from heaven, when tossed in the storm at sea, that not one life in his vessel was to be lost; that though the ship was to be wrecked, all her crew were to come safe to land.

But was there on this account any effort on his part relaxed to secure their safety? No! he toiled and labored at the pumps and rigging and anchors as unremittingly as before; and when some of the sailors made the cowardly attempt, by lowering a small boat, to produce their own escape, the voice of the apostle was heard proclaiming, amid the storm, that unless they abode in the ship none could be saved!

The true philosophy of the Gospel system is this, to feel as if much depended on ourselves; but at the same time entertaining the loftier conviction that all depends upon God. Jesus, when He invites to the strait gate, does not advocate remaining outside, in a state of passive and listless inaction, until the portals be seen to move by the Divine hand. His exhortation and command rather is, "Strive", "knock", "agonize to enter in!" We are not to ascend to heaven, seated, like Elijah, in a chariot of fire, without toil or effort, but rather to "fight the good fight of faith." The saying of the great Apostle is a vivid portrait of what the Christian's feelings ought to be regarding personal holiness—"I labored, . . . yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

As the Lord of Bethany gives the summons, "Roll away the stone," His words seem paraphrased in this other Scripture, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." You may feel assured that He will not impose upon you one needless burden; He will not exact more than He knows your strength will bear; He will ask no Peter to come to Him on the water, unless He imparts at the same time, strength and support on the unstable wave. He will not demand of you the endurance of providences, and trials, and temptations you are unable to cope with; He will not ask you to draw water if the well is too deep, or take away the stone if it is too heavy. But neither, at the same time, will He admit as an impossibility that which, as a free and responsible agent, it is in your power to avert. He will not regard as your misfortune what is your crime. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Oh! let life be, more than it ever has been, one constant effort to roll away the stone from the moral sepulcher; carefully to remove every barrier between our souls and Jesus—looking forward to that glorious day when the voice of the Restorer shall be heard uttering the omnipotent "Come

forth!" and to His angel assessors the mandate shall be given regarding the thronging myriads of risen dead, "Loose them and let them go!"

## UNBELIEF

Man—short-sighted man—often raises impossibilities when God does not. It is hard for rebellious unbelief to lie submissive and still. In moments when the spirit might well be overawed into silence, it gives utterance to its querulous questionings and surmisings rather than remain obedient at the feet of Christ, reposing on the sublime aphorism, "All things are possible to him who believes." In the mind of Martha, where faith had been so recently triumphant, doubt and unbelief have begun again to insinuate themselves. This "Peter of the female sex" had ventured out boldly on the water to meet her Lord. She had owned Him as the giver of life, and triumphed in Him as her Savior! But now she is beginning to sink. A natural difficulty presents itself to her mind about the removal of the incumbent grave-stone. She avers how needless its displacement would be, as by this time corruption must have begun its fatal work. Four brief days only had elapsed since the eye of Lazarus had beamed with fraternal affection. Now those lips must be "saying to corruption, You are my father; to the worm, You are my mother and my sister."

Death, she felt, must now be stamping his impressive mockery on that cherished earthly friendship, and, attired in his most terrible insignia, putting the last fatal extinguisher on the glimmerings of her faith and hope. "What need is there, Lord," she seems to say, "for this needless labor? My brother is far beyond the reach even of a voice like Yours. Why excite vain expectations in my breast which never can be realized? That grave has closed upon him for the 'forever' of time. Nothing now can revoke the sentence, or re-animate the silent dust, except the trumpet of God on the final day."

Thus blindly did Martha reason. She can see no other object her Redeemer can have for the removal of the stone, except to gaze once more on a form and countenance He loved. Both for His sake, and the strangers assembled, she recoils from the thought of disclosing so humiliating a sight.

Alas! how little are fitful frames and feelings to be trusted. Only a few brief moments before, she had made a noble profession of her faith in the presence of her Lord. His own majestic utterances had soothed her griefs, dried her tears, and elicited the confession that He was truly the Son of God. But the sight of the tomb and its mournful accompaniments obliterate for a moment the recollection of better thoughts and a nobler avowal. She forgets that "things which are impossible with men are possible with God." She is guilty of "limiting the Holy One of Israel."

How often is it so with us! How easy is it for us, like Martha, to be bold in our creed when there is nothing to cross our wishes, or dim and darken our faith. But when the hour of trial comes, how often does sense threaten to displace and supplant the nobler antagonist principle! How often do we lose sight of the Savior at the very moment when we most need to have Him continually in view! How often are our convictions of the efficacy of prayer most dulled and deadened just when the dark waves are cresting over our heads, and voices of unbelief are uttering the upbraiding in our ears, "Where is now your God?" But will Jesus leave His people to their own guilty unbelieving doubts? Will Martha, by her unworthy insinuations, put an arrest on her Lord's arm; or will He, in righteous retribution for her faithlessness, leave the stone sealed, and the dead unraised?

No! He loves His people too well to let their stupid unbelief and hardness of heart interfere with His own gracious purposes! How tenderly He rebukes the spirit of this doubter. "Why," as if He said, "Why distrust me? Why stultify yourself with these unbelieving surmises. Have you already forgotten my own gracious assurances, and your own unqualified acceptance of them? My hand is never shortened that it cannot save; My ear is never heavy that it cannot hear. I can call the things which are not, and make them as though they were. Said I not unto you, in that earnest conversation which I had a little ago outside the village, in which Gospel faith was the great theme, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?"

This Bethany utterance has still a voice—a voice of rebuke and of comfort in our hours of trial. When, like aged Jacob, we are ready to say, "All these things are against me;" when we are about to lose the footsteps of a



God of love, or have perhaps lost them, there is a voice ready to hush into silence every unbelieving doubt and surmise. "Although you say you cannot see Him, yet justice is before Him, therefore trust in Him."

God often thus hides Himself from His people in order to test their faith, and elicit their confidence. He puts us in perplexing paths—"allures" and "brings into the wilderness," only, however, that we may see more of Himself, and that He may "speak comfortably unto us." He lets our need attain its extremity, that His intervention may appear the more signal. He allows apparently even His own promises to fail, that He may test the faith of His waiting people—tutor them to "hope against hope," and to find, in unanswered prayers and baffled expectations, only a fresh reason for clinging to His all-powerful arm, and frequenting His mercy-seat. He first dashes to the ground our human confidences and refuges, showing how utterly "vain is the help of man;" so that faith, with her own folded, dove-like wings, may repose in quiet confidence in His faithfulness, saying, "In the Lord I put my trust: why do you say to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?"

Reader! It would be well for you to hear this gentle chiding of Christ, too, in the moment of your spiritual depression—when complaining of your corruptions, the weakness of your graces, your low attainments in holiness, the strength of your temptations, and your inability to resist sin. "Did not I say unto you," interposes this voice of mingled reproof and love, "My grace is sufficient for you?" "The bruised reed I will not break, the smoking flax I will not quench." "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." We are too apt to look to ourselves, to turn our contemplation inwards, instead of keeping the eye of faith centered undeviatingly on a faithful covenant-keeping God, laying our finger on every promise of His Word, and making the challenge regarding each, "Has he said, and shall He not do it? or has He spoken and shall He not bring it to pass?"

Yes; there may be much to try and perplex. Sense and sight may stagger, and stumble, and fall; we may be able to see no break in the clouds; "deep may be calling to deep," and wave responding to wave, "yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me." If we only "believe" in spite of unbelief; hoping on, and

praying on, and trusting on; like the great Father of the faithful, in the midst of adverse providences, "strong in faith, giving glory to God," He will yet cause the dayspring from on high to visit us.

Even in this world, perplexing paths may be made plain, and slippery places smooth, and judgments "bright as the noonday;" but if not here, there is at least a glorious day of disclosures at hand, when the reign of unbelieving doubt shall terminate forever, when the archives of a chequered past will be ransacked of their every mystery—all events mirrored and made plain in the light of eternity; and this saying of the weeping Savior of Bethany obtain its true and everlasting fulfillment, "Didn't I tell you that you will see God's glory if you believe?" John 11:40

## **THE DIVINE PLEADER**

The stone is rolled away, but there is a solemn pause just when the miracle is about to be performed. Jesus prays! The God-Man Mediator—the Lord of Life—the Abolisher of Death—the Being of all Beings—who had the boundless treasures of eternity in His grasp—pauses by the grave of the dead, and lifts up His eyes to heaven in supplication! How often in the same incidents, during our Lord's incarnation, do we find His manhood and His Godhead standing together in stupendous contrast. At His birth, the mystic star and the lowly manger were together; at His death, the ignominious cross and the eclipsed sun were together. Here He weeps and prays at the very moment when He is baring the arm of Omnipotence. The "mighty God" appears in conjunction with "the man Christ Jesus." "His name is Immanuel, God with us."

The body of Lazarus was now probably, by the rolling away of the stone, exposed to view. It was a humiliating sight. Earth—the grave—could afford no solace to the spectators. The Redeemer, by a significant act, shows them where alone, at such an hour, comfort can be found. He points the mourning spirit to its only true source of consolation and peace in God Himself, teaching it to rise above the mortal to the immortal—the corruptible to the incorruptible—from earth to heaven.

Ah! there is nothing but humiliation and sadness in every view of the grave and corruption. Why dwell on the shattered casket, and not rather on the jewel which is sparkling brighter than ever in a better world? Why persist in gazing on the trophies of the last enemy, when we can joyfully realize the emancipated soul exulting in the plenitude of purchased bliss? Why fall with broken wing and wailing cry to the dust, when on eagle-pinion we can soar to the celestial gate, and learn the unkindness of wishing the sainted and crowned one back to the nether valley?

It is Prayer, observe, which thus brings the eye and the heart near to heaven. It is Prayer which opens the celestial portals, and gives to the soul a sight of the invisible.

Yes; you who may be now weeping in unavailing sorrow over the departed, remember, in conjunction with the tears, the prayers of Jesus. Many a desolate mourner derives comfort from the thought "Jesus wept." Do not forget this other simple entry in our touching narrative, telling where the spirit should ever rest amid the shadows of death—"Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank You that You have heard me. And I know that You hear me always."

Let us gather for a little around this incident in the story of Bethany. It is one of the many golden sayings of priceless value. That utterance has at this moment lost none of its preciousness; that voice, silent on earth, is still eloquent in heaven. The Great Intercessor still is there, "walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;" loving to note all the needs and weaknesses, the necessities and distresses, of every Church, and every member of His Church. What He said of old to Peter, He says to every trembling believer—"I have prayed, and am praying for you, that your faith fail not!" "For you!" We must not merge the interest which Jesus has in each separate member of His family, in His intercession for the Church in general. While He lets down His censer, and receives into it, for presentation on the golden altar, the prayers of the vast aggregate; while, as the true High Priest, He enters the holiest of all with the names of His spiritual Israel on His breastplate—carrying the burden of their hourly needs to the foot of the mercy-seat—yet still, He pleads, as if the case of each stood separate and alone!

He remembers you, dejected mourner, as if there were no other heart but yours to be healed, and no other tears but yours to be dried. His own words, speaking of believers, not collectively, but individually, are these—"I will confess his name before my Father and his angels." "Who touched me?" was His interrogation once on earth, as His discriminating love was conscious of some special contact amid the press of the multitude—"Somebody has touched me!" If we can say, in the language of Paul's appropriating faith, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," we can add, He pleads for me, and bears me! He bears this very heart of mine, with all its weaknesses, and infirmities, and sins, before His Father's throne. He has engraved each stone of His Zion on the "palms of His hands," and "its walls are continually before Him!"

How untiring, too, in His advocacy! What has the Christian so to complain of, as his own cold, unworthy prayers—mixed so with unbelief—soiled with worldliness—sometimes guiltily omitted or curtailed. Not the fervid prayers of those feelingly alive to their spiritual exigencies, but listless, unctious, the hands hanging down, the knees feeble and trembling!

But notwithstanding all, Jesus pleads! Still the Great Intercessor "waits to be gracious." He is at once, both Moses on the mountain, and Joshua on the battle-plain—fighting with us in the one, praying for us in the other. No Aarons or Hurs needed to sustain His sinking strength, for it is His sublime prerogative neither to "faint nor grow weary!" There is no loftier occupation for faith than to speed upwards to the throne and behold that wondrous Pleader, receiving at one moment, and at every moment, the countless supplications and prayers which are coming up before Him from every corner of His Church. The Sinner just awake from his moral slumber, and in the agonies of conviction, exclaiming, "What must I do to be saved?"—The Procrastinator sending up from the brink of despair the cry of importunate agony.—The Backslider wailing forth his bitter lamentation over guilty departures, and foul ingratitude, and injured love.—The Sick man feebly groaning forth, in undertones of suffering, his petition for support.—The Dying, on the brink of eternity, invoking the presence and support of the alone arm which can be of any avail to them.—The Bereaved, in the fresh gush of their sorrow, calling upon Him who

is the healer of the brokenhearted. But all heard! Every tear marked—every sigh registered—every suppliant supported!

Amalek may come threatening nothing but disaster; but that pleading Voice on the heavenly Hill is "greater far than all that can be against us!" He pleads for His elect in every phase of their spiritual history—He pleads for their in-gathering into His fold—He pleads for their perseverance in grace—He pleads for their deliverance at once from the accusations and the power of Satan—He pleads for their growing sanctification—and when the battle of life is over, He uplifts His last pleading voice for their complete glorification.

The intercession of Jesus is the golden key which unlocks the gates of Paradise to the departing soul. At a saint's dying moments we are too often occupied with the lower earthly scene to think of the heavenly. The tears of surrounding relatives cloud too often the more glorious revelations which faith discloses. But in the muffled stillness of that death-chamber, when each is holding his breath as the King of Terrors passes by—if we could listen to it, we would hear the "Prince who has power with God" thus uttering His final prayer, and on the rushing wings of ministering angels receiving an answer while He is yet speaking—"Father, I will that they also, whom you have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory!"

Reader! exult more and more in this all-prevailing Advocate. See that you approach the mercy-seat with no other trust but in His atoning work and meritorious righteousness. There was but ONE solitary man of the whole human race who, of old, in the Jewish temple, was permitted to speak face to face with Jehovah. There is but ONE solitary Being in the vast universe of God who, in the heavenly sanctuary, can effectually plead in behalf of His Spiritual Israel. "Seeing, then, that we have a Great High Priest passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace."

If Jesus delights in asking, God delights in bestowing. Let us put our every need, and difficulty, and perplexity, in His hand, feeling the precious assurance that all which is really good for us will be given, and all that is adverse will, in equal mercy, be withheld. There is no limitation

set to our requests. The treasury of grace is flung wide open for every suppliant. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatever you shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you." Surely we may cease to wonder that the Great Apostle should have clung with such intense interest to this elevating theme—the Savior's intercession—that in his brief, but most comprehensive and beautiful creed, he should have so exalted, as he does, its relative importance, compared with other cognate truths, "It is Christ who died, yes rather, who has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Climbing, step by step, in the upward ascent of Christian faith and hope, he seems only to "reach the height of his great argument" when he stands on "the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense." There, gazing on the face of the great officiating Priest who fills all heaven with His fragrance, and feeling that against that intercession the gates of hell can never prevail, he can utter the challenge to devils, and angels, and men, "Who shall separate as from the love of Christ?"

## **THE OMNIPOTENT SUMMONS**

The moment has now come for the voice of Omnipotence to give the mandate. The group has gathered around the sepulchral grotto—the Redeemer stands in meek majesty in front—the teardrop still glistening in His eye, and that eye directed heavenward! Martha and Mary are gazing on His countenance in silent emotion, while the eager bystanders bend over the removed stone to see if the dead be still there. Yes! there the captive lies—in uninvasion silence—attired still in the same solemn drapery. The Lord gives the word. "Lazarus, come forth!" peals through the silent vault. The dull, cold ear seems to listen. The pulseless heart begins to beat—the rigid limbs to move—Lazarus lives! He rises enveloped in the swaddling-bands of the tomb, once more to walk in the light of the living.

Where Scripture is silent, it is vain for us to picture the emotions of that moment, when the weeping sisters found the gloomy hours of

disconsolate sorrow all at once rolled away. The cry of mingled wonder and gratitude rings through that lonely graveyard—"This our brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!" O most wondrous power—Death vanquished in his own territory! The sleeper has awoken like Samson, snapping the bands with which the King of Terrors had bound him. The star of Bethlehem shines, and the Valley of Achor becomes a door of hope. The all-devouring destroyer has to relinquish his prey.

Was the joy of that moment confined to these two bosoms? No! The Church of Christ in every age may well love to linger around the grave of Lazarus. In his resurrection there is to His true people a sure pledge of their own. It was the first sheaf reaped by the mower's sickle anticipatory of the great Harvest-home of the Final Day "when all that are in their graves" shall hear the same voice and shall "come forth."

Solemn, surely, is the thought that that same portentous miracle performed on Lazarus is one day to be performed on ourselves. Wherever we repose—whether, as he did, in the quiet churchyard of our native village, or in the midst of the city's crowded cemetery, or far away amid the alien and stranger in some foreign shore, our dust shall be startled by that omnipotent summons. How shall we hear it? Would it sound in our ears like the sweet tones of the silver trumpet of Jubilee? Would it be to gaze like Lazarus on the face of our best friend—to see Jesus bending over us in looks of tenderness—to hear the living tones of that same voice, whose accents were last heard in the dark valley, whispering hopes full of immortality?

True, we have not to wait for a Savior's love and presence until then. The hour of death is to the Christian the birthday of endless life. Guardian angels are hovering around his dying pillow ready to waft his spirit into Abraham's bosom. "The souls of believers do immediately pass into glory." But the full plenitude of their joy and bliss is reserved for the time when the precious but redeemed dust, which for a season is left to molder in the tomb, shall become instinct with life—"the corruptible put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality." The spirits of the just enter at death on "the inheritance of the saints in light;" but at the Resurrection they shall rise as separate orbs from the darkness and night of the grave,

each to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

However glorious the emancipation of the soul in the moment of dissolution, it is not until the plains and valleys of our globe shall stand thick with the living of buried generations—each glorified body the image of its Lord's—that the predicted anthem will be heard waking the echoes of the universe—"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" Then, with the organs of their resurrection-bodies ennobled, etherealized, purified from all the grossness of earth, they shall "behold the King in His beauty." "The King's daughter," all glorious without, "all glorious within"—"her clothing of wrought gold"—resplendent without with the robes of righteousness—and radiant within with the beauties of holiness—shall be brought "with gladness and rejoicing," and "enter into the King's palace."

This will form the full meridian of the saints' glory—the essence and climax of their new-born bliss—the full vision and fruition of a Savior-God. "When He shall appear, we shall see Him as He is!" The first sight which will burst on the view of the Risen ones will be Jesus! His hands will wreath the glorified brows, in the presence of an assembled world, with the crown of life. From His lips will proceed the gladdening welcome—"Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

But this will not exhaust the elements of bliss in the case of the "perfected just" on the day of their final triumph. Though the presence of their adorable Redeemer would be enough, and more than enough, to fill their cup with happiness, there will be others also to welcome them, and to augment their joy. Lazarus' Lord was not alone at the sepulcher's brink, at Bethany, ready to greet him back. Two beloved sisters shared the joy of that gladsome hour. We are left to picture for ourselves the reunion, when, with hand linked in hand, they re-traversed the road which had so recently echoed to the voice of mourning, and entered once more their home, radiant with a sunshine they had imagined to have passed away from it forever!

So will it be with the believer on the morning of the Resurrection. While his Lord will be there, waiting to welcome him, there will be others ready with their presence to enhance the bliss of that gladdening restoration.



Those whose smiles were last seen in the death-chamber of earth, now standing—not as Martha and Mary, with the tear on their cheek and the furrow of deep sorrow on their brow, but robed and radiant in resurrection attire, glowing with the anticipations of an everlasting and indissoluble reunion! Can we anticipate, in the resurrection of Lazarus, our own happy history? Yes! happier history, for it will not then be to come forth once more, like him, into a weeping world, to renew our work and warfare, feeling that restoration to life is only but a brief reprieve, and that soon again the irrevocable sentence will and must overtake us! Not like him, going to a home still covered with the drapery of sorrows—a few transient years and the mournful funeral tragedy to be repeated—but to enter into the region of endless life—to pass from the dark chambers of corruption into the peace and glories of our Heavenly Father's joyous Home, and "so to be forever with the Lord!"

Sometimes it is with dying believers as with Lazarus. Their Lord, at the approach of death, seems to be absent. He who gladdened their homes and their hearts in life, is, for some mysterious reason, away in the hour of dissolution; their spirits are depressed; their faith languishes; they are ready to say, "Where is now my God?" But as He returned to Bethany to awake His sleeping friend, so will it be with all his true people, on that great day when the arm of death shall be forever broken. If now united to Him by a living faith—loved by Him as Lazarus was, and conscious, however imperfectly, of loving Him back in return—we may go down to our graves, making Job's lofty creed and exclamation our own, "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see Him for myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!"

One remark more. We have listened to the Omnipotent fiat—"Lazarus, come forth!" We have seen the ear of death rousing at the summons, and the buried captive goes free! Shall we follow the family group within the hallowed precincts of the Bethany dwelling? Shall imagination pour her strange and mysterious queries into the ear of him who has just come back from that land from whose precincts no traveler returns? He had been, in a far truer sense than Paul in an after year, in "Paradise." He

must have heard unspeakable and unutterable words, "which it is not possible for a man to utter." He had looked upon the Sapphire Throne. He had ranged himself with the adoring ranks. He had strung his harp to the Eternal Anthem. When, lo! an angel—a "ministering one"—whispers in his ear to hush his song, and speed himself back again for a little season to the valley below. Startling mandate! Can we suppose a remonstrance to so strange a summons? What! to be uncrowned and unglorified!—Just after a few sips of the heavenly fountain, to be hurried away back again to the Valley of Baca!—to gather up once more the soiled earthly garments and the pilgrim staff, and from the pilgrim rest and the victor's palm to encounter the din and dust and scars of battle! What! just after having wept his final tear, and fought the last and the most terrible foe, to have his eye again dimmed with sorrow, and to have the thought before him of breasting a second time the swellings of Jordan!

"The Lord has need of you," is all the reply. It is enough! He asks no more! That glorious Redeemer had left a far brighter throne and heritage for him. Lazarus, come forth! sounds in his old world-home, where his spirit had soared, and in his beloved Master's words, on a mightier embassy, he can say—"Lo, I come! I delight to do Your will, O my God."

Or do other questions involuntarily arise? What was the nature of his happiness while "absent from the body?" What the scenery of that bright abode? Had he mingled in the goodly fellowship of prophets? Had he conversed with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? Was his spirit stationary—hovering with a brotherhood of spirits within some holy limit—or, was he permitted to travel far and near in errands of love and mercy? Had Bethany been revisited during that mysterious interval? Had he been the unseen witness of the tears and groans of his anguished sisters?

But hush, too, these vain inquiries. We dare not give rein to imagination where Inspiration is silent. There is a designed mystery about the circumstantial of a future state. Its scenery and locality we know nothing of. It is revealed to us only in its character. We are permitted to approach its gates, and to read the surmounting inscription, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Further we cannot go. Be it ours, like Lazarus, to attain a fitness for heaven, by becoming more and more like Lazarus' Redeemer!

"We shall be LIKE HIM," is the brief but comprehensive Bible description of that glorious world. Savior-like here, we shall have heaven begun on earth, and lying down like Lazarus in the sweet sleep of death, when our Lord comes, on the great day-dawn of immortality, we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness!

## **THE BOX OF OINTMENT**

"Six days before the Passover ceremonies began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man He had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with fragrance." John 12:1-3

Once more we visit in thought a peaceful and happy home-scene in the same Bethany household. The severed links in that broken chain are again united.

How often in a time of severe bereavement, when some "light of the dwelling" has suddenly been extinguished, does the imagination fondly dwell on the possibility of the wild dream of separation passing away; of the vacant seat being refilled by its owner—the "loved and lost one" again restored. Alas! in all such cases, it is but a feverish fantasy, destined to know no fulfillment. Here, however, it was indeed a happy reality.

"Lazarus is dead!" was the bitter dirge a few brief weeks ago; but now, "Lazarus lives!" His silent voice is heard again—his dull eye is lighted again—the temporary pang of separation is only remembered to enhance the joy of so gladsome a reunion.

It was on His final Sabbath evening, when Spring's loveliness was carpeting the Mount of Olives and clothing with fresh verdure the groves around Bethany, that our blessed Redeemer was seen approaching the

haunt of former friendship. He had for two months taken shelter from the malice of the Sanhedrin in the little town of Ephraim and the mountainous region of Perea, on the other side of the Jordan. But the Passover solemnity being at hand, and His own hour having come, He had "set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." It is more than probable that for several days He had been traveling in the company of other pilgrims coming from Galilee on their way to the feast. He seems, however, to have left the festival caravan at Jericho, lingering behind with His own disciples in order to secure a private approach to the city of solemnities. They were completing their journey on the Sabbath, just as the sun was sinking behind the brow of Olivet, and, turning aside from the highway, they spent the night in their old Bethany retreat.

Befitting tranquil scene for His closing Sabbath—a happy preparation for a season of trial and conflict! It is well worthy of observation, how, as His saddest hours were drawing near—the shadow of His cross projected on His path—Bethany becomes more and more endeared to Him. Night after night, during this memorable week, we shall find Him resorting to its cherished seclusion. As the storm is fast gathering, the vessel seeks for shelter in its best-loved haven.

Imagine the joy with which the announcement would be received by the tenants—"Our Lord and Redeemer is once more approaching!" Imagine how the great Conqueror of death would be welcomed into the home consecrated alike by His love and power. Now every tear dried! The weeping that endured for the long night of bereavement all forgotten. Ah! if Jesus were loved before in that happy home, how, we may well imagine, would He be adored and revered now. What a new claim had He established on their deepest affection and regard. Feelingly alive to all they owed Him, the restored brother and rejoicing sisters with hearts overflowing with gratitude could say, in the words of their Psalmist King—"You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to You and not be silent. O Lord My God, I will give You thanks forever!"

But does the love and affection of that household find expression in nothing but words? Supper is being made ready. While Martha, with her

usual activity, is busied preparing the evening meal—doing her best to provide for the refreshment of the travelers—the gentle spirit of Mary (even if her name had not been given, we would have known it was she) prompts her to a more significant proof of the depth of her gratitude. Some fragrant ointment of spikenard—contained, as we gather from the other Evangelists, in a box of Alabaster—had been procured by her at great cost; either obtained for this anticipated meeting with her Lord, or it may in some way have fallen into her possession, and been sacredly kept among her treasured gifts until some befitting occasion occurred for its employment. Has not that occasion occurred now? On whom can her grateful heart more joyously bestow this garnered treasure than on her beloved Lord. With her own hands she pours it on His feet. Stooping down, she wipes them, in further token of her devotion, with her loosened tresses, until the whole apartment was filled with the sweet perfume.

And what was it that constituted the value of this tribute—the beauty and expressiveness of the action? She gave her Lord the best thing she had! She felt that to Him, in addition to what He had done for her own soul, she owed the most valued life in the world—

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,  
Nor other thought her mind admits;  
But, he was dead, and there he sits,  
And He that brought him back is there.  
Then one deep love does supersede  
All other, when her ardent gaze  
Raves from the living brother's face,  
And rests upon the Life indeed.  
All subtle thought, all curious fears,  
Borne down by gladness so complete;  
She bows, she bathes the Savior's feet  
With costly spikenard and with tears."

What a lesson for us! Are we willing to give our Lord the best of what we have—to consecrate time, talents, strength, life, to His service? Not as many, to give Him the mere dregs and sweepings of existence—the wrecks of a "worn and withered life"—but, like Mary, anxious to take every opportunity and occasion of testifying the depth of obligation under

which we are laid to Him? Let us not say—"My sphere is lowly, my means are limited, my best offerings would be inadequate." Such, doubtless, were the very feelings of that humble, modest, yet loving one, as she crept noiselessly to where her pilgrim-Lord reclined, and lavished on His weary limbs the costliest treasure she possessed. Hundreds of more imposing deeds—more princely and munificent offerings—may have been left unrecorded by the Evangelists; but "wherever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall be told for a memorial of her."

Would that love to "that same Jesus" were with all of us more paramount than it is! "Do you love Me more than these" is His own searching test and requirement. Is it so?—Do we love Him more than self or sin—more than friends or home—more than any earthly object or earthly good; and are we willing, if need be, to make a sacrifice for His glory and for the honor of His cause? Happy for us if it be so. There will be a joy in the very consciousness of making the effort, feeble and unworthy as it may be, for His sake, and in acknowledgment of the great love with which He has loved us.

Let it be our privilege and delight to give Him our pound of spikenard, whatever that may be; and if we can give no other, let us offer the fragrant perfume of holy hearts and holy lives. That religion is always best which reveals itself by its effects—by kindness, gentleness, amiability, unselfishness, flowing from a principle of grateful love to Him who, though unseen, has been to us as to the family of Bethany—Friend, and Help, and Guide, and Portion. Mary's honor was great to anoint her Lord, but the lowliest and humblest of His people may do the same. We may have no aromatic offering, neither "gold, nor frankincense, nor myrrh;" but My son, My daughter, "give Me your heart!" "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

Nor ought we to forget our blessed Lord's reply, when Judas objected to the waste of the ointment, "Let her alone; . . . the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me." Let us seek to make the most of our Lord's visits while we have Him.

The visits of Jesus to Bethany were soon to be over—so also with us. He will not always linger on our thresholds, if our souls refuse to receive Him, or yield Him nothing but coldness and ingratitude in return for His love. "You do not always have Me." Soon may sickness incapacitate for active service! Soon may opportunities for doing good be gone, and gone forever! Soon may death overtake us, and the alabaster box be left behind, unused and unemployed; the dying regret on our lips—"Oh that I had done more while I lived for this most precious Savior! but opportunities of testifying my gratitude to Him are now gone beyond recall."

Good deeds performed on Gospel motives, though unknown and unvalued by the world, will not go unrecompensed or unowned by Him who values the cup of cold water given in His name. "God is not unmindful to forget our work of faith and our labor of love." The Lamb's Book of Life registers every such deed of lowly piety; and on the Great Day of account "it shall be produced to our eternal honor, and rewarded with a reward of grace, though not of debt."

Let us bear in mind, also, that every holy service of unostentatious love exercises a hallowed influence on those around us. We may not be conscious of such. But, if Christians indeed, the sphere in which we move will, like the Bethany home, be redolent with the ointment perfume. A holy life is a silent witness for Jesus—an incense-cloud from the heart-altar, breathing odors and sweet spices, of which the world cannot fail to take knowledge. Yes! were we to seek for a beautiful allegorical representation of pure and undefiled Religion, we would find it in this loveliest of inspired pictures. Mary—all silent and submissive at the feet of her Lord—only permitting her love to be disclosed by the holy perfume which, unknown to herself, revealed to others the reality and intensity of her love. True religion is quiet, unobtrusive, seeking the shade—its ever-befitting attitude at the feet of Jesus, looking to Him as all in all.

Yet, though retiring, it must and will manifest its living and influential power. The heart broken at the cross, like Mary's broken box, begins from that hour to give forth the hallowed perfume of faith, and love, and obedience, and every kindred grace. Not a fitful and vacillating love and service, but ever emitting the fragrance of holiness, until the little world

of home-influence around us is filled with the odor of the ointment.

"I ask You for the daily strength,  
To none that ask denied;  
And a mind to blend with outward life,  
While keeping by Your side;  
Content to fill a little space  
If You be glorified.

"And if some things I do not ask  
In my cup of blessings be,  
I would have my spirit filled the more  
With grateful love to Thee,  
More careful not to serve You much,  
But to please You perfectly."

Such is a brief sketch of this beautiful domestic scene, and its main practical lessons—a green spot on which the eye will ever love to repose, among the "Memories of Bethany."

It is unnecessary to advert to the controverted question, as to whether the description of the anointing, which took place in the house of Simon the leper, and where the alabaster box is spoken of, be identical with this passage, or whether they refer to two distinct occasions. The question is of no great importance in itself—the former view (that they are descriptions of one and the same event) seems the more probable. It surely gives a deep intensity to the interest of the narrative to imagine the Leper and the raised dead man, seated at the same table together with their common Deliverer, glorifying their Savior-God, with bodies and spirits they felt now to be doubly His!

Simon, it is evident, must have been cured of his disease, else, by the Jewish law, he dared not have been associating with his friends at a common meal. How was he cured? How else may we suppose was that inveterate malady subdued but by the omnipotent word of Him, who had only to say—"I will, be made whole!" May we not regard him as a standing miracle of Jesus' power over the diseased body, as Lazarus was the living trophy of His power over death and the grave. The one could



testify—"This poor man cried, and the Lord saved him, and delivered him out of all his troubles." The other, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul must now have dwelt in silence!"

In order to explain the circumstance of this family meeting being in the house of Simon, there have not been lacking advocates for the supposition, that the restored leper may have been none other than the parent of the household. It is not for us to hazard conjectures, where Scripture has thrown no light. Even when sanctioned by venerated names, the most plausible hypothesis should be received with that caution requisite in dealing with what is supported exclusively by traditional authority. Were, however, such a view as we have indicated correct (which is just possible, and there is nothing in the face of the narrative to render it improbable), it certainly would impart a new and fresh beauty to the picture of this Feast of gratitude. Well might the parent's heart swell within him with more than ordinary emotions!—Himself plucked a victim from the most loathsome of diseases! He would think, with tearful eye, of the dark dungeon of his banishment—the leper-house, where he had been gloomily excluded from all fellowship with human sympathies and loving hearts. His own children condemned by a severe but righteous necessity to shun his presence—or when within sound of human footfall or human voice, compelled to make known his presence with the doleful utterance—"Unclean! Unclean!" He would think of that wondrous moment in his history, when, shunned by man, the GOD-MAN drew near to him, and with one glance of His love, and one utterance of His power, He bade the foul disease forever away!

Nor was this all that Simon (if he were, indeed, the father of the family) must have felt. What must have been those emotions, too deep for utterance, as he gazed on the son of his affections, seated once more by his side! A short time ago, Lazarus had been laid silent in the adjoining sepulcher—Death had laid his cold hand upon him—the pride of his home had been swept down. But the same Almighty Friend who had caused his own leprosy to depart, had given him back his lost one. They were rejoicing together in the presence of Him to whom they owed life and all its blessings. Oh, well might "the voice of rejoicing and salvation be heard in the tabernacles of these righteous ones!"

Well might the head of the household dictate to Mary to "bring forth their best" and bestow it on their Deliverer—the costliest gift which the dwelling contained—the prized and valued box of alabaster, and pour its contents on His feet! We can imagine the theme, if not the words, of their joint anthem of praise—"Bless the Lord, O our souls, and do not forget all His benefits, who forgives all our iniquities, who heals all our diseases, who redeems our lives from destruction, and crowns us with loving-kindness and with tender mercy."

But be all this as it may, that same great Physician of Souls still waits to be gracious. He heals all our diseases. Young and old, rich and poor, every type of spiritual malady has in Him and His salvation its corresponding cure. The same Lord is rich to all who call upon Him. To the ardent Martha, the contemplative Mary, the aged Simon, Lazarus the loving and beloved—He has proved friend, and help, and Savior to all; and in their several ways they seek to give expression to the depth of their gratitude.

Happy home! may there be many such among us! Fathers, brothers, sisters, "loving one another with a pure heart fervently," and loving Jesus more than all! Seeking to have Him as the ever-welcomed guest of their dwelling—feeling that all they have, and all they are, for time or for eternity, they owe to Him who has "brought them out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set their feet upon a rock, and established their goings, and put a new song in their mouth, even praise unto our God!"

Yes! having the Lord, we have what is better and more enduring than the best of earthly ties and earthly homes. This must have been impressed with peculiar force on aged John, as in distant Ephesus he penned the memories of this evening feast. Where were then all its guests?—the recovered leper, the risen Lazarus, the devout sisters, the ardent disciples—all gone!—none but himself remained to tell the touching story. No, not all!—ONE remained amid this wreck of buried friendship—the adorable Being who had given to that Bethany feast all its imperishable interest was still within him and about him. The rocky shores of Patmos, and the groves around Ephesus, echoed to the well-remembered tones of the same voice of love. His best Friend was still left to take loneliness from

his solitude. He writes as if he were still reclining on that sacred bosom—"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ!"

Reader! take "that same Jesus" now as your Friend—receive Him as the guest of your soul; and when other guests and other friendships are vanished and gone, and you may be left like John, as the alone survivor of a buried generation—"alone! and yet you will not be alone!"—lifting your furrowed brow and tearful eye to Heaven, you may exclaim, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?"

## **PALM BRANCHES**

The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A huge crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet Him. They shouted, "Praise God! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!"  
John 12:12-13

We have just been contemplating a beautiful episode in the Bethany Memories—a gleam amid gathering clouds. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus! With what happy hearts did they hail the presence of their Lord on the evening of that Jewish Sabbath! Little did they anticipate the events impending. Little did they dream that their Almighty Deliverer and Friend would that week be sleeping in His own grave! These were indeed eventful hours on which they had now entered. The stir through Palestine of the thousands congregating in the earthly Jerusalem to the great Paschal Feast, was but a feeble type of the profound interest with which myriad angel-worshipers in the Jerusalem above were gathering to witness the offering of the True Paschal Sacrifice, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

On the morning after the supper at Bethany, the Savior rose from His couch of needed rest to approach Jerusalem. The reserve hitherto maintained as to His kingly power is now to be set aside. "The hour has come in which the Son of man is to be glorified." BETHANY is one of the

few places associated with recollections of the Redeemer's royalty. The "despised and rejected" is, for once, the honored and exalted. It is a glimpse of the crown before He ascends the cross; a foreshadowing of that blessed period when He shall be hailed by the loud acclaim of earth's nations—the Gentile hosanna! mingling with the Hebrew hallelujah!, welcoming Him to the throne of universal empire.

Multitudes of the assembled pilgrims in the city, who had heard of His arrival, crowded out to Bethany to witness the mysterious Being, whose deeds of mercy and miracle had now become the universal theme of converse. His mightiest prodigy of power in the resurrection of Lazarus had invested His name and person with surpassing interest. We need not wonder, therefore, that Bethany, "the town of Mary and her sister Martha" should attract many worshipers from Jerusalem, to behold with their own eyes at once the restored villager and his Divine Deliverer! In fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, the meek and lowly Nazarene, seated on no lordly war-horse, but on an unbroken colt, and surrounded with the multitude, sets forth on His journey.

The village and the desert were then all alive (as they still are once every year at the Greek Easter) with the crowd of Paschal pilgrims moving to and fro between Bethany and Jerusalem. Had the Redeemer's mission been on (the infidel theory) a successful imposture, what an opportunity now to have availed Himself of that outburst of popular fervor, and to have marched straight to take possession of the hereditary throne of David. The populace were evidently more than ready to second any such attempt; the Sanhedrin and Jewish authorities must have trembled for the result. The hosannas, borne on the breeze from the slope of Olivet, could not fail to sound ominous of coming disaster. So incontrovertible indeed had been the proof of Lazarus' resurrection, that only the most blinded bigotry could refuse to own in that marvelous act the divinity of Jesus. In addition, too, to this last crowning demonstration of omnipotence, there were hundreds, we may well believe, in that procession, who, in different parts of Palestine, had listened to His gracious words, and witnessed His gracious deeds. What other, what better Messiah could they wish than this—combining the might of Godhead with the kindness and tenderness of a human philanthropist

and friend?

Is He to accept of the crown? No, by a lofty abnegation of self, and all selfish considerations, He illustrates the announcement made by Him, a few hours later, in Pilate's judgment-hall, as to the leading characteristic of that empire He is to set up in the hearts of men—"My kingdom is not of this world." He will be, indeed, one day to be hailed alike King of Zion and King of Nations, but a bitter baptism of blood and suffering had meanwhile to be undergone. No glitter of earthly honor—no carnal dreams of earthly glory—would divert Him from His divine and gracious undertaking. He would save others—Himself He would not save.

Let us pause for a moment, and ponder that significant chorus of praise which on Olivet arose to the Lord of Glory. How interesting to think of the vast and varied multitude gathered around the Conqueror! Many, doubtless, assembled from curiosity, who had never seen Him before, and had only heard of His fame in their distant homes; others, from feelings of personal love and gratitude, were blending their voices in the shout of welcome. Think, it may be, of Bartimeus, now gazing with his unsealed eyes on his Divine Deliverer. Think of Mary Magdalene, her heart gushing at the remembrance of her own sin and shame, and her adorable Redeemer's pardoning and forgiving mercy! Nicodemus, perhaps, no longer seeking to travel by stealth, under the shadow of night, to hold a confidential meeting; but in the full blaze of day, and before assembled Israel, boldly recognizing in "the Teacher sent from God," the promised Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of Mankind.

Shall we think of Lazarus too, fearless of his own personal safety, venturing to follow his guest with tearful eye, the multitude gazing with wonder on this living trophy of death? We may think of the very children, as He entered the temple, uplifting their infant voices in the general welcome—pledges of the myriad little ones who, in future ages, were to have an interest in "the kingdom of God."

May not Olivet be regarded on this occasion as a type of the Church triumphant in Heaven—Jesus enthroned in the affections of a mighty multitude which no man can number—old and young, great and small, rich and poor—casting their palms of victory at His feet, and ascribing to

Him all the glory of their great salvation? Let us ask, have we received Jesus as our King?—have our palm branches been cast at His feet? Feeling that He is alike willing and mighty to save, have we joined in the rapture of praise—"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord to save us?" Have our hearts become living temples thrown open for His reception? Is this the motto and superscription on their portals—"This is the gate of the Lord, into which the Righteous One shall enter!"

Jesus refused and disowned none of these acclamations—He spurned no voice in all that motley Jerusalem throng. There were endless diversities and phases, doubtless, of human character and history there. The once proud formalist, the once greedy extortioner, the hated tax-gatherer, the rich nobleman, the child of poverty, the Roman officer, the peasant or fisherman of Galilee, the humbled publican, the woman from the city, the reclaimed victim of misery and guilt! All were there as types and samples of that diversified multitude who, in every age, were to own Him as King, and receive His gracious blessing.

We have spoken of this incident as a glimpse of glory before His sufferings. Alas! it was but a glimpse! What a picture of the fickleness and treachery of the heart!—That excited populace who are now shouting their Hosannahs, are before long to be raising the cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Four days later we shall find the palm branches lying withered on the Bethany road, and the blazing torches of an assassin-band near the very spot where He is now passing with an applauding retinue! "Cease trusting in man, whose breath is in his nostrils."

It does not belong to our purpose to record the remaining transactions of this day in Jerusalem. The shades of evening find the Savior once more repairing to Bethany. The evangelist Mark, in the course of his narrative, simply but touchingly says—"And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple, and when He had looked round about upon all things (the mitred priests, the bleeding victims, the costly buildings), and now the eventide had come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve."

As He returned to the sweet calm of that quiet home, if He could not fail to think of the hours of darkness and agony before Him, could He reap no joy or consolation in the thought, that shortly the redemption of His

people was to be consummated—the glory that surrounded the grave and resurrection of Lazarus was to be eclipsed by the marvels of His own!

## **THE FIG-TREE**

The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. He noticed a fig tree a little way off that was in full leaf, so He went over to see if He could find any figs on it. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard Him say it. Mark 11:12-14

The Hosannahs of yesterday had died away—the memorials of its triumph were strewed on the road across Olivet—as, early on the Monday morning, while the sun was just appearing above the Mountains of Moab, the Divine Redeemer left His Bethany retreat, and was seen re-traversing the well-worn path to Jerusalem. Here and there, were Fig plantations. The adjoining village of Bethphage (lit. "the house of figs") derived its name from the Green Fig. Indeed, fig-trees may still be seen overhanging the ordinary road from Jerusalem to Bethany, growing out of the rocks of the solid mountains, which, by the prayer of faith, might be removed and cast into the distant Mediterranean Sea.

An incident connected with one of these is too intimately identified with the Redeemer's last journeys to and from the home of His friend to admit of exclusion from our "Bethany Memories." These memories have hitherto, for the most part, in connection at least with our blessed Lord, been soothing, hallowed, encouraging. Here the "still small voice" is for once broken with sterner accents. In contrast with the bright background of other sunny pictures, we have, standing out in bold relief, a withered, sapless stem, impressively proclaiming, in unusual utterances of wrath and rebuke, that the same hand is "strong to smite," which we have witnessed so lately in the case of Lazarus was "strong to save."

The eye of Jesus, as he traversed the rocky path with His disciples, rested

on a fig-tree. It seems not to have been growing alone, but formed part of a group or plantation on one of the slopes or ravines of Olivet. Its appearance could not fail to challenge attention. It was now only the Passover season (the month of April); summer—the time for ripe figs—was yet distant. And as it is one of the peculiarities of the fig-tree that the fruit appears before the leaves, a considerable period, in the ordinary course of nature, ought to have elapsed—before the foliage was matured. Jesus Himself, it will be remembered, on another occasion, spoke of the putting forth of the fig-tree leaves as an indication that "summer was near." It must have been, therefore, a strange and unusual sight which met the eye of the travelers as they gazed, in early spring, on one of these trees with its full complement of leaves—clad in full summer luxuriance. While the other fig-trees in the plantation, true to the order of development, were yet bare and leafless, or else the buds of spring only flushing them with verdure, the broad leaves of this premature (and we may think at first favored) plant—the pioneer of surrounding vegetation—rustled in the morning breeze, and invited the passers-by to turn aside, examine the marvel, and pluck the fruit.

We may confidently infer that Jesus, as the Omniscient Lord of the inanimate creation, knew well that there was no fruit under that pretentious foliage. We dare not suppose that He went expecting to find figs; far less, that in a moment of disappointed hope, He ventured on a capricious exercise of His power, uttered a hasty malediction, and condemned the insensible boughs to barrenness and decay. The first cursory reading of the narrative may suggest some such unworthy impression. But we dismiss it at once, as strangely at variance with the Savior's character, and strangely unlike His customary actings. We feel assured that He literally, as well as figuratively, would not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." He came, in all respects, "not to destroy, but to save." Some deep inner meaning, not apparent on the surface of the inspired story, must have led Him for the moment to regard a tree in the light of a responsible agent, and to address it in words of unusual severity.

What, then, is the explanation? Our Lord on this occasion revives the old typical or picture-teaching with which the Hebrews were to that hour so



familiar. He, as the greatest of prophets, adopts the significant and impressive method, frequently employed by the Prophets of Israel, who, in uttering startling and solemn truths, did so by means of symbolic actions. As Jeremiah of old dashed the potter's vessel down the Valley of Hinnom, to indicate the judgments that were about to befall Jerusalem; or, at another time, wore around his own neck a wooden yoke, to intimate their approaching bondage under the King of Babylon; or, as Isaiah "walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder to Egypt and Ethiopia," so did our Lord now invest a tree in silent nature with a prophet's warning voice, and make its stripped and blighted boughs eloquent of a nation's doom!

On the height of their own Olivet, looking down, as it were, on Jerusalem, that fig-tree becomes a stern messenger of woe and vengeance to the whole house of Judah. Often before had He warned by His words and tears; now He is to make an insignificant object in the natural world take up His prophecy, and testify to the degenerate people at once the cause, the suddenness, and the certainty of their destruction! Let us join, then, the Master and His disciples, as they stand on the crest above Bethany, and, gazing on that fruitless leaf-bearer, "hear this parable of the fig-tree."

Jesus, on approaching it (it seemed to be at a little distance from their path), and finding abundance of leaves, but no fruit thereon, condemns it to perpetual sterility and barrenness. A difficulty here occurs on the threshold of the narrative. If, as we have noted, and as Mark tells us, "the time of figs was not yet"—why this seeming impatience? why this harsh sentence for not having what, if found, would have been unseasonable, untimely, abnormal? In this apparent difficulty lies the main truth and pith of the parable. The doom of barrenness, be it carefully noted, was uttered by Jesus, not so much because of the absence of fruit, but because the tree, by its premature display of leaves, challenged expectations which a closer inspection did not realize. "It was punished," says an able writer, "not for being without fruit, but for proclaiming, by the voice of those leaves, that it had such. Not for being barren, but for being false."

Graphic picture of boastful and vaunting Israel! This conspicuous tree, near one of the frequented paths of Olivet, was no inappropriate type,

surely, of that nation which stood illustrious amid the world's kingdoms—exalted to heaven with unexampled privileges which it abused—proudly claiming a righteousness which, when weighed in the balances, was found utterly lacking. It mattered not that the heathen nations were as guilty, vile, and corrupt as the chosen people. Fig-trees they were, also—naked stems; fruitless and leafless; but then the heathen made no boastful pretensions. The Jews had, in the face of the world, been glorying in a righteousness which, in reality, was only like the foliage of that tree by which the Lord and His disciples now stood—mocking the expectations of its owner by mere outward semblance and an utter absence of fruit.

The very day preceding, these mournful deficiencies had brought tears to the Savior's eyes—stirred the depths of His yearning heart in the very hour of His triumph. He had looked down from the height of the mountain on the gilded splendors of the Temple Courts beneath; but, alas! He saw that sanctimonious hypocrisy, and self-righteous formalism had sheltered themselves behind clouds of incense. Mammon, covetousness, oppression, fraud, were rising like strange fire from these defiled altars! He turns the tears of yesterday into an expressive and enduring parable today! He approaches a luxuriant Fig-tree, boasting great things among its fellows, and thus through it He addresses a doomed city and devoted land—"O House of Israel," He seems to say, "I have come up for the last time to your highest and most ancient festival. You stand forth in the midst of the nations of the earth clothed in rich verdure. You retain intact the splendor of your ancestral ritual. You boast of your rigid adherence to its outward ceremonial, the punctilious observance of your fasts and feasts. But I have found that it is but 'a name to live.' You sinfully ignore 'the weightier matters of the law: judgment, justice, and mercy!' You call out as you tread that gorgeous temple—"The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord are we!" You forget that your hearts are the Temple I prize! Holiness, the most acceptable incense—love to God, and love to man, the most pleasing sacrifice. All that dead and torpid formalism—that mockery of outward foliage—is to Me nothing. 'The incense you bring Me is a stench in My nostrils! Your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath day, and your special days for fasting—even your most pious meetings—are all sinful and false. I want nothing more to do with them.' These are only as

the whitewash of your sepulchers to hide the loathsomeness within—'the rottenness and dead men's bones!' If you had made no impious pretensions, I would not have dealt so sternly with you. If like the other trees you had confessed your nakedness, and stood with your leafless stems, waiting for summer suns, and dews, and rains, to fructify you, and to bring your fruit to perfection—all would be well; but you have sought to mock and deceive me by your falsity, and thus precipitated the doom of the cumberer. Henceforth, let no one eat fruit of you forever!"

The unconscious Tree listened! One night passed, and the morrow found it with drooping leaf and blighted stem! On yonder mountain crest it stood, as a sign between heaven and earth of impending judgment. Eighteen hundred years have taken up its parable—fearfully authenticated the averments of the Majestic Speaker! Israel, a bared, leafless, sapless trunk, testifies to this hour, before the nations, that "heaven and earth may pass away, but God's words will not pass away!"

"The fig-tree, rich in foliage, but destitute of fruit, represents the Jewish people, so abundant in outward shows of piety, but destitute of its reality. Their vital sap was squandered upon leaves. And as the fruitless tree, failing to realize the aim of its being, was destroyed, so the theocratic nation, for the same reason, was to be overtaken, after long forbearance, by the judgments of God, and shut out from His kingdom."—Neander.

But does the parable stop here? Was there no voice but for the ear of Judah and Jerusalem? Have we no part in these solemn monitions? Ah! be assured, as Jesus dealt with nations so will He deal with individuals. This parable-miracle solemnly speaks to all who have only a name to live—the foliage of outward profession—but who are destitute of the "fruits of righteousness." It is not neglecters or despisers—the careless—the infidel—the scorner—our Lord here addresses. He deals with such elsewhere. It is rather vaunting hypocrites—wearing the garb of religion—the trappings and dress of outward devotion to conceal their inward pollution; like the ivy, screening from view by garlands of fantastic beauty—wreaths of loveliest green—the moldering trunk or loathsome ruin!

We may well believe none are more obnoxious to a holy Savior than such. He (Incarnate TRUTH) would rather have the naked stem than the

counterfeit blossom. He would rather have no gold, than be mocked with tinsel and base alloy! "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!" says He, speaking to one of His Churches at a later time. He would rather a man openly avowed his enmity than that he should come in disguise, with a traitor-heart, among the ranks of His people.

Oh that all such ungodly boasters and pretenders would bear in mind, that not only do they inflict harm on themselves, but they do infinite damage to the Church of God. They lower the standard of godliness. Like that worthless Fig-tree, they help to hide from others the glorious sunlight. They intercept from others the refreshing dews of heaven. They absorb in their leaves the rains as they fall. Many a tuft of tiny moss, many a lowly plant at their feet, is pining and withering, which, but for them, would be bathing its tints in sunshine, and filling the air with balmy fragrance!

Solemn, then, ought to be the question with every one of us—every Fig-tree in the Lord's plantation—How does it stand with me? am I now bringing forth fruit to God? for remember what we are NOW, will fix what we shall be when our Lord shall come on the Great Day of Scrutiny! We are forming now for Eternity; settling down and consolidating in the great mold which ultimately will determine our everlasting state. If we are fruitless now, we shall be fruitless then. The principle in the future retribution is thus laid down—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

The demand and scrutiny of Jesus will on that day be, not what is the number of your leaves, the height of your stem, the extent of your branches! not whether you have grown on the wayside or in the forest, been nurtured in solitude or in a crowd, on the mountain-height or in the lowly valley! All will resolve itself into the one question—Where is your fruit? What evidence is there that you have profited by My admonitions, listened to My voice, and accepted My salvation? Where are your proofs of love to Myself, delight in My service, obedience to My will? Where are the sins you have crucified, the sacrifices you have made, the new principles you have nurtured, the amiability and love and kindness and generosity and unselfishness which have supplanted and superseded

baser affections?

See that the leaves of outward profession do not become a snare to you. You may be lulling yourselves to sleep with delusive opiates! You may be making these false coverings an excuse for not "putting on of the armor of light." One has no difficulty in persuading the tenant of a wretched hovel to consent to have his mud-hut taken down; but the man who has the walls of his dwelling hung with gaudy drapery, it is hard to persuade him that his house is worthless and his foundation insecure. Do not think that privileges or creeds, or church-sect or church-membership, or the Shibboleth of church-party will save you. It is to the heart that God looks. If the inner spirit be right, the outer conduct will be fruitful in righteousness. Make it not your worthless ambition to appear to be holy, but be holy!

Live not a "dying life"—that blank existence which brings neither glory to God nor good to men. Seek that while you live, the world may be the better for you, and when you die the world may miss you. Unlike the pretentious tree in our parable-text, be it yours rather to have the nobler character and recompense, so beautifully delineated under a similar figure three thousand years ago—"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season. His leaf, also, shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper."

Let us further learn, from this solemn and impressive miracle, how true Christ is to His word. We think of Him as true to His promises; do we think of Him, also, as true to His threatenings? Judgment, indeed, is His strange work. Amid a multitude of other miracles already performed by Him, this "cursing of the fig-tree" formed the exclusive exception to His miracles of mercy. All the other miracles were proofs and illustrations of beneficence, compassion, love. But He seems to interpose this one, in case we should forget, in the affluence of benignity and kindness, that the same God, whose name and memorial is "merciful and gracious," has solemnly added that "He can by no means clear the guilty."

He would have us to remember that there is a point beyond which even His love cannot go, when the voice of ineffable goodness must melt and merge into tones of stern wrath and vengeance. The guilty may, for the

brief earthly hour of their impenitence, despise His divine warnings, and laugh to scorn His solemn expostulations. Sentence may not be executed speedily; amazing patience may ward off the inevitable blow. They may, from the very forbearance of Jesus, take impious encouragement to defy His threats, and rush swifter to their own destruction. But come He will, and must, to assert His claims as "He who is HOLY, He who is TRUE."

The disciples, on the present occasion, heard the voice of their Master. They gazed on the doomed Fig-tree, but there seemed at the moment to be no visible judgment on its leaves. As they took their final glance before passing on their way, no blight seemed to descend, no worm to prey on its roots. The fowls of Heaven may have appeared soaring in the sky, eager to nestle as before on its branches, and to bathe their plumage on the dewdrops that drenched its foliage. But was the word of Jesus in vain? Did that fig-tree take up a responsive parable, and say, "Who made You a ruler and a judge over me?"

The Lord and His apostles passed that same place a few hours afterwards on their return to Bethany. But though the Passover moon was shining on their path, the darkness, and perhaps the distance from the highway, veiled from their view the too truthful doom to be revealed in morning light. As the dawn of day finds them once more on their road to Jerusalem, the eyes of the disciples wander towards the spot to see whether the words of yesterday have proved to be indeed solemn verities. One glance is enough! There it stands in impressive memorial. One night had done the work. No desert whirlwind, if it had passed over it, could have effected it more thoroughly. Its leaves were shriveled, its sap dried, its glory gone. Ever and always afterwards, as the disciples crossed the mountain, and as they gazed on this silent "preacher," they would be reminded that Jehovah-Jesus, their loving Master, was not "a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent."

Ah! Reader, learn from all this, that the wrathful utterances of the Savior are no idle threats. He means what He says! He is "the Faithful and True witness;" and though "mercy and truth go continually before His face," "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." You may be scorning His message—lulling yourself into a dream of guilty indifference. You may see in His daily dealings no sign or symbol of

coming retribution; you may be echoing the old challenge of the presumptuous scoffer—"Where is the promise of His coming?" The fig leaves may have lost none of their verdure—the sky may be unfretted by one vengeful cloud—nature around you, may be hushed and still. You can hear no footsteps of wrath; you may be even tempted at times to think that all is a dream—that credulity has allowed itself to be duped by a counterfeit tale of superstitious terror!

Or if, in better moments, you awake to a consciousness of the Bible averments being stern realities, your next subterfuge is to trust to that rope of sand to which thousands have clung, to the wreck of their eternities—an indefinite dreamy hope in the final mercy of God! that on the Great Day the threatenings of Jesus will undergo some modification; that He will not carry out to the very letter the full weight of His denunciations! that the arm which love nailed to the cross of Calvary will sheathe the sword of avenging retribution, and proclaim a universal amnesty, to the thronging myriads at His tribunal!

No! O man, who are you that replies against God? Come to the fig-tree near Bethany, and let it be a silent attesting witness to the Savior's unswerving and immutable truthfulness! Or, passing from the sign to the thing symbolized, behold the Jewish nation which God has for eighteen centuries set up in the world as a monument of His undeviating adherence to His Word. See how, in their case, to the letter He has fulfilled His threatenings. Is not this fulfillment intended as an awful foreshadowing of eternal verities: if He has "spared not the natural branches," do you think He will spare you? "If these things were done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

Mourners! You for whose comfort these pages are specially designed, is there no lesson of consolation to be drawn from this solemn "memory?" Jesus smote down that fig-tree—blasted and blighted it. Never again did He come to seek fruit on it. Ten thousand other buds in the Fig-forest around were opening their fragrant lips to drink in the refreshing dews of spring; but the curse of perpetual barrenness rested on this one tree! He has smitten you also, but it is only to heal. He has bared your branches—stripped you of your verdure—broken "your staff and your beautiful rod;" but the pruning hook has been used to promote the vigor of the tree; to

lop off the needless branches, and open the stems to the gladsome sunlight. Murmur not! Remember, but for these loppings of affliction you might have bloomed into the lush luxuriant growth of mere external profession. You might have rested satisfied with the outward display of Religiousness, without the fruits of true Religion. You might have lived and died unproductive cumberers, deceiving others and deceiving yourselves.

But He would not allow you to linger in this state of worthless barrenness. Oh! better far, surely, these severest cuttings and incisions of the pruning knife, than to listen to the stern words—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone!" It is the most terrible of all judgments when God leaves a sinner undisturbed in his sinfulness—abandons him to "the fruit of his own ways, and to be filled with his own devices;" until, like a tree impervious to moistening dews and fructifying heat, he dwarfs and dwindles into the last hopeless stage of spiritual decay and death!

"If you endure chastening—God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chastens not?" "He prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

## **THE PILLAR IN THE NIGHT**

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## **Preface**

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Exodus 13:21-22

This book is addressed to those in AFFLICTION. There is a touching tradition, to which he has elsewhere referred, regarding the Jewish Temple of old, that it had a gateway reserved exclusively for mourners. Such is the present volume. It opens up a pathway to God's sanctuary trodden by the footsteps of sorrow. It is sacred to dimmed eyes, and broken hearts, and tender memories. Moreover, though not exclusively, it is the wide family of the bereaved the writer has chiefly in view.

A few words on the TITLE. Nothing is more impressive in the desert journeys of the Israelites, than the miraculous moving Pillar which preceded them. That Pillar, as they advanced by day, took the form of a column: when they halted, it spread itself over the tabernacle as a canopy of cloud. It was nothing else than the Shekinah—the visible symbol of the Divine Presence. It resolved itself into a flaming fire by night; an equally glorious emblem, under the star-lit vault of heaven, of Jehovah's guidance. "Gathering up its luminous folds," it led the sacramental host in silence along plateau and valley. Rising high, it was seen far and wide by the vast caravan: the gleam—the lurid coruscation—now lighting up the mysterious cliffs of the Mount of God, now projected through wastes of sand to the rim of the horizon, creating, athwart leagues of desert, an illuminated golden pathway. It had even a gracious natural use. As the day-cloud tempered the tremulous palpitating heat, screening from the glare of sunlight—"the sun shall not smite you by day,"—so the holy fire, kindled at the setting in of darkness, helped to disperse the damps and chill dews of night. Regarding both aspects of the one Pillar, it could be said, in the words of the Book of Proverbs, "When you go it shall lead you: when you sleep it shall keep you: and when you awake it shall talk with you," (Prov. 6:22).

The flaming column, moreover, it may not be out of place to note, continued its significant lessons in the Gospel age. In the anniversary Jewish festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, when at each returning autumn in Palestine the wilderness journeyings were commemorated, the impressive symbol was not forgotten. During the day, the leafy encampments (Succoth) on the Mount of Olives and in the environs of Jerusalem, rehearsed the old nomad life with its "dwelling in tents." After the hour of sunset, the torches carried by the crowd; above all, the gigantic candelabra, lighted high on the Temple platform, and which illuminated hill and valley, terraced vineyard and olive grove, as well as court and cloister, recalled the glow of "the Pillar in the night"—while, at the same great gathering, Christ, with purposed allusion, revealed Himself as the true Pillar of Fire—"I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12).

With Israel, the mystic type left its varied memories, by the Red Sea,

Migdol, Elim, Marah, Rephidim, Horeb; until, Jordan reached, its light was needed no more. So is it associated still, in a deeper spiritual sense, with all the diverse experiences of "the pilgrims of the night." Could there possibly be a more significant emblem of God's constant presence, His protecting care and love, His sympathy specially in the deep gloom of bereavement? When human helps are gone, when moon and stars, human luminaries and satellites have paled in the skies, and the way is pursued in loneliness and darkness, He lights a beacon in "the sea of the desert." A Pillar, gleaming with ruby splendor appears, respecting which this is the Divine legend on the lips of many a child of sorrow—"He LED them all the night with a LIGHT of fire."

Yes, the Jehovah of the Pillar which moved along the Sinai route, keeps nightly vigil over His people still; and it is not in one trial, but in all trials—"Your faithfulness (marginal rendering) in the nights" (Psalm 92:2). "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." He makes the night of pain and separation and death, luminous. "The great and terrible wilderness" becomes a Peniel; so that the experience of His people is often that of a kindred patriarch-sufferer, "By His light I walked through darkness" (Job 29:3), or, of another, "If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me" (Psalm 139:11).

Of how many among the white-robed multitude above, who have "come out of great tribulation,"—those who are done with the desert and crossed the typical Jordan—may it be said, in the remembrance of the fiery Pillar, "It gave light by night to these!" (Exod. 14:20). Happy, O Israel, of all ages, amid the dreadful sanctities of sorrow, to be bathed in that "excellent glory"; to love God's own beacon, gleaming with love and promise, illuminating your darkened way, until you reach the land where, in His full vision and fruition, symbol is unneeded—for "there shall be no night there"; "The Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60:20). Pause, meanwhile, under the radiance of the Pillar, and make it your prayer—"If Your presence goes not with me, carry us not up hence." Hear the gracious response, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exod. 33:14, 15).

Affliction has ever been the gracious season for revival, quickening, restoration. Remember, in the case of the Hebrew host, it was when the

night and its shadows were gathering, that the invocation—the sweet Angelus of the desert—was heard (may it have its responsive meaning in the case of many): "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel!" And when the last night of the journey arrives, may it be ours, under the gleam of the Pillar, to sing in the retrospect the refrain of the great Psalm of the Exodus: "To Him who led His people through the wilderness; for His mercy endures forever!"

## **THE COMFORTER AND HIS COMFORTS.**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." Isaiah 40:1

"Make a highway for the Lord through the wilderness. Make a straight, smooth road through the desert for our God." Isaiah 40:3

"Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together." Isaiah 40:5

"I, even I, am the one who comforts you." Isaiah 51:12

Then the Lord told him, "You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come to rescue them." Exodus 3:7-8

Though so far an echo of our prefatory words, this gleam of the Fiery Pillar may well occupy the opening meditation. What, in the darkest hour of trial, is so inspiring and solacing as the simple but sublime thought of the Divine Presence? God near to us, near to us continually; the Pillar emitting no fitful intermittent flame, but "all the night with a light of fire." He whom that light symbolized and enshrined, not only ordering our afflictions, but, in them all, identifying Himself with His people in

their time of trouble. "I know their sorrows,"—"I have come down to deliver them," were words spoken on the threshold of the Exodus.

Though they actually preceded the manifestation of the Cloud, we may well regard them as the key-note to the entire night-song of pilgrim Israel. The same assurance is thus expanded by a later Psalmist: "When the Israelites escaped from Egypt—when the family of Jacob left that foreign land—Judah became God's sanctuary, and Israel became his kingdom." He proceeds to tell how the Fiery Pillar was then kindled—kindled at the Red Sea, conducting through all the immensity of the wild desert and its darkness, until they reached the border river—"The SEA saw it and fled, JORDAN was driven back." In closing the same historic hymn, he renews the theme, as he asks the reason of this opening and closing—rather this continuous miracle. It is "the presence of the Lord—the presence of the God of Jacob" (Psalm 114:1, 2, 3, 7). The Jehovah of the burning bush—the Jehovah of the burning column—remained their Divine Consoler and Guide. Night-watch after night-watch the Pillar seemed to flash out the calming assurance, "I, even I, am He that comforts you!"

Afflicted one! this is still the gracious gleam in your deepest night of trial, "I have seen your affliction." Israel's God and His realized nearness is the supreme consolation. Human sympathy is soothing; often precious; indispensable. But it has its limitations, we may even say its shortcomings. There are times when no earthly comforter can meet your case or fathom the aching voids of your heart. Words of gushing condolence, doubtless well intended, are often mis-timed, an intrusion on the sacredness of sorrow. Great afflictions are too deep to be reached by words. Milton's "mute expressive silence" is generally the best way of dealing with such; and it is the Divine way.

You remember how He who was Himself the Prince of Sufferers—who understood all the finer feelings and intuitions of the soul—the divinely sympathetic Brother-Man, dealt in a recorded hour of bereavement? He takes His disciples aside from the crowd. "Come," said He, on hearing of the death of the Baptist, "Come apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark 6:31). He knew, with discriminating tenderness, that sorrow often most appreciates the shade; the responsive sigh, the pensive unspoken

look; the grasp of the hand, the unbidden tear—away from "the minstrels making a noise" (Matt. 9:23), the conventionalisms of consolation. True are the poet's words to his "Friend on the death of his sister"—

"With silence only as their benediction,  
God's angels come;  
Where, in the shadow of a great affliction  
The soul sits silent."

Reader, seek thus, in your hour of loneliness and sadness, to stand amid these "silences of heaven," and hear the whisper of love from Him who is the Author and Sender of your trial, and who best comprehends its severity: "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed" (marg. Look not around you), "for I am your God" (Isaiah 41:10). A writer tells us that the old motto of the Fatherland is still preserved in United Germany. It may be seen as a heraldic device, sometimes engraved on shrine or portal, or emblazoned on military standard, or heard as a war-cry amid the thunders of battle. It is the same which forms the chief watchword, the strength and support of the Christian in his "great fight of afflictions"—"God is with us".

Yet, alas! despite of this, the soaring wings of faith and trust will at times droop; the old reclaiming word may, and doubtless will intrude—"If the Lord be with us, why then has all this befallen us?" (Judges 6:13). There is no response, no solace, save in the simple words of acquiescence—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight!" (Matt. 11:26). Trial ever has been, and ever will be, His method of parental dealing. He employs it as the ballast of the soul—it steadies the ship. The angels of affliction conduct "through the wilderness." Their herald-cry is in the words of one of our motto-verses—"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).

The Desert—He calls us, as He did Philip of old, from beautiful Samaria, with its groves and gardens, its rippling streams and healthful breezes—it may be from our appointed human work, imperious claims and urgent responsibilities—to Gaza, which is desert (Acts 8:26). The way to the Kingdom is by the way of the Cross. It is he "going forth weeping, bearing precious seed," who at last is rewarded with the harvest reaping and the

harvest-home (Psalm 126:6). Those who have traveled amid the sandy wastes and scant herbage of the Pillar-route know well that the dew falls thickest (most drenching) after a day of burning heat. The dews of the Spirit's grace fall most copiously after the heat of fiery trial. It is then the promise of the Divine Comforter is made good, "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (Hosea 14:5).

"When we walked," says Richter, "under the forest aisles in summer, the foliage hid from us God's sweet skies. But it was only when the desolating winds of winter had made the branches bare, that through those very black and naked boughs we could all the better discern God's eternal guiding star." It is the midnight sea, ploughed by the keel of trial, in which a brighter and better than natural illumination is manifested. In that most beautiful of inspired idylls, the Bride of the Song is represented as saying, "By night I sought Him whom my soul loves" (Sol. Song. 3:1).

"The Pillar in the night" of our volume was light in a cloud: a lustrous gleam in a cloudy setting. It is said of God, "He makes the clouds His chariot" (Psalm 104:3). "A great cloud with the fire infolding itself" (Ezek. 1:4). It is for us, therefore, to feel assured, that the clouds of life, often so gloomy, are in reality "the chariots of God." This thought inspires a living poet's invocation—

"Oh, make my clouds Your chariots; so shall I learn to see  
That the mist that dims, the glory is itself a light from Thee;  
For the shadows of the wilderness to me shall sing aloud,  
When I find Your nearest coming, in the advent of a cloud."  
—Sacred Songs.

I may close this meditation with two thoughts regarding the Divine Comforter and His comforts.

(1) He is an UNCHANGING Comforter. He survives all trials, all vicissitudes. He is the living Fountain that remains ever fresh, ever flowing, over-flowing, when other surroundings are crumbling, or have crumbled to decay. Our oldest and best writer of historical romance speaks thus of a Well, which in a former century was close by one of the ancestral palaces of England: "This fountain of old memory had been once adorned with architectural ornaments in the style of the sixteenth

century. All these were now wasted and overthrown, and existed only as moss-covered ruins: while the living spring continued to furnish its daily treasures, gushing out amid disjointed stones, and bubbling through fragments of ancient sculpture." In a far higher, diviner sense is this typical of the true "Well of Water springing up unto everlasting life."

"They shall perish, but You remain." Lover and friend may be put far from you and your acquaintance into darkness: the face and the place that once knew you may know you no more. "They truly were many, because they were not allowed to continue by reason of death." But the voice steals down from the lips of Him who is changeless among the changeable, "I am He who lives and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore!" Go, weave this word-pattern in your web of sorrow, "My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26). "I, even I, am He that comforts you."

(2) My second thought is, that He is the SOLITARY comforter.

These are the words of the great Leader of the Hebrew host: "Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard? Know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him" (Deut. 4:33, 35). "None else" can comfort. It is the avowal of every child of trial—"In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Your comforts (alone) have refreshed my soul" (Psalm 94:19, Prayer Book version). These comforts are His exclusive remedies. The world, with all its garish blessings and fascinations, cannot give them. The world with all its tribulations cannot take them away. Philosophy and the schools can yield no such solvent. Affliction baffles the most profound earthly forces and panaceas.

In these our days there is many an intellectual triumph to be recorded. All hearts may well pulsate with pride as we hear of the ever-increasing victories in the realm of science. Honor to its experts and votaries—they may well be laurel-crowned. But what can science, in the zenith of her achievements, do for us amid the deepening floods of trial? With all her spoils and trophies can she utter the longed-for assuring word, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you"? (Isaiah 43:2). In the darkest hour of all, what response has she to give to the Prophet's anxious



question "How will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5). There is but One who can say, "Through the rivers, they shall not overflow you," "I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners" (Isaiah 57:18). "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and Your billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalm 42:7, 8).

As the Pillar of the desert was formed of one isolated column or cloud, with no other to support it, so is He all-sufficient in Himself: wiser than all others, kinder than all others, independent of all others. Though it may be no more than a legend—one amid many such told of in the desert march and in connection with the Pillar-cloud, it may here be recalled. It was on the occasion of the death of Aaron. Moses was commanded to announce to his beloved brother that Aaron was about to die. In doing so (thus runs the Jewish tradition) the great leader and lawgiver let fall many tears. Ascending Mount Nebo together, Moses still weeping all the way, they came at last to a large cavern in the rock, where a couch with funeral trappings was prepared and ready. Aaron was calm and composed; Moses still wept sorely. "Why, Moses," said the other, "are you so in tears?" "Because," was the reply, "when our sister Miriam died, I had you to be with me in the hour of death. Now, when that comes I shall die alone." "No, brother, not alone: Jehovah will be with you. He will smooth your dying pillow. He will close your eyes, and be better unto you than all mourners and funeral rites. God shall be in the place of brother or sister." And the legend thus touchingly closes, "the word of Aaron came true."

"All men forsook me," was the plaint of Paul, in the Mamertine dungeon, with a violent death before him—"Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:16, 17). "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?" He, alone, as in the case of His apostle, can relax the galling chain, brighten the lonely prison and the lonely spirit. He alone can wipe the tear-dimmed eye. He alone understands the sob of a broken heart—"I am bereaved!" (Gen. 43:14). Think of Him, rejoice in Him, as what the old divines call "the upmaking Portion,"—all sufficient from center to circumference; no fantasy, but a

living, loving, Divine Personality: "The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). "I, even I, am He who comforts you."

Believe it, you sufferers. Believe that trial is the thunder-cloud with a rainbow often sleeping in its depths: that it is the door opening to the inner chamber where we are invited to touch the King's golden scepter. A quaint writer says, "He demands tribute-money from us; and Affliction is His 'Receipt of Custom.'" "Tarry here," are the words still of the suffering Master. Yes, tarry under the olive shade of your Gethsemane, whatever it is, and "watch with Me." Thus will your severest sorrows endear to you the nearness and presence of Him of whom alone it can be said, from His own deep heartfelt experience—"In all their afflictions He was afflicted!"

And then, trust this all-comforting God for the future. He will read, in His own good time and way, the typical parable of our present volume. To quote the familiar words of the poet—

"By day, along the astonished lands  
The cloudy pillar glided slow;  
By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands  
Returned the fiery column's glow.

"And oh, when stoops over pilgrim-path,  
In shade and storm the frequent night,  
Be you long-suffering, slow to wrath,  
A burning and a shining light!"

Yes, the time will undoubtedly come when "in Your light we shall see light." The afflictions of the present resemble what the clefts and unsightly gashes were to the Israelites when encamped beneath the savage cliffs of Sinai. Their gloom and terror and mystery were all gone when beheld at the far distance in the flush of evening. So, too, will your experiences of trial be, when seen bathed in the glory of unsetting suns. What now is like the tolling of funeral bells will then appear rather to have been preparatory and preparation-chimes, ringing in the festal worshipers to the Church of the glorified. No purpose of God regarding you will remain unfulfilled—no flower uncrowned with blossom.

Lord! let nothing dim the brightness of the Pillar, in the midst of present

environing gloom! Let that gloom rather inspire me with greater ardor of heart and lip to pray, "I beseech You, show me Your glory!" Turn my night of weeping into a morning of joy. Let me hear the Prophet's refrain—the sweet promise of Your love—as a voice crying in the wilderness—

"Comfort, comfort my people says your God."

## **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."—Numbers 9:23

In the season of desolating bereavement no thought is more needed to comfort and sustain than that of the Divine Sovereignty.

Does affliction spring from the dust, and trouble from the ground? Are life and death regulated by nothing better than accident and chance? Are we at the mercy of second causes? Could suffering couches, sick-beds, and death-beds, have been averted by human foresight? Does God reign? or is this world abandoned to self-rule? At best, if Deity be acknowledged, is He only some abstract, arbitrary Impersonal Force, withdrawn to the sublime solitudes of space; as little conversant and sympathetic, as the fabled gods of Olympus were, with the needs and trials of His people? Or what is worse, "the God of thunderbolts"; inexorable, stern, and vengeful, as were the idols of the old Etruscans, or Kali and Vishnu of the Hindoos?

Though dismissing the last with its repellent terrorism, it is indeed not easy, at times, to rise, even in the case of those who own the Divine Fatherhood, above the tyranny of secondary agencies. The Sovereignty of the Supreme Controller is often confronted with human culpability. "If such and such only had been done. An oar, a floating spar, a grip of the hand, would in time have saved my child!" Timely precaution—a yard

farther apart, would have averted the lightning stroke, or escaped the precipice. An improvised rope, where the fire-escape was absent, would have prevented the most dreadful of catastrophes—"The Lord does not see, neither does the God of Israel regard." "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment has passed over from my God!" If not, why these unanswered prayers? Why, to these impassioned pleadings, is the earth as brass and the heaven as iron? Does Jehovah, or the twin scepters of Destiny and Fate, rule the Universe? "Why has the Lord our God done all this to us?" (Jer. 5:19)

Hush this covert or avowed atheism. "The Lord reigns; let the earth be glad" (Psalm 97:1). "Who knows not, in all these things, that the hand of the Lord has wrought this?" (Job 12:9). Never was the pillar of the desert a truer symbolic pledge than here. God goes before His people of every age "all the night with a light of fire." This world may, indeed, appropriately be called, as was the broad field at Shechem in a future age where Abimelech was crowned King—"the plain of the Pillar" (Judges 9:6). There flashes far and wide, farthest and widest in the deep midnight of trial, the gleam of the Divine Sovereignty. This is the legend for every human soul: it forms the history of Pilgrim-Israel now as of old—"And the Ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them to seek out a resting place for them" (Numb. 10:33). That Ark moved at the bidding neither of earthly leader nor priest. Its every movement was determined by the Divine Shepherd of Israel Himself—"the Angel of His Presence." In the words of our motto-verse, "At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed" (Numb. 9:23).

God's providences, to take a long-subsequent incident from one of our own centuries, are like the land-birds which hovered over the vessel of Columbus when he was all uncertain as to his track. "Let us follow them in their course," said his seamen. The explorer hearkened to the wise counsel. Before long the shore was hailed and the anchorage of a new world secured. There is no halfway truth—we must own and follow the guiding Pillar; and recognize, step by step, encampment after encampment, the presence of the All-seeing God has beset me behind and before, and has laid His hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5). The old Patriarch,

in that same Arabian desert, grasped and antedated a true Christian philosophy, when he turned away from all devil-born suggestions of second causes: sandstorm, whirlwind and lightning, flash of Sabaeen sword and spear. Gazing devoutly out of his darkness, he owned alone the dealings and decrees of a Personal God. His cries have been the stay as well as the rebuke of many a sufferer under a brighter dispensation—"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken" (Job 1:21). "Behold He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who will say unto Him, What do You?" (Job 9:12). "He knows the way that I take" (Job 23:10).

Yes, stricken one! be assured this is the rudimentary truth in theology, the foundation-article in the creed of the afflicted—"God Himself has done it" (Isaiah 38:15). "Jehovah Shammai!" (The Lord is there). Make it your endeavor—your prayer, to listen first, and before all else, to the Voice from the Column which says—"I have appointed that trial, these hours of agonizing suspense, that pining sickness, that wasted body, that impaired mind, that early grave. Think of Me also in your minutest sorrows and their accompaniments. Think of Me, not as a powerful agency occupied only with great things and momentous events; condescending alone to guide the solemn march of stars or the revolution of kingdoms: think of Me, rather, as fixing the dew-drop on the stem, penciling the unseen flower of the desert, sculpturing the snow-wreath, controlling the undulation of the waves—watching the drop of every leaf in the forest."

Things have a relative proportion and magnitude in the eye of man. They are called large and small. There are no such terms in the Divine vocabulary. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures to all generations. (Yet) the Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all those who are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14). He feeds the young ravens when they cry. "He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand" (Dan. 4:35). "Cast your burden He has given you (R.V.) on the Lord" (Psalm 55:22).

Believe, as very essential to your present comfort, that there can be no minimizing of this Divine power and control. Seek to say with the Minstrel King in His hour of great sorrow, "I will be silent, I will open not

my mouth, because YOU did it." Seek that the too merited reproach against the old Hebrew multitude in the desert may not be yours—"Yet in this thing you did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way you should go" (Deut. 1:33).

The voice from the Pillar may at times be MYSTERIOUS. It may be heard in thunder-tones; but it is God's voice notwithstanding. Yes, and be assured, there is a Divine necessity for it. It may be in the shadow of His hand that He hides us (Isaiah 49:2). But He knows us better, He loves us better, than to leave us unchastened and unchallenged. He sees it would not be well if our path lay all through the sunlight of Beulah. We can confide in His wisdom and power, His grace and love—that He will keep us no longer in the furnace than is absolutely needful. He who lighted it, is seated by, tempering the fury of the flames.

The main lesson of this meditation ought to be that of the former—child-like, unwavering trust in the Great Supreme. Beware of misinterpreting His dealings; even when teaching by stern lessons. Much is now in a foreign tongue. All will be translated in heaven. Present experiences of "sorrow " will be rendered into "memories of His great goodness."

"God can read it; we must wait;  
Wait til He teach the mystery;  
Then the wisdom-woven history  
Faith shall read and love translate."

"He disciplines us for our profit" will then at least be the unhesitating avowal. "He that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. 5:5). The King's daughter, all glorious within, will, through the endless ages, be adorned in "her clothing of wrought gold" (Psalm 45:13). Even now we can exult in the assurance that these same angels of affliction spoken of in our last, marshaled and commissioned by the Lord of Hosts, are, on the loom of sorrow, "working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

Reader, you may thus well proceed under the solemn gleam and guidance of your Pillar, rejoicing that every turn in the desert is known to God, that

in night watches of profoundest gloom you are under the sleepless eye of Israel's unslumbering Shepherd. May your experience be, "By His light I walked in darkness." Let patience, and devout recognition of His sovereign hand, be known and read of all men. See that the broken alabaster vase may fill the whole home of your influence with its fragrance. So that of others who, in the endurance of similar trials, have failed fully to own the Divine appointment, it may be said, "They have heard that You, Lord, are in the midst of this people; for You, Lord, are seen face to face; and Your cloud stands over them. "The Lord guided them by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. That way they could travel whether it was day or night." Exodus 13:21

## MEMORIES

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old."—Psalm 77:11.

"I will remember You from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—Psalm 42:6.

The psalmists of Israel loved with reiterated interest to recall the memories of the pillar of cloud and fire—the varied incidents in the desert march. "O God, when you led your people from Egypt, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured rain before you, the God of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. You sent abundant rain, O God, to refresh the weary Promised Land." (Psalm 68:7, 8, 9). "Your way is in the sea, and Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps are not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm 77:19,20). In seasons of trial a similar rehearsing in thought of our personal and individual histories cannot fail to be profitable, comforting, strengthening. This is peculiarly so in times of severe bereavement, when tempted, at first, in a spirit of hasty impatience, to say with the faithless, desponding Prophet, "It is better for

me to die than to live." In such a retrospect of the Divine doings and dealings, we may well contemplate the mingled faithfulness and love of Him who has "led us all our life long"; ever proving Himself true to His desert name and memorial, "The Lord God, merciful, gracious, long-suffering," "staying His rough wind in the day of His east wind," "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb," "in wrath remembering mercy." The rehearsal is surely calculated to moderate grief and foster trust and lowly submission; prompting, amid present sadder experiences, to say, "I will abundantly utter the memory of Your great goodness and talk of Your righteousness."

The second of our motto-verses, though it has no reference to the Arabian desert, contains a like re-traversing of the pilgrim way by the greatest of the psalmists. During his exile in the land of Gilead, his throne for the time lost, and deeper heart-sorrows gathering around him, he revives his fainting spirit and waning fortunes by recalling some never-to-be-forgotten experiences associated with help and deliverance—some Ebenezers, we know not what they were, in the Valley of the Jordan, by the slopes of Hermon, or on "the hill Mizar." As he opened these windows of the soul each had some consolatory vista-view, each had some memory of blessing which inspired and reassured him for the future. And not in exceptional times and exigencies alone did he revive these pillar-gleams of a chequered life. When he reached the end of the wilderness, the brink of the border river—in that most magnificent of all his Psalms, the 18th (as the superscription informs us in 2 Sam. 22), he unfolds his experiences at yet greater length. It is a record of reminiscences—gleam on gleam, flash on flash, of the Column of Fire, giving the God he served the praise of all: "He gives strength"—"BY MY GOD." He embraces, too, even such minute providences as the rush through the enemy's troop, the snapping of the foeman's bow of steel, and the agile leap—the bounding over the fortress-wall which saved his life (vv. 22-30).

He does not indeed seek to disguise the occasional mystery of the Divine dealings, the glooms as well as the gleams of the Pillar. "He bowed the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under His feet" (Psalm 18:9). "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the sky" (v. 11). But taking a



cumulative view of life, he sees no purpose of God in him unfulfilled. He owns redemptive ministries in every event of his existence, summing up the long catalogue with the attestation—"As for God, His way is perfect" (v. 30).

Observe yet further, in this great heart-hymn (the swan-song, written "when God had delivered David from all his enemies"), these rehearsals—records of the past—inspire him with confidence for the days that are yet to come, and for the final day of all. He reverently gazes on the wilderness pillar with its reflected lights, and resolves undeviatingly to follow.

Read its prologue: "I love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust: my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower (v. 1, 2). For You will light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (v. 28).

Pilgrim of sorrow! in the midst of your present affliction, be what it may, seek to remember "all the way by which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness." Subscribe the roll of His suffering children with the wilderness testimony—"They called upon the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke unto them in the cloudy pillar" (Psalm 99:6, 7). Mingled, with you, as with the kingly mourner of Zion, will—must be, the retrospect. At this moment your past is overshadowed by the gloom of a present chastisement. That chastisement, moreover, may be of no ordinary severity. Is it bereavement—the removal of one who seemed the indispensable companion of the pilgrimage, who worked with you, toiled with you, anticipated your every wish, abridged your every care, shared with quick sympathy your every sorrow and anxiety? Now the gushing fountain of joyous existence has ceased to flow. But if you are true in these memories, you will not fail, you cannot fail, even though standing amid the shadows of the Valley, to recall the "goodness and mercy that have followed you all the days of your life"; the hospices that have sheltered you; the ministering angels who once guarded you, though they have surrendered earthly trusts for higher ones.

Even in the most chequered of human existences there is more of May than December; the darkest horizon is rainbow-spanned; the bright spots

outnumber the dreary. No, no—deal faithfully with God and with yourself. Life is not one uniform leaden sky loaded with weeping clouds. Life is not all music in the minor-key—far less a crash of discord and dissonance. It is rather made up of blended harmonies. The key-note of its long sonata should rather be "Mercy rejoices over judgment." Take one solace among a hundred others. Though deprived now of visible helps and comforters, nothing can defraud you of the "treasures of memory." The past can never find a vacant place in your library of thought. No page can be torn from any of its volumes. All is sacredly recorded. In these sunny memories you can bask. Your shadows are in front, and your sun is behind you.

Then, if you rise to the truly elevated view of the Divine dealings, have not your very trials already proved, or will they not in the future prove, as they were designed to be, aids in the prosecution of the journey, gleams of pillar-light in the midnight march, new spiritual forces assisting in the up-building of faltering purposes and in the reaching of noble ideals? Naturalists tell us of some migratory birds which, in being carried high by contrary winds, are thus helped onwards in their flight. So, many, buffeted with the adverse storms of trial (what Augustine calls "the severe discipline of the Lord's mercy") have, with weary, drooping wings, been driven to loftier regions and stimulated to loftier purposes. Savonarola avows how, in his case, crushed affection—the dissolved dream of young life—awoke hitherto slumbering aspirations, and raised his whole being to a consecrated mission for God and man.

Happy those whose trials thus serve to bring them near to the ever-living, ever-loving One; rousing from the dream of earth, with its often poor cares and debasing secularities, to have their lips attuned to another stanza in the sweet singer of Israel's canticle—"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God. He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears" (18:6). "They confronted me in the day of my calamity: but the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; He delivered me, because He delighted in me" (18:18, 19).

"I see the desolated ground  
With dews of heavenly kindness fed,

And fruits of joy and love surround  
The heart which You have comforted."

The refrain of David's "Psalm of the Exile" is "Hope in God" (Psalm 42:5). Beautiful, at that crisis-hour of his life, was his calm resignation—the absolute resolving, for good or for evil, his own will into that of a Higher. "If," says he, in words uttered on this same occasion, elsewhere recorded, "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back again. ...Behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good unto Him" (2 Sam. 15:25, 26).

Be it yours to aim after a similar spirit of lowly acquiescence, whatever the dealings of God may be. Your duty—your bliss—is to ask no questions, or attempt to solve the insoluble, but simply to wait and follow the guiding Pillar in the spirit of an older patriarch, "faint, yet pursuing" (Judges 8:4). The time will come when "in God's light you will see light"; when, with eyes opened and mysteries solved in whole or in part, you will own the rectitude of Christ's rebuke of unfaithfulness, "Didn't I say unto you, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

It is well, too, to note the Divine order generally in these scenes of changeful and chequered life. The sequence is sorrow first, joy afterwards—the bitter first, the sweet afterwards—the cloud first, the rainbow in it afterwards. Our Marahs and Elims are strangely near and united, just as they were in the successive encampments of Israel in the wilderness. Bonar, who beautifully notes this in his travels through the "Desert of Sinai," goes on to say: "In token, we broke off a small branch of palm from one of these Elim trees, and laying it on the similar branch we had brought from Marah, we tied them together, to be kept in perpetual memorial, not merely of the scenes, but of the truth which they so vividly teach."

Aged Jacob at first uttered the hasty verdict that for him there was nothing but "the bitter well." But he had a calmer one at last—"his spirit revived." So the day is assuredly coming when rest will follow the toil and stress of battle, sunshine follow gloom; when bereavement will interpret its often misunderstood mission; when we shall see the present apparently shapeless and incomplete building standing forth in the

beautiful proportions of Eternity; our fallen and scattered blossom making way for the immortal fruit; the Pillar of the night projecting on the sands far back to the receding horizon a trail of brightness, a pathway of golden promises now luminously fulfilled; our loved ones, we thought we had lost, waiting for us at the Gate, with the cry and the welcome —"We are all here!" (Acts 16:28).

I like the closing words in the following beautiful sentence from one of the great masters of thought and feeling of our age, as he speaks of the remembrance of sorrows here, and the blessed watchers yonder: "Their voices, common enough to other ears, fraught to us with unnumbered memories of life, have become the natural music of earth...To forget, it cannot be. We daily pass through places which are the shrine of a thousand recollections; we are startled by tones which pour on us a flood of conviction; we open a book, and there is the very name; we write a date, and it is an anniversary. ...That is the most filial hope which, regarding the brotherhood of man as an inference from the paternity of God, looks to heaven as to another home" (Martineau).

Let these interweaved memories and hopes be summed up in the lines of a living singer—

"I go to sleep, but sleep itself reveals  
The phantoms of a day that long is fled,  
And through the land of shadows softly steals  
The figured presence of the loved and dead.

"O Live in God, and your dead past shall be  
Alive forever with eternal day;  
And planted on His bosom you shall see  
The flowers revived that withered on the way."  
—Sacred Songs.

"Your goodness is so great! You have stored up great blessings for those who honor you. You have done so much for those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world." Psalm 31:19

## **SICKNESS SOOTHED**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I said, In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of the grave."—  
Isaiah 38:10 (R.V.).

"The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: You will  
make all his bed in his sickness."—Psalm 41:3.

"This sickness is...for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be  
glorified thereby."—John 11:4.

"O Lord, by these things men live."—Isaiah 38:16.

One desert experience to which we may well early advert, an experience  
to which truly may be given the designation of "Night," is the season of  
bodily pain and suffering. Is there no flash of the Pillar of Fire, in the  
shape of consolation and comfort, here?

Let none make light of physical prostration. Only those who have passed  
through the ordeal can tell of its severity; specially where prostration is  
combined with acute anguish. Afflictions cannot well be compared. It is  
wrong and needless to do so. But, while mental agony, the pang of  
bereavement, as well as other forms of unspoken suffering intenser still,  
have their terrible environments, the couch of sickness has a gloom all its  
own. In other phases of trial there are mitigations—lulls in the storm; the  
sweet influences of nature, the sympathy of friends, and so on. But calm  
rest is simply impossible when every nerve is racked with torture. Day  
and night seem to have no room for other than the one monotonous dirge  
—the passionate questioning—"When shall I rise and the night be  
gone?"—"Would God it were evening! would God it were morning!"

"All night I kept my lone and silent vigil,  
And looked in vain  
For kindly sleep to soothe my restless tossings  
And set me free from pain.  
I watched until the dawn's first doubtful glimmer  
Stole through my curtained room,  
And broke with pale grey lights and greyer shadows

Its formless gloom."—Caillard.

And then, say as we may, there is generally deepest mystery in these experiences. Bereavement has its appropriate, accepted solaces; the sweet memories of buried love; above all, the thought of the bright Beyond. But these weary vigils of throbbing pain seem to forbid respite. The world's pleasures, lavishly granted to others, seem strangely, I had almost said cruelly, denied and withdrawn. In many cases the poor flickerings of life are all that remain; the long fierce battle is too surely a losing one—  
"And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave!"

Yes, to many, bereavement has its higher, loftier solaces: the Bible, with its promises; prayer, with its strengthenings; the House of God, with its teachings. But in the case of the sufferer on his couch, even Holy Scripture for the time is, in many cases, a sealed book: the gates of prayer are closed; the footpath to the Mercy-seat is weed-grown. The distant Sabbath bells only convey the remembrance of hallowed associations with "the multitude that kept holiday." There is around nothing but an immensity of darkness! Other broken harps have their surviving strings and lingering chords; but the sick man gazes only on "the harp on the willows"—life's sweetest music fails to charm, loving looks fail to be recognized, loving words wake up no responsive smile—the vital springs of being are shattered. In bereavement, God's righteousness is "like the great mountains": it is patent, visible. But often, in sickness, His judgments are hidden from human view in an unsounded "deep!" What then? After such an indictment as this, does light from the wilderness Column for the first time seem impossible? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there?" Can we only discern the dismal side of the Pillar—all cloud, no brightness. If we see our Lord, is it only as the disciples saw Him in their midnight sea? Supposing Him to be an avenging angel, a spirit from the deep, "they cried out for fear!" Or, if the peril increases, can we do no more than hold our breath while life is trembling in the balance and the King of terrors passing by?

There is balm, not from Gilead and its mountains of myrrh, but from the everlasting hills of heaven. The flaming Presence is there; and "gives light

by night to these." Let us seat ourselves under its gleam and gather a few thoughts of comfort.

Tried one, think of all you are now suffering as needed discipline—the strange but sure pledge of a Father's love. These weary days and nights, be assured, are "appointed," to train you for Himself, His work and service now, and for His beatific presence hereafter. Builders at times construct new houses out of ruins. God often does so. From ruined shattered frames He builds up new spiritual dwellings, everlasting habitations. Without that discipline you would miss precious lessons. You would willingly evade these; but the evasion would involve sensible loss—a deprivation of moral and spiritual strength. It is no mere hollow sentiment, but a proved experience from the memory of long sickness: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71). "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so will You recover me, and make me to live" (Isaiah 38:16).

"If any of you have ever stood and watched moth or butterfly emerge from the cocoon, you will have noticed, after the first little opening, with what seemingly pained struggle the young wings are striving to free themselves. In your pity you take up the cocoon, and end the struggle by carefully cutting open the useless shroud and freeing the living winged creature. It is said that any such kindness simply means an undeveloped wing-power, by which the butterfly will never be able to soar and enjoy its life. That struggle is the needful condition of full wing-power. Men who cannot struggle can never soar" (Lovell).

To use a different illustration, no stroke of the chisel in the hand of the Great Craftsman is unnecessary. The soul, like the facets of the diamond, needs the best and sharpest tools to fashion it into a gem for the Redeemer's crown. This is specially true of those to whom the present meditation is addressed. Many an angel of resignation speeds up to heaven from the sick-couch with the message, "Made perfect through suffering."

Remember this, you who are now undergoing the desert experience, wandering through the wilderness "in a solitary way." There is no place, no occasion (just because of its dreariness and weariness) where God can

be more glorified than on a couch of pain, or where more real spiritual strength is imparted. In the words of one of our motto-verses, "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. You will make all his bed in his sickness" (Psalm 41:3). To use the familiar earthly phrase, how many in that peculiar school of suffering have "graduated with honors." They came out of "great tribulation." Tribulation—the threshing-flail—the grain-sifter, as the root-word imports, winnowing the husk from the seed. And this "tribulation" (taking the Apostle's words in his great chapter) "works" (not impatience, as we would have expected, but) "patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

It was the smitten rock of the desert that yielded the refreshing waters. Your own feeling, perhaps, may be that with you there can be no such stream; that pent up in that couch of disease and suffering, life is useless—effort for good is denied. You are like the wounded bird with broken wing struggling in the furrow; envying those around you in their capacity of flight and soaring. Perhaps, though reluctant to own it, you may be among the faithful toilers who have broken down, by reason of your very fidelity to duty. The bow was overstrained, and the bowstring has snapped; the harp-chord was overstrained, and the music has ceased. This is the history of many an arrested ministry at home or in the Mission-field. The life of excessive consecration has only paid its martyr penalties. Many a sick-bed sufferer reminds one of the Marechal Niel rose that flowers so luxuriantly as often to bloom itself to death. By the very profusion of goodness the root becomes weakened, the overloaded blossom exhausts the mortal energy. But, be still; God has work for you to do, when the wings are clipped and the eye is filmed. If activities are impossible, not so the exercise of the passive virtues.

While you may be bewailing curtailed opportunities and baffled purposes, you can in other ways "glorify Him in the fires." You may see in that shattered body of yours only the house in ruins of which I have spoken, while, in His sight and under His loving discipline, you may in truth be noiselessly rearing an angel-visited temple. Yours is a shadowed couch; but it is in "the shadow of His hand" He has "hidden you." You may be able to say nothing and to do nothing; yet you can remember, in your very helplessness, Milton's noble line—"They also serve who only stand and



wait."

"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him." Thus have many stricken souls, by patience and resignation under protracted anguish, been made preachers of righteousness; the chamber of suffering and the bed of languishing made as the House of God and the Gate of heaven! They have been unconsciously singing "Songs without words," and if called to depart, have left a trail of light behind them. The bereft, who long loved to watch that couch, will recall the "patience with joyfulness" of its occupant.

The following verses are from the "Swan-Song"—written on his death-bed, and found after his departure—of one of the best and best known of our hymn-writers. The place where Horatius Bonar penned the words gives emphasis to the silent farewell testimony—

"Long days and nights upon this restless bed  
Of daily, nightly, weariness and pain!  
Yet You are here, my ever-gracious Lord,  
Your well-known voice speaks not to me in vain  
'In Me you shall have peace!'

"The darkness seems long, and even the light  
No respite brings with it, no soothing rest  
For this worn frame; yet, in the midst of all,  
Your love revives. Father Your will is best.  
'In Me you shall have peace!'

"Sleep comes not, when most I seem to need  
Its kindly balm. Oh, Father, be to me  
Better than sleep; and let these sleepless hours  
Be hours of blessed fellowship with Thee.  
'In Me you shall have peace!'

"Father, the hour has come; the hour when I  
Shall with these fading eyes behold Your face,  
And drink in all the fullness of Your love.  
Until then, oh, speak to me Your words of grace—  
'In Me you shall have peace!'"

Above all, look, suffering one, to Him who among His other experiences as the Man of Sorrows knew, as no one else did, the combination of mental and bodily anguish. "He Himself bore our sicknesses." He, the Great Physician, has, in His Divine-human Person, walked the wards of the Hospital of humanity. If, as we believe, the strongest natures feel deepest—are often most sensitive to pain, surely in a Divine sense was this true of the Ideal Man—the Prince of sufferers—who alone could make the challenge, "Was there ever any sorrow like unto My sorrow?" "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "Yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." "The Lord," said Savonarola on the morning he was led out to execution, "suffered as much for me."

We cry in our agony, in weakness, failure, perplexity of heart, that there is no hope nor help. No hand seems to direct the storm, no pity listens. "God has forsaken us," we say. Do we say so and not recall the words which fell on that great victory on Calvary—fell from the Conqueror's lips, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" "Blackness of darkness and despair, and feebleness sinking without a stay: these are not failures. In these characters was written first the character of our deliverance: these are the characters in which it is renewed" (Hinton).

There is no verse in all the Bible that carries with it a more wondrous message of consolation to the couch of sore suffering than this—it identifies you with the suffering Christ—"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened to you: but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12, 13).

"O trust yourself to Jesus,  
When you are tried with pain,  
No power for prayer—the only thought  
How to endure the strain.

"Then is the hour for proving  
His mighty power in thee;  
Then is the time for singing,

'His grace suffices me.'

Come, O sufferer! and like the peasant woman of Galilee touch the hem of His garment. Listen, O sufferer! to the dual chimes floating across the river, under the last gleam of the Wilderness Pillar—"Neither shall there be any more pain." "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick."

## **CONSOLATION AND STRENGTH**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him."—Isaiah 57:18.

"Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days, so shall your strength be."—Deut. 33:25.

Both these verses take us to the desert of AFFLICTION under the canopy of its starless night.

The first consists, if I may so describe it, of a fourfold flash from the Pillar of Fire in the environing darkness—a fourfold promise with its graduated scale of consolation. God "sees" us, then He "heals" us, then He "leads" us; then, as the climax, He "comforts" the smitten heart.

It is He alone who does all this. His is the seeing, loving, sympathetic eye; His the healing touch, His the leading, guiding hand, His the restoring solaces. We may recall words of exquisite tenderness—parental love, in another similar voice from the Pillar, recorded in Jeremiah, where the Divine Speaker thus describes His dealings with His people in the wilderness (and they are a true emblem of His dealings with His afflicted Israel still). "In the day that I took them by the hand (like a father) to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (Jer. 31:32).

In the other verse—a verse more especially associated with the mystic column of the Exodus, (it forms one of the farewell utterances of the leader of the chosen race)—there is conveyed a lesson of trust for the

future. The "Israel of God," in the most comprehensive sense of the term, are exhorted, resolutely and bravely, to hold on their desert journey, with all its privations—wind-storm, hurricane, blinding sand driving in their faces, sharp stones bruising their weary feet. But He who sends their trials gives them pilgrim-garb and pilgrim-sandals specially suited for the roughest, thorniest, most rugged road: "Your shoes shall be iron and brass."

And then, if the future—that unknown, unrevealed future—obtrudes itself with trembling apprehensions, the fear of fearful things, strength is promised equal to the day: "As your days, so shall your strength be." The "marching orders" of the past are still addressed to the caravan of mourners in every age. "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." There is no time for lingering: camping in these "tents of Kedar." The wilderness way must be trodden. "Not" as an old writer has it, "are they to be carried, but with staff in hand to plod on as best they may." In the very effort of bearing tribulations, facing difficulties, and confronting duty, grace will be given.

It is indeed no small part of trial, especially after a lacerating bereavement, when the tendrils of the heart are wrenched from creature props, to face the world again; to encounter the old engagements; to toil through the old imperious mechanical drudgeries and grapple with the conventional commonplaces of life. But anything is better than becoming a prey to morbid feeling and querulous inaction. There is a Divine panacea in work. I was recently struck with this passage in a life of the greatest of the many great proconsuls of India, and a Christian besides, on hearing of the saddest of personal sorrows. It reminds us of what Tacitus relates of Agricola. "He wrote a line to his private secretary begging for work, no matter what kind." In another Biography of the day—these are the words of one as eminent in literature as the other was in statesmanship—"The troubles of labor" (sending a message to a friend in deep sorrow) "are God's most bountiful mercies on such occasions. Prayers and labor are the only consolations." Or, as this has been translated into verse, with a wise philosophy, by George Macdonald—"Weep, if you will, but weep not all too long,  
Or weep and work, for work will lead to song."

Elijah was miserable away from former activities, as he sat moping under his desert juniper tree, or crouched within the cave of Sinai. "Go, return on your way to the wilderness," was God's bracing command and antidote; and his crushed spirit revived. The solitudes of Horeb were left; the moodiness of the lonely life was exorcized in the resumption of the ministries of Jezreel and Carmel.

Mourner, go also your way under the shelter of the twofold saying—the twofold gleam of the Pillar—God's promised presence, and God's promised strength. Not aiming at getting the better of your trial—dulling it by some false opiate; but becoming the better for it, by grasping anew the pilgrim staff, and with girded loins pursuing your appointed way. Even if the darkness be gradually deepening, the fiery pillar is gradually brightening. It is a question of divine counterpoise and proportion. Strength adequate—more than adequate—for all emergencies.

As you are tempted at times to travel onwards with drooping head and faltering step, let the watchword of the primitive believers in their hours of "suffering affliction" be heard—"To heaven with your hearts". Let your response, like theirs, be—"We have raised them to the Lord!"

"Duty's path may thorny be,  
Steep may be her climbing;  
But upon her hill-top free,  
Sabbath bells are chiming."

Depend upon it—the day will come when His gentle, tender dealing will be owned and manifested—gracious illuminations from the flaming cloud. Standing on the other side of the river, with the wilderness discipline forever ended, you will then have no memory but this—"Your right hand has held me up, and Your gentleness (or, as that has been rendered—Your loving correction) has made me great" (Psalm 18:35).

One thing we must bear in mind. As the Pillar of old was (we may believe) gradually lighted, gradually revealing its glory at the vanishing of day, so it may be, and doubtless will be, with you. Do not expect a sudden or miraculous illumination. The Great Physician, as in the first of our motto-verses, bids you wait His time, "I will (leaving the period indefinite) heal

him, and restore to him comforts." They are only strangely unskilled in trial—the sanctities of bereavement—who would expect and exact the suddenness of an unnatural submission, and harshly forbid the heart its season of sorrow.

Nature, in her great yearly parable, teaches the true lesson. The seed of the flower has a slow, long battle with the overlying earth before its petals nestle under the blue sky and are bathed in the sunlight. Often the more beautiful the blossom the greater is the struggle. But the battle is at last won. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth" (Cant. 2:12). So let us trust God that in due time—His own time—strength will be made perfect in weakness. The law in the material and spiritual world is the same, "out of weakness made strong." "For this cause we faint not," is the gradual experience of the weary, burdened pilgrim of sorrow, "for though the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16).

Meanwhile God will take His own way with us, not ours. Sometimes He will say in His succouring love, as He disappoints our fears and more than realizes our hopes, "I removed his shoulder from the burden" (Psalm 81:6). At other times he keeps the burden on: it may even be for a time adds to it, and then He either takes it off, or gives us augmented strength to bear.

Happy those who can tell, as their experience and resolve—  
"I come not to avoid my care;  
I come not to desert the strife;  
I come to seek new strength to bear;  
I fly to find new power for life.

"When noontide brings its work to all,  
I find my task so hard to be  
That I would sink, did You not call,  
My strength is perfected in Thee."

Let us only reliantly lean upon Him in the extremity of our weakness; not "discouraged because of the way." He will not reproach us for our feeble pulse-beats, when with plans crossed and purposes thwarted, and

deepest clouds lowering, we pass through the Valley of Baca. He will not deal harshly with us if at first it be only with lisping, stammering tongue and bated breath we say, "Your will be done."

Yet, also, observe, His word is conditional on patient continuance in well doing—"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (Psalm 27:14). Be very sure that He has some great end in this trial. Seek that it may make you holier, humbler, more gentle, more submissive. Let His dealings serve to quicken your footsteps to the true Land of promise, until, the fiery pillar ceasing, the fiery chariot descends to bear you up to reunions that never can be dissolved.

O gracious Healer, Up-binder, Leader, Consoler, come in all the plenitude of Your pledged love and faithfulness! Enkindle this flaming Column in my present darkness. Put in my hand the staff of unwavering trust. Give me the sandals specially fitted for the bleeding feet; so that my experience may be that of the mighty host of sufferers who have trodden the same path, "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (Psalm 107:4, 5, 6).

If we seek to do our duty in "the daily round, the common task," glorifying God in the season of solemn adversity, He will meet us half-way. "He meets him that rejoices and works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways" (Isaiah 64:5). "I am the Almighty God" was the Divine watchword to the earliest of the Bible's Pilgrim Fathers—GOD, ALL-SUFFICIENT. We have heard of the Wady Mukatteb, in the Arabian Peninsula, with its "written rocks,"—the strange hieroglyphics of later pilgrims in the track of the Israelites. Reader, in closing this meditation, lift your eye to a great monolith in the wilderness of affliction. Let the gleam of the fiery pillar fall on its letterings. It is an inscription applicable to all varying seasons and phases of trial—"As your days, so shall your strength be."

## **MYSTERIOUS DEALINGS**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter."—John 13:7.

Not "now." The Pillar may as yet be unlighted; no stars may as yet be in the sky. The one thought and experience may be—"this great and terrible wilderness." "Where is now my God?"

Alas! it is easy with the lip to speak of the duty of lying silent under the rod—the nobleness of submission. This exhortation, glibly spoken, comes too often from those who have never themselves entered the inner depths of trial; who, however kindly meant, venture to address the smitten heart with conventional phrases of solace. They, unwittingly but unskillfully, probe the wound; in ignorance of how their words of intended condolence only lacerate. Resignation, aided with the soothing influences of time, does generally, and in due course, manifest itself. In the deepest night-watches of sorrow, the lullabies, not of man but of God, come in to soothe to rest, and to still the surges of the soul.

The assurance which heads our meditation, varying in its phraseology, is often that which Christ employs. On the present occasion, when His own disciples, all unconscious of their impending bereavement and orphanhood, were at His side—when He Himself was on the borderland of superhuman suffering—too truly the Pillar without the gracious radiance—when in His hour of gloom and desertion He uttered the "climax cry,"—His balm-word is, 'Do not make rash assertions; do not form hasty conclusions; do not misinterpret mysterious dealings, looking more at the clouds in the horizon, than at the golden waves rippling at your feet. The Pillar now, and in moments of impending terror, may be but a darksome column to you; dark as it was to the Egyptians of old. You look in vain for illumination, guidance, comfort. But leave your "hereafter"; leave alike the dreary present and the desolate future with Me. I would deepen the lesson in this the hour when I Myself most need it—"Be still, and know that I am God."

Objects and processes in nature and common life may aid illustration.

Go visit in thought one of the luxuriant valleys of the Holy Land, with



which He who spoke our motto-verse was so familiar in His daily journeyings. Amid the abundant vegetation, there is one tree peculiar to the country, alike in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee—the mulberry or sycamore-fig, whose cluster-fruit, much resembling the fig in appearance, is brought to perfection in high summer. But how is this ripening obtained? The process is strange, abnormal. To all appearance it involves the mutilation both of branch and fruit. I shall leave one to describe who is familiar beyond most with the flora of the Holy Land, as well as the happiest of spiritual interpreters. "In order to produce fruit, the part of the tree where it buds requires to have a cut or wound made in it; for, unless this is done, the tree will be barren. From the wound or opening made in this way, a bud springs up which grows and forms the fruit. Then, further, when the fruit is about to be ripe, it requires to be punctured with a sharp instrument in order to make it eatable. ...The sycamore tree originates in a wound and is ripened by a wound."

Take a kindred illustration familiar alike at home and in Palestine. Watch the pruning of these vines. Most of us may have seen the process. What an apparently merciless spoilage! These graceful offshoots running along the trellis—these exquisite leaves of tender green—the beauty alike of the terraced hills of Syria and of the home conservatory—a delight and refreshment in form and color—the last thing the uninitiated would dream of sacrificing, now strew the ground or the cold flagstones at your feet. "To what purpose is this waste?" The purpose to the ordinary inexperienced eye, indiscernible, as in the case of the sycamore, has in due season its revealing. The mellowed purple autumn clusters will vindicate the needs-be and wisdom of the seemingly ruthless use of the pruning-knife. The lopping of what is unnecessary, is in order to give fresh strength to the branches: to allow the vital sap and vital forces to permeate the leaders, swell the fruit, and ensure glory and abundance to the fruitage.

Watch that block of exquisite marble! It has looked from its heights since the birth of Time over the blue waters, or been gazed down upon by galaxies of stars in the depths of an Italian night-sky. Why disturb this sleep of ages? Why subject this fragment of a noble cliff to the tool of workmen, defrauding earth and heaven of the grandest of monoliths:

wrenching it from its "throne of rocks" to lie prone, scarred, discrowned, amid dust and debris? Follow it to the sculptor's studio. There is a slumbering angel in that insensate mass. The chisel of Michael Angelo transforms the outcast thing into all but breathing life, and transmits a legacy of power and beauty to unborn generations.

Watch, yet again, behind the tapestries! Note the blurred colors and tangled web in their bewildering confusion. To the inexperienced eye all is disharmony and ugliness. Pass from the row of skillful workers to the other side of the framework, and see the picture in process of manufacture. It is a piece of finished loveliness—every tint and color blended in perfection—a triumph of textile art.

God is that Fig-pruner, Vinedresser, Sculptor, Artist. He works unseen. His ways are past finding out. Present dealings oftentimes appear crude, harsh, unkind. That loving heart pulseless; that kindling eye of genius closed; that tender frame, shattered with the scar-marks of suffering; that home, so long resonant with joy and song, silent and voiceless.

Wait the disclosures of Eternity. Then shall we see what we were unconscious of at the time, that all was needed. That vine and sycamore have not been pruned in vain; the marble has not been wrenched from its rock-socket and chiseled in vain; the "pleasant pictures" have not been wrought in the web of life in vain. Doubts and questionings and impeachments will be at an end then: "In that day, you shall ask Me nothing" (John 16:23). A friend of Principal Shairp tells, that, on the morning he died, looking out with his old love of nature on a Highland loch, he said, "It is very misty now, but it will soon be perfectly clear." Yes, there will be no trace or memory in the halls and walls of heaven of broken thread and inharmonious pattern. The completed tapestry will then at least, when the Divine shuttle has done its work, be seen to glow with perfect and perpetual beauty in the Palace of the King.

Meanwhile listen to the following words of some gifted minstrels. They seem to form an appropriate triplet of Hope and Trust for all downcast Pilgrims—

"I hear it singing, singing sweetly,  
Softly in an undertone,

Singing as if God had taught it,  
'It is better further on!'

"Night and day it sings the sonnet;  
Sings it while I sit alone;  
Sings it so my heart will hear it,  
'It is better further on!'

"Sits upon the grave and sings it;  
Sings it when the heart would groan;  
Sings it when the shadows darken,  
'It is better further on!'

"Further on! but how much further,  
Count the milestones one by one?  
No—no counting, only trusting—  
'It is better further on!'"

In different imagery, here is the panacea of the greatest of our living poets, as thus he describes the Personation of the same heavenly Faith and Trust—

"She reels not in the storm of warring words;  
She sees the best that glimmers through the worst;  
She feels the sun is hid but for a night;  
She spies the summer through the winter bud;  
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls;  
She hears the lark within the songless egg;  
She finds the fountain where they wailed 'Mirage!'"

While a still later singer adds his sweet tribute—as if the desert and the night Pillar were in view—with the great Light of glory terminating all—

"Not yet you know how I bid  
Each passing hour entwine  
Its grief or joy, its hope or fear,  
In one great love-design:  
Nor how I lead you through the night  
By many a various way,  
Still upward to unclouded Light

And onward to the Day!"

"Why are you cast down, o my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance."

## PRECIOUS DEATH

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."—Psalm 116:15

Another gleam of the desert Pillar in the closing night of all. Despite of prevailing unbelief and rebellion, the verse may doubtless have served as an epitaph for the graves of not a few of the Israelites in the course of their long travel from Egypt to Canaan; but specially appropriate surely would its inscription be on the heights of Mount Nebo.

Never was "life" more "precious"; never death apparently more baffling; never loss more irreparable. The great commander—the great hero of that vast host, to be summoned away before his work was completed! His eye was yet undimmed—his natural force unabated. His was manhood in its highest consecration—manhood on which God had set His royal mark. It was in a critical season, also, in the Exodus march, when sagacity and forethought—all the astutest qualities of leadership were needed. Ten thousand others might well be spared. But it was the indispensable one, with his serene wisdom and inspiring presence, "the representative of God," to whom the summons was addressed—"Go up and die!" (Deut. 32:49-50).

The call was meekly responded to. All alone he ascended to his sepulcher, all alone he departed. If that departure took place at night, he had better than symbol of fiery pillar—(the funeral candle of the desert). The Jehovah of the radiant column was Himself close by. For not by kinsman, or armed warrior, or stoled priest—not by man nor by angel were his funeral rites performed. The legend on his grave is the strangest, grandest

in Scripture. It tells that the most honored of all the burial rites of earth were his. "God buried him."

"Nobly your course is run;  
Splendor is round it;  
Bravely your fight is won,  
Victory crowned it.  
In the high warfare  
Of heaven grown hoary,  
You are gone like the summer's sun,  
Shrouded in glory!"

We can imagine next day, as the sun rose on the mourning camp, how the tribes or the best among them, as they realized their void, would, with bated breath, give expression to their emotion by antedating, in spirit at least, the words of the Psalmist: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!"

Reader, though in circumstances more personal and domestic, you may at this moment be absorbed in grief over the enigma and mystery—the havoc and defiances of death. The desire of your eyes and the delight of your heart may have been taken from you. You may be, indeed you are, unable yet to grasp hold of the words at the head of this meditation or get beyond the natural expression of the broken heart—"Precious is the Life!" You are standing by a sepulcher of buried hopes. The hush of oblivion—a silence that almost may be felt is around you. It was but yesterday existence was a "valley of vision" opening everywhere glades and vistas. Now it is a yawning chasm spanned with a "Bridge of Sighs," from the farther side of which seems to come the dirgeful, piteous accents—"Those who would pass from hence to you cannot!"

All that seems left now are inanimate portraits looking down from the walls. You have memories—doleful souvenirs and associations—no more; the flower planted in the garden; the love-birds with drooping wings in the untended cage; the hushed notes of favorite music; the unshared walk by stream or meadow; it may even be the deserted plaything or unused toy. The charm has retired from these life-pictures. The once long, prophetic dream has vanished like summer lightning. You had fondly

hoped to keep your loved ones at your side—to claim their ministries of affection in times of sickness, perplexity, trouble—saying, in the great Master's words, "Tarry here and watch with me!" What havoc a few brief months have wrought! Your castles of golden sand! One wave, or it may be wave upon wave, of calamity has come, and swept them away.

Whether it be beautiful natures, or strong natures—the one like the graceful birch and its tresses, the other like the ancestral oak "moored in the rifted rock." At morning they were bathed in sunlight or fanned by gentle zephyrs; but the unforeseen storm has been let loose, and the things of "beauty and strength" lie prone on the ground. As you sit under your "Oak of Weeping," casting its shadows on the grave of the loving and beloved, these lines of an unknown mourner may express simply and pathetically your experience—

"What did the old year bring?  
Six feet of sod in the acre of God  
Where the robins sweetly sing.  
"What did the old year bring?  
A silent hearth and a saddened earth,  
With the loss of everything."

Or words of pathetic tenderness and truth, better known—

"Break, break, break,  
At the foot of your crags, O sea!  
But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
Shall never come back to me!"

No, say not "Never." That sick-bed, that grave, has a better beyond. In the midst of your tears, listen to the words of this old minstrel of Zion. Let them steal into the hushed chamber like a serenade of angels—"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!" Death with its densest darkness to sight and sense (a pillar of cloud indeed), is, in the words of the poet, "stricken through, with rays from the inner glory"; the hopes full of immortality. As the Pillar that was all gloom and mystery to the Egyptians was all light to Israel, so is the gate of death when seen from within the heavenly portals. An iron gate on this side; on that, "every gate was one of pearl" (Rev. 21:21).

"You grope, tear-blinded, in a darksome place,

And touch but tombs. Look up, these tears will run  
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,  
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun."

Let not the depressing "nether voice and vision" recall to you only the shrine once so sacred, now a heap of dust mouldering to decay. Death is not annihilation. It is the blossom dropping, that the immortal fruit may ripen. The bud forming—waiting to burst forth into verdure next spring—is the cause of the old leaf falling off. It is truly to make way for a better, a more blessed Easter, in which decay is unknown. George Herbert's thought of the passing from this world to glory, as "going from one room to another," is a feeble exponent of the reality. I like Mason's definition better, "Death is the funeral of all our evils, and the resurrection of all our joys." It is a step in the infinite progression of the soul. It is the encasing sheath taken from the cocoon to let the incarcerated spirit free. It is God's own summons—"Come up higher." The casket may perish—the jewel is indestructible. Jesus Himself encountered death; He entered the dark valley and its darkest experiences with a hymn of triumph "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him!" (John 13:31). In a lowlier sense, your dear departing ones, falling or fallen asleep, can echo these words of their dying, ever-living Lord.

The last saying of a well-known Christian senator—venerable in years as mature in faith, may be recalled: "You are leaving," said his friend, "the land of the living." "Say not so," was his reply; "I am leaving the land of the dying, and going to the land of the living."

"Farewell, farewell, my beloved!  
We must say farewell again,  
And I know that your heart is breaking  
With a great and speechless pain.  
Yet things are clear to the dying,  
Which the living cannot see,  
And God, in His infinite mercy,  
Has comfort for you and me.  
Soon we shall think on the parting,  
And the sorrow it gave, no more;  
Yet we could not have known such gladness

Unless we had wept before."—Caillard.

Ponder, also, the beautiful clause in our motto-verse—"Precious in the sight of the Lord." Natural—only too natural—is the clinging of the bereft heart rather to the preciousness of the life. It is different with the great Life-giver. He sees His work done—the mission of existence completed. Life is but a loan from Him. At His good pleasure He revokes the grant and resumes His own. As a father rejoices to welcome back again his son from the distant colony after years of absence—as the shepherd of the parable rejoices with the angels of heaven over the "lost and found"; so, in the sight of the great Lord of all, precious is death: because it takes the pilgrim to his heavenly Haven, the child to his heavenly Home. As with Moses, GOD "buries" your loved ones yes, and "His own beloved ones," that He may leave all that can die in the earthly valley, and take all that lives forever to Himself in the eternal Canaan. Whether it be from the heights of Pisgah, 4000 years ago, or from the grassy turf and "mouldering heap" of the quiet British church-yard of today, there comes the chime—the blessed requiem: "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him" (Deut. 33:12).

Yet another thought, suggested casually in an interesting volume describing simple Christian peasantry under the sunny skies of Northern Italy, with a faith different from ours, but with hearts the same. At times, with them, as with us, loved ones are taken, the knowledge of whose preciousness is confined to the home circle. They die otherwise unknown. While outwardly more distinguished lives and deaths are unfolded in volumes to the world, their deeds, their gracious characters, loving words and loving ways are left unchronicled. But, unrecognized by man, they are not forgotten in heaven. There are recording angels in default of human pens. The writer tells the beautiful myth (a poetical way of stating a reality), "They have a story in the Veneto, that the angels come down into the Campo Santo at night with their golden censers, and burn incense at the grave of those saints whom nobody knows." "Precious," whether in peasant garb, or in silent chamber, or in priestly clothing, or in royal robe—"in the sight of the Lord" and of His angel-watchers, "is the death of His saints." "The Lord knows those who are His."

Oh, 'tis a placid rest,



Who shall deplore it?  
Trance of the pure and blest,  
Angels watch o'er it!  
Sleep of their mortal night,  
Sorrow can't break it;  
Heaven's own morning light  
Alone shall wake it."

Bereaved mourner! let these gleams of the Pillar irradiate your present desert darkness. Perhaps He who has taken your dear one from the loves and affections of earth, wishes the more, and the better, to raise your love to Himself. He points you to your withered and blighted flower, and tests you with the challenge—"do you love ME more than these?" Seek, as one of the results of your trial, to make Him increasingly the focus of your being—the Center in the circumference of your present sorrow. Earthly "presences" are gone. But thus would the unchanging God speak from the cloudy pillar by day and the fiery pillar by night—"My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." He would take you now, as Christ did His disciples, from the Valley of trial up to the Mount to get these glimpses and pledges of reunion—assurances that when those, like Moses and Elias on the heights of Hermon, have departed, you are left with better than the best of earthly friends: "They saw no man save Jesus only!"

If blighted memories of the years that are fled be beyond recall, look forward with confidence to everlasting fellowship in a deathless heaven: they and you with Christ, and Christ and you with them. Resume the midnight march saying, "Let Your loving Spirit lead me forth to the land of righteousness" (Psalm 143:10).

Happy those, who, with love thus revived, and faith strengthened, and resolves quickened, and ties with the glorified renewed, can prolong the verses already quoted—  
"What will the new year bring?  
No more to roam from the heavenly home,  
Where the joy-bells ever ring.

"What will the new year bring?"

A year nearer rest with Him I love best,  
In the presence of our King."

"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope."

## **PARENTAL TENDERNESS**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will be a father unto you."—2 Cor. 6:18.

"As one whom his mother comforts."—Isaiah 66:13.

"As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings: so the Lord alone led him."—Deut. 32:11, 12.

Three gleams from the Pillar of Fire! A triple emblem and relationship of earth is taken to set forth the paternal love and tenderness of God—dealing as a Father; comforting as a Mother; and then is added a figure very subordinate in itself, but still beautiful and touching—a figure surely appropriate here as associated with the "Wilderness of the Wandering"—the eagle of its rocky heights.

The latter words, indeed, form a part of the great leader's own retrospect of the Divine dealing. Jehovah is likened by him to the mother eagle teaching her young brood to fly; alluring them from their eyrie to try their wings, watching their first feeble efforts, hovering over them, ready, if need be, to dart underneath and bear them on her stronger pinions.

Our present brief meditation then, is Israel, and the Israel of the desert of all ages—subjects of a most gracious discipline and training: guided, supported, safeguarded, by the Eagle-wing of God.

God's Parental Love—the heavenly Fatherhood—is surely a theme of themes in the midst of trial. Earth's most sacred relation has its archetype

in the Divine. A father's or mother's tenderest thoughts are centered in their weak and suffering child. The strong and vigorous of the family are left to care for themselves. It is the fragile flower, bent with hurricane and storm, that engrosses deepest affection and sympathy. So is it with our Father in heaven. It is the child of sorrow on whom He chiefly lavishes His regards. It was the "sick one" whom "Jesus loved." He took the blind man "by the hand." He was "moved with compassion" when He met the funeral crowd, and spoke words of solace and condolence to the bereft widow. At the sight of His own deeply afflicted mother He forgot for the moment His own pangs. His last deed and word was to dry her tears and provide for her a home (John 19:26). The Shepherd in the parable left the ninety-nine which were safely folded. He deemed it unnecessary to keep watch and ward over them. It was for the footsore and weary wanderer, away up amid the thorny brakes and jagged rocks, that he subjected Himself to toil and peril. "I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. I will make a covenant of peace with them and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then my people will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear." (Ezek. 34:16, 25).

Reader—in the midst, it may be, of mysterious dealings—dismissing all servile fear, delight to think of this (paradoxical as the words we have often repeated in these pages may appear), "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." "What son is he whom the Father chastens not?" Chastisement—the family badge—the family pledge—the family privilege. Delight to dwell on that great, that greatest revelation of Christ. The saying may be taken as the brightest emanation from the Fiery Pillar—"My Father and your Father; My God, and your God."

My Father! It was the soothing balm mixed in the Redeemer's own cup in Gethsemane. "This cup which My Father gives Me to drink, shall I not drink it?" My Father! it is the one name which fetches back the prodigal and sings him home. So in seasons of severest discipline, submission is best attained when chastisement puts the yearning prayer into heart and lip, "I will arise and go to my Father." "Even so, Father." My Father! it is the key which unlocks many perplexities in life. My Father! it is the

lullaby which smooths the pillow of pain and soothes to sweetest rest. It is the requiem in the hour of death—"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." Here is a filial prayer: go forth to the desert with it on your lips; hear the response in your night of gloom and sadness—

"The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud  
Is gathering thickly over my head, and loud  
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand  
Like one bewildered! Father, take my hand.

"The way is dark, my child; but leads to light;  
I would not have you always walk by sight;  
My dealings now you can not understand,  
I meant it so; but I will take your hand.

"The way is long, my Father! and my soul  
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal.  
While yet I journey through this weary land,  
Keep me from murmuring; Father, take my hand.

"The way is long, my child! but it shall be  
Not one step longer than is best for thee;  
And you shall know at last, when you shall stand  
Safe at the end, how I did take your hand."

Reader, with the hand of a Father-God in yours, and yours in His, rejoice in the double assurance, alike under the shadow of the Pillar of cloud and the gleam of the Pillar of fire—"You compass my path" (in the daytime), "and my lying down" (the vigils of night). Implicitly rely on the methods of His guidance. His one object in all is to bring you nearer to Himself; and even if there be the removal of prized blessings, be assured there is a "needs-be." "You may accuse me," says the Duchess de Gontaut, in her impressive Memoirs, "of making too light of all vicissitudes. You would be wrong. God has simply endowed me with the faculty of making the best of His severest inflictions: and I believe this to be the surest proof of real faith and the only way of living through life without repining."

Oh for the trust and ready implicit submission of the Father of the Faithful, of whom it is said, "he rose up early in the morning"; as if eager

to fulfill, be what it might, the bidding of his God! Instead of murmuring at the slow lifting of the cross, seek to bear meekly your mystery of pain or of sorrow. We are apt to be hasty and impatient; to marvel at protracted suffering and baffled hopes. All God's dealings are slow. An earthly father's education of his child is necessarily gradual and prolonged. The child feels the slowness. There are tears shed over hard tasks, and restlessness under what appears redundant toil and effort. But there is wise discipline in all these mental and moral struggles. Our Heavenly Father has the same end in view—"He, for our profit"—"Then do we with patience wait for it." Let every murmur be suppressed with the Master's words, "If you (earthly fathers), being evil (imperfect—often erring), know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?" (Matt. 7:11).

It is difficult—almost impossible—often to own all this—to see wisdom and love, "good things," in what seem strange, regarded as paternal dealings. But ever fall back on the truth that the best and noblest lives have been molded by affliction: the purest gold is brought forth from the refining process in the furnace. It was the alabaster vase in New Testament story, shattered and broken, that yielded precious ointment and diffused sweetest fragrance. How many of God's afflicted family can give the attestation—It was trial that braced me for duty and service. Trial was the training school where I was disciplined as a soldier in the use of spiritual weapons: taught how to put on "the whole armor of God" that I might be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. "It was good for me that I was so afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word!" The homestead has been pillaged, but the pillaging of the earthly nest has driven me to the wing and to heavenly soarings. As it is the famine, and crippled resources, which form the main impelling motives of the emigrant to seek other climates and shores, so it is affliction which often colonizes the spiritual kingdom.

Trust parental love. In words suggested by one of our motto-symbols—  
"Let Your angel-wings be spread  
O'er me; keep me close to Thee:  
In the peace Your love does shed

Let me dwell eternally!"

"What," says Bishop Hall, "if property, credit, health, friends, and relatives were all lost; you have a Father in heaven." And if these fatherly dealings are not at the time apparent—if the writings be now blotted, undecipherable; rather, if we in our infancy are only spelling out our Father's mysterious words—the meaning strange—the time will come, when all shall be made plain; erasures restored; light supplied; involved passages interpreted. Many a needed translation of what has been long to us like a foreign language, will be rendered in "Heaven's Vernacular," the motto on every title-page of the volumes—too often blurred and faded now, made luminous then—"like as a father pities his children."

It is said of the seventy translators of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint), who were shut up to accomplish their task by one of the Ptolemies in the Island of Pharos, that though each occupied a separate apartment, on issuing forth from their seclusion, the translations were to a word identical. It will be so in Heaven with God's translated Providences. However diverse may be the rendering at times here, there will be no divergence from the united testimony in that true "Land of LIGHT"—"He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37). "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away...Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:9, 10, 12).

"Leaflets, now unpagged and scattered,  
Time's great library receives;  
When Eternity shall bind them,  
Golden volumes we shall find them,  
God's light falling on the leaves."

Yes, His ways may be past finding out; but confident that there are blessings in reserve for us, blessings in disguise, surrender yourself to His wiser, better guidance, with faith's impassioned prayer, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father!" The response will in due time come. It is already yours—the Pillar-flash lights up the barren wilderness—"I will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord almighty."

## ABOUNDING GRACE

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."—2 Cor. 12:9.

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."—2 Cor. 9:8.

What could we do, in the midst of the thick darkness of trial, but for the sustaining grace of Christ? Like the great Apostle, who tells his experience in our first motto-verse, we plead with God for the removal of some affliction—"the thorn in the flesh sent to buffet us" (12:7). The prayer is answered, the support is given; but not in the way we asked for, or expected. The lacerating spur is still left—the trial or bereavement, whatever it be, is permitted to continue. The God, however, who sent the trial—yes, who sent the trial—for observe the special word of the Apostle, "there was given me a thorn in the flesh" (v. 7)—He who appointed the trial and still retains it, bestows what HE deems preferable. He imparts compensating grace enabling us to endure the thorn.

To borrow an illustration from the name of our volume; the Israelites, soon after the commencement of the desert march, gave vent to bitter complaint. Their cry was to be delivered from a prolonged wilderness journey, to terminate days of scorching heat and nights of chill and darkness. 'Remove the thorn. Take us back, either to the waters and palm-groves of Egypt; or else, by some easier and shorter route, conduct us to the Land of Promise.' God answers their prayer; but not as they would have desired. He continues the long, lonely, dreary road for the space of forty years. But He bestows the better equivalent, not for their good only, but to be a spiritual lesson for His Church in all coming ages. He gives the symbol and pledge of His own immediate presence. He spreads over their camp a canopy of cloud by day. He lights up a pillar of

fire by night. He would teach them the far higher truth of realizing their dependence on Him. Weak, wavering, helpless in themselves, at the mercy of a thousand hostile forces and influences, (inhospitable nature combined with the assaults of desert foes,)—"He led forth His own people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven. He rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the bread of heaven. ... Man did eat angels' food" (Psalm 78:52, 23, 24, 25, R.V.). In other words, the answer to their importunate pleadings was given in the language of our New Testament assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

All this is suggestive, also, of severest affliction. The Apostle's emblem points to trial in its acutest form. Those who have traveled in Eastern lands know what "the thorn" is. Paul could fetch his figure from early memories by the banks of the Cydnus river, and the Tarsus Valley, as well as from many subsequent scenes of travel where the same tree was abundant. Very different is it from what is familiar to us at home. The spikes, at once larger and stronger, always recalled to the present writer what must have been the anguish of that thorny crown which circled the brow of the Man of Sorrows. Indeed the original word may, according to some, imply the intenser form of suffering which points to those stakes or iron prongs employed at times by barbarous conquerors to mangle the bodies of the vanquished (R.V. margin).

Afflicted one, your present trial may in no figurative, but very real sense, be one of exceptional severity: the iron may have entered into your soul. God's method of dealing is still the same as with Paul. The Shepherd of Israel, who "led Joseph like a flock," has some great end in view in the sending and continuance of the lacerating thorn. He designs life to be a scene and season of discipline. The word more than once translated in the Epistles "judgment" really means "training," "education." He is educating you in His school, as He did Israel under the sheen of the Pillar. His dealings—the acutest and most mysterious, are not arbitrary—not capricious. He knows what is best. "The sufferings from which He could not deliver us He has transfigured for us. They are no longer penal, but remedial and penitential. Pain has become the chastisement of a Father



who loves us: and Death the passage into His very presence" (Lyttleton).

The thorn which you would sincerely remove He sees fit to continue; the somber cloud in which He enfolds you, He delays or refuses to rim with the silver lining. "I will give you," says He, "better than the removal of either thorn or cloud: 'Strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those who are afraid, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will shout and sing! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the desert. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived.' (Isaiah 35:3, 4, 6, 7).

He knows you too well, He loves you too well, to give the nest without the thorn. That very discipline begets trust. Like Alpine travelers we grope our way tremulously along the yawning crevasse and rugged terrain, and through the misty darkness. But His purpose and design is that we may be led to cling only more unfalteringly to the hand of the wise, unerring Guide, and to feel that He is equal to all emergencies. The wilderness is dark: but the darkness only brings into brighter contrast the beacon-glory of the Pillar. The good poet, lately departed, seems, in his "Light to be felt," to write under its gleam—

"We older children grope our way  
From dark behind to dark before:  
And only when our hands we lay,  
Dear Lord, in Yours, the night is day,  
And there is darkness nevermore.

"Reach downwards to the sunless days,  
Where human guides are blind as we,  
And faith is small and hope delays;  
O Take the hands of prayer we raise,  
And let us feel the Light of Thee!"

Bunyan's Pilgrim trembled as he passed with dripping garments through the Slough of Despond. But why his plight? It was because he saw not, or,

for the moment refused to see and to use the stepping stones close by, provided by the King of the Way. So are we guilty too often of disregarding the stepping stones of God's Promises. We plunge, in our despondency, into "the miry clay," when He would set our feet upon the solid Rock.

Then, further, ponder our companion motto-verse with its wealth of provision and promise—"all grace"—"abounding"—"all-sufficiency"—"sufficiency in all things." "What an illimitable balance," to use an old writer's comment on the words, "have we here, in the bank of heaven!" What a sure pledge that, as the Shepherd of Israel, He will keep sleepless "watch over the flock by night"—never leave the shorn lamb to the untempered winds of trial, or allow His faithfulness to fail. He afflicts "in measure": not imposing on His people burdens too heavy to carry. "But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it." (1 Cor. 10:13, R.V.). "For myself," says one whose saintliness has stirred the pulses of the century, "now, at the end of a long life, I say from a full heart that God has never failed me; never disappointed me; has ever turned evil into good for me...and what He has been to me who have deserved His love so little, such He will be, I believe and know, to every one who does not repel Him, and turn from His pleadings."

Do not misinterpret or misunderstand the way in which the promised grace is given. It does not come with a torrent, in rain-floods or water-floods. Submission is evolved gradually. As with the prophet of old, we often cannot all at once recognize spiritual helps and supports, or we refuse to do so. The evening star glimmers at first imperceptibly in the twilight. Our fields, at first, only show patches of struggling verdure. So also with resignation, the pre-eminent grace in trial, "Nevertheless, afterward," (Heb. 12:11), like the after-glow of Egypt with which the Israelites were so familiar, is God's principle and method. Not all at once, with impetuous rush, is the stranded vessel moved. But as wave after wave comes rolling in, the inert mass seems to wake up to the sound of many waters. Gradually the conquest is made; and in due time, with

white wings outspread, she is once more buoyant on summer seas. Thus is it with the wave of God's love in a time of affliction. The agitated, shattered, stranded heart is gradually swayed by an influence above. In this, as in other things, "he that believes shall not make haste."

Reader, God, in His infinite, mysterious wisdom, has seen fit to touch you in your tenderest part. The world is changed to you. You have, indeed, the same old environments. You feel yourself plodding on in the old mechanical way: life and its exacting duties cannot be evaded. But, Ichabod! its glory has departed. Yes, true, and yet not true. If your sun has gone down in the darkness of bereavement and death, that is the time for the lighting of the Pillar and for the bright unfoldings of grace.

"I lay, with heaven's cold night above,  
Upon a couch of stone;  
I said, 'O Lord, if You are love  
Why am I left alone?'  
And there I heard the answer fall,  
'My love itself is all in all.'"—Sacred Songs.

His end is surely a noble and elevated one, "if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Works." The great Workman with the tools of affliction sifts the quartz and debris and dross, in order to get the grains of gold which are subsequently fashioned into "the crown of glory that fades not away." Trial is the golden rod measuring the wall of the New Jerusalem. Trial is the golden gate leading into its eternal Temple. Trial is the means—the chief means—employed in assimilating the soul to God, and imprinting on it the Divine lineaments. "This honor have all His saints" (Psalm 149:9). "Most gladly, therefore," says Paul (2 Cor. 12:9), speaking of his unremoved thorn, and borrowing also a metaphor from the desert Pillar with its cloudy curtain-canopy—"will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may (literally) spread its tabernacle over me" (R.V. margin).

"To be made with You one in spirit,  
Is the boon that I lingering ask;

To have no bar 'twixt my soul and Thine;  
My thoughts to echo Your will Divine:  
Myself Your servant for any task."—L. Larcom.

"When He has tried me I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

"But the god of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you " (1 Peter 5:10).

## **THE GREAT SYMPATHIZER**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to support those who are tempted."—Heb. 2:18.

"I know their sorrows."—Exod. 3: 7.

"In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16:33.

He suffered! Sorrowing one, what a gleam of the Pillar-cloud is this!

He suffered! What are all your most agonizing afflictions compared with what He endured for You!

He suffered—poverty, weariness, privation, hunger, thirst, grief, and the minor other ills that flesh is heir to. These, however, were but the surface-heavings of the deeper depths of woe—the assaults of men and the malignity of devils, cruel innuendoes, savage indignities; the loss or desertion of beloved friends; the treachery of trusted associates: that, also, in the case of a nature sensitively strung alike physically and spiritually. "Reproach," said He, "has broken My heart."

He suffered more profoundly still. There was a mystery of anguish in

Gethsemane which mortal tongue cannot tell, or imagination conceive. No wonder it is described with an emphasis belonging to no other—"THE Agony." Its undefined dreadfulness is worded in the Greek Litany by "Your sufferings known and unknown." What mean these drops of blood oozing from His brow? What means the thrice-uttered prayer, in a paroxysm of woe, "Let this cup pass from Me"? (Matt. 26:39). What means the climax and consummation of all, when the very sun, in the words of Jeremy Taylor, "put on sackcloth, as if ashamed to confront the spectacle of its expiring Creator": when the wail was evoked from parched and dying lips—the bitterest cry that ever rose from earth to heaven—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me"?

He suffered. Of Him alone could the words be said—"All Your waves and Your billows have gone over me." Well may He have addressed the question, first to His disciples and then to His suffering children of all ages—"Can you drink of the cup which I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" With an intense pathos of which the afflicted patriarch knew nothing, He could make the appeal to a whole world of weepers, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you, my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!" (Job 19:21).

He suffered. But the lesson from these sufferings for you and for me is to watch how, in this melancholy gloom, shone the Pillar of Fire! See His perfect and profound resignation! He takes the cup, whatever that mystic emblem may mean, with trembling hand. Humanity in its weakness, rather humanity in its very strength, utters an "If it be possible"—the prayer of His suffering children still—"let it pass." But it is only for the moment. The bitter chalice is drained to the dregs. Three times He recedes from the edge of the abyss and its "horror of great darkness." But it is a momentary recoil—no more. He plunges in! Self-surrender, heroic obedience, un murmuring submission can go no farther. His own will is now, as ever, submerged in the Divine—"Not as I will, but as You will." He ceases not in the prolonged conflict until He could utter the cry waited for by all time, and which sends its prolonged echoes through eternity—"It is finished!"

Though we have selected the closing hour of all, He was, during the entire period of His earthly life, "the Faithful and True Martyr" (Rev. 1:5). Well

may a writer speak of "the fascination of that mournful life-story, so infinite in its pathos and so profound in its wisdom, the most touching of scenes, and the most impressive of tragedies...the loving and gracious Man of Sorrows, listening to every plaint of weakness, and helping every troubled heart to bear its burden, even while on His own there rested the burden of a world's salvation" (Present Day Religion).

Reader, I know not what the circumstances of your suffering are. More than probable they may be identical in kind, though not in degree, with those of your suffering Lord.

(1) They may be physical. As was noted at greater length in a previous chapter, it is only those conversant with a couch of lingering pain who can testify to the reality. The sudden close of the windows, long open to the cheering light of day; the drawn blinds; the tossing from side to side in the hopeless battle with wakefulness—opiates giving, at the best, transient moments of relief—only to renew the pitiless struggle: "Saying in the morning, 'Would God it were evening!' and in the evening, 'Would God it were morning!'"

That pain—that physical pain—on the Cross, He suffered! There were, as I have just said, other reasons of infinitely more tremendous significance which convulsed His soul. But one reason for His being subjected to the pangs of an agonized body, undoubtedly was, that He might impart to every child of anguish His own experimental exalted sympathy. In our hours of prostration, weakness, and weariness—when in their prolonged vigils we may be tempted at times "to faint when we are rebuked of Him," the whisper trembling on parched lips—"Why all this discipline of pain? Why this cruel cross to bear? Where is the wisdom? Where is the love?"—we may think of a Divine fellow-sufferer subjected without any mitigation—(for the very anodyne offered was refused)—to the intensest bodily torture. "Consider Him that endured...lest you be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:3).

(2) Your sufferings may be mental. Harassment, unkindness, ingratitude, the barbed shafts of malice and slander, all the more grievous to bear if sent winged from the quiver of a friend. It may be anxiety about a beloved relative, the subject of slow disease, around whose couch the too ominous

shadows are gathering—"life balanced in a breath." It may be the agony of bereavement, when the long alternations of hope and fear have ended—the vacant niche in your heart—the vacant chair in your home—the cherished name on the gravestone. Or, it may be, in your own case, wasting disease too surely pointing to the fatal termination—this involving the severance of holiest ties, and leaving dear ones solitary and alone to do battle with adversity. These and many such, though varying in their outer form and complexion, your great suffering Master knew in their fullest measure. Yes, inclusive of the last-mentioned; when, Himself racked in agony, He had that agony intensified by the sight of a fond mother jostled amid the crowd that surged around, and made sport of His dying moments; the sword too truly piercing her own heart, as the nails were lacerating the Body at whose feet she crouched.

The refrain of the present meditation is, He suffered; and because He suffered, says the Apostle in our motto-verse, "He is able to support." We have quoted more than once, as suggested by the name of this book, the words which emanated from the Jehovah of the Pillar-cloud, the opening syllables in that drama of the Exodus and the desert; let them be repeated in their most appropriate form here: "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people, for I know their sorrows." His whole life, from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, formed an empathetic commentary and fulfillment. He knew—He knows, every heart-throb of His suffering Israel in every age. He is no god or demi-god of Pagan mythology, who lives in unsympathetic isolation amid the clouds of Olympus, all in ignorance of the travail of a sin-stricken, woe-worn world. From deepest experience He is cognizant of every pang that rends the soul. If one of earth's kingdoms is the Kingdom of Sorrow, He is its King. The crown on His head was a crown of thorns, and, being so, the scepter in His hand is the scepter of kingly sympathy.

It is recorded of Alexander the Great, that he touched with his crown a wounded soldier in the ranks, and that at the touch there were the tinglings of new life. It is so in a diviner, heavenly sense. Christ touches our wounds with His double crown—the crown of thorns as the Human Sympathizer, and the crown of glory as Head over all. It is the thorn-crown which forms the special theme of our present meditation. I always

like the conjunction of the two clauses in the familiar Litany—"Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts...O Son of David, have mercy upon us!" It was the Lord of the Pillar-cloud, the God-Man, of whom it is touchingly said, "So He was their Savior. In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:8, 9). "It is Christ alone," beautifully says Pere Didon, in his Life of Jesus, "who teaches the joy of suffering, because it is He alone who pours into the soul a Divine life which no pain can overwhelm; which trial only strengthens, and which can despise death, because it permits us to face it with the fullness of immortal hope."

My brother, trust this Great Sympathizer, "who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross." Conquer as He conquered, by a noble submission and self-surrender to the will of your Father in heaven. While you take trial for granted as a part of His appointed discipline, hear the Lord of sorrow encouraging you from His own example and victory—"In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

We read of Him that "being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly." "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard (as it has been rendered) because of His reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7). Is not that saying impressive—"He became obedient unto death"? It was a gradual effort requiring Divine self-sacrifice. But it was given, and the triumph was assured. Let this, also, afflicted one, be the sanctified result, in your case, of the Cup which the same Father has put into your hands. "Be more courageous," are the words of Francis de Sales, "in your trials, cherish them carefully, and thank God for vouchsafing to give you ever so small a share in His dear Son's cross."

"Rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy."



## PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one; therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared a City for them."—Heb. 11:13, 16.

Though really spoken of the older patriarchs, these verses would seem as if uttered under the gleam of the Pillar-cloud. They might have formed the refrain in the Song of Israel for forty years in their desert.

"Pilgrims and strangers on the earth!" This opening clause, applicable to believers in all ages, is no morbid sentiment. The Christian is not a pessimist. God's child, pilgrim and wayfarer though he be, has bright experiences in "the house of his pilgrimage." He comes to Zion, not with dirges, but with songs. "Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return to Jerusalem, singing songs of everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be overcome with joy and gladness." (Isaiah 35:10). He is feelingly alive to the wealth of loveliness in the surrounding world. It belies the name often given to it of "Valley of Tears." None more than he, none so truly as he, in the contemplation of the glowing skies by day and the silver galaxy by night,  
"Can lift to Heaven an unassuming eye,  
And smiling say, My Father made them all."

And yet it is not inconsistency to affirm—it would be vain to deny, that in the hour of sorrow all undergoes a gloomy transformation. Affliction has its exceptional teachings. God's fair earth then seen through tearful eyes, is draped in sadness. It wears not bridal attire, but funeral clothes. And the lesson so reluctantly listened to in the day of prosperity, with its sunshine, is urged with irresistible power on the broken heart—"I am a stranger with you, and a sojourner as all my fathers were!" The harp of a thousand strings is rendered tuneless—the light of life goes out, like the stars fading from the sky.

Job was no pessimist. On the contrary, his heart, in its normal condition, was full of brightness and thankfulness. Read his pathetic story. No eye had a keener relish for the grand and beautiful in nature. He revels in "the philosophy of the seasons." The keener were his sympathies, that he saw God's footsteps and felt God's touch, in all. But can we wonder that this "Prince of the East," dowered with the three best gifts—goodness, intellect, and piety, when stricken in soul and body, realized as he had never done before, that Time was "a walking shadow"; and that he is heard wailing out the monotone, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down: he flees also as a shadow, and continues not" (Job 14:1, 2). In a word, "he confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth."

The time indeed (and thank God for it) will come, must come, when the cloud is lifted; when you will even feel the reviving influences of nature and yield to the claim and attraction of human interests. But meanwhile, all is "sicklied over with the pale cast of thought." The way cannot be traversed with gleaming eye and elastic step when the staff and the beautiful rod are broken.

It is, therefore, in no spirit of murmuring or rebellion, that we repeat the first entry in this meditation. Let us rather look at it as lighted up by the sanctity of the Pillar of Fire. Reader, in that ashen flame, God—the God who has seen fit severely to chasten—would lead you, it may be through tears of anguish and a rifled home, to confess your homelessness. But it would be a poor, unworthy result of family trial, were it simply to discover the blight that has passed over your being and surroundings. The passage which forms our theme does not confine itself to gazing on the cloud. It has a glorious counterpart. There is a rift in the sky, disclosing the blue eternities behind and beyond. The down-cast pilgrim when he most deeply realizes that he is but a pilgrim, is inspired with noble resolves—stimulated with brighter prospects. The Song of the Night merges into a Song of Eternal Day. It is the grandest possible result of trial—"But NOW (the sequence of affliction) they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

Oh most blessed fruit and result of the Divine dealings! The sorrowing present not obscuring or shrouding, but only lending brightness and

glory to the future! The wear and tear of life—many petty cares it may be, wedded with far deeper sorrows—unspoken trials, anxieties, and responsibilities previously unknown. "Hill Difficulties," which before had their arbors and hospices, now one toilsome ascent; rugged steep and treacherous hollow, bewildering mist and storm-cloud. It was but recently balmy seas, now it is winter with fog and snowstorm, needing anxious pilotage. Worst and saddest of all, the oppressive silence in the dark empty halls of grief. "One there is not," rings dolefully at every turn. What you thought to be a fixed star is changed into meteor-gleam, vanished as a morning cloud, or like the bubble on the ocean. Yes, let none cynically deny you your newly-appropriated name, "Pilgrims and strangers." They can see no wilderness, because they have still their unshattered tents and camp fires, and undiminished circle to surround them. Can it be wondered at that the song of their encampment can get no response in yours?

Turn, however, now, your contemplation to the reverse side. If bereavement and death have read their own impressive homily, there is a contrasted view to those afflictions which "for the present are not joyous but grievous." God's end and the soul's good is attained, if the breaking up of the temporary desert home quickens the onward march; lip and heart attuned to the resolve, "Now we desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one!" But for that trial, you might have forgotten that the wilderness was not your final rest or portion. You might otherwise have permitted fond fibers of affection to root you to earth. You might have continued in the pursuit of tinted air-bubbles—like one of Bunyan's well-known characters in his dream, preferring feathers and dust to the beckoning angel and the gleaming crown—dimming your eye to "the Better Country."

God has, in mercy, shut out the garish noontide, and lighted up His own fiery column with its own golden splendor. He has illuminated it with the words which you can turn, in all time to come, into a pilgrim chant—a "song of degrees," like one of those used by the Jews in going up to their greatest Feast, "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Your affliction has brought Heaven nearer. It has served to wean from the too alluring fascinations of the present. It

has forged adamantine chains to link you to the unseen and eternal. If some who read these pages can tell of successive bereavements—they have peopled the once strange, silent, solitary Land with living souls. Angels and glorified spirits seem to wave signals of welcome. It has made the other world more of a home than this—  
"We dream awhile that Home is Heaven;  
We learn at last that Heaven is Home."

Happy those who can thus join the two correlated Bible sentences, "Pilgrims and strangers on the earth," "Our Citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. 3:20); who can listen under desert skies to words of heart-cheer, "Upwards, Onwards, Heavenwards, Homewards!" I like the words in the Revised Version of 2 Cor. 5:8, "We are of good courage, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord."

In heathen mythology (the legend is one of the oldest of Greek antiquity), Prometheus, represented by Aeschylus "as an immortal god and friend of the human race—willing to sacrifice himself for their salvation," was said to bring down two gifts from heaven—that is, Fire and Hope. In an infinitely more real sense, as our double motto-verse unfolds, the true Prometheus—the Son of the Highest—Himself the Divine Sacrifice, "brought down FIRE for the Pillar-cloud in the night of earth." Along with this He has brought HOPE, "the hope full of immortality,"—the promised bliss of that world where darkness is changed to light and hope to full fruition—where the winter is forever past, the rain over and gone, nothing left but eternal summer for the soul.

Pilgrim of sorrow, recognize your afflictions to be ladder-steps to help you in reaching the Gate of the City. It was the beautiful saying of young Prince Otto, who endured with such heroic Christian fortitude—"More than we can bear is not sent us; and when we can bear no longer, the end comes, and we are blest in heaven." Yes, "more than we can bear is not sent us." Whatever is sent, in the way of pain and suffering and bereavement, is God's needed discipline—God's best discipline. The gifts and graces of the Christian have ever been nurtured thereby. To borrow the words of a friend, "In the garden of sorrow the soul's loveliest passion-flowers reach their ideal perfection." The noblest heroes and heroines of the Faith have been braced by "great tribulation." It is often

the bruised reeds the Almighty converts into golden arrows for His quiver.

Go, then, up and on through the wilderness leaning on your Beloved. Keep in sight the guiding night Pillar. Be loyal to God, as a son whom He chastens, and He will be faithful to the resigned and trusting heart. So may it be said of you, day by day, and never more than on the last day of all—life's vesper bell ringing the words—"There has sprung up a light for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are true-hearted."

## **LIGHT ON THE MORROW**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow."—Matt. 6:34.

"Commit your way unto the Lord."—Psalm 37:5.

Here is a double voice from the Pillar-cloud, in the midst of your night of sorrow.

Like most trials, I shall suppose that the present one has suddenly overtaken you. An unexpected bolt has descended; some silver chord has suddenly been loosed; some golden bowl irreparably broken. You can say of your grief as a true sufferer has simply described it: "It lies down with us at night. It rises with us in the morning." You feel at once out on the stormy billows, away from the harbor where all so lately was peace. You ask, in your first hour of bewilderment, can it really be so; that the fond vision of years has departed like a scroll; the favorite life-chord snapped? "Suddenly are my tents spoiled and my curtains in a moment," (Jer. 4:20) —those gone in the twinkling of an eye for "the forever of time," who, using the words of a distinguished scholar, "in old days it was strength to be with, and for the future it will be strength to remember" (Westcott).

But it is, alas! this very future which is now, all unexpectedly, the perplexing and pathetic anticipation. Must the light of the Pillar-cloud here be sought for in vain? With these dense impalpable shadows projected without warning on your path, is your only outlook, voiceless solitude—the gloom of the desert by night or its mocking mirage by day; beguiling you into false confidences and disappointing hopes?

"Leave," says Christ, "that tomorrow with Me." "Take no needless, over-anxious thought, as the word means, about it. That tomorrow, under My hand, will reveal itself. Instead of trying vainly in this "hurricane eclipse" to forecast the dusty, travel-stained roads of life—"Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:5, 6, 7).

Reader, do not suppose that nervous, anxious apprehensions about the future, or wonderment at the mysterious dealings of God are in your case exceptional. You remember, how, in a different form, they were experienced and avowed by the typical "Pilgrims of the Night,"—the Hebrew host at the very commencement of their Exodus. Not only was it with them mystery and enigma, but the almost certainty of disaster, appalling in its suddenness, "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness has shut them in!" "Surely You did set them in slippery places: You cast them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (Psalm 73:18, 19). Even their faithful commander was terror-struck. The column of flame was deflected from what appeared the right way—leading to panic and peril—the barrier mountains behind, and the raging sea in front. There was nothing but misgiving for the present, and tremulousness for the future. Falling prone to the ground, Moses wails out his plaint and remonstrance.

But the God of the covenant host knew better. Accordingly, He answers only in words of righteous rebuke, "Why do you lie on your face? Tell the children of Israel to go forward." "Commit," as if He said, "that unknown road and unrevealed tomorrow to Me; I the Lord will go before you; I the God of Israel will be your reward." "Forward," was the word of command, as the no longer sceptic leader anew grasped his rod and rose in the might

of Jehovah. If not then, the day would come in long after years, when the memorial song would be sung, "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (Psalm 107:7, 8).

Confide in that same assurance. The tomorrow may doubtless to you, also, be all perplexity. Like a group of desert travelers of a future age—like the Magi, you may seem suddenly to have lost your guiding star. But, Jehovah-Jireh! (the Lord will provide.) Seek to rise above these unworthy morbid forebodings. It is the nature of faith—the triumph of faith—to overcome difficulties, to feel assured that in due time the gloomiest cloud will be braided with silver linings.

The disciples at the scene of Transfiguration at first "feared to enter the cloud." Before long when they passed through its enfoldings, the gloom and mystery were dispelled. "They looked unto Him and were lightened," for "His face shone as the Sun." His feet, as they were in an after day seen in Patmos by one of those privileged spectators, would seem "like pillars of fire." That glimpse of transfigured glory prepared them for the great impending suffering in Gethsemane and Calvary. They were braced under the shadow of the cloud for the fiery trials that were so soon to try them.

Enter on your veiled future in a similar spirit—  
"Stoop not forever over sorrow's loom  
On webs of drear unprofitable gloom,  
Behold the text, writ with the Sun's last hand  
In crimson cipher on the golden sky,  
Proclaiming joyous tomorrow to the land:  
Then let the soul take comfort."—After-Glow.

God gives you in our older type of the Pillar, a similar pledge of safety and rest. He can bring good out of evil, and light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. He can transform the wilderness into an oasis fringed with palms and musical with fountains—thus fulfilling in a better than its literal sense His own promise, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

One of the sweetest of our religious poets would almost seem to have had that "Light of fire" in view, as the lines were written—  
"For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead,  
Lead me aright.  
Though strength should falter,  
and though heart should bleed,  
Through peace to light.  
I do not ask my cross to understand,  
My way to see—  
Better in darkness just to feel Your hand,  
And follow Thee."

How blessed, we may well add, that the future, so well known to Him, is unknown to us! What a pall would be cast on many a joyous life, had the power been given (so mercifully withholden) of foreknowing it! We are thus spared years of anticipated misery. Never was there a more gracious appointment and provision than that spoken of by James, "You don't know what shall happen tomorrow."

"Accept the present with a thankful heart,  
Nor listen to the tramp of troublous years  
Remembered joy shall soothe, when sorrow's smart  
Turns your sweet past to tears."

The best and highest thought of all is, that our "destinies,"—our present—and above all, our future and its unborn hours are "God-appointed." When from His lips the question is propounded, "Is it well with you?" (that question to which the faithless heart is ever tempted to give an evasive answer)—be it yours, confident in the combined wisdom and love of your Leader, to respond, "It is well!"—glorifying Him by meek submission and faithful following. "Shall we presumptuously cross His path? or shall we, like well disciplined soldiers, keep our post and watch for the signals?" (Newman). With the change of a word, let us strive to say

—  
"I do not ask to see  
The unveiling of Your purpose, or the shining  
Of future light on mysteries untwining,  
Your promise-roll is all my own,



Your Pillar enough for me."

Chequered though your way may be, He will be at every turning point—soothing adversity—tempering prosperity. And when that tomorrow shall itself come to an end, death will be but as a short summer's night pearled with clouds, a momentary overcasting of the heavens—no more. Life's retrospect will evoke the Angel-Song of Bethlehem, "Glory to God!" Then the light, not of wilderness pillar, but of unsetting suns, "the light that never was on land or sea," will illuminate an endless tomorrow.

With this glorious prospect, mourner, you may now sing, even it may be amid present blinding grief, one of the inspired "restful rhythms"—"Yet I am always with You. You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory!" Psalm 73:23-24

## **THE POWER OF PRAYER**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"O Israel, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles? How can you say God refuses to hear your case? Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding."—Isaiah 40:27, 28.

"The Lord is good unto those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him."—Lam. 3:25.

"O Israel, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles? How can you say God refuses to hear your case?" Strong, impassioned as are these words, how truthfully they interpret the thoughts of many a sorrowing heart! Yes, of many a Christian heart. For, observe, the tender reproach and admonition is not addressed to the unbeliever, with his sceptic devil-born doubts; but to God's own covenant people—"Israel." Disguise it as we may, in the depths of profound grief, and despite of all accepted

dogmas and creeds, such reflections will obtrude themselves. "Has not God forgotten me? I adore Him and cling to Him as my Heavenly Father—it is the assurance I shall be the last to surrender. But why this terrible trial? Where are any footprints of His love? I fail to hear even the faintest tones of the voice from the cloudy Pillar. Life is bereft of its beauty and brightness, and I am called to tread the dreary corridors of death, wedded to sepulchral silence. My prayers are apparently unheard. They only seem to lead from darkness to darkness. Surely He is, like Baal, asleep, leaving me to cry unsupported in the lonely desert—My soul thirsts for You, in a dry and weary land, where there is no water."

In vain I make my appeal to the God of the Fiery Column. In vain I plead the memories of the old pilgrim march—"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!...Are you not the One who dries up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (Isaiah 51:9, 11). I call in the anguish and desertion of despair, "Keep not silence, O God. Hold not Your peace, and be not still, O God!" (Psalm 83:1).

These, sorrowing one, in your seasons of despondency—it may be even now—are the tones of your muffled harp. Like the Syrophenician woman you eagerly follow the steps of the Great Helper—seeking deliverance from Him who alone can give it. You can, as little as she did, understand the strange silence, the unheeded appeal, the apparent repulse. Is this like—is it not rather sadly unlike His loving heart? "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord,"—might well have been her agonizing soliloquy. But the tide of Divine-human sympathy was only for the time pent up and restrained. The sluices were before long withdrawn—her trust was commended; her child restored. The word of the Gracious Consoler was a bequest for the importunate of all ages, "O woman, great is your faith; be it unto you even as you will."

Call to remembrance, child of affliction, a higher than any mere human experience. Christ could Himself enter into the mystery—shall I say, the terribleness of apparently unheard and unsuccored prayer. Read that psalm so unquestionably His own; the psalm of the Eloi-cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" His tearful pleadings were, "Why are You so far from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry unto You in

the daytime, but You hear not, and in the night season I am not silent!" What is His solace and balm-word in that hour of apparent desolation? He rests contented with the assurance, "But You are Holy" (Psalm 22:3).

Think, in the midst of your crisis-hours with their silences of grief, how He traversed this, as well as other solitudes—how He drank this, as well as other sorrow-brooks by the way (Psalm 110:7). Under the shade of these moonlit olives, the Master is giving utterance to importunate pleadings. But the cup is not allowed to pass, and that, also, though "being in an agony, He prayed the more earnestly," "BUT, You are Holy." He will not surrender His confidence in God—in His Heavenly Father's righteousness, faithfulness, and truth. At last, light breaks through the darkness; and before the Psalm of the Agony closes, He can tell the joyful experience, imparting help and hope and courage to all His people in their hours of misgiving—"Snatch me from the lions' jaws, and from the horns of these wild oxen. The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy." (Psalm 22:21, 26). The pathway of thorns is changed into that of triumph.

Take courage from the example and experience of the Great Sufferer. Plead the promise of this same praying Savior, whose heart vibrates and throbs on the throne to the woes of humanity—"Verily, verily I say unto you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you." Only adding, as He did, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as You will."

The great lesson He would teach His children is "Be patient." Let faith rise above the obscurations of sight and sense. This was the philosophy of affliction manifested in the case of the smitten patriarch of Uz. "Behold we count them happy who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James 5:11). In the case of this much tried servant, the mysterious dealings came at last to be vindicated; and in anticipation he sang the song of victory on his bed of ashes—"Though He slays me yet will I trust in Him." "For I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Seek to imitate this creed of the Pilgrim Father. Chide your buffeted and baffled faith with the verse which heads this meditation, "Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel?" "Israel!" that is the tenderest word in the

remonstrance, for it again recalls the wrestler in Peniel—the conflict all night long, which left a struggling wayfarer the triumphant "Soldier of God!" Hope on; trust on; fight on; pray on. Feel the calm assurance that "the prayer of faith shall save," and that, also, despite of thwarted purposes and apparently unanswered requests.

The following words simply but truthfully describe the sorrowful—the at times despairing yearnings of one who feels the mystery of unsupported pleadings; but who feels also, that these "silences," rightly understood, have deep meanings, if not in most cases triumphant issues—and alluring, at all events, to higher hopes, even though the way leads through shadow and darkness—

"Will not the baffled soul, dismayed,  
Fall prostrate in the dust?  
The expectant child-like heart, afraid,  
Forget its early trust?"

"They shall not be ashamed who wait,  
Are words that cannot fail.  
Blessed who linger at the gate  
Until their suit prevail.

"Forthwith, transfigured, smiles each sense  
Over which the darkness fell;  
The notes of praise swell dear and keen—  
'He does all things well.'"

They are an echo of the more familiar words of the Laureate—  
"The world's great Altar-Stairs,  
Which slope through darkness up to God."

Not a few, doubtless, have personally experienced—more likely have witnessed in others such notable results and triumphs. One aged mother in Israel, well known to the writer, never ceased for years, undeterred by adverse, almost hopeless influences, to plead, and plead, and plead again—rising from her bed at night, in the darkness, to pursue her importunate suit. She refused to surrender the conviction that the answer would come. Though it tarried, she "waited for it." Come it did, in time to gladden her

waning existence and to enable her on her own death-bed—"the sleep of the beloved"—to adore her faithful God as the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. Her experience for years might well have been that of our verse, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my cause is passed over from my God." But she had "known and heard," and testified—that "the everlasting God (the God of Eternity), the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary."

Reader, look and long for the assured gleams of this Pillar of Fire. "The Lord is good unto those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him." He never said unto any of the seed of Jacob, "you seek My face in vain." Three times Christ prayed the prayer of His agony before He was heard. Three times Paul prayed the prayer for the removal of the buffeting thorn before he was heard. In both cases, at last, support was given, not in the way it was asked for (by removal), but an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen. You may be now like the Apostle on another occasion, in the dungeons of Philippi: your soul under scourging; your feet fast in the stocks—the plaintive dirge on your lips, "Where is now my God?" But, as with him, "at midnight," the darkest hour of all, deliverance—not perhaps as you expect it, will be given. The gracious though deferred accents will be heard—"You called me in troubles, and I delivered you: and heard you what time as the storm fell upon you" (Psalm 81:7). Yes, following the Pillar—peering for its light in the surrounding darkness, sooner or later the experience and the prayer of the desert Psalm will be your own: "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

"O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

## **THE CHASTISEMENT OF LOVE**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."—Rev. 3:19

"I rebuke." "I chasten." These are solemn assertions.

The Fire of the Glory-Pillar we have interpreted very specially, as the symbol of the Divine love. But we dare not restrict it to this. It is the emblem of the Divine holiness also. It was an opening strain in the closing song of Israel's great chief—"A God of truth and without iniquity, just and righteous is He" (Deut. 32:4). And the same assertion is repeated in various forms throughout Scripture.

Nor is it well, in the midst of these thoughts of comfort and solace, to forget this complementary phase of affliction, that God—yes, God, our Heavenly Father, appears to His pilgrim Israel now, as then, at times in the character of a punisher, with the fire of rebuke and chastisement. "Behold, My angel," says He, "Shall go before you: nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them" (Exod. 32:34). True, it is not the loftiest, it is not the consolatory view to take of His dealings. That gracious assurance of "Fatherhood" revolts at the thought of retributive suffering. In our seasons of deepest grief we cling to the revelation of the Divine Being with His repertory of golden promises, announcing earth's best symbol of love ("like as a Father") to be the parable and exponent of His own.

Moreover, it would be doing injustice at once to God and His people—it would be a misapprehension contradicted by the lips of a gracious Savior, to regard chastisement in the light the sterner Jews were disposed to do, as the invariable token of Divine displeasure (John 9:2, 3). But yet I feel convinced many a stricken one, conscious of sin—it may be some special sin—can acknowledge through tears: "I know that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge." "And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing: but now put away, I beseech You, the iniquity of Your servant. ...And the Lord commanded the Angel, and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (1 Chron. 21:8, 27).

Often, also, there may be felt and owned some strange profound conformity between the sin and its chastisement, known only to the individual soul, as it whispers its unspoken griefs and accusings in the ear of Omniscience. The arrow which pierces and rankles may be feathered from our own bosoms. It may be some willful overt act of transgression. It may be the neglect and omission of some known duty. It may be siren voices of the world to which our traitor hearts have too readily, though gradually, responded, resulting in a wounding of the conscience, restraining prayer, grieving the Spirit: in a word, spiritual declension. He subjects in mercy—yes, in mercy, to some sharp discipline, to rouse us from our perilous sleep. That is the rebuke and chastisement of love here spoken of. Self-humbled, self-accused, self-condemned, we utter the confession with tremulous lip and broken heart—"Righteous are You, O Lord."

Tried and suffering one, be comforted. I believe in this furnace of affliction—the fire of Divine rebuke. But I believe, yet more, in the fire of purifying chastisement. Blessed is the man who owns the rectitude of the Great Chastiser, yet who regards all the Divine dealings, with their apparent severity—wasting disease, blighted affections, withering disappointments, lacerating bereavements; only (strange as may be the contradiction) as the tokens and pledges of a Father's love.

The parent of the Parable, weeping over his penitent prodigal, is the Image of God. He tells you it is a furnace affliction, lighted, it may be, because of your sin. But He tells you, also, that He kindles it not to destroy but to refine. He Himself is seated by, tempering the fury of the flames; keeping the silver in the glowing heat just so long and no longer than is needed to purify—to purge away the dross, and leave His own image reflected there—"a vessel fit for the Master's use." One of the great master comforters of a past generation reminds us "it is where the rough waves roar, and the rattling shingle is tossed about, that we find the pebbles rounded and polished. So the Lord is shaping the storm-tossed life" (Guthrie). "In the same way," says another, "Christ deals with the white sapphire stone of His love, glistening with its hexagon star of light and the disciple's own name engraved by His own hand as a keepsake of love. ...The white stone is love's symbol. For in the old heraldry the

sapphire always meant love. The ruby, which is only the red sapphire, earth's love. The commoner blue sapphire, heaven's love. The white sapphire, Christ's special love" (Lovell).

Never let us forget God's object in affliction. It is to draw out new and hitherto unmanifested graces, especially the grace of silent unquestioning submission: the "peaceable fruits of righteousness in those who are exercised thereby." To adopt a sentence written on a different subject, "The devout soul, in this process, may be likened to a sensitized plate, set in proper position under a starlit sky, which after due exposure is found marked by new stars, invisible to the naked eye, and beyond the farthest sweep of the unaided telescope" (Edinburgh Review).

At times the remedial measures, which God sees and knows to be required, may involve the destruction of fond hopes and proud ambitions. You may recall the story of the Italian painter, high on the church scaffolding, completing on that dizzy height one of the frescoes. He was over-absorbed in his labor, and in a perilous position, from there being no railing. While stepping back, as is the artist's used, to get the general effect of his subject, he was all unconsciously on the very verge of the scaffolding. Another step would have hurled him a dead man to the marble pavement beneath. A brother artist close by, perceived his danger. With a flash of thought he took the swiftest, best means of rescuing his friend. What was this? He made a dash with his brush at the wet fresco. In so doing he spoiled his companion's work, but he saved his life.

This is at times God's needful method of dealing and discipline. He sees His people in perilous and "slippery places," about "to cast themselves to destruction," possibly through their own blindness, and all unconscious of danger. He wrecks, for the moment, their darling hopes, spoils "the pride of life." But all to save and prevent irreparable spiritual loss. "The day of the Lord of Hosts is...on all pleasant pictures" (Isaiah 2:16). It is a strong expression to employ. I heard that great preacher, Henry Melvill, use it fifty years ago, and I have never forgotten it, as he spoke empathetically of a father laying child after child in the grave. "It broke his heart, but saved his soul!" Yes, emphasize the saying of our motto-verse, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Unto you it is given—(a family badge, a covenant privilege) to suffer." It is with His own children



He thus deals, "Whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 31:9).

O fire of the cloudy Pillar! come and search me, come and try me, come and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way! Great will be the blessedness of sorrows if such be the result.

"And after the fire a still small voice."

## LIGHT IN DARKNESS

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will lead the blind down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will make the darkness bright before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them."—Isaiah 42:16.

"What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter."—John 13:7.

A twin voice speaking from the Glory-Cloud. That Cloud, as of old, often conducts, as we have again and again noted, not by the short and easy way to the true Canaan, but through formidable leagues of desert. The cry of the fainting Hebrew host is repeated still: "We are entangled; the wilderness has shut us in." So great also, now and then, is the gloom, that with misgiving hearts we ask—Can the testimony in our case, be indeed true—"He led them ALL the night with a light of fire"? "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." The luminous token, temporarily obscured, will in due time appear. He will subject you to no unnecessary peril, no needless circuitous road. Trust this promise; trust it in the dark; trust it when you fail to trace—"I will lead the blind down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will make the darkness bright before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them."

What a wondrous succession of wilderness watch-words! all crowned by the gracious assurance that HE "appoints all"; and that though the light of the Pillar-cloud may seem to us fitful and wavering, He does not, and will not, abandon His covenant Israel.

It was but the other day I saw a picture of a blind man. The name—the impressive title—given to it by the artist, was "Lighten our darkness, O Lord!" The subject of the picture was reading from the raised letters of a Bible. A lamp was throwing its brightness on the reader's countenance, and on the hieroglyphics of the sacred page. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, was then and there shining into his heart with the light of the knowledge of His own glory. The principal figure seemed from the reflected glow on the face to say, "And HE took the blind man by the hand and led him" (Mark 8:23). Here surely are suggestively portrayed what the Lord does with our rayless souls in the gloom of blinding trial—"If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me" (Psalm 139:11).

I love the thought—God the Leader of the blind; and in their very blindness interpreting His ways!

Turn we now to the added motto-verse. We have spoken of it specifically in a previous page. But we may recur to it here as a New Testament parallel with the Old. "What I do you know not now." The Divine Brother in our nature, about to expiate the sins of the world by laying down His own life, uttered the saying. The time He uttered it was that, when surely, beyond all others, an electric chord of sympathy was linking Him with universal suffering humanity. He could then and there, with a deeper intensity and pathos, use the declaration He made of old in the night of the Exodus—"I know your sorrows." The same balm-word was whispered in this the most solemn crisis of all time. It came from the lips of dying love. 'I am about,' He seems to say, 'to encounter the hour and power of darkness for you. Will you not accept My own self-surrender and sacrifice, My tears and groans and agony, as the pledge that I can enter, from personal experience, into your uttermost griefs? I can send no unnecessary trial. Trust My "hereafter promise." And, meanwhile, let the reverential saying be your own—the saying I am about to utter in the garden-shade, in the name of all sufferers—"This cup which My heavenly

Father gives Me to drink, shall I not drink it?"

Yes, "hereafter." "I will make" (not "I have made") "crooked things straight." "Hereafter"—Reader, let that word ring its solitary chime in your darkness. We cannot too often recall, how emphatically the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews loves to echo the same—"Nevertheless AFTERWARD" (Heb. 12:11). It is the Divine order and sequence. Present ignorance, future unfoldings. Present darkness, future illumination. Present blindness, the full vision of God; His "light of fire" transforming the arid wastes and sands of the wilderness into a pathway of safety and peace. Even in this world, when, as just noted, the atmosphere is dulled with haze and mist and cloud, we have flashing gleams from the Pillar—revelations, partial and incomplete it may be, of the ways of the Almighty, strange minglings of light and shadow. In the unblighted home above, there will be a finished retrospect of wisdom and faithfulness, the light of fire without the murky cloud—the pathetic appeal of the patriarch sufferer heard no more—"When shall I arise and the night be gone?" (Job 7:4).

Recognize, then, sorrowing one, God's hand and presence in this, and all the solemn passages of your life; the day-cloud given to temper the heat of prosperity, the fire-cloud to counteract the noxious exhalations of adversity. "When I am weary and disappointed," says a sympathetic writer, "when the skies lower into the somber night, when there is no song of bird, and the perfume of flowers is but their dying breath; when all is unsetting and autumn; then I yearn for Him who sits with the summer of love in His soul, and feel that earthly affection is but a glow-worm light, compared to that which blazes with such effulgence in the heart of God." Other lights maybe obscured or missing; yours may possibly even now be either the mourner's watch, with its hushed vigils, or you may be sundered by death from dearly loved ones, yearning for "the touch of the vanished hand." You cannot be away from the touch of God. "The Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Grow not weary of His correction. He loves you through your anguish, and will yet assuredly vindicate the rectitude of all His procedure.

The lines seem so appropriate, in closing this meditation, that their familiarity will not deter transcribing them. They form the prayer and

solace of all "Pilgrims of the night," as they look upwards to their Guiding Pillar—

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead me on!

O keep my feet: I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me.

"So long Your power has blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on

Over moor and marsh, over crag and torrent, until

The night is gone.

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

Ceasing unavailing tears, look forward to the time when the promise of earth will be perpetuated without symbol in the heavenly city: and when a new meaning will be given to the old words of the Wilderness Leader —"But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."

## **THE BORDER RIVER**

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Behold, the ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan"—Josh. 3:11.

"And the king said unto him, Come over with me, and I will feed you with me in Jerusalem."—2 Sam. 19:33.

The theme of this meditation may seem a step backward from the preceding; but I have purposely retained it as an appropriate one with which to close our volume. The wilderness Pillar was undeviating in its guidance to the end. This pillar of the Hebrew host never failed in "giving

light by night to these" until Jordan was reached.

We can picture it as it moved silently, majestically through the hills of Moab—from upland to upland, from ridge to ridge, from valley to valley—the pioneer of the mighty multitude, until its fiery splendor was seen for the last time. It had for forty long years shot up its column to the heavens. Now that its mission is accomplished, it ceases to shine. Its sacramental purpose is no more needed.

Yet, in another sense, it was more needed than ever. If the visible symbol be removed, is there no guarantee for further Divine guidance at this final crisis-hour? When the river—the arrowy river rushing through its gorges—(for Jordan was in full flood) was seen by the pilgrim tribes, the question must have naturally passed from lip to lip—'How are we to cross the impetuous barrier?' Joshua calms their fears with the inspiring assurance, "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan."

Believer, with you also, in a true anti-typical sense, the border-river may now, or before long, be within sight. For yourself—(more possibly for some one near and dear to you) there is a gradual or near approach to the end of the pilgrimage. It is a new experience. In the words of Joshua uttered at the same historic hour, "You have not passed this way before" (Josh. 3:4). It is the night of nights—night in its deepest darkness. You may try to invent euphemisms to dim and mitigate the gloom. It is nevertheless too surely, too dreadfully, the advent of the King of terrors. But if by grace served heir to the hopes and promises of the Gospel, that final passage is not traversed alone. Your Savior-God (Joshua-Jesus) gives a corresponding assurance—a better counterpart to that of Israel's commander—"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). "I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17). He will be true to His own covenant word, "Fear not, for I am with you" (Isaiah 43:2).

No, more, not only does He conduct you through the stream, but He has Himself forded it. He knows what death and the grave are. He surrendered Himself to both, a voluntary captive. As He, the Incarnate Redeemer, the Divine Son of Man, has shared every wilderness experience of His people, so also this closing one. "Fear not: I am He that

lives and was dead" (Rev. 1:18). 'Can you dread,' He seems to say, 'to pass what I have encountered before you? With Me at your side you will go over dry shod. I have sanctified that hour of departure by My own. By My dying, the tomb has been transfigured. The gate of the grave has been made the gate of Heaven. I have "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light!"'

Believer! when the wilderness journey is about to end—the better Canaan in sight, take God to witness, as did the Hebrew leader, "There has not failed one word of all His good promise which He promised" (1 Kings 8:56). "The light of fire" has been "all the night"; it has never dimmed. The faithfulness of Jehovah in the past is a pledge that He will not forsake you now. He who guaranteed special provision for the roughest part of the way (Deut. 33:25) will not forget you in the supreme hour of all. And when the guiding column fails, it is only to be superseded by "the glory that excels." You will not need the Shadow where you have the Substance. You will not need the Satellites where you have the Sun. You will not need the Symbol where you have the all-glorious Reality. In the words of a recent theme of meditation—"God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The invitation will then be true regarding every ransomed Israelite, in a far higher and nobler sense than when uttered to the aged Gilead chief by the brink of the literal Jordan—"And the king said unto him, Come over with me, and I will feed you WITH ME in Jerusalem."

Wondrous must have been the spectacle in that final hour of the Hebrew march—the goal of the desert wanderings. Already some had pitched their tents amid the acacias and palm-groves which studded the plain beyond, near to the Valley of Achor and the walls of Jericho. But the safety of all was secured: alike manhood in its strength; infancy in its feebleness; age in its decrepitude. The crossing was completed, doubtless with a hymn of victory, similar to that which resounded on the Red Sea shores. Thus will it be with the army of the Redeemed—"the multitude which no man can number"! The Great Captain of Salvation will not only be their faithful Protector and Guide, but He will secure that however varied their bygone experience, there will be a glorious meeting at last, as individuals and families, in "scenes beyond the flood,"—"the fields of living green." And so all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:26).

You who are laid on beds of hopeless suffering, wait patiently amid the experiences of "death's dark night," until the sentinel footsteps are heard with tidings of the dawn. Pain, weakness, and languor, inseparable from the closing hour, may be yours, or that of those by whose couch you are keeping sacred watch. But though an enemy confronts you, it is the last enemy. It is but the boom of the breakers telling that the voyage is ending and the heavenly shore is at hand. John in Patmos, as he listened to the blast of trumpets and beheld the outpouring of vials—in the hush and interlude of the great drama, heard a voice saying, "Write; Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Be it yours to subscribe the inspired beatitude. Feeling that "to die is gain," let this be your prayer and calm resolve—"All the days of my appointed time, (or as rendered in the Revised Version, "of my warfare,") would I wait until my release come."

"Now we pitched our final tent,  
The desert journey done:  
The glorious hills of the Better Land  
Gleamed in the setting sun.

"The great and terrible river  
Which we stood by night to view  
Is left far off in the darkness,  
For the Lord has brought us through."

Meanwhile, with memories of the goodness and mercy that have followed you all the days of your life—a wilderness-vista of these, you can take up the great song of the ages, "the Song of the Valley," the most familiar of all inspired words, with their rhythmic music—"I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff comfort me." It is, at best, but a brief transit. It is only the shadow of death. The substance—the terribleness has been taken away by Him who announced in a note of prophetic triumph, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague, O grave, I will be your destruction." "With that staff," said an aged pilgrim, speaking of the revealed Christ of the Bible with His supporting grace—"will I pass over this Jordan."

"My work is done; I lay me down to die.

Weary and travel-worn I long for rest.  
Speak but the word, dear Master, and I fly,  
A dove let loose, to nestle in Your breast.

"It is enough, dear Master—yes, Amen!  
I will not breathe one murmur of reply.  
Only fulfill Your work in me, and then  
Call me, and bid me answer, 'Here am I.'"

O God, when the terminating hour of the pilgrimage comes to me, or comes to those I love, shine upon us through the flaming Pillar! I seek no other funeral torch but this. Let it prove what a lighthouse often is in "crossing the bar" of some earthly harbor, when friends are disclosed on the pier waving their welcome. Yes, the thought of reunion after long years of separation, will joyfully mingle with other supreme visions of the Home hereafter, and God will be found true to His word, "the God not of the dead but of the living."

"We must not doubt, or fear, or dread,  
That love for life is only given,  
And that the calm and sainted dead  
Will meet unrecognized in Heaven;  
But that which makes this life so sweet  
Shall make eternal joy complete."

Was it a cheering thought to the Hebrews, that once on the Canaan side, their feet touched the land made sacred by the names of the patriarchs—the pilgrim fathers of their nation sleeping in the not distant cave of Machpelah? What, O child of promise, will be your joy, when, the border-river left behind, you come not only to share the Presence of the King in Jerusalem, but also to recognize sainted ones gone before you; and, as a member of the family of the glorified, sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Your Father?

May the fleeting meditations of the foregoing pages carry with them a few balm-words of comfort to those who may stand much in need of such. Pausing once more under the Column of Fire—or rather, with the last gleam of the Pillar reflected in the gloomy waters, and with our faces and



footsteps turned to the City of the living God, let us sing the final, triumphant note—"Death is swallowed up in VICTORY."

"And they all passed over Jordan by morning light."

## **THE GATES OF PRAYER**

"Prayer is a Golden Key, which should open the morning and lock up the evening." We can say of prayer, what Christian said to Hopeful in the dungeon, "I have a KEY in my bosom that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle!"

Each day contains two separate prayers—one for the morning, and one for the evening.

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## **CHOICE EXCERPTS**

Heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, I approach Your gracious presence. In the extremity of my own weakness, may I lean on Your Almighty arm—hold me up, and I shall be safe. Preserve me from the world's insinuating, seductive power, and from the treachery and deceitfulness of my own evil heart. Order my steps in Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Waiting on You afresh, may I receive strength and courage for all the duties of a new day. I would confide to Your ear every need, every care, every sorrow, every cross.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inspire me with devout acquiescence in Your will, knowing that whatever You appoint must be for the best. Preserve me from peevishness and fretfulness—from petulance of temper and hastiness of speech—from covetousness and selfishness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, I come, owning my great unworthiness. I come with my poverty and helplessness, my doubts and conflicts, my foes and fears, my difficulties and perplexities, my sorrows and my sins. I would lay the heavy burden of them all, at the foot of the Redeemer's cross. In that cross alone I would glory. I look away from myself to His completed work. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have too often sought for happiness in objects and pursuits which fail to satisfy the yearnings of the immortal spirit. Lord, have mercy upon me! Save me from the sins which most easily ensnare me. From the love of the world which alienates my affections from heavenly realities—from the love of self which interferes with the entire consecration of the heart to Christ—from the covetousness which hardens—from the impurity which debases and enslaves! From every evil lust and passion and temper—good Lord, deliver me! Conscious of my own utter weakness, I would look for the supplies of Your promised grace. By it alone I stand. If I am enabled this day to resist temptation, it is all Your doing. It is You who uphold me by Your right hand. Human power is impotent to break the chains of sin and Satan.

\* \* \* \* \*

I bless You that, as the Good Shepherd who gave Your own life for the sheep—the weakest, the weariest, the most burdened of the flock can claim Your regard. You mark out our pasture for us. You know Your sheep by name and lead them out. If at times I am unable to understand the mystery of Your dealings—if at times You lead along the thorny path—teaching by crossed purposes and baffled and thwarted expectations—may it be mine to confide in Your unerring wisdom. May I implicitly trust Your faithfulness; glorifying Your holy name by unquestioning submission, saying "Lord, here am I—do to me, and with me, as seems best in Your sight." "Though You slay me, yet will I trust in You." Strong in Your grace, may I strive to live under the sovereignty of that loftiest motive—that whatever pleases You shall please me; that whatever be

Your holy will shall be mine.

\* \* \* \* \*

If the path of prosperity should be chequered—if human props fail—if human refuges reveal themselves to be refuges of lies—if worldly substance be impaired—if earthly love dies—may that which is perishable and corruptible only drive me nearer to the incorruptible—to seek closer and more intimate fellowship with Him in whose presence there is fullness of joy. Thus, trusting You and loving You, let me rise superior to all that is fleeting and fluctuating around.

\* \* \* \* \*

O Father, I bring all my needs and sins, my difficulties and trials and perplexities—and pour them into the loving ear of my most loving Father-God. Keep me from living as if this world were my final rest, and home, and portion. May I seek, rather, to live from day to day as one whose true home is above. May I trust a Father's love, a Father's hand, a Father's heart, a Father's rod; regarding Your dealings as needful discipline; and honoring You by simple, confiding, unreserved submission.

\* \* \* \* \*

Adorable Redeemer, give me grace that I may be more and more assimilated to Your holy image, and more and more molded in conformity to Your holy will. Impart to me Your meekness, Your humility, Your gentleness, Your forgiveness of injuries—Your tender consideration for others; that patience under provocation which made You stand as a Lamb silent before Your shearers. Make me more lowly and loving—more resigned and submissive. May I live under the power of renewed affections. Raise me above all fretting cares and timid fears, above all morbid anxieties and solitudes about trifles.

\* \* \* \* \*

O unchanging Savior-God, lead me to Yourself—the Rock that is higher than I. Whatever is the cause of my trials, may I be enabled, in

unmurmuring, uncomplaining submission to say, "Even so, Father!" In the midst of impaired health, and thwarted schemes, and disappointed hopes, and broken hearts, and voices hushed in death—may it be mine exultingly to exclaim, as I look to the One who survives all blanks and losses, "They shall perish, but You remain; as a vesture shall You fold them up, and they shall be changed; but YOU are the same, and Your years shall not fail."

\* \* \* \* \*

O God, who is the refuge of all who seek You, may I know this day the blessedness of those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and who abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I rejoice that I am never a solitary moment away from Your guardianship and care—that You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Amid all changes—You are the abiding One. The world's joys are shadowy and fleeting—they mock the hand which grasps them; the world's refuges are refuges of lies. But in the pavilion of Your love I am ever safe and secure. Hide me there until earth's calamities be over and past. I adore You as the Supreme Disposer of all events. Your purposes no accident can change—Your faithfulness no time can impair—Your counsels no created being can question or resist. Blessings and trials, comforts and crosses—come alike from You. You send the gourd. You send the worm. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? I adore You especially as the God of Salvation, and praise You for the riches of Your sovereign grace in Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

I come to You, Blessed Lord, thanking You for all Your mercies. How manifold have been the proofs and tokens of Your kindness and faithfulness! The past has been paved with love. There is no friend in the world who has been like You, and none so willing to befriend me. You have showered me with the blessings of Your goodness. While others have been laid on beds of sickness or cut down by sudden death, I am still among the living to praise You. Above all, You have bestowed upon me the Gift of gifts—that Gift which in magnitude and preciousness dwarfs and absorbs all others. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift! Life



may well be a perpetual hymn of gratitude for all Your unmerited mercies, alike temporal and spiritual. I am unworthy of the least of them. It is to Your free Sovereign abounding Grace I owe them all. Not unto me O Lord, not unto me, but unto Your name I would give glory—for Your mercy and for Your truth's sake.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, I have to mourn my constant proneness to depart from You—the instability of my best resolutions—the fitfulness of my best frames and feelings—the sordidness of my best motives. I confess, without reservation, my heart-sins, lip-sins, life-sins—omitted duties—abused mercies—unsanctified warnings—love of the world—love of ease—love of self—taking Your gifts and forgetting the Giver. Blessed Savior, have mercy upon me. I confide in Your infinite power and wisdom. There is a potency in Your name to soothe every fear and to hush every sorrow. Say in the might of Your mingled omnipotence and love—"Your sins are all forgiven!" I cast myself on You, alike for time and in eternity. In life, may I feel the power of Your sustaining grace; in trouble, the support of Your tender consolations; and in death the all-sufficiency of Your exceeding great and precious promises.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fit me this day for the battle of life. Trusting to the promised aids of Your Spirit, may I be enabled to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. Keep me from absorbing love of this world—from all forbidden paths—from all doubtful and debatable ground. Preserve me from the lusts which debase, the selfishness which hardens, the anger or malice which, if unchecked and unrepressed, may grow into malevolence.

\* \* \* \* \*

May the joys of the way and the trials of the way alike bring me nearer heaven and nearer to You.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I go forth this day into a world of trouble and trial and conflict. In no armor or power of my own am I proof against the enemy—but I take refuge in the elevating assurance that I can do all things, and suffer all things, and overcome all things—through Christ who strengthens me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, You are the Supreme Disposer. There is no such thing as accident or chance in Your providential rule. Each varying scene in this varying chequered life is from You alone. In all difficulties and perplexities, enable me to commit my way implicitly unto Your better direction—hearing Your voice behind me saying, "This is the way, walk in it"—rejoicing in Your wise orderings, Your beneficent purposes—and willing to tread, if need be, the roughest path, because it is Your sovereign will and wisdom to lead me there. Teach me ever devoutly to follow the leadings, and to imbibe the spirit, of the divine Redeemer. Keep me . . .  
from the manifestation of unholy tempers,  
from the pride which elates,  
from the worldliness which hardens,  
from all unkindness and uncharitableness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, keep me from the absorbing love of the world; from coveting earthly good rather than heavenly riches. Keep me from all that would dim, to the eye of faith—the glories of the future. Enable me to live habitually, as I would wish I had been living, when the Son of man comes. Let me also anticipate with joy that day when . . .  
all mysteries will be unfolded,  
all wrongs redressed,  
all sufferings removed,  
all corruptions vanquished,  
and death itself swallowed up in eternal victory!

\* \* \* \* \*

I adore You, especially, for the mightiest proof which You have given of Your benignity and kindness, in the person and work of Your dear Son! Herein indeed is love! If at times unable to trace, in Your mysterious providential dealings, the footsteps of mercy—if at times tempted, under baffling dispensations, to say, "Your judgments are a great deep"—"Truly You are a God who hides Yourself"—seated at the foot of Calvary's cross, we can joyfully exclaim, "We have known and believed the love God which has to us."

\* \* \* \* \*

Man's love is changing—Yours is unchanging; man's love is finite—Yours is infinite; man's love is the result of kindness, the return of love for love—but You commend Your love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! Thanks, eternal thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!

\* \* \* \* \*

Before I engage in my daily duties, I would implore Your guidance and protection. I cannot forecast the circumstances in which I may be placed today—what temptations may beset me—what troubles may oppress me. Let a sense of Your presence hallow my labors—that so, begun, carried on, and ended in You—all may redound to Your praise and glory. Let me use, with a glad and grateful heart, the many enjoyments You have given me in this beautiful earth; but abolish the evil dominion of self and selfishness. Keep me from the beguiling and seductive love of pleasure, on which Your approval cannot rest. Write the law of kindness on my heart. Let it be my happiness and joy to minister to others. May I feel that it is better to give than to receive; better to be last than to be first. Keep me pure—preserve me from false living—from all artifice—all underhand and dubious dealings—all crooked and covetous ways. May my conversation be sincere, my conscience clear as the noonday. Serving You cheerfully here, may I become more and more fitted for the full consecration—the perfect spontaneity of the heavenly world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Teach me ever to realize what a needy pensioner I am, from day to day and from hour to hour—on Your grace. Hold me up! Keep me, guide me, protect me, undertake for me. In temptation support me—in danger defend me—in sorrow comfort me. If You send prosperity, enable me to carry the cup with a steady hand. If You send adversity, enable me to glorify You in the midst of the fires—adoring a 'taking' God, as well as a 'giving' God. As a member of the Christian priesthood, may it be my desire to offer on Your altar the continual sacrifice of a humble spirit, and a holy, pure, consistent life. Keep the lamp of faith and love trimmed and burning. Let me aim, more and more, at the crucifixion of sin and self. Should You speak at times by crossed dealings and mysterious dispensations, reading the impressive lesson of earth's corruptible and defiled and fading inheritances—may I harbor no guilty suspicions of Your faithfulness, or seek to arraign the appointments of Your paternal wisdom. Let me bear, with patience, whatever You see fit to appoint. Put into my lips the prayer, divinely taught, "Your will be done." Seeking to have no jot or tittle altered in the allotments of infinite love, may I look forward to that morning without clouds, when in Your light I shall see light, and when every shadow which now dims and darkens—shall forever flee away!

\* \* \* \* \*

Deliver me from the enthralling power and bondage of sin in every form. As a temple of the Holy Spirit, may I be kept from whatever would defile or desecrate its hallowed courts. Preserve me from the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—from the power of all carnal appetites and corrupt affections. Guard the springs of thought and will. Prevent me from harboring or indulging unrighteous desires. In all I do, may I put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. Having the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, may I sit at the feet of Him who pleased not Himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Even when the footsteps of a God of love fail to be traced—may there be implicit trust in the wisdom and rectitude of inscrutable dealings.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gracious Redeemer, You have a balm for every wound; an antidote for every sorrow.

\* \* \* \* \*

Give the quickening energy of Your Holy Spirit, to disarm the power of temptation—to dethrone self—to deliver from the seductive influences of the world. Keep me from the intoxication of success—and the pride of prosperity. Keep me from undue depression—and guilty murmuring in adversity.

\* \* \* \* \*

While I bear about with me continually the dying of the Lord Jesus, may the life of Jesus be made manifest in my mortal flesh. May it be my habitual aspiration, that my character be a reflection of His—in its gentleness and meekness—its purity and unselfishness—its benevolence and sympathy.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the tree falls—so must it lie. As death leaves us—so will judgment and eternity find us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, I have reason to mourn my manifold sins—my disobedience and unbelief—my ingratitude and rebellion. I am a wonder to myself—self-destroyer that I am—that You have spared me—that You have not, long before now, pronounced against me the lumberer's sentence, and executed against me the lumberer's righteous doom. It is because You are God and not man, that, despite of all I have done to merit Your just displeasure—Your anger is turned away, and Your hand of mercy and love and compassion is stretched out still.

\* \* \* \* \*

You are willing to bestow every needed blessing—pardoning grace—sustaining grace—strengthening grace—sanctifying grace—comforting grace—grace, until grace is no longer needed, but is lost and swallowed up in glory! O You who gives "more grace," hide me deeper in the clefts of the smitten Rock! Other refuge I have none—my helpless soul depends entirely on You. Lord, save me—else I perish! Save me, I beseech You, not only from the guilt, but from the power of sin. Save me from the corruptions of my own heart—from the seductive influences of the world—from the temptations that may be incident to my secular duties and engagements. Save me from the sin that most easily besets me—save me from bringing dishonor on Your holy cause and Your holy name, by my inconsistent conduct or uneven walk. Save me, oh, save me, from the wrath to come!

\* \* \* \* \*

I come pleading that Name which soothes all sorrows, heals all wounds, dries all tears; which is manna to the hungry soul, and rest to the weary. How many are now in Glory, testifying to the boundless stores of grace hidden in Christ!

\* \* \* \* \*

I desire to acknowledge my great unworthiness—my constant and grievous departures from the path of Your commandments. I have gone astray like a lost sheep, following too much the devices and the desires of my own heart. You might have righteously excluded me forever from the green pastures and still waters, and left me to pursue my own devious wanderings. But blessed be Your name, in the midst of abounding sin there is abounding grace—the Good Shepherd—He who gave His own life for the sheep, is still waiting to be gracious—not willing that any of His sheep should perish, but that all should come unto Him and live. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto You. May I have the habitual feeling that I am only safe when following the footsteps and leadings of the Great Shepherd of the flock. May the realizing sense of His presence and nearness, sweeten all joy and alleviate all sorrow.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, reveal to me, more and more, the infinite evil of sin—the ingratitude of such requitals of Your love and resistings of Your Spirit. Keep me pure—protect me from temptation—preserve me unspotted from the world. Give me the habit of a holy life. May my affections be more entirely surrendered to You.

\* \* \* \* \*

The thread of my life is in Your hand. I am no judge of what is best for me—often would I choose the evil and refuse the good. But You are ever faithful and unerring. O lead me, not in my own way—but in the way that I ought to go. May it be mine, amid every vicissitude, to recognize infinite wisdom in all Your allotments—to sit at the feet of the Great Teacher, contented with the assurance, "This also comes from the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Blessed be Your name for Your wise teaching in the past—for all the deliverances You have given in times of danger—for all the help in times of trouble—for all the support in times of temptation. I would desire implicitly to trust You in the future. There is no corruption but what Your grace will enable me to subdue—there is no cross but what Your grace will enable me to carry—there is no foe but Your grace will enable me to conquer.

\* \* \* \* \*

"As for God, his way is perfect." I thank You, Heavenly Father, that from day to day, and from hour to hour, I am under Your wise and loving direction—that it is You who set up the waymarks, and appoint the bounds of my habitation. The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. If left to my own self, I would often choose the evil and refuse the good—I might select what was selfish and perilous and sinful—what might compromise my peace of conscience, and endanger my spiritual interests. I have often erred in the past, pursuing at times devious paths on which Your blessing could not rest. I would desire to take You more as my guide and counselor for the future. Let me follow You wholly—trusting Your heart, even where I fail to trace Your hand—amid all vicissitudes and perplexities, hearing Your voice behind

me saying, "This is the way, walk in it"—and writing over every dubious path—every mysterious Providence—"As for God, His way is perfect."

\* \* \* \* \*

I know that all Your dealings are dictated by unerring wisdom and unchangeable love. I would look forward, with joyful confidence, to that great Day of disclosures, when the now sealed roll shall be unfolded, and when every tongue will be brought to confess, "The Lord was righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." Meanwhile, with the fear of God within me, and the eye of God above me, and the Heaven of God before me—may I prosecute steadfastly my pilgrim-way—going up through the wilderness leaning on Your arm. And then, though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear—for greater is He who is with me, and for me—than all those who can be against me. Amid the changes of the world and the instability of earth's best props and refuges—amid the tossings and heavings of this treacherous sea of life—may I cling to the sure anchorage—"As for God, His way is perfect."

\* \* \* \* \*

My every sorrow is numbered and appointed by the Man of Sorrows. May I feel how light and trivial my bitterest cup is—compared with the cup of suffering He so willingly drained for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have to confess and mourn my great unworthiness. How far short have I come of that holiness of heart and purity of life, without which no man can see the Lord. How many sinful thoughts have I harbored—how many guilty words have I spoken—how many duties have I omitted, or carelessly and perfunctorily performed. How little gratitude have I shown for blessings—how little patience under crosses. How much pride has there been in my humility—how little childlike trust in Your dealings. How have even my best resolutions to serve You, been erased by the world's oblivion-power. How often have I returned to those very sins I had solemnly sworn and covenanted I was to part with forever. Lord, have mercy upon me! I come anew, guilty, polluted, helpless—to Him



who is help and hope and portion—to all who seek Him. My own repentings and tears cannot cleanse away the guilt of a single transgression. But the blood of Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, cleanses from them all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Deliver me from the enthralling power and bondage of sin in every form. I anticipate with joy that day when all mysteries will be unfolded—all wrongs redressed—all sufferings removed—all corruptions vanquished—and death itself swallowed up in eternal victory!

\* \* \* \* \*

Even when the footsteps of a God of love fail to be traced—may I have implicit trust in the wisdom and rectitude of Your inscrutable dealings.

\* \* \* \* \*

While I bear about with me continually the dying of the Lord Jesus, may the life also of Jesus be made manifest in my mortal flesh. May it be my habitual aspiration, that my character be a reflection of His—in its gentleness and meekness—its purity and unselfishness—its benevolence and sympathy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let me trust You in the dark. Amid all tossings and tribulations, may I see in every trial, only the appointed billow to waft my bark nearer the haven, and may I sing amid the storm—"So gives He His beloved rest."

\* \* \* \* \*

Most Gracious God, how insensible have I proved to the multiplied tokens of Your love and kindness. Your mercies have been unworthily requited; my duties have been perfunctorily performed. Corruption within has responded to temptation from without. There has been too often pride where there should have been humility—resentment where there should have been forgiveness—unbelief where there should have

been trust—murmuring where there should have been submission and resignation. For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity—for it is great. A sinner to the uttermost, I rejoice that, in Your dear Son, there is salvation to the uttermost. I rejoice in Him as the very Savior I need. Though omnipotence slumbers in His arm, He is touched with a fellow-feeling for all my infirmities. He can enter, with tender sensitiveness, into every temptation that crosses my path, and into every pang that rends my heart. I would lay hold anew on the blood besprinkled horns of the altar; and listen to Your voice of power and grace and love saying, "Your sins which are many are all forgiven you!" Give to me, I beseech You, salvation from the power, as well as from the guilt, of sin. This is Your will concerning me, even my sanctification. Keep me from all hardness of heart and contempt of Your holy word and commandment—from envy and malice—from pride and vain-glory—from vanity and lies—from tampering with temptation in any form, and thus endangering my present peace and imperiling my soul's everlasting interests. Guard every loophole by which any spiritual foe might enter. Give me resolute energy of will, to resist and to endure—as seeing Him who is invisible.

\* \* \* \* \*

Give me grace to look beyond the cloudy present—to the stormless skies of that better land, where the pang of sorrow can neither be felt nor feared. Lying passive in Your hands, may it be mine through my tears to say, "Father, glorify Your name!"

\* \* \* \* \*

As a suppliant at the gates of prayer, may I feel it to be a privilege to draw near unto You. Give me filial trust and confidence. Enable me to unburden, without reserve, into Your ear—all my trials and difficulties.

\* \* \* \* \*

How unworthy, Lord, I am of Your paternal regard and patient forbearance! How much have I done to forfeit Your favor! I have been rebellious and wayward—unthankful and unholy—leaving too often Your countless mercies unacknowledged—dethroning You from my affections,

and giving to others the loyalty and allegiance which should be Yours alone. Give me deep contrition for an erring past. Graciously give me Your help. Lord, I feel that this struggling with sin, this conflict with temptation, is a hopeless contest without You—without Your strengthening, sustaining, restraining grace. Hold me up—and I shall be safe.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let it be my habitual aim to imbibe the meek, lowly, patient, unworldly spirit of Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

I know not what difficulties, or trials, or temptations, may be before me this day. Prepare me whether for duty or for conflict. Knowing the treachery of the heart, I desire this morning, and each morning, to receive fresh supplies of Your grace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bring me to act more habitually under the influence of unseen spiritual realities. From the dominion of Satan—from the enslavement of lust and passion—from the absorbing love of the world—from the deceitfulness of riches—good Lord, deliver me! May the law of love, which has its highest exemplification in the life of Your dear Son, find expression in my daily walk. May I be molded, more and more, in conformity with His will, and copy more of His example—in His meekness and gentleness, in His unselfish and tender consideration for others. I have no ability in myself to carry out one good or holy resolution. Undertake for me. If there is any indication of spiritual quickening or vitality within me, it is derived from You, the source and inspiration of all energy and goodness. I can do all things through Christ strengthening me. "More grace! more grace!" may this be my constant prayer. Hold me up, and I shall be safe.

\* \* \* \* \*

I confide in Your wisdom which never errs, and Your love which never

changes.

\* \* \* \* \*

I look forward to that glorious land, where there is no sin to crucify—where there is no corruption to subdue—where there is nothing to be delivered from—where the joy and the presence of the Lord will be my eternal strength.

\* \* \* \* \*

May Your children, who are laid on couches of sickness, manifest a spirit of un murmuring submission to Your will; recognizing Your hand, and Your hand alone—remembering that You are never arbitrary in Your dealings—that even "wearisome nights are appointed." Give them strength to be silent ministers of the truth, by exhibiting the power of Your sustaining grace; looking beyond the cloudlands of earth, to the better country, where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." Thus patiently bearing their cross, may they anticipate, with calm and joyful expectancy, that blessed hour, when all the sorrows and tribulations of earth will be forgotten in the words of welcome, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

\* \* \* \* \*

O Lord, forearm me by Your grace. In the battle with evil, around me and within me—I would overcome alone by the blood of the Lamb. Give me grace to live under a sense of Your All-Seeing Eye; rejoicing that no distance and no locality can separate You and I.

\* \* \* \* \*

You can enter with tender sensitiveness into the keenest woes of humanity. I can think of You, the Prince of Sufferers, feeling for me—weeping for me—bleeding for me—dying for me. There is no extremity of distress, in which Your hand is shortened, or Your ear is heavy.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is by Your grace alone I stand. Hold me up and I shall be safe. Shield me from the snares of a seductive world; fortify me against the assaults of temptation. Pray for me, as You did for Your erring disciple, that my faith fail not.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is You alone who can whisper forgiveness, quiet misgivings, quicken faith, subdue corruption. Feeling the yoke of sin heavy and grievous, I come to You, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Weary and heavy-laden—in Your cross I would find rest for my soul. May I lean upon You with unfaltering dependence—may I be consecrated to You in unswerving allegiance. Enable me more and more to crucify sin. May its power be subdued and its love mortified. May I set watch at every avenue by which temptation may gain entrance.

\* \* \* \* \*

When every other source of comfort fails—may all my springs be in You. When in deep distress, may I adore Your sovereignty, and own Your wisdom, and trust Your love. May Christ be magnified in me whether by life or by death. May I find Him the one way to consolation and peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself just as He is pure." Having this hope in Him—the blessed hope of seeing Him as He is, and of enjoying His everlasting fellowship—may I purify myself even as He is pure; daily imbibing more of His meek, gentle, unselfish, unworldly spirit; withdrawing my affections from things which are of the earth, earthy—and consecrating them to His service. Enable me to exercise a vigilant jealousy over my thoughts, words, and actions; seeking to renounce whatever is displeasing to Him, and that would mar my peace of conscience.

\* \* \* \* \*

In every difficult and perplexing duty, may this always form the testing

question and final appeal—"How would my Lord and Savior have acted here?" And knowing His will, may it be my delight to do it. Strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die. Let the power of sin wax weaker and weaker, and let the power of Your grace within me wax stronger and stronger. Thus, blessed Savior, whatever may be the changes and sorrows I experience in this precarious, uncertain existence; with the conscious assurance of Your presence and love, I must be happy. If You are near to me—if You abide with me—there can be no terror in trial, no bitterness in tears, no sting in death. With You for my portion, I am independent of every other. In all Your dealings towards me, may I recognize the gracious purpose and design of making me more and more fit for that glorious world, where obedience to You shall never falter, and consecration shall never fail; where every thought and wish shall be in unison with the divine.

\* \* \* \* \*

O You, whose heart beats responsive to the smallest sorrow of Your stricken people, look down in great mercy on Your sons and daughters of affliction. May they know that You have a wise and holy end in all Your discipline. May they come to feel that their greatest trials are the ladder-steps to their greatest blessings—links in the chain which draws them to heaven. Whether You chasten or gladden, may they be enabled to say, "Even so, Father, for it seems good in Your sight."

\* \* \* \* \*

Day by day are You loading me with Your benefits, and giving me unceasing cause for gratitude and praise.

\* \* \* \* \*

I acknowledge with deep humiliation my unworthiness and guilt. Each day, as it brings with it the memory of Your great goodness, brings with it also the memory of my multiplied offences. I confess my sins, alike of omission and commission; that I have done the things I ought not to have done, and have left undone those things I ought to have done. I have often no affecting sense of the enslaving power of sin. I have too often

resorted to false and unavailing refuges for satisfaction and happiness. I have too frequently sought to slake my thirst at the world's polluted cisterns, and failed to remember that all my fresh springs are in You. Lord, have mercy upon me! Christ, have mercy upon me! It is by free, sovereign, unmerited grace, I am what I am. If I stand at last accepted before Your throne, this will be my plea, my confession, my eternal avowal—"Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." May I live under the elevating consciousness that I stand clothed in His righteousness, and that nothing can ever separate me from His love. Once within the fold, I am in the fold forever. Loving His own at the beginning, He will love them unto the end.

\* \* \* \* \*

Keep me from conformity to the evil maxims and practices of the world. Enable me to use its blessings without abusing them, and to live under the powers of the world to come. May I know the conquering, transforming influence of Redeeming love—raising my affections, purifying my desires, elevating my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whatever the cross be, which Your suffering people are called to carry, may they enjoy the assurance, that the same Lord who died for them, lays it on, and keeps it on—that no unnecessary thorn is in their chaplet of sorrow. We look forward to a sinless, sorrowless, tearless immortality!

\* \* \* \* \*

Blessings innumerable have been poured into my lap, but they have often been received with an unthankful heart. Shadowing palms and wells of refreshing have studded my pilgrim path; but I have too frequently reclined under the shadow, and partaken of the refreshment, without any breathing of gratitude to the Bountiful Provider.

\* \* \* \* \*

Defend me from every snare and danger which may beset my path. Be my

Shield in prosperity—my Refuge in adversity—my Comforter in sorrow—  
my Light in darkness—my Hope in death—my Defender and Vindicator  
in judgment—my Joy and Portion through all eternity.

\* \* \* \* \*

May the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, expel whatever is unholy, and  
transform me more and more into the image and likeness of Your dear  
Son.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have to mourn the poverty of my faith—the lukewarmness of my love—  
the fitfulness of my obedience—the perfunctory performance of my  
religious duties. How little the precepts of Your sacred Scriptures have  
been treasured in my heart, and reduced to practice in my daily walk and  
life. How often I have indulged in tempers and feelings inconsistent with  
Your revealed will, and with the character of Him who was meek and  
lowly in heart. I have too often yielded to the power of temptation—bent  
like a brittle reed in the storm; dishonoring Your name and grieving Your  
Spirit. You might righteously have left me to reap the fruit of my own  
ways and to be filled with my own devices—saying, "Ephraim is joined to  
his idols, let him alone."

\* \* \* \* \*

I desire to repose on Him who alone can speak peace to the sin-burdened  
and sorrow-burdened. Looking to His glorious, completed work, I can  
triumphantly say, Return unto your rest—your peace—O my soul, for the  
Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the  
world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." I  
would seek to have no wish, and no will, and no way of my own. Do to  
me, and with me, as seems good in Your sight, only make me possessor of  
this best blessing—the peace of Yours, which passes all understanding—



that peace which the world knows not of—which the world with its riches and pleasures, its blandishments and fascinations—cannot give; and which the world, with all its troubles and anxieties, its sorrows and its trials—cannot take away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Whom the Lord loves He chastens." May this prove a quietener to all fears, lull all misgivings, and repress all murmurs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Anew I commend myself to Your gracious keeping this day. Guide me by Your counsel—guard me from temptation—lead me in the way everlasting. May every unloving thought—every unworthy aim and aspiration—give place to what is pure and unselfish and kind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, I would plead for increased communications and supplies of Your grace. Strengthen me with all might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Keep me from all that would be detrimental to my spiritual interests—all that would weaken or impair this filial confidence, and lead me to restrain prayer. Whatever be my dominant sin—ease or pleasure—pride or passion—covetousness or ambition—enable me by the promised help of Your Spirit, to subdue it—nailing it to the Redeemer's cross. Enable me to follow His meekness and gentleness; to be kind and forgiving—tender and charitable towards all. Conscious of the supreme enthronement of Your love, may life be, more than it has been—an effort to crucify self and to please You. Even when there may be mystery in Your dealings, let me not wrong Your goodness and wisdom with one shadow of suspicion. Whether by giving or by taking—by smiting or by healing—by the sweet cup or the bitter—may it be mine to say, "Father! glorify Your name!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"The Lord God omnipotent reigns!" O God, I adore Your sovereignty. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. All space is Your dominion. You

do according to Your will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. You count the number of the stars, and name every one. You heal the broken in heart and bind up their wounds. The sparrow's fall is appointed by You—the young raven's cry is heard by You—the very hairs of our head are numbered by You. From the drop of the forest leaf, to the departure of the soul in death—all is known to You and ordered by You. You appoint the bounds of our habitation. Man proposes, but You dispose; and You dispose all things well. Let it be thus ever a joyous thought—that whatever concerns me, is under the control and direction of infinite wisdom and unchanging, everlasting love. I cannot forecast the future—but it is in Your hands. Even if there be cloud and tempest, it is You who walk upon the wings of the wind. Omnipotence treads the stormy waters. Omnipotence directs the roll of every billow and, when it is fit, Omnipotence utters the mandate, "Peace, be still!"

\* \* \* \* \*

O God, I have to acknowledge that I have not always thus realized Your constant supervision, and taken the comfort I ought to have derived from Your sovereign rule. I have too often practically forgotten the Great Supreme, by dwelling on second causes. I have allowed myself to be disturbed and harassed with little vexations—anxious thoughts for the present, and misgivings and forebodings for the future. Enable me to cast all my cares, great or small, on You; knowing that You care for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Forbid that I should offer at the shrine of self, or pleasure, or mammon—my best; and be content with giving the remnants of worn and wasted affections to You. May I beware of any and every deviation from the straight path. Hold me up and I shall be safe. This day, guard me from whatever would be detrimental to my soul's good. Preserve me from the guilt of wasted hours and slighted opportunities. Enable me to renounce all evil habits—all debasing compliances. May every idol that would usurp Your place be overthrown. May no corrupt thought pollute my heart—no unworthy utterance defile my tongue—no unholy action stain my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Adored be Your name, that all events are at Your disposal and under Your righteous ordination and control. I rejoice to know that Your dealings, though sovereign, are never arbitrary. You are my Father. Give me trust, and confidence, and filial reverence. Like as a father pities his children, so You pity those who fear You—for You know our frame—You remember that we are dust. Your way is sometimes in the sea, and Your path in the deep waters, and Your judgments unsearchable; but the day is coming when You will vindicate the rectitude of Your procedure, and bring every tongue to confess that You have done all things well. Let my will be resolved into Yours. Then will the trials of life be disarmed of their sting—when I view them as part of Your own plan of infinite wisdom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alas! the love which ought to have reigned paramount, has too often been supplanted and superseded by other affections. I have to lament my bias to sin—the latent principles of corruption—the evil heart of unbelief which is ever tempting me to stray from the living God—the burdens and impediments which clog the wings of faith and prevent me soaring heavenwards. Lord, elevate my affections, purify my desires, quicken me to new obedience. May my life become, more than it has been, an offering of gratitude—a sacrifice of praise for all Your many mercies. Keep me from the absorbing power, the benumbing influence of earthly things!

\* \* \* \* \*

If You send me blessings, may I connect every gift with the Great Bestower. If You give me the full cup, may I be enabled to carry it with a steady hand. If You appoint crosses, may I have strength to bear them. If You appoint afflictions and bereavements, may I regard them as Your own special messengers sent on a mission of wisdom and mercy.

\* \* \* \* \*

All I ask or hope for, is in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ—my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **1st Morning—ALL NEED SUPPLIED**

"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:19

O God, my Heavenly Father, who has permitted me to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of a new day, I bless You for the liberty of access into Your presence. Rend Your heavens and come down; fill my heart with Your love, as I draw near to the footstool of Your Throne. I thank You for Your gracious assurance that these Gates of Prayer lead to an abounding treasury of spiritual blessing, out of which all my need shall be supplied. In Jesus, my adorable Redeemer, infinite fullness dwells; and out of His fullness—the riches of Your glory in Him—You are willing to impart even grace for grace.

You have supplied all my need in the past. You have been a loving, a bountiful, and a wise Provider; satisfying me with the blessings of Your goodness, and giving help from trouble, when vain was the help of man. I look to You for guidance and direction in the future. That future is veiled and hidden—but it is in Your better keeping. I would say, in simple confiding faith, "Undertake for me." Hitherto have You been true to Your unfailing promise "As your day is, so shall your strength be;" and over every coming need and exigency I may well write "Jehovah Jireh," "The Lord will provide."

Supply that need this day. If called to do battle with evil, let me go forth in Your might, panoplied for the conflict. Strengthen me with Your good Spirit—fortify me against every temptation. In the extremity of my own weakness, may I lean on Your Almighty arm—hold me up, and I shall be safe. Preserve me from the world's insinuating, seductive power, and from the treachery and deceitfulness of my own evil heart. Order my steps in Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

In the discharge of duty, may it be my effort and endeavor to subordinate the secular to the sacred. Keep me ever roused from the low dream of

earth, to see, as in the patriarch's dream, the ladder of God. May Your providences be as angels traveling up and down that ladder, and beckoning me "nearer to You." Keep me from whatever would be detrimental to my spiritual interests—from all avarice and selfishness; from all malice and uncharitableness; from all indolence and sloth; from putting off until tomorrow what can be best done, and may only be done, today.

If You have given me of this world's goods, may I seek to be a generous distributor of Your bounties. If silver and gold I have none, may I give You the consecration of the heart, and the answer of the life; knowing that You accept, according to that a man has, not according to what he has not. Forbid that my talent, be what it may, should be hid in the earth. May I ever listen to the prompting "How much do you owe your Lord?" and with a quickened sense of my responsibilities to You the Great Creditor, may I be diligent, that I may be found of You in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Supply the need of those whom I love. Wherever my friends are, O ever-present God, protect and defend them by Your mighty power. If You send them prosperity, keep them from being intoxicated with it—if You send adversity, keep them from being unduly depressed by it. Enrich them with the blessings of Your covenant grace. May we all be bound up together, on the great reaping-day of Judgment, in the same 'bundle of life'.

Supply the need of those who are in sorrow. When human cisterns are emptied and human props removed, may they know You as the Portion that cannot be taken from them. May they honor You by being silent in the midst of perplexing dealings—recognizing these as the ministers of Your will, sent on a mission of wisdom and mercy, and that while they are only planning for time, You are planning for Eternity. May they trust Your sure word of promise, that though now they may see through a glass darkly—when death shall have rent with his wing the obstructing cloud, in Your light they shall see light. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, direct their hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Bless the nations of the earth. Hasten the day when the nameless wrongs of a now groaning and travailing creation shall be redressed; when all heathen shrines shall be demolished; when will-worship and superstition shall cease. Turn the world's sighings into songs of gladness. Cause its sinful unbelief, the lust and tyranny of passion, the twin curse of slavery and war, to yield to the benignant scepter of the Prince of Peace. Increase the ministry of holy lives, and loving deeds. Purify Your churches more and more. Stimulate them to greater energy in Your service. As witnesses for You may they seek with augmented and ever increasing fidelity to show forth the Word of life—and may Your faithful ministers enjoy at last the blessed testimony, that they have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.

Listen to these my humble prayers, and when You hear forgive and grant me an answer in peace for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **1st Evening—THE GREATEST GIFT**

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."  
John 3:16

Almighty God, I desire to approach Your gracious presence on this the evening of another day. I bless You that I can come to the Gate of prayer and know it to be a Gate of love. If the vast creation be Your temple, this is its "Beautiful gate," for God is love. All other powers of Your universe are vassal to love. It is Your nature, Your name, Your glory. No earthly friend could have loved me and cared for me like You. Man's love is finite, Your is infinite. Man's love is changing, Your is unchanging. Man's love must sooner or later die—change it may—perish at some time it must—but Yours is unfailing from everlasting to everlasting.

You have given me the mightiest proof of Your benignity and condescension in the gift of Your dear Son. His advent might have been for the world's condemnation—but "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." It might have been to pronounce the woe of eternal death—"but the gift of

God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Lord, if such has been Your love to me; how poor and cold and inadequate has been my return to You! I have before me, this night, the memories of neglected duty, slighted warnings, broken vows, forgotten mercies, resisted grace. I feel how sin darkens the understanding—perverts and alienates the will—deadens the heart—depraves the affections. I acknowledge my deep creature destitution; my sins of nature, my sins of practice; my shortcomings known to my fellow creatures, my sadder failures in heart and life, in principle and in duty, alone known to You. I have too often stifled the accusations of an upbraiding conscience—I have permitted the ascendancy of worldly influences—I have bent like a brittle reed before the power of temptation.

I flee anew to the shelter of Your love. May my faith be simpler—deeper—truer. May I have a humbler reliance of the efficacy of the blood of atonement; and by the loyalty I owe to my Redeemer, seek to make a fresh dedication of myself to His service. I would see too, in the gift of Jesus, the pledge of all minor blessings. Let me have no over-anxious care for the future. With the Cross of Calvary before me, may I leave the unknown tomorrow, with all its solitudes, in the better keeping of a faithful covenant God. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

Lord, mold my heart more and more in conformity with Your holy will. May I find pleasure in nothing without You; maintaining a constant and habitual hatred of those sins which have again and again severed me from Your favor. Keep me from pride and passion—from fretfulness and discontent—from envy and jealousy. Repress all inordinate and unlawful desires. May the faculties of my being and the strength of my affections be surrendered to Your service. May my soul be filled with the one absorbing passion of love to Him who first loved and so loved me.

Look down in kindness on my friends and relatives. May it be theirs also, through the Redeemer's merits, to have the gift of eternal life. May they be among the number of those who love You, who are said to be "as the sun when he goes forth in his might."

I pray for all whom You have visited with tribulation. May they know that Your purpose in bringing them into the threshing floor, is to separate the chaff from the wheat. May they see the winnowing fan in Your hand—preparing the grain for the heavenly garner. May all sick ones whom Jesus loves, triumph in His love—may the thought that You did not spare even Your own Son, hush every repining word—may they remember that every sorrow that wounds them has wounded Him. May dying ones listen to the pleadings of the Great Intercessor, "Father I will, that they also whom You have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Save Your people and bless your inheritance. It is upon a Rock You have built Your church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Be as a wall of fire around Your Zion and the glory in the midst thereof. May God be known in all her palaces for a refuge. May the watchmen on her walls be men of faith and men of prayer, who make mention of the Lord and keep not silence, until He establishes and until He makes His people a praise in the earth.

I desire to compose myself to rest at peace with You, exulting in the plenitude of Your love in Jesus. O God of love and of peace—be the guardian of my sleeping hours—and may every night as it comes round, find me more and more fit and prepared for entering on the great heritage of everlasting life, through my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **2nd Morning—THE OMNIPOTENT CHALLENGE**

"He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32

O God, I come into Your blessed presence, thanking You for the rest and the refreshment of the past night. I laid me down and slept, I awaked for the Lord sustained me. You might have made my pillow a pillow of death. But I am once more among the living to praise You—permitted to bend suppliant at the Gates of mercy, and to invoke the presence and



benediction of the prayer-hearing God. I bless You for Your daily bounties of creation and providence—for food and clothing—for health and strength—for social and domestic comforts and endearments; for much that is bright and joyous in my lot. Keep me from the abuse of any of Your gifts, by permitting them to supplant the Giver—may they rather be hallowed and sanctified by linking them with Yourself the Great Bestower. May I be enabled with grateful heart to say, "All my fresh springs are in You."

I thank You especially for Jesus, my gracious Redeemer, the Son of Your love. I bless You that He, before whom angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim, hymned their triumphant anthems, "laid His glory aside"—assumed our nature—and traveled down to this valley of tears, that He might lift us up from our state of ruin and degradation, and invest us with the glories of immortality. By all that He has done and taught and suffered; by the mystery of His holy incarnation; by His completed atonement and perfect righteousness; by the merits of His Sacrifice; by the virtues of His holy life as the all-perfect pattern; by His Intercessory work and mighty pleadings at the right hand of the Father—accept of my unworthy person; pardon my daily sins—receive the fresh consecration of soul and body to Your service. I will wash my hands (not in my own innocency) but in His, so, shall I now compass Your altar O Lord, and with the Golden key of Promise unlock the Gates of Prayer.

After this mightiest pledge of Your love, You give me a blank to fill up as I please with all other needed benefits. You put into my lips the gracious challenge "Will You not with Him also, freely give me all things?" Deepen in my heart the sense of my obligation to so gracious a Savior. Strengthen my trust in His unutterable—unalterable love. May His righteousness clothe me—His blood cleanse me—His grace uphold me—His Spirit sanctify me. May it be my daily and lifelong aspiration to be more and more assimilated to His glorious image. Even should I be called to suffer with Him here, may I cheerfully bear the cross, and remember that this is only a prelude to my reigning with Him hereafter.

Be with me this day in my ordinary avocations—whether these be household duties, or buying and selling and getting gain. Preserve me from using any means for the advancement of my own interests, on which

Your blessing cannot rest. May I move uncontaminated through the world's various scenes. When temptation assails me, give me grace to resist it. Enable me to put a restraint on all angry or resentful passions, all uncharitable thoughts or insinuations; to seek to avenge injuries with love—unkindness with forgiveness—manifesting patience in the midst of provocation. May I seek to defend a brother's character and extenuate his failings—considering myself lest I also be tempted. Conscious of the supreme enthronement of Your love in my heart, may I be zealous in duty—patient in tribulation—humble and thankful; living under the sovereignty of that loftiest motive, to walk and act so as to please You. That so, when Christ shall come again, He may not find me asleep and unready—but prepared to go forth joyfully to meet Him in the company of His ransomed.

I pray for all the members of my household. May they be members of the household of faith—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ—having their names written in the Lamb's Book of life. I pray for friends at a distance. May they enjoy the fellowship of an ever-present never-absent God. May Jesus be their refuge in life, their strength in prosperity, their prop in adversity—and may the music of His name soothe and refresh their souls in death.

O You, whose heart of old bled for human misery—whose pathway through the world was paved with compassion; who in Your infinite tenderness did gather around You the poor—the helpless—the sick—the sorrowful—the brokenhearted, and, as the Great Physician, did heal them all—bend Your pitying eye on all who are in any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body or estate. Prepare the dying for death. As they feel the chill of the falling shadow, may they think of Him who has taken the substance of death away, and left nothing but the shadow. Grant that when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken, they may enter on the full fruition of those unspeakable joys which You have prepared for those who love You.

Hear these my unworthy supplications—and all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **2nd Evening—TRUST IN THE DARK**

"Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God." Isaiah 50:10

Heavenly Father, I come into Your presence through the blessed gateway of Trust; desiring to repose in the name of the Lord and to stay upon my God. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is safe. This is Your name and this Your memorial throughout all generations—the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious. You are infinite in power and boundless in resources. Yet, though You are the mightiest of all Beings, You are also the kindest and the best of all. With You, there is an ever open door of welcome, for the poor—the helpless—the doubting—the desponding—the backsliding—the lost. While justice and judgment are the habitation of Your throne, mercy and truth go continually before Your face.

How wondrous has been Your sparing mercy in the past! The axe might long ago have been laid to the root of the tree—the mandate might have gone forth, "Cut it down." Yet with all my grievous guilt and constant backsliding, You are not "upbraiding;" Your hand of love and forbearance is stretched out still. Forbid that I should be tempted to give way to unbelieving doubts and misgivings, when You are thus waiting to be gracious. Let me not distrust the riches of Your Sovereign love and grace in Jesus, or fail to hold fast the beginning of my confidence.

O You who turn the shadow of death into the morning, enable me to confide in You in the midst of dark and perplexing dealings. Your name is often "Secret"—Your counsels are often "astonishing," walking in darkness Your people at times fail to observe the light. But let it be our comfort to know, that this fitful day, made up often of light and shadow—clearness and gloominess, is "one day known to the Lord;" and to trust Your promise, that "at evening time it shall be light." O Lord our God, who is a strong Lord like unto You! You rule the raging of the sea—when the waves thereof arise, You still them. Speak Your own "Peace be still," and immediately there shall be a great calm.

Abide with me for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. Forgive, for Your dear Son's sake, all the ills I have done this day; all shortcomings in duty—all selfish and unchristlike deeds—all tamperings with sin and temptation—all breaches and infringements of the golden rule—whatever would exalt myself at the expense of others. In the time to come, go before me with Your most gracious favor and further me with Your continual help. May the Lord God be a sun and shield—a sun to enlighten me in the midst of darkness—a shield to protect me in the midst of trouble.

Impart to me that charity which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Deliver me from all unkind and censorious thoughts; from all reproachful and resentful words. O You who bore nameless wrongs and indignities—give me grace to overcome evil with good—remembering the saying of Your servant, "When you do good and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." Keep me from all corroding cares and feverish anxieties—let me ever confide my troubles in Your ear. Let the blessed influences of the truth as it is in Jesus, permeate and penetrate with their leavening power every daily duty, and brace me for the endurance of every trial.

I pray in behalf of all who are in sorrow; those suffering the infliction of bereavement—those enduring the pang of unspoken griefs, those hearts which know their own bitterness, walking in darkness and having no light. Preserve such, also, from the indulgence of a hasty spirit under dark dispensations. Let them know that in sending into the furnace, it is for purification not for destruction—to refine as the gold—to fit the better for Your service here, and for Your presence hereafter. Meanwhile, let them trust in the name of the Lord and stay themselves upon their God. May they too be enabled to say "I have remembered Your name O Lord in the night and have comforted myself!" Prepare the dying for death. May they hear the voice of Jesus proclaiming—"I am the resurrection and the life, he that lives and believes on me shall never die."

Bless all near and dear to me. May they have the seal of the life-giving God on their foreheads. Protect the young from those snares and temptations incident to early years—preserve them unspotted from the world—keep them as the apple of Your eye; hide them under the shadow

of Your wings; and whatever separations time and distance and bereavement may make on earth, may there be at last, for severed hearts, a glorious and deathless reunion before Your throne.

Again I commend myself to Your Fatherly benediction. Watch over me during the night, granting me quiet and refreshing sleep. Let me go forth to the duties of tomorrow, and every new day, girded afresh for the conflict—trusting in the name of the Lord and staying upon my God. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

### **3rd Morning—PERFECT PEACE**

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you; because he trusts in you." Isa. 26:3

O God of peace, who has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep—meet me as I now stand by the Gates of the mercy-seat, and fill me with all joy in believing. Gracious Redeemer, Prince and Purchaser of peace, draw near to me in infinite love, and say, as You did to Your disciples of old, "Peace be unto you; receive you the Holy Spirit." Grant me throughout the day Your benediction and blessing. May the peace of God which passes understanding keep my heart. May I walk in the light of Your countenance, under the sense of Your presence and favor—enjoying the comfort of the divine assurance, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You."

Lord, You know the causes of disquietude and unrest—my sins and corruptions, my trials and difficulties, my struggles and burdens. I confess that the guilt and the misery of sin is all my own. You know that there has often been discontent where there should have been cheerfulness; murmuring where there should have been rejoicing; indolence where there should have been activity; self and selfishness where there should have been generous consecration to You, and a kindly interest in the well-being of those around me. If I have not been enjoying this perfect peace, O author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life—whose service is perfect freedom, speak

Your own omnipotent word, and immediately there will be a great calm. I would bring my sins to the Great Surety—I would lay bare my wounds to the Great Physician. Blessed Savior, renew and ratify to me, this morning, Your gracious gift and legacy "My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives." Looking to You, loving You, trusting You, You will prove my Shield in danger, my Refuge in adversity, my Comforter in sorrow, my Light in darkness, my Hope in death, my Defender in judgment, my Joy and Portion through eternity. O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace!

If, this day, in the course of my duties, whether in the quiet of home or in the bustle of the world, there be any thwarting of my will, or crossing of my plans, or wounding my spirit—let me manifest a spirit of meek endurance. Let me seek to deny myself and take up my cross and follow Christ. Give me the blessing promised "to him that walks uprightly and works righteousness." Preserve me at all times from sacrificing principle to temporal advantage. May I know the pleasure in some lowly way of doing good. May I seek to forego and conquer what pleases self, and to become more and more rescued from its iron tyranny. Enable me to struggle with my besetting sin whatever it may be; whether pride or ambition, malice or envy, indolence or sloth, lust or passion. May I seek ever higher acquisitions in the life of faith, and onward progress in the path of obedience; that so, when the hour comes which shall dissolve the tie binding me to the world, at peace with You and with all mankind, I may fall asleep in Jesus.

O Great Peace-giver, impart Your own gracious gift to all who need it. Give rest to the weary, hope to the desponding, wisdom to the ignorant, salvation to the lost. Promote true unity among Your people. Let the watchmen on the walls of Zion see eye to eye. Hasten the time when the jarring and dissonant notes in the church militant shall cease, and when the bonds of brotherhood shall link nations as well as believers together. Terminate everywhere the reign of godlessness and vice, of error and superstition. Look in mercy on Your ancient people who are still beloved for their fathers' sake. May they be brought to own and welcome Him whom they have so long rejected. Let Israel's Alleluia be added to the Gentile Hosanna. Tell the daughter of Zion "Behold Your King comes."

Bless all poor afflicted ones. May they be enabled in the midst of their trials to say, "If He gives peace, who then shall give trouble?" Let none despair when You smite, nor faint when You rebuke. With a rainbow of promise set in every cloud, may they be cheered with the hope that they shall before long come to look within the portal, beyond this land of drought and of the shadow of death; where the flock shall be led, forever, by the living fountains of waters, and every tear shall be wiped from every eye.

These and all other needed blessings for myself and others—I ask them all, in the name of Him whom You hear always, Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior—to whom with You the Father, and You ever-blessed Spirit, Three in One in covenant for our salvation, be ascribed, as is most due, all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, both now and ever, Amen.

### **3rd Evening—THE GREAT SUPREME**

"From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do. No one can reverse my actions." Isaiah 43:13

O God, I desire to come into Your blessed presence, on this the evening of another day, adoring Your sovereignty. I rejoice in the simple but sublime assurance "The Lord reigns;"—that all events are in Your hands. The sparrow's fall is watched by You; the raven's cry is heard by You; the hairs of our head are numbered by You. In Your sight there is no such thing as great or small—mighty and insignificant. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. No mistake can occur in Your dealings—no shortcoming in Your wisdom—no failure in Your power—no faltering in Your faithfulness.

I rejoice especially to think, that You who are the Infinite Jehovah, are also my Father; that with filial confidence and boldness I may come into Your presence, trust a Father's tenderness, and resign myself to a Father's will. I can look up, through Jesus Christ my adorable Savior, and call You—the mightiest of all Beings—by Your new best name of—Love.

Alas! You have abundant reason to say, "If I have been a Father, where has been my honor?" I have disowned and abused Your paternal regard. I have not given You the trust of a loving heart—the obedience of a true life—the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit. Lord have mercy upon me! In penitence and contrition of soul may it be mine to say "I will arise and go to my Father." Heal my backslidings; receive me graciously and love me freely.

O You who alone works, and none can hinder it, may Your grace bring me nearer, and keep me nearer You. If You send prosperity, enable me to use Your mercies with sobriety and thankfulness—if You send adversity, may I glorify You when You smite, as well as when You heal; when You take, as well as when You give; rejoicing to say regarding each and all of Your dealings—"This also comes from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Keep me from every base surrender to the power of temptation, the tyranny of self, the false maxims and principles of the world—the unruly forces of evil. In all duties give me Your help—in all perplexities aid me with Your counsel—in all perils grant me Your protection. May it be the aim of my life to obey You, and the joy of my soul to please You. Make me kindly in thought and gentle in word, and generous in deed—not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing, but rather a blessing; seeking day by day to attain a gradual conformity to the mind and image and will of the divine Redeemer.

Forgive, Lord, for the sake of Your dear Son, whatever I have this day done amiss, that I may retire to rest at peace with You, and in good will towards all men. Bless my beloved friends; may they too be led to exult in Your sovereignty—to rejoice that You appoint the bounds of their habitation, the length of their days, and the end of their days. Whatever be the period of existence You allot to them, may they be enabled faithfully to serve You. When the days of earth are finished, may they pass into Your blessed presence; and there, united in those ties which survive the uncertain ones of earth, may we be served heirs together to the grace of eternal life; even to "length of days forever and ever."

Great God of the afflicted, draw near in infinite love to all broken hearts. Seated by the furnace, temper the fury of the flames. By the sustaining power of Your grace and the comforting influences of Your Holy Spirit,



may trial be disarmed of its sting and the bread of affliction be turned into angels' food.

Pity a perishing world—listen to the groanings and travailings of a creation cursed with sin and riveted with the chains of corruption. Lord mitigate her sufferings—redress her cruel wrongs. Stay the outpouring of vials of judgment. Come, Prince of Peace, Lord and Giver of life, take to Yourself Your great power and reign; and then shall the wilderness and the solitary place be made glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Bless Your church universal. Give efficacy to all instrumental means employed, alike for reclaiming the outcast and perishing, and for building up and establishing Your people in their most holy faith. Send times of refreshing unto Zion. May the shower come down in its season, let there be showers of blessing. If Your faithful servants hear not the fall of the rains—nor watch the distilling of the dew—if they see neither the fruit nor the flower; may they sow in faith, knowing that Your word shall not return to You void—that it will accomplish that which You plead, and prosper in the thing whereto You had sent it.

Anew I commend myself to Your guardianship and keeping. Give Your good angels charge concerning me this night, that they may encamp round about me. When the Gates of the morning are again opened—may it be mine to go forth to the varied duties and occupations of another day, in fresh dependence on Your mercy and loving-kindness. And all that I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **4th Morning—LOVING-KINDNESS**

"How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings." Psalm 36:7

O God, whose nature and whose name is love—whose tender mercies are over all Your works, draw near to me this morning and breathe upon me Your own benediction. As I am seated once more at the Beautiful Gate of Your Temple—may I put my trust under the shadow of Your wings. The kindness of the kindest knows a limit—but Your kindness knows no limit. You have been gracious to me in the time that is past. Your pillar of cloud

has been with me by day, and Your pillar of fire by night. In difficulty You have directed me—in weakness You have strengthened me. You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling—giving me ever new causes for gratitude, and new material for praise. Even when the shadows of affliction have fallen around me, You have mingled sweet drops in the cup, and enabled me to sing of mercy in the midst of judgment—staying Your rough wind in the day of Your east wind. The retrospect of life is crowded with Ebenezers, testifying that "hitherto has the Lord helped me."

O You "Sun of my soul," who is thus gladdening my existence from day to day, and who has given me the mightiest proof and pledge of Your loving-kindness in the gift of the Redeemer—do enable me to trust You implicitly in the future, and to seek in all my ways to acknowledge You. My purposes and plans of life I commend to Your better wisdom. May prosperity be hallowed, and adversity sweetened, by seeing You in everything—and everything in You.

May all the gifts of Your bounty wear a new aspect, coming with the seal of Your covenant love stamped upon them. May that love reign paramount and supreme. May it preside over all my motives—form them—rule them—regulate them. May all good impulses be followed and pursued into vigorous action. May my heart be Yours, my life be Yours, my work be Yours. May a sense of Your loving-kindness mold and influence my conduct towards those around me. Keep me from whatever would wrong another's feelings. Preserve me from a resentful spirit—from morbidly dwelling on injuries—from fretting and disquietude about imagined cares and evils. If the circumstances of my lot prevent me making any great or laborious efforts in Your cause, may I remember that the lowliest service done for You will not be rejected or disowned. Give me a conscientious fidelity over the few things—if You have not made me steward over many things; and at last, through the merits and mediation of Your dear Son, may an entrance be ministered to me into Your eternal kingdom and glory.

I pray for my dear friends—may they also know, in their happy experience, the excellence of Your loving-kindness. May they give You, not the wrecks of a worn and withered love, but in all time of their wealth,

as well as in all time of their tribulation, seek to live in Your fear and favor.

O You who did of old utter the merciful apology for human infirmity, "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak"—draw near in infinite compassion to those who are in any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate. If Your dealings are mysterious—as those who know Your loving-kindness, may they put their trust not only under the brightness but under the shadow of Your wings. In darkness, as well as in sunshine, may they glorify Your holy name; and regard all as a needful discipline and training. If portionless and friendless here—may they be led nearer to Yourself—the everlasting Friend and Portion. Let despairing guilt and trembling penitence find refuge at the feet of the Great Physician. May the balsam distilled from the Tree of Life heal their soul troubles. If the kindness of man be denied them—Lord may they know the "excellence" of Yours.

Promote every effort for the extension of Your Son's kingdom. May Your churches fulfill their responsibilities to those still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, in a spirit of faith and prayer, undeterred by difficulties, unbaffled by discouragements. If the furrows in many places be inviting the immortal seed, do send forth faithful laborers—men inspired with a passionate devotion to You and Your cause, a self-sacrificing enthusiasm for Christ, and for the salvation of the world He died to redeem. May they be cheered with the promise, "In due season you shall reap, if you faint not."

Anew, I commend myself, soul and body, to Your Fatherly keeping. Assist me in all my duties. Stand by me—protect me—shield me—strengthen me. Preserve me in Your faith, fear, and love, all the day long. If temptation in any shape crosses my path—by the help of Your grace may I resist it. Dwelling in the secret place of the most High, may I abide under the shadow of the Almighty. And all I ask is for the sake of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior—Amen.

## **4th Evening—THE HOLY SPIRIT**

"The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Rom. 8:26

O God, I desire to come through the opened Gates of Prayer, to the footstool of Your Throne, thanking You for all the mercies of the by-past day. Spirit of light and love! You who make intercession in behalf of the church and of every individual believer, with groanings which cannot be uttered—You who feed the lamp of devotion with the oil of Your grace—do replenish my vessel this night, as I venture into the presence of the Holy One. Put earnest desires into my heart—enabling me to hunger for the bread which endures to everlasting life. Let me rest on the sure encouragement given by lips which cannot lie—"If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your child. Times and days and ways without number, I have grieved Your good and gracious Spirit. I have too often done what might have quenched the light of His presence—thwarted the drawings of His love—and hushed the voice and remonstrances of conscience. I have too often permitted my heart to be the home of impure thoughts and vain imaginations. I have sought to invent unworthy apologies and extenuations for my guilt, or attempted to consign to oblivion what cannot be forgotten by You, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no flesh living be justified. Come, Spirit of the living God, as an Enlightener, dispersing my darkness—rebuking my unbelief. Come, as a Sanctifier, expelling the power and the love of sin. Come, as a Comforter, easing my doubts and unloading my burdens. Come, above all, as the Glorifier of Jesus—receive of His, and show it unto me. Come, with new pledges and tokens of Redeeming love and mercy. Come, as the Spirit of adoption, enabling me with filial trust and confidence to cry "Abba! Father!" Come, in all the plenitude of Your gifts and graces, and breathe upon me and say "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

Under a sense of my own weakness and insufficiency, I would resign myself to Your gracious influences. Write Your own superscription on my

heart—"Holiness unto the Lord." By Your indwelling power, subdue my corruptions—stimulate my graces. Let me not remain fruitless amid the quickening means of grace. Faithful to whatever duties may be allotted to me in my earthly sphere, may I be fitted and prepared, by Your guidance and discipline, for the higher services of eternity, and for entering on the fulfillment and enjoyment of the lofty beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Thus building up myself on the faith and promises of the Gospel, "praying in the Holy Spirit," may I keep myself in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Bless Your church everywhere. Open the windows of heaven and refresh Your heritage when it is weary. Let the Divine Spirit come down like rain upon the mown grass and as showers that water the earth. Let no part of the fleece be dry. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened. "Awake O north wind, come you south wind—blow upon Your garden, that the spices thereof may flow out—that our Beloved may come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits."

To the same gracious keeping and protection, I commend all near and dear to me. Cause them to lie down in the green pastures, lead them beside the still waters. Restore their souls, and lead them in the paths of righteousness for Your own name's sake. May all in sorrow have their sorrows sanctified. May they, lovingly and without a murmur, accept every cross, knowing that all rebukes as well as blessings emanate from You. May Your Providences prove heart-searchers—strengthening the things that remain, which might have been otherwise ready to die. Thus may the shadow of death be turned into the morning—and the trial of faith, being much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be tried with fire, be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Anew I supplicate forgiveness for the sins of the past day. Anew I would wash in the opened fountain, and plead the name which is above every name. Be my guardian through the silent watches of another night. Abide with me, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. As You have permitted me once more to erect my altar and to offer this my evening oblation—do spare me also, in health and strength again to see the light

of a new day, and to rise fitted and prepared for its varied duties.

I ask these and all other needed blessings, for the sake of Him whom You hear always; who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever lives and reigns, one God; world without end. Amen.

## **5th Morning—WAITING**

"Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." Psalm 27:14

Heavenly Father, I desire to come into Your presence thanking and praising You for Your great goodness. Let me 'shake off dull sloth;' and in the name and merits of Your dear Son, lay upon Your holy altar an acceptable sacrifice. Glory to God who has watched over my pillow and permitted me to rise in safety. May this be an emblem of that better waking in the morning of immortality, when I shall see Your face, and be called to partake of endless life. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him—unto the soul that seeks Him. Waiting on You now without distraction, may I receive strength and courage for all the duties of a new day. I would confide to Your ear every need, every care, every sorrow, every cross. May this be my prayer and my resolve, as the Gates of another morning are opened—"My soul, wait only upon God, for my expectation is from Him."

What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me? Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Enable me ever to link true happiness and enjoyment with Your favor. May I know more and more Your service to be self-rewarding and self-recompensing. There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord lift up the light of Your countenance upon me!

But, alas! I do not thus at all times wait upon You in simplicity of faith and with unwavering reliance. My fitful affections have too often been deviating from their all-glorious Center. I have allowed myself to be cumbered with much serving—a slave to needless anxieties and distractions—distrustful of Your providence—sometimes, it may be,

impeaching Your wisdom and faithfulness—questioning the rectitude of Your dispensations, and tempted to look to second causes rather than to You the First Great Cause. I have not been at all times willing to accept this as the Sovereign reason and explanation of Your dealings "This also comes from the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." O You who keep covenant with those who seek You, do increase my faith. Confirm my wavering resolutions. Waiting upon You afresh, may I renew my strength, and mount up as on eagles' wings. Give me the heart to love and the resolution to do. In all my worldly duties and engagements, may I have no aims but what You will approve, and no ends but what You will bless.

May Your Word, with its precious lessons and elevating motives, be inweaved into my daily life, leading me to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Inspire me with devout acquiescence in Your will, knowing that whatever You appoint must be for the best. Keep me from presaging and forecasting evil. Preserve me from peevishness and fretfulness—from petulance of temper and hastiness of speech—from covetousness and selfishness. May I take the golden rule as my guide in all transactions this day and every day—"Whatever you would that men should do to you, do even so unto them." Whatever be the talent You have entrusted to me, may it be laid out for You, and may I seek to gain by it a revenue for Your glory. As a faithful steward in my Lord's household may I be diligent, that I may be found of Him at last in peace, without spot and blameless.

O God of all the families of mankind, may Your way be known upon the earth, Your saving health among all nations. Bless the land of our nativity. Protect and perpetuate its civil and religious privileges. May it be more and more a center of holy influences radiating to earth's circumference. May its rulers be increasingly inspired with that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, and be guided by that righteousness which alone exalts.

Bless my beloved friends wherever they are. Unite them to You in those covenant ties which will survive the uncertain ones of earth. May they be Yours now, and Yours on the day when You make up Your jewels.

May the sick and the suffering "wait on the Lord." Strengthen such as be

on beds of languishing—make all their bed in their sickness. May the bereaved "wait on the Lord"—trusting You in the dark, and adoring Your name alike in giving and in taking. May the dying "wait on the Lord." Calm the wave of ebbing life. Turn the shadow of death into the morning. May the gates of death prove the portals leading into everlasting day.

Prepare me, gracious God, for my own final hour of weakness and suffering, by consecrating the season of health and strength to You; so, called to surrender my earthly trust, I may be able in calm confidence to say, "I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord."

Hear in heaven, Your holy habitation, these my morning supplications; and when You hear, forgive, and grant me an answer in peace. Through Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **5th Evening—THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal. 6:14

O God, I desire to approach the throne of the heavenly grace, rejoicing in You as a kind and beneficent Father. Your mercy is infinite—unchanging—everlasting. Enable me with childlike trust and confidence to bow at Your footstool. With joy, this evening, may I "go down with Your people to the Gates," and draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Lord, I come, owning my great unworthiness. How weak has been my faith! how languid and fitful my best efforts to serve You! In prosperity I have too often disowned You; in adversity I have been tempted to entertain hard thoughts of You; in the world I have too often forgotten You. My own heart condemns me, and You are greater than my heart—You know all things.

I come with my poverty and helplessness, my doubts and conflicts, my foes and fears, my difficulties and perplexities, my sorrows and my sins. I would lay the heavy burden of them all, at the foot of the Redeemer's cross. In that cross alone I would glory. I look away from myself to His



completed work. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Seal to me the blessed assurance of pardon and peace and eternal life. From Him who bled for me as an atoning sacrifice, may I receive a passport now into the privileges of the Heavenly Kingdom; and from the same gracious lips, may I at last listen to the welcome, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Meanwhile, may I aim at advancement in the divine life. Let me make no truce with whatever is at enmity with You. Enable me in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to cast out every demon-sin. May His cross exercise upon me a constraining power; teaching me thus to judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead—and in that He died, He died that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again. May I seek henceforth, that my heart may be a holy altar and my life a living sacrifice. Let me be vigilant and circumspect in my daily duties. Set a watch before my mouth, keep the door of my lips. Deliver me from the trouble and disquietude and shame which follow every deflection from the path of rectitude; from being arrogant, or discontented, uncharitable, or time-serving—from being tempted to stoop to base compliances and unworthy equivocations. May a sense of Your presence dominate all my actions; and a holy fear of offending so kind and loving a God, repress every unholy thought and tendency. May it be my greatest pain to grieve You, and my greatest delight to do Your will—whether by active duty or by passive suffering.

May I feel that in common with all Your people I have some sphere allotted to me—some niche to occupy in Your temple, whether it be by working or by waiting. Following the footsteps of the Redeemer with cheerful alacrity, may I know that even the taking up of the cross, when this is required, is its own reward—that they have cause to rejoice who are honored thus to be partakers with Him in His sufferings, that when He shall be revealed, they may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Bless my beloved friends. Bring them individually to know Christ crucified as the power of God unto salvation, and to realize, above all other things, the truth of the words, "The Redemption of the soul is precious."

Hasten the time when the year of Your Redeemed shall come; when the "many crowns" shall be set on Messiah's brow, and by the attractive power of His cross all men shall be drawn unto Him. Prosper the work of Your ministering and missionary servants—may they be faithful and loyal to their divine commission and to their adorable Master; hiding themselves, and glorifying Him—losing themselves, as they proclaim their great message—"Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world."

Bless all in sorrow. May they, too, be led meekly to bear their cross, remembering all their dear Lord so patiently and willingly endured for them. May they see the heavenly mansions shining through the mists of the Valley; and hear the divine voice declaring, "the days of your mourning shall be ended."

Lord be my watchful Keeper through the silence and darkness of another night. Guard me from unquiet dreams—give me peaceful rest—spare me, if it be Your will, to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of a new day—and grant, that during all the period of my allotted time on earth, whether I wake or sleep I may live together with You. And all I ask or hope for, is in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **6th Morning—SUPPLICATION WITH THANKSGIVING**

"Be anxious for nothing—but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Phil. 4:6

O God, I desire on this new day, in accordance with Your own gracious invitation, to make my requests known unto You. Blessed Redeemer, You who are the True Aaron, the Great Angel Intercessor, You who are ever pleading in love and never pleading in vain, do come forth from the Holiest of all, to the multitudes of Your waiting people, assembled this morning at the Gateway of Prayer, and bless them with peace. Breathe upon us and say, "Receive you the Holy Spirit."

The retrospect of the past is a retrospect of love—mercy upon mercy—privilege upon privilege. For all Your providential goodness, Lord, I praise You. For health and strength, for friends and home; for powers of body and faculties of mind; for my religious privileges, for all appointed means of grace, for the glorious hope of immortality; for peace amid the manifold changes of life; for comfort in sorrow; for the assurance of victory over death—the last enemy—Lord, I praise You. I have to acknowledge my many and multiplied offences—that in thought and word and deed I have transgressed against You, O Preserver and Redeemer of men. I have too often sought for happiness in objects and pursuits which fail to satisfy the yearnings of the immortal spirit. I have too often indulged in feelings and tempers inconsistent with my Christian profession—unworthy of the love I owe to You my God, and the good-will and generosity and forbearance I owe to my fellow-men. Lord, have mercy upon me! Save me from the sins which do most easily ensnare me. From the love of the world which alienates my affections from heavenly realities—from the love of self which interferes with the entire consecration of the heart to Christ—from the covetousness which hardens—from the impurity which debases and enslaves—from every evil lust and passion and temper—good Lord, deliver me! Conscious of my own utter weakness, I would look for the supplies of Your promised grace. By it alone I stand. If I am enabled this day to resist temptation, it is all Your doing. It is You who uphold me by Your right hand.

Under the realized consciousness of Your sustaining presence, may I be anxious for nothing—committing the unknown future to Your wise and better keeping. Burdened with no perplexing or disquieting thoughts, but rolling every such burden and anxiety on Him who cares for me, may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep my heart. With my feet on the unchanging Rock of Ages, I will rejoice, amid all trials and vicissitudes, that nothing is able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord.

Let Your good and gracious hand be specially around me today. Strengthen me for the discharge of every duty, whether at home or in the world. Prepare me for the resisting of every temptation and for the endurance of every trial. Whatever be the talent You have committed to

me—whether position, or intellect, or worldly substance—may I feel the sacredness of the trust, and seek thankfully to employ it for the good of others, and for the glory of You, My God. Enable me to aim at that high standard of Christian responsibility, which regards all possessions valuable, only so far as they contribute to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into marvelous light. Living under the habitual impression that soon—very soon—that committed trust may be recalled, oh, give me grace to fulfill the part of a faithful steward.

Compassionate those who are in trial. Listen to the loud wail of humanity; especially to that rising from the members of the household of faith. Blessed Redeemer, it is our comfort to know, that wide as the family of the afflicted is, You can say regarding every diversity of case and experience, "I know their sorrows." May Your suffering people be brought into nearer relationship and fellowship with You. Amid the mystery of present baffling dispensations, may they look forward to that day, when, in the light of eternity, they shall listen to the repetition of Your own saying—"Said I not unto you that if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?"

Let the cause of truth triumph over the pride and superstition and will-worship of man. Hasten the time when earth shall become one consecrated temple—every heart an altar—every life a sacrifice—every tongue praise. Human power is impotent to break the chains of sin and Satan. But the wisdom of God is wiser than man, and the weakness of God is stronger than man. It is not by human might nor by human power, but by Your Spirit, Lord God Almighty.

Anew I commend myself to You. May the love of God the Father animate me—may the grace of God the Son sustain me—may the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit quicken and sanctify me. O blessed Three in one! make me fit now and evermore, for the inheritance of the saints in light. Amen.

## **6th Evening—THE UNSEEN TRUSTED**

"Although you say you shall not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust in him." Job 35:14

O God, I bless and praise Your holy name, that I am again permitted to hold fellowship and communion with You the Father of spirits. I might, like others this night, have been summoned to the Gate of death; but I am once more privileged to be a suppliant at the Gate leading to the mercy-seat, with the golden key in my hand, and the assurance that a God of mercy is waiting to be gracious.

I desire to bless You for Your constant, unwearied kindness. I would seek to extract motive for gratitude from every varied token and tribute of Your love. I bless You for exemption from danger and accident, from pain and sickness and disease. I bless You for health and strength; for manifold outer comforts and domestic enjoyments. Above all do I bless You for the good hope through grace—the hope full of immortality—which You have given me in Your beloved Son; and that, with the Greater Gift, You will freely bestow all things needful, alike for my present peace and my eternal well-being. O Savior God, who has redeemed me with Your most precious blood, to whom can I go but unto You? I am persuaded You are able to keep that which I have committed unto You. I bless You that, as the Son of man, You came to seek and save those who are lost—as the Good Shepherd who gave his own life for the sheep—the weakest, the weariest, the most burdened of the flock can claim Your regard. You mark out our pasture for us. You know Your sheep by name and lead them out. If at times I am unable to understand the mystery of Your dealings—if at times You lead along the thorny path—teaching by crossed purposes and baffled and thwarted expectations—may it be mine to confide in Your unerring wisdom.

Knowing that "judgment is before You," may I implicitly trust Your faithfulness; glorifying Your holy name by unquestioning submission, saying "Lord, here am I—do to me, and with me, as seems best in Your sight."—"Though You slay me, yet will I trust in You." Strong in Your grace, may I strive to live under the sovereignty of that loftiest motive—that whatever pleases You shall please me; that whatever be Your holy will shall be mine. If the path of prosperity should be chequered—if human props fail, and human refuges reveal themselves to be refuges of lies—if worldly substance be impaired, or earthly love dies—may the perishable and corruptible only drive me nearer to the incorruptible—to

seek closer and more intimate fellowship with Him in whose presence there is fullness of joy. Thus, trusting You and loving You, let me rise superior to all that is fleeting and fluctuating around. In quietness and confidence let my strength be.

Keep me from moping over fancied ills, or brooding morbidly over disappointments. Let me feel that, had it been well for me, my desires would have been gratified; but in Your better wisdom You have denied what, if granted, might have proved detrimental to my soul's interests. Preserve me from all pride and vain glory—make me charitable and forgiving—kind and unselfish—cheerful and thankful. Give me that lowliness of mind which leads me to esteem others better than myself. O that each member of Your family who bears the name of Christian, could more heartily make the avowal—"None of us lives to himself."

Bless, Lord, all the children of sorrow. Some of these may be experiencing overwhelming afflictions. There may seem to them no ray in the darkness—no silver lining in the looming cloud. Set Your own rainbow in it. Enable them to rejoice even under the shadow of Your wings, and to sing their "song in the night." May they, too, implicitly trust You, that You will impose no needless burden—that all Your dealings are interlaced and interweaved with mercy—that judgment (wise and righteous judgment) is before You. May their trials yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Bless Your church everywhere. Prosper her in all her undertakings for the good of man and for Your glory. Bless Your ministering servants—make them polished shafts in their Master's quiver—honored instruments in turning many from darkness to light. Endow them with spiritual energy, zeal, and fortitude, in days of coldness and lukewarmness, apathy and apostasy. May all Your churches, walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, everywhere be multiplied.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for?—my hope is in You! Pardon whatever I have this day thought amiss, and said amiss, and done amiss—all commissions of sin, all omissions of duty. Abide with me for it is toward evening and the day is far spent; and when the day of life is spent, and the last shadows have fallen, may it only be to welcome in "the morning without clouds," and to enjoy forever the brightness of Your presence and

the plenitude of Your love. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake, Amen.

## **7th Morning—OUR FATHER**

"Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." Matt. 6:9

O Lord, God Almighty, the God of my life and the length of my days, I come to You this morning, seeking to realize You in Your paternal character. I bless You if I am able to utter that gospel word—that gospel name—"My Father;" if I am able to feel that the Gates of prayer are the gates leading to a Father's house, a Father's presence and love. I bless You that I have the warrant of Your adorable Son in appropriating the words "My Father and your Father, my God and your God;" that I have His own encouraging assurance "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him." I would avail myself of the privilege. I would bring all my needs and sins, my difficulties and trials and perplexities, and pour them into the loving ear of a most loving Parent. Deliver me from bondage-worship and bondage-fear, and enable me with the sweet confidence of Your children to say "Abba! Father."

Lord, how unworthy have I proved myself of this holy relationship. If You have been a Father, where has been Your honor? If You have been a Master, where has been Your fear? Thus unfaithful and unfilial, You might justly have disowned and disinherited me—left me an alien and an outcast from Your presence, and refused forever to "set me among the children." But adored be Your name, O Father-God, that in the midst of deserved wrath, You have remembered and are still remembering, mercy. Your hand of love and forgiveness and pity is stretched out still. Your paternal voice is still heard, "Return, you backsliding children." Although often, by reason of my own truant wanderings, I have been ready to perish for hunger, there is bread enough still in my Father's house and to spare. Lord, evermore, and more and more, give me this bread of life! Graciously forgive and forget the past, and arm me with Your grace for the future. Give me childlike repentance—childlike faith, childlike obedience. Enable me to lean with calm trustfulness on You. Prevent me from inflicting any wound on my own conscience that would alienate me

from Your favor. Keep me from living as if this world were my final rest, and home, and portion. May I seek, rather, to live from day to day as one whose true home is above—as if on the threshold of the Father's house with its many mansions, and ready for the summons "Come up here."

As a child, may I be jealous of Your honor. May I seek to make manifest the reality of my filial relationship, by meekness and gentleness, by obedience and love. Give me that charity which is the bond of perfectness. Put a sanctified restraint on my thoughts. Preserve me from uttering unkind words, or entertaining ungenerous suspicions. May I seek to hold the character and reputation of others, sacred as my own.

O You who does compassionate, even "like as a father pities his children," do pity and commiserate all the members of suffering humanity, especially those who are of the household of faith. Lord, there are many sorrows no human sympathy can reach. There is nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. But You can gauge the depth of all. Impart to Your tried children, everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Let them trust a Father's love, a Father's hand, a Father's heart, a Father's rod; regarding Your dealings as needful discipline; and honoring You by simple, confiding, unreserved submission. Prepare the dying for death. If it be Your holy will, bring back the shadow on life's dial, and utter the word "You shall live and not die."

Bless all my beloved friends near or at a distance. Let them, too, become Your own children by adoption—exulting in the fullness and beneficence of Your paternal love—listening to Your voice amid all the changes of this changeful scene, "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters."

Prosper every missionary effort. Blessed be Your name, the day has come, when "neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, do men worship the Father;" but that gracious Fatherhood extends to every region and every tongue. Give to all nations peace and concord, that the furrows of the earth may be prepared for the insertion of the divine seed. Let Your ministers be diligent sowers and abundant reapers—baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Give greater unity of effort in Your cause. May this be, more and more, the motto and watchword of all Christians



and all Churches—"Doubtless You are our Father."

Be with me throughout this day. As the Gates of the morning are now opening, may I realize Your blessing, and carry it along with me into all my duties. Hear me, Gracious Father, for the sake of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **7th Evening—AN IMMUTABLE SAVIOR**

"Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Heb. 13:8

O God, who has again brought me in peace and safety to the close of another day, I bow my knees this night at the throne of the heavenly grace; beseeching You, before I retire to rest, to give me Your blessing. It is in the name of Him who holds in His hand the Key and the Gates of Prayer—who opens and no man shuts—that I can alone venture to come into Your presence. I rejoice to think that He has wrought out and brought in an everlasting righteousness—that He has thrown the luster of a sublime vindication over every requirement of Your law. I rejoice especially in His unchanging faithfulness. While recalling, with devout gratitude and thankfulness, all He did and taught and suffered on earth; how oftentimes He delighted to minister to the sick, and support the tempted, and heal the broken-hearted, and offer peace and rest to the weary and heavy laden—it is my comfort to feel assured, that, though now exalted at Your right hand, He still retains, in His glorified humanity, the unchanged human heart with its yearning love and sympathies; that, amid all other vicissitudes, there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning," in Him. His name and memorial continues to this hour what it was, when He trod, a Pilgrim wanderer, this valley of tears—"Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever."

O God, before the Gates of another evening be closed, and I again lie down to sleep, grant me the forgiveness of all the day's sins, of thought, word, and deed—of omission and commission. Blot them out of the book of Your remembrance; sprinkle anew the lintels and door-posts of my heart with the covenant token; hide me anew in the clefts of the Smitten Rock; seal to me anew the blessed sense of reconciliation through the

blood of the cross. And while I look to this immutable Savior—this Rock of Ages—for pardon and peace, give me grace that I may be more and more assimilated to His holy image, and more and more molded in conformity to His holy will. Impart to me His meekness, His humility, His gentleness, His forgiveness of injuries—His tender consideration for others; that patience under provocation which made Him stand as a Lamb silent before His shearers; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. Make me more lowly and loving—more resigned and submissive. May I live under the power of renewed affections. Influenced and guided by lofty principle, may my eye be single, that my whole body may be full of light. Raise me above all fretting cares and timid fears, above all morbid anxieties and solitudes about trifles. Let me have the fear of God and no other fear. When heart and flesh faint and fail, may I triumph in the immutability of Him who has promised to be the strength of His people's heart, and their portion forever.

Extend Your cause and kingdom everywhere. How long shall the wicked triumph? save Your people, bless Your inheritance; feed them also, and lift them up forever. I would rejoice in the thought, that Your gospel is the power of God unto salvation—that as such, under its blessed instrumentality, every mountain of unbelief and error will in due time become a plain before the true Zerubbabel. Do demonstrate now, as in the previous history of Your Church, that it is not the vaunted armor of earth's great ones, but the sling of faith and the few pebbles from the running brook of truth, which will conquer the world's unbelief. Bring in Your ancient people with the fullness of the Gentile nations. Have respect unto Your covenant—the oath which You did swear unto Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Arise, O Lord, and plead Your own cause.

Bless all related to me by ties of kindred or affection. The Lord watch between us when we are absent one from another. May they be among the beloved of the Lord who dwell safely—may the joy of the Lord be their strength.

Compassionate the case of poor afflicted ones. When their hearts are overwhelmed, O unchanging Savior-God, lead them to Yourself—the

Rock that is higher than they. Whatever be the cause of their trials, may they be enabled, in uncomplaining, uncomplaining submission to say, "Even so, Father!" In the midst of impaired health, and thwarted schemes, and disappointed hopes, and broken hearts, and voices hushed in death, may it be theirs exultingly to exclaim, as they look to One who survives all blanks and losses, "They shall perish, but You remain; as a vesture shall You fold them up, and they shall be changed; but YOU are the same, and Your years shall not fail."

These, and every needed blessing, for myself and for others, I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **8th Morning—THE HIDING-PLACE**

"For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion—in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." Psalm 27:5

O God, who is the refuge of all that seek You, may I know this day the blessedness of those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and who abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I rejoice that I am never a solitary moment away from Your guardianship and care—that You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Amid all changes You are the abiding One. The world's joys are shadowy and fleeting—they mock the hand which grasps them—the world's refuges are refuges of lies. But in the pavilion of Your love I am ever safe and secure. Hide me there until earth's calamities be overpast. I adore You as the Supreme Disposer of all events. Your purposes no accident can change—Your faithfulness no time can impair—Your counsels no created being can question or resist. Blessings and trials, comforts and crosses, come alike from You. You send the gourd. You send the worm. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? I adore You especially as the God of Salvation, and praise You for the riches of Your sovereign grace in Jesus.

I acknowledge my great unworthiness. I have to mourn the constant cleaving of defilement to my nature; that while earnest in the pursuit of

earthly things, I am prone to languish and grow weary in the things of God; that while I would do good, evil is present with me. In the season of prosperity, when receiving manifold gifts at Your hands, I have been too ready to forget the gracious Giver. In the hour of adversity, or even amid the fretting anxieties, and troubles, and solitudes of life, though You have invited me to the secret of Your tabernacle, there to unburden my needs, and sorrows, and perplexities, I have too often fled to other solaces, and put my confidence in unworthy supports, or else given way to murmuring and repining under Your righteous chastisements. Lord hide me alone in the clefts of the Rock of Ages! In the finished work and glorious righteousness and exalted sympathy of the God-man Mediator, may I find the shelter I need—a free and secure refuge from the storm, and covert from the tempest. Everywhere else in danger and trouble, may I feel that there I am safe. If sin has alienated me from that service in which I once delighted—if my love has been waxing cold—my affections becoming lukewarm and dead, revive and quicken me. Strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die. Return, O Holy Dove—blessed Spirit—Messenger of peace and rest!—enable me to hate the sin, whatever it be, which led me to forfeit the comforting sense of Your presence. Come, breathe upon my dry bones that they may live.

I know not what temptations I may be called today to encounter—temptations in business, in the family—in the world. In every trouble, whatever it may be, O fulfill Your own promise, and hide me in the secret of Your pavilion. Keep me from evil thoughts, evil wishes, vain imaginations. May the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus, mold and renew, control and elevate my whole being. Loving You, my God, may that love embrace all mankind. Give me that charity which is the bond of perfectness. Preserve me from the indulgence of implacable and malevolent feelings—the retaliation of wrong—the resenting of injuries; from all that would promote my own advantage at the expense or by the injury of others. Keep me from covetousness, from inordinate craving for mere material good—and make me more solicitous about the one thing needful—the only enduring riches of eternity—thankful for the many blessings of the present life, and seeking gratefully to enjoy them—yet living in the habitual anticipation of the Lord's second coming—"that blessed hope"—which, like a rainbow of promise, spans the sky of the

future. May I be looking for it—preparing for it—longing for it—living for it. The Lord grant unto me that I may find mercy of the Lord on that day!

Bless my dear friends. May each one of them, too, have their feet planted on the Rock which cannot be shaken. May ties, at best precarious on earth, be rendered indissoluble by grace. I pray for all sufferers. In the time of their sore trouble, do hide them specially in Your pavilion, and as the beloved of the Lord—who have the covenant mark upon them, may they there dwell safely.

Have compassion on a world lying in wickedness. May abundant showers of blessing descend on those vast tracts of heathendom wherein Your faithful missionary servants are laboring. May they see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in their hands.

I anew commend myself to Your gracious care and keeping. Be this day my shield, my glory, and the lifter up of my head; and when all my work on earth is accomplished, in Your own good time do receive me to Yourself, and number me with Your ransomed Church in glory everlasting. Through Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **8th Evening—COMFORT IN DEATH**

This gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter—

"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me."

Psalm 23:4

I come to You, Blessed Lord, this evening, thanking You for all Your mercies. How manifold have been the proofs and tokens of Your kindness and faithfulness! The past has been paved with love. There is no friend in the world who has been like You, and none so willing to befriend me. You have showered me with the blessings of Your goodness. While others have been laid on beds of sickness or cut down by sudden death, I am still among the living to praise You. Above all, You have bestowed upon me the Gift of gifts—that Gift which in magnitude and preciousness dwarfs

and absorbs all others. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift! Life may well be a perpetual hymn of gratitude for all these Your unmerited mercies, alike temporal and spiritual. I am unworthy of the least of them. It is to Your free Sovereign abounding Grace I owe them all. Not unto me O Lord, not unto me, but unto Your name I would give glory for Your mercy and for Your truth's sake.

While grateful for countless present blessings—Oh, prepare me for that solemn time, when they shall come, every one of them, to be renounced—when the trust of existence must be surrendered to You, the Great Being who conferred it. I bless you for Him who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light. In His cross, the last Enemy has been robbed of its sting and the grave of its victory. With that cross in view, may I see the Dark Valley flooded with celestial radiance—the gate of the grave and the gate of heaven become one! May I see in death, the birthday of a new being, in glory everlasting.

Lord, enable me habitually to bear about with me the solemnizing truth—that "as men live so do men die"—that as death leaves us, so will judgment and eternity find us. May it be mine to have the girded loins, and the burning lamp, and the ever-vigilant watchfulness—that when my Lord comes, I may be among the waiting servants who are ready to open unto Him immediately. Let Your love, meanwhile, form the animating motive and principle in all I do. May I be dying daily to self and to sin. May I live now as I would wish I had been living when the time of my departure is at hand—leaving nothing for these closing moments. May the best of life—not its dregs, be given to You. Whether I live may I live unto the Lord, or whether I die may I die unto the Lord—whether therefore I live or die, Lord, may I be Yours. That so, whatever be the term of existence apportioned to me here, I may at last be ushered into the enjoyment of Your presence, and into the possession of length of days forever and ever.

Look down in compassion on the whole human race. May the time be hastened when from every nation of the earth the cry shall arise, "Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns! The kingdoms of this world have become the one kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ."

I pray for all upon whom the hand of sorrow is laid. May those racked with suffering and disease, who are saying in the morning "Would God it were evening," and in the evening "Would God it were morning," look forward to that glorious time when there shall be no more pain; and to that glorious place "where the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick." May all who have been called to witness the shadows of death gathering around those they love, rejoice that in Jesus the substance of death has been taken away—that to depart and to be with Him, is indeed far better. May those now entering the final conflict gird themselves with the plighted promise of the great Vanquisher—"Fear not; I am he who lives and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of the grave and of death." Commending them to the hand of a sustaining God and supporting Savior, may they have nothing to do but to die. May angels be waiting to carry their spirits into the Redeemer's bosom.

Meanwhile, good Lord, be my Shepherd and I shall lack nothing. Make me to lie down in the green pastures—lead me beside the still waters. Whatever be Your dealings, may these result only in restoring my soul, and leading me in the paths of righteousness. And then, when I come to walk through the Dark Valley, I shall fear no evil—for You are with me supporting me with the rod and staff of Your comforting promises. May goodness and mercy, like two guardian angels, follow me all the days of my life; and may my dwelling be in the house of the Lord forever.

These, and all other needful blessings for myself and for others, I supplicate in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ—my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **9th Morning—THE FAITHFUL SAYING**

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance—that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Tim. 1:15

Heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, I approach Your gracious presence, thanking You for the mercies of the by-past night and the renewed comforts of another day. O You who has anew opened the Gates of the morning, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,

do shine into my heart. May no "earthborn-cloud arise," to intercept the light of Your countenance. May the morning radiance without, be to me the emblem of that inner sunshine with which You visit the souls of Your people.

I come rejoicing in You as my Creator, Preserver, and bountiful Benefactor. You have never left Yourself without a witness in that You are continually doing me good. I have no memories but of Your unceasing care and kindness—Your unvarying paternal love. I come rejoicing in You especially as the God of Salvation; exulting anew in "the faithful saying" which is as faithful as ever, and as worthy of all acceptance as ever, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Lord, I have to mourn my constant proneness to depart from You—the instability of my best resolutions—the fitfulness of my best frames and feelings—the sordidness of my best motives. I confess, without reservation, my heart-sins, lip-sins, life-sins—omitted duties—abused mercies—unsanctified warnings—love of the world—love of ease—love of self—taking Your gifts and forgetting the Giver—seeing my brother have need, and shutting up my compassion. Blessed Savior, ever living—ever loving—Son of Man who came to seek and to save that which is lost—who does, through Your precious sacrifice, cover all claims and cancel all debts—do have mercy upon me. I confide in Your infinite power and wisdom. There is a potency in Your name to soothe every fear and to hush every sorrow. Say in the might of Your mingled omnipotence and love—"Your sins are all forgiven you." I cast myself on You, alike for time and in eternity. In life, may I feel the power of Your sustaining grace; in trouble, the support of Your tender consolations; and in death the all-sufficiency of Your exceeding great and precious promises.

Keep me this day, in my worldly business and avocations, from whatever would be injurious to my spiritual interests, or that would soil and blemish my Christian character. I know not into what unforeseen sins and temptations I may be betrayed. I know not what guilty thoughts may find expression in unworthy and hasty and sinful words—defiling my conscience and dishonoring Your holy name. Keep me from whatever is mercenary and avaricious—from all double dealing—from seeking to accomplish any end by deceitful means on which Your blessing cannot



descend. Preserve me from the selfishness that would appropriate Your gifts alone for personal enjoyment and gratification. If I have in any measure freely received at Your hands, may I feel it alike my duty and my privilege freely to give—seeking to act under the lofty motive of pleasing You, and doing good unto all men as I have opportunity.

Lord have mercy on the afflicted. Point wounded spirits to the Great Physician, of whom it was said that "He healed them all." May they consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest they be wearied and faint in their minds. May every rebellious tear be dried, as they listen to the gracious assurance—"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Recover the sick. Provide for the fatherless and the widow, and him who has no helper. May bereaved ones hearken, amid the shadows of the Valley, to the beatitude of the heavenly voice—"Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth—Yes, says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them." May all sufferers in this suffering world look forward to that happy time, when not a groan shall be heard throughout Your ransomed creation—but when delivered from the bondage of corruption, it shall be translated into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Bless Your Church. May she be the honored instrument, more and more, of reclaiming those who are out of the way. Multiply the number of Your devoted servants at home, who are ready to rush with their censer and incense between the living and the dead that the plague may be stayed. Bless all missionaries abroad—those who, in heathen lands, are preparing the way of the Lord, and making straight in the desert an highway for our God. May they not be afraid of evil tidings, but may their hearts be fixed trusting in You. May the faithful saying—Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners—so potent in the past, vindicate, its claim still, to be the power of God unto salvation.

Anew I commend myself, and all near and dear to me, to Your gracious care and keeping. Fit me for life, and for death, and for eternity. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

**9th Evening—NEEDED DISCIPLINE**

"He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lam. 3:33

O God, enable me to approach this night the footstool of Your Throne, with child-like confidence and love. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him, for He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust. May the Holy Spirit—the Sanctifier, the Quickener, the Comforter of His people, visit me with His gracious influences. Open the windows of Heaven, and send down some drops of the plentiful rain with which You refresh Your heritage when it is weary, that I may feel it to be good for me to draw near unto God.

I desire to make acknowledgment of my many sins—my rebellious thoughts, my unbelieving doubts, my heinous backslidings—my murmuring under Your chastisements, my resisting of Your grace, my grieving of Your Spirit. My best motives have been mixed with self-seeking, arrogance, and vain glory. My best services have been marred with imperfection and impurity. If You O Lord should mark iniquity—who would stand? But there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared. Impart to me the blessed sense of Your pardoning mercy. Restore unto me the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit. If You are on my side, I shall fear no evil. The light of Your countenance and the assurance of Your favor can compensate for all losses. Whether You send adversity or prosperity, whether You conduct by the mountain or by the valley—by steep and crooked ways, or by smooth and pleasant ways, let this be my comforting assurance and rejoicing confession—"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth!" "Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation, on You do I wait all the day." Should You see fit to subject me to severe and arduous discipline—may I rest in the sweet confidence that it is needed; that it is a Father's rod that smites, and a Father's voice that speaks. You do not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. Enable me to maintain the testimony of a good conscience. In simplicity and godly sincerity, may I keep myself unspotted from the world, and seek in all things to glorify Your holy name. Lift me out of the region of self. Conform me more and more to the image of Your dear Son. Keep me from all evil surmisings; from all unkind interpretations of Your dealings. Give me the sanctified use of

Your dispensations; that so, when the angel of affliction comes down and troubles the pool, I may step in and be purified—and thus the trial of my faith may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Look down in compassion on the extensive circle of sufferers, in a suffering world. O Prince of Sufferers, who alone, by experience, can gauge the depth of Your people's sorrows, draw near to all such in Your infinite mercy, and say "I am the Lord who heals you." May they listen to the reason of their trials coming from Your own lips of love—"Your Father knows that you have need of all these things." Comfort them with the thought of the better world, where the pang of sickness is never felt, where the shadow of death never falls, and where the tear of bereavement never dims the eye. Strengthen and sustain the dying. Grant unto them an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom.

Promote Your cause everywhere. Encourage the often drooping hearts of Your ministering servants at home, as well as those who are lifting up their voices amid the wastes of heathenism. Hasten the day when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad for them; when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Prosper all measures in this our land which tend to promote the social well-being, and the growth and spread of true and undefiled religion. May our nation continue, as in past ages, a faithful witness for the truth, and a diffuser of holy influences. As the recipient of manifold spiritual riches and blessings, may she feel more and more her duty and responsibility, to be the almoner of these to others less highly favored. God be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us—that Your way may be known upon the earth—Your saving health among all nations.

Anew I commend myself, and those near and dear to me, to Your gracious care and keeping. May every night find us pitching our tents nearer heaven and nearer to You—and at last, in the morning of immortality, may we be permitted to awake in Your likeness, and to rejoice evermore in Your presence and love.

And to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, world without end. Amen.

## **10th Morning—STRONG CONSOLATION**

"So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." Hebrews 6:17, 18

O God, I beseech You to draw near to me in Your great mercy. My voice shall You hear in the morning, O Lord—in the morning will I direct my prayer unto You and will look up. Fill my heart with Your love; that I may feel the Gate of prayer to be as the Gate of heaven—the portal opening into a Father's presence.

I bless You that amid all changes You are unchanging—that amid the instability and insecurity of human purposes—the fickleness of earthly counsels—I can exult in Your faithfulness. You are the same. "The Lord lives and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." I thank You especially, for the purchased blessings of that everlasting covenant which is well ordered in all things and sure. By two immutable things—Your oath and Your promise—in which it is impossible for God to lie, I have strong consolation.

And yet Lord, I have to acknowledge with shame and humiliation, that I have not been living up to my privileges. I have not been realizing as I ought to have done, my position and prospects as an heir of these exceeding great and precious promises. Your mercies have been too often received with unthankfulness, and Your chastisements with repining. I have to bewail my lack of faith and lack of love—my coldness and deadness—the dullness of my spiritual perceptions—the often surrender of my heart to objects and pursuits on which Your favor cannot rest. I have too often given to self, and the world, and sin—those affections and that service which should have been inalienably Yours.

Where can I look, in the hour of conscious unworthiness and demerit, but to the "strong consolation" of Your blessed Word. If I have forgotten and forsaken my first love—if other lords have had dominion over me—if like

a vessel I have broken loose from my moorings and been drifting away from You, may that hope—the hope of forgiveness now and the hope of heaven hereafter—both purchased and sealed for me in the cross of Your dear Son—be as an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil.

Fit me this day for the battle of life. Trusting to the promised aids of Your Spirit, may I be enabled to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. Keep me from absorbing love of earth—from all forbidden paths—from all doubtful and debatable ground. Preserve me from the lusts which debase, the selfishness which hardens, the anger or malice which, if unchecked and unrepressed, may grow into malevolence. Give me a spirit of watchfulness—keeping vigil even in the hour of apparent security; ever listening to the needed monition "When you think you stands, take heed lest you fall." Preserve me from hard construction of Your dealings—from hard construction of the doings and dealings of my fellow-creatures—from censorious and ungenerous suspicions. May I strive to make charitable allowance for those who injure me—eschewing all hastiness of speech or temper. If exposed to unmerited wrong, may I leave my cause with You.

I pray for all who may still be far from You—living without God and without hope in the world. May they also be led, before it be too late, to flee for refuge and lay hold on the hope set before them in the gospel—confiding in the inviolability of Your own oath and promise, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies."

Hear the cry ascending from the dark places of the earth, full of the habitations of cruelty. Lord, how long? Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; let the reign of the just be established. Bless and prosper every mission cause and enterprise. May idols be dethroned and idol-worship abolished, and may men know that You, whose name alone is Jehovah, are the most High over all the earth. Bless our beloved country. Give to its rulers wisdom and prudence and energy—a sense of responsibility to You, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. Reform whatever is evil—protect, conserve, and perpetuate whatever is good.

O God of the mourner!—to the fatherless be a Father—to the widow a husband—to the friendless a friend. May all afflicted ones know, in the midst of their sorrows, the strong consolation imparted to those who have fled to Christ for refuge. Great and manifold as are Your consolations at all times, You are specially a present help in trouble.

I again commend myself to You and to the word of Your grace. Be ever at my right hand and I shall not be moved. As an heir of promise, may my eye be upwards and my footsteps onwards. May everything tend to promote my spiritual advancement. May the joys of the way and the trials of the way alike bring me nearer heaven and nearer to You. I ask these and all other needed blessings, in the name of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **10th Evening—GOD IS LOVE**

"He who loves not, knows not God; for God is love." 1 John 4:8

Almighty and everlasting Father, the God of my life, the length of my days, I desire this evening, before I retire to rest, to offer the tribute of grateful praise for all Your mercies given to me, and to supplicate Your blessing and guardian care during the silent watches of the night. I adore You for the gracious manifestations You have made of Your name and character and attributes—as the Holy and the Righteous, the Just and the True. Above all, I bless You for Your best, Your endearing name—"God is love." Your outer creation proclaims it—the vocal melodies of forest and grove—the placid heavens above, and the bounteous earth beneath—spring in its buds of promise, and summer with its wealth of beauty. In a silent hymn of thanksgiving, universal nature testifies, "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works."

But it is in the work and atonement of Your dear Son, You have given the mightiest proof and pledge of the great love with which You have loved me. It is while seated at the foot of His cross, that I can most truly exclaim, "Herein indeed is love!" I rejoice to think of the eternity of that love—that it existed before the birth of time or of worlds. You loved Your people with an everlasting love. And knowing no beginning of days,

neither does it know end of years. Loving Your own who are in the world, You loved them unto the end. O You, whose nature and whose name is love, bring me to live under the power and influence of this divine perfection. May I be enabled, more and more, to love Him who has first loved and so loved me. Keep me from the guilt of requiting Your love with ingratitude. May it secure and conciliate my confidence and trust. Deliver me from every heart-sin and life-sin that would tend to intercept its gracious effluence. By needed and salutary discipline, wean me from every less worthy object of affection. Subordinate all creature and created love to the divine. May the love of God be shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit given unto me. Even should You see fit to chequer my path with trials, may these prove heart-searchers, testing the depth and reality of my devotion to Him who must do all things well, and nothing but what is well; so that I may be able to say, under every varying scene of changeful life—"I have known and believed the love which God has to me."

Bathed in the element of love to You a loving God, let me seek to love all around. Give me large and generous thoughts and plans for the welfare of others. May that love of Yours, which has my own heart and the circle of my more immediate influence for its center, have the world for its circumference. Let it radiate forth to all mankind.

Keep my dear friends and relatives in this same pavilion of love. May they pillow their heads this night on the divine assurance, "He who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." Linked to one another and to You in these bonds of holy fellowship, may we together look forward to that daybreak of immortality when this divine affection will be enthroned supremely in every heart; when at last we shall all be able to comprehend, in some feeble measure, what is the height and depth and length and breadth, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Bless all in sorrow. May they indulge no hard suspicions of Your faithfulness—may they trace no footsteps in their darkened way but the footsteps of love—may they hear no voice in their hushed chambers but the voice of love. May they listen to this explanation of Your dealings, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."

Hasten the day, when this world, now groaning and travailing in pain and clad in the garments of sorrow, shall be arrayed in festive attire, and be enabled to exult in the glorious liberty of Your children. Send times of refreshing unto Zion. Create upon all her dwelling-places and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night—upon all the glory be a defense. Arise, O Lord, and plead Your own cause.

Be pleased to forgive whatever in thought, in word, or in deed, I have committed against You this day. Before I retire to rest, sprinkle my heart with the covenant token. Oh, unslumbering Shepherd of Israel, guard my midnight hours; and when the Gates of the morning again are opened, may they be opened anew to the light of Your love, and to fresh heart-consecration to Your service and glory.

I present these humble supplications, relying on nothing in myself, but trusting alone for pardon and acceptance and peace, to the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **11th Morning—THE SECRET OF STRENGTH**

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

O God, I desire to come into Your gracious presence this morning, adoring You as the God of my life and the length of my days. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?—the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? You are the Fountain of all excellence; Your loving-kindness is better than life.

I approach You in the name of Him whom You hear always, and in whom You are ever well pleased. Come forth, O Great High Priest, in this the hour of morning sacrifice, and breathe upon me Your own benediction, "Peace be unto you!" Fill me with all joy and peace in believing. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant me Your peace! I



rejoice in the dignity of Your nature—the fullness of Your grace—the tenderness of Your sympathy—the prevalence of Your pleadings. I go forth this day into a world of trouble and trial and conflict. In no armor or panoply of my own am I proof against the enemy—but I take refuge in the elevating assurance that I can do all things, and suffer all things, and overcome all things, through Christ who strengthens me.

Meanwhile, give me calm contentment with my lot. May all its blessings be sweetened, by having them in You, and You in them. Keep me from all that would foster a spirit of unbelief and rebellion and murmuring. Give me a childlike docility—tenderness of conscience—simplicity of trust—holiness of heart—obedience and consistency of life. May I be enabled to make a more entire and unreserved surrender of myself—my will—my affections—my talents—my energies—my time—to You. Let me know that the promise is sure and unfailing, "My God shall supply all your needs out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." May Your fear deliver me from the sinful fear of man—may Your love enable me to rise superior to the caprice and fitfulness of human friendships—may the hope of being with You forever, reconcile me to the vicissitudes and trials of a changing, chequered, transient world. I rejoice that life's unknown future is in better keeping and disposal than in mine. I will be anxious for nothing—knowing that the morrow will bring along with it from You, grace proportioned for all exigencies—strength in weakness, support in temptation, patience in trial, and victory in death.

Bless my beloved friends. May the joy of the Lord be their strength also. Keep them as the apple of Your eye—let them repose under the shadow of Your wings. Look in great kindness on the afflicted. Hide them in the clefts of the Rock until these calamities are overpast. Reveal Yourself unto them in another way than You do unto the world. Show them, that You see fit at times to bring them out from themselves—their own likings, and trusts, and confidences, and earthly joys—that they may lean on Your arm. Show them, that in the realized possession of Your love and favor, they have what will fill all blanks and compensate for all losses. May they go from strength to strength, until every one of them in Zion appears before God.

I pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. May she rise from the

dust and put on her beautiful garments; a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of our God. Give to Your churches a spirit of unity and concord—lead them willingly to co-operate in every good work and labor of love, so that, though there be many separate flocks, they may all look to the one Guiding Shepherd; though differing in outer organization, they may be all truly one in Christ Jesus. Disperse the brooding darkness of the world, and utter Your own omnific mandate, "Let there be light."

Direct, control, suggest this day, all my designs—my deeds—my words. Let me carry the fragrance of the mercy-seat out into the world. May a sense of Your presence prove a preservative against temptation. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins, and let them not have dominion over me. And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **11th Evening—THE RESURRECTION AND LIFE**

"I am the resurrection, and the life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11:25

Most blessed God, my Heavenly Father—I desire to come into Your gracious presence this night, having my heart filled with gratitude and thankfulness for all Your unmerited mercies. That I have been protected throughout the day, from danger, and accident, and disease—that I have been shielded from sin and temptation, it is all Your doing. Your hand has been around me for good. It is You, Lord, who alone makes me to dwell in safety.

I bless You for the exceeding riches of Your grace, in Your kindness towards me through Christ Jesus. I bless You for His spotless obedience—His meritorious death—His glorious resurrection. I bless You that I can enter by faith His vacant sepulcher, and hear the joyful assurance, "He is not here, He is risen." In that gracious declaration, I have the pledge and testimony that You the Father have accepted His completed work—that You, in Him, have begotten us again unto a lively hope—the hope of an

inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away. Enable me by faith to rise and walk with Him in newness of life. Risen with Christ, may I seek those things that are above, where He sits at the right hand of God. May my life now be hidden with Christ in God, that when Christ who is my life shall appear, I may also appear with Him in glory. May Your Holy Spirit dwell within me, quickening this life of faith in Your dear Son, and promoting the growth of every spiritual and heavenly grace.

Forgive, Lord, all the offences I have committed against You this day—the sins of thought and word and deed. Blot them out of the book of Your remembrance. Before I retire to rest, I would seek to wash anew in the opened fountain; and to receive anew the blessed assurance of Your pardoning love in Jesus. Watch over me during the unconscious hours of slumber. As You have been a pillar of cloud by day, be as a pillar of fire by night. Grant to me, and to all near and dear to me, refreshing sleep, even the sleep of Your beloved; and may the return of a new morning be a fresh pledge of that better day-dawn of immortality, when we shall awake in Your likeness, and earth's shadows and darkness shall forever flee away.

I commend all in sickness and sorrow to Your own infinite compassion. Be a Friend to the friendless, a Father to the fatherless. Point every bereft one beyond the gloom of the grave, to Him who, as the Resurrection and the Life, has flooded the dark Valley with glorious light—who Himself, having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Bless the whole human race. Open to a perishing world the Gates of righteousness; that multitudes now sitting in darkness may enter in and praise the Lord. Bless Your Church everywhere—send times of refreshing unto Zion. O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years. Arouse and quicken the careless and ungodly. Bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived. Before the day of grace and mercy be past, may they be led to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; and remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said, "He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Oh, teach us all to be living in habitual preparation for death and judgment and eternity; that when the cry shall be heard in the

midst of the heavens, "Behold the Bridegroom comes," we may be ready, and not ashamed before Him at His coming.

I ask these, and all other needful blessings, in the name of Him whom You hear always—the Great Advocate and Intercessor—who, with You the Father, and You the ever-blessed Spirit, Three in One in covenant for our salvation, ever lives and reigns, one God, world without end. Amen.

## **12th Morning—COVENANT FAITHFULNESS**

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you." Isaiah 54:10

O God, I come into Your presence on this the morning of a new day, rejoicing in Your covenant faithfulness. You change not. The mountains shall depart and the hills shall be removed. Human props may fail; human friends may grow cold; adversity may alienate; death must separate. But You are the same. Your kindness shall not be taken from us. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever.

How great has been Your patience towards me! Despite of all my faults and failings—my backslidings and declensions—Your hand of mercy and forbearance is stretched out still. You are God and not man, therefore it is that the sons of Jacob are not consumed. Unchangeableness cannot be thwarted by creature vacillation—Infinite fullness cannot be exhausted by finite needs. I bless You, O Lord, especially, that I can exult in the faithfulness and immutability of Jesus—that, He who of old received sinners—who came to seek and to save the lost—who broke not the bruised reed nor quenched the smoking flax—is still as unchanged as when He lived and loved and compassionated on earth. This is His name and memorial to all generations, and which ages and generations cannot alter—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."

Before I go forth to my worldly duties and engagements, I would desire to repair to His cross, there to have all the blessings of the everlasting

covenant anew ratified and sealed. Out of His infinite fullness I would seek to derive the needed grace and strength to fit me for work and warfare. I may perhaps this day have some untried path before me. There may be some unknown temptation to encounter—some unforeseen burden to bear. Arm me for every conflict. Amid all harassments and troubles and disquietudes, amid all taunts and provocations, let me endure as seeing You who is invisible. Having avouched the Lord to be my covenant God, may I aspire more and more after purity of heart and consistency of character. Give me grace, with a single eye to Your glory, to fill my sphere in life whatever it be—doing my duty heartily as to the Lord and not unto men—jealous of anything that would tend to alienate my affections from You, and lead me into detrimental courses—dubious and debatable ground on which Your blessing cannot rest. Let me bear upon me the lofty impress of those, born from above and for above—grateful and thankful for the many means and sources of enjoyment You have given in the present life, yet seeking to live a pilgrim and stranger on the earth, having my citizenship in heaven.

Compassionate a dead and dying world. Darkness is covering the lands and gross darkness the people. May the summons be heard, "Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." From kingdom to kingdom, and from shore to shore, let the cry in due time ascend, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation." Prosper all Bible and missionary agencies. May Your servants, alike at home and abroad, be valiant for the truth. May they experience much of Your presence and witness much of Your power. Baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Look down in mercy on all who are afflicted—tossed with tempest and not comforted—on all who are mourning the sudden extinction of some star in their skies—the premature withering of some cherished gourd. May they know that they can have no real loss, if they have more of Your fellowship and presence and love.

I pray for all my dear friends. May they be among the beloved of the Lord who dwell safely. Bless them and make them blessings. Now bound up together in the bundle of life—may we be found at last, without spot and blameless, when the harvest of the earth shall be reaped. The Lord grant

unto us that we may find mercy of the Lord on that day. And all I ask is for the Savior's sake, Amen.

## **12th Evening—THE LOVE OF CHRIST**

"The love of Christ, which passes knowledge." Eph. 3:19

O God, You are making the outgoings of the evening and of the morning to rejoice over me, I beseech You to draw near this night in Your great mercy, as I approach Your presence through this blessed Portal of Love. You have been my watchful Protector and Guardian during another day. Give me still Your blessing. I would now retire to rest, under the shadow of Your wings, feeling that it is You alone Lord, who makes me to dwell in safety.

I bless You that I am permitted to look up unto You as my covenant God and heavenly Father; that with boldness and confidence I am invited to the Throne of the heavenly grace, there to unburden all my needs and difficulties, my perplexities and temptations, and to receive the twofold boon, of mercy to pardon, and grace to help. Fill me with a deep sense of the greatness and magnitude of the love of Christ. Teach me in some feeble measure to comprehend its height and depth, its length and breadth, and to experience its constraining influence.

Blessed Savior—You who have loved me with an everlasting love, enable me to feel that I am not my own. May I seek to make a joyful and willing surrender of my soul's best affections to You, who has ransomed me with Your precious blood. May all earthly love be subordinated to Yours. Let there be no rival or competing affection. Conscious of the predominance of divine spiritual motives and purposes, may I be enabled in honest sincerity to avow—'Lord, O Great Redeemer—O Great Heart-searcher, You know all things, You know that I love You.'

Help me to the cultivation of all the graces of the Christian character. Raise me above all that is base or ungenerous—unkind or resentful—ensorious or uncharitable. Let the law of love, which has had its highest and loftiest exemplification in the doing and dying of Jesus, find

expression also in my daily walk and conversation. God is love—and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him.

Bless my friends and relatives. May that same love of Jesus form the motive principle in their actions. O Blessed Source of all grace! as the first fruit produced by You in the regenerated heart is love—do nurture in them the spirit of Love. Let them live and act, as seeing You who is invisible—and when all that is fitful and changing in affection here below has terminated, may the fellowships and friendships of earth be resumed indissolubly in glory.

Lord, have mercy on a fallen world. In the region and shadow of death, may the Sun of Righteousness arise. Terminate the reign of selfishness and tyranny—of error and superstition. Let the gospel of love sheathe all swords of war, unbind all chains of slavery, and unite the nations in a holy brotherhood. Let the wind and earthquake and fire of human passion pass by—and let the Lord of love be heard in His own 'still small voice.'

Bless Your ministering servants at home—stand by all Your faithful missionaries in their varied fields of labor in distant lands. May they be the honored instruments in laying many trophies at the feet of their Great Master. May their bow abide in strength, and their arms be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

Forgive blessed Lord—for the sake of Your dear Son—all that I have this day spoken or done amiss. As the Gates of the evening are closing, I would anew hear Your benevolent voice of pardoning mercy, saying, "Your sins are forgiven!" As I resign myself, once more, to that which is the image of death, may I feel that it is Your kindness and mercy alone, night after night, which prevents the emblem being converted into a reality. Oh, grant, that when that reality does overtake me—when I am summoned at last to a dying hour and dying pillow—the last long slumber; through the merits of Your dear Son, I may have a blissful and glorious awaking in the morning of Immortality.

I ask these, and all other needful blessings, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## 13th Morning—THE COMMITTED WAY

"Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass—and he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day." Psalm 37:5, 6

O God, I desire, as the Gates of the morning are again opened, to commit my way to You throughout a new day. You are near to those who call upon You, to all who call upon You in truth. To You all hearts are open—all desires known, and from You no secrets are hidden—cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy name.

You are the Supreme Disposer. There is no such thing as accident or chance in Your providential rule. Each varying scene in this varying chequered life is from You alone. In all difficulties and perplexities, enable me to commit implicitly my way unto Your better direction—hearing Your voice behind me saying, "This is the way, walk in it"—rejoicing in Your wise orderings, Your beneficent purposes; and willing to tread, if need be, the roughest path, because it is Your sovereign will and wisdom to lead me there.

You know how unworthy I am to come into Your presence, or to take Your thrice holy name into my lips. If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared—with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption. I come to Your footstool, through Him who has cancelled all debts and fulfilled all righteousness; who is now exalted a Mighty Pleader at Your right hand—the Prince who has power with God and must prevail. For His sake, receive me graciously and love me freely. Out of His infinite fullness may I receive for all exigencies even grace for grace—sustaining grace, restraining grace, sanctifying grace. When temptation assails, may I be enabled, in a strength greater than my own, to resist. In the trying warfare of life, cover my head in the day of battle—that finally I may be made more than conqueror through Him that loved me.

Teach me ever devoutly to follow the leadings, and to imbibe the spirit, of



the divine Redeemer. Keep me from the manifestation of unholy tempers—from the pride which elates; from the worldliness which hardens; from all unkindness and uncharitableness. Enable me to put the best construction on the motives and actions of others; not passing harsh and censorious comments on their inconsistencies or failings—but rather considering myself lest I also be tempted. If assailed wrongfully with the tongue of malice or slander, may I seek, like Him who was silent before His shearers, to repress the spirit of retaliation—to commit myself to One that judges righteously, and who has promised to those who so trust Him, to bring forth their righteousness as the light and their judgment as the noon-day. Invigorate my drooping faith, quicken my spiritual apprehensions, stimulate my wavering purposes and languid zeal, incline me to a more hearty and entire consecration of soul and body to Your service and glory.

O God of all consolation—the God in whom compassions flow, bestow Your tenderest sympathy on poor afflicted ones—especially on those who may be mourning the loss of beloved friends. Committing too their darkened way unto You, may the words of promise contained in holy Scripture, come out as ministering angels in their night of sorrow, cheering them with hopes full of immortality. May the dying pass through the gates of death to the unending enjoyment of Your presence and love. And may we be stirred by the example of those, who have fought the good fight and obtained the crown.

Bless my dear friends, temporally and spiritually. Set Your covenant mark and seal on each of their foreheads. Look in mercy on Your Church throughout all the world. May the Lord create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, and upon all the glory be a defense.

I anew commend myself to You and to the word of Your grace. And all I ask, is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **13th Evening—PURITY OF HEART**

"Blessed are the pure in heart—for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

O God, I desire to come in to Your presence this night, beseeching You to give me a Father's blessing. Let my prayer come before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. The most acceptable oblation I can offer, is that of the broken and the contrite heart; the sweetest incense—the incense of gratitude and thankfulness. Give me this brokenness of spirit; fill me with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have to confess and mourn my great unworthiness. How far short have I come of that holiness of heart and purity of life, without which no man can see the Lord. How many sinful thoughts have I harbored—how many guilty words have I spoken—how many duties have I omitted, or carelessly and perfunctorily performed. How little gratitude have I shown for blessings—how little patience under crosses. How much pride has there been in my humility—how little childlike trust in Your dealings. How have even my best resolutions to serve You, been erased by the world's oblivion-power. How often have I returned to those very sins I had solemnly sworn and covenanted I was to part with forever. Lord, have mercy upon me! I come anew, guilty, polluted, helpless—to Him who is help and hope and portion to all who seek Him. My own repentings and tears cannot cleanse away the guilt of a single transgression. But the blood of Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, cleanses from them all.

While I look to Him as my only Savior, and rely alone for justification on His atoning sacrifice, enable me to make His stainless, heavenly life, my habitual model and pattern. Give me grace to purify myself even as He is pure. May the Holy Spirit, the Glorifier of Jesus, take of the things that are His and show them unto me; that beholding, as in a glass, the glory alike of His divine character and His spotless obedience, I may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit. Do confirm and strengthen every Christlike principle within me; and may principle have its outcome in deed and action. May perfect love cast out fear. When at any time assailed with tormenting doubts or fiery temptations—may I know that He is faithful who promised "I will make my grace sufficient for you, I will perfect strength in weakness." May whatever is displeasing, Lord, to You, be displeasing to me. Give me

integrity of purpose, and simplicity of service, and loftiness of aim. May I speak kindly and act gently. Keep me from uttering anything that would infringe on truth, or that would injure the absent. Let all I do, and all I say, be inspired by that charity which is the bond of perfectness.

I commend those in sorrow to Your sympathy—especially any in whom I may be more deeply interested. May they see You thus educating them for eternity. By the sanctifying use of affliction, may losses be turned into gains. Coming forth from the furnace, as gold tried in the fire, may they at last be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Bless Your Church everywhere. Bless all the sanctuaries throughout our land. May every House of God be as the Gate of Heaven—do there command the blessing, even life for evermore. Repress and subdue sectarian bitterness and animosity. May the alabaster box be broken in the midst of Your worshiping assemblies, and may the whole temple-courts be fragrant with the odor of the ointment. Pour the continual dew of Your blessing on the faithful ministers and stewards of Your mysteries. Anoint them with fresh oil. May they go in the strength of the Lord God; and ever hear the sound of their Master's footsteps behind them. Remember all devoted laborers in heathen lands. Going forth weeping, bearing the precious seed, may they be cheered with the promise, that they shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? my hope is in You. Abide with me, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. I will not let You go, except You bless me. Shield my body from danger and my soul from sin; and as each night gathers its shadows around, may it find me better fitted and prepared for the day of consummated holiness in Your presence and kingdom, and for experiencing, in all its reality, the fulfillment of Your own beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And all I ask is in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ my only Lord and Savior; to whom, with You the Father, and You the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most due, all honor and glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## 14th Morning—THE SECOND COMING

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13

O God, I desire to thank You that the Gates of the morning are again opened, and that I am permitted to approach the footstool of Your Throne. Pour out upon me a spirit of grace and of supplication. May I draw near to You with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having my heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and my body washed as with pure water. Before I enter on the duties and engagements of a new day, I would seek to have Your blessing and benediction resting upon me. May the pillar of Your presence go before me. You have watched over me during the silence and darkness of another night. O You who leads Joseph like a flock—be in the daytime a shadow from the heat. If Your presence goes not with me—carry me not hence.

I desire to bless Your holy name for the first coming of the Redeemer; when "the Great God" became "my Savior;" when He veiled His glory, and, in the likeness of sinful flesh, tabernacled among men—humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. I bless You for the fullness and completeness of His mediatorial work; that He magnified Your law—satisfying all demands—fulfilling all righteousness, and proclaiming with triumphant voice, "It is finished."

I bless You that, from His first advent in lowliness and humiliation, I can look forward to His second coming "without the sin-offering, unto salvation;" when He shall be glorified in His saints, and admired in all those who believe. May that event ever be to me "the blessed hope"—the brightest rainbow of promise which spans the sky of the future. May I be "looking" for it—living habitually ready to utter the cry of joyful expectancy—"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" "Lo! this is our God, I have waited for Him!"

Meanwhile, give me grace to love Him more and serve Him better. May my belief be more simple—my devotion more ardent—my walk more consistent—my obedience more uniform and sincere; that I may not, like

many, be found at last, all unfit and unprepared for the Bridegroom's approach—but rather, with loins girded and lamp burning, go forth to join the festal train, and be among the number of the waiting servants, who, when their Lord comes, are ready to open unto Him immediately.

In the prospect of that day, may I keep a sacred and watchful guard alike over my thoughts and actions. Give me that charity which is patient and kind; which seeks not her own—is not easily provoked—thinks no evil—which rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. May Your good hand be with me, whether in the discharge of household or of business duties. Keep me from the absorbing love of the world; from coveting earthly good rather than heavenly riches. Keep me from all that would dim, to the eye of faith, the glories of the future. Enable me to live habitually, as I would wish I had been living, when the Son of man comes.

The same blessings I ask for myself, I implore in behalf of all near and dear to me. May they too be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. Attaining now a gradual conformity to His holy mind and image—when He shall appear, may they be like Him, when they shall see Him as He is. Thus united to one another, alike in ties of human relationship and in the fellowship of the gospel, may all of us, having this common hope in us, purify ourselves, even as He is pure.

Bless the children of sorrow. Let them also anticipate with joy that day when all mysteries will be unfolded—all wrongs redressed—all sufferings removed—all corruptions vanquished—and death itself swallowed up in eternal victory.

Let the world, now groaning and travailing in pain, exult in the prospect of her coming emancipation—when, delivered from the bondage of corruption, she shall be translated into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Prince of peace! take to Yourself Your great power and reign—soon may predicted voices be heard saying—"The kingdoms of this world have become the one kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever!" May Your churches be more and more faithful to their great missionary responsibilities. Baptize every ambassador of the cross with the Holy Spirit and with fire—and when the enemy is coming in like a flood, may this same Divine Spirit set up a standard to resist him.

I now commend myself, soul and body, to Your gracious care, O Great God my Savior! Never leave and never forsake me—guide me while I live by Your counsel, and afterwards receive me into glory. And to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most due, all blessing and honor and glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## **14th Evening—THE PROOF OF LOVE**

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10

O God, my heavenly Father, who is ever waiting to be gracious, and who is more ready to hear than Your children are to ask—draw near to me at this time in Your great kindness, and fill me with all peace and joy in believing. You have been a pillar of cloud to me by day—my Protector and Guardian. Be as a pillar of fire through the silent watches of the night. It is You, the great Shepherd of Israel, who gives Your beloved sleep.

I adore You, alike as my Maker and my Redeemer. You have filled the outer creation with manifold proofs of Your love, in brightness of sky, and beauty of flower; in music of stream, and song of bird. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. But I adore You, especially, for the mightiest proof which You have given of Your benignity and kindness, in the person and work of Your dear Son! Herein indeed is love. If at times unable to trace, in Your mysterious providential dealings, the footsteps of mercy—if at times tempted, under baffling dispensations, to say, "Your judgments are a great deep"—"Verily You are a God who hides Yourself"—seated at the foot of Calvary's cross, we can joyfully exclaim, "We have known and believed the love God has to us." Man's love is changing—Your is unchanging—man's love is finite—Your is infinite—man's love is the result of kindness—the return of love for love—but You commend Your love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Thanks, eternal thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!

I adore the freeness and sovereignty of that love. It was from everlasting, as it is to everlasting—unbought and unprocured by any poor love of mine. May I ever bear about with me Your own gracious declaration, as

the only reason for its bestowment—"My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts." You are God and not man. Man's thoughts would have been condemnation, judgment, wrath—but Your thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace and not of evil. How precious are these—Your thoughts of love unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! May the exceeding riches of Your grace, in Your kindness bestowed through Christ Jesus, exercise a constraining influence on my heart and life. Feeling the infinite debt of obligation under which I am laid to the divine Redeemer, may soul and body be consecrated as living sacrifices to Him, who so freely surrendered and consecrated His all for me. Blessed Savior, make me Yours. I am Yours by creation, I am doubly Yours by redemption. Quicken my faith, deepen my love, stimulate my obedience. Under the guidance and influence of lofty principle, may my eye be single, that my whole body may be full of light.

Bless my dear friends. Reward my benefactors. Pardon any who have wronged me. May I seek to conquer unkindness with kindness. Give me peace of conscience—charity towards all men. If in social communion, or in any of my dealings and transactions today, I have transgressed the golden rule—cherished an ungenerous thought—uttered an unkind or resentful word, or harbored an unjust suspicion—good Lord, forgive me.

Bless Your Church everywhere. Be a wall of fire around her—over all the glory be a defense. To whatever outward denomination they belong, do abundantly strengthen Your ministering servants. May their speech and their preaching not be with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and with power. May those who have gone forth as Your accredited ambassadors to heathen nations, enjoy many visible tokens of Your presence and blessing. May the precious seed, sown often with a trembling hand in uncongenial soil, be watered by the dews of heaven, and yield an abundant harvest.

Sanctify Your dealings to all mourners in Zion. Pity, relieve, comfort them. You heal the broken in heart and bind up their wounds. Let them see, in the love of Jesus, the pledge and guarantee of love in all that befalls them.

Hear, O Lord, in heaven, Your holy habitation, this my evening prayer;

when You hear forgive, and grant me an answer in peace, for Jesus' sake.  
Amen.



## 15th Morning—PATIENT WAITING

"The Lord is good unto those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." Lam. 3:25

O God, Inspirer of all good thoughts, the Hearer and Answerer of prayer—draw near to me in infinite loving-kindness. At this Morning-gate of Your Temple, I desire anew to ask Your blessing, and to invoke Your favor. You have graciously said, that You are good to those, who, in simplicity of faith and earnestness of trust and hope, wait upon You. "My soul, wait only upon God, for my expectation is from him!"

I thank You for Your sparing mercy. While others have been laid on beds of sickness, or prostrated by accident, or called away by sudden death—I am this hour among the living to praise You. How constant and how tender has been Your care and kindness to me in the days that are past! How enduring Your long-suffering, despite of countless provocations, and in the midst of ingratitude and disobedience, declension and backsliding!

I wait upon You, this morning, to implore forgiveness for the past and grace for the future. Give me the blessed sense of pardon and peace through the blood of the cross. Seal to me afresh the blessings of the new and well ordered covenant. Say, in mingled omnipotence and love, "Your sins are all forgiven you," Being thus forgiven much, may I lean upon You and trust You in the time to come; feeling that I cannot be in better or in safer keeping than in Yours. For all my joys, may I have chastened gratitude and thankfulness while they are granted; yet seeking not to invest them with a permanency which is not theirs. And when You curtail them, or take them away, let me not dishonor You with guilty doubts and distrustful fears. May this thought silence every murmur—"He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him also, freely give us all things." May I know and feel assured, that all things, by immutable covenant, are working, and will work together for good to those who love You. Thus do You shed hope and joy and peace around my daily path; may Goodness and Mercy, like two

guardian angels, follow me all the days of my life, and may my dwelling be in the house of the Lord forever.

Before I engage in my daily duties, I would implore Your guidance and protection. I cannot forecast the circumstances in which I may be placed today; what temptations may beset me—what troubles may oppress me. Let a sense of Your presence hallow my worldly work—that so, begun—carried on, and ended in You, all may redound to Your praise and glory. Let me use, with a glad and grateful heart, the many enjoyments You have given me in this beautiful earth; but abolish the evil dominion of self and selfishness. Keep me from the beguiling and seductive love of pleasure, on which Your approval cannot rest. Write the law of kindness on my heart. Let it be my happiness and joy to minister to others. May I feel that it is better to give than to receive; better to be last than to be first. Keep me pure—preserve me from false living—from all artifice—all underhand and dubious dealings—all crooked and covetous ways. May my converse be sincere, my conscience clear as the noonday. Serving You cheerfully here, may I become more and more fitted for the full consecration—the perfect spontaneity of the heavenly world.

I pray for all unsoled, unsuccored, and unpitied ones; all the wide circle and family of affliction. O You who bear Your people, as a man bears his own son that serves him—do bear their griefs and carry their sorrows. Even when wills are thwarted and plans are crossed—may they too know what it is "to wait only upon God." May the bruising in the olive-press of trial, only cause an overflow of the oil of joyful submission. Spare useful and valued lives. Let not the sun of existence go down before it is yet day. Prepare the dying for death and what is after death. May they exult in the finished work of Jesus—may the music of His name refresh their souls in the closing hour; and when they are taken away, may those left to mourn their loved and lost, know that the message "You shall die and not live," comes from You.

I pray for Your Church. Increase her faith, stimulate her zeal, heal her breaches. O Blessed Redeemer, who, by reason of these unhappy divisions, are wounded in the house of Your friends—do bring the varied members of the household of faith nearer You, and then they shall be nearer one another. Send times of refreshing unto Zion. Pour upon her

the continual dew of Your blessing—may no part of the fleece be dry. Beautify Your sanctuary—make the place of Your feet glorious.

Anew I commend myself and all belonging to me, this day, to Your gracious keeping. Waiting upon You, may I be enabled to renew my strength—and know that You never say to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek you my face in vain. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **15th Evening—THE FOURFOLD PLEA**

"Who is he that condemns? It Is Christ who died, yes rather, that has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Romans 8:34

Most blessed and everlasting God, who has been my guide and guardian and protector throughout the day, I approach the Gates of prayer tonight, with my evening tribute of gratitude and thanksgiving. Others, who rose this morning in health and strength, have been summoned without a note of warning into an eternal world. I am among the living to praise You. In my case, too, the axe might have been laid at the root of the tree, and the mandate have gone forth, "Cut it down." It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed.

I render unto You praise for all the outward blessings of my lot—for food and clothing—for bright sunshine and revolving season—for social and domestic pleasures—the endearments of kindred and home—the fellowship of loving and congenial hearts. I bless You, above all, for spiritual privileges. I render You devout thanks for the finished work of my adorable Redeemer. Looking to myself—my own guilty doings and demerits—there is everything to sadden and overwhelm. But, blessed be Your name, You have put this new song with its fourfold theme into my lips—'Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ is at the right hand of God; Christ makes intercession.' I rejoice to think, that, as the great Angel of the Covenant, he is ever pleading before the throne—bearing on His breastplate the names of His true Israel. Looking to the perfection of His sacrifice, the efficacy of His intercession, the fullness and all-sufficiency of His grace, I can joyfully make the challenge, "Who is he that

condemns?" "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Reposing on these gracious covenant assurances, I would retire to rest this night, cheered by the thought, that I am tended by the sleepless eye of Israel's unslumbering Shepherd.

Forgive the sins of the past day—the sins I have committed against You my God—the sins I have committed against my fellow-creatures; any unkind thoughts, or uncharitable judgments or censorious sayings. Sanctify me by the indwelling of Your gracious Spirit. Risen with Christ, may I live under the power of holy principles and renewed affections; seeking to make His divine example and spotless character—in His patience and meekness, His forgiveness and submission—the guide and regulator in all my duties and communion. Bearing about with me continually the dying of the Lord Jesus—may the life also of Jesus be thus made manifest in my mortal flesh.

I pray for all on whom You have been laying Your chastening hand. May they too know the quickening power of His resurrection and the sympathetic fellowship of His sufferings. If they have been brought in sad experience to feel that change is their portion here—that hopes are transient, joys insecure, friendships perishing—may they look upwards to an unchanging Savior-God, and listen to His assurance—"Fear not; I am He who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of the grave and of death." Comfort all who have been bereaved of beloved relatives—grateful for the valued loan, may they resign the trust to the great Proprietor of life. Only yielding You what is Yours, may it be theirs to say, "Your will be done!"

Bless Your Church everywhere. Heal divisions. Hasten the time when the watchmen on Zion's battlements shall see eye to eye and heart to heart. We know that there is a day coming, when the divine saying shall receive its joyful fulfillment—"Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." We would long, good Lord, for the realization of this holy brotherhood of Christians and of churches—that blessed era, when there shall be no contrariety to Your mind; when all shall be in blessed accord with Your will; and when, in answer to the Redeemer's prayer, His people, all becoming one, the world shall believe.

Let Your word triumph over pride and infidelity—superstition and will-worship. Let the people praise You, O God, yes let all the people praise You. The harvest truly is plenteous and the laborers are few. I would ask the Lord of the harvest that, He would send forth laborers to His harvest. Spirit of truth and love and peace I speed forth in Your glorious mission; and utter the divine summons over the darkened and degraded nations, "Let there be light!"

Lord, I anew commend myself, and all near and dear to me, to Your gracious keeping. Lift upon me the light of Your countenance and give me peace. Watch over me during the unconscious hours of sleep; and when the Gates of the morning are again opened, may I rise, in Your strength, fitted for the discharge of the duties and employments of another day. Hear me, gracious Father, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **16th Morning—THE LIVELY HOPE**

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away." 1 Peter 1:3, 4

O God Almighty, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You for all the manifold tokens of Your goodness and love. The Gates of the morning have again been opened. Do open, along with them, the Gates of Righteousness, that I may enter in and praise the Lord. Enkindle within my heart holy desires and devout affections. May these be pre-occupied with You, and with the things which belong to my everlasting peace. May I have Your blessing resting upon all my duties and engagements this day—the blessing which makes rich and adds no sorrow with it. May no created good be allowed to displace the sense and assurance I enjoy of Your favor and friendship.

I bless You, above all, for Your abundant mercy in the purchased, incorruptible inheritance. Change is our portion here. We are ever reminded, in the course of Your Providence, of the precarious tenure which links us to all earthly objects of happiness. But in the Resurrection

of Jesus I have the pledge and earnest of enduring blessings—"the lively hope"—the hope "full of immortality." In His finished work alone is all my dependence placed. With quiet confidence, I desire to repose in His covenant love and in the plenitude of His promises. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace!

Teach me ever to realize what a needy pensioner I am, from day to day and from hour to hour, on Your grace. Hold You me up! Keep me, guide me, protect me, undertake for me. In temptation support me—in danger defend me—in sorrow comfort me. If You send prosperity, enable me to carry the cup with a steady hand. If You send adversity, enable me to glorify You in the midst of the fires—adoring a 'taking' as well as a 'giving' God. As a member of the Christian priesthood, may it be my desire to offer on Your altar the continual sacrifice of a humble spirit, and a holy, pure, consistent life. Keep the lamp of faith and love trimmed and burning. Let me aim, more and more, at the crucifixion of sin and self. Should You speak at times by crossed dealings and mysterious dispensations, reading the impressive lesson of earth's corruptible and defiled and fading inheritances—may I harbor no guilty suspicions of Your faithfulness, or seek to arraign the appointments of paternal wisdom. But looking beyond to that which is imperishable—in answer to the question, "Is it well with you?" may I seek to be ready with the unhesitating reply, "It is well."

God of Bethel—the God of my fathers—the God of all the families of the earth—I pray in behalf of those near and dear to me—beseeking You to grant them a saving interest in that same unfading heritage. Make them partakers of Your abundant mercy—prepare them for Your Son's appearing and kingdom; and let nothing dim or obscure the brightness of that "blessed hope."

Extend Your support and sympathy to all in sorrow. Let them bear, with patient equanimity, whatever You see meet to appoint. Put into their lips the prayer, divinely taught, "Your will be done." Seeking to have no jot or tittle altered in the allotments of infinite love, may they look forward to that morning without clouds, when in Your light they shall see light, and when every shadow which now dims and darkens shall forever flee away.

Prosper Your cause and kingdom on the earth. Reveal Yourself to the nations who know You not, as a Father—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed Savior, have You not said, regarding the world You have redeemed, "The hour comes when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth?" Hasten the time, in Your own good way, when "neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem," nor in any exclusive "holy places"—but when from the lips of ransomed humanity the cry shall be heard—"Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not."

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. Let all my duties this day, whether private and domestic—or public and in the world, be performed under a sense of Your approval, and under the consciousness of Your strengthening and upholding grace—that so, when the shades of evening have again gathered, I may be enabled, in grateful remembrance, anew to set up my Ebenezer and to say—"The Lord has helped me." And all I ask is for the Savior's sake. Amen.

## **16th Evening—BELIEVING**

"He who believes on the Son has everlasting life." John 3:36

O God, I bless You that in the multitude of Your mercies the Gates of the evening have again closed upon me in peace. May the great Angel of the Covenant descend, and mingle the fragrance of His adorable merits with the evening incense-cloud; that my prayers, mingled though they be with much imperfection and sin, may ascend before You with acceptance. Hallow my thoughts—sanctify my affections; raise me above the seen and the temporal, and enable me to hold converse with the unseen and the infinite.

I bless You for that free and glorious gift of everlasting life, which You have given me in Your dear Son. May I freely and lovingly receive it—as it is freely and lovingly offered. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief! May I be enabled to see in Jesus the very Savior I need—the Physician who heals all my diseases. To His precious blood I look for pardon—to His supporting grace for strength—to His tender sympathy for solace. Give

me the present blessedness of those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. May I know the truth and reality of the words, "We who have believed do enter into rest,"—"He who believes on the Son has everlasting life." Give me the preparatory rest of grace here, which is the prelude and pledge of the eternal rest of glory hereafter. Fill me even now with all peace, and joy in believing, that I may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

With that everlasting life begun, which is to be perfected and consummated above, may I purify myself even as Christ is pure. Enable me to live worthy of so glorious a heritage. Deliver me from the enthralling power and bondage of sin in every form. As a temple of the Holy Spirit, may I be kept from whatever would defile or desecrate its hallowed courts. Preserve me from the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—from the power of all carnal appetites and corrupt affections. Guard the springs of thought and will. Prevent me from harboring or indulging unrighteous desires. In all I do, may I put on charity which is the bond of perfectness. Having the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, may I sit at the feet of Him who pleased not Himself.

I pray for all my dear friends—number them among Your believing children—make them heirs of this same everlasting kingdom. Let none be guilty of procrastination in the things which belong to their eternal peace. Let none be beguiled by the delusion of a deathbed repentance—beginning the watch when the summons comes to leave the watchtower—seeking a living Savior for the first time at a dying hour—but may we all be living habitually in that state of preparedness, that when the midnight cry shall be heard, we maybe ready with the response, "Even so—come, Lord Jesus!" Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him!

Let the dew which descended on the mountains of Zion descend on every branch of Your Church universal. Let a season of reviving and refreshing come from Your own immediate presence. Build the walls of Jerusalem. Soon may there be voices heard saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the one kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Look in tender love on the children of sorrow. If You have been recently impressing upon any the solemn lesson regarding the present life, that it



is even as a vapor which appears for a little moment and then vanishes away, let them rejoice in the glorious reversion they have in life everlasting; that beyond the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, the eye of faith can rest on a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Comfort the fatherless, the widow, the poor also, and him that has no helper. Even when the footsteps of a God of love fail to be traced—may there be implicit trust in the wisdom and rectitude of inscrutable dealings.

I anew supplicate Your forgiveness for the sins of the by-past day, and commit myself to Your gracious protection and guardianship during the silent watches of another night. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **17th Morning—THE GREAT PROPITIATION**

"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."  
Rom. 3:25

Most Blessed God, Father of all mercies and God of all grace, do hear in heaven Your dwelling-place these my morning supplications. When You hear forgive, and grant me an answer in peace.

You have mercifully guarded me during the unconscious hours of slumber—permitting me to lie down in sleep and to awake in safety. And now that I am about to enter on the duties and engagements—it may be the temptations and trials—of a new day, I would invoke Your presence. Give me Your benediction and blessing. If You are for me, who can be against me? I will go in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of Your righteousness.

Blessed be Your name for the Great Propitiation—that I can look away from myself, and my own guilty doings, to Him who has done all, and suffered all, and procured all for me. Oh sprinkle the lintels and door-posts of my heart with the covenant token. Countless multitudes have already washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and are now before Your Throne the trophies and monuments of redeeming grace and love. To His cross I desire anew, in simple faith, to

look—to the horns of that bloodstained altar I desire anew to cling. I have no other Savior, and blessed be Your name, need no other. Gracious Redeemer, You are able to save and willing to save to the uttermost. You have a balm for every wound; an antidote for every sorrow. To whom can I go but unto You, You have the words of eternal life.

May I be enabled, this day, to bear about with me the dying of the Lord Jesus. May that blood of sprinkling purge my conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Give the quickening energy of Your Holy Spirit, to disarm the power of temptation—to dethrone self—to deliver from the seductive influences of the world. Keep me from the intoxication of success—the pride and alienation of prosperity. Keep me from undue depression and guilty murmuring in adversity. Forbid that I should ever take encouragement to sin from abounding grace—but be led, rather, thus to judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead, and in that He died, He died that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. Impart to me increasing aspirations after that holiness of heart and life without which no man can see the Lord. Thus continuing, from day to day, in the enjoyment of Your fear and favor, when I come to die, may I be enabled to fall asleep in Jesus—in the blissful hope of a glorious immortality.

Let every blessing I ask for myself, be largely bestowed on all near and dear to me. Seal, to each of them, a saving interest in the blessings of the everlasting covenant. As the beloved of the Lord may they dwell safely. Let not one be found lacking on the day when You make up Your jewels.

Speed the gospel through the nations of the earth. Give Your faithful servants everywhere grace to proclaim, in all its fullness, Your own glorious message—the only remedy for a ruined world—peace through the blood of the cross. Arise, Lord, and plead Your own cause. Hasten the day, when the Prince of Peace shall be welcomed to the Throne of universal empire, and when all the ends of the world shall see the salvation of our God. Bless all Your churches at home. Imbue Your ministering servants with the healthful spirit of Your grace. Restore the lost; reclaim the backslider; comfort the mourner; shield the tempted; support the sick; sustain the dying. Bless the young. Enable them to lay the green ears of early consecration on Your holy altar, and to cry, "My

Father, You shall be the guide of our youth." Bless manhood in its prime. May the best energies of soul and body be willingly surrendered to Your service. Bless old age. May the hoary head be a crown of glory, found in the way of righteousness.

I ask these and all other needed blessings in the name of Him whom You hear always; who has loved me, and washed me from my sins in His own precious blood; Jesus Christ—my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **17th Evening—VICTORY OVER DEATH**

"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15:55-57

O God, I desire, as the Gates of the evening are again closing around me, to draw near into Your gracious presence, adoring You as the God of my life, in whose hands is the breath of every living thing. You have watched over me during another day—protecting me from danger, guarding me from temptation, sustaining me with the blessings of Your goodness. I thank You for this great gift of being—that I am still this night among the living to praise You, while others have slept the sleep of death.

You are ever giving impressive intimations and remembrances of our frailty and mortality. As for man his days are as grass—as the flower of the field so he flourishes. The wind passes over it and it is gone, and the place that once knew it knows it no more. I bless You that as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. Adored be Your name, that we can look, through the bars of the grave, on hopes full of immortality, and hear the voice of the divine Redeemer saying, "Fear not; I am he who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of the grave and of death,"—"I am the resurrection and the life, he who lives and believes on me shall never die." I bless You that in His cross and passion victory has been obtained over the King of terrors; that to all His true people the portals of death have been transformed into the gate of heaven, and that in His resurrection they have the pledge of their own. Grant me now, O God, a saving interest in

all those spiritual blessings He died to purchase, and which He is exalted to bestow; that thus I may be enabled to look forward with calmness and fortitude to the hour of departure, whenever and wherever You see fit to call me hence. May I be so living in near and conscious fellowship with Him, that when the summons of death comes, it may be to me like an angel whispering—"The Master has come, and calls for you."

While I bear about with me continually the dying of the Lord Jesus, may the life also of Jesus be made manifest in my mortal flesh. May it be my habitual aspiration, that my character be a reflection of His—in its gentleness and meekness—its purity and unselfishness—its benevolence and sympathy. In life, doing His will and imbibing His spirit; in death, ready to use His words of filial trust and self-surrender, "Father, into Your hand I commend my spirit."

I pray for any who may be living unready for the great change—lulling themselves in self-security, or risking their hopes for eternity on a deathbed repentance. Let them no longer remain in a state of guilt and danger; but lead them to know, in this their day, the things that belong to their peace, before they are forever hidden from their eyes.

Bless all near and dear to me. May they be united to You and to one another, in the bonds of the everlasting covenant. May their lives now be hidden with Christ in God, that when their last summons also comes, they may have nothing to do but to die, and to wake up in glory everlasting.

Look in great kindness on all who are in any way afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate. May those who are mourning their loved and lost, be enabled to sorrow, not as others who have no hope—for if they believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, those also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him. We pray for those who are drawing near to the gates of death. May the unwavering eye of faith be directed to death's great Abolisher. In Him, may they see the last enemy vanquished and the grave spoiled. Let them plead Your promise with unfaltering hope, "O death, I will be your plagues—O grave, I will be your destruction."

Pity a fallen world, still under the ghastly dominion of sin and death.

Hasten the time when its ashen robes shall be laid aside. Destroy the kingdom of Satan, which is the kingdom of disorder, and set up the kingdom of Christ, which is the kingdom of peace. Bless Your Church everywhere. May the anointing oil, poured on her great Head, flow down to the skirts of her garments. Rouse all slumbering and lifeless churches with Your own summons—"Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life"—"Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die." Oh give us all, as individual believers, grace to be up and doing, cultivating a wakeful vigilance—living dying lives—remembering, that as death leaves us, so will judgment and eternity find us, and that as the tree falls, so must it lie.

Watch over me, this night, during the unconscious hours of slumber. Grant me the sleep of Your beloved; and when I awake, may I be still with You. And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **18th Morning—DESTRUCTION AND HELP**

"O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help." Hos. 13:9

O God, who has mercifully permitted me to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of a new day, draw near in Your infinite mercy this morning, and bestow upon me Your blessing. Open to me the Gates of Righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord. As the sun of the outer world once more shines, may the better Sun of Righteousness arise upon me with healing in His beams—dispersing all the clouds of sin and unbelief, and revealing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Lord, I have reason to mourn my manifold sins—my disobedience and unbelief—my ingratitude and rebellion. I am a wonder to myself—self-destroyer that I am—that You have spared me—that You have not, long before now, pronounced against me the cumberer's sentence, and executed against me the cumberer's righteous doom. It is because You are God and not man, that, despite of all I have done to merit Your just displeasure, Your anger is turned away, and Your hand of mercy and love and compassion is stretched out still.

Gracious Savior, Your divine errand in coming into our world was to seek that which was lost. The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. All my trust is in Your finished work, and glorious atonement, and everlasting righteousness, and continual intercession. You can save—and You alone! I have no help and no hope in myself. Blessed be Your name for Your own gracious and encouraging assurance—"In ME is Your help." A humble and humbled suppliant at the Gates of prayer, I would utter the simple cry of faith which of old came from the lips of a believing petitioner—"Lord, help me!" May I receive also the gracious response, "Be it unto you even as you will." You are willing to bestow every needed blessing—pardoning grace—sustaining grace—strengthening grace—sanctifying grace—comforting grace—grace, until grace is no longer needed, but is lost and swallowed up in glory. O You who give "more grace," hide me deeper in the clefts of the smitten Rock. Other refuge I have none—my helpless soul depends entirely on You. Lord, save me, else I perish! Save me, I beseech You, not only from the guilt but from the power of sin. Save me from the corruptions of my own heart—from the seductive influences of the world—from the temptations that may be incident to my secular duties and engagements. Save me from the sin that does more easily beset me—save me from bringing dishonor on Your holy cause and Your holy name, by my inconsistent conduct or uneven walk; save me, oh, save me, from the wrath to come!

Compassionate a lost world. Pity the careless, reclaim the backsliding, remove every impediment to the spread of Your truth—that all the ends of the earth may soon see the salvation of God.

O Help of the helpless—Friend of the friendless—Portion of the portionless—Father of the fatherless—regard with pitying eye Your suffering children. There are unnamed griefs—unspoken sorrows—which cannot be whispered into human ears. They can alone be unburdened and confided to You. Say to each and all such, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." In the multitude of the sorrows in their hearts may Your comforts delight their souls.

Give to those related to me by the ties of kindred or affection, that same promised and needed help this day. Protect and defend them by Your mighty power, and may all their doings be ordered by Your governance,

that they may do always that which is righteous in Your sight. Sanctify Your true people in body, soul, and spirit; and present them at last faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy.

I anew commit myself to Your gracious keeping and direction. May the Eternal God this day be my refuge, and underneath me be the everlasting arms. And all I ask, is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **18th Evening—REST IN JESUS**

"Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

O God, I desire to approach Your presence, on this the close of another day, through this most blessed Gateway. Gracious Redeemer, You who have finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness—who Yourself, having overcome the sharpness of death, have opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; draw near, as You did to Your disciples of old when it was toward evening and the day was far spent, and grant me Your benediction. Heaven and earth may pass away, but never will that promise be altered, that coming to You, weary and heavy laden, You will give rest and peace to the burdened soul. I rejoice that in You the conflict was endured and the victory won—that there is no sin too great for Your compassion—no case too extreme for Your support—no sorrow too trivial for Your sympathy—no tempest-tossed soul that cannot listen to Your "Peace be still." Fill me with Your own bequeathed gift of peace—the peace which passes understanding—peace through the blood of Your cross. Looking to Your completed atonement—the fullness of Your grace—the plenitude of Your love—the perpetuity of Your covenant blessings—may I be able to say, "Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you."—"This is the rest whereby You cause the weary to rest—and this is the refreshing." Fill me with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, quicken my dormant and languid affections. May I not only bear continually about with me the dying of the Lord Jesus, but may the life also of Jesus be made manifest in my mortal flesh. May it be my constant aim and endeavor, while resting in His love, to be imbibing His spirit and following His footsteps; obeying His will whether by active obedience or by passive endurance; that at last I may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, and pass from the rest of grace to the eternal rest of glory.

I bless You, Lord, for the mercies of the by-gone day. If, in the prosecution of my worldly duties and avocations, I have been kept from sin and preserved from temptation, it is all Your doing. Graciously be with me in all time to come; clothe me with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. Let me trust You in the dark. Keep me from over solicitude and anxiety about the future. Keep me humble, thankful, contented—keep me from being deceived with fictitious good—from coveting blessings which are not blessings. Let my prayer be that of Jabez—"O that You would bless me indeed!" Whatever be the niche in Your temple I am called to occupy, may I fill it joyfully and with a glad heart, cherishing a sense of solemn responsibility. May I know that duty becomes a delight when done for You. Direct my heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ; that so, when my summons does come to enter into rest, I may be ready to pass from my appointed work on earth, to engage in the ceaseless activities of the glorified.

Lord, look down in infinite compassion on all who need Your consolations. May those who are in spiritual trouble, anxiety, and disquietude—who maybe going about seeking rest and finding none, be brought to seat themselves at the feet of Jesus—clothed and in their right mind. May those who are laid on beds of pain and sickness, manifest unmurmuring submission to Your holy will. May those stretched on beds of death, be enabled to fall asleep sweetly in Jesus. Encircle them with the bow of Your Covenant mercy. As they pass through the dark valley, may Your precious promises cluster like winged angels around their pillows; and may the Savior's words bear to them a blessed meaning and significance they never had before, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Amid all tossings and tribulations, may Your afflicted children see



in every trial, only the appointed billow to waft their bark nearer the haven, and may they sing amid the storm—"So gives He His beloved rest."

Let Your Church anew be baptized with Pentecostal fire. Spirit of the living God! O Spirit of light and Spirit of burning, kindle into new life every decaying flame—feed every lamp with the oil of Your grace—and may the golden candlestick with all its branches shine for Your glory, and radiate to the ends of the earth.

I commend my dear friends to Your friendship. Make them the objects of Your sovereign care, and the subjects of Your redeeming love. May the Lord watch between us when we are absent one from another; and listening together now to the Savior's words of welcome from the Throne of grace, may it be ours at last to listen to His words of welcome from the Throne of glory, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And all I ask is for His sake. Amen.

## **19th Morning—THE ONE ENTRANCE**

"By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." John 10:9

O God, I desire, this morning, to approach by the one only Gateway to Your presence. Enable me to hear the voice of the Great Angel Intercessor—the mighty Prince who has power with God and prevails, saying, "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." I come pleading that Name which soothes all sorrows, heals all wounds, dries all tears; which is manna to the hungry soul, and rest to the weary. How many are now in Glory, testifying to the boundless stores of grace hidden in Christ. In the plenitude of that same mercy I would still exult. I rejoice that His name is called Jesus, because He saves His people from their sins.

I desire to acknowledge my great unworthiness—my constant and grievous departures from the path of Your commandments. I have gone astray like a lost sheep, following too much the devices and the desires of my own heart. You might have righteously excluded me forever from the

green pastures and still waters, and left me to pursue my own devious wanderings. But blessed be Your name, in the midst of abounding sin there is abounding grace—the Good Shepherd—He who gave His own life for the sheep, is still waiting to be gracious—not willing that any of His sheep should perish, but that all should come unto Him and live.

Lord, reveal to me, more and more, the infinite evil of sin—the ingratitude of such requitals of Your love and resistings of Your Spirit. Turn me and I shall be turned, for You are the Lord my God. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto You. May I have the habitual feeling that I am only safe when following the footsteps and leadings of the Great Shepherd of the flock. May the realizing sense of His presence and nearness sweeten all joy and alleviate all sorrow. May I know that sorrow is turned into joy with the conscious possession of His friendship, and that joy would be sorrow if bereft of that favor which is life. Keep me pure—protect me from temptation—preserve me unspotted from the world. Give me the habit of a holy life. May my affections be more entirely surrendered to You. Whatever I do, enable me to do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, and to have the growing experience that Your service is perfect freedom.

I would desire to set out, this morning, under the protection of the Shepherd of Israel, who leads Joseph like a flock. Give, O Lord, to keep me, this day without sin. May the inspired saying form the directory of my conduct—may it act as a holy preservative in all time of temptation, and a blessed incentive and stimulus in pursuing the path of obedience—"If you live after the flesh you shall die, but if you, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." Prevent me being betrayed into anger, or resentment, or uncharitableness. Make me gentle and amiable, kind and forgiving—remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another." May it be my desire to lay out whatever humble talents You have conferred upon me, for Your glory and for my neighbor's good—having a mind intent on pleasing You.

Hasten the time when all shall avail themselves of the one all-glorious entrance; when, as there is but one Shepherd, so there shall be but one flock—when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Set faithful

watchmen on the towers of Zion, who will not keep silence, until Jerusalem be made a praise throughout the earth. Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause.

While in the personal enjoyment of health and many outward comforts, I would intercede, this morning, in behalf of the poor, the afflicted, the sorrowful, the bereaved, and the dying. May they look to God their Maker who gives 'songs in the night'. May the poor be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. May sick ones be upheld by Your everlasting arms—may bereaved ones be cheered with the thought of eternal reunions—may dying ones exult in the name of Jesus—may the music of that name refresh their souls as they pass through the dark valley. When I hear of others summoned, in the twinkling of an eye, to render in their final account—oh may I seek to be myself dying daily—realizing my position as standing each moment on the brink of immortality. With my loins girded and my lamp burning, may I not be ashamed before Christ at His coming.

Anew I commend myself, and all near and dear to me, to You. "Sun of my soul" shine upon my pathway. May no "earthborn cloud arise," to obscure the brightness of Your reconciled countenance. Guide me this day, and every day, by Your good counsel while I live; and afterward receive me into glory. For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## **19th Evening—WISE TEACHING**

"I am the Lord your God who teaches you to profit—who leads you by the way that you should go." Isaiah 48:17

O God, who accepts the feeblest attempt to serve You, receive this my evening sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. I adore You as "God only wise." Justice and judgment are the habitation of Your throne—mercy and truth go continually before Your face. I bless You that every moment of my existence I am under Your loving guidance. The thread of my life is in Your hand. I am no judge of what is best for me—often would I choose the evil and refuse the good. But You are ever faithful and unerring. O lead me, not in my own way—but in the way that I ought to go. May it be

mine, amid every vicissitude, to recognize infinite wisdom in all Your allotments—to sit at the feet of the Great Teacher, contented with the assurance, "This also comes from the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Blessed be Your name for Your wise teaching in the past—for all the deliverances You have given in times of danger—for all the help in times of trouble—for all the support in times of temptation. I would desire implicitly to trust You in the future. There is no corruption but what Your grace will enable me to subdue—there is no cross but what Your grace will enable me to carry—there is no foe but Your grace will enable me to conquer.

I come to You, this night, with all my heavy burdens. Deliver me from the burden and the bondage—from the love, and practice, and dominion, of sin—from unbelieving thoughts and disquieting doubts and apprehensions from the tyranny of self—from the fear of death—and what is after death. May I jealously guard every avenue by which temptation may assail me, keeping watch and ward over the treachery of my own deceitful heart. Let me cherish habitual mindfulness that time is fleeting. Let not the calls of an engrossing world without, foster the procrastinating spirit within. If others indulge in slumber, may it be mine to be vigilant. If others venture to trifle and tamper with convictions, may it be mine to maintain the testimony of a good conscience; and, uninfluenced by earthly fascinations and seductions, to pursue the path of heavenly obedience. Hold me up and I shall be safe! Mold my heart in conformity with Your holy will. May duty become a delight when performed for You. Give me intensified earnestness in Your service, as well as a greater desire to benefit my fellow-men. Take away all that is unamiable—and implant all that is generous, and beneficent, and kind. May I strive to be pure and sincere in speech—honorable and upright in transaction—temperate in the use of lawful enjoyment. And thus, whatever I do, whether in word or in deed, may I be enabled to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Bless Your Church throughout the world. It is our comfort to know, amid the blindness and errors, the mistakes and prejudices of human instructors, that she is under wise and infallible teaching with You. Hasten the day when all within her pale will come to see eye to eye, and

unite their now discordant voices in a blended song of praise. Bound up in the bundle of life, may Your true people, by whatever name known, be gathered, at last, by the reaper-angels, into the one heavenly garner.

To an all-wise God I would specially commend the children of sorrow, and any in whom I may be more deeply interested. Lord, sanctify to them the dealings of Your providence. May they see in their afflictions errands of love in disguise. May they recognize Your hand alike in bestowing the gifts and in revoking the grant; trusting the wisdom they cannot trace. Knowing that You lead them by the way they should go, may they write over the most mysterious of Your dispensations, "He disciplines us for our profit, that we may be made partakers of His holiness."

Anew I commend myself to Your keeping this night. Forgive the sins of the day which is now closing. Guard me during my sleeping as well as my waking hours. And grant that I may wake up finally, from the sleep of death, to glory everlasting. Amen.

## **20th Morning—THE SURE GUIDE**

"As for God, his way is perfect." Psalm 18:30

O God, I bless You that You have spared me to see the light of another day, and once more permitted me to approach the morning gate of prayer. "My voice shall You hear in the morning, O Lord. In the morning will I direct my prayer unto You, and will look up."

I thank You, Heavenly Father, that from day to day, and from hour to hour, I am under Your wise and loving direction—that it is You who set up the waymarks, and appoint the bounds of my habitation. The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. If left to my own self, I would often choose the evil and refuse the good—I might select what was selfish and perilous and sinful—what might compromise my peace of conscience, and endanger my spiritual interests. I have often erred in the past, pursuing at times devious paths on which Your blessing could not rest. I would desire to take You more as my guide and counselor for the future. Let me follow You wholly—trusting Your heart, even where

I fail to trace Your hand—amid all vicissitudes and perplexities, hearing Your voice behind me saying, "This is the way, walk in it"—and writing over every dubious path—every mysterious Providence—"As for God, His way is perfect."

I know that all Your dealings are dictated by unerring wisdom and unchangeable love. I would look forward, with joyful confidence, to that great Day of disclosures, when the now sealed roll shall be unfolded, and when every tongue will be brought to confess, "The Lord was righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works." Meanwhile, with the fear of God within me, and the eye of God above me, and the Heaven of God before me, may I prosecute steadfastly my pilgrim-way—going up through the wilderness leaning on Your arm; and then, though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear—for greater is He who is with me, and for me, than all those who can be against me.

Lord, wash me anew, this morning, in the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Give me the renewed sense of Your pardoning love in Christ. Renew me by the indwelling of Your gracious Spirit. I pray not that You should take me out of the world, but that You would keep me from the evil. Disengage me from all that is perilous in its engrossments and fascinations. May I be molded by the kind and loving precepts of Your holy gospel. Knowing Your will, may I delight to do it because it is Yours. Let me not lapse into a selfish disregard of the claims of others, but strive to be, in some feeble measure, useful in my day and generation; following in this the "perfect way" of Him, who went about continually doing good. May I do nothing I would wish to have cancelled and undone at a dying hour. But be so living and walking and acting, that when that solemn season does arrive—at peace with You, in charity with all mankind, and in humble, steadfast reliance on the merits of the Divine Redeemer, I may fall asleep.

I pray for the sick—the afflicted—the sorrowful—the bereaved—the lonely—the dying. Accommodate the supplies of Your grace to their varied necessities. In patience may they possess their souls. Amid the changes of the world and the instability of earth's best props and refuges—amid the tossings and heavings of this treacherous sea of life, may they cling to the sure anchorage, "As for God, His way is perfect."

Lord, compassionate a world lying in wickedness. Listen to that perpetual dirge of woe which is ascending from suffering humanity. Ease the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free. Emancipate the nations from the thralldom of Satanic sway. Let every power unto destruction be vanquished and overthrown by "the power of God unto salvation." May the gospel of Christ be mighty as ever to the pulling down of strongholds. Prosper all evangelistic efforts at home—prosper the cause of missions abroad. Beautiful upon many mountains may the feet be of those who bring good tidings. May the Lord Himself give the word, and great shall be the company of those that publish it.

I pray for all my beloved friends. I rejoice that, morning by morning and evening by evening, we can meet in spirit at Your holy altar, mingling our petitions and thanksgivings and confessions together. May our united supplications load the cloud of mercy, and cause it to burst in blessings on our heads.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? my hope is in You. Give Your angels charge concerning me, that they may encamp round about me and bear me up in all my ways. If there be arduous duties before me today, make them easy. Level every mountain of difficulty—remove every threatening temptation—sustain me with the blessings of Your goodness. "Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation, on You do I wait all the day." And when all Your teachings and all Your leadings are completed on earth, do receive me into Your everlasting kingdom and glory, through Jesus Christ my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **20th Evening—HOLINESS OF HEART**

"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Heb. 12:14

Heavenly Father, I come to the footstool of Your throne this night, desiring to remember that You are holy. In bestowing the golden key of admission into Your presence, these are Your words of invitation and welcome—"Open the gates, that the righteous, who keeps the truth, may

enter in." If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me. May it be mine to enjoy and appropriate Your gracious beatitude and benediction, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Come, Lord, and search me—come and try me—come and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Enable me ever to bear in mind the solemn attestation You have given, in the atoning work of Your dear Son, as to the holiness of Your nature and the rectitude of Your law. On the cross of Him who was made sin for us though He knew no sin, is the superscription written, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness." As the pure and spotless beings who surround Your throne contemplate the great mystery of godliness, their continual cry and ascription is, "Holy, holy, holy!" Blessed be Your name, that in Jesus You are the just God and yet the Savior. I can exult in the assurance that the holiest of all Beings is also the kindest and the best of all.

Lord, make me holy as You are holy, and pure as You are pure. While I look to Christ in His perfect oblation as my Savior from sin's penalty, may I look to Him also as my great example. Let me catch the inspiration of His holy life. Give me grace to tread in His footsteps—to imbibe His spirit, and to reflect His image. Let me love, as He did, whatever is virtuous and benevolent and good; subordinating my own ways and wishes to the will of my Father in heaven; patient under injury—submissive under trial. May I be the possessor of that inner peace—the sunshine of a good conscience—which makes me independent of all outer disquietudes and troubles—singleness of eye, purity of heart, integrity of purpose, consecration of life. Remove every hindrance to spiritual growth. May I take that, alike as a precept and a promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Thus may I have the character of heaven, in its holiness, impressed upon me on this side of death, that, on the other side of death, I may be fitted for its lofty companionships and joys.

Especially, Lord, guard and shield me in my worldly duties. Leaven the common tasks of life with Your fear. On my business and avocations may there be inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord." Whatever I do, may I do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men. Keep me from whatever has a tendency to foster the selfish element in my nature. May I cherish no



purposes but what You will own, and employ no means but what You will bless. May I know that holy living will lead to happy dying. Oh may I be so living from day to day, that when I come at last to resign the great trust of existence, I may be enabled to say, "Now, Lord, let You Your servant depart in peace."

Bless all my beloved relatives—bring them also to the cross of the Redeemer, that while they learn there how righteous You are, they may there too "give thanks at the remembrance of Your holiness." Make them partakers of the holy character and resurrection-life of the risen Savior—purifying themselves even as He is pure—that at His second coming in the glory of His Father, they may be prepared to welcome Him with joy.

Look in compassion on poor afflicted ones. Let them trust, and not be afraid; believing that all is well, just because it is Your blessed will. May they know that every sorrow is numbered and appointed by the Man of Sorrows. May they feel how light and trivial their bitterest cup is, compared with the cup of suffering He so willingly drained for them.

Bless Your Church everywhere—refresh it with the dews of heaven. Sanctify and cleanse it, that it may be presented at last a glorious Church—without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—holy and without blemish.

I commend myself anew to Your watchful keeping this night, O Holy One of Israel. Forgive the sins of the day, in thought, word, and deed. Give Your angels charge concerning me that they may encamp round about me—and if it be Your will to spare me until tomorrow, fit me for all its duties.

These needful blessings which I have asked, and others equally needed and urgent which I have omitted to ask, do bestow upon me in the all-prevailing name of Him in whom all fullness dwells; and to whom with You the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all praise and honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

## **21st Morning—SALVATION TO THE UTTERMOST**

"Therefore he is able also to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25

O Lord, I desire to draw near into Your merciful presence as to a most loving Father, and joyfully pay my morning sacrifice. Glory be to You for watching over me during another night—giving me the refreshment of sleep, and permitting me to awake in health and strength. May this be to me the emblem of a better waking in the morning of immortality, to partake with Yourself of endless life.

All my trust is in the atoning sacrifice of the Great High Priest—the covenant Angel at Your right hand—the ever-living, ever-loving Intercessor, who is pleading the cause I cannot plead for myself, and who never pleads in vain. May He receive my imperfect prayers into His fragrant censer—that all unworthy in themselves, sprinkled with the incense of His adorable merits, they may ascend with acceptance before the Throne.

Most Gracious God, how insensible have I proved to the multiplied tokens of Your love and kindness. Your mercies have been unworthily requited, my duties have been perfunctorily performed. Corruption within has responded to temptation from without. There has been too often pride where there should have been humility—resentment where there should have been forgiveness—unbelief where there should have been trust—murmuring where there should have been submission and resignation. For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. A sinner to the uttermost, I rejoice that, in Your dear Son, there is salvation to the uttermost. "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous—and He is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." I rejoice in Him as the very Savior I need. While omnipotence slumbers in His arm, He is touched with a fellow-feeling for all my infirmities. He can enter, with tender sensitiveness, into every temptation that crosses my path, and into every pang that rends my heart. O Lamb of God, who takes

away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me! O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace! This is Your name and Your memorial throughout all generations, "Mighty to save." I would lay hold anew on the blood besprinkled horns of the altar; and listen to Your voice of power and grace and love saying, "Your sins which are many are all forgiven you."

Give to me, I beseech You, salvation from the power, as well as from the guilt, of sin. This is Your will concerning me, even my sanctification. Keep me from all hardness of heart and contempt of Your holy word and commandment—from envy and malice—from pride and vain-glory—from vanity and lies—from tampering with temptation in any form, and thus endangering my present peace and imperiling my soul's everlasting interests. Guard every loophole by which any spiritual foe might enter. Give me resolute energy of will, to resist and to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. I rejoice that, in the extremity of my own weakness, I have the promise of Almighty strength, and that too "abundantly above all that I can ask or think." I can do all things through Christ strengthening me. In the calm and assured hope of forgiveness in Him—a saving interest in His great salvation; and with the promised aids of the Holy Spirit, may I go from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue, from attainment to attainment, until at length I appear before You perfect in Zion.

I pray for those who are bartering so great salvation for the sins and the follies of a fleeting present. Convince them, before it be too late, of their danger, and discover to them the one thing needful, the better part—the only part, which never can be taken from them. Bring all men to a knowledge of Your gospel—to a saving belief of the truth as it is in Jesus. Send times of refreshing unto Zion. Bless Your faithful ministers—may they be valiant for the truth—polished shafts in their Master's quiver. May the day soon arrive when the glory of God shall be the supreme sovereign motive, governing every thought and feeling and action. May our own nation, as heretofore, continue the honored instrument of advancing Your cause on earth—a dispenser and almoner of spiritual blessings. May the precious privileges civil and religious bequeathed to her, be handed down unimpaired from generation to generation.

Pity the case of the sick, the destitute, and the bereaved. O You, who when on earth did turn aside from Your own path of suffering, to weep with those that wept—bless all afflicted ones. Give them grace to look beyond the cloudy present to the stormless skies of that better land, where the pang of sorrow can neither be felt nor feared. Lying passive in Your hands, may it be theirs through their tears to say, "Father, glorify Your name!"

I anew commend myself, and those near and dear to me, to You and to the word of Your grace. Lord, ever enable me so to pass through things temporal, that finally I lose not the things eternal. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **21st Evening—THE STRONGHOLD IN TROUBLE**

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; He cares for those who take refuge in Him." Nahum 1:7

O God, I come this night to the Gates of this glorious stronghold. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust—my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I rejoice in the assurance that You are good. You are a refuge in the day of perplexity—a strength in the day of weakness—a light in the day of darkness—a stronghold in the day of trouble. May I feel it to be a privilege to draw near unto You. Give me filial trust and confidence. Enable me to unburden, without reserve, into Your ear, all my trials and difficulties. A suppliant at the Gates of prayer, may I receive fresh tokens of Your love and goodness—even the blessing which makes rich and adds no sorrow with it. The Lord is good unto those who wait for Him, unto the soul that seeks Him.

How unworthy, Lord, I am of Your paternal regard and patient forbearance! How much have I done to forfeit Your favor! I have been rebellious and wayward—unthankful and unholy—leaving too often Your countless mercies unacknowledged—dethroning You from my affections,

and giving to others the loyalty and allegiance which should be Yours alone. I have experienced little of the depressing consciousness, I ought to have had, of my sin and danger, and of my need of a Savior. I have little realized, as I ought to have done, the thought of death, and of the precarious tenure which binds me to the world's best blessings. You have, from time to time, been putting lover and friend far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness; yet I have been traveling as if with my back to the grave, keeping it out of sight. Careful and troubled about earth's many things, I have been sadly prone to forget the one thing needful.

Give me deep contrition for an erring past. Inspire me with new resolutions for the future. Graciously give me Your help. Lord, I feel that this struggling with sin, this conflict with temptation, is a hopeless contest without You—without Your strengthening, sustaining, restraining grace. Hold me up. You who have revealed Yourself to Your people, in all past ages, as a stronghold in the day of trouble and a shield in the day of battle—be my defense, and my glory, the lifter up of my head. I can overcome, only through the blood and the help of the Lamb. Anew I repair, this night, to the clefts of the Rock—anew I take refuge in the only sheltering stronghold—anew I seek the light and direction of the only safe guiding pillar. Keep my eye single, that my whole body may be full of light. May all my duties and avocations be transfigured by the elevating Christian motive, "Whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Let it be my habitual aim to imbibe His meek, lowly, patient, unworldly spirit—not seeking my open interests, but willing rather to surrender these, if He be honored and glorified—endeavoring to bear and forbear, even under the conscious infliction and endurance of wrong. Enable me to put the best construction on motives and failings, giving heed to the monitory word—"Considering yourself, lest you also be tempted."

Lord, have mercy on the afflicted. May they specially recognize You as a stronghold in the day of trouble. Knowing that finite wisdom has no place in Your dealings, may they seek to bow in un murmuring submission to Your holy will. Turn the shadow of death into the morning. Give them the sanctified use of Your dispensations. May chastisement which, for the present, is not joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward, yield the

peaceable fruits of righteousness. You know those who trust in You. May they trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength; and amid present affliction and sadness, anticipate the time when voices will be heard saying, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain—for the former things are passed away."

Bless my beloved friends. May they, too, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God. If called at times to the endurance of trouble, may they know You and cling to You as a sure stronghold. Number each and all of them among the favored pilgrim band, who are now seeking Zion with their faces there, and who shall finally reach it with everlasting joy upon their heads.

Take me, gracious Father, under Your care and keeping. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for You, Lord, alone make me to dwell in safety. May I repose, as under the shadow of Your wings; and may I wake tomorrow refreshed and invigorated for duty. Let each returning day of life find me better furnished and prepared for Your service on earth, and at last for the enjoyment of Your presence in glory. Through Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior, Amen.

## **22nd Morning—THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

"This is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." Jer. 23:6

O God, prepare my heart for approaching anew, this morning, the Beautiful Gate of Your Temple. I come into Your presence in the name of Him whom You hear always, our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. I rejoice that He who was dimly revealed in type and vision and prophecy, has been manifested as the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person—that He became a sin-offering for us, though He knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Lord, I am utterly destitute of any

righteousness of my own, and of any claim to Your favor. Every hour I live might be cited as a witness against me, telling of unrequited mercies—neglected opportunities—unimproved warnings—resisted grace. Look upon me not as I am in myself. Behold my shield—look on the face of Your anointed One. My sole trust is in the doing and dying of the All-righteous One. I am absolved in Him. He has cancelled my debt and absorbed my curse; taken off my filthy garments, and clothed me in fresh clothing. May I be enabled to cleave to Him, in greater simplicity of heart and confidence, as the Lord my Righteousness. May His cross be my shelter; His wounds my healing; His death my life. I would go up and on through the wilderness, leaning on His arm; feeling that He who is with me and for me, is greater far than all that can be against me.

While I look to Him for the righteousness imputed—I would look to the promised grace of the Holy Spirit, for the righteousness implanted—that holiness of heart and life, without which no man can see the Lord. May I put on the Lord Jesus Christ in the beauty of His divine character and example—imbibing more of His spirit, and reflecting more of His image. Bestow upon me "the clothing clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints;" and present me at last faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy.

I know not what difficulties, or trials, or temptations, may be before me. Do prepare me whether for duty or for conflict. May that glorious shield of Your righteousness cover my head in every day of battle. Knowing the treachery of the heart, I desire this morning, and each morning, to receive fresh supplies of Your grace. Hold up my goings in Your paths; that thus, I may not be of them who draw back unto perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Lord, bless me in all the relations and circumstances of my life. May I be a faithful steward in whatever has been entrusted to my keeping. If You have given me worldly substance, may I regard these gifts of Providence as a talent, not to be selfishly appropriated, but to be shared by others, for their good and Your glory. May all my business dealings and transactions be regulated by transparent honor—spotless integrity—unswerving love of truth. May my daily avocations prove incentives, not drags and hindrances, in running the Christian race. Give me that charity which is the bond of perfectness.

May I seek to overcome evil with good; ever aiming at the more complete conquest of self—subduing pride and restraining temper—sitting meekly at the feet of Jesus.

Have pity on those who are sinning away their privileges. While they "have the light"—while they still enjoy gospel privileges—may they be led to "believe in the light"—turning from every false ground of confidence, to Him who has made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in an everlasting righteousness, and who alone can give rest and peace to their souls.

Extend Your sympathy and love to the case of all in affliction—support, support, and comfort them. Let them manifest a spirit of uncomplaining submission, saying, "Not our will, but Your will be done!" May any who have been bereft of beloved friends, see in the removal of those near and dear to them, only the coming of the Savior to fetch His children home, and to give them the promised lodgment in the "many mansions." May they rejoice in the happy assurance, that the silver cord on earth is loosed and the golden bowl broken, only to usher into the deathless joys of a world where friendships cannot be severed, and trial can neither be felt nor feared.

I pray for all mankind. Look in compassion on earth's valley of vision. Behold the bones are very many and very dry. Come from the four winds, O Spirit of the living God!—breathe upon these slain that they may live. Clothe every moral desolation with the verdure of spiritual life. May the wilderness and the solitary place be made glad—may the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose; and all the ends of the earth see the promised salvation.

I commend myself, and those belonging to me, to Your keeping and protection throughout this day. Lift upon us the light of Your countenance; never leave and never forsake us. And all I ask is for the Savior's sake. Amen.

## **22nd Evening—THE GREAT LOVE**



"But God, who is abundant in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. By grace you are saved!" Ephesians 2:4-5

Most gracious and everlasting God, I desire to approach the footstool of Your throne this evening, through the golden gates of mercy. You did so love the world as to give Your only-begotten Son. I adore the wonders of Your sovereign grace in Him. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Under a grateful sense of the riches of that love, I would desire to compose myself to rest. O Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps—guard me during the unconscious hours of night. May I rise refreshed for duty and service—rejoicing to bear about with me, in the course of a new day, the elevating sense of my relationship to You, as my Covenant God and Heavenly Father. Saved by the grace and purchased by the blood of Jesus, may I yield You, not the constrained service of the bond-slave, but the spontaneous, devoted, love and obedience of Your adopted child. May a sense of the infinite obligation under which I am laid for all Your mercies, and especially for their crown and consummation on the Cross of Calvary, stimulate to greater ardor in running the Christian race—to more singleness of eye and simplicity of aim. Saved by grace from the guilt of sin, may I ever remember that I am saved too by grace from the power of sin.

Bring me to act more habitually under the influence of unseen spiritual realities. From the dominion of Satan—from the enslavement of lust and passion—from the absorbing love of the world—from the deceitfulness of riches—good Lord, deliver me! May the law of love, which has its highest exemplification in the life of Your dear Son, find expression in my daily walk. May I be molded, more and more, in conformity with His will, and copy more of His example—in His meekness and gentleness, in His unselfish and tender consideration for others. I have no ability in myself to carry out one good or holy resolution. Undertake for me. If there is any indication of spiritual quickening or vitality within me, it is derived from You, the source and inspiration of all energy and goodness. I can do all

things through Christ strengthening me. "More grace! more grace!" may this be my constant prayer. Hold me up, and I shall be safe.

Prosper Your cause and kingdom everywhere. Send times of refreshing unto Zion. May she rise from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments. Stand by all Your faithful ministering servants. Clothe Your priests with salvation, let Your saints shout aloud for joy. May a spirit of unity pervade the varied branches of the Church universal—that unity, which will be the prelude to the Gospel's final triumph—when, in answer to the prayer of the Great Intercessor, His people shall be one, and the world shall believe.

May my dear friends be savingly united to You, in the bonds of the new and better covenant. Quicken them also together with Christ, and save them by Your grace. Defend them from the temptations of a present evil world, and bring them in safety to the everlasting home above. Sanctify them from all the family of sorrow. Many whom You love are sick—make You their bed in their sickness. Draw near to every broken, bereaved heart. Give beauty for ashes; the oil of joy for mourning; and the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness. May affliction, which, in the light of immortality is but for a moment, work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I ask these and all other needed blessings for myself and others, in the name of Him whom You hear always, and to whom, with You the Father, and You the ever-blessed Spirit, one God—be ascribed all blessing and honor and glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## **23rd Morning—TRUST IN GOD**

"Trust you in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Isaiah 26:4

O God, I bless and praise Your holy name, that You have spared me during another night—permitting me, once more, to kneel at the Gates of Prayer, and to offer anew my morning sacrifice of thanksgiving. Give Your benediction and blessing. Sprinkle me afresh with the peace-

speaking blood. Grant me forgiveness for the past—impart grace and strength for the future. In all my ways I would acknowledge You—direct my paths. That future is in Your hands. I will trust and not be afraid. O my God, when my soul is cast down within me, "I will remember You from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar." I will recall former tokens and pledges of Your love and favor, and implicitly confide in You for the time to come. Your hand is never shortened—Your ear is never heavy. Give me cheerful acquiescence in Your most holy will—undeviating reliance in the wisdom and rectitude of Your appointments. Save me from all impatience; all fretting and disquietude. Whatever may now be crossing my wishes, or thwarting my plans, or disappointing my hopes—may my faithlessness be rebuked, by the assurance from lips which cannot err—"Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things."

Blessed Savior, in whom stands our eternal life, be my guide and protector this day. May I be enabled to maintain my temper unbroken and my conscience undefiled; to stand fast in my integrity, with a single eye to Your glory. Keep me from all deflection from the paths of purity and peace. Keep me from envy and uncharitableness—from pride and ambition—from discontent and dissatisfaction with the position I am called to occupy—from all that would bring discredit on the religion I profess, and that would form a blot in life's retrospect at the hour of death. Let me set a watch on every questionable and wayward impulse. May Your present discipline, however mysterious at times it may be, tend the better to fit me for the duties and occupations of that blessed world, where I shall no longer need to trust You in the midst of dark dealings, but where trust shall be merged in the full and everlasting enjoyment of Your presence and love.

Look in great mercy on the children of sorrow. In absolute self surrender, may they lean on You. If, when called to traverse mazy and thorny paths, they are led, in the lack of faith, to say, "Not here, Lord"—may Your voice be heard, gently rebuking their distrust, "What is that to you, follow Me." May those bereft of loved ones, listen to divine accents breaking over the sleepers in the silent land—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth; yes, says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors and

their works do follow them." Meanwhile, may they confide in a wisdom that never errs, and a love that never changes; anticipating that better time, when no angel of sorrow shall evermore come dawn "to trouble the pool;"—and when their "loved and lost" shall be loved, never to be lost again.

Extend the gracious influences of Christianity. Reveal Christ to many needy, sin-stricken souls, as the Physician who heals all diseases. Blessed Savior—Prince of Peace! take to Yourself Your great power and reign. Hasten the day, when, by the regenerating influences of Your gospel, You shall sprinkle many nations, and kings shall shut their mouths at You—when, seated on the throne of universal empire, angels shall laud You and saints shall crown You; and Your Church triumphant, gathered in from every kindred and tribe and people and tongue, shall unite in the eternal ascription—"Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

O God, I desire anew to commit myself, and all belonging to me, to You and to the word of Your grace—rejoicing that the blessings of the covenant are in Your hands. Give us whatever You know to be good—deny us whatever You know to be evil. And all I ask is for the sake of Jesus Christ, my blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **23rd Evening—THE FINAL WELCOME**

"Enter into the joy of your Lord." Matt. 25:23

O God, I desire to come into Your presence on this the close of another day—adoring You for the gracious welcome You ever give to the mercy-seekers. Have You not said, "Knock and it shall be opened?" Have You not set Your seal to the words, that if an earthly father, in the tenderness of his love, knows how to give good gifts unto his children—much more may I expect to receive a plenitude of blessings from the hands of my Father in heaven? Open unto me the gates of righteousness; and, from Your holy habitation, command upon me the blessing, even life for evermore.

I thank You, O great Redeemer, for the reception You did accord of old in

Your ministry of love on earth, to all who sought You in penitence and faith. I bless You for that welcome which You bestowed on "the weary and heavy laden"—on the sin-stricken and the sorrow-stricken. No bruised reed was ever broken by You—no smoking flax was ever quenched by You. The most erring sheep was pursued by You, the Great and Good Shepherd—until You found it, and laid it upon Your shoulders rejoicing. Still it is Your blessed prerogative to welcome back the wanderer—to seek and to save that which is lost.

I bless You, that exulting in Your free welcome, seated on the Throne of Grace, I can also with hope and confidence anticipate Your last and most joyous welcome on the Throne of Glory. All my boldness in the prospect of that Great day, is founded on Your completed work and glorious righteousness. I would exclaim now—what will form my sole plea then—"Behold, O God, my shield—look on the face of Your anointed!" I know that I have a living Redeemer, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, to plead my cause before an assembled world, and to give the glad summons—"Enter into the joy of your Lord!" Keep me, meanwhile, earnestly and habitually looking for this blessed hope. Preserve me from whatever would dim or darken its elevating influences—from all sloth and carelessness—all frivolity and sin. May I seek to make life, more than it has been, a preparation for eternity. In all my worldly duties and engagements, with the prospect of giving in my account at His appearing and His kingdom, may I hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Occupy until I come."

Whatever talents You have confided to me, give me grace diligently and faithfully to improve them. Keep me from the abuse of my stewardship. If You have given me worldly means—material prosperity—preserve me from selfishly hoarding the gifts of Providence, but, according to my ability, may I rejoice at being the almoner of Your bounties to others. Thus faithful over a few things, may I finally be made partaker of Your own gracious promise of abundant recompense. If You have denied me earthly good, may I strive all the more, to give You the consecration of the heart, and to lay up my treasure in heaven. Give me increasing aspirations after holiness. May I be enabled to walk in the path of obedience—daily renouncing and overcoming the power and practice of

sin. Having the hope of seeing the Redeemer as He is, may I purify myself even as He is pure—and thus, having obtained victory over all my spiritual enemies, may I be ushered at last into that glorious land, where there is no sin to crucify, no corruption to subdue—where there is nothing to be delivered from—where the joy and the presence of the Lord will be an eternal strength.

Lord, have mercy on the whole world. Let the people now sitting in darkness see a great light. On those that are in the region and shadow of death, may the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His beams. Adored be Your name for the assured word of promise, that the day is approaching, when alike obdurate Jew and idolatrous heathen will join their voices together in the shout of welcome—"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

O Comforter of all who are cast down—Healer of the brokenhearted—Friend of the friendless, look in infinite compassion on those who need Your pitying love. Stay Your rough wind in the day of Your east wind. May those laid on couches of sickness, manifest a spirit of uncomplaining submission to Your will; recognizing Your hand, and Your hand alone—remembering that You are never arbitrary in Your dealings—that even "wearisome nights are appointed." Give them strength to be silent ministers of the truth, by exhibiting the power of Your sustaining grace; looking beyond the cloudlands of earth, to the better country, where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." Thus patiently bearing their cross, may they anticipate, with calm and joyful expectancy, that blessed hour, when all the sorrows and tribulations of earth will be forgotten in the words of welcome, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom."

Graciously accept of my thanks for the mercies of the by-past day; and give to me, this night, the sleep of Your beloved; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## **24th Morning—THE BLOOD OF JESUS**

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the

blood of Jesus." Heb. 10:19

Almighty and everlasting God, draw near to me in Your great kindness this morning. You have permitted me to awake in health and strength. I would seek to enter on the duties of a new day with my mind stayed on You—looking for Your guidance and direction. O You who commanded the light to shine out of darkness—shine into my heart. The day will be happy and peaceful, if begun, carried on, and ended, with the conscious possession of Your favor and love.

I come to You, relying on the one only Sacrifice, and exulting in the one sole plea—that the blood of Jesus Christ Your Son cleanses from all sin. Blessed be Your name, I have boldness to enter into the holiest through this new and living way—God's way to the sinner, and the sinner's way to God. Countless multitudes have entered through the same Gate of access. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; they are now before Your throne, to testify to the fullness and freeness of that great Redemption. And, still, there is blood for all, and grace for all, and salvation for all. Sprinkle the lintels and door-posts of my heart with that same covenant token. Have You not said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." I have no other argument but this, and blessed be Your name—I need no other.

Lord, grant that that precious blood may not only be sprinkled on my conscience, but that it may purify me from dead works to serve You—the living God. Make me holy—keep me holy. Sanctify me, in body, soul, and spirit. Bearing about with me continually the dying of the Lord Jesus, may the life also of Jesus be made manifest in my mortal flesh. Further me this day, in all lawful undertakings, with Your blessing. I know not, in the course of it, what guilty thoughts may rise, and which may find expression in unworthy and hasty and sinful words or actions, defiling my own conscience, injuring my neighbor, and dishonoring Your holy name. May I ever seek to exercise a conscience void of offence; to deal tenderly with those around me—refraining from magnifying failings, or circulating the injurious report. O Lord, forearm me by Your grace. In the battle with evil, around me and within me—I would overcome alone by the blood of the Lamb.

Bless my beloved friends—those who are living near—and those who may be separated by intervening oceans and continents. O ever-present God! be their help and friend. May Christian memories follow them wherever they go. May they live under a sense of the All-Seeing Eye; rejoicing that no distance and no locality can divide between them and You. And whatever separations may take place on earth, may there be, at last, a happy and glorious meeting-place for us before Your throne in glory, to exult together in ties that can never be dissolved.

Bless Your Zion everywhere. Set faithful watchmen to guard her battlements, and to sound the trumpet of alarm. In times of doctrinal defection and laxity, and of defiant skepticism, may they earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Prosper the cause of truth and righteousness, and hasten, in Your own good season, Your Son's coming and kingdom. Have great compassion on the afflicted. Visit in mercy the poor—the widow—the solitary—the unbefriended. Spare useful and valued lives. If it be Your holy will, bring back the shadow on life's dial, and utter the omnipotent words, "You shall live and not die."

May those who are appointed to death have boldness in the prospect of entering Your immediate presence, through the same blood of Jesus. With His cross before their eyes, and the music of His name on their lips, may they be able to say, "We are confident, and willing rather, to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

I commend myself anew to Your gracious care, looking to You this day and forever—for pardon, and peace, and eternal life, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **24th Evening—THE FELLOW-SUFFERER**

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15

O God, my heavenly Father, I desire to approach Your sacred presence



tonight, in the name of Him who is my Great High Priest—the ever-living, ever-loving Redeemer. May He touch my lips as with a live altar-coal, in the hour of evening sacrifice—that my prayer may ascend before You as incense, sweetly perfumed with His adorable merits. You have graciously shielded me this day by Your good Providence. Accept my humble tribute of gratitude and thanksgiving for all the unmerited tokens of Your love. How great has been the sum of them! and there are no small kindnesses with You, for the least of them are undeserved. Even when You see fit occasionally to mingle the cup, and to cause the shadows of affliction to fall, how little has been the proportion between the trials sent—and the deserts of sin! Adversity has been alleviated by unexpected solaces, and mercy has attuned my lips to sing in the midst of judgment.

O adorable Redeemer, in whom is all my hope—in whose most precious blood alone, I rely for pardon and acceptance—O pleading Angel-Intercessor, made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life—I bless You that You are touched with a fellow-feeling of all my infirmities. In coming to the Gates of Prayer, in seasons of pain and suffering, loneliness and sorrow, I can cherish the consoling assurance that, as the Brother on the throne, there is not a pang I endure but You have felt the same. When the best of earthly sympathy is inadequate and unavailing, You, who in the days of Your flesh did suffer the reproach of Your people to break Your heart, can enter with tender sensitiveness into the keenest woes of humanity. I can think of You, the Prince of Sufferers, feeling for me—weeping for me—bleeding for me—dying for me. There is no extremity of distress, when I can find You, as You did find Your disciples in Your own hour of agony, asleep. Your hand is never shortened, Your ear is never heavy. You do not faint, neither are weary.

Subdue within me whatever is inconsistent with Your mind and will. However afflictive at times may be Your Providential dispensations, Lord, may I ever deeply feel that there is no sorrow like the sorrow of alienation from Your favor—that the heaviest cross I have to bear, is the cross of an unbelieving, wandering, treacherous Heart. God be merciful to me a sinner! O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world—have mercy upon me and grant me Your peace. You who, though sinless

Yourself, did confront sin in every shape and form—You whose infinite tenderness and compassion of old, dictated the merciful excuse for the unfaithful watchers of Gethsemane, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," compassionate my weakness—sympathize with my struggles—give me the strength I have not in myself. It is by Your grace alone I stand. Hold me up and I shall be safe. Shield me from the snares of a seductive world; fortify me against the assaults of temptation. Pray for me, as You did for Your erring disciple, that my faith fail not.

May the Lord arise and have mercy upon Zion. With the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit sent down at Pentecost and perpetuated from age to age, Your Church never can be orphaned or desolate. Cause the plentiful rain to descend, with which You refresh Your heritage when it is weary. Illuminate the world which is now in darkness. Sheathe its swords—break its chains—redress its wrongs. Let it welcome a long rejected Savior as its Lord and King.

Shepherd of Israel, be my guardian-keeper through the silence and darkness of another night. Abide with me, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. Let all near and dear to me share Your loving care. Lying down to rest in Your fear, may we awake in Your favor, fitted and prepared for the duties of a new day. And all I ask is for the sake of Jesus Christ Your only Son, my Savior. Amen.

## **25th Morning—THE ONE WAY**

"Neither is there salvation in any other—for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12

Father of mercies and God of all grace, impotent and helpless in myself, I wait this morning at the Gate of Your temple to listen to Your divine word of pardon and healing. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, enable me to rise up and walk. I thank You for that all powerful Name; that all sufficient Savior—I thank You for that new and living way of access into the holiest of all, through His precious blood. There is no other way, and blessed be Your name I need no other. I rejoice that, in Him, every barrier which guilt and sin interposed has been removed; that although countless

multitudes have already availed themselves of the free invitation, still is the door of welcome—the gate of mercy open—still are the gracious words true as when first they were uttered—"Him who comes unto Me I will never cast out."

Blessed Redeemer, I desire to repose with implicit confidence in Your finished work, and glorious righteousness, and all prevailing intercession. Wash me in the Fountain You have opened for sin and for uncleanness. Lord, if You will, You can make me clean. If You wash me not, I can have no part with You. It is You alone who can whisper forgiveness, quiet misgivings, quicken faith, subdue corruption. Feeling the yoke of sin heavy and grievous, I come to You, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Weary and heavy-laden—in Your cross and passion—in Your will and service—I would find rest for my soul. May I lean upon You with unfaltering dependence—may I be linked to You in holy fellowship—may I be consecrated to You in unswerving allegiance.

Enable me more and more to crucify sin. May its power be subdued and its love mortified. May I set watch at every avenue by which temptation may gain entrance. Lord, be with me this day in all my worldly duties. Keep me from the selfishness which narrows and debases. May I stoop to no base compliances—no equivocal or unworthy means of bettering my circumstances. May my work and duty be done in a pious spirit; carefully avoiding whatever would interfere with the surrender of heart and soul to Your service. Let me exercise a jealousy over my motives as well as my actions; let my converse be sincere—my conscience clear as the noonday. Deliver me from rashness of speech—may I be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath—seeking to discharge faithfully whatever trust You have in Your providence confided to me. In my relation to all around, give me Your own most excellent gift of love, remembering the tenderness of Him who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. May I consider the beam that may be in my own eye, when I detect the mote that is in my brother's.

I pray for my dear friends. Unite them to You in the bonds of the everlasting covenant. If there are any who are still going about to establish their own righteousness, and refuse to submit themselves to the righteousness of Christ, lead them to own and to confess, that is there

salvation in no other. Bring them under the Beloved's shadow. Number them with Your saints in glory everlasting.

Hasten the happy period, when all the ends of the earth shall come to exult in this same salvation of God. When alike Jew and Gentile shall recognize in Messiah, the one sole way and the truth and the life, and be led to crown Him as Lord of all.

I commend to Your sympathy the wide family of sorrow. When every other source of comfort fails—may all their springs be in You. When no longer filling their cup, but emptying them from vessel to vessel—may they adore Your sovereignty, and own Your wisdom, and trust Your love. May Christ be magnified in them whether by life or by death. As He is the one way to pardon—may they find Him also the one way to consolation and peace.

I anew supplicate Your grace and blessing, May the Lord this day be my keeper—my stay and my strength at my right hand—through the same Jesus Christ, my blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **25th Evening—THE PURIFYING HOPE**

"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure." 1 John 3:3

O God, my Heavenly Father I come this night a needy suppliant to the Gates of Prayer. Give me Your presence and benediction. Give me the golden Key which unlocks the treasures of Your grace. Let all wandering thoughts—all worldly cares and disquietudes, be hushed and set aside—that I may enjoy a brief season of fellowship with You. Though the darkness of night has gathered around me, may it be mine to know that You are light, and that with You there is no darkness at all. "As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so my soul pants after You, O God—my soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

I desire to exult anew in the plenitude of Your great mercy in Christ. I bless You that I have such a Savior to flee to. Under the consciousness of

my own utter sinfulness and unworthiness, I look alone to Him for pardon and peace. May He be formed within me, the hope of glory—made unto me wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Planted in the likeness of His death, may I be planted also in the likeness of His resurrection. May my life now be hidden with Christ in God, that when Christ who is my life shall appear, I may also appear with Him in glory. Having this hope in Him—the blessed hope of seeing Him as He is, and of enjoying His everlasting fellowship—may I purify myself even as He is pure; daily imbibing more of His meek, gentle, unselfish, unworldly spirit; withdrawing my affections from things which are of the earth, earthy—and consecrating them to His service. Enable me to exercise a vigilant jealousy over my thoughts, words, and actions; seeking to renounce whatever is displeasing to Him, and that would mar my peace of conscience.

In every difficult and perplexing duty, may this always form the testing question and final appeal—"How would my Lord and Savior have acted here?" And knowing His will, may it be my delight to do it. Strengthen the things which remain and that may be ready to die. Let the power of sin wax weaker and weaker, and let the power of Your grace within me wax stronger and stronger. Thus, blessed Savior, whatever may be the changes and sorrows I experience in this precarious, uncertain existence; with the conscious assurance of Your presence and love, I must be happy. If You are near to me—if You abide with me—there can be no terror in trial, no bitterness in tears, no sting in death. With You for my portion, I am independent of every other. In all Your dealings towards me, may I recognize the gracious purpose and design of making me more and more fit for that glorious world, where obedience to You shall never falter, and consecration shall never fail; where every thought and wish shall be in unison with the divine.

O You, whose heart beats responsive to the smallest sorrow of Your stricken people, look down in great mercy on Your sons and daughters of affliction. May they know that You have this same wise end in all Your discipline. May they come to feel that their greatest trials are the ladder-steps to their greatest blessings—links in the chain which draws them to heaven. Whether You chasten or gladden, may they be enabled to say,

"Even so, Father, for it seems good in Your sight."

Bless all related to me by whatever tie. May theirs be the tabernacles of the righteous, where the voice of gladness and rejoicing is heard. May none of them be among the number of the loitering and presumptuous, who say, "My Lord delays His coming." May their loins rather be girded and their lights burning. Set as gems in Immanuel's crown, may they be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at His appearing and kingdom.

Send times of refreshing unto Zion. Enlarge her borders; lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes. Purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer to You sacrifices of righteousness. Raise up faithful and devoted ambassadors of the cross, who will sound the trumpet whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. May the Lord give the word, and great shall be the company of those who publish it.

Forgive, Lord, the sins I may have committed against You this day—failures in duty, rashness of speech, covetous thoughts, infirmities of temper, uncharitable words or insinuations. If I have been quick in taking offence, or betrayed into giving offence—if I have tampered with conscience, or grieved Your Spirit—I would seek pardon and remission through Him who is ever waiting to be gracious, and who is alike able and willing to bestow upon me full forgiveness of all transgressions, negligences, and ignorances. Spare me, if it be Your will, to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of a new morning. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **26th Morning—JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE**

"Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."—Romans 3:24

O God, I desire to come into Your blessed presence this morning, thanking You for the mercies of the by-past night, and the renewed comforts of another day. I laid me down and slept—I awaked for the Lord sustained me. Day by day are You loading me with Your benefits, and giving me unceasing cause for gratitude and praise. I bless You for my

creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. But I adore You especially for the grace of the Lord Jesus, who though He were rich—rich in all the attributes of Godhead—rich in all the plenitude of the Divine perfections—yet for our sakes He became poor—stooped to the lowest depths of humiliation, that we through His poverty might be rich. I bless You that around His cross, mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have embraced each other. You are, in Him, the just God and yet the Savior.

I acknowledge with deep humiliation my unworthiness and guilt. Each day, as it brings with it the memory of Your great goodness, brings with it also the memory of my multiplied offences. I confess my sins, alike of omission and commission; that I have done the things I ought not to have done, and have left undone those things I ought to have done. I have often no affecting sense of the need of salvation, and of the enslaving power of sin. I have too often resorted to false and unavailing refuges for satisfaction and happiness. I have too frequently sought to slake my thirst at the world's polluted cisterns, and failed to remember that all my fresh springs are in You. Lord, have mercy upon me!—Christ, have mercy upon me! It is by free, sovereign, unmerited grace, I am what I am. If I stand at last accepted before Your throne, this will be my plea, my confession, my eternal avowal—"Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Let me know, more and more, the blessedness of that word—"No condemnation." From personal experience, may I exult in the infinite treasures that are hidden in Christ; may I live under the elevating consciousness that I stand clothed in His righteousness, and that nothing can ever separate me from His love. Once within the fold, I am in the fold forever. Loving His own at the beginning, He will love them unto the end.

In response to Your summons, I would desire to go forth this day, to willing work and service. Be my shield, my glory, and the lifter up of my head. Keep me from conformity to the evil maxims and practices of the world. While grateful for the many mercies of my lot, and for the diversified sources of pleasure and enjoyment in this beautiful earth, enable me to use its blessings without abusing them, and to live under the powers of the world to come. May I know the conquering, transforming

influence of Redeeming love; raising my affections, purifying my desires, elevating my life. Keep me from all that is unworthy of my Christian profession; from all malice and uncharitableness, from all impatience and irritability. Let me be guarded in language, tender and considerate in my dealings with others. May even unmerited reproach receive the gentle answer—may I endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Let this grace of God which brings salvation—teach me, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, I should live soberly and righteously and godly in the world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God our Savior.

Blessed Spirit of all grace! come from the four winds, and breathe upon earth's slain that they may live. In the might of Your omnipotence, say to every gate of unbelief and error, Ephphatha! be opened! May the Church be a reflector of You her Lord—shining for Your glory. Hasten the day, when no jarring note will disturb her blissful harmonies—when the watchmen on her walls shall see eye to eye, and over all the glory, You shall be a defense.

Bless poor afflicted ones. If You are leading into deep waters, may the everlasting arms be underneath and round about. Whatever the cross be, which Your suffering people are called to carry, may they enjoy the assurance, that the same Lord who died for them, lays it on, and keeps it on—that no unnecessary thorn is in their chaplet of sorrow. When the unquiet dream of earth is over, may they awake in the morning of immortality, to see and to own, that mercy and faithfulness regulated all Your earthly dealings; and to utter with fervid lip the confession, "We have known and believed the love which God has to us."

Anew I supplicate Your grace and blessing on myself, my family, and household this day. Lift upon us the light of Your countenance—never leave and never forsake us. May the Lord be the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; the maintainer of our lot and then, the lines shall have fallen unto us in pleasant places; yes, with God, we shall have a goodly heritage. And all I ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **26th Evening—A FAITHFUL GOD**



"Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it." 1 Thess. 5:24

O God, I approach Your sacred presence, on this the evening of another day, through the gateway of Your tried faithfulness. Amid the vicissitudes of a changing world—amid the instability of human props and confidences—the fitfulness of human friendships—there is no change in You. With You is the fountain of life. For the weak, the weary, the sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened, there is ever an open door of welcome. All Your promises are yes and amen to those who believe.

I desire to utter the memory of Your great goodness—to recall with heartfelt gratitude Your faithfulness in the past. My way through life has been paved with mercies. I have abundant reason to set up my Ebenezer, and to write upon it the inscription, "Hitherto has the Lord helped me." You have been the same in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, amid comforts or crosses.

Alas! Lord, these memories of Your great goodness are sadly marred and clouded by the memory of my own transgressions. I offer no extenuation for their guilt. I have sinned against light and love, against the warnings of Your providence, against the riches of Your grace. I have too often given way to rebellion and presumption, to pride and unbelief. I have not lived up to my privileges. I have not realized, as I ought, my responsibilities. Whether You have spoken to me in the whirlwind, or in the still small voice—I have alike been slow to listen. Blessings innumerable have been poured into my lap, but they have often been received with an unthankful heart. Shadowing palms and wells of refreshing have studded my pilgrim path; but I have too frequently reclined under the shadow, and partaken of the refreshment, without any breathing of gratitude to the Bountiful Provider. And when the palm-shade and the well-spring have been exchanged for the dry and thirsty land, where no water is—when the sun of earthly joys has gone down, and I have been left to walk in darkness, how apt have I been to murmur under Your chastening hand, and to impeach the rectitude and wisdom of Your dispensations.

O faithful, covenant-keeping God, have compassion on my unfaithfulness; heal my backslidings—receive me graciously—love me

freely. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit. You have promised "all-sufficiency in all things;" make Your grace sufficient for me, and perfect Your strength in my weakness. Keep me lowly—keep me pure—keep me watchful. May I neither seek the world's applause—nor dread the world's censure. My soul; wait only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. All my purposes and plans of life I leave to Your better direction. Guide me, while I live, by Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Make me, at last, in Christ more than conqueror. Faithful is He who calls me, who also will do it.

O You who had a kindly word even for the outcast's tears, look in great mercy on those who are resisting Your grace—grieving Your Spirit—rushing against the thick bosses of Your shield. Lord, reclaim them, before it is too late. Reveal to them the glorious name, and person, and work of Him, whose divine mission it was to seek and to save those who are lost. Amid the misery and disquiet of their alienation and guilt, may they flee to His cross, and there obtain rest for their souls.

Have mercy on the afflicted. There is not one broken, bleeding heart among the aching children of humanity, but what is known to You. Look upon them with Your pitying eye. May they regard each trial as an angel beckoning them nearer heaven. May the thought that He who sends their afflictions is the same God who gave Jesus for them, lull all misgivings and silence all murmurings. Harboring no suspicions of Your faithfulness, may they breathe the prayer divinely taught—"Your will be done," and trust Him to be faithful, who promised—"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Bless all my dear friends—pour upon them the continual dew of Your blessing. May they be among the beloved of the Lord who dwell in safety, and who are quiet from fear of evil. Hasten the promised and predicted conversion of the world—when the Gentiles shall come to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your rising. Let Your mighty power be manifested as of old, in behalf of Your Church; that men may know that You, whose name alone is Jehovah, are the most High over all the earth. "Let the people praise You, O Lord, yes let all the people praise You."

I would retire to rest this night rejoicing in a faithful God, and reposing under the covert of Your wings. Watch over me; and, if spared until tomorrow; may I rise refreshed and invigorated for the duties of a new day. And all I ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **27th Morning—VISION AND FRUITION**

"As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness—I shall be satisfied, when I awake with your likeness." Psalm 17:15

God Almighty, who are ever good and doing good—Father of all mercies and God of all grace—I thank You for the gladsome return of day. I thank You for the glories of sunshine—for the varied delights of this beautiful earth—for its summer and winter—its seed-time and harvest—its grateful alternation and vicissitude of season. You have never left Yourself without a witness, in that You are continually doing us good; giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and with gladness. Your tender mercies are over all Your works. Do grant me Your benediction, as I wait upon You anew at the Gates of the morning. Shine upon me, O better Sun of Righteousness, with the brightness of Your rising. May no cloud of sin or unbelief be suffered to obscure Your radiance, or to dim the sense of Your favor and love.

I desire to make a full and unreserved acknowledgment of all my many offences. You know how apt I am to offer vain excuses for my faults; to plead my inability, when it is my unwillingness—to call that my misfortune, which is my sin. Truly I have no palliation or extenuation for my transgressions. Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified.

I bless You that in Your dear Son, You are waiting to be gracious; that in Him I can even now behold Your face in righteousness. My own heart condemns me, and You are greater than my heart. But let Your hand be upon the Man of Your right hand, on the Son of Man whom You have made strong for Yourself. Behold, O God, my Shield, and look on the face of Your anointed.

And while I turn to His cross for pardon and reconciliation—I would pray that Your Holy Spirit may fulfill within me all the good pleasure of Your goodness, and the work of faith with power. May it be my habitual and constant endeavor to aim after that holiness of heart and life, without which no man can see You or enjoy You. Keep me from, and keep from me, all that would be detrimental to my soul's interests. Deliver me from hardness of heart, from worldliness and uncharitableness, from those absorbing anxieties of earth which tend to dim and impair the spiritual vision. Make me a more loving and obedient follower of the Great Exemplar; seeking daily to walk in His blessed footsteps, and to imbibe His blessed spirit; and thus rising to the true dignity and greatness of redeemed humanity, to become gradually more and more fit for His full vision and fruition, when I shall be like Him, for I shall see Him as He is.

While I pray for myself, I would pray, also, for all whom it is alike my privilege and duty to remember at the throne of the heavenly grace. May the voice of rejoicing and salvation be heard this day in the tabernacles of those I love. Shield their households from danger, and their souls from sin. Beholding now Your face in righteousness—may they, too, at last wake up from the dream of earth in the morning of immortality, wearing Your likeness, and tasting the joys of Your own beatitude—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Have mercy on the sick, the sorrowing, the bereaved; those who have secret, unspoken afflictions, with which no stranger—no friend—can intermeddle. If they see not yet any bright light in the cloud, may they take comfort in the promise—that "at evening time it shall be light."

Bless Your Zion everywhere. Hasten the coronation day of the Church triumphant. Let the Year of Your Redeemed speedily come, when all wrongs shall be redressed—all calumnies and aspersions wiped away. Return and visit the Vine which Your own right hand has planted, and the branch You have made strong for Yourself.

I put myself this day under Your gracious care. I would re-enter the battle of life girded with Your strength, clothed with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. Let me engage in nothing that will violate the dictates of conscience, or do despite unto the Spirit of Grace.

May I seek that—my hands may be clean—my heart pure—my words kind—my actions unselfish. May I, and all near and dear to me, live and walk and act, from day to day and from hour to hour, as we would wish we had done, in a dying hour. With the glorious prospect of at last beholding You face to face, may this urgent question exercise over us an ever-present influence, "What kind of people ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God?" Oh may we be diligent, that we may be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Hear, O God, in Heaven Your dwelling-place, these my morning supplications—when you hear, forgive, and grant me an answer in peace; for the sake of Him whom You hear always—Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **27th Evening—THE GRAND PERSUASION**

"For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Tim. 1:12

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, draw You near to me in Your infinite loving kindness, as I now commend myself, soul and body, to You in well-doing, as unto a Faithful Creator. The shadows of night have again gathered around me. I would close the portals of another day with the golden key of prayer; rejoicing that You are more willing to hear than I am to ask. I would retire to rest with Your blessing and benediction breathed upon me. May He who came of old to His disciples at eventide, and said unto them, "Peace be unto you," abide with me, "for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

I desire to look, blessed Savior, with the unwavering eye of faith, to Your completed work and unchanging promises. I know whom I have believed. You are all I need, living or dying. I commit my temporal as well as my everlasting interests to Your keeping—all that concerns alike this world, and the next. I rejoice that they are in safe custody in Your hands. To whom can I go but unto You? You have the words of eternal life.

Deepen within me the sense of my solemn responsibilities. Keep me ever mindful of "that Day"—that the Great Being who is now my omniscient witness, will shortly be my Judge. I rejoice to think that He who is then to be exalted on a Throne of glory, is that same gracious Redeemer who is now seated on a Throne of grace. "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world—who has done all, and suffered all, and procured all on my behalf—and out of whose infinite fullness I have the promise of receiving grace for grace—do strengthen me with might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Defend me from every snare and danger which may beset my path. Be my Shield in prosperity—my Refuge in adversity—my Comforter in sorrow—my Light in darkness—my Hope in death—my Defender and Vindicator in judgment—my Joy and Portion through all eternity.

Forgive, Lord, whatever I have said amiss, or done amiss this day. If in my worldly occupations there has been any turning aside from the path of duty or rectitude—any tampering with temptation and sin—any exhibition of temper or passion inconsistent with my Christian profession—any impurity of thought or selfishness of motive—Lord, forgive me. Sprinkle my erring heart anew with the covenant token. Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins, and allow them not to have dominion over me. Come, Lord, and search me; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. May the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, expel whatever is unholy, and transform me more and more into the image and likeness of Your dear Son.

Every blessing I ask for myself, I implore in behalf of all near and dear to me. May they too be led to make this sacred, everlasting deposit, into the hands of the Great Redeemer. O forbid that His advent should overtake any of us as a thief. May we be looking for it, longing for it, preparing for it, living for it. The Lord grant unto us that we may find mercy of the Lord on that day.

Let the wanderer be brought back to the fold. Let the impenitent and

stouthearted be subdued and humbled; and let those who love You be as the sun when he goes forth in his strength. Support the sick and the distressed. Pity the careless—reclaim the backsliding. Comfort the widow, the orphan, the fatherless, the poor also, and him who has no helper. May trial result in the quickening and sanctifying of Your true people. May the dying be prepared for their great change—may the light of Your love cheer them in their passage through the dark valley—may the hour of departure be to them the birthday of glory everlasting. And may those who have recently committed their loved ones to the silence of the tomb, exult in the assurance which robs Death of its sting and the Grave of its victory—that this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality; and that those who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him.

I would lie down to rest this night, at peace with You, and in charity with all mankind. O Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers, be around my pillow during the unconscious hours of sleep. If spared until tomorrow, may I awake refreshed and invigorated for the duties of another day, and for renewed consecration to Your will and service. Through Jesus Christ my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **28th Morning—THE SACRED WORD**

"Your word is very pure—therefore Your servant loves it." Psalm 119:140

O Lord, I come this morning into Your gracious presence, adoring You as God over all, blessed for evermore. You have never left Yourself without a witness. The heavens declare Your glory, the skies shows forth Your handiwork. The sun and moon and stars are silent evangelists discoursing of Your greatness. They have no speech nor language, their voice is not heard—but they bear mute and ceaseless testimony to Your eternal wisdom, power, and Godhead.

I bless You that You have not left Your children to these utterances of material creation. I bless You for that sublime Revelation of Your character and attributes You have given in Your holy Word. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul—the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. I bless You, that in this favored land of religious

freedom, each is permitted to sit under his own vine and fig-tree without any to make him afraid, and to read in his own tongue the marvelous works of God. By the teaching of Your Spirit, may I be enabled duly to value the Holy Scriptures, and to know from personal experience that they are able to make wise unto salvation. O Enlightener, Teacher, Sanctifier of the whole Church, open mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of the Divine law, and cause it to be esteemed by me, better than thousands of gold and of silver.

I desire, Lord, to acknowledge how unworthy I am of this and of every other spiritual boon and blessing. I have to mourn the poverty of my faith—the lukewarmness of my love—the fitfulness of my obedience—the perfunctory performance of my religious duties. How little the precepts of Your sacred Scriptures have been treasured in my heart, and reduced to practice in my daily walk and conversation. How often I have indulged in tempers and feelings inconsistent with Your revealed will, and with the character of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. I have too often yielded to the power of temptation—bent like a brittle reed in the storm; dishonoring Your name and grieving Your Spirit. You might righteously have left me to reap the fruit of my own ways and to be filled with my own devices—saying, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone."

Lord, have mercy upon me. Forgive me, for Your dear Son's sake. I would make it my prayer, "Teach me the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end." May I hold fast the profession of my faith without wavering. May my worldly engagements and calling, whatever these be, be sanctified and sweetened by the consciousness of Your approval and love. Let all life's duties be pervaded by a sense of Your presence—laying out my time and talents and opportunities for Your glory, and being tenderly solicitous about the happiness and well-being of others. Let me not prefer my own word, and my own will, to Yours—but may all the plans of my life be framed in accordance with Your testimonies. With docility may I listen to their divine teachings. Amid the fretting annoyances of everyday life, may they prove my infallible counselors. Amid all earth's joys, may they be the songs in the house of my pilgrimage. Amid all earth's changes—when the grass withers and the flower fades, may I know that the Word of our God shall stand forever;



and at last, with it as a staff in my hand, may I cross the border river.

Lord, let Your Word have free course and be glorified throughout the whole world. May it be mighty as ever in the pulling down of strongholds. May Your faithful missionary servants, going forth with the sling of faith and a few pebbles from the brook, overcome every foe—may this be their joyful testimony—"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." We thank You for that plentiful rain with which, from time to time, You refresh Your inheritance when it is weary. May the shower still come down in its season—let there be showers of blessing. Spirit of the living God! You who can alone give efficacy to the living Word—as the Dove of peace, do speed with this true olive branch from country to country and from shore to shore. May the leaves of the Tree be for the healing of the nations.

Bless all who are in sorrow. May they, too, be enabled from heartfelt experience to say, "This is my comfort in mine affliction—Your Word has quickened me." May they kiss the rod that smites, and adore the hand which lays them low. And by Your gracious discipline here, may they be trained for the higher services of the heavenly sanctuary.

I anew commend myself, and all near and dear to me, to You this day. Deliver my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from falling. Keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit. Your Word have I hid in my heart, that I may not sin against You. Hold up my goings in Your paths, that my steps slip not; and lead me in the way everlasting. Through Jesus Christ my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **28th Evening—THE GIFT OF PEACE**

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you—not as the world gives, give I unto you." John 14:27

O God, compose my mind for venturing now into Your presence. I thank you for so precious a legacy bequeathed by the adorable Savior to all His true people. I desire, in retiring to rest, to pass through this Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and anew to repose on Him who alone can speak

peace to the sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened. Looking to His glorious, completed work, I can triumphantly say, Return unto your rest—your peace—O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

Forbid that I should ever be found seeking peace elsewhere—searching for forgiveness and comfort in anything short of the peace purchased and secured through the blood of His cross. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace. It is "not as the world gives." If You give peace, who then can give trouble? May the possession of that peace preserve me calm and tranquil amid all adverse providences. May I be enabled to repose with unswerving confidence in the wisdom of the divine guidance, and in the rectitude of the divine dealings. O God of peace, who has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep—who has, in the past, caused me to lie down in green pastures, and led me by the still waters—often disappointing my fears and more than realizing my hopes—loading me with the blessings of Your goodness—I will still go in Your promised strength. I would seek to have no wish, and no will, and no way of my own. Do to me, and with me, as seems good in Your sight, only make me possessor of this best blessing—the peace of Yours, which passes all understanding—that peace which the world knows not of—which the world with its riches and pleasures, its blandishments and fascinations, cannot give; and which the world, with all its troubles and anxieties, its sorrows and its trials, cannot take away.

Having peace with You, my God, give me that charity which is ever the associate and companion of peace. Fill me with the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, temperance. Hasten the time when the waves of this troublesome world will be rocked to rest. Promote the cause of true and universal brotherhood. Come, O blessed "Father of peace!" give to all the nations of the earth unity, and concord. Come, O blessed Prince of peace!—go forth with that sword which smites only to heal, "conquering and to conquer." Come, O Holy Spirit! Dove of peace—"sweet Messenger of rest!"—and brood, as You did of old, over the waste of chaos—bringing light out of darkness and order out of confusion.

Give, I beseech You, to my beloved friends, a personal interest in the same dying legacy of the Great Redeemer. To ensure to them the

enjoyment of this peace, may they look to Him for everything, and may they look to Him in everything; seeking to live day by day, under the invigorating motive, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I pray for those who are in any way afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate—tossed with tempest and not comforted. O sympathizing Savior—draw near to them, and say, "Peace, be still." You will keep them in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on You. May they know Your own gracious word of promise, that "this is the rest with which You cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing."

I would lie down tonight in peace, and sleep, under the comforting assurance that You alone Lord, make me to dwell in safety. It is You who give Your beloved sleep. And when all earthly nights are past—may I wake up to endless peace, in glory everlasting; and be made partaker of the true rest which remains for Your believing people; through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

## **29th Morning—THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE**

"In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." Tit. 1:2

O God, I desire to come to the Gates of Prayer this morning, thanking and praising You for all Your great mercies. The pleasant radiance of another day has visited my chamber. Glory be to You for the blessings of the light. You might have made my pillow last night a pillow of death. But another sun has risen upon me. You might have forbidden that sun to rise; or, as in the case of many who started life with me, it might now have been shining on my grave. But You have spared me to enjoy the blessings of existence, and the many sources of its happiness. O You who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, do shine into my heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. May He who is the true Sun of Righteousness disperse all the mists of unbelief, and ignorance, and sin; and may I enjoy the elevating satisfaction of a soul at peace with You.

Lord, I acknowledge how much I have done to quench the light of Your countenance, to forfeit Your favor, and incur Your righteous displeasure. I have no apology to plead for my sins. You have spoken to me in the lessons of Your Providence, and by the teachings of Your Word—by the voices of the living, and the silent voices of the dead—in prosperity, by Your manifold mercies—in adversity, by their curtailment or withdrawal. And yet, how callous and unconcerned have I been! How careful and troubled about the many things of this life, and how prone to forget the realities of the world to come.

I bless You for the revelation of this higher existence; for the hope of eternal life given by the God who cannot lie—the glorious assurance that death is but the moment of transition into purer being—that through Him who by His own death has been death's Vanquisher, the gates of the grave open on a limitless beatific future. May all the beneficial discipline of Your Providence wean me from earth, and train me up in a fitness for that heavenly Kingdom, whose truest rest will be the unceasing activities of Your service. Deaden unnecessary solicitude about the present. Enable me to walk through the world with a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man. Let me strive after a closer and more consistent walk with You, and a more habitual dependence on the aids of Your grace and Spirit. I cannot soar to the region of faith without Your strength; I cannot live under the powers of the world to come, without Your teaching and guidance. Show me Your ways, O Lord—teach me Your paths.

Remembering that this present life of probation molds and shapes and determines the life that is to come—that as men live here, so will they live forever—may I be so enabled faithfully to occupy, as best I can, and while I can, whatever niche You have assigned me in Your Temple, that when I come to resign my stewardship, it may be with the humble hope that I have not been a traitor to my trust. Feelingly alive to my momentous responsibilities—may I be diligent, that I may be found of You in peace without spot and blameless.

Let a rain-shower of blessing descend on all near and dear to me. May they too, be enabled to know Him and to love Him, whom to know and whom to love is life eternal. Bless all in sorrow. May they lie passive in the

arms of Your mercy. Raise up the sick. Be the God of the widow—the Help of the poor—the Friend of the unbefriended—the Father of the fatherless. Conduct the dying through the swellings of Jordan. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." May this prove a quietener to all fears, lull all misgivings, and repress all murmurs.

O great Ruler of mankind, hasten the time when all shall know You, from the least unto the greatest. Extend and establish the principles and the reign of Righteousness. Scatter the people that delight in war. Let the cruel sword long slumber. Give peace in our time, O Lord, for there is none other who fights for us but You alone, O God. Let the dew of Hermon—the dew which descended on the mountains of Zion, come down on the Holy Church throughout all the world. May all Your churches, walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, everywhere be multiplied. Save Your people; bless Your inheritance; feed them also, and lift them up forever.

Anew I commend myself to Your gracious keeping this day. Guide me by Your counsel—guard me from temptation—lead me in the way everlasting. May every unloving thought—every unworthy aim and aspiration—give place to what is pure and unselfish and kind. And when You have finished Your course and Your purposes with me here below, may an abundant entrance be ministered into Your kingdom and glory. Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **29th Evening—ACCESS TO THE FATHER**

"For through him, we have both access by one Spirit unto the Father."  
Eph. 2:18

Blessed God, I am again permitted this night to approach the Throne of Grace, in the name of Him whom You hear always—who ever stands by the golden altar with the fragrant censer in His hands. The voices of countless suppliants are at this moment ascending into His ear, but He can listen to them all, and answer them all.

Give me now filial confidence in drawing near to You, my Father in heaven. Let me rejoice that the Key which unlocks these gates, admits to a Father's presence and a Father's love. Through Him who has secured this glorious liberty of access, let my prayer come up before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Great Keeper of Israel! Keep me under the shadow of Your wings. Gladden me with that inner sunshine which brightens and beautifies and glorifies every earthly lot, and makes Your people independent of all the varying and changing circumstances of outer life. Under the consciousness of Your friendship and blessing, may I feel that I am rich, whatever else may be lacking.

But while rejoicing in this freedom of approach accorded to Your children, I have reason also to utter the confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son." I acknowledge my great unworthiness—my declensions and backslidings by reason of indulged sin, leading too often from weakness to weakness, instead of from strength to strength. I have not habitually frequented the mercy-seat as I ought to have done, and prized the privilege of unfettered access to Your presence—My prayers have too often been cold and listless—formal and insincere; instead of being the unburdenings and outpourings of filial confidence and trust. Where would I have been this night but for Your paternal forbearance.

Blessed Savior, I desire to rest on the preciousness of Your atoning blood—on the perfection of Your glorious righteousness—on the tenderness of Your all-wise dealings—on the prevalence of Your continual intercession. In You I have all and abound. In You, in the midst of my spiritual poverty, I am rich—nothing can touch my divine patrimony. In You, I have the pledge and guarantee for the bestowment of every other needed blessing.

Lord, I would plead this night for increased communications and supplies of Your grace. Strengthen me with all might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Keep me from all that would be detrimental to my spiritual interests—all that would weaken or impair this filial confidence, and lead me to restrain prayer. Whatever be my dominant sin—ease or pleasure—pride or passion—covetousness or ambition—enable me by the promised help

of Your Spirit, to subdue it—nailing it to the Redeemer's cross. Enable me to follow His meekness and gentleness; to be kind and forgiving—tender and charitable towards the weak and the absent—the tempted and the erring. Conscious of the supreme enthronement of Your love, may life be, more than it has been, an effort to crucify self and to please You. Even when there may be mystery in Your dealings, let me not wrong Your goodness and wisdom with one shadow of suspicion. Whether by giving or by taking, by smiting or by healing—by the sweet cup or the bitter, may it be mine to say, "Father! glorify Your name!"

Bless my beloved friends. Though severed from one another by distance, we can meet in thought at the mercy-seat, and, through Christ, have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Breathe upon us and say, "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters."

Compassionate all in sorrow. If there has been, with any, the thwarting of favorite schemes and the blighting of fond hopes—may these, too, be met with the breathing of meek acquiescence, "Even so, Father." May the realized consciousness of Your paternal love, sustain amid adverse experiences and foster submissive trust. Stand by every couch of sickness. If it be Your will, give back loved ones. Show that, with You, all things are possible, and that to the Lord our God belong the issues from death.

Bless Your universal Church. Beautify every sanctuary with Your presence; and hasten the promised day, when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad, when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Bring Your true people nearer one another. May the watchmen on Zion, who, by reason of present infirmity and weakness and prejudice, may be alienated and estranged, come to see eye to eye. May we all look forward to that happy time when filial love shall be perfected, and consecration of heart and service be complete; when every human will shall be in harmony with Yours—the intellect purified and ennobled—the memory made the repository of pure and hallowed recollections—the whole soul converted into a spiritual temple, where God is all in all. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **30th Morning—A REIGNING GOD**

"The Lord God omnipotent reigns." Rev. 19:6

O God, I adore Your sovereignty. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. All space is Your dominion. You do according to Your will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. You count the number of the stars, and name every one. You heal the broken in heart and bind up their wounds. The sparrow's fall is appointed by You—the young raven's cry is heard by You—the very hairs of our head are numbered by You. From the drop of the forest leaf, to the departure of the soul in death—all is known to You and ordered by You. You appoint the bounds of our habitation. Man proposes, but You dispose; and You dispose all things well. Let it be thus ever a joyous thought—that whatever concerns me, is under the control and direction of infinite wisdom and unchanging, everlasting love. I cannot forecast the future; but it is in Your hands. Even if there be cloud and tempest, it is You who walk upon the wings of the wind. Omnipotence treads the stormy waters. Omnipotence directs the roll of every billow and, when it is fit, Omnipotence utters the mandate, "Peace, be still!"

O God, I have to acknowledge that I have not always thus realized Your constant supervision, and taken the comfort I ought to have derived from Your sovereign rule. I have too often practically forgotten the Great Supreme, by dwelling on second causes. I have allowed myself to be disturbed and harassed with little vexations—anxious thoughts for the present, and misgivings and forebodings for the future. Enable me to cast all my cares, great or small, on You; knowing that You care for me. Let me brace myself for duty or for trial under the sheltering promise, "I will make My grace sufficient for you—I will perfect strength in weakness." If I enjoy the consciousness of having You on my side, who has given me the mightiest pledge of Your love in Jesus—I may confidently trust Your faithfulness for lesser blessings. Every other rill of comfort may be withdrawn—but if my well-springs are in You, I am independent alike of what the world may give or take away. With You as my heritage and portion, I need no other.

Keep me pure and unspotted in my interactions with the world, whether in my duties or my enjoyments. Forbid that I should offer at the shrine of self, or pleasure, or mammon, my best—and be content with giving the



remnants of worn and wasted affections to You. May I beware of any and every deviation from the straight path. Hold me up and I shall be safe. This day, guard me from whatever would be detrimental to my soul's good. Preserve me from the guilt of wasted hours and slighted opportunities. Enable me to renounce all evil habits—all debasing compliances. May every idol that would usurp Your place be overthrown. May no corrupt thought pollute my heart—no unworthy utterance defile my tongue—no unholy action stain my life.

O mighty reigning God—give peace in our time! Maintain peace among the nations; or if You should send war as one of Your four sore judgments, let the sword prepare the way for the ploughshare, and the spear for the pruning hook. If darkness be now covering the lands and gross darkness the people, may it usher in the longed-for era of millennial bliss, when the Prince of Peace shall take to Himself His great power and reign—when the cry shall be heard from shore to shore and from pole to pole, "The kingdoms of this world have become the one kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Keep, and preserve, and comfort, all the sons and daughters of sorrow. In the spirit of weaned children may they say, "Father, not our will—but Your be done." May they feel that in You they have enough for every emergency, and that they can write under each trying hour, "As your days, so shall your strength be." Compassionate those laid on beds of sickness and languishing. Assuage suffering—smooth the pillow of pain. Prepare the dying for death, and what is after death. And may the living remember that they too must die.

Before I now go out into the world I would cling to the horns of the altar. There I would bind with cords, my morning sacrifice of confession and penitence—of gratitude and praise. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You do I wait all the day. Whom have I in heaven, O Savior, but You; on earth there is none I would desire in comparison with You. My flesh and my heart fail, but You are the strength of my heart, and my portion forever. Unto You, with the Adorable Father and the Eternal Spirit, I would ascribe all blessing and

honor, and glory and praise; world without end. Amen.

## **30th Evening—THE CHASTENING OF LOVE**

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Rev. 3:19

O God, I desire to come into Your gracious presence, thanking You for the mercies of the past day. The shadows of another evening have gathered around me—may I feel that "it is not night if You are near." May "no earth-born cloud arise" to eclipse the sunshine of Your love, and deprive me of the sensible tokens of Your favor.

Adored be Your name, that all events are at Your disposal and under Your righteous ordination and control. I rejoice to know that Your dealings, though sovereign, are never arbitrary. You are my Father. Give me trust, and confidence, and filial reverence. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him—for He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust. Your way is sometimes in the sea, and Your path in the deep waters, and Your judgments unsearchable; but the day is coming when You will vindicate the rectitude of Your procedure, and bring every tongue to confess that You have done all things well.

I have no reason to wonder at any afflictions or chastisements. I have rather reason to wonder at Your patience and kindness; that the cumberer's sentence has not been pronounced, and the cumberer's doom has not been visited upon me. Blessed Redeemer, how coldly have I requited Your love—how unworthily have I resisted Your grace, evaded Your pleadings, grieved Your Spirit. How often have I kept You standing at the door of my heart—Your head wet with dew and Your locks with the drops of the night resigning myself to spiritual sloth and indifference—allowing worldly interests and engrossments to supersede the concerns of the soul and eternity. And yet You are still waiting to be gracious—Your hand of mercy and forbearance, is stretched out still.

Let me trust that same love and mercy, in whatever means You see fit to employ in order to promote the life of faith, to quicken obedience, and stimulate my spiritual graces. We are apt to settle on our lees, when we

are not emptied from vessel to vessel. We need at times, a thorn put into our nest, that we may not build too securely here. We need, ever and always, the monition to be sounded in our ears, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest." Lord, by Your own beneficial discipline—wean me from earth, and train me for heaven. Destroy all self-sufficiency. Give me the ornament of a meek and quiet, a peaceful and contented spirit. Keep me from being fretted by real or imagined injuries. Keep me from whatever would inflict pain on others—or infringe in any way the sacredness of the golden rule. In lowliness of mind may I seek to esteem others better than myself. Preserve me from all that would generate rebellion, or foster worldliness, or deaden spirituality of heart. Whether by active work or by passive endurance, may I seek to glorify Your holy name. If You have curtailed me of some earthly good, let me feel that some higher spiritual blessing is in reversion. Let my will be resolved into Yours; and then will the trials of life be disarmed of their sting, when I view them as part of Your own plan of infinite wisdom.

I pray for all the children of God that are scattered abroad. I pray for Your tempest-tossed Church. Amid environing storms, may she look to Him who rules the raging of the sea. Bring Your true people nearer one another. Hasten the time when, no longer ranged under different banners bearing the shibboleth of party—they shall be found, side by side, fighting the battles of their Lord.

O Help of the helpless, Father of the fatherless, Friend of the friendless—O Great and Good Shepherd who gently leads the weak, the weary, the burdened of Your flock—do look in especial tenderness on the afflicted. May they be enabled to sing of mercy in the midst of judgment. May they know from experience, that You ever mingle sweet ingredients in the cup of sorrow—opening well-springs in the Valley of Baca, and transforming Achor into a door of hope. Be the healer of the broken-hearted, the comforter of all that are cast down. In the midst of the blighting of cherished hopes and the failure of favorite schemes, may they glorify You by unquestioning submission. Take off their sackcloth and gird them with gladness. May the assurance "whom the Lord loves He chastens"—still and quiet every misgiving. Prepare the dying for death. May they pass from the cherished scenes and associations of earth, to the presence of

angels and the fruition of God.

Take the charge of me through the silence and darkness of another night. May I lie down to sleep with the assurance that You sustain me, and when I awake, may I be still with You. And all I ask is for the Blessed Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **31st Morning—BANISHED FEARS**

"He shall not be afraid of evil tidings—his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." Psalm 112:7

Heavenly Father, I desire to approach Your gracious presence through this blessed Gateway of Trust. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed—I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation. I bless You that in this holy confidence, I can enter on the work and duties—the joys and sorrows—the trials and temptations of a new day. You have been in the past a refuge in the time of trouble, vouchsafing help when vain was the help of man. I will trust You still; leaning on Your arm—confident in Your grace, I will go in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of Your righteousness, even of Yours alone.

I come to You supplicating Your pardoning mercy. Forgive my many sins in all their heinousness and aggravation—may every guilty stain be washed away—may I stand now and ever in Your sight, accepted in the Beloved. Other Refuge—other Savior—other Righteousness—I have none, and I need none—I cast my helpless soul for time and for eternity on His finished work and atoning sacrifice. May the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of all grace—promised by Him on His departure from the world, come down to cleanse and regenerate and sanctify me, and make me fit to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Your Spirit, O God, is good, lead me to the land of uprightness.

Lord, equip me this morning for Your service. May the great predominating motive, to love and to glorify You, regulate and control my actions—quicken my energies—and give direction to all my schemes and

purposes. Clothe and panoply me with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. The name of my spiritual foe is "legion," for they are many. I have no might against this great multitude, neither know I what to do—but my eyes are upon You. Your hand is never shortened; Your ear is never heavy. He who is with me and for me, is greater far than those who are against me. I will trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. "O Lord, in You have I trusted, let me never be confounded."

And may all near and dear to me enter by this same Gate of the righteous; and exercise the same loving, unwavering confidence in Your faithfulness. If any are in trouble—support them; if any are bereaved—comfort them. May they know, in their happy experience, that those who trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. If any are dying—flood the dark Valley with glorious light; and when the dust returns to its dust, may the spirit return to the God who gave it.

Bless this great country in its varied interests, civil and sacred. May it be distinguished for the righteousness which alone exalts. May there be more of lofty principle and sterling integrity and honor, regulating and influencing transactions between man and man. Grant us the inestimable blessing of peace. May the sword long slumber. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

Bless Your Church throughout the whole world. Be a wall of fire around Your Zion, and the glory in the midst thereof; over all the glory be a defense. Bless Your ministering servants—the ambassadors of Your Word at home, as well as Your faithful missionaries abroad. May it specially be theirs, amid manifold discouragements, to rise by faith above the fear of evil tidings, and to have their hearts fixed trusting in the Lord. May the joy of the Lord be their strength.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? my hope is in You. Hear in heaven, Your holy habitation, these my unworthy prayers; and when You hear, forgive, and grant me an answer in peace—through Jesus Christ, in whom is all my trust; and to whom, with You the Father, and the Holy Spirit—Three in one in covenant for my salvation—be ascribed all blessing, and

honor, and glory, and praise world without end. Amen.

## **31st Evening—THE EVERLASTING LIGHT**

"Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end."  
Isaiah 60:20

O God, I come to You this evening, as the Everlasting Light; with whom there is no darkness at all. I beseech You show me Your glory. May the din of the world be shut out—allow not its distracting thoughts and cares to intrude in this the hour of my evening oblation. Bring me under the solemnizing influence of unseen realities. May the Gate of prayer become as the Gate of heaven.

I bless You for the glimpses given of the things prepared within the veil, for those who love You. I thank You for the images and emblems contained in Your most holy Word, of this future world of bliss—"the rest which remains"—"the kingdom which cannot be moved"—"the Father's house" with its "many mansions"—"the sun that shall no more go down"—the moon that shall never wax nor wane—a sinless, sorrowless, tearless immortality. All present joys are transient, shadowy, unreal, compared with these. Grant, Lord, that when I awake from the sleep of death, I may partake of endless life in You—satisfied with Your likeness; and served heir to Your own gracious beatitude—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Alas! the love which ought to have reigned paramount, has too often been supplanted and superseded by other affections. I have to lament my bias to sin—the latent principles of corruption—the evil heart of unbelief which is ever tempting me to stray from the living God—the burdens and impediments which clog the wings of faith and prevent me soaring heavenwards. Lord, elevate my affections, purify my desires, quicken my new obedience. May my life become, more than it has been, an offering of gratitude—a sacrifice of praise for all Your many mercies. By the blessings You are bestowing, as well as by the beneficial discipline of Your providence in curtailing or removing these, may I become gradually

prepared for the enjoyment of Your presence—for taking my place as a worshiper in that Temple, where my present imperfect and divided service and love will be merged in the bliss of perfect, unalloyed, uninterrupted consecration. Meanwhile, keep me from the absorbing power, the benumbing influence of earthly things. Keep me mindful that my little day is flitting fast, and that opportunities of serving and glorifying You must speedily terminate. May I be enabled so to live, that when the hour of departure arrives, I may lean with unfaltering and unwavering trust on the promised rod and staff, and pass from a death full of hope to an immortality full of glory.

I pray for all mankind. Lord, pity the heathen kingdoms, still the habitations of cruelty; hear the loud cry of oppression and tyranny and wrong which is ever ascending from an enslaved world. Break these bonds asunder; and send the nations forth, walking and leaping and praising God. Prince of Peace! take to Yourself Your great power and reign. Upbuild the walls of Zion, and hasten the fulfillment of the glorious things spoken of the city of God.

Have mercy on the afflicted—the poor—the orphaned—the widowed—the friendless—the sick—the dying. Reveal Yourself to all such as the Great Physician. May those lamenting the earthly loss of loved ones—fallen asleep in Jesus—rejoice that to them the shadow of death has been turned into the morning, and that the Lord their God has become their everlasting light.

Bless those connected with me by ties of kindred or affection. Be to them as a pillar of cloud by day, and as a pillar of fire by night. If You send them blessings, may they connect every gift with the Great Bestower—if You give the full cup, may they be enabled to carry it with a steady hand. If You appoint them crosses, may they have strength to bear them—afflictions and bereavements, may they regard them as Your own special messengers sent on a mission of wisdom and mercy. However far we may be separated from one another here, may an entrance at last be ministered unto us abundantly, into the abiding Home, whose walls are Salvation, and its GATES, PRAISE.

Anew I commit myself to Your gracious protection. Give me quiet and

refreshing sleep, and spare me, if it be Your will, to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of another day.

And now, unto Him who alone is able to keep me from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy—  
Unto Him who loved me, and washed me from my sins in His own blood—  
—Unto Him who, Himself having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the Kingdom of Heaven and the Gates of Righteousness to all Believers—be ascribed all blessing and honor, might, majesty, and dominion, world without end. Amen.

## **FAMILY PRAYERS**

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## **CHOICE EXCERPTS**

We look forward with joyful hearts to that better world, where we shall have no contrariety of mind to You, when we shall be with You, and like You; serving You without distraction; and where sin and sorrow will be no more felt or dreaded.

\* \* \* \* \*

The shadows of night have again fallen around us in peace. We thank You for the continuance of health and strength, and many outward blessings. We thank You for the crowning mercy of all--Jesus, Your unspeakable gift! Thousands of needy, outcast sinners have repaired to Him, yet still the Fountain of His grace is as free as ever. This is still His name and memorial, "Mighty to save!" Lord, we come to You, with all our sins, casting ourselves on His infinite and all-sufficient righteousness. Wash every guilty stain away.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is not a corruption we have within us, which Your grace is unable to subdue. There is not a cross or trial, or care, but Your grace will enable us to endure. It is Your all-powerful grace alone which, from hour to hour, averts from us temptations we could have no strength in ourselves to resist. Hold us up--and then alone we shall be safe. To You we look for everything.

\* \* \* \* \*

May we view every dark providence as an errand of love in disguise--a messenger sent from the Eternal Throne, to minister to us, who are heirs of salvation. May we live as pilgrims on the earth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whatever Your leadings may be, let us cheerfully confide in their wisdom and faithfulness. We are poor judges of what is good for us, but we can trust You in all things--in what is great and what is small; what is dark and what is bright; what is joyous and what is grievous. We rejoice that all is in Your hands, and all is for the best!

\* \* \* \* \*

May we ever regard sin as our greatest trial. When temptation assails us, grant us power to resist it. May our lives, our tempers, our affections, our desires--be regulated by the example of our divine Lord and Master. Give us His meekness of spirit--which no provocation could ruffle. Give us His forgiveness of injuries--amid ingratitude and scorn. Give us His calm, uncomplaining submission to Your holy will.

\* \* \* \* \*

We bless You especially for the tokens of Your mercy in Jesus. We bless You for His full, free, everlasting Redemption. Oh set us in the Clefts of the Rock--and hide us there! Let us feel the all-sufficiency and security of His covenant love. For our infinite need--there is Your infinite fullness! For our infinite danger--there is Your infinite salvation! Lord, give us grace to live worthy of our high calling. Enable us to adorn the doctrine of

our God and Savior. Let His love be the animating principle in our actions. Let our chief delight be to serve Him. May our greatest pain be to vex and grieve Him. May our affections be more elevated--our eye more single--our lives more consistent--true religion more the one thing needful.

\* \* \* \* \*

May we rest in the confident persuasion that You do all things well--and nothing but what is well. Enable us to exercise a child-like acquiescence in all Your dealings. These may at times be mysterious; but when Your purposes of love are at last unfolded, we shall dwell with adoring gratitude on all the way by which You have led us. Give us grace, meanwhile, to be living as dying creatures. Let us never forget our pilgrim character, nor dream away, in guilty unconcern, our fleeting moments. Enable us to take You as the strength of our hearts and our portion forever. Keep us from the absorbing power of earthly things. May . . .  
Your Spirit be our teacher;  
Your Word be our guide;  
Your sovereign will be our motive;  
Your glory be our ultimate end.

\* \* \* \* \*

Enable us to rely on Your guiding arm, and to merge our wills in Yours. Hold us up--and we shall be safe. O God, forbid that, in the midst of earth's cares and pursuits, we should ever lose sight of our immortal destinies. Let us imbibe more of the pilgrim spirit; having our eye upwards, and our footsteps onwards. Give us grace to manifest the power of a holy life.

\* \* \* \* \*

We desire to make acknowledgment of our unworthiness and guilt. We will not cloak nor disguise our manifold and multiplied transgressions. Discover to us the depths of our depravity; unveil to us the secret pride and selfishness and worldliness of our hearts. Deliver us from our besetting sins. Let us see our vileness--in the cross of Your dear Son.

\* \* \* \* \*

We renounce all dependence on ourselves. Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—we take Jesus as all our salvation and all our desire.

\* \* \* \* \*

May we seek in every providence to hear Your voice; and in every event to read Your will. May we live conscious of the predominating motive of love to You. May we feel Your favor lightening every cross and lessening every care.

\* \* \* \* \*

May all our duties be gladdened with a sense of Your presence and love. May we have a single eye in all we think, and say, and do—to the glory of our adorable Redeemer. As pilgrims and strangers on the earth, may we declare plainly that we seek a better country.

\* \* \* \* \*

We rejoice to believe that we are entirely in Your keeping. If You send us prosperity, Lord, hallow it. If You send us adversity, Lord, sanctify it. May all things work together for our good. We put ourselves, blessed God, into Your hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sanctify affliction to all in sorrow. Let Your suffering people rejoice in the assurance that Your chastisements are the dealings of a Father; that the furnace is lighted to purge away the dross, and refine and purify for glory. Direct, control, suggest, this day, all our thoughts, purposes, designs, and actions—that we may consecrate soul and body, with all their powers, to the glory of Your holy name. And all that we ask or hope for, is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

\* \* \* \* \*

We come, acknowledging, that it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed. We are nothing and we have nothing. By nature and by wicked works, we could expect nothing but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Each day is a witness against us. We confess our proneness to depart from You, the living God. We confess our reluctance to render to You the tribute of our undivided homage and love. Lord, we bring our sins and lay them on Him, who, as our Surety-Substitute, was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. We bring our weakness to His Almighty strength. We bring our insufficiency, that we may receive from Him, the promised "all sufficiency in all things." We rejoice, blessed Savior, to think of You, as sympathizing with us in all our trials and perplexities and temptations; keeping us as the apple of Your eye, and feeling what is done to Your people as if it were done to Yourself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Enable us to repose in the infinite fullness of Your grace and mercy; to experience the blessedness of an unreserved, unwavering trust and confidence in Your dealings. Let us confide to You the allotment of all that befalls us. Let us harbor no suspicions of Your faithfulness or love. Let us commit the unknown future to Your better wisdom, saying, "Teach us the way wherein we shall walk, for we lift our souls unto You."

\* \* \* \* \*

May we walk in the light of Your countenance. Your favor is life. Nothing but the possession of Your infinite love can satisfy the longings of our souls. Whom have we in heaven, O God, but You? and there is none upon earth we would desire besides You.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Lord reigns! Nothing befalls us but what is the dictate of infinite wisdom and everlasting love! Let every heavy-laden one know that it is Your gracious hand that appoints every burden. Often would we choose what would be detrimental to our best interests. You choose for us. Let us rejoice in You as a rich Provider, and an all-wise Provider; who will give us nothing, and deny us nothing, but what is for our good. May all Your

poor afflicted ones take refuge in the assurance that You are the God of Providence; that whatever befalls them is Your doing; and that the sunshine of Your countenance can make up for every loss. O Source of all consolation, draw near to the afflicted. Abundantly sanctify Your dealings.

\* \* \* \* \*

We desire anew this night to repair to His cross. We disown all trust in ourselves. Other refuge, other righteousness, we have none, and we need none. We cleave, in simple dependence, to the work of Jesus. We are safe only when clinging to the horns of the blood-besprinkled altar.

\* \* \* \* \*

Every blessing, temporal and spiritual, we desire to connect with Your favor. Every rivulet of providential or gracious mercy--we would trace to Yourself—its great fountain-head. Every cross and loss we would submit to—as the appointment of Your wisdom. We would tread the roughest path--if You lead us there! May all Your dealings toward us issue in our sanctification. May our hearts be becoming holier and purer. Transform us more from day to day, and from week to week—into the image of Your Son.

\* \* \* \* \*

Through another night, be pleased to grant us Your guardian care. Shepherd of Israel, may Your wakeful, sleepless eye be upon us. May the shadows of this night's darkness be to us only as the shadow of Your wings. Shield soul and body by Your mighty power. Lying down in Your fear, may we awake in Your favor, fitted for the duties of a new day. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Amen.

\* \* \* \* \*

Preserve us from the snares of a wicked world.  
Strengthen us in seasons of weakness.  
Protect us in the hour of temptation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Never for a solitary moment, have You withdrawn Your hand of love from us. Take these hearts of ours and make them Yours. May our inmost thoughts, and desires, and purposes—be dedicated to Your glory. Pour Your rich grace into our hearts. Let us not fall a prey to the allurements and enticements of this present evil world; but may we walk as seeing You, who is invisible.

\* \* \* \* \*

God of all consolation, bind up their wounds. Keep them from a murmuring spirit, under dark dispensations. Let them know and believe—that infinite love is in all Your arrangements—that finite wisdom has no place in Your chastisements—that He with whom they have to do, cannot do wrong. Lord, give us all this lowly spirit of submission to Your will. Whether You chasten us, or gladden us; whether prosperity or adversity be our portion--oh bring us nearer Yourself! May Your dealings serve to trim the lamp of faith and keep it brightly burning.

\* \* \* \* \*

O Lord our God, we desire to bow this night at the footstool of Your Throne, adoring You for all Your great goodness. What are we--that we should be permitted to come into Your presence, or take Your thrice blessed name into our sinful and polluted lips? You have not dealt with us after our sins—but according to Your rich and undeserved mercy. What mercy it is in You—to bend Your ear to our feeble lispings of praise, and to listen to the pleadings of such unthankful and unholy hearts. We could not have ventured to approach Your footstool--but for Your great love to us in Christ Jesus. Through Him alone it is, that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts are rendered acceptable in Your sight! In Him we are pardoned, justified, adopted, saved! In Him we are kept, sanctified, sealed. In Him we shall at last be presented without fault before Your throne. Blessed Savior, we may well entrust our eternal all to Your keeping. Our needs are numberless, but Your help is infinite! You are waiting to dispense needed grace, for every time of need. Lord, we feel that we require grace for everything! There is not the hour or moment we

can live independent of You. Carry on Your own work within us. Hold us up--and then alone we shall be safe.

\* \* \* \* \*

Most Blessed God, You have again permitted us to see the beginning of another day. We desire to accept every new morning as a fresh gift of Your love. We are the constant beggars on Your bounty. If Your sustaining arm be withdrawn--we instantly perish. We rejoice to look back on the way by which You have hitherto led us; protecting us from danger, supporting us in trouble, disappointing our fears, and realizing our hopes.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is our desire, blessed God, to lie passive in Your hands. Whether prosperity or adversity be ours, whether You chasten us or gladden us--oh bring us nearer Yourself. When we cannot understand Your dealings--may faith repose in Your unchanging faithfulness. May we feel assured that all things are working together for our good; and that what is mystery here--will be unfolded and unraveled hereafter. Now, we see through a glass darkly--but then face to face. Meanwhile, may we walk less by sight and more by faith. May we bow to Your will. Let us see no hand in our trials but Yours; while we say, in lowly submissiveness, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has a sovereign right to take away." May we cheerfully submit to whatever You see fit to appoint. May we murmur at nothing that brings us nearer to You. Loving You supremely, take what You will away--we must be happy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Make us like Jesus--patient and meek, thankful and forgiving. Take away all pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy--all absorbing love of the world. Set our affections on things above.

\* \* \* \* \*

O Lord, we desire to draw near into Your gracious presence, in the name



of Him whom You hear always, and in whom You are ever well pleased. Give us grace to approach You, under a deep sense of our unworthiness. We have nothing to plead in extenuation of our guilt. We have sinned against light and privilege, warning and mercy. We mourn our deep-rooted depravity, our constant proneness to depart from You, the feebleness of our faith, the coldness of our love, the imperfection of our best services, the mingled motives in our holiest duties. We come anew, casting ourselves on the infinite fullness of our adorable Redeemer. In Him is all our hope. Give us, out of His inexhaustible treasury, grace upon grace. Transform us into His image. May we seek to walk in His footsteps, and to copy His example.

\* \* \* \* \*

All that we are, and all that we have, is derived from You. There is nothing we possess that we have not received from You. Oh give us grateful hearts; feeling that the least blessing we enjoy—is unmerited on our part, and a gift of free grace on Yours.

\* \* \* \* \*

Enable us to feel our sins—to have a deep and heartfelt consciousness of their heinousness in Your sight. We are apt to cloak and mask them; we are reluctant to make a frank and unreserved confession of them all. Lord, give us grace, in true penitence and contrition of heart, to cast ourselves—all unworthy—on the infinite worthiness of Him who is all-worthy. For His sake, receive us graciously--love us freely. We rejoice to meditate on the love which He had for us from all eternity. We rejoice to think that it is the same at this hour that it was then—unchanging, everlasting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, subdue within us whatever is inconsistent with Your mind and will. Put a sanctified restraint on our thoughts. Repress all vain imaginations. Crucify every remaining sin. May our hearts become holy temples, and our lives living sacrifices.

\* \* \* \* \*

We commend all belonging to us to Your sovereign care. May Your love reign paramount within us--may there be no competing affection. May we seek to show by our pure lives and consistent walk—that we have been imbibing the Savior's spirit. Take these unworthy, erring hearts—sanctify and seal them for Yourself. Make them Yours—Yours only, and Yours wholly, and Yours forever!

\* \* \* \* \*

Let us live as the expectants of a glorious immortality. Lord, may we habitually remember, that here we are pilgrims and strangers. Oh be our constant Guide in all our journeyings. Let us never go but where You direct. Let us never hesitate when and where You call us. Let us not arraign the allotments of Your infinite love. May we feel that all the circumstances of life---its joys and its sorrows--its comforts and crosses--are ordained by You in adorable wisdom. Our way might have been hedged up with thorns, but it has been full of mercy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, we mourn over our dullness, and coldness, and lukewarmness. We look forward to that day, when there shall be nothing to mar the joy of entire and undivided devotion to you, and consecration to Your service.

\* \* \* \* \*

O God, we come into Your blessed presence this evening, anew to thank You for the unmerited tokens of Your love and mercy. On You we are dependent for all the temporal bounties of our lot, and for all our higher and more enduring spiritual privileges. If we have been enabled this day to resist temptation, and to fight against sin, it is Your grace which has enabled us to do so. We are weak and helpless. Our hearts are ever dealing treacherously both with ourselves and You. The good that we would do--that we don't do. And the evil that we would not do--that we do. Nothing else but the merits of our blessed Redeemer can save us. We take refuge in the fullness of His grace—in the completeness of His

finished work. Our souls would magnify the Lord, our spirits would rejoice in God our Savior; for He who is mighty has done great things for us--holy is His name.

\* \* \* \* \*

We take refuge anew at the foot of Your cross, bringing our infinite unworthiness to Your infinite merit and all-sufficiency. Wash us, blessed Savior, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Receive us graciously. Love us freely. Preserve against the world's snares, and dangers, and temptations.

\* \* \* \* \*

May all worldly thoughts, and cares, and disquietudes, be laid aside, that we may enjoy a foretaste of the everlasting blessedness which is at Your right hand. We come, gracious Lord, relying on Your mercy and love in Jesus. We would direct the undivided eye of faith to His finished salvation; rejoicing that it is as free as ever, and as efficacious as ever.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fill us with a deep and humbling sense of our guilt. May we mourn an erring past, and receive grace for an unknown future. We would seek this day anew to enkindle our love at Your holy altar. Inspire us with resolutions of new obedience. May we no longer live unto ourselves—to the world—to the creature—to sin. May the great Creator and the adorable Redeemer occupy, without a rival, the throne of our affections!

\* \* \* \* \*

We approach You, acknowledging our great unworthiness. Fill us with a deep sense of our guilt. We have not the humbling consciousness we ought to have of our exceeding vileness. We are apt to plead vain excuses for our sins. Forgive us, O Lord—forgive us all, for Your dear Son's sake. Wash these crimson and scarlet stains away, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Blessed Lord, make these unworthy hearts of ours Your temple—holy altars of gratitude and love. May our lives form a

continued thank-offering for Your manifold mercies. May we count it our highest privilege, as well as our sacred duty, to walk so as to please You.

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Almighty God, we desire, on this the morning of a new day, to approach the footstool of Your Throne of grace. You are glorious in Your holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders. Your eternity, no finite mind can fathom. Your purposes no accident can alter. Your love no time can impair. We adore You as the God of our life; moment by moment we are dependent on Your goodness; if You withdraw Your hand, we perish. And yet, O Lord, we have not been living habitually mindful of You. We have too often taken our blessings as matters of course. We have had unthankful hearts in the midst of Your daily tokens of unmerited mercy. Above all, we have been living in guilty forgetfulness of Your dear Son. We have not been remembering as we ought, that but for Him and His wondrous grace, we must have perished everlastingly! We have not felt, as we ought, the attractive power of His cross. Other lords have had dominion over us. Your love, which ought to have reigned paramount, has been displaced by other affections. We have been "minding earthly things;" too often anxious, and troubled, and concerned—about things that will perish with the very using. Lord, have mercy upon us. Melt our hard and obdurate hearts; renew them by the indwelling of Your gracious Spirit.

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All our hope is in Jesus. Help us, blessed Savior, else we die! Give us to see the adaptation of Your character and work to all the wants and weaknesses the trials and difficulties—the sorrows and sins of our fallen and suffering and tempted natures. There is infinite merit in You to meet all the magnitude of our infinite guilt. May we exhibit more willingness to renounce all dependence on ourselves, that You may be enthroned in our hearts, as Lord of all. Make us more heavenly minded—more pilgrim-like. Our graces are feeble—Lord, sustain them. Our affections are lukewarm—Lord, revive them. Search us—try us—lead us. Use whatever discipline You see best: may it all result in our growing sanctification, in endearing to us Your favor, and bringing us to live under a more constant and

realizing sense of the things which cannot be shaken.

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O Lord, our Heavenly Father, by whose good providence we are spared from day to day—enable us to come this night into Your presence, with hearts filled with gratitude and thankfulness for all Your mercies. We would be deeply humbled on account of our unworthiness. What are we—that we should be permitted to take Your name into our polluted lips? We have sinned—what shall we say unto You, O preserver and Redeemer of men? We have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and the desires of our own hearts unto evil. We have been rebellious, and wayward, and selfish, and unthankful. We have been living in the enjoyment of countless blessings without any due acknowledgment of Your giving hand. Your kindness has too often been abused, Your grace resisted. We have been worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed forevermore. Lord, we flee anew to the clefts of the Smitten Rock—hide us there, from that wrath and everlasting condemnation which these our manifold sins have justly merited.

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What encouragement we have to trust Your love and mercy! We can fear no evil when You are with us. We rejoice that we are in Your hands; that all that our concerns are at Your disposal. Enable us to rest, in calm composure, in Your infinite wisdom. Give us lowliness and gentleness; kindness and unselfishness. May our own wills be merged in the higher will of our Father in Heaven. Whatever be the discipline You employ, may we meekly submit to it. May we watch all Your varied teachings, and get profit and sanctification out of them all. May they bring us nearer Heaven and nearer You.

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O Lord, we desire to draw near into Your blessed presence on this the beginning of a new day. Accept of our morning sacrifice. Enkindle our souls with a live coal from the inner sanctuary. Throughout the day may

our minds be stayed on You. May a sense of Your favor and love be intermingled with all its duties—hallowing all its pleasures, and softening all its trials. Lord, we have received our being from Your hands; may the lives imparted by You, and sustained by You, be consecrated to Your praise. May we feel the happiness of Your service, and regard nothing that this world can give, as comparable to the enjoyment of Your friendship and love. We thank You, above all, for the provisions of the everlasting covenant. Gracious Savior, Shepherd, Guide, and Portion of Your people—give us the assured sense of pardon and forgiveness through the blood of the Cross. May we have no trust in anything but in Your matchless work. May simple faith be followed by holy obedience. May we know the blessedness of a holy life; of affections once alienated from God, now alienated from the world. May no spiritual foe be permitted to obtain the victory over us. May no idol to usurp Your place in our souls.

\* \* \* \* \*

We adore You, gracious God, as the source of all our happiness—the Author of all our blessings. Forbid that we should allow any created good to dispossess Yourself from the supreme place in our affections. May our one animating wish and longing be—to live, and walk, and act, so as to please You.

\* \* \* \* \*

What are our lives—but testimonies to Divine faithfulness? We look back with gratitude and thankfulness on a wondrous past—the innumerable mercies which have been showered upon us, and that, too, in the midst of our ingratitude and sin. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget not all His benefits! Where would we now have been, but for Your great love to us in Christ! On Him our every hope of pardon and acceptance is built.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord, enable us to manifest our love to You, by a holy walk and life, adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Give us a tender conscience, a broken spirit, filial nearness, purity of heart, consistency of

conduct, uprightness of life. Bring us under the power of renewed natures and purified affections. May all that is earthly and carnal, all that is unamiable and selfish, all that is unkind and unholy—be displaced by what is pure, elevated, lovely, and holy. Above all, may we live under the influence of unseen realities. With our faces Zionwards, may we feel that our true home is above.

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May Your sorrowing people be enabled to trust You in the dark. May they look forward to that joyous period when they shall come to stand in Your presence, and trace for themselves all the wisdom of Your now inscrutable dealings.

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Most Blessed God, we desire to approach Your sacred presence on this, the close of another day. Let our prayer come before You as incense, and the lifting up of our hands as the evening sacrifice. Enable us to have a realizing view of Your Divine Majesty. Glory be to Your Holy Name, that though Heaven is Your dwelling-place, You condescend also to make every lowly heart Your habitation. Though You are the greatest of all Beings, You are the kindest of all, and the best of all. We come, weak and helpless and burdened, to that cross where alone there is shelter and peace for the guilty. We will not cloak nor mask our manifold sins and wickedness before the face of You, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father. We would confess them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart. May Your love exercise a paramount influence over us.

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We come, poor and needy, pleading Your own gracious promise, to give "all sufficiency in all things" to those who seek You. We have no offering of our own to present at Your footstool—we have everything to receive. There is nothing between us and everlasting destruction—but Your mercy in Jesus. Wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty, our souls fainting within us—we would drink of the streams of abundant grace which flow from the Smitten Rock. Bring us to live, more

and more every day, under the constraining influence of Your love.

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Give us fresh victories over our secret corruptions. May the power of evil wax weaker and weaker; and the power of Your grace wax stronger and stronger. May we know, by joyful experience, the happiness of true holiness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Give us reverential and child-like submission to Your will. The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Finite wisdom has no place in Your dealings. Not only are all things ordained by You, but ordained in ineffable wisdom and love. May the end of Your dispensations be our growing sanctification.

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O God, You are great—and greatly to be feared. Your greatness is unsearchable. Heaven is Your throne—the earth is Your footstool. Before You, cherubim and seraphim continually cry—'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty!' Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Your glory. You are the sovereign controller of all events. You do according to Your will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. The Lord reigns. Man proposes—but You dispose! And You dispose wisely and well.

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Whatever be the sphere in which Your good providence has placed us, may it be our earnest endeavor to use our time, and talents, and opportunities for You. May it be our highest desire—to walk so as to please You. May it be our heaviest cross and trial—to incur Your displeasure. In the performance of every-day duties, let us seek to make this the directory of our conduct, "How would Jesus have acted here?"

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We come anew to You this night, weary and heavy-laden, beseeching You to grant us the blessed sense of Your forgiving mercy. We lament that we do not feel, as we ought to do—the burden of sin. Bring us in poverty of soul—in self-denying, self-renouncing lowliness, to cry out, "God be merciful to us, sinners." Show us the infinite adaptation of the Redeemer, in His Person and work, to meet all the necessities of our tried and tempted natures. May His name be as ointment poured forth. May His blood be our only plea—His love our animating principle—His glory our chief end.

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In Christ we are as secure as everlasting power and wisdom and love can make us!

\* \* \* \* \*

How, Lord, shall we come into Your presence? Our very prayers are enough to condemn us. Our purest services, if weighed in the balances, would rise up in judgment against us. We come anew in the name of Your dear Son, confessing, and desiring deeply to feel as we confess—that we are sinners and the chief of sinners. We look to Your grace abounding over all our sin—to Your infinite merit abounding over our infinite demerit—to the everlasting righteousness and faithfulness of a tried Redeemer, coming in the room of our imperfections. We would place all our sins on the head of the immaculate Substitute. He alone can bear them away into a land of oblivion, so that they can rise up to condemn us no more. We bless You that He ever lives and reigns for our justification. We rejoice to think of Him as our Great High Priest, with the names of His covenant people engraved on His heart, bearing them along with Him in His every approach to the throne. All power in Heaven and in earth is entrusted to His hands!

\* \* \* \* \*

We desire anew to bless and praise You for Your unspeakable gift—Jesus, the Son of Your love. There is not a ray of hope which visits our souls—but emanates from His cross. He is the channel of every blessing. We

rejoice to think that at this moment He is bending upon us a gracious eye from the Throne, and, with undying and undiminished love, pleading our cause. Lord, we come, casting ourselves on the fullness of Your grace in Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

May even trials and crosses become easy to us, when borne in a spirit of tranquil submission. Let us be living as pilgrims on the earth—weaned from what is uncertain and transitory here—and having our affections fixed on the things which cannot be shaken, but remain forever. Oh that Your love might be enthroned more than it is, as the ruling passion of our souls—and Your glory more the end and aim of our being. We adore you for Your free, sovereign, unmerited love in Jesus!

\* \* \* \* \*

We often confess with the lip—what the heart does not feel. We often appear to be humble, when we are not humble—when our hearts are full of self, and pride, and vainglory. We desire to come anew into Your presence, casting ourselves on the free grace, and love, and mercy of Jesus. We rejoice that in His cross all Your attributes have been magnified.

\* \* \* \* \*

Known unto You are all our varied circumstances, our peculiar trials, and temptations, and perplexities. Our every burden we cast on a faithful God. Our souls, our lives, our cares—we leave entirely in Your hands, saying, "Undertake for us."

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It is in the name, and trusting in the merits of Your dear Son alone, that we can have any confidence in approaching You. We rejoice that we have always a safe shelter at the foot of His cross. We rejoice that there, every attribute of Your nature, and every requirement of Your law, have been vindicated and magnified. Myriads are now in glory to bear witness to the

power and love of an all-gracious Savior. Save us, else we perish! There is not a sin but You can cancel—there is not the unsanctified heart which Your promised Spirit is unable to convert into a Temple of the living God. Keep us from evil; preserve us from temptation.

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May our weakness drive us to Almighty strength. Keep us, by Your grace, from an uneven walk, from inconsistency of conduct. May we be gentle, and lowly, meek, and forgiving. May we overcome evil with good.

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We pray for all in sorrow—may they look to the hand which was pierced for them, to bind up their bleeding wounds. May He who graciously said of old, "I know their sorrows," be near, with His own exalted sympathy, to minister to their varied experiences of trial.

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Give us grace to look away from our guilty selves and our guilty doings—to Him who has done all and suffered all, and procured all for us! Give us a deep and abiding sense of our vileness and unworthiness. May every sin which has usurped the throne of our affections be cast down, that God Himself may be our all in all. May we seek to imbibe more of the spirit, and to copy more of the example, of our Divine Redeemer. May we feel it to be our joy to serve Him, our privilege to follow Him, our sorrow to vex and grieve Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

O Lord, we desire to approach the footstool of Your Throne, adoring You as the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who neither faints, nor is weary. Your wisdom never fails. Your resources never exhaust. The kindness of the kindest knows a limit, but Your kindness knows no limit. With Your friendship, and favor, and blessing—we are rich—whatever else You may take away.

\* \* \* \* \*

We come unto You this morning in the name of Your dear Son. Our sins reach unto the clouds. Blessed Savior, we would bury all our transgressions in the depths of Your forgiving mercy. We seek no other refuge, and need no other refuge—but You. Relying on Your finished work, we can look calm and undismayed on the unknown future. We can cast all our cares, as they arise, upon You, feeling not only that You care for us—but that You make these cares Your own.

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During the past day, You have been compassing our path—shielding us from danger, and guarding us from temptation. None is so able, none is so willing, as You are—to befriend and guide us in every perplexity. We can experience no real deprivation, and mourn no real loss—if we have You. May we ever be near the atoning fountain; continually hidden in the clefts of the Rock.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have nothing of our own but our sins; all that is good in us comes from Jesus. Have mercy upon us, for His sake, in whom You see no iniquity.

\* \* \* \* \*

We desire to take Jesus as our pattern in all things. When in need of direction or guidance in any duty, or under any perplexity—may this be ever our inquiry, "How would the Savior have acted here?" May we imbibe His unselfish spirit. May life be a more constant effort than it has been, to crucify self and to please God.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sanctify sorrow to the sons and daughters of affliction. Let them not murmur under Your Fatherly chastisements. Let them own Your Sovereignty, and take comfort in the thought that You do all things well; seeing no hand but Yours in the bestowing and removing the gifts of Your bounty. "The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad!"

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How unworthy are we to come to Your footstool. There is enough of coldness in our prayers, of insincerity in our repentance, of imperfection in our best attempts to serve You—that were we tried by these, we must have perished forever! Our prayers themselves require forgiveness. In You alone are our persons and our services rendered acceptable. We flee to the foot of Your cross. Here we are safe, though everywhere else we be in danger. Let us exercise a simple confidence and trust in Your completed work. We bring every sin to Your atoning blood. May we have You in all, and for all the duties and difficulties and trials of life.

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Your thoughts are not as man's thoughts. Had they been so, the sinner, with all his deep depravity, and unutterable vileness, and base ingratitude, would not have been thus welcomed, pardoned, accepted, loved. Bring us to live more constantly and habitually under the constraining influence of Your Redeeming love. May these souls of ours, ransomed at such a price—be dedicated to Your service.

\* \* \* \* \*

Keep us from pride—the master passion of our fallen and corrupted natures.

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Our wishes, our desires, our interests, our joys, our sorrows, our friends—we leave entirely to Your sovereign care and disposal.

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May we be melted under a sense of our own great unworthiness, and of His amazing love.

\* \* \* \* \*

May sin be more dreaded, and holiness more loved.

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Lord, break the world's alluring spell; strip it of its vain fascinations! May we give evidence to all, that we are living under the power and influence of gospel principles and renewed affections. And even though trial and sorrow should at times be our allotted portion, may we seek to show that the grace of God can impart an inner sunshine which no outward darkness can obscure. May we increasingly experience—that the way of holiness is the way of happiness.

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O Eternal, Everlasting God, Fountain of all happiness, God of all grace--we desire to acknowledge anew with grateful hearts, Your undeserved mercies. You have made our cup to overflow with blessings. From the very threshold of our being, You have been our Protector and Guardian. You have shielded us from unknown dangers. You have warded off unseen calamities. No earthly friend could have loved us and cared for us, like You! Helpless, hopeless, friendless, portionless by nature, we cast ourselves on Him who is help and hope and friend and portion--to all who seek Him. We have no trust but in His work. Sprinkle these polluted hearts with His pardoning, peace-speaking blood. Hide us in the clefts of the smitten Rock. Safely sheltered there, we can make the triumphant challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" We mourn our distance and estrangement from You, our guilty departures, our coldness and insensibility. Let Your wondrous patience and kindness lead us to repentance. Turn us, Lord, and we shall be turned! Draw us and we shall run after You! May every thought, and affection, and feeling, and temper--be brought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus. May we love what He loves, and hate what He hates. May we know the happiness of true holiness; and rejoice in doing Your holy will.

# First week

## SUNDAY MORNING

Almighty God, we desire to approach Your sacred presence, thanking You that You have permitted us to see the light of another day. This is the day which You have made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Draw near to us, as we draw near to You. Inspirer of all good thoughts, pre-occupy our hearts with Yourself. May we walk in the light of Your countenance. Your favor is life. Nothing but the possession of Your infinite love can satisfy the longings of our souls. Whom have we in heaven, O God, but You? and there is none upon earth we would desire besides You.

We acknowledge our unworthiness; the depravity and corruption of our nature; the sins and shortcomings of our practice. We have to mourn over unrequited kindness, resisted warnings, unimproved providences, neglected privileges. For the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of Your love—have mercy upon us miserable offenders! We bring our guilt to the Great Atoning sacrifice. We bring the burden of daily transgression to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. In Him, receive us graciously and love us freely. Hidden in the clefts of the smitten Rock, may it be ours to take up the song of the pardoned, "O Lord, we will praise You; though You were angry with us, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort us! Behold, God is our salvation—we will trust, and not be afraid—for the Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song, He also is become our salvation."

Lord, subdue within us whatever is inconsistent with Your mind and will. Put a sanctified restraint on our thoughts; repress all vain imaginations; crucify every remaining sin. May our hearts become holy temples, and our lives living sacrifices. Let eternity exercise a more commanding influence over us, and true religion become more "the one thing needful." May we grow in meek and childlike submission to our Heavenly Father's will. Breathing a perpetual heavenly-spirit on earth, may we be fitted for that rest which shall never be broken, which awaits Your people in the Kingdom of the Redeemed.

We pray for those who are this day to minister to us in the sanctuary. Give them an unction from the Holy Spirit. May every impression of Your Holy Word be rendered permanent and saving. May we be in the Spirit on Your day, and enabled to pitch our tents near the gate of Heaven. Bless any who may be prevented waiting along with us in the courts of Zion. May those who tarry at home divide the spoil; and know that You are not confined to temples made with hands. Bless us as a family and household. As we are knit together in earthly ties; unite us in the better bonds of the everlasting covenant. Make us partakers of the resurrection-life of Your people; that, though death may sooner or later separate us here, we may meet at last where separation is unknown. We commend all belonging to us to Your sovereign care. May the pillar of Your presence go continually before us.

We pray for the poor, the afflicted, the bereaved, and the dying. O Comforter of all who are cast down—heal their sorrows, bind up their wounds. To the friendless—prove a Friend. In the multitude of their thoughts within them, may Your comforts delight their souls. Hear us, gracious God, for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and in whose most precious name and words we pray.

## SUNDAY EVENING

Heavenly Father, we desire to close Your holy Sabbath, looking up to You for a blessing. You have been as a pillar of cloud before us this day. You have again spread for us a table in the wilderness. We have again seen Your glory, as we have seen You hitherto in Your Temple. As the shadows of night are falling around us, do the "Sun of our Souls," be near us—dispersing the darkness of sin, and giving us the inner sunshine of Your presence and love. We entreat You graciously to forgive the many sins that have mingled in our efforts to serve You. If we were to be judged by our holiest seasons, how would we stand condemned! Look not on us as we are in ourselves; but behold our shield—look on the face of Your Anointed. We would cleave to Him as our only Savior.

Enable us to testify the reality of our faith, by bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. May Your love reign paramount within us—may there be no competing affection. May we seek to show by our pure lives



and consistent walk, that we have been imbibing the Savior's spirit. Take these unworthy, erring hearts; sanctify and seal them for Yourself; make them Yours—Yours only, and Yours wholly, and Yours forever. Clothe us with the armor of righteousness; enable us to exercise a holy jealousy over ourselves, lest things temporal should tend to exclude things eternal. May it be our great aim to be progressing in the Divine life. Let us ever hear Your voice saying, "Arise, and depart—for this is not your rest—it is polluted!" May our habitual response be, "We desire a better country—that is a Heavenly one."

We pray for a world lying in wickedness. How long shall the wicked—how long shall the wicked triumph? Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance, feed them also, and lift them up forever. Bless abundantly the preaching of Your holy word. Glorify Yourself in the salvation of sinners. May the hands of Your ministering servants be made strong by the arms of the mighty God of Jacob. May bows, this day, drawn at a venture, have carried the arrow of conviction or of comfort to many hearts.

We entreat You to take under Your protection all our beloved friends. It is our privilege to bring them in prayer to the mercy-seat. Though unable to meet within the same sanctuary, it is our comfort to know that no distance can estrange from You—that You can, at one and the same moment, be present within every gate of Zion and every dwelling of Jacob. We commend both present and absent ones to the gracious Shepherd of Israel. Be to them as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Draw near to the sons and daughters of sorrow. Give them everlasting consolation and good hope, through grace. Let them bow to Your will. Let them see no hand in their trials but Yours; saying, in lowly submissiveness—The Lord gave, and the Lord has a sovereign right to take away.

We thank You for Your many mercies still vouchsafed to us. Watch over us during this night. Grant us the sleep of Your beloved; and when we awake, may we still be with You. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior; to whom, with You, the Father, and You, O Eternal Spirit, one God, be ascribed all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, world without end. Amen.

## MONDAY MORNING

O Lord, we desire to draw near into Your gracious presence, in the name of Him whom You hear always, and in whom You are ever well pleased. Give us grace to approach You, under a deep sense of our unworthiness. We have nothing to plead in extenuation of our guilt. We have sinned against light and privilege, warning and mercy. We mourn our deep-rooted depravity, our constant proneness to depart from You, the feebleness of our faith, the coldness of our love, the imperfection of our best services, the mingled motives in our holiest duties. We come anew, casting ourselves on the infinite fullness of our adorable Redeemer. In Him is all our hope. Give us, out of His inexhaustible treasury, grace upon grace. Transform us into His image. May we seek to walk in His footsteps, and to copy His example; bearing continually about with us the dying of the Lord Jesus, may the life also of Jesus be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

O God, let it be our constant aim and endeavor to know what Your will is; and may we have strength given us to obey it. May we cheerfully submit to whatever You see fit to appoint. May we murmur at nothing that brings us nearer You. Conscious of the supreme enthronement of Your love in our hearts, may we be enabled to avow, "Lord, You know all things, You know that we love You." Loving You supremely, take what You will away—we must be happy.

God of Bethel, dwell in this household; make every member of it a member of the household of faith. Bless all our friends. Those who are absent—Lord be near them. Those that are in distress—Lord comfort them. Those that know You not—Lord reveal Yourself unto them. Those that are Your children—increase their devotedness.

Prosper Your cause and kingdom everywhere. Let Satan's kingdom be destroyed, and the kingdom of grace advanced—the kingdom of glory hastened. Give to each of us this day Your gracious benediction; and when our days on earth are finished, may it be ours to spend the years of Eternity in the full vision and fruition of You, our God, through Jesus Christ our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## MONDAY EVENING

O God Almighty, who has mercifully shielded us during another day, we desire, before we retire to rest, to commit ourselves, soul and body—to You in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. Glory be to our God for all the blessings of the light; and now that the curtain of evening is again drawn around us—keep us beneath the shadow of Your wings. It is You, Lord, alone—who makes us to dwell in safety. We acknowledge You as our daily Benefactor and Guardian. Yours is the air we breathe, the food we eat, the raiment with which we are clothed. But far above all Your other gifts, we bless You for Jesus, the Son of Your love. He is our only Savior. We would exult anew, in the assurance, that His blood cleanses from all sin; and that He is able to save to the uttermost. We rejoice to think that He is at this moment pleading in behalf of His people—the wonderful Counselor, the Prince who has power with God, and must at all times prevail.

May we be clothed with His spirit, as well as with His righteousness. Make us like Him, patient and meek, thankful and forgiving. Take away all pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy—all absorbing love of the world. Set our affections on things above; and enable us to pass through temporal things, so that finally we lose not the things that are eternal. May we seek to be zealous in the performance of our relative duties. Let us feel that whatever talents You have given us, are trusts to be laid out for Your glory, and to promote the well-being of those around us. Whatever our hand finds to do, may we do it with our might. Visit Your church—the vineyard which Your own right hand has planted. May grace, and mercy, and peace be upon the Israel of God. Bless our own household; may every heart within it be given unto You. Let none of us leave for a dying hour, what may be best done, and it may be, only done—now. May all our friends at a distance enjoy the friendship of an ever-present God. Guard them, guide them, provide for them. May we walk together the same Zionward path; and at last have an abundant entrance ministered into that better land, where You shall rest in Your love, and rejoice over Your people with singing. Hear us, for the sake of Your dear Son, our only Lord and Savior

## TUESDAY MORNING

O Lord, You are from everlasting to everlasting, God. You inhabit the praises of eternity. Your glories no time can impair. Your mercy endures forever. Who shall not fear You and glorify Your name—for You only are holy! We bless You for the Son of Your love. We rejoice that for every sinner casting himself on His fullness and sufficiency there is a gracious welcome. Reposing on His completed work, we can triumphantly say, 'Return unto Your rest, O our souls, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with us.' O God, enable us to enter into this rest. Forbid that we should delay availing ourselves of Your offered mercy. May every other question be subordinated to this, "What must we do to be saved?" May we know that Jesus is in every respect, the Savior we need. Let us experience the blessedness of living with Him in holy fellowship, upon Him with unfaltering dependence, and to Him in undivided consecration of soul and body. Enable us to search out the plague of our own hearts. Laying aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us, may we run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus. May whatever pleases Him please us. May we find all our happiness in inquiring what the will of the Lord is. And knowing it, let us joyfully pursue our heavenward way.

While thankfully employing the manifold gifts of Your bounty, O God, keep us from the abuse of any, by allowing them to supplant the Giver. May they be hallowed and sanctified to us by connecting them with Yourself—the Source and Bestower of all!

Bless all in sorrow. Descend, Lord, to heal their wounds. May they bow with unrepining submission to Your will, and say, 'It is good for us that we have been so afflicted!' May those laid on beds of languishing, manifest patience under bodily pain and infirmity, glorifying You in the furnace-fires. May useful lives be spared, and the dying be prepared for death. Hasten the promised times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. May Jesus take to Himself His great power and reign. Let the day soon come, when He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth, when all kings shall fall down before Him, and all nations shall serve Him. Restrain human passion. Scatter the people who delight in war. Give peace in our time, O God, for there is none other that fights for us, but You alone, O God.

Bless this family and household: may we all know the happiness of the Shepherd's fold. May the lambs of the flock be gathered in His arms and carried in His bosom. Take us this day under your peculiar care. May the Lord bless us and keep us. May the Lord cause His face to shine on us. May the Lord be gracious unto us and give us peace, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## TUESDAY EVENING

O God, we come into Your blessed presence this evening, anew to thank You for the unmerited tokens of Your love and mercy. On You we are dependent for all the temporal bounties of our lot, and for all our higher and more enduring spiritual privileges. If we have been enabled this day to resist temptation, and to fight against sin, it is Your grace which has enabled us to do so. We are weak and helpless. Our hearts are ever dealing treacherously both with ourselves and You. The good that we would do—that we don't do. And the evil that we would not do—that we do. Nothing else but the merits of our blessed Redeemer can save us. We take refuge in the fullness of His grace—in the completeness of His finished work. Our souls would magnify the Lord, our spirits would rejoice in God our Savior; for He who is mighty has done great things for us—holy is His name.

And while we look by simple faith to His atonement, as the alone ground of our justification, we would look to The Holy Spirit to work in us all the good pleasure of His goodness. May He mold us after the Savior's image, and conform us to His will—enabling us to live under the sovereignty of that lofty motive, to walk and act so as to please Jesus. Lord, give us supreme love to You; fervent charity to all men; faithfulness to whatever trust Your Providence has confided to us. May we seek to live, as we would wish we had been living, when we come to a dying hour.

Have mercy on the sons and daughters of sorrow. Let them own Your hand in all their troubles; let them rest in Your love. Let them rejoice in Him who is the Brother born for adversity; and if they see not the bright light in the cloud, may they trust Your own promise, "At evening time, it shall be light."

Promote Your cause and kingdom in the world. Pour out upon Your ministers, and missionaries, and churches, Your health-giving grace. May the time soon come when all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God. Bless our own immediate dwelling, and the circle who are nearest and dearest to us. May the peace of God, which passes understanding, keep their hearts. Number them with Your saints in everlasting glory. Be with us throughout this night. May our bodies be refreshed with sleep; and may we awake to the duties of a new day with our minds stayed on You. And unto Your great name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we ascribe blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, now and forever. Amen.

### WEDNESDAY MORNING

O God, You are great, and greatly to be praised. Your greatness is unsearchable. You are the God of our life, and the length of our days. You appoint all our lot—and settle the bounds of our habitation. The Lord reigns! Nothing befalls us but what is the dictate of infinite wisdom and everlasting love! How unvarying has been Your kindness. We have to tell of mercy upon mercy; and there are no small mercies with You. All Your mercies are great, for the least of them are undeserved.

We thank You especially for that mercy which transcends all others in magnitude—we bless You for a full and everlasting salvation in Jesus. May we be justified freely by His grace. May He be formed within each of us, as the hope of glory. May we be enabled, with some good measure of triumphant confidence, to say—We know whom we have trusted, and we are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him against the Great Day.

Anew this morning, as your Redeemed children, we would present our souls and bodies as living sacrifices to You. May we feel this to be a reasonable service. May all that is displeasing to You be disowned. May new-born spiritual principles ripen into holy tastes and permanent habits. May we add to our faith, virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity. May all anger, and wrath, and malice, and evil speaking be put away from us—as we remember Him who was meek and lowly in heart—who when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judges

righteously.

Lord, be our covenant God. Your presence hallows all joy, sweetens all sorrow, and takes the sting from every thorn and every cross. If we have Your favor and blessing, we are independent of every other. Our heart and flesh may fail, but You are the strength of our heart and our portion forever. We pray for the afflicted. Be a father to the fatherless—a husband to the widow—the stranger's shield—and the orphan's stay. Let every heavy-laden one know that it is Your gracious hand that appoints every burden. Give us all grace to be resigned to Your will. May this be the only breathing of our hearts, "Father, glorify Your name!"

Sanctify our home. May our children rise up and call You blessed! Pour Your rich grace early into their hearts; may they be led to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. May this be esteemed their highest privilege—that they are the children of their Father in Heaven. Hasten, Lord, Your kingdom. Bring in Your ancient people with the fullness of the Gentile nations. Prosper the labors of Your missionary servants; may the Lord stand by them and strengthen them. May they not be afraid of evil tidings; may their hearts be fixed, trusting in You. May each of us feel that in our several spheres, we have some work to perform for You. Let the solemn word of warning be ever sounding in our ears, "The night comes when none of us can work." Oh, may we be diligent, that we may at last be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and all that we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

#### WEDNESDAY EVENING

O God, we desire to come into Your presence on this the close of another day. We beseech You to fill our souls with some befitting conceptions of Your greatness—Your divine majesty and glory. What mercy it is in You to bend Your ear to our feeble lisps of praise, and to listen to the pleadings of such unthankful and unholy hearts. We could not have ventured to approach Your footstool, but for Your great love to us in Christ Jesus. Through Him alone it is, that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts are rendered acceptable in Your sight! In Him we are pardoned, justified, adopted, saved! In Him we are kept, sanctified, sealed. In Him we shall at last be presented without fault

before Your throne. Blessed Savior, we may well entrust our eternal all to Your keeping. Our needs are numberless, but Your help is infinite! You are waiting to dispense needed grace, and for every time of need. Lord, we feel that we require grace for everything; there is not the hour or moment we can live independent of You. Carry on Your own work within us. Hold us up—and then alone we shall be safe.

May the fruits of righteousness abound in us. Purge us, that we may bring forth more fruit. Forbid that we should be content to remain sapless, unproductive cumberers, occupying ground in Your vineyard, but yielding no revenue of glory to You. This is Your will concerning each of us—even our sanctification. Oh! You who search Jerusalem with candles—search our hearts; see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the everlasting way. Lead us not in our own way. Often would we choose what would be detrimental to our best interests. You choose for us. Let us rejoice in You as a rich Provider, and an all-wise Provider; who will give us nothing, and deny us nothing, but what is for our good.

We commend to Your protection all near and dear to us this night. Keep them, gracious Father, under the shadow of Your wings; bless them and make them blessings. May they never lose sight of the chief end of their being—to glorify You on earth, and to enjoy You forever in Heaven. Bless our own family. We thank You for all Your great goodness in the past. The Lord has been mindful of us, and He will bless us. Do good in Your good pleasure unto Zion. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. May every branch of Your Church be blessed with tokens of Your favor. Revive Your work, O God, in the midst of the years.

Take the charge of all of us this night. It is You who give Your beloved sleep. It is You, Lord, who alone makes us to dwell in safety. Spare us, if it be Your will, to see the light, and to enjoy the comforts of another day. And all this, we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

#### THURSDAY MORNING

Most Blessed God, You have again permitted us to see the beginning of another day. We desire to accept every new morning as a fresh gift of Your love. We are the constant beggars on Your bounty. If Your



sustaining arm be withdrawn—we instantly perish.

We are unworthy to come into Your presence. There is nothing so amazing as Your condescension towards us. You might righteously leave us to perish in our sins, and make us the monuments of Your wrath. But in the midst of 'deserved wrath' we have received Your 'unmerited mercy'. We come to You through the new and living way of access. We cast ourselves on the full, free, and everlasting salvation of our adorable Redeemer. Our souls would magnify the Lord. Our spirits would rejoice in God our Savior, for He who is mighty has done great things for us. Holy is His name. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up for us an horn of salvation in the house of His servant David.

May each of us have a personal and a saving interest in all those covenant blessings which He died to purchase, and which He lives to bestow. May we take Jesus as ours alone—ours wholly—ours for every step Zionwards—ours until we reach the gates of glory—yes, ours forever and ever!

We are grateful to You, O God, for all Your goodness to us in the past, we desire to commit ourselves to Your guidance for the future. It is our blessed consolation that no good thing will You withhold from those who walk uprightly. We will hear Your voice behind us saying, "Fear not, for I am with you! Be still; and know that I am God."

Lord, impress us with a sense of the value of time. May we seek to make the most of the present fleeting hours. Let us live under the power of holy principles; that so, when called to give an account of our stewardship, we may do so with joy and not with grief.

Bless all near and dear to us. Our friends we commend to Your friendship. Let not one of them be found lacking on the Great Day. May the Eternal God be their refuge, and underneath them the Everlasting Arms. Sympathize with those in sorrow. May all Your poor afflicted ones take refuge in the assurance that You are the God of Providence; that whatever befalls them is Your doing; and that the sunshine of Your countenance can make up for every loss.

Spare useful and valued lives. Unto the Lord our God belong the life and death. Sanctify us now before You, in body, soul, and spirit: seal us unto the day of eternal redemption. We ask these, and all other blessings, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Savior, to whom, with You the Father, and You, ever blessed Spirit—be ascribed all praise and honor and glory, now and ever. Amen.

#### THURSDAY EVENING

O God, we desire to come into Your blessed presence, thanking and praising You for the renewed experiences we have enjoyed of Your faithfulness and love. Another day of mercy and grace has been added to those which have preceded it. We rejoice to look back on the way by which You have hitherto led us; protecting us from danger, supporting us in trouble, disappointing our fears, and realizing our hopes. We bless You for our place in life, for our preservation, for all the blessings of this life. But above all, for Your inestimable gift—Jesus, the Son of Your love. Enable us this evening, like the believing suppliant of old, to touch by faith the hem of His garment, and to receive the benediction, "Your sins are forgiven—go in peace."

We would seek to draw fresh supplies from the fountain of His grace; knowing that He is equal for all exigencies; and that there is a fullness in Him to meet all our needs, and minister to all necessities. It is our desire, blessed God, to lie passive in Your hands. Whether prosperity or adversity be ours, whether You chasten us or gladden us—oh bring us nearer Yourself.

Save us from the bitterest of all trials—the removal of Your love—the loss of Your favor. Strengthen us for duty; guard us from temptation; and enable us so to pass through things temporal—that finally we lose not the things that are eternal. When we cannot understand Your dealings, may faith repose in Your unchanging faithfulness. May we feel assured that all things are working together for our good; and that what is mystery here—will be unfolded and unraveled hereafter. Now, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Meanwhile, may we walk less by sight and more by faith. May we live under the powers of a world to come—and be looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the Great

God our Savior.

Take each and all of our family under Your special guardianship. You are better than the best of earthly parents—be the guide and protector of our children. May they be the children of the living God. May their hearts be early given to You; and by holy and obedient lives, may they glorify their Father in Heaven. We pray for Your cause and kingdom everywhere. Give Your Son the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. May He take to Himself His great power, and reign. May there soon be voices heard saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the one Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Lord, all our desires are before You; all our hope is in Your mercy; all our happiness is in Your favor. Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent; and when our evenings and mornings shall merge into everlasting day—be still our All in all; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Savior. Amen.

#### FRIDAY MORNING

O Lord, we adore You as God over all, blessed for evermore. You are the former of our bodies and the Father of our spirits—the God in whom we live, and move, and have our being. All that we are, and all that we have, is derived from You. There is nothing we possess that we have not received from You. Oh give us grateful hearts; feeling that the least blessing we enjoy, is unmerited on our part, and a gift of free grace on Yours.

We come anew, glorying in the work and merits of our adorable Surety. In Him, You are waiting to be gracious, not willing that any should perish. May the unwavering eye of faith be kept, Blessed Savior, on You, and on Your completed salvation. We have nothing to pay, You have paid all. We have nothing to procure, You have procured all; everlasting forgiveness, everlasting righteousness, union and communion with You now and evermore. To You we look for everything. Save us from every false confidence. Elevate our affections: purify our desires: make us more heavenly minded. Let us, while living in the world, live above it. Let Your Spirit be our teacher; let Your Word be our guide; let Your Will be our

sovereign motive; let Your glory be our ultimate end. May we make true religion more the one thing needful. Let us not remain content with an indefinite hope of final safety.

As pilgrims and strangers on the earth, may we declare plainly that we seek a better country. Give us a beneficial sense of the uncertainty of life. May we feel that the great secret of existence is to be in habitual preparedness for a dying hour. We know not what may be before us. Oh to be living so, that the step between us and death—may be a step between us and glory. Bless all connected with us by whatever tie. May we be able to love all our friends in You. May there be bonds uniting us together which will survive the uncertain ones of earth. We commend to Your special care those who are absent. May an ever-present God be with them. Guide them by Your grace; defend them from temptation; fit them, by the beneficial dealings of Your providence, for the varied duties of the present life, and for the joys of Your Heavenly Kingdom.

Bless the lambs of Your flock. We commend them to the Great Shepherd of the sheep, beseeching Him to bring them early to His fold, and to make them perfect to do His will. We put ourselves, blessed God, into Your hands. May all our doings this day, begun, carried on, and ended in You, redound, through Jesus, to Your praise and glory. And all we ask is for His sake. Amen.

#### FRIDAY EVENING

O Lord our God, we desire to bow this night at the footstool of Your Throne, adoring You for all Your great goodness. What are we—that we should be permitted to come into Your presence, or take Your thrice blessed name into our sinful and polluted lips? You have not dealt with us after our sins, but according to Your rich and undeserved mercy. You are the Author of our being, and the source of all that makes existence joyous and happy; Your favor alone is life. Bereft of You, we are bereft indeed.

Enable us to feel our sins—to have a deep and heartfelt consciousness of their heinousness in Your sight. We are apt to cloak and mask them; we are reluctant to make a frank and unreserved confession of them all. Lord, give us grace, in true penitence and contrition of heart, to cast

ourselves, unworthy, on the infinite worthiness of Him who is all-worthy. For His sake, receive us graciously—love us freely. We rejoice to meditate on the love which He had for us from all eternity. We rejoice to think that it is the same at this hour that it was then—unchanging, everlasting.

O great Angel of the covenant, accept of these our unworthy petitions: perfume them with the incense cloud which ascends continually from Your hand. Sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit. Make us altogether what You would have us to be. Let us be willing, if need be, to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow You. May we be among the number of those who follow the Great Captain of their Salvation wherever He sees fit to guide them. Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, may we go on our way rejoicing. Bless Your own cause and kingdom everywhere. Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; feed them also, and lift them up forever.

We would look forward to that time when earth shall become one consecrated temple—when every day shall be a Sabbath—every heart an altar—every tongue praise—and Jesus Christ owned as Lord, to the Glory of God the Father. God of Bethel, God of all the families of the earth, who has promised to show mercy to thousands of those who love You—do bless our household, and give to us the heritage of those that fear Your name. Bless our children; may they early know those ways which are pleasantness, and those paths which are peace. May they be enabled, by Your grace, to resist temptation, and to beat down Satan under their feet. Bless young and old, master and servants. Let none of us be left to seek for the first time a living Savior at a dying hour. But laying hold of Him now, may we be found at last unto praise and honor and glory at His appearing and Kingdom.

We would retire to rest this night, reposing in Your gracious providence; beseeching You, if it be Your will, to spare us to see the light and to enjoy the comforts of a new day; and all we ask is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our only Savior. Amen.

SATURDAY MORNING

Most blessed God, whose nature and whose name is Love; we, Your dependent creatures, desire to draw near this morning to the footstool of Your throne. Vouchsafe us, we beg, Your presence and blessing. We would begin the day with You. We would enter on all its duties supplicating Your favor; feeling that Your favor is life, and that all the happiness the world can give, cannot compensate for its loss. We approach with deep humility. Lord, we are vile, what shall we answer You? Ours is not only the 'guilt of rebels', but the 'ingratitude of children'. We have abused the care and the kindness of the best and most beneficent of Parents. We have too often known our doings to be sinful, and yet we have persevered in them. We have too often known what was in accordance with Your will, and yet we have not followed it. We have reason to marvel that You have borne with us; that You have not, long before now, consigned us to the doom of the cumberer. We would look away from ourselves, to Your dear Son, our Redeemer; feeling that if we are saved it must be by Him alone. May He be formed within us the Hope of Glory. By His grace and Spirit, may we be brought under the power and influence of renewed affections.

Let us seek to manifest the reality of our union with Him, by bringing forth all the peaceable fruits of righteousness—adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. May ours be an active and devoted obedience. Expel from us whatever is unholy. Let us live as the expectants of a glorious immortality. Lord, may we habitually remember, that here we are pilgrims and strangers. Oh be our constant Guide in all our journeyings. Let us never go but where You direct: let us never hesitate when and where You call us. Let us not arraign the allotments of Your infinite love. May we feel that all the circumstances of life—its joys and its sorrows—its comforts and crosses—are ordained by You in adorable wisdom. Our way might have been hedged up with thorns, but it has been full of mercy.

You have been our help, leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation. Give us to see written over every hour of the future, "So shall your strength be." Bless all near and dear to us. Defend our friends by Your mighty power. Surround them with Your favor as with a shield, and bring them at last to the enjoyment of Your immediate presence. Bless especially those now before You. May our children be the objects of Your

love, and the subjects of Your grace; may they be enabled to say, 'Our Father, You shall be the guide of our youth.' We commend each and all of us this day, to Your keeping. Let us enter upon its duties with our souls stayed on You. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus, in whose name and words we would further call You Our Father.

## SATURDAY EVENING

O God almighty, Sovereign Proprietor of the Universe, bow Your ear to the voice of our supplications, as on this the close of another day—when another week of mercy is receding—we venture to approach the Throne of the heavenly grace. Father, we have sinned against Heaven and in Your sight, we are no more worthy to be called Your children. Long before now might You have turned away Your face from us, and our prayer from You. We are wonders to ourselves, that we are still spared. What guilt on our part—yet what forbearance on Yours! What aggravated ingratitude on our part—yet You are waiting to be gracious and willing to pardon! What sins against privilege, slighting Your warnings, grieving Your Spirit; and yet for all this, Your hand of mercy is stretched out still. We desire to remember how it is we are still permitted to approach Your footstool. It is through the Son of Your love; for His work's sake—for His obedience and righteousness' sake. But for Him, we must have been forever without God and without hope.

We plead anew His finished atonement. We would glory in nothing but His cross. Give each of us to enjoy the blessedness of the assurance that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Let us not rest, until, with personal, appropriating faith, we can say, "We know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him." May Your Holy Spirit take of the things that are Christ's, and show them unto our souls. May He touch us as with a live coal from off the altar: purifying our affections, elevating our desires; making our hearts living temples, with this as their superscription, "Holiness unto the Lord."

If led often to mourn over our dullness, and coldness, and lukewarmness here, may it be ours, O God, to look forward to that day, when there shall

be nothing to mar the joy of entire and undivided consecration to Your service.

Bless our beloved friends both near and at a distance; may they all be near to You. May there be no separation between them and Your favor. Any who are in sickness, Lord, support them. Any who are in bereavement, Lord, comfort them. Pity a careless, ungodly world—arrest the spread of impiety—establish the reign of purity and righteousness. Give us grace to be faithful among the faithless; resolving that, whatever others do, as for us, we will serve the Lord.

Be with us this night. Watch over us as we sleep. May night after night of refreshing slumber, be to us the emblem of that better rest above, when, in perfect security, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Prepare us for the services of Your day. Attune our minds for its sacred duties. May each recurring Sabbath, as it brings us nearer Eternity, find us better prepared for it; and all that we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **Second week**

### **SUNDAY MORNING**

Most Gracious God, who has in Your good providence again permitted us to see the light of Your holy day—draw near to us in Your great mercy. You have dispersed the darkness of another night; may the Sun of Righteousness arise upon us with healing in His beams. May our fellowship be with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We thank You for the stated return of this season of sacred rest, when, away from the feverish anxieties of earth, we may give heed to the things which concern our everlasting peace. We bless You for the great truth which this day more especially commemorates.

We bless You that Jesus has burst the bands of the grave, and triumphed over principalities and powers. The Lord is risen! He has satisfied all the



demands of Your holy law; He has finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. The Lord is risen! He has fully vanquished our foes; Satan's power is overthrown, and the kingdom of heaven is opened to all believers. We take refuge anew at the foot of Your cross, bringing our infinite unworthiness to Your infinite merit and all-sufficiency. Wash us, blessed Savior, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Receive us graciously. Love us freely. Being made free from sin, and having become the servants of God, may we have our fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life.

Lord, give us grace ever to walk as the heirs of immortality. Let us bear about with us the recollection that time is short. Let us live as if each Sabbath possibly be our last. May a sacred spirit pervade this day's services. May we glean from these, for the week on which we have just entered, what will form a preservative against the world's snares, and dangers, and temptations.

We pray for those who profane Your holy name; who reject the offers of Your grace, and continue in alienation and sin. Before the door of mercy is forever shut—turn them from their wickedness; point them to Jesus, and show them that "neither is there salvation in any other." Unfold to them the fearfulness of meeting You as they are, unpardoned and unreconciled. Let them know the preciousness of that precious assurance, "He is able to save unto the uttermost."

O Source of all consolation, draw near to the afflicted. Abundantly sanctify Your dealings. Stay Your rough wind in the day of Your east wind. May this thought silence every murmur, "He who spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." God of Bethel—bless all related to us by the bonds of earthly affection. May they evermore have affiance in You. Shepherd of Israel—You who lead Joseph like a flock—may they be safe under Your gracious guidance, and repose in Your love. Bless our children. Pour Your rich grace into their hearts. Let them not fall a prey to the allurements and enticements of a present evil world, but may they walk as seeing You, who is invisible.

Bless Your holy Church throughout all the world. Clothe Your priests with salvation: let Your saints shout aloud for joy. Own, this day, Your own appointed instrumentality in the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. May Your word prove quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. It is not by might, nor by power, but by Your Spirit, O Lord Almighty. Let Your mercy, O God, be upon us, according as we hope in You. And when our Sabbaths on earth are ended, may ours, at last, be an unending Sabbath in Your presence and favor. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and to whom with You, the Father, and You, O Eternal Spirit, one God, be ascribed, all blessing and honor, and glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

### SUNDAY EVENING

Almighty and Everlasting God, we desire to draw near to the footstool of Your throne of grace, thanking You for all the mercies of the past day. We will set up our Ebenezer of gratitude, and say, "The Lord has helped us!" We bless You that You have permitted us once more, on earth, to enjoy the rest and quiet of Your holy Sabbath; that again we have been invited to hush worldly disquietudes and cares, and have our minds stayed on You. Pardon whatever You have seen amiss in our attempts to serve You. May our persons and our services be accepted in the Beloved. May they be perfumed with the fragrance of His adorable merits. We desire anew this night to repair to His cross. We disown all trust in ourselves. Other refuge, other righteousness, we have none, and we need none. We cleave, in simple dependence, to the work of Jesus. We are safe only when clinging to the horns of the blood-besprinkled altar.

Lord, give us to know the happiness of being at peace with You through Him. Every blessing, temporal and spiritual, we desire to connect with Your favor. Every rivulet of creative, providential, and redeeming mercy—we would trace to Yourself, its great fountain-head. Every cross and loss we would submit to, as the appointment of Your wisdom. The roughest path we would tread—if You lead us there! May all Your dealings toward us issue in our sanctification. May our hearts be becoming holier and purer. Transform us more from day to day, and from week to week, into the image of Your Son; that we may at last be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

We pray for all who may have worshiped with us this day. May grace, mercy, and peace be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Bless Your ministering servants, more especially those who have spoken unto us Your word. Out of the abundance of their hearts, may their lips speak; may they ever hear the sound of their Master's footsteps behind them. Extend Your cause and kingdom everywhere. May the glorious Gospel of the grace of God speedily triumph over all the pride, and reason, and will-worship, and delusion of man. Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause. May it long be our privilege to repair without hindrance to the living waters of Salvation. Continue to us the bliss of unbroken Sabbaths, and quiet sanctuaries, and peaceful communions.

Bless our family. O You who have brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep—through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, make us all perfect to do Your will, working in us that which is well pleasing in Your sight. May we be found at last among Your sealed ones—members of the white-robed multitude who shall dwell with You forever. May our friends who are at a distance from us, be protected and guarded by Your gracious providence. The Lord watch between them and us when we are absent one from another—may their names also be written among the living in Jerusalem. Teach us all to be walking as pilgrims and strangers on the earth—sojourners as all our fathers were—looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God our Savior. May we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear—prepared for whatever may be Your will concerning us—for health or for sickness—for joy or for sorrow—for life or for death. Have mercy on the afflicted. Let the prayer of faith save the sick. Spare useful and valued lives. Let not the sun of life go down while it is yet day; but turn the shadow of death into the morning. Comfort the bereaved. Sustain the dying. Prepare them for their great change.

Through another night, be pleased to grant us Your guardian care. Shepherd of Israel, may Your wakeful, sleepless eye be upon us. May the shadows of this night's darkness be to us only as the shadow of Your wings. Shield soul and body by Your mighty power. Lying down in Your fear, may we awake in Your favor, fitted for the duties of a new day. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Amen.

## MONDAY MORNING

O Lord, You are glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders! Blessed be Your name, that though You are the Greatest of all Beings, You stoop to hear our prayers, and listen to our needs. It is because You are God and not man, that we are still in the land of the living, and in the place of hope. Day by day have our sins incurred Your righteous displeasure. We have left Your bounty unacknowledged, and Your love unrequited. We have to tell of our unthankful hearts, ungodly lives, deep corruptions. Lord, impress us with a sense of our guilt. Let us feel it is no light matter to sin against You, and to be living in unconcern of Your manifold mercies. Sinners—the chief of sinners, we would look away from ourselves—to the work and merits of our Great Redeemer. Blessed Savior, You are waiting to be gracious. All the mighty load of our guilt we would transfer to You, our adorable Surety and Redeemer. You have already satisfied the requirements of a righteous law. As our Kinsman and Elder Brother, You are now within the veil; as willing as You ever were—to save unto the uttermost.

While we look to You as the Lord our Righteousness, may we know You also as the Lord our Strength. May we imbibe more of Your blessed spirit. May we be learners at Your feet—learning to deny ourselves, and to bear all that You chose to appoint, without a murmur: knowing that it must be for the best. May we be enabled to follow Your footsteps and to reflect Your purity. May Your love animate us in the discharge of every daily duty. May we act under the feeling that "we are not our own—but are bought with a price." Consecrated soul and body to the Lord who died for us, may life become a tribute offering to Your praise.

Preserve us from the snares of a wicked world. Strengthen us in seasons of weakness. Protect us in the hour of temptation. To us to live may it be Christ; so that when called to leave this scene of probation, we may die in peace, and have our souls filled with hopes of heaven.

Lord, bless our friends—reward our benefactors—forgive our enemies. May our household ever have Your gracious benediction resting upon it. May every member of our family, near and at a distance, have the seal of

God on their foreheads, and be numbered with Your saints in glory everlasting. Pour Your rich grace into the hearts of the young. Let them not allow golden moments to pass by misimproved. Let them know the happiness of living under Your continual favor.

Look in kindness on the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, the bereaved, and the dying. Accommodate Your grace to their varied needs and trials. Let them take refuge in the mercy of Him who is chastising them; rejoicing that all which concerns them and theirs, is in Your hands and at Your disposal. Hear these our humble prayers; when You hear, forgive; and grant us an answer in peace, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

#### MONDAY EVENING

Most gracious God, Father of all mercies, God of our salvation—we desire, this evening, to approach the footstool of Your Throne of Grace. We would end another day of mercy with the offering of grateful hearts. What shall we render unto You, for all Your benefits to us? Never for a solitary moment have You withdrawn from us Your hand of love. We rejoice that we have such a God on whom to cast our cares; and who has given us, in the past, so many wondrous proofs, that You continually care for us. We desire anew to look to the merits and righteousness of Your dear Son. His blood has washed guilty thousands; and it is still free to us. We take refuge in the assurance, that coming unto You through Him, confessing our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.

Take these hearts of ours and make them Yours. May our inmost thoughts, and desires, and purposes, be dedicated to Your glory. May we be living as the expectants of immortality; walking worthy of You unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good word and work. Feeling our responsibilities as the servants and stewards of Your household, may our time and talents be more laid out for You, that when Jesus comes, He may receive His own—with interest.

Bless all the family of the afflicted. God of all consolation, bind up their wounds. Keep them from a murmuring spirit, under dark dispensations. Let them know and believe that infinite love is in all Your arrangements;

that finite wisdom has no place in Your chastisements; that He with whom they have to do, cannot do wrong. Lord, give us all this lowly spirit of submission to Your will. Whether You chasten us, or gladden us; whether prosperity or adversity be our portion—oh bring us nearer Yourself! May Your dealings serve to trim the lamp of faith and keep it brightly burning.

Extend Your covering wings over all whom we love. May none of our friends be unbefriended by You. Bless our own immediate household; sprinkle its lintels with the covenant token. Write the names of our children in the Lamb's book of life. May each of us at last be included in the invitation, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" May our lives now be hid with Christ in God, that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we may also appear with Him in glory!

Regard with favor Your Church everywhere. You have promised abundantly to bless Your Zion and to satisfy her poor with bread. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Those who love You shall prosper. Scatter the darkness that is now brooding over the nations. Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause.

Watch over us during the unconscious hours of sleep. May we close our eyes at peace with You, and awake refreshed and invigorated for the duties of a new day. Hear these our unworthy petitions; and when You hear, forgive, and grant us an answer in peace, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## TUESDAY MORNING

O God, You are the KING of Kings, and Lord of Lords. We draw near unto You, this morning, rejoicing that we have a Throne of Grace, to which, through the merits of Your dear Son, our only Savior, we can ever repair. Before we enter on the day's duties, may a shower of heavenly blessing descend to refresh our souls. If we are blessed by You, we must be blessed indeed. We confess our great unworthiness; our sins of thought, word, and action; our sins of omission and commission; our sins against light and privilege, warning and mercy. We repose every burden upon Him

who has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Blessed Jesus, we would dismiss all our own misgivings, and cast ourselves on Your promised grace and strength. We rejoice in You as "God only wise;" mighty to save; to whom all power has been committed in Heaven and in Earth. You do all things well, and nothing but what is well. Enable us to rely on Your guiding arm, and to merge our wills in Yours. Hold us up—and we shall be safe. O God, forbid that, in the midst of earth's cares and pursuits, we should ever lose sight of our immortal destinies. Let us imbibe more of the pilgrim spirit; having our eye upwards, and our footsteps onwards.

Let us not forfeit fleeting opportunities. In every providence may we hear, as it were, an angel's voice saying, 'Why are you sleeping? arise! let us be going—the night is far spent, the day is at hand.' May each of us in our varied spheres be led to ask, 'Lord, what would You have me to do?' Let us all seek to do something for You. If we are forbidden to do much in the way of active service, may we endeavor to manifest the power of a holy life, and to leaven our daily duties with Your fear.

Bless the members of this household. May they walk before You with a perfect heart. May the young be enabled to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things. Bless our native land. Bless all in authority. May the time soon come, when the crowns and scepters of the earth shall be cast at the feet of Him who is KING of Kings and Lord of Lords. Hasten the day, when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. We commend ourselves, O God, to You. Guide us—provide for us—go before us. Let us have the conscious assurance that You are for us—and then none can be against us. We have no care of our own, we cast our cares upon Him who cares for us. Prepare us for whatever You have in store for us. For joy or for sorrow; for health or for sickness; for living or for dying. And all we ask is for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## TUESDAY EVENING

O Lord, we desire to draw near to the footstool of Your Eternal Throne. We bless You for all the renewed proofs we have had, during another day, of Your care and kindness. While others have been pining in sickness,

laid on beds of languishing and death—we are still among the living to praise You. Oh may the lives preserved by Your bounty, and dedicated to Your praise. Far above all Your other gifts, we bless You for Your inestimable love in the redemption of Your people by the Lord Jesus, for the means of grace and for the hopes of glory. We bless You that Your well-beloved Son has brought in an everlasting righteousness; that He has magnified Your law and made it honorable; that He has dispelled the darkness of the Valley of Death; and opened the gate of Heaven to all believers.

We desire to make acknowledgment of our unworthiness and guilt. We will not cloak nor disguise our manifold and multiplied transgressions. Discover to us the depths of our depravity; unveil to us the secret pride and selfishness and worldliness of our hearts. Deliver us from our besetting sins. Let us see our vileness, in the cross of Your dear Son. May the power of sin wax weaker and weaker: may the power of Your grace within us wax stronger and stronger. May our souls become living altars, and our lives living sacrifices. Yielding our members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness, may we serve You in newness of spirit.

Lord, we know the proneness of the heart to put off the solemn consideration of the one thing needful. Many have lived with good intentions, and yet have perished. Let it not be so with us. Let us not be slumbering and sleeping. Let us not be among the number of presumptuous ones, who are saying, "The Lord delays His coming." May we be ever ready, ever watching; having our loins girded and our lamp burning, so that when the summons shall be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes," we may be ready with the response, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him!"

May the seal of Your covenant mercy be on all now before You—parents and children, young and old. May every night, as it gathers around us, remind of the approach of the long night of death; and may it lead us to think of the awaking time in that glorious morning, when, in the full vision and fruition of You, our God; earth's shadows and darkness shall forever flee away. Bless the aged; may Your favor and love rest on the hoary head as a crown of glory. Bless the young; may they early know what are alone the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace. Bless the



afflicted—the bereaved—the solitary—the forsaken—the dying. May they know Him who has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

Give us all grace to trust You implicitly, even when Your dealings cross our own purposes and frustrate our wills. Let us obey no will but Yours. Following Your guiding footsteps, may we say, "The Lord is our Shepherd, we shall lack nothing." Watch over us, blessed Lord, this night. May Your good angels encamp round about us. Give us refreshing sleep, even the sleep of Your beloved. May we lie down to rest in Your fear, and awake in Your favor. All that we ask, is in the name of adorable Redeemer.

### WEDNESDAY MORNING

O God Almighty—KING of Kings and Lord of Lords. You are the Maker, Proprietor, and Judge of all. We approach You as our Covenant God and Father; trusting in the name and merits of our adorable Redeemer. What mercy it is that we have such a refuge to repair to! that amid our own faithlessness we can ever repose in the faithful saying, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." We renounce all dependence on ourselves. Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—we take Him as all our salvation and all our desire.

We are no judges of what is good for us; what blessings are best to receive what mercies are best withheld. We often seek what is not for our well-being; but we rejoice in the infinite wisdom and tenderness manifested in Your allotments. Let us ever feel, regarding each and all, "This also comes from the Lord Almighty." May we seek in every providence to hear Your voice; and in every event to read Your will. May we live conscious of the predominating motive of love to You. May we feel Your favor lightening every cross and lessening every care. Lord, give us more of the simplicity of children. Keep us watchful, and humble, and thankful. Keep us from pride and vainglory; from envy and uncharitableness; from evil surmisings and unkind insinuations; from all that would exalt us—at the expense of others. May we learn to esteem others better than ourselves.

Look in great mercy on the family of sorrow; be their support and consolation. Teach us all, in the midst of health and strength, to prepare

for the hour of adversity. There is nothing permanent here on earth. May we know what it is to look to a strong tower which cannot be shaken. We are in our true rest—if we are in You. You gladden our pathway through life. May we be lighted through the dark Valley, with the lamp of Your love; and enjoy through eternity Your beatific presence.

God of Bethel, we commend our family, and all related to us by whatever tie, to Your care. Seal to them a saving interest in the everlasting covenant. Bless the young. May they know the happiness of those who fear You. Great Shepherd of the sheep, preserve them from the snares of a world lying in wickedness. May they be early taught of God, and so inherit Your own promise to such— "Great shall be the peace of Your children." Take us under Your care this day. May all our duties be gladdened with a sense of Your presence and love. May we have a single eye in all we think, and say, and do, to the glory of our adorable Redeemer.

#### WEDNESDAY EVENING

O Eternal, Everlasting God, Fountain of all happiness, God of all grace, we desire this evening to acknowledge anew with grateful hearts, Your undeserved mercies. You have made our cup to overflow with blessings. From the very threshold of our being, You have been our Protector and Guardian. You have shielded us from unknown dangers; You have warded off unseen calamities. No earthly friend could have loved us and cared for us like You. We bless You for the liberty of access we enjoy at all times into Your sacred presence; to make known our varied needs, and to ask for mercy to pardon and for grace to help in every time of need. We need everything; but You have promised in Jesus, Your own dear Son, to make us perfect and entire, lacking nothing. Helpless, hopeless, friendless, portionless by nature, we cast ourselves on Him who is help and hope and friend and portion to all who seek Him. We have no trust but in His work. Sprinkle these polluted hearts with His pardoning, peace-speaking blood. Hide us in the clefts of the smitten Rock. Safely sheltered there, we can make the triumphant challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

We mourn our distance and estrangement from You; our guilty

departures; our coldness and insensibility. Let Your wondrous patience and kindness lead us to repentance. Turn us, Lord, and we shall be turned; draw us and we shall run after You. May every thought, and affection, and feeling, and temper, be brought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus. May we love what He loves, and hate what He hates. May we know the happiness of true holiness; and experience somewhat of the joy of angels—in doing Your holy will on earth as they do it in Heaven. Fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bless our family and friends; may our household be one of the dwellings of the righteous. May every member of it be zealous in the promotion of Your glory, remembering that the day is coming when we shall be called to give an account of our stewardship. Our moments are gliding swiftly by. Forbid that any among us should be found seeking oil when the lamp of life is going out. Do, even now, Lord, from Your own mercy-seat, replenish our empty vessels. Let us be living with a dying hour in view. Let us die daily to sin, and live daily to You; that when the hour of our earthly departure arrives, it may be to us the birthday of a new life, in everlasting glory. We ask all these manifold blessings, for ourselves and for others, in the name and for the sake of our adorable Lord and Savior, who is now within the veil; and where, with You, O Eternal Father, and You, O ever-blessed Comforter, Three in One in covenant for our redemption, He ever lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

#### THURSDAY MORNING

O God, You are great, and greatly to be feared. Your greatness is unsearchable! Another day has in mercy dawned upon us. We desire to enter on its every duty with our minds stayed on You. May all our doings be ordered by Your governance; that we may be enabled to perform those things that are pleasing in Your sight, and to promote the glory of Your holy name. We bless You for all the loving-kindness You have hitherto made to pass before us. From our earliest infancy Your protecting hand has been around us—shielding us from unseen dangers, and showering us with the blessings of Your goodness. And we are, this morning, once more gathered around the footstool of Your throne, the monuments of Your patience, and forbearance, and mercy. We bless You especially for Jesus,

and His great salvation. We rejoice that He is both willing and able—and as willing as He is able—to save unto the uttermost: that all are alike warranted and welcome to repair to the fountain He has opened for sin and for uncleanness.

Lord, give us grace to improve our manifold privileges while we have them. Let us not remain asleep in sin—enjoying the means of grace, yet trifling with convictions. May we "occupy" until Jesus comes, seeking to witness for Him by the testimony of a consistent life. May this be our habitual feeling—"what kind of people ought we to be, in all holy conduct and godliness?"

We commend to You all the family of affliction. Take them under Your special protection. It is behind the cloud You often speak most tenderly, teaching precious lessons, which in no way else could be learned. Let Your suffering people wait until they hear the "still small voice." Calling upon You in the day of trouble, and experiencing Your delivering hand, may they be led to "glorify You." Teach us all, in the season of health and strength, so to live, that when the night comes, we may be enabled to resign the trust of existence to its great Proprietor—and to say, "Now, Lord, let You Your servant depart in peace."

Bless our beloved friends; forbid that any one of them should be found missing on the day when You make up Your jewels. May they all be set as gems in Immanuel's crown, and be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at His second appearing. Bless Your Church. Imbue her ministers and people with the healthful spirit of Your grace. Extend everywhere the boundaries of the Redeemer's kingdom. The harvest truly is plenteous, and the laborers are few. We ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers to His harvest. Be with us, O God, this day; may the everlasting arms be underneath and round about us; may we be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. We look forward with joyful hearts to that better world, where we shall have no contrariety of mind to You, when we shall be with You, and like You; serving You without distraction; and where sin and sorrow will be no more felt or dreaded. And all that we ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THURSDAY EVENING

O God, we bless You for Your great mercy; that we are again permitted to approach the throne of Heavenly grace. Many have been summoned this day into eternity. We have been spared. The shadows of night have again fallen around us in peace. We thank You for the continuance of health and strength, and many outward blessings. We thank You for the crowning mercy of all—Jesus, Your unspeakable gift. We rejoice that You are in Him reconciling the world unto Yourself. Thousands of needy, outcast sinners have repaired to Him, yet still the Fountain of His grace is free as ever. This is still His name and memorial "Mighty to save." Lord, we come to You, with all our demerits, casting ourselves on His infinite and all-sufficient righteousness. Wash every guilty stain away. Forgive our sins of omission, and our sins of commission. May the Angel be caused to fly swiftly and touch us in this the time of our evening oblation. One day's transgressions are enough to condemn us. There is nothing but Your sacrifice and continual intercession, O Great High Priest, between us and everlasting destruction. It is Your all-powerful grace alone which, from hour to hour, averts from us temptations we could have no strength in ourselves to resist. Hold us up—and then alone we shall be safe.

In all time of our tribulation—in all time of our wealth—in the hour of death—and at the day of Judgment, good Lord, deliver us. Come forth out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Instruct the ignorant—reclaim the wanderer—save the obdurate and impenitent. Convince them, before it be too late, that there is no loss comparable to the loss of the soul—to be left hopeless and portionless forever. I Point them to the Lamb of God—cleanse them in His atoning blood—and make them the monuments of Your mercy.

Look down in kindness on all who are in affliction. Draw near to those who may be bereaved of near and dear friends; be to them better than a son or daughter, or any earthly relative. May they know that He is faithful who promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Bless all our beloved friends; write their names in the Lamb's Book of life; may the pillar of Your presence go before them night and day continually. Bless our own family; may every name be set in the breast-plate of the Great High Priest. Bless our children; may they all be taught of the Lord, and great shall be their peace. May we walk before You with a perfect heart,

and as seeing Him who is invisible. Take the charge of us during the silent watches of the night; when we awake, may we awake to praise You, and to use the powers and the talents committed to us, to Your glory. And all that we ask is for the sake of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Savior, Amen.

## FRIDAY MORNING

Our Father in Heaven, what are we, sinful dust and ashes, that we should be permitted, morning after morning, to take Your name into our lips? We bless You for all the unmerited proofs of Your kindness. From our earliest years we have been the recipients of Your bounty. With all a Father's tenderness You have watched over us. We have received, and we are still receiving, of the Lord's hand "double for all our sins." We draw near in the name of Him whom You hear always. "Nothing in our hands we bring"—we would cling simply to His cross. Empty us of all self-righteousness; let us feel our deep creature-destitution; let us stand alone in the finished righteousness of the All righteous One. We have forfeited all claim to Your favor. We have turned aside like a deceitful bow; and if we had been left to our own treacherous hearts and wayward wills, we must long ago have perished!

We desire to look to Your grace in the future. There is not a corruption we have within us, which Your grace is unable to subdue; there is not a cross or trial, or care, but Your grace will enable us to endure. Whatever Your leadings may be, let us cheerfully confide in their wisdom and faithfulness. We are poor judges of what is good for us, but we can trust You in all things—in what is great and what is small, what is dark and what is bright, what is joyous and what is grievous. We rejoice that all is in Your hands, and all is for the best.

May we ever regard sin as our greatest trial. When temptation assails us, grant us power to resist it. May our lives, our tempers, our affections, our desires—be regulated by the example of our divine Lord and Master. Give us His meekness of spirit—which no provocation could ruffle; His forgiveness of injuries—amid ingratitude and scorn; His calm, uncomplaining submission to your holy will.

Bless all the sons and daughters of affliction. Let them view every dark providence as an errand of love in disguise—a messenger sent from the Eternal Throne, to minister to them who are heirs of salvation. May we all live as pilgrims on the earth. Make us fit for the time when our earthly work and warfare shall cease, and when, in unspotted sanctity, we shall stand without fault before the Throne. Lord, take the charge of each and all of us. Vouchsafe to keep us this day without sin. May all our doings be ordered by Your governance, to do that which is well-pleasing in Your sight, through Jesus Christ our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

### FRIDAY EVENING

O God, we desire to draw near into Your sacred presence, thanking You for the mercies vouchsafed to us during another day. Many of our fellow-men have, since its commencement, passed into eternity, their season of grace fled forever. We are still spared. The living—the living—we shall praise You, as we do together this night. We bless You especially for the tokens of Your mercy in Jesus. We bless You for His full, free, everlasting Redemption. Oh set us in the Clefts of the Rock, and hide us there. Let us feel the all-sufficiency and security of His covenant love. For our infinite need—there is Your infinite fullness! For our infinite danger—there is Your infinite salvation! Lord, give us grace to live worthy of our high calling. Enable us to adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior. Let His love be the animating principle in our actions. Let our chief delight be to serve Him. May our greatest pain be to vex and grieve Him. May our affections be more elevated—our eye more single—our lives more consistent—true religion more the one thing needful.

May we rest in the confident persuasion that You do all things well—and nothing but what is well. Enable us to exercise a child-like acquiescence in Your dealings. These may at times be mysterious; but when Your purposes of love are at last unfolded, we shall dwell with adoring gratitude on all the way by which You have led us. Give us grace, meanwhile, to be living as dying creatures. Let us never forget our pilgrim character, nor dream away, in guilty unconcern, our fleeting moments.

Look in kindness on this household; may they all have the rich and enduring heritage of those who fear Your name. Bless the children; may

they be taught of God. May we all serve the Lord Christ, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with You their God. Bless all our absent friends. Be ever present with them. If there be any still at a distance from You, Lord, bring them near, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Let not one be found missing at the Great Day.

We pray for the Church universal. O Great High Priest, do feed every golden candlestick with the oil of Your grace. Be the "all in all" of every church, as of every believer. Promote union among Your true people. Let them not live apart, looking coldly and distantly on one another. Feeling that they are all one in Christ Jesus, may they love one another with a pure heart fervently; and thus the Church on earth may be a dim reflection of the glorious Church of Your redeemed in Heaven. Watch over us during the silence and darkness of another night; and spare us, if it be Your will, to see Your light, and to enjoy the comforts of another day.

Hear these our humble supplications. And all that we ask is for Jesus' sake Amen.

## SATURDAY MORNING

Almighty God, we desire to come anew this morning into Your sacred presence. Glory be to Your holy name, that we are again permitted to draw near to the footstool of Your Throne, and to call You "Our Father." Our pillow last night might have been a pillow of death. We might have found ourselves this morning righteously exiled from Your presence—knowing You only as "the consuming fire." But You have lengthened out our day of grace. We are still among the living to praise You. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. Anew we draw near to the opened fountain—anew, gracious Savior, we plead Your spotless merits. It was Your own errand of wondrous love—that which brought You from Your Throne in Heaven—to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Do usher us into the glorious liberty of Your people. May we feel that there is no real happiness independent of You—that all else are walking in a vain show—seeking rest but finding none. But if You make us free, we shall be free indeed.



Enable us to take You as the strength of our hearts and our portion forever. Keep us from the absorbing power of earthly things. Let us not be dead to You, and alive only to a dead and dying world. Let not the seen and the temporal, eclipse the higher and nobler objects of faith. May we live under the powers of a world to come—loving You now with some feeble and imperfect foretaste of that love with which we trust we shall love You forever. We rejoice to believe that we are entirely in Your keeping. If You send us prosperity, Lord, hallow it. If You send us adversity, Lord, sanctify it. May all things work together for our good.

We commend to Your gracious providence those in whom we are more specially interested. Take our friends under Your special care. Sanctify them by the indwelling of Your Holy Spirit; prosper them outwardly and inwardly; may all their duties and occupations be leavened with godliness. Bless our own immediate circle—may God be our Father, and Jesus our elder Brother, and Heaven our everlasting home. Bless our children—defend them from a present evil world. Let them early know the happiness of seeking and finding the one thing needful. May we all fulfill the duties of our calling, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but doing the will of God from the heart.

May Your kingdom come. Support and strengthen all devoted laborers in heathen lands. May Your Spirit come down as rain upon the mown grass—as showers that water the earth. Sanctify affliction to all in sorrow. Let Your suffering people rejoice in the assurance that Your chastisements are the dealings of a Father; that the furnace is lighted to purge away the dross, and refine and purify for glory. Direct, control, suggest, this day, all our thoughts, purposes, designs, and actions, that we may consecrate soul and body, with all their powers, to the glory of Your holy name. And all that we ask or hope for, is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

#### SATURDAY EVENING

O Lord, we desire to approach Your Throne of Grace this evening, adoring You as God over all, blessed for evermore. Draw near to us as we draw near to You. We bless You that You have spared us during another day, and another week. Let us end every day and every week as if these might possibly be our last; as if the midnight cry might break upon our

ears, before we see another rising sun, or a returning Sabbath.

We come, acknowledging, that it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed. We are nothing and we have nothing. By nature and by wicked works, we could expect nothing but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Each day is a witness against us. We confess our proneness to depart from You the living God—our reluctance to render to You the tribute of our undivided homage and love. Lord, we bring our sins and lay them on Him, who, as our Surety-Substitute, was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. We bring our weakness to His Almighty strength; we bring our insufficiency, that we may receive from Him, the promised "all sufficiency in all things." We rejoice, blessed Savior, to think of You, as sympathizing with us in all our trials and perplexities and temptations; keeping us as the apple of Your eye, and feeling what is done to Your people as if it were done to Yourself. Enable us to repose in the infinite fullness of Your grace and mercy; to experience the blessedness of an unreserved, unwavering trust and confidence in Your dealings. Let us confide to You the allotment of all that befalls us. Let us harbor no suspicions of Your faithfulness or love. Let us commit the unknown future to Your better wisdom, saying, "Teach us the way wherein we shall walk, for we lift our souls unto You."

O God, while we pray for ourselves, we would remember before You, all whom we ought to bear on our hearts, to the Throne of Grace. Prosper Your cause and kingdom in the world. Bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end: may the Prince of Peace take to Himself His great power and reign. Bless the young; may they spring up as willows by flowing streams. May they be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. Bless the aged; may they be gathered into the garner of the Great Farmer, as the shock of corn in its season—full of years and ripe for glory. Bless all Your faithful ministers—especially those who, tomorrow, are to proclaim Your holy word. Strengthen them outwardly and inwardly, as they go forth, bearing the precious seed; and on the great reaping-day of judgment, may they come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Bless us as a family; parents and children. Let us all own one common Master—one Father in Heaven. Be with us throughout the silent watches of the night. Whether we wake or sleep, may we live together

with You. There is no darkness to us if You are with us. Defend us during the unconscious hours of slumber—that we may rise on Your Holy Sabbath fitted for duty, happy in the assured continuance of Your favor and love. And all we ask is for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## **Third week**

### **SUNDAY MORNING**

Almighty and Everlasting God, we bless You for the return of another day. We thank You that we have been spared during another week, while many of our fellow-men have been called to render in their final account. Give us filial nearness to You our Father in Heaven. Let us hear Your gracious benediction, "Peace be unto you." May Your own Day be begun, carried on, and ended, under a sense of Your presence and favor. May all worldly thoughts, and cares, and disquietudes, be laid aside, that we may enjoy a foretaste of the everlasting blessedness which is at Your right hand. We come, gracious Lord, relying on Your mercy and love in Jesus. We would direct the undivided eye of faith to His finished salvation; rejoicing that it is as free as ever, and as efficacious as ever.

Fill us with a deep and humbling sense of our guilt. May we mourn an erring past, and receive grace for an unknown future. We would seek this day anew to enkindle our love at Your holy altar. Inspire us with resolutions of new obedience. May we no longer live unto ourselves—to the world—to the creature—to sin. May the great Creator and the adorable Redeemer occupy, without a rival, the throne of our affections. Let us cultivate a holy fear of offending You. Let us no longer continue in guilty estrangement, forfeiting Your favor and our own true happiness. May the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit, given unto us.

We desire to remember in Your presence, all in whom we are interested.

Bless Your people, this day, throughout the Christian world; may multitudes be added to the Church, of such as shall be saved. Strengthen Your ministering servants; may they have singleness of eye, and singleness of aim, in the proclamation of Your holy word. May many careless souls be arrested; may weak ones be strengthened; may sorrowing ones be comforted; may the weary and heavy-laden obtain rest. May a Sabbath-spirit follow us all throughout the week; and may this day—the memorial of the Savior's Resurrection—be to us also a pledge of the everlasting rest which remains for Your people in glory.

We commend our dear friends especially to Your protection. May they, too, be in the Spirit on the Lord's day; may they call and find the Sabbath a delight. Keep them, good Lord, by Your mighty power. May they live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God our Savior. Bless the members of our family circle; keep them ever near to You. May our children be the peculiar care of the great and good Shepherd. May they know early the safety and happiness of His fold; make them to lie down in the green pastures; lead them by the still waters. Sanctify trial to the sons and daughters of affliction. May they bow in submission to Your sovereign appointments, saying, "Even so, Father! for so it seems good in Your sight." Lord, take the charge of us; and when Your will concerning us on earth is completed, take us to dwell with Yourself in everlasting glory; and all we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## SUNDAY EVENING

Praise waits for You, O God, in Zion, and unto You shall the vow be performed. O You who hears prayer, unto You shall all flesh come. You never have said unto any of the seed of Jacob, 'Seek my face in vain'. Your thoughts to us are unchanging thoughts of love. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. We approach You on this the evening of Your holy Day, acknowledging our great unworthiness. Fill us with a deep sense of our guilt. We have not the humbling consciousness we ought to have of our exceeding vileness. We are apt to ourselves, if not to You, to plead vain excuses for our sins. Forgive us, O Lord—forgive us all, for Your dear Son's sake. Wash these crimson and scarlet stains away, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Let us know more and more

the preciousness of the faithful saying, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Enable us to live as Your redeemed children. As He who has called us is holy, so may we be holy in all our lives. Put Your fear in our hearts—not the fear of torment, but the child-like fear of offending so kind a Father—so gracious and forgiving a Savior.

Blessed Lord, make these unworthy hearts of ours Your temple—holy altars of gratitude and love. May our lives form a continued thank-offering for Your manifold mercies. May we count it our highest privilege, as well as our sacred duty, to walk so as to please You; ever maintaining the attitude of waiting and expectant servants, who are seeking to "occupy" until their Lord comes. Keep us from inactivity and sloth. Let our loins be girded and our lamps burning. Let us be growing in faith and love—in charity and meekness, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

Father, glorify Your name. Darkness is still covering the lands, and gross darkness the people. May the time to favor Zion, yes, the set time, speedily come. Revive Your work in the midst of the years; in wrath, remember mercy. We pray for all in affliction. O You who are the healer of the broken-hearted, the comforter of all who are cast down—impart to every sorrowing, bereaved spirit, Your own everlasting consolations. You are seated by every furnace. May all Your suffering people come forth as gold tried in the fire; and so be found at last unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

We commend our family and household to Your care. God of Bethel, God of our Fathers, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, be the covenant God of all near and dear to us. Whether they be now present or absent, may they all be near and dear to You. Keeper of Israel, be their Keeper; guide them, guard them, sanctify them; use them for Your service here, and bring them to the enjoyment of Yourself hereafter. Take us under Your providential care this night. May no unquiet dreams disturb our repose. When the gates of the morning are again opened, may it be to hear Your benediction and blessing, "Fear not, for I am with you." And all that we ask is for the sake of Him whom You hear always; and to whom, with You, the Father, and You, O blessed Spirit, one God, be everlasting praise, honor, and glory, world without end. Amen.

## MONDAY MORNING

Almighty God, we desire, on this the morning of a new day, to approach the footstool of Your Throne of grace. You are glorious in Your holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders. Your eternity no finite mind can fathom. Your purposes no accident can alter. Your love no time can impair. We adore You as the God of our life; moment by moment we are dependent on Your goodness; if You withdraw Your hand, we perish. And yet, O Lord, we have not been living habitually mindful of You. We have too often taken our blessings as matters of course. We have had unthankful spirits in the midst of daily tokens of unmerited mercy. Above all, we have been living in guilty forgetfulness of Your dear Son. We have not been remembering as we ought, that but for Him and His wondrous grace, we must have perished everlastingly. We have not felt, as we ought, the attractive power of His cross. Other lords have had dominion over us. The love which ought to have reigned paramount, has been displaced by other affections. We have been "minding earthly things;" too often careful, and troubled, and concerned, about what will perish with the very using. Lord, have mercy upon us. Melt our hard and obdurate hearts; renew them by the indwelling of Your gracious Spirit.

Give us henceforth a more ardent ambition to serve You. May we seek to exhibit now the evidences of that spiritual life begun, which will issue in the joys of eternity. All our hope is in Jesus. Help us, blessed Savior, else we die! Give us to see the adaptation of Your character and work to all the wants and weaknesses the trials and difficulties—the sorrows and sins of our fallen and suffering and tempted natures. There is infinite merit in You to meet all the magnitude of our infinite guilt. May we exhibit more willingness to renounce all dependence on ourselves, that You may be enthroned in our hearts, as Lord of all. Make us more heavenly minded—more pilgrim-like. Our graces are feeble—Lord, sustain them. Our affections are lukewarm—Lord, revive them. Search us—try us—lead us. Use what discipline You see best: may it all result in our growing sanctification, in endearing to us Your favor, and bringing us to live under a more constant and realizing sense of the things which cannot be shaken, but remain.

We commend to You all near and dear to us. May they be shielded by

Your providence, and sanctified by Your grace. Let them repose in the plenitude of Your promises, and feel that to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Bless our own family—preserve us by Your mighty power. May we all feel that it is You, Lord, only, who make us to dwell in safety. We put ourselves, this day, and ever, at Your disposal. May the everlasting arms be around us for good; guiding through life—through death—until we are safe in glory; through Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## MONDAY EVENING

O Lord, our Heavenly Father, by whose good providence we are spared from day to day—enable us to come this night into Your presence, with hearts filled with gratitude and thankfulness for all Your mercies. We would be deeply humbled on account of our unworthiness. What are we—that we should be permitted to take Your name into our polluted lips? We have sinned, what shall we say unto You, O preserver and Redeemer of men? We have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and the desires of our own hearts unto evil. We have been rebellious, and wayward, and selfish, and unthankful. We have been living in the enjoyment of countless blessings without any due acknowledgment of Your giving hand. Your kindness has too often been abused, Your grace resisted. We have been worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for evermore. Lord, we flee anew to the clefts of the Smitten Rock—hide us there, from that wrath and everlasting condemnation which these our manifold sins have justly merited.

What encouragement we have to trust Your love and mercy! We can fear no evil when You are with us. We rejoice that we are in Your hands; that all that concerns us and ours, is at Your disposal. Enable us to rest, in calm composure, in Your infinite wisdom. Give us lowliness and gentleness; kindness and unselfishness. May our own wills be merged in the higher will of our Father in Heaven. Whatever be the discipline You employ, may we meekly submit to it. May we watch all Your varied teachings, and get profit and sanctification out of them all. May they bring us nearer Heaven and nearer You.

Bless our household—unite us, as a family, in the bonds of peace. May the Blood of the everlasting covenant be sprinkled on the portals of every heart. We commend our children to Your care; beseeching You early to instill the dew of Your grace into their souls, and to preserve them from all danger and sin. We pray for our native land. Bless all rulers, and judges, and senators; may they be a terror to evildoers, and a praise to them that do well. Bless the ministers of the everlasting Gospel; may they be workmen needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Whatever, O God, our station in life may be, may we seek to do something for the glory of Your Holy Name; and may we feel that Your service is self-rewarding and self-recompensing. Give us grace to work while it is called today. May our loins be girded and our lights burning; may we be like those who are waiting for their Lord when He returns from the wedding, that when He comes and knocks, we may be ready to open to Him immediately. Watch over us during this night. Grant us refreshing rest; and spare us, if it be Your will, to see the light of a new day. And all this we ask is for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and to whom, with You, the Father, and You, ever blessed Spirit, one God, be ascribed everlasting praise, honor, and glory, world without end. Amen.

## TUESDAY MORNING

O Lord, we desire to draw near into Your blessed presence on this the beginning of a new day. Accept of our morning sacrifice. Enkindle our souls with a live coal from the inner sanctuary. Throughout the day may our minds be stayed on You. May a sense of Your favor and love be intermingled with all its duties—hallowing all its pleasures, and softening all its trials. Lord, we have received our being from Your hands; may the lives imparted by You, and sustained by You, be consecrated to Your praise. May we feel the happiness of Your service, and regard nothing that this world can give, as comparable to the enjoyment of Your friendship and love. We thank You, above all, for the provisions of the everlasting covenant. Gracious Savior, Shepherd, Guide, and Portion of Your people—give us the assured sense of pardon and forgiveness through the blood of the Cross. May we have no trust in anything but in Your matchless work. May simple faith be followed by holy obedience. May we know the blessedness of a holy life; of affections once alienated



from God, now alienated from the world. May no spiritual foe be permitted to obtain the victory over us; no idol to usurp Your place in our souls. May we have strength given us either to perform or to endure Your will, and to cleave unto You with full purpose of heart.

We pray for all mankind; visit, in mercy, the dark places of the earth, which are still the habitations of cruelty. Strengthen Your missionary servants. Arouse Your churches to greater zeal in the promotion of Your cause. We ask the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers to His harvest. God of our Fathers, be our covenant God. Dwell in this family and household: hallow every heart as an altar to Your praise. Impress upon us all a family resemblance to the Great Elder Brother, our living Head in glory. Pour Your grace on the young. Each of us is advancing nearer eternity; may we seek to be becoming more and more fit for our everlasting home. Prepare us for the blessedness of uninterrupted fellowship with Yourself hereafter. Have compassion on all who are afflicted. Pity the houseless poor, the orphaned children, the widowed heart. O You, who turn the shadow of death into the morning—console and comfort them. May they adore You, alike in giving and in taking away; in the dispensing of Your gifts, and in removing them; saying, in devout submission, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

We commit ourselves to Your care. May the Lord God this day be to us a sun and shield. May the Lord give grace and glory, and withhold from us nothing that He sees to be truly good. And all that we ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## TUESDAY EVENING

O Lord our God, we thank You that we are again permitted, in the multitude of Your mercies, to see the close of another day. We desire to end it with You. Before we retire to rest, we would supplicate Your blessing and guardian care. Make not our pillow this night, a pillow of death. Give Your angels charge over us during the unconscious hours of sleep; and when we awake, may we be still with You. We adore You, gracious God, as the source of all our happiness—the Author of all our blessings. Forbid that we should allow any created good to dispossess Yourself from the supreme place in our affections. We desire to take You

as our chief joy: to subordinate to You all else besides. Guide us by Your counsel. You have been gracious to us in the past; we will trust You in the future. Let our one animating wish and longing be—to live, and walk, and act, so as to please You. And thus may each returning night, as it finds us nearer eternity, find us better prepared for the enjoyment of Your presence forever.

Wash out all the defilements of the day; all our sins of omission and commission. Accept of us in the Beloved. Adored be Your name, we have in Jesus the Physician who heals all our diseases. We stand now, as we desire to stand on a Judgment-day, clothed in His spotless righteousness.

We commend, Holy Father, to Your gracious care and providence, our family and household. May each be a member of the household of faith. If it is Your will, long continue unbroken our home-circle on earth; but let our true home be above. Let the watchword of each near and dear to us be this—"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord has said, I will give it to you." Bless the young; train them early for glory. Preserve them from the countless temptations of a world lying in wickedness.

We pray for the afflicted; we commend them to Him who knows their frame; who Himself having suffered being tempted, is able to support those who are tempted.

Let Your kingdom come. Stand by Your missionary servants; may they have many heathen souls for their hire; many, who shall be to them as a crown of joy and rejoicing on the Great Day. Known unto You are all our needs; we leave our petitions at the footstool of Your throne, assured that in You we have a rich Provider. And when the provisions of the earthly journey are needed no more, may it be ours to feed on the Bread which endures to everlasting life. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of Him whom You hear always; and to whom, with You the Father, and You, O Eternal Spirit, one God, be ascribed all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY MORNING

O Lord, You are great, and greatly to be feared. Your greatness is

unsearchable. Who shall not fear You, and glorify Your name? for You only are holy. Eternal Father, who has loved us with an everlasting love; Eternal Son, who did so freely shed Your precious blood for us; Eternal Spirit, who is waiting and willing to renew and sanctify—yes, to make these worthless souls of ours Temples to Your praise—come to us in the plenitude of Your love this morning, that we may feel it to be good for us to draw near unto God.

What are our lives, but testimonies to Divine faithfulness? We look back with gratitude and thankfulness on a wondrous past—the innumerable mercies which have been showered upon us, and that, too, in the midst of ingratitude and sin. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget not all His benefits! Where would we now have been, but for Your great love to us in Christ! On Him our every hope of pardon and acceptance is built. On His work we desire every hour to live. We rejoice that we have such a Mediator between us, who has laid His hand upon us both; that He is now pleading for us within the veil; answering for those who cannot answer for themselves. Lord, enable us to manifest our love to Him, by a holy walk and life, adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Give us a tender conscience, a broken spirit, filial nearness, purity of heart, consistency of conduct, uprightness of life. Loving You, our God, may we love also our fellow-men. Bring us under the power of renewed natures and purified affections. May all that is earthly and carnal, all that is unamiable and selfish, all that is unkind and unholy, be displaced by what is pure, elevated, lovely, and of good report. Above all, may we live under the influence of unseen realities. With our faces Zionwards, may we feel that our true home is above. Establish our hearts with the blessed truth, that the coming of the Lord draws near; that so, when the hour of death shall overtake us, it may be to us an angel whispering, "The Master has come, and is calling for you!"

Compassionate those who are in affliction. May Your sorrowing people be enabled to trust You in the dark. May they look forward to that joyous period when they shall come to stand in Your presence, and trace for themselves all the wisdom of Your now inscrutable dealings.

Have pity on the careless; reclaim the backslider; arouse the lukewarm; bring back all wanderers who may have strayed from the fold. Bless us as

a family—give us the heritage of those who fear Your name; may the absent know You as ever present—and when earth's separations are at an end, may there be a common meeting-place for us all at last, before Your Throne. Be our God and guide this day; protect our bodies from danger, preserve our souls from sin; never leave and never forsake us. And all that we ask is in the name, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

### WEDNESDAY EVENING

Most Blessed God, we desire to approach Your sacred presence on this the close of another day. Let our prayer come before You as incense, and the lifting up of our hands as the evening sacrifice. Enable us to have a realizing view of Your Divine Majesty. Glory be to Your Holy Name, that though Heaven is Your dwelling-place, You condescend also to make every lowly heart Your habitation. Though You are the greatest of all Beings, You are the kindest of all, and the best of all. We come, weak and helpless and burdened, to that cross where alone there is shelter and peace for the guilty. We will not cloak nor mask our manifold sins and wickedness before the face of You, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father. We would confess them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.

Blessed Jesus, it is our comfort to know that there is in You, all that is required to meet our needs. We rejoice to think of You as You now are—the unchanging Intercessor within the Veil, with all the might of infinite Godhead, and all the tenderness and pity of compassionate man. May it be ours to cleave to You now, and to serve You now, that we may not be ashamed before You at Your coming. May Your love exercise a paramount influence over us. Let it be our endeavor to show that we are Christians indeed—living Epistles, known and read by all men. Let us be gentle, and kind, and forgiving. Let us not be betrayed into anger or uncharitableness. Let there be no hard construction of the Divine dealings. Let patience have its perfect work. May we be willing to do all, and to bear all—for the sake of Him who has done so much and borne so much for us.

Give us a solemn sense of responsibility for every talent committed to our

keeping. Let us feel that they are not given merely to be enjoyed by us, but to be employed for You. Alive to our stewardship, may we lay them out for Your glory and for our own and our neighbors' good. Bless all our beloved friends; remember them with Your special favor: wherever they are, may they know the true blessedness of life, when spent in Your service. We pray for all poor afflicted ones. Ease their burdens; soothe their sorrows; dry their tears; enable them meekly to repose in Your covenant faithfulness and love.

And now, Lord, what wait we for? our hope is in You. Most graciously answer us, not according to our own wishes, (which are often erring, and often sinful,) but according to what You know would be best. We are poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon us. Make no tarrying, O our God. Guard us through the night. Give Your Angels charge concerning us, that they may encamp round about us. Whether we wake or sleep, may we live together with You. And all that we ask is for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and in whose most precious name and words we would sum up our petitions at the Throne of the Heavenly grace.

#### THURSDAY MORNING

Almighty Father, You are from everlasting to everlasting, God. We adore You as the Author of our existence, and the source of all our happiness. We desire to connect every blessing we possess with You; to trace every stream of providential bounty up to Yourself—the great Fountain-head. You alone, amid all changes, are the unchanging One. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but You are the same, and Your years shall not fail. We come, poor and needy, pleading Your own gracious promise, to give "all sufficiency in all things" to those who seek You. We have no offering of our own to present at Your footstool—we have everything to receive. There is nothing between us and everlasting destruction, but Your mercy in Jesus. Wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty, our souls fainting within us—we would drink of the streams of abundant grace which flow from the Smitten Rock. These have been flowing for ages past, and yet still the warrant and welcome are free as ever. "Ho! everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!"

Blessed Savior, say unto each of us, "Your sins are forgiven." Bring us to

live, more and more every day, under the constraining influence of Your love. Being made free from sin, and having become Your covenant servants, may we have our fruit unto holiness. May we be gaining fresh victories over our secret corruptions. May the power of evil wax weaker and weaker; and the power of Your grace wax stronger and stronger. May we know, by joyful experience, the happiness of true holiness.

Give us reverential and child-like submission to Your will. The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Finite wisdom has no place in Your dealings; not only are all things ordained by You, but ordained in ineffable wisdom and love. May the end of Your dispensations be our growing sanctification. Mercifully accommodate the supplies of Your grace to the sons and daughters of sorrow. May they call upon You in the day of trouble—deliver them. And though it may not be the deliverance they would have desired, may it lead them to "glorify You."

Look in kindness on our family circle; may Your name be ever hallowed here; may we know the happiness of that household whose God is the Lord. Bless our beloved friends who may be absent from us. If separated from one another now, may we meet at last in the better country, and together enter into the joy of our Lord. Be with us throughout this day. May Your peace be upon us and upon all the Israel of God. Guide us by Your counsel; strengthen us for duty; and prepare us for trial. In all our ways we would acknowledge You, and You will direct our paths. And all we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

#### THURSDAY EVENING

O God, You are great—and greatly to be feared. Your greatness is unsearchable. Heaven is Your throne—the earth is Your footstool. Before You, cherubim and seraphim continually do cry—"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty!" Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Your glory. You are the sovereign controller of all events. You do according to Your will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. The Lord reigns. Man proposes, but You dispose! And You dispose wisely and well.

We bless You, that as sinners we are permitted to come, with all the load of our guilt, to a great Savior. We will arise and go to our Father; we will say, Father, we have sinned against Heaven and in Your sight—we are no more worthy to be called Your children! For Jesus' sake, Your own dear Son—have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Behold, O God—our shield! Look upon us in the face of Your Anointed. Wash us in His blood; clothe us with His righteousness; sanctify us by the indwelling of Your Holy Spirit; and present us at last, faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy.

May the life of Jesus be made manifest in our mortal flesh. May our hearts be more in Heaven; may we bear upon us the lofty impress of those who are born from above, and for above—and who declare plainly that they seek a better country. Whatever be the sphere in which Your good providence has placed us, may it be our earnest endeavor to use our time, and talents, and opportunities for You. Our season of probation must soon be finished: may we work while it is called today, remembering that the night comes.

Look in kindness on Your Church universal. Revive Your work in the midst of the years. Return, O Lord, and visit this vineyard which Your own right hand has planted. May every branch be laden with fruit; found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Pity the afflicted: comfort all who are cast down. Be the helper of the helpless; the refuge of the distressed; the Father of the Fatherless. May all mourning the loss of beloved friends be led to bow submissively to Your sovereign will, and look forward with joyful hearts to that better time and that better world, where the fountain of these tears shall be forever dried. Bless each one of us now bending at Your footstool. May our children have Your grace poured into their hearts. May they be defended from the snares of a world lying in wickedness. Give them to know that, if they seek You early, You will be found of them, but if they forsake You, You will cast them off forever. Give us all the heritage of Your grace and love, and then we shall be rich indeed.

Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?" May we have but one wish, "Lift upon us and ours, the light of Your countenance." Be with us

this night. It is You, Lord, who alone makes us to dwell in safety. When we lie down to rest, let the curtain of Your protecting providence be drawn around us, and when we awake may we still be with You. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

#### FRIDAY MORNING

O God, our Heavenly Father, we desire, on this the morning of a new day, to encompass the footstool of Your Throne of Grace. We thank You for the guardianship and care vouchsafed during the unconscious hours of sleep. You have dispersed the darkness of another night, and permitted the sun once more to arise upon us. O You better Sun of Righteousness, do disperse the deeper darkness of sin; shine on us with the brightness of Your rising; let us enjoy this day the blessedness of peace with God. Lord Jesus, we commit our temporal and eternal interests anew to Your keeping. Soul and body are Yours by Your redemption-purchase. May they become Temples of the Holy Spirit, with this as their superscription, "Holiness to the Lord." May nothing that is unclean or that defiles enter therein.

May it be our highest desire—to walk so as to please You. May it be our heaviest cross and trial, to incur Your displeasure. Let us not be content with a name to live. Give us grace, that we may be enabled to do Your will and promote Your glory; diffusing around us, as far as we can, the influence of a holy, consistent life. In the performance of every-day duties, let us seek to make this, the directory of our conduct, "How would Jesus have acted here?" May we deal tenderly with others, remembering the tenderness of Him who would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. May we put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, affections of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any has a quarrel against any—even as Christ has forgiven us, so may we do also.

We pray for all in sorrow. O God of all consolation, be a Father to the Fatherless, a Husband to the widow, the stranger's shield, and the orphan's stay. Enable Your suffering people to rest in Your love-saying, 'The Lord's will be done.' Bless our beloved friends; if there be any among them who are still strangers to You, Lord, reveal to them Your dear Son in



all His ability to save. Preserve us as a household from danger and sin; keep us in the hollow of Your hand; and may death, when it comes, be to all of us the entrance to glory.

May Your Church universal live in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bond of peace. Revive Your work in the midst of the years; may the day soon arrive, when all ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God. We again supplicate Your presence and blessing throughout the day. May we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger, but may all our doings be ordered by Your governance, to do that which is well pleasing in Your sight. Listen, gracious Father, to these our supplications; when You hear, forgive; and grant us an answer in peace, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

#### FRIDAY EVENING

Gracious Father, we approach the footstool of Your throne this evening, adoring You as the God of our life, and the length of our days. We bless You for the many tokens of Your love daily bestowed upon us: for food and clothing—for health and strength—for friends and home—for all that brightens our pathway in life—for all that cheers and irradiates our prospects beyond the grave. Lord, how often have You disappointed our fears, answered our prayers, and fulfilled our hopes; how often has Your grace made arduous duties easy, and leveled mountains of difficulty! How often, when our hearts were overwhelmed, have you led us to the Rock that is higher than us; and given us help from trouble, when vain was the help of man!

We come anew to You this night, weary and heavy-laden, beseeching You to grant us the blessed sense of Your forgiving mercy. We lament that we do not feel, as we ought to do—the burden of sin. Bring us in poverty of soul—in self-denying, self-renouncing lowliness, to cry out, "God be merciful to us, sinners." Show us the infinite adaptation of the Redeemer, in His Person and work, to meet all the necessities of our tried and tempted natures. May His name be as ointment poured forth; may His blood be our only plea—His love our animating principle—His glory our chief end.

May our souls become holy altars, from which the incense of obedience

ascends continually. May we be enabled to do Your will and to love Your will, because it is Yours. May our eye be single that our whole body may be full of light. Oh keep us from temptation; support and deliver us when we are tempted. May we be able to say, in reply to all the seductive allurements of the Evil One, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Accomplish the number of Your elect, and hasten the coming of Your Son's kingdom. Keep Your churches faithful; may they earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints—holding fast that which they have, that no man take their crown.

Sanctify affliction to all Your afflicted people. Let them know that Your chastisements are mercies in disguise; that You watch every sheep in the fold; and when led out to the rougher parts of the wilderness, You "go before them."

We pray for those who are living without God, and therefore without hope. Let them not put off until it be too late; until they are forced, with unavailing tears, to mourn wasted hours and forfeited opportunities. Convince every procrastinator, that now is the accepted time—that now is the day of salvation. Bless us, even us, O God, who are now bending at Your mercy-seat; rebuke our faithlessness; warm our love; quicken our graces; let us live more constantly under the powers of the world to come.

Before we lie down on our nightly pillows, we would lay our sins afresh on the head of the Great Surety, that so we may retire to rest at peace with You; and if You see fit to spare us until tomorrow, may we rise fitted for all its duties. Hear these our humble supplications; when You hear, forgive; and all that we ask is for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## SATURDAY MORNING

Most Blessed God—we desire to begin this new day with You. We bless You for Your sparing mercy; in having permitted us once more to lie down to sleep, and to awake in safety and comfort; may we be enabled, as dependents on Your bounty, to receive every returning morning as a fresh pledge of Your love. We confess, O God, our unworthiness; the utter

alienation of our hearts from Yourself—the source of all life and joy and blessedness. To original sin, we have added manifold transgressions. Our iniquities testify against us. But we bless You, that where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift; for all that Jesus died to purchase, and which He is now exalted to bestow.

O Lamb of God—O spotless, sinless Victim—we rely on Your most precious Sacrifice. Bear away these life-long sins of ours, into a land of oblivion, that they may no more rise up in judgment against us. Lord, may our daily walk be more circumspect and holy. Let us follow Your will whatever it may be—though, at times, it may be at variance with our own—feeling that the Judge of all the earth must do right, and cannot do wrong. In the spirit of Him who was "silent before His shearers," may we have grace to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in Your sight."

Above all, preserve us from the temptations of a world lying in wickedness. May we seek to walk circumspectly: remembering that our time is short; that we have much to do—and a brief time for doing it. May we have our loins girded, and our lamps burning; and be like those who are waiting for their Lord's coming. We entreat You to look down in special mercy on our household. Visit us all with the love which You bear to Your own. May the young be guided through the slippery paths of youth; may they be enabled early to enlist on the Lord's side—early to seek You, that they may early find You. May all be actuated by Christian motives; performing the duties of their calling, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as doing the will of God from the heart. May we know that in keeping Your commandments there is a great reward. Bless those that are absent from us; may they be shielded by Your good providence; make them all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.

Good Lord, be with us during this day; vouchsafe us that blessing which makes rich and adds no sorrow with it; and when all our days are finished, receive us into everlasting habitations, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior; to whom with You the Father, and You Ever Blessed Spirit—be ascribed all blessing and honor and glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

## SATURDAY EVENING

O Lord, we approach Your sacred presence, on this the close of another day, and the termination of another week, adoring You for Your great goodness. We desire, with united hearts, to set up our Ebenezer of thankfulness, and to say, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us!" We are utterly unworthy of the least of all Your mercies. If You had dealt with us as we deserved, or rewarded us according to our iniquities—we could not answer for one of a thousand. Blessed be Your name, You have devised means by which Your banished ones may not be expelled from You. Through the doing and dying of Jesus, the law has been disarmed of its condemning power; all its penalties have been borne; death itself has been stripped of its terrors, and the Kingdom of Heaven opened to all believers!

Lord, after such a pledge of Your love, in not sparing Your own Son, we believe You will with Him also freely give us all things. If You send us prosperity—may we be enabled to give You the return of grateful hearts, and obedient, submissive lives. If You deny us earthly bliss and earthly happiness—let us accept the denial as the will of Infinite Goodness. We will trust You implicitly. In You we are as secure as everlasting power and wisdom and love can make us! If there be times when we are led to exclaim, "Verily You are a God who hides Yourself," we will look forward with joy to that better world, where mystery shall give way to perfect knowledge.

Lord, make us more holy; sanctify us through Your truth; keep us watchful; keep us humble; keep us from unchristian tempers; keep us from all pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy. Let us cultivate a habitual, realizing sense of Your Divine Presence. In our worldly work and avocations, whatever we do—may we do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.

We pray for others as well as for ourselves. Draw near in mercy this night to any who may be in sorrow and distress, or who may be mourning the loss of beloved relatives. Sanctify their trials; may these yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Bless our beloved friends; write their names in the Lamb's book of life. Bless us who are now surrounding Your

footstool; spare us long together as an unbroken circle on earth; and when we shall be called to leave behind us this lower valley, may we be conducted into those blessed regions, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard; where there shall be no more parting; and where we shall stand without fault before Your Throne!

We commend ourselves to Your Fatherly protection during the silent watches of the night. Do You give us tranquil repose; may we be permitted to lie down in Your fear, and to awake in Your favor—fitted and prepared for the duties and services of Your holy day. And all that we ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **Fourth week**

### **SUNDAY MORNING**

We will extol You, our God, O King, we will bless Your name forever and ever; every day will we bless You, and we will praise Your name forever and ever. We thank You for the return of another Sabbath. Again have You permitted us to awake in safety, and not suffered our eyes to sleep the sleep of death. May it prove a holy day of rest to each of us; a rest from sin and a rest in God. May we welcome with gladness of heart the return of these peaceful hours. May all vain and worldly thoughts be set aside; and may we be enabled to worship You in the beauty of holiness.

But how, Lord, shall we come into Your presence? Our very prayers are enough to condemn us. Our purest services, if weighed in the balances, would rise up in judgment against us. We mourn our guilty insensibility to sin; we do not sufficiently see its vileness; we have no depressing

consciousness, as we ought to have, of the plague of our own hearts. We have little realizing sense of the infinite purity of Your holy, righteous law. We come anew in the name of Your dear Son, confessing, and desiring deeply to feel as we confess, that we are sinners and the chief of sinners. We look to Your grace abounding over all our sin—to Your infinite merit abounding over our infinite demerit—to the everlasting righteousness and faithfulness of a tried Redeemer, coming in the room of our imperfections. We would place all our sins on the head of the immaculate Substitute. He alone can bear them away into a land of oblivion, so that they can rise up to condemn us no more. We bless You that He ever lives and reigns for our justification. We rejoice to think of Him as our Great High Priest, with the names of His covenant people engraved on His heart, bearing them along with Him in His every approach to the throne; that all power in Heaven and in earth is entrusted to His hands!

Nothing befalls us but by His direction; nothing is appointed us but what He sees to be for our good. Lord Jesus, we commit our temporal and our everlasting interests, to Your keeping. We rejoice that to You we can confidently entrust them. Undertake You for us. Carry on within us Your own work in Your own way. Keep us from all evil that is likely to grieve us. May we know the truth of Your own gracious promise, "As your day is—so shall your strength be."

We pray for all in sickness and distress; for those laid on beds of languishing; for those deprived of beloved relatives, and who are mourning those who have died. May it please You to bind up their wounds, and to soothe their sorrows: direct the unwavering eye of faith to that better world, where every weight of suffering shall be exchanged for the exceeding weight of glory, and where God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.

Bless our own family and friends, both present and absent. May the invisible chain of Your covenant-love bind us all together. Bless our children; may they be led to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and to know that the way of holiness is the way of happiness. Strengthen this day the ministers of the everlasting gospel; may great grace be imparted to them; may they come forth fully fraught with the

blessings of the gospel of peace. May all Your churches, walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, everywhere be multiplied. Promote unity and concord among Your true people. May that predicted period soon arrive, when Ephraim shall not vex Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim; when all shall see eye to eye and heart to heart.

Take us now under Your care, and enable us, whether waking or sleeping, to live together with You; and all that we ask, is for the sake of Him whom You hear always; and in whose most precious name and words we pray.

### SUNDAY EVENING

Most blessed God, whose nature and whose name is Love, we desire to draw near into Your gracious presence on this the close of another Sabbath. We thank You for all the tokens of Your mercy we have been permitted to enjoy. Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Under the realizing sense of Your presence and nearness, we would compose ourselves to rest, with our minds stayed on You.

We desire anew to bless and praise You for Your unspeakable gift—Jesus, the Son of Your love. There is not a ray of hope which visits our souls but emanates from His cross. He is the channel of every blessing. We rejoice to think that He is as willing as He is able to save "to the uttermost," that at this moment He is bending upon us a gracious eye from the Throne, and, with undying and undiminished love, pleading our cause. Lord, we come, casting ourselves on the fullness of Your grace in Him. Sanctify us wholly, in body, soul, and spirit. Subdue our wills. Bring them in righteous subordination to Your own. When You call us to any duty, may we be ready with the response, "Here I am." May even trials and crosses become easy to us, when borne in a spirit of tranquil submission. Let us be living as pilgrims on the earth—weaned from what is uncertain and transitory here—and having our affections fixed on the things which cannot be shaken, but remain forever. Oh that Your love might be enthroned more than it is, as the ruling passion of our souls—and Your glory more the end and aim of our being.

May we give no sleep to our eyes nor slumber to our eyelids, until, in our hearts, we find a place for the Lord—a habitation for the mighty God of

Jacob. Fulfill in our experience Your own gracious promise "I will dwell in them and walk with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Follow with Your enriching blessing all the services of the sanctuary. May Your word be quick and powerful—forbid that impressions be allowed to die away—fasten them as a nail in a sure place. May the Sabbath duties and employments diffuse their solemnity around us throughout the week.

We remember, with affectionate sympathy, the poor, the destitute, and "him that has no helper"—the sick—the bereaved—the dying. Lord, draw near to all such; let them know that You have grace in store for their every time of need, and that there is no lack to those who fear You. We desire for our friends Your benediction and blessing. May You watch between them and us when we are absent one from another. O omnipresent God, show that no distance can sever from You—give them every token of Your love—preserve them from danger—guard them from temptation—number them with Your saints in glory everlasting.

Bless the lambs of the flock—more especially those now before You. Shepherd of Israel, make them Yours. Bring them to the fold of grace on earth—and to Your heaven of glory hereafter. Bless that branch of Your Church with which we are connected; bless Your holy Church universal. Have mercy on those who are still sitting in darkness and in the region and shadow of death. May a lifted-up Savior, by the attractive power of His cross, draw all men unto Him. We commend us, blessed Lord, to You, and to the word of Your grace. Watch over us during the unconscious hours of sleep. May we awake in the morning in Your favor; that so every new day being spent to Your glory, may find us better fitted for entering on the joys of Your everlasting Kingdom; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Amen.

## MONDAY MORNING

O God, You are the Infinite, Eternal, Unchangeable Jehovah. You are exalted far above our adorations and praises. Angels and archangels veil their faces with their wings in Your presence, and cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" We acknowledge our great unworthiness; we mourn our many sins. Your law has been set at nothing by us; Your love has been slighted;



Your Spirit grieved; Your sovereignty disowned. We have been unmindful of You in prosperity. We have been prone to repine at Your righteous ordinations in adversity. We have not endeavored to hallow all life's duties with Your favor. We have not sought Your glory with singleness of eye. We have too often indulged in feelings and desires, in tempers and affections, inconsistent with our profession as followers of the Lord Jesus. Not only do our iniquities, but our best services, testify against us.

We come, casting ourselves on Your free grace and mercy in Christ. We rejoice that for the greatest sins there is a great and all-sufficient Savior. There is no load of sin which we have, but He who bore our transgression is able and willing to remove it. We will rejoice in the Lord, our souls will be joyful in our God, for He has clothed us with the garments of salvation, He has covered us with a robe of righteousness. Enable us to walk as it befits Your children. Give us a holy fear of offending You. May we feel all sins to be grievous in Your sight—and may it be our special desire to gain fresh victories over our besetting sins, and to be more and more fortified against the assaults of temptation. Strengthen us with might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Make Your grace sufficient for us, and perfect Your strength in our weakness.

We pray not for ourselves only, but for all whom we ought to remember at the Throne of grace. If there be any in whom we are interested who are still far from You, bring them near by the same precious blood. If any are still loitering and lingering, may they hear Your voice, saying, "Escape for your life, lest you be consumed." If there be any backsliding; Lord, reclaim them. If there be any sorrowing; Lord, comfort them. Bind up their broken hearts. Give them Yourself—the better portion which never can be taken from them. Your way is often in the sea, and Your path in the deep waters. But "the Lord reigns"—may this quiet all doubts. May we wait in patience the great Day of disclosures, when "in Your light we shall see light." Look down in mercy on our family and household; let it be a garden which the Lord has blessed. May we live in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bond of peace. Vouchsafe to keep us this day without sin. Be our Shepherd, and we shall not lack any good thing. Keep us from, and keep from us, all that would be detrimental to our souls' interests. And, when time shall be no longer, may we meet in the unclouded sunshine of

Your presence; through Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

## MONDAY EVENING

Most Gracious God, Father of all mercies, You are the King of kings and the Lord of lords! The Heaven, even the Heaven of heavens, cannot contain You. Myriads of blessed spirits are continually casting their crowns at Your feet. How shall we, dust and ashes, presume to lift up our eyes to the place where You dwell in glory? Adored be Your name, for Your free, sovereign, unmerited love in Jesus. We desire to flee to Him as our only Savior—we have no other we need no other. His finished work and complete righteousness is our glorious ground of confidence. It has been tried by countless multitudes; and the blood that has cleansed their guilty souls, has an undiminished efficacy and all-sufficiency for us.

To You, O God, we commit the keeping of our temporal and eternal interests. We cannot be in better hands than in Yours. Whether it be to do, or to bear Your will—may it be ours meekly to say, "Even so, Father!" Whatever may most conduce to Your glory and our good—appoint for us. Be ever near us—not as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for only a night, but gladdening us with the continual sense of Your presence and favor.

Give us grace always to realize how transient and fleeting existence is. Let us feel the precarious tenure by which we hold earth's best blessings. We cannot tell what a day or an hour may bring forth. Whatever our hand finds to do, may we do it with our might, remembering that there is no device, nor work, nor labor, in the grave where we are going.

Bless all our dear friends; let them be related to You in the better bonds of the everlasting covenant; preserve their bodies from danger, and their souls from sin. May our household be a household of faith; may its lintels have sprinkled on them the blessed symbol of covenant love.

Bless those in sorrow; may they feel that all are "need-be" trials. Let this be their comfort in their affliction, "If we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together." Let them look forward to that hour, when their sorrow shall be turned into joy; when God Himself shall be with them and be

their God, and when all tears shall be wiped from off all faces. Give each of us grace to be so living, that ours at last may be an "abundant entrance" into Your everlasting Kingdom. Keep us waiting; keep us watching; that when the cry shall be heard in the midst of the heavens, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes!" we may be able joyfully to respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!"

Before we lie down to sleep this night, renew to us the gracious sense of sin forgiven; and if spared until tomorrow, let us rise refreshed for duty, and fitted for Your service. And all that we ask, is for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and to whom with You, O Father, and You, O blessed Spirit, one God, be everlasting praise, honor, and glory, world without end. Amen.

## TUESDAY MORNING

Almighty and Everlasting Jehovah, You are the heart-searching and thought-trying God. You are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; evil cannot dwell with You; fools cannot stand in Your presence. You have solemnly declared that You can by no means clear the guilty. It is only because of Your mercies in Christ, that we are not consumed, and that You have not executed against us the cumberer's awful doom. We bless You for all that Jesus has done—and for all that He is willing to do. We bless You that He is now exalted as a Prince and a Savior; that having purged our sins, He has forever sat down on the right hand of God; and that there He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet.

Our earnest prayer is, that each of us may be personally and everlastingly interested in His great salvation. May He be precious to us in all His offices—as our Prophet, Priest, and King; ruling over us and within us; making our hearts the habitations of God through the Spirit. Spare us, good Lord, spare Your people, whom You have redeemed with Your most precious blood; and be not angry with us forever. Seeing You have loved us with an everlasting love, may we not requite You with coldness and unthankfulness, or give You the wrecks of a worn and withered life. May the best of our thoughts, and the best of our lives, be surrendered to Your service.

We would cast all our cares, and every individual care, on You; knowing and rejoicing that You "care for us." Let us trust You in everything; let us see Your faithfulness in every event in our chequered and changing histories. How You have smoothed our way in the past! By You, our crosses have been lightened; our fears disappointed, our fondest hopes fulfilled. We will trust You in the future. Let us feel that the great Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep, cannot lead us wrong.

Bless our dear friends; may the Lord be their keeper; may the sun not smite them by day, nor the moon by night. Preserve them from all evil, in their going out and in their coming in, from this time, henceforth, and even for evermore. Be merciful to the family of affliction; those laid on beds of pining sickness; or those bereaved of beloved relatives. May it please You to help, support, and relieve them. May they know Your own blessed name, "The Consolation of Israel." May they take comfort in the assurance, "the Lord will provide." Be with us throughout this day; sanctify all its duties; go with us where we go, dwell with us where we dwell. Guide us, while we live, by Your counsel, and afterwards receive us into Your glory. Hear us, gracious God, and accept of us for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## TUESDAY EVENING

Heavenly Father, who has in Your good providence permitted us to meet together this night, be pleased, in Your infinite mercy—to vouchsafe us Your blessing. Scatter our darkness with the beams of Your love. Dispel all harassing thoughts, and misgivings, and disquietudes. Before we retire to rest, may our souls be stayed on You. Unto us, O Lord, belong shame and confusion of face. We mourn that we feel so inadequately our guilt and unworthiness; that we have so little depressing sense of our alienation from You. We often confess with the lip—what the heart does not feel. We often appear to be humble, when we are not humble—when our hearts are full of self, and pride, and vainglory.

We desire to come anew into Your presence, casting ourselves on the free grace, and love, and mercy of Jesus. We rejoice that in His cross, all Your attributes have been magnified. You are now proclaiming to the vilest and unworthiest, that You have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but

rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live. Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned! Enable us to receive this blessed Physician of souls, who heals all our diseases. And having tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, enable us to live as those who are not their own, but bought with a price. May we be willing to be anything, and to do anything, and to suffer anything for that Savior, who has done and suffered so much for us! May our only grief be "to give Him pain." May our "joy be to serve and follow Him." Keep us from temptation. Support and deliver us when we are tempted. Sanctify us by the indwelling of Your Holy Spirit, and bring us to live more under the influence of unseen realities.

We desire to remember before You, all whom we love. Hide them under the shadow of the everlasting wings, until earth's calamities be over and past. Pour Your richest benediction on this our household. Known unto You are all our varied circumstances, our peculiar trials, and temptations, and perplexities. Our every burden we cast on a faithful God. Our souls, our lives, our cares, we leave entirely in Your hands, saying, "Undertake for us." Pity the afflicted. Be the Father of the Fatherless, the Husband of the widow, the stranger's shield, and the orphan's stay. Let them know that when heart and flesh faint and fail, You are the strength of their heart, and their portion forever. We now commend us all, to Your gracious keeping. The darkness of night has gathered around us; but do lift upon us, O God, the light of Your countenance. It cannot be night if You are near. Watch over us during sleep, and when we awake may we be still with You. We ask these, and all other blessings, trusting in the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Savior, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

### WEDNESDAY MORNING

Gracious Father, Source and Giver of every good and every perfect gift—draw near to us this day in Your undeserved kindness—visit us with that love which You bear unto Your own. We are receiving, morning after morning, new proofs of Your care—new pledges of Your mercy. You are loading us with Your benefits, though we have been ungrateful and unthankful. It is in the name, and trusting in the merits of Your dear Son

alone, that we can have any confidence in approaching You. We rejoice that we have always a safe shelter at the foot of His cross. We rejoice that there, every attribute of Your nature, and every requirement of Your law, have been vindicated and magnified. Myriads are now in glory to bear witness to the power and love of an all-gracious Savior. And what grace has done, grace can still do: "the faithful saying" has lost none of its faithfulness. Lord Jesus, stretch forth Your supporting hand. Save us, else we perish! There is not a sin but You can cancel—there is not the unsanctified heart which Your promised Spirit is unable to convert into a Temple of the living God. Keep us from evil; preserve us from temptation.

As good soldiers, may we place ourselves under Your banners; animated by holy allegiance to Him who is the great Captain of our salvation. We would seek to repose on the Divine promises. May our weakness drive us to Almighty strength. Good Lord, keep us, by Your grace, from an uneven walk, from inconsistency of conduct. May we be gentle, and lowly, meek, and forgiving. May we overcome evil with good.

Bless this family and household. May it be one of the Tabernacles of the righteous, where the voice of joy and melody is often heard. May the lambs of the flock be the special care of the great and good Shepherd. Blessed Jesus, seal to them early an interest in Your covenant—write their names in Your Book of Life.

We pray for all in sorrow; may they look to the hand which was pierced for them, to bind up their bleeding wounds. May He who graciously said of old, "I know their sorrows," be near, with His own exalted sympathy, to minister to their varied experiences of trial.

We pray for Your cause throughout the world. Bless our nation; may it be the honored instrument, among the kingdoms of the earth, in greatly promoting the glory of God. Bless every rank and condition; may Your favor encompass all as with a shield. Be with us, blessed Lord, this day. May Your angels encamp round about us and keep us in all our ways. And when we come to die, receive us into everlasting habitations, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Amen.

WEDNESDAY EVENING

Most Blessed God, You have again, in the multitude of Your mercies, permitted us to meet together around Your footstool. Giver of all grace, draw near to us; enable us to end another day with You, and to retire to rest, in the conscious possession of Your friendship and love. What are we—that we should be permitted to approach such a glorious and infinite God! We are dust and ashes—creatures of a day—who might, long before now, have been righteously spurned from Your presence! Blessed be Your great and holy name, for all the manifold proofs of Your favor. Your ways are not as our ways; had they been so—we must all of us have perished without hope! It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.

Do give to each of us this night, to know the blessedness of being at peace with You—of taking hold on that everlasting covenant, which is well-ordered in all things and sure; looking away from our guilty selves and our guilty doings, to Him who has done all and suffered all, and procured all for us! Give us a deep and abiding sense of our vileness and unworthiness. May every sin which has usurped the throne of our affections be cast down, that God Himself may be our all in all. May we seek to imbibe more of the spirit, and to copy more of the example, of our Divine Redeemer. May we feel it to be our joy to serve Him, our privilege to follow Him, our sorrow to vex and grieve Him. Take us and use us for Your glory; sanctify our affections; elevate our desires. Keep us from being overly concerned and overly troubled about earth's many things. Enable us to be more solicitous about the one thing needful; may we be covetous only of the solid and durable riches of eternity.

Bless our beloved relatives; may they all be enabled to claim a common kindred with the one Elder Brother on the Throne. Set Your own mark on each of them: though separated from one another now, may Your blessed angels gather us together, at last, in the same bundle, for the Heavenly Garner! Let none put off preparation for death until a dying hour—a present hour is all that we can call our own. May we be living in that state of holy preparedness, that when the silver cord by which life is suspended is broken, we may be ushered into Your presence, and into the enjoyment of everlasting glory.

Look down on Your Church everywhere throughout the world—purify her more and more; may no weapon formed against her prosper; may her

ministers be holy men, and may her saints and people shout aloud for joy. Do satisfy Zion's poor with bread. May every afflicted one partake of Your own consolations, and be led meekly to say, "the Lord's will be done."

Graciously take the charge of us during this night. We commend us all to Your Fatherly protection and care; whether we wake or sleep may we live together with You. And all we ask is for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

#### THURSDAY MORNING

O Lord, we desire to approach the footstool of Your Throne, adoring You as the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who faints not, neither is weary. Your wisdom never fails. Your resources never exhaust. The kindness of the kindest knows a limit, but Your kindness knows no limit. With Your friendship, and favor, and blessing—we are rich—whatever else You may take away. Vicissitude is written on all around us—time may estrange the nearest and dearest on earth, but "You are the same." Loving us at the beginning, You will love us unto the end.

We come unto You this morning in the name of Your dear Son. Our sins reach unto the clouds; we cannot answer for one in a thousand. But we rejoice that we can look up to Him who has answered for us. Blessed Savior, we would bury all our transgressions in the depths of Your forgiving mercy. We seek no other refuge and need no other refuge but You. Relying on Your finished work, we can look calm and undismayed on the unknown future. We can cast all our cares, as they arise, upon You, feeling not only that You care for us, but that You make these cares Your own. We can look forward to the last enemy-to death itself, without alarm; the rays of Your love will dissipate the gloom of the dark Valley, and cause us to rejoice in the hope of immortality!

Meanwhile, O God, sanctify to us—the dealings of Your providence. May these prove heart-searchers, quickening our footsteps Heavenward. Let us follow the leadings of the Great Shepherd of the flock. Let us repose in the blessed assurance, that we shall not lack any good thing. You will not overburden us. We have known You in the past, we will trust You still.



Guide us while we live by Your counsel, and afterwards receive us into Your glory.

Bless Your Church everywhere; may all its ministers be men of God, valiant for the truth; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom. Sustain the faith of those, who, amid manifold discouragements, are laboring in heathen lands; may the Lord send His Angel to stand by them, and to shut the mouth of every gainsayer. Hasten that glorious time, when the year of Your redeemed shall come, and the whole earth shall be filled with Your glory.

Bless all of us who are here assembled in this home. Known unto You are our several needs, and temptations, and perplexities. Make Your grace sufficient for us. May a sense of Your presence hallow all the day's duties, and lighten all its trials. Go with us where we go: dwell with us where we dwell. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts. And all we ask is for the sake of Him whom You hear always—Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

#### THURSDAY EVENING

Most Blessed Lord, Father of all mercies, You are from everlasting to everlasting God; the same yesterday, and today, and forever. You have, in Your great goodness, brought us again around the footstool of Your Throne of Grace. During the past day, many of our fellow-beings have gone into eternity; we are spared. You have been compassing our path—shielding us from danger, and guarding us from temptation. None is so able, none is so willing, as You are, to befriend and guide us in every perplexity. We can experience no real deprivation, and mourn no real loss—if we have You. The Lord lives, and blessed be our Rock, and let the God of our salvation be exalted!

We desire this night to retire to rest, in the assured confidence of Your favor. Forgive all the sins of the past day—its sins of omission and commission—of thought, and word, and deed; whatever has been inconsistent with Your pure and holy will. Make us more zealous for Your honor and glory—may we maintain a constant and habitual hatred of those sins which have so long severed us from You. May we ever be near

the atoning fountain; continually hidden in the clefts of the Rock; that when the last summons shall come, our end may be peace.

Bless all who are in affliction. May they be led to lean confidently on the arm of Jesus, and they shall be more than conquerors. We pray for the whole world. Pity the nations which are sunk in heathen darkness. Hasten the Pentecostal effusion of the latter day. When the enemy is coming in like a flood, may the Spirit of God lift up a standard to resist him. Bless all Your faithful missionaries. In lands where Christian sanctuaries are not—be a little sanctuary to all Your true servants. May they know You, as a prayer-hearing, a prayer-answering, a covenant-keeping God. Direct their hearts into Your love, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Bless our household. May the joy of the Lord be our strength. May we feel that in keeping Your commandments there is a great reward. As the pillar of cloud goes before us by day—may the pillar of fire be with us by night. May angels gather around us during the unconscious hours of sleep. May no danger befall us, and no plague come near our dwelling. If pleased to spare us until tomorrow, may we rise fitted and prepared for all the duties to which we may be called. And now unto Him who alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God and our Savior, be ascribed all blessing and honor, dominion and praise, world without end. Amen.

## FRIDAY MORNING

Almighty and Most Merciful Father, You are great and greatly to be feared. Your greatness is unsearchable. You are infinite in wisdom, and power, and love. Your justice is as the great mountains. Your judgments are a great deep. Lord, our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. We have done those things we ought not to have done—and we have left undone those things which we ought to have done—and there is no health in us. Have mercy upon us, for His sake, in whom You see no iniquity. We have nothing of our own but our sins; all that is good in us comes from Him; we would confidently repose our everlasting interests on His finished work. Forbid that we should presume on Your

mercy—that we should take encouragement to sin from Your abounding grace. May we feel that Your pure eye is upon us; that You try us, not according to man's fallible judgment, but according to the standard of unerring rectitude and holiness.

May it be our lofty aim to be the servants of righteousness. May we show that the influence of Your goodness and loving-kindness is to lead us to repentance—to reclaim our hearts from their wanderings, and bring them into captivity to the obedience of Jesus. We desire to take Him as our pattern in all things. When in need of direction or guidance in any duty, or under any perplexity—may this be ever our inquiry, "How would the Savior have acted here?" May we imbibe His unselfish spirit. May life be a more constant effort than it has been, to crucify self and to please God. Let us be willing to accept of anything with Your approval, and to dread nothing but what incurs Your wrath and displeasure.

In our varied spheres may we seek to feel that we have some work to perform—some talent to trade on. Let us cast by faith our mites into Your treasury, that we may earn at last this Your own word of approbation, "They have done what they could."

May Your arms be around all our beloved friends, present or absent. Inscribe their names in the Lamb's Book of Life; may they be Yours on that day when you make up Your jewels.

Sanctify sorrow to the sons and daughters of affliction; let them not murmur under Your Fatherly chastisements; let them own Your Sovereignty, and take comfort in the thought that You do all things well; seeing no hand but Yours in the bestowing and removing the gifts of Your bounty. "The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad!" We commend ourselves, blessed Lord, to You, and to the word of Your grace. Hear, answer, and accept of us, for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and to whom, with You, the Father, and You ever blessed Spirit—Three in One in covenant for our Redemption—be ascribed all blessing, and honor, and glory, and praise—world without end. Amen.

FRIDAY EVENING

O Lord, we desire to approach Your Throne of Grace, thanking You for the liberty of access we at all times enjoy into Your presence. We bless You that the gates of prayer are always open; that You regard the cry of the needy, and never say unto any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek my face in vain."

How unworthy are we to come to Your footstool. There is enough of coldness in our prayers, of insincerity in our repentance, of imperfection in our best attempts to serve You—that were we tried by these, we must have perished forever! Our prayers themselves require forgiveness. Blessed Jesus, great covenant Angel—let down Your golden censer into the midst of us this night, that we may have these our petitions perfumed with the incense of Your adorable merits. In You alone are our persons and our services rendered acceptable. We flee to the foot of Your cross. Here we are safe, though everywhere else we be in danger. Let us exercise a simple confidence and trust in Your completed work. We bring every sin to Your atoning blood—every wound to Your healing. May we have You in all, and for all the duties and difficulties and trials of life. Disarm all life's crosses—sanctify its losses. May prosperity and adversity be alike used for Your glory.

Let us hate evil. Make us feel how cherished sin ruins our peace, and unfits us for the enjoyment of You and Your service. Keep us especially from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over us. Loving You our God, may we love our fellow-men; may we be patient and unselfish, forbearing and forgiving, lowly and meek, full of pity and courteous. Let us overcome evil with good. May all we do be done in love. May we show, by our Christ-like walk and life, who we belong to. May we not be conformed to the sinful practices and base compliances of a world lying in wickedness; but seek to have our conduct molded in conformity with Your holy will.

O sympathizing Savior, be the Friend of the friendless; the support and solace of the bereaved. There are nameless sorrows on earth which are beyond the reach of the tenderest human sympathy; blessed Jesus, make them Yours. This is Your sublime prerogative, "I know their sorrows." Let all Your tried people with joy anticipate that gladsome morning, when the shadow of death shall be merged in eternal glory.

Bless our beloved friends; may Your loving eye rest upon them; may a sense of Your favor pervade all their doings. May none be found missing at Your right hand, on the Great Day. Let us seek to order our plans as dying creatures. Night after night, as we retire to rest, may we think of that deeper darkness, which must, sooner or later, gather around us. Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers and never sleeps, be very near us. As we now retire to rest, may we repose in Your keeping; and in the morning, when we rise, may we rise refreshed for duty—fitted for whatever may be in store for us. Hear us, blessed God, and grant us an abundant answer, for the sake of Him whom You hear always. Amen.

#### SATURDAY MORNING

O Lord, we desire to come into Your blessed presence on this, the morning of a new day, adoring You for all Your mercies. Last night we might have slept the sleep of death; we might have been startled by the midnight cry, "Prepare to meet your God!" But Your love and forbearance again permit us to meet on praying ground; the day of grace is lengthened, and the God of grace waits to be gracious. Lord, we look back with amazement at Your patience. Mercies have been abused; providences have been slighted; warnings have been neglected. Our lives contain a long retrospect of ingratitude and guilt. Justly might You have said, "Let them alone! Why should they be stricken any more?" But You are not willing to leave us in our state of estrangement and sin. You are ever opening up a way for the return of Your prodigal and wayward children. In wrath You are remembering mercy.

We have still the richest encouragement to repair to the opened fountain. Jesus still waits—His blood still cleanses—His Spirit still pleads. The faithful saying is as faithful as ever, "Him that comes unto me I will never cast out." Your thoughts are not as man's thoughts. Had they been so, the sinner, with all his deep depravity, and unutterable vileness, and base ingratitude, would not have been thus welcomed, pardoned, accepted, loved.

We desire to receive this new day as a fresh gift from You. Let Your approval form, throughout it, a holy incentive to every duty. Let us feel

that we never can be happy, but when pleasing You. Let us be aiming at a conquest of self; subordinating all we do to Your will and service. Keep us from alienating existence from its great end, by living to ourselves. We look to Your grace to enable us thus to will and to do. You have wrought all for us—and You alone can work all in us. Strengthen us with might by Your Spirit in the inner man.

How slow we are to believe that our truest security is leaning confidently on Your arm. You are faithful who promised. Your name is the God of all grace; You give all sufficiency in all things. The cup runs over that is filled by You. Nothing can come wrong to us, that comes from Your hand. Bless all near and dear to us: all that is truly good for them, in this life, do bestow; and, what is better, give them the heritage of glory. May our children grow up as willows by the flowing streams, and be a seed to serve You, when we are gathered to our Fathers. Take us all, young and old, this day under Your protection. God of all mercy, spread Your covering wings around us. Be our God and Guide even unto death, and finally bring us to Your everlasting kingdom, through the merits of Your dear Son—our only Lord and Savior.

#### SATURDAY EVENING

O Lord, You are the King eternal, immortal, and invisible. The Heaven of heavens cannot contain You. Myriads of pure and holy spirits cease not day nor night to celebrate Your praises. All their adorations cannot add to Your glory, or augment Your blessedness. What are we, that we should be permitted to approach the presence of a God so great and so glorious—and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? We are apt to extenuate sin—but no sin is trivial with You. We are apt to forget sin, we are too willing to hide it from You, and to hide it from ourselves; but we cannot evade Your righteous scrutiny. We cannot screen our guilt from the Great Heart-searcher! All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. But blessed be Your name, though You are the Greatest and the Holiest of all Beings, You are also the kindest and most forgiving. Who is a God like unto our God—who pardons iniquity and sin! Sinners—and the chief of sinners—we can find rest and peace in the work, and merits, and righteousness of Your dear Son. Confiding our eternal all to Him, we can rejoicingly say, "Return unto Your rest, O our souls, for

the Lord has dealt bountifully with us!"

Bring us to live more constantly and habitually under the constraining influence of Your Redeeming love. May these souls of ours, ransomed at such a price, be dedicated to Your service. Forbid that any of us should be content with a name to live, if we are dead; and deceive ourselves with the form of godliness. Let us know, more and more, that this is Your will concerning us—even our sanctification. May we grow in grace. May the struggle against corruption issue in the confirmed habit of a holy life. May Your Spirit—the Spirit of grace, and peace, and love—dwell in our hearts, and elevate our affections.

Keep us from pride—the master passion of our fallen and corrupted natures. Keep us from vain-glory and hypocrisy. Keep us from envious, uncharitable, unforgiving frames and tempers. Keep us from the secret atheism which refuses to own Your hand, and which regards as "accident" that which is the sovereign and deliberate decree of a Wisdom which cannot err. Oh, may we be preserved in body, soul, and spirit; ready to be presented at last, faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy.

We would desire especially, as the week is closing, to remember before You, all our beloved friends. God of all grace, dispense to them Your richest blessings. May those ties which on earth are so precarious and liable to be dissolved, be rendered indissoluble by grace; so that, when we part on earth, it may be only to meet in everlasting glory.

Have mercy on all who are in affliction. O healer of the broken-hearted, helper of the helpless—may every wounded spirit be bound up by You. May the lonely and unbefriended feel, that in the loneliest solitude, they are not alone—if You, their God and Father, are with them. Spare valued and valuable lives; and may those who are appointed to death, have the valley-gloom lighted with Immanuel's love.

And now, Lord, what wait we for? Our hope is in Your mercy. Be with us this night. Be the Guardian of our unconscious hours. Whether we wake or sleep, may we live together with You. Our wishes, our desires, our interests, our joys, our sorrows, our friends—we leave entirely to Your

sovereign care and disposal. Prepare us for the solemn duties and services of another day. Give to all of us a double portion of Your Holy Spirit, that our souls may be fitted for holding nearer and more intimate fellowship with You. And all that we ask is for the sake of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

## **Communion Morning**

Almighty and Everlasting God, we bless You for the return of another day. Pour out upon us a double portion of Your grace—fill our hearts with Your love. May all vain, and wandering, and sinful thoughts be repressed; may our communion and fellowship this day be with You, and with Your Son Jesus Christ. We thank You for the prospect we have of anew commemorating the dying love of our risen and exalted Redeemer—of surrounding once more the table in the wilderness, and partaking of the bread of everlasting life. Give to each of us the "wedding garment." Let us prepare to meet our God. May we feel that the place whereon we are to stand is holy ground; and rejoice at the renewed opportunity of testifying, in the presence of angels and men, our unaltered and unalterable attachment to our blessed Lord and Master.

In a strength greater than our own, may we be enabled to resolve, that He will be henceforth ours only--ours wholly--ours forever. Give us this day lively apprehensions of the great love with which He has loved us. May these dead and lukewarm souls of ours be quickened into newness of life. May our faith be invigorated, and our love deepened, and our graces strengthened. May this be the grateful aspirations of all our hearts, "What shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards us? We will take the cup of Salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; we will pay our vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people."

We pray for all who are to receive along with us this day, the sacred



emblems. Give to each of them some special tokens of Your covenant love. May they see the King in His beauty. May their experience be, "It was good for us to draw near unto God." Keep back all presumptuous and unworthy guests. Encourage all trembling, faint-hearted ones. While feeling their own unworthiness, may they remember they go to commemorate the infinite worthiness of Him who is All worthy. May they hear Your voice of encouragement saying, "Fear not, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified."

Go forth this day everywhere with the preaching of Your holy Gospel. May wanderers be reclaimed; may mourners be comforted; may saints be edified; may Your name be glorified. Stand by Your ministering servants —may they hear the sound of their Master's footsteps behind them—may they hide themselves behind their Lord, pointing away from the excellency of their own speech and their own wisdom--to Him, who alone, by the attractive power of His Cross, can draw all men unto Himself.

We commend to Your paternal keeping our beloved friends. May they be among the number of Your sealed ones. Sanctify them in body, soul, and spirit, that they may at last be presented faultless and unblamable before Your dear Son at His appearing.

Bless this household. Let us all at last sit down, one united and undivided family, with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, at the better feast of communion in Your heavenly kingdom. And all that we ask, is for the sake of our adorable Redeemer. Amen.

## **Communion Evening**

Most gracious God, who has in Your good providence brought us to the close of another Sabbath, we entreat You to accept of our sincere thanks for all the loving-kindness and tender mercy You have made this day to

pass before us. We bless You for all that our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, and our hands have handled—of the Word of life. Do wash us after supper. May the benediction and blessing of the Master of the feast rest upon us. May we descend the holy mount rejoicing in the presence of Him who brought us into His own banqueting house, and caused His banner over us to be love. Give us grace to pay the vows which our lips have this day uttered; fulfill in us all the good pleasure of Your goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be magnified. As we have named His precious name anew, may we henceforth depart from all iniquity.

Send us help out of Your sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion. May the Lord grant us the desires of our hearts, and fulfill all our petitions. May this Communion service diffuse a hallowed glow over all the duties and engagements of the week. May we show to the world that we have been with Jesus, and that it has been no vain thing for us to draw near unto God. Lord, our own strength is weakness; we cannot carry out one single resolution, depending on ourselves. We will go in the strength of the Lord God. May we be kept by Your mighty power. May we exercise a holy jealousy over our hearts. Let us hear Your monitory voice ever saying to us, "When you think you stand, take heed lest you fall." Keep us from the beginnings of sin; preserve us from venturing on debatable ground; may we ever be where we should wish to be found by our Lord when He comes.

Our cry would be "More grace! more grace!" Our trust would be in that God who, as the God of all grace, can impart an all-sufficiency in all things. Sanctify our hearts by the indwelling of Your blessed Spirit. May they become temples dedicated to Your glory. May this be their motto and superscription, "Holiness to the Lord."

We pray for those who may have joined with us this day in the same solemn and sacred ordinance. We commend each and all to the great Shepherd of the sheep, who, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, will make them perfect to do His will. Regard, in Your great mercy, any who may have been prevented from waiting upon You in Your house and in Your ordinances. May those who tarry at home divide the spoil. Compensate, by an increased supply of Your own promised grace—

for the lack of public services. Transform every sick-chamber, and every death-bed, into the house of God and the gate of heaven. May valuable lives be prolonged. May the bereaved be comforted; may they repose on Him who bore their sins—and who knows their sorrows.

Take the charge of us this night; watch over us during the unconscious hours of sleep; may we all come at last to the eternal blessedness of an uninterrupted Communion Sabbath in glory, around which no shadows shall fall. For "there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever!" Amen.

## **Prayer for a Day of Humiliation**

Almighty and Most Merciful God, You are glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders. You are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity—You cannot look upon sin but with abhorrence. Do pour out upon us this day the spirit of grace and of supplication—the spirit of humility and deep abasement. In self-renouncing lowliness we desire to take the publican's place and cry out, "Unclean, unclean! God be merciful unto us sinners!" Father! we have sinned against heaven and in Your sight, we are no more worthy to be called Your children. Our sins have reached unto the clouds; they are highly aggravated; they have been committed against manifold privileges, solemn warnings, earnest entreaties, innumerable mercies.

The kindness of the best earthly friend has been nothing to Yours. Morning and evening have had the same testimony to bear, of unmerited patience, and condescension, and love—and yet our hearts have been ungrateful and unthankful. They have been mercies abused; warnings slighted; providences unsanctified. We acknowledge our sins as individuals. Our hearts have been estranged from You—we have been lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Divine things have not been exercising a paramount influence over us. We have been living for earth; seeking our chief good short of Yourself, the only soul-satisfying portion. Our love has been cold—our faith weak—our graces languid—our services polluted. Self and sin have mingled with our best attempts to glorify You.

We have not been exercising a holy watchfulness over ourselves. We have been guilty of envy and jealousy; we have harbored unkind suspicions of others; we have not had that love which hopes all things, and believes all things, and endures all things. In prosperity, we have been unmindful of the Author of our mercies. In adversity we have been tempted to give way to hard thoughts and unrighteous surmises about the faithfulness and rectitude of Your dealings.

We acknowledge our sins as families. We have not been exhibiting consistency of walk. Your Word has not been prized as it ought. The flame of love and devotion has not burned brightly on the domestic altar as it ought. The leaven of vital godliness has not been pervading, with its hallowed influences, our family engagements, and occupations, and duties. We have not done what we might have done for You. We have been more set on selfish and worldly schemes and objects, than on devising measures for the promotion of Your glory and the good of our fellow-men. The religion professed by the lip—has not been verified and exemplified by holy and devout practice.

We confess our sins as a church and as a nation. Lord, You have filled our cup with mercies. You have dealt with us as You have not dealt with any other people. But, alas! have we not abused our privileges? We mourn and blush to think of the vice and profligacy—the intemperance and ungodliness, which is rising up in terrible memorial against our land. We mourn our deserted sanctuaries, and unread Bibles. We mourn the eye-service and the lip-homage which, too often among Your professing people, takes the place of heart and soul consecration. We mourn the little we have done, the much we have left undone, to promote Your cause in the world. Father, forgive us these our many and heinous offences. Humble us in the dust because of all our unworthiness. Give us grace this day, while we mourn the past, humbly, but earnestly, to resolve to live more devotedly to You in the future. Accept of our unworthy confessions, for Jesus' sake. Sprinkle these guilty hearts with His precious blood.

In the prospect of sitting down at Your holy table, may we be enabled to look upon Him whom all these transgressions of ours have pierced, and to mourn. May we be melted under a sense of our own great unworthiness, and of His amazing love. When we take into our hands the

memorials of His anguish and sufferings, may they read to us an affecting lesson of the evil of that accursed thing, which cost the Son of God so much. Let us not venture on that holy ground with one sin unrepented of, or uncrucified. Let us go, humbly resolving that we are to be wholly Yours—that whatever others do, as for us, we will serve the Lord. Let us seek, in all time to come, to walk before You in holiness and righteousness of life, to the glory of Your holy name.

## **Prayer in a national calamity--such as plague, pestilence, famine, or war**

Holy father, You are now seeing fit—in Your adorable providence, to read aloud to us, as a nation, solemn lessons of rebuke and judgment. We acknowledge anew that our sins are the fruitful cause of national calamities. Instead of wondering at these vials of Your wrath, we have rather reason to wonder and be amazed that You have forborne so long—that You have been so slow to deal out merited retribution. Lord, listen to our fervent supplications for Your returning favor; avert further calamity. Let us fall into the hands of God—for great are His mercies. Do say to the destroying angel, as He is even now hovering around us, "It is enough, stay now your hand." May this national chastisement lead to national repentance. May we come forth from the furnace purified as gold--vessels of glory more and more fit for the Master's use.

We commend ourselves and all belonging to us to Your care and keeping--never leave and never forsake us; and all that we ask or hope for, is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Christmas Day**

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we

desire, on this sacred anniversary, to draw near, in His name, to Your footstool. Our souls would magnify the Lord—our spirits would rejoice in God our Savior; for He who is mighty has done great things for us, and holy is His name. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up for us a horn of salvation in the house of His servant David.

We look back with gratitude and joy to that memorable night, when the angels appeared over the Plains of Bethlehem, proclaiming that the promised Child was born, the promised Savior was given; that through Him, while glory was secured to God in the highest, peace was proclaimed on earth, and good-will to the children of men. We adore the amazing condescension which brought the Lord of life and of glory from His Throne in Heaven to that manger of humiliation; "God over all," dwelling in union with an infant of days!

We desire to present ourselves before the Holy Child Jesus, like the wise men of old, with the gold, and frankincense, and myrrh of our best affections and deepest love. Had it not been for this inconceivable stoop from the infinite to the finite—where would we have been this day? Well may we join in the angelic song, and say, "Glory! eternal glory be to God in the highest, for His best—His unspeakable gift; without which, not one ray of hope or joy could have visited our doomed world." As we gather in thought around His cradle, may our souls rise in lively gratitude to Him who spared not His only Son, but freely gave Him up unto death for us all. We will sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we seek, by holy, righteous, and consistent lives—by holy living and holy walking—to show that we are not insensible of all His unmerited love and kindness. Blessed Jesus, make us Yours. Sanctify us wholly—wean us from earth—train us for glory. Forbid that it should be said, that for any of us, Bethlehem's manger was prepared in vain, and Bethlehem's angel-song sung in vain. Contemplating You this day in Your humiliation, when You were made in the likeness of man, may it be ours to look forward, with holy joy, to Your second coming in the clouds of Heaven; Your tears,

and sorrows, and sufferings all past—when the Babe of Bethlehem—the sufferer of Gethsemane—the crucified of Calvary—shall be seated on the Throne of universal empire, and crowned "Lord of all."

We pray that Your holy name may be everywhere magnified. Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause. May a dark world be soon cheered by the wondrous proclamation we this day love to recall. May the "Prince of Peace" take to Himself His great power and reign—causing men to beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

We pray for the afflicted—lead them too this day to Bethlehem's Savior. Show them all that He was willing to do for them; and may this reconcile them to bear patiently whatever trial He may see fit to appoint; may they rejoice in His tender sympathy, remembering one great end for which He descended to the lowly manger was, that in all points He might be tempted even as they are.

Bless our children—let them be brothers and sisters of Him who (once the lowly Child Jesus) is now an exalted Elder Brother on the Throne. Give us all that is really good for us—withhold all that is evil. May Your will be our only rule and directory; may we trust You in everything; and look forward with joyful hearts to that better time, when we shall be permitted, with a multitude which no man can number, to take up the song of this day, and ascribe "glory to God in the highest," for that mercy which, through His own dear Son, is to endure forever. And all we ask, is for His sake. Amen.

## **Prayer for the last night of the year**

O Lord, we adore You as the God of times and seasons, of days, and of years. You alone are without any variableness or shadow of turning. You inhabited the glories of eternity, before the birth of time or of worlds. You had no beginning of days. You can know no end of years. Amidst fleeting moments and revolving seasons, the past and present and future are, to You, one ever-present "Now." A thousand years in Your sight are but as

yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. It is our comfort to know, amid so much that is transient in a fleeting world, that You are the same—that Your Throne has the pillars of immutability to rest upon—that though all is changing and hastening to decay and dissolution, "Your dominion endures throughout all generations."

We desire, on this the last day of another year, to bow at Your footstool, and to take a solemn retrospect of all the year's mercies. We have indeed good reason this night to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, "The Lord has helped us!" It is a retrospect of love. We may well write as our motto on its waning hours, "We have received at the Lord's hands, grace upon grace." From how many unseen dangers have You delivered us! From how many temptations, which we had no strength of our own to resist, have You rescued us! How many during this last year have been wasted with sickness, or racked with pain, or stretched on beds of languishing; yet You have mercifully protected us. How many households have been darkened with the shadows of death—the hallowed circle broken—and yet we are all still among the living to praise You. How many thousands of our fellow-men, since the year began, have passed into eternity; but we, unworthy cumberers, are yet spared; the axe has not been laid to the root of the tree; we are preserved another year longer. Night after night we laid ourselves down and slept because the Lord sustained us, and we are still the objects of Your unceasing watchfulness and tender care.

O God, when we think of Your great mercies, what shall we say of the retrospect of our past sins? Our record of the past year is now ascending to Your Throne; alas! it is the record of abused kindness, and despised warnings, and misimproved providences, and lukewarm hearts, and careless, thankless lives! Were we to be judged by the duties and doings—the sins and shortcomings of any one day of the passing year—we would be righteously condemned. Oh, before the record has passed upwards to Your Great Book, do wash out every stain in the blood of Immanuel! We have no hope but in Him. We desire this night to hear His own blessed words of consolation and mercy, "Son, daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are all forgiven you."

We lament, O God, how little we have been affected by all that He has done for us. Lead us to repentance. Bring us more and more to realize the



depth of obligation under which we are laid—to You who have loved us with an everlasting love. We would mourn the past, and seek for "more grace" for the future. Come, Lord, search us and try us, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the everlasting way. May the lives which You have, during another year, prolonged and preserved by Your bounty, be willingly consecrated as thank-offerings to Your praise.

We desire, at this time more particularly, to commend to Your Fatherly care and goodness all in whom we are interested. May our absent friends meet us this night in spirit around the Throne of the heavenly grace—each commending us, as we now desire to commend them, to Your care and love. Make them the objects of Your providential bounty, and the subjects of Your heavenly grace and kingdom. May they also be brought to bewail the sins of the past, and seek for new grace in entering on a new period of existence. Oh, when this rapid flight of years and seasons shall have come to an end, may we all be found in the regions of everlasting day, to unite together in singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

Pity all in affliction; may the bereaved be comforted—may the dying be prepared for their great change—may the living know that they too must die. We desire to retire to rest under the solemnizing impression that we are a year nearer eternity—that a year more of our probation time is fled—that a year less of grace and opportunity and privilege belongs to us. Lord, take the charge of us; and if You are pleased to spare us to see the light of a new day and a new year, may it be to us the emblem of a better morning and a nobler term of being, when earth's shadows and darkness shall have forever fled, and when we shall be satisfied, awaking in Your likeness. And all we ask is for the adorable Redeemer's sake. Amen.

## **Prayer for the first morning of a new year**

Almighty and everlasting God, You are the Alpha and the Omega—the First and the Last. Amid all the vicissitudes of a changing world, You

change not. All things below must perish—but You remain the same. You have mercifully preserved us to see the commencement of another year. We desire to begin this new period of our existence by consecrating its hours to You. Before we enter on its manifold duties, and its unknown trials—we beseech You to impart to us Your gracious benediction. We would seek to connect its coming blessings with You—to own Your hand and Your wisdom in its coming sorrows. We would seek to feel that it can only be to us a happy year by being a holy one—spent in Your service and devoted to Your praise. It is one of the many new years we have seen; we cannot tell how few we may have yet to see.

Our prayer is, that we may live this year as if it were to be our last. Lord, we desire to begin the year, where we would wish to begin and to end its every day—at the opened Fountain. We desire to take as our motto and superscription throughout its course "God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." We desire to connect this new year's morning with the great atoning sacrifice, without which no years could have revolved to us. Our every temporal comfort, as well as every spiritual blessing, flow to us entirely from Jesus. Oh, do enkindle in our hearts a flame of more ardent devotedness to Him, whose amazing love it is, which crowns every year with goodness, and makes all its paths to drop fatness.

Gracious Lord, we desire, this morning, to make a fresh consecration of ourselves and our household unto You. Sprinkle our lintels with the blood of the everlasting covenant. Set Your own seal and mark on our foreheads. If in past years there has been forgetfulness of You—if Your kindness has been abused, and Your mercies slighted, and Your name dishonored—enable each and all of us to make this year one of more undivided surrender to Your service. May it be a new year of love, and meekness, and forgiveness, and close walking with God. May sin be more dreaded, and holiness more loved. May the lessons of eternity come more powerfully and impressively home to us. Let us live as immortal beings. Let us live a dying life. Let it not be the impression of a solemn anniversary like the present, but a habitual conviction, that "The fashion of this world is passing away."

O Lord, accept of this our united new year's sacrifice. We would light our

flickering lamps at Your holy altar—do replenish them day by day with the oil of Your grace; that should any of us be summoned in the course of the year to meet our Lord, we may not have to make the mournful confession, "Our lamps have gone out."

Good Lord, bless all our dear friends; we would remember them, as we trust they are remembering us, this day, at Your footstool. Hear our mutual prayers: may the cloud of mercy descend on all our heads. Though absent from one another on earth, may faith bring us near, by having our tents pitched by the gate of heaven. Bless our native land; may it ever remain a center of holy influences, distinguished by that righteousness which exalts a nation. Bless our rulers, our senators, our magistrates. Bless the ministers of the everlasting Gospel; may they be wise to win souls; and may every religious privilege we now enjoy, be handed down unimpaired to the last posterity. God of all grace, undertake for us. Let the pillar of Your presence go before us. Direct, control, suggest throughout this year, all that we design or do—so that every power of our bodies, and every faculty of our souls, may unite for the showing forth of Your praise and glory. And all that we ask is for the sake of Jesus—Your only Son and our Savior. Amen.

## **Prayer for a time of bereavement**

O Lord God almighty, we rejoice to think that "the Lord reigns!" Though Your way may sometimes seem to be in the sea, and Your path in the deep waters, and Your judgments unsearchable—yet nothing can happen by accident or chance—but all is the unerring dictate of infinite wisdom and unchanging faithfulness and love. Where would we be at this hour, but for the blessed assurance, "This also comes from the Lord Almighty," who, though "wonderful in counsel," is ever "excellent in working." Often we cannot discern, through our tears, the rectitude and love of Your varied dispensations. Often are we led to say, with trembling and misgiving hearts, "Truly, You are a God who hides Yourself." But all is well. We could not wish our concerns in better hands than in Yours.

May this wondrous challenge silence and rebuke every murmur, "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him, also freely give us all things?"

You cannot send one trial that is unnecessary, or light one spark in the furnace that might be spared. We will be silent, we will open not our mouths, because You are the one who has done this! Man may err, and has often erred; but, O unerring God! Your faithfulness has established in the heavens! The Judge of all the earth must do right. We would seek to lie submissive at Your feet, and say in un murmuring resignation, "May Your will be done." We "fear to enter into the cloud,"—You have afflicted us by terrible things in righteousness; the desire of our eyes has been taken away by a stroke—the shadows of death have unexpectedly fallen around us! Oh forbid that we should rebel under the rod, and refuse to be comforted. Let us glorify You "in the fires!" Let us feel that if we are Your children, there is not a drop of wrath in that cup of sorrow; but all is love, infinite love! We would see no hand but Yours "the Lord gave us our blessings—and the Lord has a supreme and inalienable right to take them away!" "Even so, Father, for it seems good in Your sight."

Our earnest prayer, blessed God, is, that this severe trial may be sanctified to us all. We have need of such a blow—to remind us that this earth is not our rest. We were leaning on the creature—we were disowning and undeifying the Great Creator. You would not leave us to ourselves, to settle on our lees. You saw the need of Fatherly chastisement to bring back our alien and truant hearts to Yourself. Oh, may we listen to our Father's voice. May we feel it to be a loud voice, and yet full of gentle tenderness. May it rouse within each of us the question, "What will You have me to do?" May we "arise and call upon our God." Thus may this very affliction, which, for the present, seems not to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Lord, abundantly sanctify this solemn dispensation to every member of our household—to all friends and neighbors. May the warning voice sound loudly in our ears, "You also be ready!" It is another testimony borne to the truth, that at such a time as we think not, the Son of God may come. May it be ours ever to live in preparation for that solemn event

which awaits us all. Whatever our hand finds to do, may we do it with our might, remembering that there is no work, nor device, nor labor, nor repentance in the grave, where we are going.

Sprinkle us all with the blood of Jesus; give us all a saving interest in Him, as the Resurrection and the Life. Let us hear His voice of encouragement and love, sounding amid the stillness of the death-chamber, and from the depths of the sepulcher, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave." "Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." Soon shall these bitter tears and partings of a weeping world be over; death-divided friends shall meet, never again to know separation. Enable us to look forward to that blessed hope and that glorious appearing, when "those who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him." Lord, meanwhile descend, and to the friendless prove a Friend. O Helper of the helpless, Comforter of all who are cast down, better and dearer than the dearest and best of earthly relatives—give us that grace which You have promised specially in seasons of weakness; may we realize the truth of Your own precious promise, "As your day is—so shall your strength be."

"I hear the tumult of the raging seas as Your waves and surging tides sweep over me." Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night His song shall be with us. However low we may be sunk under the waves, the arms of Your love and upholding grace are lower still. May it be our sweet experience, that the deeper we sink, only discovers more the infinite depths of Your love and mercy. May this thought reconcile us to bear all and suffer all—we shall soon be done with this present evil world, and be with our God, and that forever and ever! Hide us meanwhile, in the clefts of the Smitten Rock, until this and all other of earth's calamities are over and past. May we trust Your heart—where we cannot trace Your hand! We wait patiently for the great day of disclosures, when all shall be revealed, and all be found redounding to the praise and the glory of Your great name!

Hear us, blessed God. All that we ask is for the sake of Your dear Son, our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Prayer when detained from public worship**

Almighty and everlasting God, You are glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders. Your Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, Your dominion endures throughout all generations. Amid all the changes and vicissitudes of a changing world, You the Lord do not change. You are the same, and Your years shall have no end. We desire to bless and praise Your holy name for the return of another day. This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. Do go forth everywhere with the preaching of the everlasting gospel. Clothe Your priests with salvation: let Your saints shout aloud for joy. May the assemblies of Your people be enabled to worship You in the beauties of holiness, and feel it to be good for them to draw near unto God.

It is our comfort to know that You are not confined to temples made with hands; that wherever there is a true worshiper, there, there is a prayer-hearing God. O God of Bethel—God of our Fathers, and the covenant God of all who truly fear You, do look down in kindness on us who are prevented this day, by the restraints of Your Providence, from joining with our fellow-Christians in the public services of the sanctuary. It is not to numbers You look—wherever two or three are gathered together in Your name, we have Your own recorded promise, that there You will be in the midst of them to bless them and to do them good. Though You love the gates of Zion, You are not forgetful of the dwellings of Jacob. You have said that You will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, as well as upon her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Let the pillar of Your promised presence go before us; may we feel like Your disciples of old, when the voices of heavenly messengers on the mount were silenced—that we are "alone with Jesus."

Gracious Savior, abide with us; we are independent of all ordinances—if we have You. It is Your presence and love which gives a blessing to all outward means of grace. Your most hallowed altar is the altar of a humble, lowly, contrite heart. Your most acceptable sacrifice is the

incense of grateful love—of devoted, obedient, submissive lives. O Great Angel of the everlasting covenant, sprinkle these our unworthy prayers and services with the incense of Your spotless merits, that thus, worthless and polluted in themselves, they may be made acceptable in the sight of God.

Lord, may every returning Sabbath be finding us better prepared for the eternal Sabbath. May sin be dying within us. May we be progressively advancing in the divine life. May we be abounding in faith, and hope, and love; seeking by Your grace to walk in newness of life—more humbly—more consistently—more prayerfully. May we live as dying creatures. May all the solemn events that are taking place among ourselves and around us, be so many voices proclaiming, "Arise and depart—for this is not your rest."

Lord, break the world's alluring spell; strip it of its vain fascinations! Let the "seen and the temporal" be more subordinated to the "unseen and the eternal." May we give evidence to all, that we are living under the power and influence of gospel principles and renewed affections. May we be meek and gentle—patient and forbearing—thankful and resigned. And even though trial and sorrow should at times be our allotted portion, may we seek to show that the grace of God can impart an inner sunshine which no outward darkness can obscure.

Do look down in mercy on all our dear friends—may they too see the good of Your chosen ones, and glory with Your inheritance. May the fragrance of this day's services follow them throughout the week; may they have the increasing experience that the way of holiness is the way of happiness. Bless all Your missionary servants. Give them a double portion of Your Spirit. May it be their privilege this day to gather in some sheaves of the great gospel harvest. May the Lord of the harvest stand by them to strengthen them; should they be now only sowing in tears, may it be theirs, at last, to reap in joy.

And now, Lord, what wait we for? Our hope, for ourselves, and for all near and dear to us—is in You. Hear us for the sake of Him whom You hear always, and in whose most precious name and words we pray.

## **Prayer for one in dangerous illness**

O God, our Heavenly Father, in You we live, and move, and have our being. We rejoice to think that Your hand is never shortened, that it cannot save—that Your ear is never heavy, that it cannot hear. We thank You for Your own recorded promise, that the prayer of faith, if consistent with Your blessed will, will save the sick. We entreat You to look down in great mercy on that member of our family who is this day laid on a bed of languishing. May it please You of Your infinite goodness speedily to restore him. Rebuke his disease. Bring him back from the gates of the grave. May this sickness not be unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. Mitigate the severity of pain. Grant him patience under his sufferings, and uncomplaining submission to the will of Him who afflicts not willingly. His times are in Your hands. We commend him soul and body to You, the great Physician. If You see fit to raise him up, may restored health and strength be more than ever given unto him; but if You have otherwise determined, fit him for his eternal change. To him to live, may it be Christ—to him to die may it be great gain.

## **Prayer at the bedside of a dying believer**

Ever blessed God, we rejoice to know that our times are in Your hands. The Lord gives us our lives--the Lord has a sovereign right to take them away. Give us grace to say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!' Do look down in great mercy on Your servant, whom You are about to take to Yourself. Let him know, that, leaning on Jesus, the sting is plucked away from death, and the grave is robbed of its victory. Oh, ever-living



Redeemer, great "Abolisher of Death," who has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel--smooth his dying pillow—let Your voice be heard, saying, "Fear not, it is I; be not afraid!" Grant relief from suffering. Give him a peaceful entrance into glory; may Your angels even now be waiting to waft him to Your presence. May he know that You are faithful who has promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!"

Forgive, oh, forgive all his past sins. May this be the one glorious truth to which his soul clings in a dying hour, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin." Lord, may Your own blessed soul-sustaining peace be his. In a few more moments, he will wake up in heaven--sorrow and sighing shall have fled away forever. May he feel that to depart and to be with Christ is indeed far better. Hear us, good Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Now this is what the Lord says—the One who created you, Jacob, and the One who formed you, Israel—Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and [when you pass] through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you. For I the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also." John 14:2-3

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

"Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. For

we know that if our earthly house, a tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1

Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where do they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. That is why they are standing in front of the throne of God, serving him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will live among them and shelter them. They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat. For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears." Revelation 7:13-17

"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying--Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever." Revelation 21:3-4

## **A BOOK OF PRIVATE PRAYERS**

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## INTRODUCTION

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father!" Luke 15:18

If the Lord's Prayer has been called "The Beautiful Gate of the Temple," "Our Father" may well be designated its Golden Key.

It was the mission of Christ, the Divine Author of this prayer, to reveal "the Father," the new Paternal name: "I have manifested Your name unto the men whom You gave me out of the world." "I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it" (John 17:6, 26). "My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God" (John 20:17). How He delights to interweave it with parable, and miracle, and intercessory prayer, and last agony, and first resurrection words! It was the object and end of the work to be accomplished on behalf of His redeemed people, "That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:45).

Our MORNING motto-verse throughout this volume, is the answer to the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray!" — "And He said unto them, When you pray, say, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name," etc.

"Father!" it forms also the central jewel-thought in the choicest of His parables, from which we have taken our corresponding EVENING motto-verse: "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father".

All the true Christians have loved to acknowledge and reverence the same adorable Name "Father". Whatever otherwise be their discords, there is here, "concerted harmony."

Take the most familiar of liturgies. The chord struck in its opening prayer is, "Almighty and most merciful Father." It is echoed in the commencement of the sublime Te Deum: "All the earth worships You, the Everlasting Father" — "The Father of infinite majesty." It stands at the threshold of the apostles' creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty." It is taken up in the beautiful prayer: "Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, who have safely brought us to the beginning of this day." It heads the prayer for kings and rulers. It initiates the grandest portion of the Anglican litany: "O God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!" It closes the same with the prayer: "We humbly beseech You, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities." The comprehensive General Thanksgiving which terminates all, enshrines the same loving and gracious formula, "Almighty God, Father of all mercies;" while this "our Father," like an angelic strain, follows in refrain, blending throughout the entire service of sacred song.

"Our Father," says Neander, "because Christ has made us His children. Our Father in Heaven, that the soul may soar in prayer from earth to heaven, with the living and abiding consciousness that earth and heaven are no more kept asunder. To this the substance of the whole prayer tends."

"What," says Hall, "if property, credit, health, friends, and relations were all lost; you have a Father in Heaven!" "We yield ourselves," was the prayer of Sir Philip Sidney, "unto Your will, O Lord, our Father, because You are our Father, and joyfully embrace whatever task You shall set us to do, whatever sorrow You will have us to bear." Bernard of Clairvaux thus describes the last moments of his brother Gerard: "Resting on the word, 'Father, Father' he turned to me and smiling said, 'Oh how gracious of God to be our Father—and what an honor for men to be His children!'" "O my Heavenly Father!" was Luther's final prayer, "the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, You the source of all consolation, I thank You for having revealed unto me Your Well-beloved Son." Then, thrice over, the parental name was repeated, and with it Luther's last battle was ended. Prayer was turned into praise.

The words of one of the last, though not the least bright or saintly of these

attesting witnesses we may quote, are those of Frances Ridley Havergal. She tells us that on her confirmation day, as she sank on her knees at the service, she gave voice to the spontaneous utterance, "My God! oh my own Father!" (The italics are hers.)

"My Father!" That word may well relegate to the Great Day of disclosures, a thousand problems and enigmas now waiting solution!

The injunction of the Master, moreover, as He sounds the invocation of the universal prayer, would seem to have special reference to private devotion: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." Like Daniel, as he kneeled upon his knees, and prayed with his window open toward Jerusalem, so may we have our chamber-window open toward the Heavenly Jerusalem — the Father's house — and thence listen to the divine voice, "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters!" (2 Cor. 6:18).

"The heart of the compassionate Eternal  
Stoops from the glory of the mercy-seat,  
And breaks, in ecstasy of love Paternal,  
Over His creature bending at His feet."

Let us live each day, as it were, under the influence of that divine Name, inspired by the word and example of Him who said, "I live by the Father" (John 6:57). As we greet the morning light, let Our Father, with its suggested fellowship — the thought of Christian brotherhood — be to us as the sweet tones of the silver trumpet sounded by the temple-priest of old, which woke up Jerusalem to a new day of duty and service.

Father! — My Father! At evening, with perhaps a more realized assurance of personal need, let it be like the curfew chime, which invites and hushes to night-rest and repose — a Father's gracious lullaby: "So He gives His beloved sleep."

Yes, He is the Father of distant orbs; the watchful Parent of other suns and planets. So that this universal prayer, though more especially the prayer of the redeemed from the earth, throbs and pulsates through infinite space — like the stone cast into the quiet lake, deepest in the



center of ransomed humanity, but carrying its concentric circles to the wide circumference of space and being.

Thus, by day and by night, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, may we, dismissing all servile fear, cleave to that Name with its inspiration of confidence and trust — the Fatherly hand to guide us, the Fatherly heart to love us, the Fatherly compassion to pity us—until the hour of death finds the same filial parting prayer on our lips which consecrated the closing moments of the Great Brother-Man, — "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit!"

Heavenly Leader, still direct us, still support, console, protect us, until we safely stand in our Fatherland. When that Fatherland is reached, "My Father" will be the passport and password at the Golden Gates! And when the great family meeting is consummated in the Home of heaven, the refrain of earth will be the refrain of eternity. The welcome of Him who taught us the words will be, "Behold I, and the children whom You have given Me!" "In my Father's house are many mansions!" "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!"

"Now unto God and our Father—be glory forever and ever! Amen." (Phil. 4:20)

The verses of Scripture at the head of each prayer, are made suggestive of thought for the morning and evening prayers which follow. This, it is hoped, will secure greater variety in the subject matter of devotion.

To all who have God as their Father, these aids to devotion are inscribed.

In lowliness of heart and mind,  
I make my humble wishes known,  
I only ask a will resigned,  
O Father, to Your own!

Beneath Your watchful, loving eye,  
I supplicate for peace and rest,  
Submissive in Your hand to lie,  
And feel that it is best.

My burdened spirit sighs for home,  
And longs for light whereby to see;  
I, like a weary child, would come,  
O Father, unto Thee!

Though oft, like letters traced on sand,  
My weak resolves have passed away,  
In mercy lend Your helping hand  
Unto my prayer today.  
Whittier

## **First Morning**

"Doubtless you are our Father." Isaiah 63:16.

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephesians 4:6.

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, God over all, blessed for evermore; draw near to me in infinite mercy this morning. I laid me down and slept; I awaked, because You did sustain me. Vouchsafe now the blessing which makes rich—and adds no sorrow with it. May the conscious sense of Your love and nearness, help and guide, cheer and comfort me throughout the day; that its every duty begun, carried on, and ended in You—may redound, through Jesus, to Your praise and glory.

All Your creatures own Your paternal care. You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing. With a still deeper reverence and filial affection, may I be enabled to look up to the omniscient, omnipresent One, and address You by the endearing name, "Doubtless You are our Father." While I love to trace Your presence and power in nature and in daily providence — the everlasting watch kept by You day and night over Your creation — I adore You especially as the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him — MY covenant God and heavenly Father. It is to Him I owe my every adoption privilege. Through Him has been revealed the Father's heart of tenderness and the Father's home of love. By Him the gracious accents were uttered, and the truth of the gracious name confirmed, "My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God." As the Way, and the Truth, and the life — God's way to the sinner, and the sinner's way to God — I would thus dismiss all servile fear, as I now bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

Seal and ratify to me, a saving interest in this divine Fatherhood. Inspire me more and more with the love and confidence of Your adopted children. With some good measure of faith and trust, may it be mine to say, "MY Lord and my God!" "I know whom I have believed." Put more of the filial spirit within me — the spirit of joy and peace; of restful reliance on Your good and gracious guidance here, and the blessed assurance of Your full vision and fruition hereafter. Keep me humble and lowly; make me charitable and forgiving, pure in thought and pure in deed. May it be my habitual aspiration to walk worthy of You unto all well-pleasing, as it befits the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Bless all in sorrow. In the midst of the earthquake and the fire, let them listen to the still, small voice. May every misgiving be silenced. "He who spared not His own Son" may well encourage confidence, and inspire the un murmuring word, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight."

Regard in kindness my beloved friends and relatives. Watch between us when we are absent one from another; and may their names be written among the living in Jerusalem. Bless Your church universal. Lengthen its cords, and strengthen its stakes. Promote all efforts for the proclamation of Your truth, and for hastening the time when unto Him who is above all, and through all, and in all—the voice of universal adoration will be heard ascending.

Meanwhile, in reliance on a promised answer, and the bestowment of all needed present and future blessings, I would unite with Your redeemed family in calling You my Father.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## First Evening

"Your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Most High: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Luke 6:35

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I would seek to end another day with You, looking up for Your promised blessing. How wondrous are the words, just read, from the lips of Your dear Son! You condescend not only to invite all to draw near to You in filial trust and confidence, but you call them "children," yes, "children of the Most High." Your kindness is, like Yourself, illimitable. An earthly father would long ago have disowned and disinherited me. But I listen to the amazing assurance — "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Past evil and demerit and sin have not excluded me from hope of pardon, or involved the forfeiture of favor and love. You have "devised means by which Your banished one may not be expelled from Your presence." You are ever waiting to be gracious; not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn from their wickedness and live.

Anew would I wash, this evening, in the opened fountain. Lord, take away my unthankfulness, and attune my lips to the never-ceasing song of Your redeemed — "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" Deepen within me, a sense of my obligations to Christ for all that He has done and suffered on my behalf. May it be my habitual desire to love Him more and serve Him better — my soul a consecrated altar, and my life a living sacrifice"

I would thank You, too, for Your many temporal mercies, the many tokens of Your unmerited goodness in my daily lot. While other hearts and homes are clouded with sorrow, or saddened with poverty, or stricken with suffering — You have caused me to lie down by the green pastures, You have led me beside the still waters. Your goodness and mercy, like two guardian angels, are still following me, as they have followed me until now. I may well accept Your love and faithfulness in the

past, as pledges and guarantees for the future. Blessed be Your name, that that future — the morrow — is unknown. Better still, that it is in Your hands; that all which concerns me and mine, is planned and ordered by You; and that You have promised strength for the day.

I pray for any who especially stand in need of my prayers: for those in the thick of the spiritual conflict, environed with many temptations; for those laid on couches of sickness and suffering; for those passing through the shadowed valley; for those mourning their "loved and lost." Make them, severally and individually, partakers of Your own everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

Hear these my evening supplications; and enable me to close the day by uttering, with ever-growing reverence, the filial ascription — my Father.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Second Morning**

"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads." Revelation 14:1

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, I draw near to You in the name of Him whom You hear always — the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the Lamb now standing on Mount Zion; the center of the adoring reverence and worship of the church above, yet who is ever waiting to receive the petitions of His church on earth, and present them to You — the Father of an infinite majesty!

Gracious God, accept of me in the Beloved. Inspire me with filial love and

devotion. May my prayer be set forth before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the morning sacrifice. You have again dispersed the darkness of another night, and permitted me to see the light of a new day. Grant me Your blessing throughout its hours. Let me enjoy conscious nearness to You, my Father in heaven. May I covet, above all, Your favor and approval; and then, whatever else I lack, I must be happy.

Before I enter on its duties, do sprinkle the lintel and door-posts of my heart anew with the covenant-token. I rejoice to think of that ransomed multitude — the hundred and forty and four thousand — the already ingathered of the church triumphant. That same blood which has secured for them pardon and peace, still cleanses from all sin; there is still forgiveness for all, salvation for all your redeemed children. I look to Him as my only Savior. Every blessing I enjoy, temporal and spiritual, emanates from the Lamb on Mount Zion! To Him may I be enabled to give the willing surrender and homage of an undivided heart.

May all I have, be elevated and sanctified by the thought that it thus comes to me through His adorable merits — the purchase of His cross and passion. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, I would follow You wherever You see fit to guide me. As God, You are mighty to save; as Man, You are mighty to pity and compassionate. Your sympathetic heart is responsive to every throb of human anguish. Your grace is promised to enable me to cope with all emergencies and vanquish all temptations. Over my spiritual enemies, in You I am more than conqueror!

Bless Your whole church, the myriads of Your children throughout the world, who, whatever be the distinction of Christian creed and profession, have, better than all earthly symbol, their Father's name written in their foreheads. Hasten the number of Your elect. Prepare the world for the advent of its King. Let the year of Your redeemed come, when the shout of joyful welcome will be heard from "a people prepared of the Lord." "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace; who says unto Zion, Your God reigns!"

Look in kindness on my beloved friends. May the Father's name be engraved in their foreheads also. Bless and sanctify them in their varied

duties and engagements in the world; may they give You now the devotion of filial hearts; and at last may they be presented unblamable in the day of Christ's appearing.

Compassionate Your sorrowing children. May all murmuring thoughts be hushed by the assurance — "It is the will of my Father!" At present they may feel Your dispensations mysterious — no silver lining in the cloud. But let them cherish the joyful confidence that when they come to stand by the luminous gates of glory, in Your light they shall see light; and sing together, without a jarring note, the song of providence and the song of grace — the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

I would sum up these my unworthy petitions, in His strength-imparting, all-prevailing prayer — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Second Evening**

"Will you not from this time cry unto me, My father?" Jeremiah 3:4.

"Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto you; for you are the Lord our God." Jeremiah 3:22.

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You for sparing me to see the close of another day. Your gracious hand has been around me throughout its hours, shielding me from peril, guarding me from temptation, upholding me with the blessings of Your goodness. Before I lie down to rest, I would supplicate Your pardoning mercy.

Graciously forgive all that I have said or done amiss. If there is anything in the retrospect of the day, or of past days, which Your pure eye sees blameworthy, and which my own conscience condemns — sins of



omission or sins of commission; if I feel that I have not been walking and living and acting — as seeing You who are invisible; if I have the humbling consciousness of suffering other lords to have dominion over me — may I listen to the divine voice which has just spoken in Your Holy Word, "Return, O backsliding children!" And may I be ready with the response, "Behold, I come unto You; for You are the Lord my God."

Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. With new self-surrender, may I answer Your own divine challenge, "Will you not from this time cry unto Me, My Father!" Saturate me with filial love. Quicken and stimulate every good resolution. May that gracious, paternal name hush all fears, and dispel all doubts, and inspire unwavering trust.

I take refuge anew at the Redeemer's cross! I plead anew the ever-faithful saying, that He came into the world to save sinners. By His grace alone — His free, sovereign, unmerited grace — I am what I am.

I have good cause, from saddening memories of my failures and faithlessness, to be distrustful of the future — on Your same sustaining, restraining, energizing grace, may I be enabled to repose. Hold me up — and I shall be safe! Let me live from day to day, and from hour to hour, alike in temporal and spiritual things — with a realizing dependence on Your bounty.

Bless my dear friends. Encompass us together now with Your favor; and, looking to You as our Father, fit us at last for the great family meeting in the home of heaven!

Compassionate those in sorrow. May they, too, be hushed to quiet rest in the assured belief, that all which concerns them and theirs, is dictated by Your unerring wisdom. Amid the loss of earthly friends and the wreck of earthly portions, may they cleave to the Friend who never wearies and never fails and never dies — "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

And now, as the curtains of night are drawn around me, I anew plead with You to wash out the defilements of the day. Blessed Intercessor — the Brother in my nature, ever-living, ever-loving Lord, the Prince who

has power with God, and at all times prevails — pray for me that my faith may never fail. And so, in the words consecrated by being Yours, may I with filial confidence be able to say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Third Morning**

"He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him, also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in Him has begotten us again unto a living hope by His resurrection from the dead — may this morning bring with it a resurrection blessing. As partaker of His resurrection life, may I be enabled and quickened to seek those things which are above, where He sits at the right hand of God. May He breathe upon me His special salutation, "Peace be unto you!" "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and unto my God, and your God!"

Gracious Giver of all good, may all the duties of the day be pervaded with a sense of Your favor — the bright consciousness of my Father's presence, and a Father's love. Every new morning brings with it fresh causes for gratitude, and fresh materials for praise. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!

Especially would I remember the benefit of all benefits, the crown and consummation of all other mercies, in the gift of Jesus. You did not spare Your own, Your only Son, but delivered Him up for us all. Adored be Your name, for this pledge and guarantee of every minor blessing. After so wondrous a proof and token of Your love, how can I cherish the thought that You can send one superfluous trial, or exact one unnecessary sacrifice? That mightiest blessing within the compass of Almightyness to

bestow, carries with it the gracious certainty of all else needful alike for the body and the soul, for time and for eternity! Standing by the cross of Calvary, and beholding there the picture of a love, which in its heights and depths, no plummet-line can fathom, I can listen to Your own voice — a Father's voice — addressing each of Your children, "All things are yours!"

Lord, forgive my manifold transgressions. You know the fickleness of my faith, and the inconstancy of my love. I mourn that I have so little humbling, abiding conviction of my guilt and demerit. May an affecting sense of my shortcomings and sins, my weakness and unworthiness, keep me, this day and ever, near the atoning Sacrifice. I flee anew to the pavilion of Your love! I take refuge anew in the clefts of the Rock of Ages! Keep me near Yourself! No earthly good can compensate for the loss of Your friendship! While, having the sweet sense of Your favor, I shall seek to rise superior to what the world may give or take away. Strengthen me with all might by Your Spirit in the inner man. My cry would be, "More grace, more grace!"

Give me singleness of eye and simplicity of aim. Disarm my temptations; solve my perplexities. Let me hear the gracious assurance echoing afresh the words of this morning, "My God shall supply all your needs, out of His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus!"

Extend Your Fatherly blessing to my beloved friends. Seal them unto the day of eternal redemption. May every relationship be hallowed in You, and thus earthly bonds will become eternal ones. Draw near in kindness to all who are in any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, and estate. Send down Your Holy Spirit as a divine Comforter. May Your dealings and discipline wean from earth, and train Your children for admission into the Father's better house and enduring home above. Take off their sackcloth, and gird them with gladness, enabling them to glorify You in the day of visitation.

Direct, control, and suggest this day, all my designs and thoughts and actions. Let me live under the sovereignty of that lofty motive — to walk and act so as to please You. May its every hour of duty and of service receive fresh consecration from the ever-inspiring words — "MY Father in

heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Third Evening**

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."  
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say to Him —

MY FATHER, who delights to lavish on Your children tenderest love and pity — bestow, upon me and mine, "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." The shadows of night are again falling around me. Under Your sleepless watch I am safe from all danger! O You who are the true Aaron, the mighty Pleader within the veil, the Angel standing by the golden altar — come forth from the holy place with Your censer full of much incense! Accept the evening sacrifice of the church throughout all the world, which You have purchased with Your blood. Bless Your people with peace.

I rejoice, blessed Savior, to contemplate the glories of Your person, the completeness of Your finished work. In You, I have the all-power of Godhead, and the all-sympathy of humanity — the great I AM, yet the Brother in my nature; mighty to save, yet mighty to pity and compassionate. May I joyfully listen to Your own gracious balm-words, which have so often hushed doubt and misgiving, and calmed the fever-heats of the soul: "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Lord, may I ever feel that my heaviest burden and heaviest cross — is the burden and the cross of sin — the cross of an erring, treacherous, deceitful heart, tempting me to stray from the living God, and to seek my happiness and satisfaction independent of You. May the great love with

which You have loved me, reanimate my drooping faith, and quicken me to love You more and to serve You better!

While thankful for creature and created blessings, may they ever possess a double preciousness by being linked with Yourself, the infinite Bestower. May the temporal mercies I enjoy be elevated by the thought that they are the emanations from a Father's hand — the pledges of a Father's love! Adored be Your name, that these are crowned by spiritual mercies — "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" — that hope which "makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." By His quickening, energizing, sanctifying influences, may I become gradually transformed into Your glorious image! May He "comfort my heart," and "establish me in every good word and work." Let it be my habitual and earnest resolution to work while it is called day, while the solemn admonition sounds in my ears, "The night comes, wherein no man can work."

Bless those in affliction. Compassionate any who are suffering unspoken sorrows — trials and heartaches that can be confided to no ear but that of the All-merciful and All-loving. May every tear-dimmed eye be turned from care and doubt — to Him who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps.

Make me and all my dear friends partakers in the gladness and glory of Christ's resurrection life. May we be one in and with Him now, so that the tenderest ties of earth may be perpetuated before the throne; and the unstable unions here, be there rendered indissoluble.

Pity and compassionate a whole world. Forgive its sins, break its chains of slavery, sheathe its weapons of war. "Give peace in our time, O Lord; for there is none other who fights for us, but only You, O God." Hasten the period of predicted glory, when the blight shall be removed from this otherwise fair creation; when, delivered from the bondage of corruption, it shall be translated into the glorious liberty of Your children.

Before I retire to rest, I would pillow my head anew on the surety work of my divine Redeemer — on the "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" purchased by His atoning death, and sealed by His

prevailing intercession. It is in His name, and in accordance with His gracious authority and teaching, that I am permitted, this night and ever, to call You, my Father!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fourth Morning**

"How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation! I thought you would call Me 'Father' and not turn away from following Me!" Jeremiah 3:19

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, the name which disarms all fear and inspires deepest confidence and trust — enable me to pronounce it with child-like reverence and love. "Like as a father pities his children," — may the earthly be a type and parable of the heavenly. Rejoicing in the sanctity of this higher and more endearing filial relationship, may it be mine to say, "The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes," with You, and in You, my Father-God, "I have a goodly heritage."

You have awakened me once more from the unconscious hours of night and darkness. Come to me this morning in the plenitude of Your mercy. Replenish my empty vessel with the oil of Your grace. As I set out anew on the pilgrim path, may I have the conscious assurance of Your presence — that He who has "set me among the children" will be true to His faithful promise, and "shall not turn away from me."

I desire to make confession of my manifold transgressions. I have nothing to plead in extenuation. They have been committed against the clearest light and the fondest love. My own heart condemns me. My own conscience, blinded though it is to the evil and turpitude of sin, condemns

me. You are the heart-searching and the thought-trying God; You know all things.

Look upon me in Jesus! Look upon me on account of what He has done and taught and suffered. I rejoice in the glorious assurance that the hands that were once outstretched for me on the cross, are now, with all-prevailing power, pleading for me before the throne! Rock of eternal Ages! Let me hide myself in You. Let me know, more and more, the conquering power of redeeming grace. May every high thought and lofty imagination be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

May I have the increasing experience, O my Father in heaven, that Your service is perfect freedom; that in doing Your holy commandments, and obeying Your gracious will, I am treading indeed "a pleasant land," and am an heir to "a goodly heritage" — better than wealth of this world! Keep me from wandering away from You, and forfeiting the joys of Your salvation. Keep me watchful and vigilant. May I exercise a jealousy over my heart and its truant affections — curbing all selfishness and passion, avoiding all that would dishonor or compromise the Christian name, cultivating a filial fear of offending One so gracious and beneficent, seeking to live more habitually under the power of that lofty motive — to do my heavenly Father's will, and accomplish with fidelity the work, however lowly, You have given me to do.

Bless my beloved friends. If separated by distance, may our prayers blend at the mercy-seat; and may we have the joyous assurance that You can watch between us, when we are absent one from another.

Comfort, sustain, and solace all Christian mourners in their pilgrimage of sorrow. Open to them wells in the valley of Baca! Enable them reverentially to acquiesce in Your dispensations, however hard for flesh and blood to bear. Stripped of other blessings, may they rejoice in You as their supreme portion! As You have promised not to turn away from them — that when father and mother and all earthly friends forsake them, that You will take them up! May they say through their tears, "Turn unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted!" May they know that You are faithful who has promised: "He shall call upon Me — and I will answer him! I will be with him in trouble! I will deliver him and

honor him."

Arise, Lord, and have mercy upon Your children! Prince of Peace, take to Yourself Your great power and reign! Go forth in Your glorious apparel, traveling in the greatness of Your strength; manifest Yourself as "mighty to save!" Let Your glorious gospel be everywhere proclaimed, with its sublime message. May it heal all wounds, and redress all wrongs; may it rescue the tempted, and save the lost!

I would enter on the day's duties and engagements, its joys and its sorrows, under the shield and shelter of the same ever-blessed name and ever-blessed words — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fourth Evening**

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there, whom the father does not chasten?" Hebrews 12:7

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, who is ever dealing with Your children in love and pity, draw near to me this evening, while I render my tribute-offering of grateful praise. I thank You for sparing me. Others in the course of today have slept the sleep of death. Some have been called without a note of warning, into the eternal world. I am preserved to this hour in the land of the living and in the place of hope.

I will praise abundantly, the memory of Your great goodness. If, in the past, You have seen fit at times to darken my heart and my home, and to visit me with chastisement; I have reason, in the retrospect, to own and acknowledge that it was the chastening of love, the wisdom of paternal discipline. When these storms of the wilderness have beaten upon me, You have graciously led me under the shadow of the great Rock, and



revealed Him, who is the Refuge from the storm and the Covert from the tempest, in all His preciousness!

May I trust You still. I dare harbor no suspicions of Your faithfulness. I have rather only reason to wonder at Your patience and forbearance towards me. The kindest of earthly parents often mistake; but You are the unerring Father of Your redeemed children! There may be an ebb and flow in their love — but never in Yours! In all time of my tribulation, let me hear Your Fatherly voice; let me ever see some bright light in the darkest cloud. Even when Your dealings are inscrutable — when the why and wherefore are unrevealed — may I believe when I cannot see; and confide where I fail to trace the footsteps of Your love, saying in the spirit of the patient sufferer of old, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him!"

Meanwhile, as Your feeble child — may I put my hand in Yours; not afraid of the day of trial, but knowing that when the struggle-hour comes, that You will bestow the needed grace — giving power to the faint, and to those who have no might, increasing strength. Above all, I pray that whatever Your varied dealings may be, whether in the way of prosperity or adversity, that they may be the means of bringing me nearer to Yourself.

Keep me from everything that would imperil my spiritual well-being. Deliver me from the fascinations, the evil maxims and principles of the world. Break their alluring spell! While thankfully accepting and joyfully using the manifold gifts of Your love, may these never be allowed to divert me from loftier and more enduring spiritual realities. Foster within me, the virtues of the Christian character. Give me a spirit of self-sacrifice, willing, if need be, to take up my cross and follow You. Make me humble and meek, lowly and submissive, jealous of anything that would alienate my affections from You — the highest good — the only supreme, all-satisfying Portion! Let me dread nothing so much as displeasing You, in thought, word, or deed. In whatever I do, may I be animated by the fear, the holy fear, of offending so loving and gracious a Father, and dismiss all other fear.

Have mercy upon those who are still far from You. Cause them in their

sad and unresting hours of estrangement from You, to think of the Father's heart, the Father's home, the Father's welcome. Deepen in them a sense of the misery of alienation from You, and the happiness of a full and gracious restoration to Your favor and peace. Confirm the irresolute and wavering, in unswerving loyalty and love.

Bless my beloved friends. If distance separate us on earth, may we look forward with joyful assurance to that blissful day when severance shall be unknown, when we shall be re-gathered in the true home of heaven, and so be with one another, and with our great Lord — forever!

Be the Comforter of any that are cast down. Overrule the dispensations of Your providence, for the good of Your sorrowing children. May this thought hush and dispel all misgiving and still every murmur, "You chasten us — because You love us!" You deal with us as Your sons! Lord, what are our severest trials, compared with what they might have been, had Your justice been laid to the line, and Your equity to the plumb-line! Now glorifying You, if need be, in the fires — may we look forward, beyond the night-watch, to the morning without clouds, when You shall terminate the tears of Your weeping children, and sorrow and sighing shall forever flee away!

In the realized assurance of a holier and better than earth's most sacred relationships, I will this night both lay me down in peace and sleep, saying, in words which divinest lips have taught me — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fifth Morning**

"You are the children of the Lord your God." Deuteronomy 14:1

"You have one Father, who is in heaven." Matthew 23:9

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, look down upon me in Your great mercy, as I draw near on a new day to the throne of Your heavenly grace. I beseech You to hallow the filial bond which unites me to You. Give me, gracious God, a holy fear, as I now lay my morning sacrifice on Your altar; not the fear of bondage, but the reverent love inspired by consciousness of my adoption into Your family. The natural sun is again shining upon me. May the beams of the better Sun of righteousness disperse the shadows of sin and unbelief. May I walk all the day in the light of Your countenance.

How wondrous has been Your paternal love in the past! No earthly parent, not the kindest and most forbearing, could have borne with me like You have done — often tracking my wandering footsteps; bringing me back to peace, and rest, and home; often and graciously accepting my confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son!" Grant me forgiveness for the past, and grace and strength for the future.

I look anew to Christ as my only Savior, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name." Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief! Lord, increase my faith! As a member of Your covenant household, may I seek to live under the sovereignty of that lofty motive — to walk and act so as to please You; and with singleness of eye, and simplicity of purpose — to glorify Your holy name.

Be with me throughout this day. Be my Protector from danger, my Shield and Guardian in temptation. Arm me for the spiritual conflict. Realizing my own weakness, may I be strong in You, and in the power of Your might. May all Your dealings and discipline, whether in the way of joy or of sorrow — have the sanctified effect of bringing me nearer You — the only Portion that can never be taken from me! Living or dying, may I be Yours!

Bless my beloved friends. May it be said of all of them, "You are the children of the Lord your God!" And may they, too, be able to look up to the mightiest of Beings, and call You by the endearing name, "Abba, Father!"

Compassionate all Your children who are in sorrow; and any in whom I may be more deeply interested. In their hour of darkness and desolation — it may be in the deep mystery of their trials — may it be theirs trustingly to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

Bless Your Church everywhere. Bless the whole world. Through the proclamation of Your glorious gospel, may more and more everywhere be brought to participate and exult in this divine Fatherhood and Brotherhood, and to walk as children of the light.

I ask these requests, and requests for every other needed blessing, in the name and for the sake of Him who, when He was on earth, taught us to say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fifth Evening**

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!" John 10:28

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You for these gracious words. May I take them as a pillow on which I may rest my head this night. Under their blessed and consolatory assurance, I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, because You, Lord, only make me to dwell in safety.

Blessed be Your name, that my spiritual interests, for this world and the next, are as sure as Your everlasting power and faithfulness can make them. It is Your prerogative, always to have mercy. It is not Your will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. You, the mightiest of Beings — is the kindest and best and most condescending. You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

In Your unceasing watch of love, You tend the feeblest member of Your flock. When away from the fold, straying on the far mountains, You reveal Yourself as the great Shepherd-Restorer. Your words are not those of rebuke and terror, but of peace and gentleness: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

O Shepherd of the wandering sheep! O Father of the wandering prodigal! Restore my soul, and lead me in the paths of righteousness! Lead me ever nearer to Yourself, the true Home and Hospice of the weary and burdened. All true satisfaction and joy emanate from You, and are centered in You. Let me not rest satisfied with any lowlier portion. Your favor alone, is life. Rising superior to the changes of this mortal life, may it be mine to say, "My heart and my flesh may fail; but You are the strength of my heart and my portion forever!"

Give me, this evening, a renewed sense of Your pardoning love in Jesus. May my past transgressions, in all their heinousness and aggravation, be blotted out, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Impart to me daily, a deeper and diviner sense of that spiritual peace, secured by His death and sacrifice, and perpetuated by His prevailing intercession. In myself I have nothing to lean upon, nothing to hope for. But let His own gracious reassuring words dispel every misgiving, and inspire lowly confidence and trust: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand!"

My Father-God, foster within me every righteous purpose and good resolution. Let me grow ever in submissiveness to Your holy will and in obedience to Your holy commandments. Keep me from dishonoring Your name by any unworthiness of thought, or speech, or act. Preserve me from all evil tempers, all selfish and uncharitable deeds, all that is in contrariety to Your revealed Word, all that offends the Spirit of grace. Cultivating habitually more of the pilgrim character, may I be enabled to progress in the divine life, from grace to grace, until grace is merged and consummated in glory!

Look in kindness on my beloved friends and relatives. Bless them, and

make them blessings. Bring them within Your earthly fold now, and at last to the pastures of the blessed in heaven. Hasten the Savior's coming and kingdom — that happy time when the reign of suffering and of sin shall be known no more. Rescue the perishing; break the chains of slavery; sheathe the cruel sword of war; usher in the world of peace and love — that creation, so long groaning and travailing in pain, may fully participate in the liberty of the glory of Your children!

And now, Lord, I wait upon You. My hope is in You. Accept of my renewed thanks for the manifold mercies of the day. Watch over me during the hours of night; and if You are pleased to spare me until tomorrow, may it be to listen to Your own assurance, "My presence shall go with you — and I will give you rest!"

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Sixth Morning**

"He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress." Proverbs 14:26

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, I am once more invited and permitted to draw near to the throne of Your heavenly grace. You have again not allowed my eyes to sleep the sleep of death, but have awakened me to the light and the blessings of a new morning. Bestow upon me Your blessing. May I realize Your gracious presence, and feel that it is good for me to draw near unto You. May all the engagements of the day be sanctified.

I have been listening to Your voice, inviting me to a place of refuge, and unfolding Yourself as such. You are my refuge and my strength. May my whole soul, every faculty of my nature, be brought into near in delighted fellowship with You, and consecration to You. In Your fear — the

reverential fear of Your filial love — may I have strong confidence. Give me the perfect love which casts out fear.

Still all my unrest — with the gracious, paternal words, "You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" I would anchor myself on Your Divine veracity. All Your promises in Christ Jesus, are yes and amen to those who believe. Earth can tell of no such strong and stable confidence. The best of human refuges often prove refuges of lies — cobweb confidences, which fail when most needed. "They will all perish, but You will endure; all of them will wear out like clothing. You will change them like a garment, and they will pass away. But You are the same, and Your years will never end!"

Adored be Your name, for Him who is especially revealed as a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest — the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. I thank You that He is a refuge open for all, suited for all, abundant for all; a refuge to which all are alike warranted and welcome to shelter in! Blessed Savior, I have no other refuge — and I need none. My helpless soul, for time and for eternity, is safe in You. You understand the needs and necessities, the trials and temptations of my tried and sorrowing and tempted nature. To whom else can I go? you have the words of eternal life!

Give me grace to walk worthy of my adoption privileges. Let it be my chief aspiration and yearning, not only to know, but to do Your will, O my Father in heaven. Teach me to be trustful and confiding in You. Keep me from being over-anxious and over-troubled about earth's many concerns. Preserve me from surrendering my heart and its affections, to the base compliances and maxims of this present evil world. Let me nourish a constant sense of my dependence on You — and place undeviating reliance on Your almighty support and strength!

May the Holy Spirit descend upon me in the fullness of His spiritual gifts, enlightening my darkness, removing unbelief and worries, and quickening my experience of spiritual realities. Stimulate within me, every Christian principle and virtue. Let me live, and walk, and act — as seeing You who is invisible!

Reveal Yourself also to all Your suffering children as the same sure place of refuge. When trial may have shattered their own props and confidences; broken "the strong staff and the beautiful rod," may they place the more assured confidence in You who has said, "I will never leave you — nor ever forsake you!" When their hearts are overwhelmed, may they know what it is to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Let this assurance dry all tears, "Whom the Lord loves — He chastens."

Look in kindness on those near and dear to me. Undertake for them. May we here continue heirs together of the grace of life — children of the same heavenly family. Guide us while we live by Your counsel; and at last may death take us from the fleeting fellowships of the pilgrim journey — to the heavenly rest and the unblighted home above!

Bless the means used for the promotion of Your cause and the extension of Your kingdom. Bring the world and its peoples, in Your own good time and way, under the benignant sway of the Prince of Peace. Let captive souls and captive nations come forth from their chains and servitude, walking and leaping and praising God.

Lord, be with me throughout this day. Strengthen me for the performance of every duty. Prepare me for the endurance of every trial. Feeling alive to all the unmerited proofs and pledges of Your mercy, and with the fear, not of bondage, but of "strong confidence" and filial love, may be it mine to say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Sixth Evening**

"I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —



MY FATHER, who is ever keeping watch and ward over Your children, spread Your overshadowing wings around me this night. You have been with me throughout the day, defending me from danger, guarding me from envying temptation, upholding me with the blessings of Your goodness. Be near me during the unconscious hours of sleep. Come and whisper Your own gracious lullaby: "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

The past is crowded with memories of Your paternal kindness. No earthly father could have acted towards his child as You have done — pitying my weaknesses, compassionating my frailties, solacing my sorrows. How poor and inadequate has been my requital! How often have I proved a bruised and broken reed, bending before the blast, yielding to the seductions of sin, and the assaults of the tempter, resisting Your grace, grieving Your Spirit! I have been a wayward prodigal, neglectful of filial duty and obedience, prone to forget the home of Your love and its sacred and peaceful memories. Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son. Yet, despite my disobedience and rebellion and estrangement, You have not left me to perish with hunger. There is forgiveness with You still, that You may be feared. You have, in generous keeping — robe, and ring, and sandal — above all, the voice of joyous welcome. The words of today ring their gracious chimes in my ear, as they have done in the case of multitudes in ages past: "I will receive you, and be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters."

It is through Jesus, the divine Elder Brother, that this welcome and jubilee are granted. I look to Him as my only Savior. He is all I need, living or dying, for time or for eternity! Let me live as one who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found. Make me more dutiful to You. Deepen within me filial affection. Transform me by the power of Your Holy Spirit, into the image and likeness of Christ! Let me not dishonor You by unbelief, or distrust Your faithfulness. An earthly father may err; a heavenly Father cannot. If at times I am troubled with anxious forebodings, may I know that however checkered my experiences, I may regard the future undismayed — with such a Guide, Protector, Friend! What is unknown to me — is known to You! Let the thought of a Father's

hand, a Father's voice, it may even be a Father's rod—check all my fears and hush all my disquietudes.

I pray for my beloved friends. Set them as a seal upon Your heart, a seal upon Your arm. May we all live under the spirit and influence of Your divine law of love.

Extend Your Fatherly compassion to Your sons and daughters of sorrow. May they be led to see and acknowledge that Your dealings are tempered with gracious tenderness. You stay Your rough north wind, in the day of Your east wind. When we cannot trace Your mysterious footsteps — may we implicitly trust Your loving heart. When we remember that You have given us, in the incarnation and death of Your dear Son, the mightiest proof of kindness which Omnipotence can bestow — may this hush all our murmurs, and attune our trembling lips to the avowal, "Father, not my will, but may Your will be done!"

I look to You anew for Your gracious blessing. Let me listen anew to Your special whisper of love, "I will be a Father unto you!" May I compose myself to rest under the sweet assurance that You Lord, sustain me; and so, when I awake, I may be still with You!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Seventh Morning**

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 1:2

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, I listen in these words to Your own gracious benediction. Enable me, not with lip homage, but with true, reverent, filial devotion —

to approach Your holy presence. I need have no slavish fear in thus coming to Your footstool. You are even now offering me the twofold blessing of grace and peace — both emanating from the love of my gracious Father and my divine Redeemer.

My cry would ever be, "More grace! More grace!" It is by grace I stand. I am saved by grace, sustained by grace, restrained by grace. Grace keeps me from falling. Grace — Your free, sovereign, unmerited grace in Jesus — will at last present me faultless before Your glorious presence with exceeding joy!

And as the companion of grace, please impart to me peace — Your peace, which passes understanding — peace through the blood of the cross — that peace which the world knows nothing of — peace which the world, with all its riches and honors and blessings, cannot give — and which the world with all its trials and tribulations cannot take away! Feeling the yoke of sin to be grievous and heavy, entailing disquietude and unrest; may I flee now and always, to the great Peace-giver, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

I rejoice that Jesus died for my sins, rose again for my justification, and is now carrying on His divine work of intercession before the throne for me. Blessed Jesus, ever-pleading on high, and never pleading in vain, draw near to me this morning in Your infinite love, and breathe upon me, as You did on Your disciples of old, and say, "Peace be unto you!" Amid my conscious weakness and infirmities, may I listen to Your assuring promise, "I will make my grace sufficient for you; I will perfect My strength in your weakness." Thus may grace and peace follow me all the days of my life; and may I realize their upholding power and soothing presence, when standing at the threshold of eternal life.

Bless Your sorrowful children. Sanctify the dispensations of Your providence to them. If they fail now to trace and recognize the mystery of Your dealings, may they anticipate the coming day, when, in the light of eternity, Your voice, gracious Savior, will be heard: "Did I not tell you, that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Rescue the perishing; reclaim the wanderer; solace the suffering; support the dying.

I pray for the widely scattered family of mankind. Hasten the time when the sighs of a burdened and groaning creation will be heard no more — every sword sheathed, every fetter broken; when the wilderness and the solitary place will be made glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Lord, be with me throughout this day. Fit me for the battle of life. May I be strong in You, and in the power of Your might. And when every conflict here below is terminated, may it be mine to exchange the earthly warfare — for the eternal rest of the glorified. Meanwhile, I would sum up these my imperfect supplications with the words which Your Son's divine lips have taught us — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Seventh Evening**

"Like as a father pities his children — so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Psalm 103:13

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, draw near to me this evening, and teach me how to pray. Confidently trusting Your pitying love, I would unburden and unbosom to You — all my needs and perplexities, my sins and sorrows, my frailties and infirmities. Have I not the gracious promise that, casting all my burdens on You — that You will sustain me? Blessed be Your name, for the assurance given tonight in the precious Psalm of Your servant of old. No earthly parent, not the kindest and the best, can pity like You. Your ways are not as our ways, nor Your thoughts as our thoughts.

As one of Your children, thus loved and pitied, may it be my aim to hear Your voice, and obey Your wishes — having my own will in all things resolved into Yours. I rejoice to think of Your pitying love in Jesus. Thanks be unto You, for Your unspeakable gift! In this most wondrous

evidence of Your paternal interest in me, may I see the pledge and guarantee of all other blessings; while I seek to give you back in return — the homage of a grateful heart and consecrated affections. May my life be, more than it has been — an effort to crucify sin and to live for You. Keep me lowly and meek, tender and forgiving. May my love to You be accompanied with love to my fellow-men. Loyal to the Golden Rule, may I do all things in love.

You have guided me throughout the day by Your good counsel; and now that the shadows of evening have gathered around me, and the day is far spent, be my unchanging Friend, still with me. Be about my bed — as You have been about my path.

Extend especially, Your same pitying love to all Your children of affliction. May they know — that Omnipotence and Love together tread the stormy waters; that You are the same in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, in life and in death. Turn trial and loss, into spiritual riches and gain. Cheer every desolate heart, with the hope of immortality.

Bless everywhere the proclamation of Your gospel. Give efficacy to the power of the Cross. Awaken slumberers to the momentous realities of their souls, and eternity. May many seek with boldness, to bow to You as their God.

I commend myself to Your gracious keeping. Father, pity me! Father, shield me! Father, guide me! Father, restore and comfort me! Father, sanctify me! Father, bring me at last to the many mansions, the home of Your glorified children, from which I shall go no more out! Meanwhile, I would now, as ever, love to call You by the same endearing name — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Eighth Morning**

"Your Father knows the things you need, before you ask Him." Matthew 6:8

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, regard me this morning with Your gracious favor. You invite me into Your presence, and with filial trust to make known to You my varied needs. I do not need to enumerate them. You are intimately acquainted with all my ways. There is not a thought in my heart, not a word on my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, You know it altogether! Yet it is my privilege thus to come and unburden — my soul's necessities, my sins, my sorrows, my weaknesses and infirmities.

There are blessings especially promised to those who frequent the mercy-seat. When "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" our requests are made known unto You, we have the annexed sure promise that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

How little do I realize this privilege as I ought! How little, when approaching the throne of grace, do I feel my own urgent needs! How little am I actuated by the predominating motive of love to You, and a supreme desire to show forth Your glory! O omniscient One, graciously forgive my erring past, and grant me strength and trust for the unknown future. Let that future be left to reveal and unfold itself. Let me not needlessly strive to predict it, or to anticipate needed help and grace; but rest in the paternal promise, that there will be strength assigned and proportioned for each day, and sufficient to meet all my necessities. Meanwhile, let me exult in the assurance, that though the lot may be cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof is by You.

Let me know the gladness and joy of sanctified prosperity — the many unmerited blessings You have bestowed upon me. And when You see fit to revoke the gracious loan, grant that I may, in lowly reverence and submission say, "Even so, Father — for so it seems good in Your sight!" Help me in every unexpected difficulty. Arm me in every conflict. With the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, may I be loyal to You and to the dictates of my conscience; and thus be so enabled

to pass through temporal things — that I lose none of the eternal things.

I pray for the whole world. Arise, O Lord, and let not man prevail. Arise, O Lord, and plead Your own cause. Give efficacy to the gospel, the glad tidings of great joy. May the leaves of the Tree of Life be for the healing of the nations.

Let Your Fatherly love embrace all in whom I am interested. Bless the aged. Make the autumn of life golden with Your presence and with the light of unsetting suns. Bless the young. Let them lay the green ears of early consecration on Your holy altar. Bless the lonely and desolate. May they look to You who sets the solitary in families. Bless and comfort the bereaved. Turn their night of weeping into a morning of joy. Bless and sustain the dying. As they watch the approaching footsteps of death, may they only recognize Jesus coming to fetch His pilgrims home — and to fulfill His own promise regarding the Father's house and the many mansions.

I supplicate anew, for Your presence and blessing this day. Strengthen me with all might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Grant me to fear You — and be conscious of no other fear. May my best affections be centered on You, my sure portion and chief joy; so that when the supreme hour of death overtakes me, I may be able to take up the triumphant song which my Redeemer has given me the right to sing, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?"

I ask these, and every other needed blessing, in the name of Him whom You always hear. To You be ascribed all blessing and honor, and glory and praise!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Eighth Evening**

"They can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection." Luke 20:36

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I come to You this night, trusting in the name and merits of the great Angel-Intercessor. Into His golden censer, full of precious incense, I would place my imperfect prayers. May they ascend before You with acceptance, being sprinkled with the incense of His adorable merits. Make me Your child now by grace, that it may be mine at last to enter on all the glorious privileges and blessings of the "children of the resurrection."

O You who are Yourself the Resurrection and the Life, who has given us, in Your own rising from the dead, the pledge of our resurrection, draw near to me, as You did on the first resurrection evening of old, and breathe upon me and say, "Peace be unto you! Receive the Holy Spirit!" Risen with Christ, may I seek those things that are above, where Jesus sits at Your right hand. May my life now be hid with Christ — that when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, I may also appear with Him in glory. His finished work is my only plea for acceptance. It is by looking to Him, who having Himself overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, that I can appropriate the gracious words of this morning, spoken by his own lips, "Neither can they die any more!" "Thanks be to You O God, who gives me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

I would seek to make confession of my manifold transgressions. "If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities — who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Our sins reach unto the clouds — but Your mercy is high above the heavens. I rejoice in Your willingness and ability thus to forgive my guilty past. Being justified by faith, may I have peace with You.

Bestow upon me the power of Your Holy Spirit. Give me strength equal to my day. Left to my own resources, I would often be compelled to lose the conflict. But You have graciously promised to give adequate grace in the hour of trial or temptation. Lead me more and more to distrust myself.



Reveal to me — my own emptiness and weakness and liability to fall. Keep me from doing anything that would be unworthy of my Christian profession, inconsistent with Your holy mind and will, and detrimental to my own peace. Deliver me from pride and selfishness, from envy and malice, from hatred and uncharitableness. If I see frailties in others, may I consider myself, lest I also be tempted. May I be ever ready to listen to the apostolic monition, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

Have mercy on the human race. Speed everywhere the proclamation of Your blessed gospel. May the cross of Christ, and the message it carries with it, loose all chains, and redress all wrongs, and dry all tears. Beautify the place of Your sanctuary.

Sanctify providential dealings to Your sons and daughters of affliction. May they come forth from the furnace, as purified gold. Spare useful and valued lives; and may those appointed to death fall sweetly asleep in Jesus, in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life.

Anew I commend myself this night to You and to the word of Your grace. Ever hold up my goings in Your paths, that my footsteps do not stumble. Enable me to look forward to the time when, in an unsinning world, there shall be nothing to mar or impede the interchange of communion with You; but where, as children of the resurrection, we shall be one forever and ever in our living Lord and King. Watch over me during the defenseless hours of sleep. Let the curtain of Your protecting care be drawn around me! And when I awake, may I be still with You, ready anew to greet You with the words of adoring reverence — "'MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Ninth Morning**

"I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn

son." Jeremiah 31:9

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, who has brought me to the beginning of a new day, defend me by Your mighty power; and grant that this day I fall into no sin, nor run into any kind of danger, but that all my doings may be ordered by Your governance, to do always what is righteous in Your sight. I would enter on today's duties and engagements, free from over-anxious or disquieting thoughts and cares, under the consciousness of Your love and protection.

Blessed be Your name for Your manifold and great mercies — the "springs in the desert" which You have provided still, as of old, for Your ransomed people. Cause me to walk in a straight way. Prevent me from stumbling. Have You not promised to keep Your children in the hour of temptation; and when temptation arises to give them the needed strength so that they may be able to bear it, or to resist it? You who have revealed Yourself as a Father to Your spiritual Israel, strengthen me for every duty this morning. Arm me for every conflict. Enable me, day by day, to imbibe more of the pilgrim spirit, and to pass the time of my sojourning here in fear.

Blessed Savior, You are as sympathetic and responsive as ever to the needs and petitions and trials of Your people. There is no infirmity beyond Your help, no peril beyond Your support, no sin which excludes from Your pardoning, pleading, interceding love! I would gratefully own the power which has hitherto protected me, and the grace which has restrained me. Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would often have been devastated. When my feet were ready to slip, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up!

Let me wage a constant warfare with all that is antagonistic to Your divine mind and will. Enable me to exercise a holy jealousy over my motives as well as my actions — to live and walk as seeing You who are invisible, remembering that You who are my Witness now — will be my Judge at last. Let me take no step without Your sanction. May I be distrustful of my own wisdom. Give me a right judgment in all things. It is

my comfort to know that You will mark out and decide for me — every stage in my heavenward journey. In a spirit of delighted obedience, I would hear Your voice behind me saying, "This is the way — walk in it."

Bless my beloved friends. May we be united in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and cherish the same certain hope of immortality. Let us all be taught by You, and great shall be our peace.

Compassionate the sick, the sorrowful, the bereaved, the dying. Enable them to take down their harps from the willows of sadness, and sing songs in the night; looking with submissive faith to the Brother on the throne, who notes every pang of the throbbing and sorrowing heart, for He has Himself felt them.

Have mercy on Your whole Church! Pity the careless, arouse the slumbering, confirm the wavering. Bring Your true people more and more to see eye to eye and heart to heart. Hush the voice of discord and division, so that, in one glad burst of harmonious song, the universal prayer may in due time arise!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Ninth Evening**

"Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight." Luke 10:21

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You anew for Your glorious name, for all the blessed thoughts and assurances and solaces which cluster around it. As a Father You have again watched over me during the day; as a Father You have shielded me from danger; as a Father You have poured unnumbered blessings into my cup — the least of them undeserved. And even when

You see fit to cloud my path, curtail my comforts, and withdraw my cherished joys — I recognize the same paternal hand. When You bring a cloud over the earth — the rainbow is seen in the cloud. Crosses and comforts both emanate from You, and our comforts are always greater than our crosses. Whether therefore You give or take away, I would adore alike — a giving and a taking God, and say, with reverential love and submission, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

Sprinkle anew the lintel and door-posts of my heart this night, with the blood of atonement. I bring infinite demerit and unworthiness — to the worthiness of Him who is all-worthy. I would listen to the ever-gracious declaration, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities I will remember no more."

And while looking to Christ as my Savior, I would look to Him also as my great Example and Pattern. It was He who uttered this morning's word of filial obedience and submission. May He attune my lips to utter the same. Confidently reposing in the same heavenly Father — His Father and my Father, His God and my God — may I be enabled to say, "Do to me and with me, whatever seems good in Your sight; and forbid that what seems good in Your sight, should ever seem unacceptable in mine. This cup which You give me to drink — shall I not drink it? Not as I will — but as You will."

Look in kindness on all Your poor afflicted ones. Bless the ministry of sorrow. Soothe and sustain in every dark and perplexing hour. If Your tried people fail at times to see the bright light in the cloud, may they take comfort in the assured promise that "at evening time, it shall be light."

Let Your favor and blessing rest on every effort for the promotion of Your cause throughout the world.

Subdue all hearts and all kingdoms by the conquering power of redeeming love. Revive Your work in the midst of the years. The work from first to last, is Yours. It is You who lay the foundation-stones; it is You who lay all the subsequent stones. And when the top-stone shall be brought forth with shouting, the cry will still be, "Grace, grace unto it!"

And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in You. May the great Angel of the covenant come down in this, the time of evening oblation. May my imperfect services be accepted through Him who, when on earth, taught His universal Church to call You "Our Father".

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Tenth Morning**

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" Matthew 7:11

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, I beg Your blessing, as I am once more on the threshold of a new day. May its duties and engagements be undertaken and pervaded with the gracious sense of Your nearness and favor. Dispel all fear; promote and strengthen all confidence in these assuring words of the great Redeemer. He has consecrated with a heavenly meaning, the most sacred tie and relationship of earth. The love of father to child is only the feeble image, Lord, of Your love to Your redeemed people. Parental gifts, bestowed with yearning affection, are only the pledges and emblems of a divine interest in us which knows no change, no decay. Loving Your own who are in the world, You love them unto the end. You have established Your faithfulness forever.

Impart unto me all these promised "good things" — pardon, peace, justification, sanctification — crowned and consummated with the hope of immortality. I would bring my emptiness — to Christ's almighty, all-sufficient fullness. Alas! how far do I fall short of Your lofty standard of duty! How far do I come beneath my own best ideals! How much I think and say and do, when my motives are rigidly scrutinized — is mingled

with humbling imperfection! But, incomplete in myself, I am complete in Jesus! Thanks be to You, who always causes me to triumph in Christ. Impart to me especially, the aids of Your Holy Spirit, that He may quicken my zeal, energize my faith, deepen my love, elevate and consecrate my whole being! Of all "good things" — of all Your promised blessings — this is the best and greatest (Luke 11. 13). Empower me with the Holy Spirit. Your Spirit, O God, is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.

Bless Your sorrowing children. May they be enabled to recognize chastisement as one of the gifts of adoption — that You chasten them because You love them. With unrepining submission, may it be theirs to say, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good unto Him."

Look in pity, gracious God, on this sin-stricken, woe-worn world. Unloose the chains of slavery; scatter the people that delight in war; and hasten the advent and kingdom of the Prince of Peace. Stir up Your faithful people in Your service. Raise up honored heralds of the truth to prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert, a highway for our God. Give us all grace, in our varied spheres, to be waiting and watching; to lay out whatever talent You have entrusted to our care; to work while it is called today, and prepare for the coming night, when the season of earth's opportunities shall cease forever. I ask these, and other needed blessings, in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Savior.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Tenth Evening

"He prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." John 11:52

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, before I retire to rest, visit me with Your grace. Renew to me the blessed sense of Your pardoning love. I have the blessings of another day, with thankful heart to record. I have received throughout its hours, double mercy for all my sins. And now, as the shadows of evening are gathering around, I beseech You to be my keeper. As You have been to me a pillar of cloud by day—be a pillar of fire by night. Fulfill Your own gracious promise: "In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you and bless you." "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." May every joy of life be sweetened, and every sorrow sanctified, by the assurance that, "You are my Father." May I know, in common with the whole family of God, the exceeding greatness of Your power to us who believe.

While I renew my gratitude and praise for personal mercies, for the blessings of home and kindred, health and strength, above all, for spiritual and religious privileges, my thoughts are more especially drawn, to such as are less highly favored. I would sympathetically and earnestly remember those who are sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death; who have never enjoyed the opportunity of welcoming the glad revelation of Yourself as a gracious Father, and of Christ as a living, loving Savior. Lord, hasten the time when "the children of God that are scattered abroad" shall by You be ingathered; when the filial song shall arise from a regenerated world, "Behold! we are all Your children!" Make those Your people, who are not Your people; and her beloved, who was not beloved. Let Jew and Gentile, barbarian, bond and free, exult together in the liberty of the glory of the sons of God!

Own every means for the promotion of Your cause. May the divine Dove

of Peace brood, as He did over chaos of old, bringing light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. May we all feel, in our varied spheres of influence, that we have some mission, however lowly, to perform for You, and for the good of others. Give the single eye, and the single aim, and the lofty unalloyed motive.

Have great compassion on Your suffering and distressed children, more especially on the bereaved and desolate. May they recognize Your dealings, however mysterious, as dictated and regulated by unerring love, the appointments of Your own infinite wisdom; and look forward to that better world where all afflictions shall be ended, all tears dried — where there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither any more pain, for the former things are passed away!

Gracious God, I anew plead with You, in fulfillment of the gospel promise of this evening, to gather together Your now scattered children, that so the happy predicted time may soon come, when no man shall need to teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," but when all shall know You, from the least even unto the greatest; when nations and kingdoms and people and tongues shall unite with one heart and voice in calling You "Our Father"!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Eleventh Morning**

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, blessed be Your name, that Your children are ever permitted to enter Your presence and invoke Your favor. Let me this



morning approach the gates of prayer with filial confidence and holy reverence. Keep me from vain distractions and disturbing thoughts. Let me know and feel somewhat of that divine fellowship realized by Your servant and apostle. Make my soul receptive of spiritual influences. Open the windows of heaven, that a shower of blessing may descend. May I see everything around me transformed and transfigured in You, all wearing the print and impress of a Father's love, and gladdened with the memories of a Savior's redeeming work and salvation.

Alas! I have to own that I am the ungrateful recipient of much divine kindness. I have not the humiliating sense I ought to have of sin in general, and of my own sins in particular. My best resolutions, how frail! My best affections, how divided! My best services, how mingled! My best aims and aspirations, how far short of Your glory! Your love and patience and forbearance are as wondrous as they are undeserved. It is of Your compassions alone, that I am spared the cumberer's sentence and doom.

I would lie low at the foot of the cross, disowning all trust and confidence in anything I have done, in anything I can do. I would look alone to Him who is able to save, and willing to save to the uttermost, and through whose merits and mediation, I am now, and shall be at last, more than conqueror.

Deliver me from the dominion, as well as from the guilt of sin. Deliver me from this present evil world. Amid its legion foes, may I stand panoplied in the armor of righteousness, faithful to You through good report and through bad report; so that, at last, an entrance may be ministered to me abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of my Lord and Savior.

Deepen in me a sense of responsibility for the use of every entrusted talent. Let me seek to lay them out for the good of men, and for Your glory. Let me enter on no duty without invoking Your sanction, and seeking to hear Your voice amid all perplexities, "This is the way — walk in it."

May Your gospel triumph over the pride and superstition and will-worship of man. Darkness is still covering the earth, and gross darkness the people. May the joyful mandate soon be heard, "Arise and shine; for

your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you."

May trial have the blessed effect of bringing me nearer to You. Direct broken hearts and weeping eyes to that bright world where nothing shall mar or interrupt everlasting harmonies — the rest which remains for Your people.

May all varied duties and engagements this day be sanctified. Fit me for work and warfare. May I ever realize that Your pure eye is upon me! And so, when the shadows of evening gather around, I may not have the saddened sense of a day lived and spent in vain, but rather of having enjoyed somewhat of this gracious fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Leaning with a more simple and entire dependence on divine grace amid all changes and checkered experiences, may it be ever mine with filial love and confidence to say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Eleventh Evening**

"So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe!" Philippians 2:15

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, the shadows of night are again gathering around me. Abide with me; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Graciously forgive whatever I have done amiss in thought or word or deed. Before I close my eyes in sleep, I come anew to the opened fountain, and plead anew the all-sufficient atonement of the divine Redeemer.

Let me more deeply realize my filial covenant relationship to You, rejoicing that all which concerns me is in Your hand, and under Your divine, sovereign control. For the manifold blessings of this life, may I

feel a chastened gratitude and thankfulness while I have them; and when You, the great Giver and Disposer, see fit to revoke the grant, may it be mine, with filial self-surrender, to say, "Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure."

Alas! O God, I have to confess how far I am living beneath my privileges and responsibilities! How inadequately I realize my spiritual deficiencies and shortcomings! How little consciousness I have of my need of the Redeemer and of His great salvation! How little have I attained to the "purity and blamelessness" of Your children! how much in my temper and conduct and daily walk is unworthy of those who are called to shine as lights in the dark world!

Lord, may this be more and more, my habitually aspiration — to shine for You; to manifest daily, the elevating, sanctifying, transforming precepts and principles of Your gospel; that I may live blameless and pure, without fault, my conduct unmarred and unblemished by inconsistency. Let me enter on no engagement unsanctioned by Your approval. Preserve my purity of thought, purity of word, purity of deed.

Whatever Your dealings and discipline towards me are, whether in the way of prosperity or adversity, may it be my single desire that You may be glorified. Thus cultivating a pilgrim spirit, may I be prepared, whenever You see fit to call me hence, to enter Your presence and home above; where, fully purged from the dross of earthliness, with no bias to evil, no contrariety to Your divine mind and will — I shall be permitted to serve You forever and ever!

Have mercy on Your afflicted children. If Your dealings with them are apparently harsh and mysterious, may they hear also Your gracious undertones of love. May they trust the Father-heart of their heavenly Parent, and feel assured, whatever the complexion of their trial is, that all things, joyful or sorrowful, prosperous or adverse, are working together, and will work together, for their eternal good.

Bless my beloved friends. May they too count it their highest privilege and happiness to be among the blameless and harmless sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, testifying for You, Your cause and

kingdom and glory, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Lord, how long shall the wicked — how long shall the wicked triumph? Save Your people; bless Your inheritance; sustain them also, and lift them up forever.

Meanwhile, I would present my evening petitions, and close them, with the conviction of a divine and gracious reality in the words — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twelfth Morning**

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" 1 John 3:2

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, draw near to me this morning in Your own infinite mercy. "Sun of my soul," who has set Your glory above the heavens, eclipsing all created beams, may Your presence be an inspiration to me. I need no other blessing if I have Yours. The retrospect of life is a retrospect of Your divine love. I am a living monument of Your forbearance.

How wondrously have You borne with my ingratitude and waywardness; with my sinful omissions of known duty, and my sinful commission of known sin! I am a mere cumberer of the ground, yet You have spared me. It is of Your mercies, that I am not consumed. Unworthy to eat of the crumbs which fall from my Master's table, You are bestowing upon me token upon token of unmerited goodness, waking me up each morning to new causes for filial gratitude and praise.

I bless You for my regeneration, my preservation, and for the manifold

blessings of this life. Most chiefly do I bless You for Jesus Christ, the Son of Your love; for all that He has done for me, for all that He is still doing for me. In Him I would rock my every fear and disquietude to rest. In the words of Your holy apostle just read, I would cleave to the assurance of a present sonship in the family of which He is the divine Elder Brother. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God!" This is the pledge of the inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.

Grant that I may be enabled to walk worthy of my adoption privileges, looking forward with humble yet triumphant confidence to the full realization of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of my great God my Savior, when I shall be transformed into His divine image and likeness, and see Him as He is!

Meanwhile, may I have grace given me to purify myself even as He is pure. My Father-God, keep me from whatever has the tendency to estrange me from You, and to weaken the filial tie and the child-affection. Preserve me from a spirit of selfishness; from seeking alone personal enjoyment of Your gifts, instead of making thankful and generous employment of these in respect of others. From all indolence and sloth; from all hatred and envy, jealousy and malice; from all unworthy ambitions and debasing allurements; from all that would interfere with my brother's well-being; from every breach of charity, good Lord, deliver me.

Bless my beloved friends and relatives. May they too be quickened by the same animating and encouraging prospect of attaining at last, resemblance to Jesus. May they be looking for and hastening His coming; so that when the advent-hour shall strike, they may be able to lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption draws near.

Promote Your cause and kingdom everywhere. May Your churches act up to their responsibilities as lights in the world, called to shine for You, and to diffuse sacred influences all around. Hasten the day when the reign of sin and sorrow and death shall be forever terminated; when Your ingathered people, out of every nation and kindred and tongue, shall welcome in the Prince of Peace to the throne of universal empire.

Compassionate the sick and sorrowful. Prepare the dying for their great change. May angels be waiting by their death-pillow, to carry the departing spirit into the Savior's bosom. May all who are called to sorrow and tribulation here — who tell of vacant places and blanks in the family circle, and mourn their loved and lost — submissively trust, where they fail to understand the mystery of Your ways. Oh, that we were ever able and ready to follow You, not only in smooth places, but where the way is rough and the prospect dreary; seeing a rainbow of promise in every cloud, looking beyond the changes and chances of this mortal life — to the Father's home of unblighted love, where we shall be "forever with the Lord."

Quicken me this day, to run the pilgrim race. Remove every hindrance and impediment. May a sense of Your favor pervade and hallow all its doings. May I be enabled to close it as I would now begin it, by calling You, "My Father".

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twelfth Evening**

"You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I would retire to rest this night, invoking Your blessing, and seeking, "by faith in Christ Jesus," more deeply and thankfully to realize my filial relationship to You. Let me dismiss all fear or worry. May every source of anxiety and disquietude be hushed to rest, that by that same faith in Him who is my only Lord and Savior, I may, in common with Your children throughout the world, commit myself to Your gracious keeping.

You have, in the day that is past, been loading me with Your benefits. May every blessing I enjoy bear the impress of Your love, and be hallowed and sanctified by the thought that it comes from You. I would exult anew in the security of Your promises. I rejoice, that nothing can touch my divine inheritance. Those whom You love at the beginning — You love unto the end. The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but Your kindness shall not depart from me, nor shall Your covenant of peace be removed.

You are inviting me to cherish child-thoughts of confidence and affection, in coming now to Your throne of grace. Strengthen every tie which binds me to Yourself. Yours by creation, may I feel that I am doubly Yours by redemption. May I seek to consecrate the life to Your praise, which You have ransomed at such a high price. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." May I not dishonor You by departure from the path of duty or principle. Risen with Him, may I seek those things that are above, where He sits at Your right hand.

If any lukewarmness should have imperceptibly crept upon me, Lord, quicken and revive me by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Restore Your love to its place of rightful ascendancy. Subordinate all creature love to Yours. Give me grace to occupy with conscientious fidelity, whatever place in the world You have seen fit to assign to me. Let nothing dim or obscure my "blessed hope."

May Your dealings and discipline fit and nurture me for the time when my present imperfect and divided love — shall be imperfect and divided no more; when the glory of God will be the motive principle interfused through every thought and action of my life — translated from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of Your children.

Bless my beloved friends. Hallow every earthly tie, by making it a heavenly one. We can ask no better blessing than in the gracious words of this evening, that we may all be the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Be the binder-up of broken hearts, the rest for the weary, the stay of the orphan, the home of the homeless. Smooth the pillow of sickness. May

those appointed unto death, be prepared for the great change. Amid the manifold uncertainties of the present, may I be so living and walking and acting by faith in a faithful Savior, that when that same supreme hour overtakes me, I may have nothing to do but to die and to awake up in everlasting glory!

I ask every needed blessing in the name of Him whom You always hear, and who taught His disciples in all ages, to unite in the gracious invocation — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirteenth Morning**

"This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"  
Luke 15:24

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, You have loved us with an everlasting love. You love us even in our prodigal wanderings, when, forgetful of the lavish proofs of Your affection, we stray into the far country. I come to You this morning, rejoicing that You have heard my cry, that You have led me to mourn over my estrangement; and instead of rejecting my yearnings for return and reconciliation have, with the outstretched arms of mercy, You have welcomed me back to peace, and rest, and home!

Grant me the gracious sense of Your presence. Let me hear the wondrous name and assurance, "This my son!" Let it banish all doubt and unbelief, all disquietude and fear. "My Father" may the consciousness of this affiance in You, lead me to deeper contrition, to more devout filial reverence and devotion. Once lost, but now found, returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of my soul, let me listen to the voice of mingled omnipotence and love, "Be of good cheer — your sins are forgiven!" Being forgiven much — may I love all the more.



May genuine contrition for the past — mingle with heartfelt resolutions of new obedience for the future. As one alive from the dead, let me rise and walk with Christ in newness of life. Risen with Him, may I seek those things that are above, where He sits at the right hand of God. Elevate my affections. Enthroned His love as the ruling passion in my soul. Lead me to fight more faithfully under His banner, and to be more loyal and uncompromising in my allegiance. May this be my motto and watchword, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me!"

Promote His cause throughout the world. Father, glorify Your name. Hasten the day when the year of Your redeemed shall come. Cause the places round about to become a blessing. May the shower come down in its season; let there be showers of blessing.

Look down in love and sympathy on Your children of sorrow. Preserve us all from a murmuring spirit under dark and trying dispensations. May bereaved ones look forward with chastened joy, to that glorious time when tears shall no more be shed, and "death itself shall die."

Lord, be with me throughout this day. In my varied worldly work and engagements, my duties and occupations, may I seek to be a faithful steward. And when You see fit to call me hence, may I be found ready for the summons, and be able to look beyond death and the grave — to that morning without clouds when in Your light, I shall see light; and with earth's pilgrim wanderings finished, I shall be safe in my true Father's house and home forever.

Meanwhile, with childlike reverence and trust, I would look up to the mightiest of all Beings, and call You by the endearing name — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirteenth Evening**

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, another evening has gathered its shadows around me. You are light, and with You there is no darkness at all. "It is not night — if You be near." Let no "earth-born cloud" arise, to intercept the sunshine of Your countenance. Before I retire to rest, I would recall with gratitude, Father of mercies, the many memories of Your great goodness. Under the shelter of Your wings I would rejoice. Enable me, with the close of day, to enjoy a foretaste of that everlasting fellowship and communion which is to be the heritage of Your people in the heavenly kingdom.

Well may I address You as "the Father of mercies!" My earthly path is strewn with mercy, loving-kindness on loving-kindness. I would set up this night anew, my Ebenezer — my stone of remembrance — and write upon it the inscription, "Hitherto has the Lord helped me!"

When at times, in the retrospect of life, clouds have darkened my sky, and the bright spots of the wilderness have been mingled with dreary ones, still have I had reason to rejoice in You as "the God of all comfort, who comforts me in all my afflictions," giving me strength equal to my day, delivering my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who daily loads me with benefits!

I desire to make acknowledgment of my great unworthiness — the poor and inadequate returns I have made to You. How often I have requited Your mercies with ingratitude, doing the things I ought not to have done, and leaving undone those things that I ought to have done. I have no excuse or apology for these, my sins and shortcomings. My own heart condemns me, and You are greater than my heart. I look away from myself and my own mis-doings, to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

O Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me! You have an all-sufficiency

in all things. I take You to be my refuge in danger, my guide in perplexity, my solace in sorrow, my confidence in death, my joy and portion through eternity. Enable me to obey Your own gracious invitation this night. Coming weary and heavy laden, may I have rest and peace for my soul — peace in the renewed consciousness of the perfection of Your atonement, the merits of Your death, the completeness of Your righteousness, the prevalence of Your intercession. Bring me to live more habitually under the constraining power of Your love; that I would regard life more and more as a mission to please You — to please You not so much in great things as in little things — in the faithful discharge of little duties, and in the calm endurance of little trials; taking up the cross when it is Your will to lay it upon me, saying with adoring filial love, "Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure."

Grant to me the promised abiding influences of Your Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of life and light, sanctification and comfort. Restore unto me the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free and gracious Spirit!

Bless those near and dear to me. Sanctify them in body, soul, and spirit. Seal them unto the day of eternal redemption!

May all Your poor afflicted ones, be enabled to resolve their wills into Yours, rejoicing in Your covenant, paternal name, "the God of all comfort." You have said that You will send no temptation greater than Your people are able to bear. With the temptation, give them the accompanying pledged promise of grace, that they may be able to bear it.

I retire to rest this night, reposing in Your covenant faithfulness, extracting strength, consolation, and peace from the words throbbing on the lips of so many of Your children at this hour of evening prayer —

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Fourteenth Morning

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."  
Romans 8:17

"He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hebrews 2:11

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, draw near to me in Your infinite mercy, and grant me the blessing which makes rich and which adds no sorrow with it. Rend Your heavens and come down; fill this little sanctuary with Your glory, and my heart with Your love. Let my prayer come before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the morning sacrifice. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Help me to understand the privilege and glory of being an heir of Yours, and a joint-heir with Your dear Son.

I thank You anew, for that ever-gracious name which hushes all fears, and dismisses all doubts and misgivings. I thank You that He who is the Prince of Life condescended to take upon Him our nature, in all its weaknesses and infirmities, its sorrows and temptations; and that thus linked in a true and spotless humanity, He is not ashamed to call us brethren. We adore this great mystery of godliness. The ascription of earth will be the ascription of eternity — "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

I rejoice in His full and completed atonement. I rejoice that by Christ's doing and dying, every barrier of access is removed between me and Your throne of mercy; that having overcome the sharpness of death, He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. I have His own gracious assurance, that because He lives — I shall live also; that as an heir of God and a joint-heir in Him — I have everything pledged for my salvation which is within the compass of omnipotence — pardon, peace, and acceptance here, and the promise of eternal glory hereafter.

My earnest prayer is that strength may be given me to walk worthy of so

priceless an inheritance. May it be my constant aspiration to consecrate the life redeemed at such a cost, to Your service. May I jealously watch whatever in my heart or conduct I know to be displeasing to You — contrary to the dictates of conscience and the teachings of Your holy Word.

Preserve me from sin, and from the snares and assaults of the Evil One. Keep me from all unworthy cares and worldly entanglements. Bring my thoughts and purposes into harmony with Yours; setting ever before me my Savior's example, in His kindness and forgiveness, His humility and meekness, His resignation under suffering, His unswerving resolve ever to do His Father's will. Emancipated from the bondage of corruption, may I know more and more, what it is to be translated into the liberty of the glory of Your children, and to realize, partially now, and fully hereafter, all that is comprehended in the divine beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Give each of us grace in our varied spheres to seek to glorify You, either by active duty or by passive submission. Let us feel that if You are our portion, we are independent of every other.

Let all Your poor afflicted ones, bow to Your sovereign and all-wise appointments, satisfied that You chasten not arbitrarily, but because You love, and that nothing can come wrong to them which, as Your children and heirs — comes from Your hand. May the bereaved be able to utter over their departed, "Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints."

Bless my beloved friends. Hallow the bond which unites us. May we enjoy now a common fellowship in You, and in the blessings of the covenant of grace. Whatever fountains of earthly bliss it may be Yours to open to us in our pilgrimage way, may we be permitted at last, in Your full vision and fruition, to drink together of the streams of Your everlasting love!

May this day be begun, continued, and ended in You. And with the blessed assurance of Your paternal love in Christ, I would address You in His own gracious words, and say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as

it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fourteenth Evening**

"They will be Mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up My jewels. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him." Malachi 3:17

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, draw near to me this evening, as I now draw near unto You. Let me hear Your voice saying, "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is your!" "I have called you by your name; you are Mine!" I thank You for Your ministrations of earthly blessing; for all that gladdens and brightens my daily existence; for food and clothing, for health and strength, for friends and home. The retrospect of my life is a retrospect of Your kindness. I will utter abundantly the memory of Your great goodness, and talk of Your righteousness. I would take Your tender, pitying love in the past, as a pledge for the future, and hear Your voice behind me saying, "Be still, and know that I am God!" "This is the way; walk in it."

Let the sense of my covenant relationship to You in Christ, dispel all doubt and hush all disquietude. Let me feel the gracious persuasion that whatever befalls me is Your ordination; that be they bright or dark, joyful or sorrowful, Your dealings are mercy and truth, the decrees and allotment of Your infinite wisdom. Where I cannot trace Your hand -- I shall trust Your loving heart! What I do not know now -- I shall know hereafter. Have You not said, "I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him"? I accept the tenderness of the earthly relationship, as the symbol of diviner realities. After such an assurance, how can I dare to impeach Your rectitude or question Your faithfulness?

Lord, let me mourn nothing but the withdrawal of the conscious sense of

Your favor. It is absence from You which creates the greatest blank in my heart. With You I am rich, whatever else I lack. Without You I would be poor, though I owned the wealth of worlds beside. Let me aspire after increasing conformity to Your most holy will. Keep me from imbibing false worldly maxims and becoming a prey to the fascinations of a world that disowns You. Elevate my affections, purify my desires. Make me more Savior-like. Fit me for the heavenly Fatherland. On that day when You make up Your jewels, Your precious treasures, may I be found among those who have been long taught on earth to regard You with filial love, and who are to have that divine affection intensified and perpetuated through eternal ages.

Regard with Your sympathy and compassion, Your children of sorrow. May they too be able to look forward with childlike faith and hope and confidence, to that blessed morning when earth's shadows shall have vanished; when every mystery shall be revealed and made luminous with love, and when they shall remember with adoring gratitude, all the way by which You have led them through the wilderness, to humble them, and to prove them.

Bestow Your providential care on my dear friends, enabling them also to appropriate the elevating assurance, "They will be Mine, says the Lord Almighty!" Pour upon us the continual dew of Your blessing. May we now together rejoice in hope of the coming glory—found together, watching and waiting and working, that the final summons may not find us unprepared to enter the eternal rest and the eternal home.

Anew I thank you for the mercies of the bygone day. Watch over me during the silence and darkness of the coming night. Give Your angels charge concerning me, that they may encamp round about me; and if pleased to spare me until tomorrow, may I rise refreshed and invigorated for duty and service. Whether I wake or sleep, may I live together with You.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from

the evil one."

## **Fifteenth Morning**

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Galatians 4:4-5

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, who have in Your great mercy permitted me to see the light of another day -- defend me by Your mighty power; and grant that this day I fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger, but that all my doings may be ordered by Your wise governance. I would enter the inner chamber of Your presence, and in the sweet concord of covenant fellowship with the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, I would bow at Your throne of heavenly grace.

I rejoice in the assurance of Your faithfulness. Amid all the fitful changes of life -- You are the same. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.

I would adore especially the mysteries of Your love manifested in the mission and incarnation of the divine Redeemer — that when the fullness of the time had come, when the world by its own boasted wisdom failed to effect its own salvation, when "the world by wisdom knew not God," You sent forth Your dear Son, virgin-born, to redeem by His perfect life and meritorious death, the children of fallen humanity, and bestow upon them the adoption of sons. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law -- by nothing short of becoming a curse for us!

My earnest prayer is that these adoption privileges and blessings may be mine; that with believing trust and confidence I may be able to look up to the greatest of all Beings and call You "My Father!" Impart to me more and more the feelings and dispositions of Your children. Give me the heritage of those who fear Your name. Make me gentle and loving, unselfish and forgiving. Father, guide me! Father, keep me! Father,



discipline me by Your providence for Your service here, and for Your glory hereafter! It is by Your grace alone, that I stand. Hold me up -- and I shall be safe! How often and how easily would I have fallen in the hour of temptation, but for Your upholding hand! In all times of peril or tribulation, of weakness or vacillation, set me in the cleft of the Rock. Inspire me with purposes of new and more devoted obedience. Sanctify me in body, soul, and spirit; and present me at last faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy!

I pray for the whole Church; I pray for all Your children who are scattered abroad. Fetch home every wanderer; reclaim every backslider. Confirm Your true people in their most holy faith. May they know in their increasing experience, that Your service is self-rewarding and self-satisfying. Make their hearts sacred altars — living temples, on which the superscription is written, "Holiness to the Lord!"

Bless Your sorrowful and the bereaved ones. May they accept their trials as the dealing and discipline of infinite wisdom, designed to wean from the perishable, and allure to the imperishable. If it is night here, prepare them for a cloudless, nightless, sorrowless heaven, where trial is no longer either felt or feared.

"Almighty God, may it please You of Your gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of Your elect, and to hasten Your kingdom, that we, with all those who are departed in the true faith of Your holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Your eternal and everlasting glory."

Anew I commend myself to You this day, and to the word of Your grace. Help me in the battle of life. Set a watch before my mouth; guard the door of my lips. In every duty, may I have Your presence; in every perplexity, may I have Your counsel; for every burden, may I have Your support. May each returning morning find me better prepared for the rest of the glorified, and the full vision and fruition of You, my God. Meanwhile, with the ever deepening love and devotion of Your adopted children, may it be mine to say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have

forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Fifteenth Evening**

"Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" Malachi 2:10

"You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer; Your name is from everlasting." Isaiah 63:16

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I come to You this night as the one God and Father of all, the beneficent Creator, the all-wise Provider, the supreme Disposer. Especially do I approach You as my Redeemer, whose redeeming name and redeeming love are "from everlasting." Teach me to feel my dependence on You; that from day to day and from hour to hour, I am a miracle of Your grace, "kept by the power of God."

I acknowledge my great unworthiness. I have sinned against You times and ways without number. I have nothing to plead in extenuation. If tried by my best hours, or best days, or best services — how condemned would I stand! How often You might righteously have left me to the fruit of my own ways and to be filled with my own devices, turning away Your face from me — and my prayer from You. But You have not so requited me. Blessed be Your name, You do not "upbraid." Your hand of mercy and loving-kindness and longsuffering is stretched out still. Your ways are not as our ways, nor Your thoughts as our thoughts. The forbearance and longsuffering of the best of earthly fathers is only the feeble reflection of Yours. With devout filial love I would seek Your forgiveness and favor.

As Your redeemed child, adopted into Your family, may it be my desire to love You more, and to serve You better. Let Your will be the controlling principle of my life. If You send me prosperity, let me accept every blessing as emanating directly from You. If You send me adversity, may it be the blessed means of promoting my spiritual growth, freeing me from the dross of worldliness and sin, and transfiguring me into the likeness of

Christ.

Gracious Savior, I rejoice in Your exalted and ever-present sympathy. You make my case and my cares, Your own. Whatever troubles or perils, difficulties or temptations may environ my path, may this be my elevating consolation, that Your hand is never shortened that it cannot save, neither is Your ear heavy that it cannot hear. Quicken me in Your service. Lift me above the life of selfishness, and unsympathetic isolation. Bring me more under the dominion of that charity which is the bond of perfectness. Preserve me from overlooking and neglecting the interests of others. May this be my habitual aim — to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You my God.

I commend to Your gracious care, all my beloved friends. May they dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Let us be together sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, and able to rejoice in the common hope of the glory of God. We bless You for those eternal ties, which survive the uncertain ones of earth.

May the realized sense of Your presence and love, take the sting from all our afflictions. O Brother born for adversity, speak Your own balm-word for the weary and heavy-laden — "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Turn the night of weeping into a morning of joy. May the cross blossom into a crown. Prepare the dying for the final hour. May they fall asleep in Jesus, to wake up in everlasting glory.

Hasten that happy day when "our Father in heaven" shall be the one universal name, owned and revered all the world over; when the love of Christ shall be enthroned in every heart, and become the theme and inspiration of every tongue!

I anew commend myself to You and to the word of Your grace. While beseeching You to be with me through the silent watches of the night, I would close my petitions and retire to rest by pronouncing the ever-blessed words, in the name of Him who first uttered them — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned

against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Sixteenth Morning**

"You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation." Psalm 89:26

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, the God of my life, and the length of my days; may it be mine to avow, with some good measure of appropriating faith and holy confidence, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation."

Other portions are perishable, other confidences are unstable, other refuges too often prove refuges of lies. But my Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted! O You who go before Your people still, as of old, in the day-cloud and night-fire, uphold me with Your most gracious favor, and sustain me with Your continual help. Let me have increasing experience of the blessedness of Your everlasting watch by night and by day.

"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let my foot slip; He who watches over me will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over His people will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over me; the Lord is the shade at my right hand; the sun will not harm me by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep me from all harm; He will watch over my life; the Lord will watch over my coming and going, both now and forevermore!"

It is, above all, my comfort and consolation, my highest, holiest privilege, that the Shepherd-God of old, is the Father-God of His true spiritual people in every age; and that with filial reverence and devotion I may now this morning, approach my Father's presence and invoke my Father's love.

I acknowledge my many and grievous offences, committed as they have

been against so much light and love, so much warning and mercy. I have too often resisted Your grace, grieved Your Spirit, and wronged my conscience. I have fallen a prey to the fascinations of the world, the whisperings of unbelief, and the deceitfulness of my own heart. Lord, have mercy on me! Christ, have mercy on me! Holy Spirit, have mercy on me! Remember not the sins of my youth, nor the transgressions of my riper years; but according to Your mercy — remember me.

Lead me in Your good and holy way. Deliver me from the tyranny of any secret, besetting sin. To all the seductions of the tempter, may I be ready to say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against You, my God and my Father?"

Blessed Savior, ever-living, ever-loving Elder Brother on the throne, may it be my earnest desire to follow in Your steps as my great Example and Pattern. Like You, may I seek to be meek and lowly in heart, tender and considerate, resigned and submissive, forbearing and forgiving; so that even here I may enjoy Your own special beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers." "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Look in great kindness on my beloved friends. Distance separates between us, but no distance can separate between them and You. May we together plead the same exceeding great and precious promises. May we be anchored to the same "Rock of salvation." Make us heirs together of the grace of life. Let us be able to unite in the common filial invocation, "You are my Father!"

Bless our beloved country. Protect and perpetuate whatever is likely to promote Your glory and the well-being of the people. Be a wall of fire around Your Zion. May her watchmen never keep silence, until the Your righteousness goes forth as brightness, and Your salvation as a lamp that burns.

Pity and compassionate all Your sorrowing children. Smooth the pillow of pain and sickness; grant restoration to health and strength. Point the bereaved and the lonely, beyond this land of shadows, where all is frail and fleeting — to those joys which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive!

Be with me throughout this day. I know not what is before me. But this is my prayer, "Lead, kindly Light. Lead, gracious Father. Lead me on. I ask not to know the distant scene. Lead me, step by step. I would not choose my own path. You choose for me. And so, with the same omnipotent Father still blessing me, who has blessed me in the past — lead me over every dark and dreary spot in the journey, until the night is gone, and I reach the gates of everlasting day!

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Sixteenth Evening**

"Be imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us." Ephesians 5:1, 2

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, draw near to me this night, and visit me with that love which You bear to Your own people. I am once more on praying and on pleading ground. It is Your own gracious promise, that those who wait upon You, shall renew their strength. As I now commune with You from Your mercy-seat, may I be strengthened with all might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Make Your grace sufficient for me, and perfect Your strength in my weakness. Deepen the sense alike of my dependence on You, and of my spiritual responsibilities.

Forbid that I should be guilty of receiving even the least of Your mercies as matters of course. May they all be hallowed and sanctified by connecting them with Yourself, the great Bestower. I am unworthy to eat of the crumbs which fall from Your table. But You are inviting me to Your banqueting house, while Your banner over me is love. May it be my chief and habitual desire, to love You who first loved, and so loved me. Let Your love be shed abroad in my heart; and may a sense of that love and of

my infinite obligations to it, quicken and stimulate me in every good word and work. "He who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him."

Blot out my manifold transgressions, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Say to me, in mingled omnipotence and mercy, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven!" Along with the assured sense of fatherly forgiveness for the past, arm me with Your upholding strength for the future. May that indwelling love constrain me, in the time to come, to live not unto myself, but unto Him who died for me and rose again. However feeble and imperfect the resemblance, may I seek to be a follower and imitator of Him whose food and whose drink it was, to do Your holy will. Grant me to be an imitator of His meekness and gentleness, and His consecration to whatever was pure and lovely and kind.

Repress all unworthy ambitions, all selfish aims, all perilous concessions to the spirit of the world. Let me not be discouraged because of the hardness of the way — its difficulties, its dangers, its temptations. Let my path be brightened and beautified with the sunshine of His favor, who having once suffered being tempted, is able to support those who are tempted.

Lord, let this love of Yours, be an expansive principle in my heart and life. Let love to You, my Father in heaven, be accompanied with love to all. Preserve me from narrowness and exclusiveness, from unforgiving tempers and unbrotherly deeds. From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord — deliver me. May the well-being of my neighbor be as sacred as my own. If exposed to the shafts of slander and unkindness, may it be my habitual effort not to render evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing. May I live under the influence and sovereignty of these blessed words, "Walk in love, just as Christ has loved you."

May this same charity permeate churches as well as individuals. Terminate the spirit of sectarian jealousy and mutual recrimination. Quicken and stimulate the life of love. Give access in every land, to Your faithful missionary servants; may they prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert, a highway for our God. Hasten the time when

kings and princes shall cast their crowns and scepters at the feet of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords!

Bless all Your children who are in sorrow; all who are bowed down with heavy cares and disappointed hopes and wounded spirits; all who are mourning departed relatives and friends. Let them cleave to the unforgetting love of their Father in heaven. May afflictions lead to a more complete and entire surrender of soul and life, to Him who does all things well.

Accept of my renewed thanks for the mercies of the bygone day; and when earthly mornings and evenings have terminated, may it be mine to wake up in Your likeness in everlasting glory! Meanwhile, with uplifted heart, I would utter the name and words which serve to dispel fear and to impart an ever-deepening trust — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Seventeenth Morning**

"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, who through Your dear Son have given us power to become Your sons, help me to draw near to You this morning with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, seeking and receiving that blessing of Yours, which makes rich and adds no sorrow with it.

You are forever the same. Vicissitude may be impressed on all around me. The fondest affections may be dimmed or alienated: trusted friends may grow faithless. But You are forever the same.

With gratitude and thankfulness I can trace, in the retrospect of the past,



Your gracious footsteps. The way I have hitherto traversed, has been paved with kindness. May I see in every temporal mercy, the image and superscription of Your love. All which gladdens and sweetens my lot, emanates from the cross of Jesus. He who spared not His own Son, has with Him also freely given me all things. Realizing my filial relation, may I have grace given me to "believe on His name." Lord, I believe; help my unbelief! May I "receive" Jesus with a hearty and unhesitating faith in His varied offices, as my Prophet, Priest, and King — the Prophet to teach me; the Priest to intercede for me; the King to reign over and within me, bringing every high thought and lofty imagination, into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Amid conscious weakness and infirmity, I rely on Your grace and guidance in all the diverse experiences of life; and at last to be presented faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy!

Look in kindness on those in whom I am interested, and for whom it is alike my duty and privilege to pray. Bring into the way of truth, all such as have erred or are deceived. Have mercy on those who may have fallen wounded in the battle, or who may have turned faint-hearted in the hour of conflict. Restore unto them, the joys of Your salvation, and uphold them with Your free Spirit.

Pity and relieve Your suffering and sorrowing ones, according to their several necessities. Give them the heritage of those who fear Your name. May the thought of the coming glory and its unspeakable joys, reconcile them to the tribulations of the present world.

Have compassion on the whole world. Hasten that predicted time when all kings shall fall down before You; when all nations shall serve You; when they shall bring gold and incense, and shall show forth the praises of the Lord. Saturate Your faithful ministering servants with the healthful Spirit of Your grace, and pour upon them the continual dew of Your blessing.

Help me this day in the engagements of life. May love to You and a desire to glorify Your name, be intermingled with all I think, or say, or do. Whether I live, may I live unto the Lord; or whether I die, may I die unto

the Lord; living or dying, may I be Yours! Thus fitted for duty and prepared for trial, with filial reverence and confidence, I would sum up my petitions by calling You— "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Seventeenth Evening

"Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You for the mercies of the bypast day. May every blessing I enjoy be hallowed and sweetened by the thought that it comes from You, and is a pledge of Your goodness. You are graciously ministering to my ever-recurring necessities. Enable me, from morning to evening, to live as a pensioner on Your bounty; to trace every gift to the great Bestower, every stream of creative and providential mercy — to Yourself, the infinite Fountain-head. Your favor alone is life; Your loving-kindness is better than life. There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" Lift up the light of Your countenance upon me. Hide not Your face, else I must be troubled. Cause it to shine, and then I must have peace!

I acknowledge my many and multiplied transgressions. By reason of my sin, I might often have forfeited Your favor, and been left to wander as a prodigal and exile forever, far from rest, and home, and You. Blessed be Your name, the hand of parental love and mercy is stretched out still. You are waiting to be gracious. A Father's voice of reconciliation and forgiveness is ever heard saying, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities I will remember no more."

As partaker of Christ's resurrection life — sanctify me in body, soul, and spirit. Preserve me from the snares of the world, the assaults of

temptation, and the deceitfulness of my own heart. It is my comfort to know that He who is with me, and for me — is greater far than all that can be against me. Remembering Your goodness in the past, I would entrust myself to Your keeping and guidance for the unknown future, knowing that You will be faithful to Your promise, "I will never leave you — nor forsake you." May it be my habitual desire to please You — and my sorrow to grieve You. Enable me to subdue and mortify unholy affections, and to live as seeing You who are invisible.

Hallow my relations to my fellow-men, and to the world around me. Grant me grace to inherit the blessing and beatitude of the peacemakers; ever coveting that most excellent gift of love, which is the very bond of perfectness — seeking, amid wrongs, to forgive and to forget. Alas! that there should so often be unworthy estrangements among the children of a common Father, and the professing heirs of the same heavenly inheritance!

Look in kindness on Your children who stand in need of sympathy. Be the Comforter of all who are cast down. May the breaking of earthly cisterns, only endear to them the great inexhaustible Source of consolation. Let them see; and if they cannot see, let them believe — that there is a "needs be" in their varied tribulations. May they count it their highest duty and supreme privilege, with the reverent obedience and submission of children, to bow to the will of their Father in heaven.

God of Bethel, O God of all the families of the earth, take those near and dear to me under Your loving care. May You be their keeper; their stay, and their strength at their right hand. As night now closes around me, I would for them and for myself, take shelter in the gracious promise: "When you lie down — you shall not be afraid. Yes, you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet." Let me retire to rest at peace with You and in charity to all mankind, listening to Your promise: "In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you, and I will bless you."

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from

the evil one."

## **Eighteenth Morning**

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" Galatians 4:6

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, send forth Your Spirit into my heart, enabling me, as one of Your children by adoption, fully to realize the graciousness of Your paternal name, and the tenderness of Your paternal love. I come to the footstool of Your throne, thanking You for this morning's light and this morning's mercies. Refresh me with Your blessing; revive me with Your grace. May I enjoy a season of fellowship with You my Father, and with Your Son, Jesus Christ. I acknowledge with profound thankfulness Your unwearying watchfulness and care. Sun of my soul, shine upon me with the brightness of Your rising. May each returning morning be the emblem and pledge of that glorious day, when the sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself, but You shall be my everlasting Light.

With an ever-deepening reverence would I say, "Give me this day, and day by day, Father, my daily bread." I would realize my constant dependence as the pensioner on Your bounty. Lift me above the unrest and perplexities of the present. Enable me to see You in everything, and everything in You. May I know and feel that Your favor alone is life, and Your loving-kindness is better than life. My heart and my flesh fails; but You are the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

I acknowledge with sincerity and penitence of heart, my manifold trespasses. I have done those things I ought not to have done; I have left undone those things which I ought to have done; and there is no soundness in me. I have nothing to palliate or extenuate my guilt. Against You — You only, have I sinned, and done iniquity in Your sight. Father, forgive me! Father, love me! Father, save me! Father, fetch me home from every unworthy wandering!

Let me rise to a sense of my adoption privileges, with purposes and resolutions of new obedience. May Your Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Purifier, the Sanctifier — preserve my soul pure and undefiled as His own living temple, revealing the glory of the Redeemer's person and work — taking of the things that are Christ's, and showing them unto me. It is by Your grace alone, that I stand. How often has Your interposing hand shielded me from spiritual danger, and repelled the assaults of evil! Be still my ever-present Defender. Keep me from all false ways, from treading questionable ground. If there are temptations, please disarm them. If there are difficulties, please remove or resolve them. If there are joys, please hallow them. If there are trials, please sanctify them.

Deepen in me a sense of my individual responsibility to You. May the divine principle of love, influence and govern all my actions. You love me too well to give me my own way; for in my blindness and self-will I would often choose the evil — and refuse the good. Seal me with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the pledge of my heavenly inheritance.

Pity Your children who are in sorrow. Bless all weepers and watchers by the couch of sickness, or the bed of death. Spare useful and valued lives. Turn back, if it is Your holy will, the shadow on life's dial; and where You have appointed otherwise, transform the gate of death into the gate of heaven.

O Lord arise, and have mercy upon Zion. Let the time to favor her, yes, the set time, soon come. May all Your churches, walking in Your fear, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, everywhere be multiplied. Open closed eyes to see, and closed ears to hear, and closed hearts to understand Your Word. Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause.

I would seek this morning to have my mind stayed on You; living under the loving constraint of that lofty motive, "to do always those things that are pleasing in Your sight." I would be strengthened for the day's engagements, and fortified against its trials, by thus summing up my petitions with the divinely-taught words — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead

us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Eighteenth Evening**

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God -- are sons of God. You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Romans 8:14-16

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You for this, Your new, best name. The shadows of evening have again fallen around me. May I repose under the shadow of Your wings. With You there is no darkness at all; the darkness and the light are both alike unto You. Before I lie down to rest, impart to me the gracious sense of Your favor — of sin forgiven, of peace secured and sealed to me through the blood of the cross. Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the work of Your Holy Spirit, that I may be enabled perfectly to love You, and worthily to magnify Your holy name.

While I thank You for the unnumbered temporal blessings of my lot, let me ever feel that of all Your gifts -- You Yourself are the crown and consummation of all Your blessings! I would bless You especially this night for the gift and revelation of Your Holy Spirit — the Enlightener, Purifier, Sanctifier of Your people. May it be mine to feel His indwelling power, His quickening, energizing influences, raising me more and more from the death of sin -- to the life of righteousness. May He bear witness with my spirit that I am Your child, and, as a child, an heir of heaven.

Have You not just said, by the mouth of Your holy apostle, "Those who are led by the Spirit of God -- are sons of God"? May I thus be conducted on from grace to grace, and from strength to strength. Your Spirit, O God, is good; lead me to the land of uprightness — that land where the leading will be from glory to glory. May it be my endeavor now to attain a gradual resemblance to the image and character of the divine Redeemer, aspiring after that holiness of heart and life without which no one can see, no one can enjoy, the presence and fellowship of an infinitely pure and holy God.

I pray for any in whom I am interested who may still be far from You — those who are crying in the far country, "I perish with hunger." Gracious Father, fetch them home! Let them welcome the outstretched arms of Your love, the opened gates of mercy. Have compassion on a world lying in wickedness, on the nations and peoples that know You not. Come from the four winds, O Breath, O Spirit of God, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live! Brood, as You did of old over the darkness of chaos, and say, "Let there be light!"

Pity those who are in tribulation, and with regard to whom deep may be calling unto deep. May Jesus come to them walking on the sea. Enable them to look forward in quiet, peaceful confidence to the time when every wave will be rocked to rest, sin vanquished, sorrow unknown, tears wiped away. Meanwhile, as Your children, may they feel that even in the floods of great waters they are "led by the Spirit of God." May He, in these "paths of the sea," reveal Himself especially to them as the Comforter.

I again invoke Your guardian care and divine blessing. Spare me, good Lord, to welcome the light of a new day. May I awake in Your favor, fitted for the discharge of all its duties.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Nineteenth Morning**

"I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." John 16:23

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, I approach the footstool of Your throne of grace through the merits and mediation of Him whom You always hear. O divine Redeemer, who holds in Your hand the golden key of the gates of

prayer, who open and no man shuts, I trust the gracious word of promise to which I have now listened. May I be enabled to draw near to the divine Presence with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.

How wondrous Your own declaration, that whatever I ask, if it is in accordance with Your holy will — "whatever," within the bounds of Omnipotence to bestow -- will not be refused. There is bread enough in our Father's house, and to spare; none of Your children need perish with hunger. Lord, evermore give me this bread! The bread which perishes, the bread of daily provision for my earthly needs and necessities — providential care and providential guidance — but above all, the Bread of heaven for the supply of my daily spiritual needs, and which alone can stay and satisfy the hunger of the soul — the Bread, whoever eats of which, shall live forever.

Adored be Your name for this twofold revelation of Yourself as a God of providence and a God of grace. I rejoice that You are with me in every step of the earthly journey, whispering in my ear the consoling words, "In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you and bless you!" Let my heart be responsive to Your directing voice and wise appointments. If you give me the full cup, oh enable me to carry it with a steady hand. If the cup is mingled with troubles, be this my solace and comfort, that it is my Father who has added the bitter drops. Whether mine is the experience of cloud or of sunshine, may I be ready in both to say, "May Your will be done!"

In the blessing promised to me this morning in answer to prayer, give me above all the blessed sense of forgiveness — peace through the blood of the cross. Pardon whatever sins I have committed against You in thought, word, and deed. Accept of me in the Beloved; heal my backslidings, receive me graciously, and love me freely.

Bless Your children in affliction. May it be their joy and privilege to pour their sorrows into a Father's ear. As one whom his mother comforts, do comfort them, and they shall be comforted. Be the rest-giver and the rest-provider for Your weary and heavy-laden children.

I would ask You also in behalf of those near and dear to me, all connected



by the ties of nature, all associated in the holier and more enduring fellowships of Your covenant children. Write every name in the Lamb's book of life. Make them Yours now, and Yours forever.

Look in kindness on our native land, in all its interests, sacred and civil. As you have blessed her and made her a blessing in the past, may she continue to realize that she is the honored instrument in Your hand for the spread of truth and the triumph of righteousness.

Compass my path, good Lord, and keep me from evil. Give me increasing purity of heart, and simplicity of purpose, and singleness of aim. Let no transaction be undertaken but what I believe to have Your sanction and approval. When the day is ended, may it be blemished with no remembrance of unworthiness in word or deed. Give me the daily grace promised for daily necessities and exigencies. May my whole nature be in harmony with Yours. Thus, in undivided and delighted consecration to You and Your sole glory, may I be enabled now and ever to call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Nineteenth Evening**

"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Romans 8:19-21

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I would again, at the close of another day, bring to You the incense-offering of gratitude and praise. Meet me at this appointed hour of evening sacrifice. Disperse all the shadows of sin and unbelief, and impart the inner sunshine which no darkness can obscure. How

unworthy am I of the privilege of approaching Your presence! There is enough of coldness and formality in my best services, to debar me from fellowship and communion with You. Touch alike my erring heart, and my imperfect petitions with the live coal from off Your holy altar.

I rejoice at the thought of the glorious liberty of Your children, and of Your gracious willingness that I should partake of the same. By nature and by practice I am tied and bound with the chain of sin! Yet You have, in Your dear Son, revealed a glorious method by which emancipation can be secured, alike from its guilt and its tyranny, its condemning and its enslaving power. If Christ makes me free, then am I free indeed. Take away all slavish and servile fear — the bondage of corruption. Put Your spirit of adoption within me, enabling me to cry, "Abba, Father!" Like the cripple laid at the temple gate of old, let me go forth with every chain of spiritual slavery unloosed and broken -- walking and leaping and praising You -- conscious of freedom from the curse of the law, freedom from the tyranny of heart-sins and life-sins, freedom from the fear of death, freedom and deliverance from the wrath to come.

Lord, I have ever need of Your grace and of the influence of Your Holy Spirit. Protect and preserve me by Your mighty power. If at times prone to spiritual declension, reclaim my truant heart from its wanderings. Give me increasing tenderness of conscience, scrupulously avoiding anything that would compromise Christian principle, or dim the sanctities of pure thought and holy deed.

And while I ever aim after a Christ-like character and life, do fill me with deeper solicitude for the well-being of those around me. Make me more and more loyal to the great gospel rule and requirement, of doing to others as I would desire that they would do to me. Let me know and feel and exemplify that love is the fulfilling of the law.

Pity a fallen world, "subjected to frustration, not by its own choice." Hasten the happy time when creation, now in mourning and sackcloth, shall put on her bridal attire, and when the invocation shall be heard, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready!"

Have mercy on the wide family of Your afflicted ones. May they take refuge in the very arms that are chastising them, feeling assured that their heavenly Father knows best, that they have need of all these things. May it be theirs to look beyond what is frail and fleeting and transitory -- and anticipate the time when every tear-dimmed eye shall wake up amid the brightness and glory of an unsinning, unsorrowing, tearless world!

Bless my beloved friends. May they, too, know, in their happy personal experience, the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Enable them to cultivate those elevating virtues which make life truly beautiful. Consecrate every family tie by fellowship with Him of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

Anew I ask You to forgive whatever You have seen amiss in me this day. Before I retire to rest, I would wash in the opened fountain; seeking always to be living ready for the summons when it comes, "Prepare to meet Your God!" and so at last, when the night of death gathers its shadows around me, I may fall asleep in the humble yet confident assurance of a resurrection to eternal life. With these gracious hopes and promises, I would sum up my petitions at the throne of the heavenly grace by calling You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twentieth Morning**

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" Luke 12:32

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, draw near to me this morning with Your own gracious word and welcome, "Fear not!" You feed Your flock like a shepherd, carrying in Your arms the weak and tender, the burdened and weary. What a promise is mine, of Your Shepherd-care and Fatherly goodness —

the green pastures and the still waters of the Good Shepherd, the unwearied love and affection of the Father of all mercies and the God of all grace!

As I now approach Your holy presence, I would seek to be possessor of the peace which has been purchased and secured to me through the blood of the cross. I look for pardon and acceptance and the hope of eternal life to the Good Shepherd who gave His own life for the sheep. Blessed be Your name, my safety is not dependent on myself. Gracious Savior, I cleave to Your own divine assurance, which, by a double security in its twofold emblem, hushes to rest every doubting, disquieting, unbelieving thought: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" I accept a Father's pledged word and immutable promise, ratified by the declaration of the great Shepherd of souls.

Hear and accept my penitential acknowledgment of sin and unworthiness, of weakness and infirmity, of defeat and failure. Grant me Your upholding, strengthening, sanctifying grace for the future. Let me exercise a habitual jealousy over my words and actions. Purify my motives, elevate my affections. Keep me from dishonoring Your paternal goodness by doing what is inconsistent with Your will. Be my Protector in danger, my Counselor in perplexity, my Light in darkness, my Comforter in sorrow, my Guide even unto death.

Have mercy on a perishing world. Sheathe the sword of war; break the fetters of the slave. May the captive nations go forth exulting in gospel freedom, made partakers of the liberty with which Christ makes His people free.

Purify the members of Your church more and more. Receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, may they have grace to serve You acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Compassionate all who stand in need of our sympathy. May Your sorrowing people experience the blessedness of sanctified affliction. Stay Your rough north wind -- in the day of Your east wind. Deep may be calling unto deep, all Your waves and billows going over them. Lead them to the Rock that is higher than they. In the midst of long and weary vigils, whether of pain or of sorrow, may they stay themselves on You.

Fit and strengthen me for the special duties of this day. Let Your love be shed abroad in my heart. May I be living in charity with all men, cultivating the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in Your sight is of great price. Make me feelingly alive to my responsibility for every entrusted talent, however lowly. Thus may I be guided, directed, shielded -- until from being one of Your little flock below, I am folded forever with Your glorified flock above in the pastures of the blessed. Meanwhile, in the name of Him whom You hear always, I delight to call You, — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twentieth Evening**

"And he said unto him, Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours!" Luke 15:31

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, —

MY FATHER, anew I would cling this night to Your name and character unfolded in Your Word, as my living and loving, the faithful and unchanging Father. I would hear Your voice saying of spiritual blessings now in possession, and of everlasting blessings in prospect, "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours!" These blessings have been purchased for me, fully, freely, and forever -- by my great and gracious Redeemer! You will supply all my needs, out of Your riches in glory through Christ Jesus. Accept of my person and my services in Him.

I would put the incense of my evening sacrifice into the censer of this great High Priest. Let the fragrant cloud of His merits cover all my imperfections. Look not on me as I am in myself. My best motives are mingled with selfishness; my best actions are marred with defilement. But behold my Shield; look upon me in the face of Your Anointed Son. Let Your hand be upon the Man of Your right hand, on the Son of man whom You have made strong for Yourself. I feel the weakness of my faith,

the coldness of my love, the fitfulness of my affections; that much owned and professed by the lip has not been countersigned by the life. "If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities -- who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."

I cast myself anew on Him who has done all and suffered all and procured all for me; and who carries with Him the sympathies of exalted human nature to His throne of glory.

Blessed Savior, You can enter into my needs and trials, my misgivings, and perplexities, and fears. You know earth's wilderness paths, for You have Yourself trodden them. You know the hour of sorrow, the hour of temptation, the hour of loneliness, the hour of suffering, the hour of death. Son of man, pity me! Son of God, save me! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. May I be found resolute and invincible in the hour of spiritual conflict; through Him made more than conqueror. By simplicity of trust, consistency of obedience, consecration of heart and life -- may I ever seek to glorify His holy name.

Lord, bless Your church throughout all the world. Bring many out of darkness to exult in the marvelous light of the gospel. Fetch every prodigal back from his wandering. Blessed be Your name, for the encouragement given in Your holy Word, for such to retrace their steps to the long-forfeited home; for the assurance that You will resound with songs of joy at their return.

Comfort mourners. Direct them to the Balm in Gilead -- and the Physician there. Let them recognize Your sovereign right to deal with Your children as seems good in Your sight. Every thorn in the nest is permitted by You. There is infinite wisdom in Your dealings. Driven from creature refuges and perishable joys, may it be theirs to say, "My heart and my flesh may fail; but You are the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!" May we all be enabled to look beyond human vicissitudes, to the time when sorrow and sighing shall forever flee away, and when to each ransomed one the same welcome shall be addressed, "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours!"

Meanwhile, with my eye upwards and my footsteps onwards, may I seek

to run with endurance the race that is set before me, with no undue solicitude or anxiety for the future; ever asking, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" and delighting to execute Your will and mission, simply because they are Yours.

As You have preceded me today with the pillar of cloud, so let the fiery pillar go before me this night. Shepherd and Keeper of Israel, let me fall asleep under the consciousness of Your unceasing vigil, while I call You by the still more endearing name —

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-first Morning**

"O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You are our potter; we all are the work of Your hands." Isaiah 64:8

"You, Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from of old is your name." Isaiah 63:16

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, hallowed be Your name. I laid me down last night and slept; I awaked; because You sustained me. You who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, over the works of whose hands the morning stars of old sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy — shine into my heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. May Your presence brighten all the day's blessings, and remove all its worries, and sanctify all its trials.

I flee to the sanctuary of Your covenant love, rejoicing in You as my Father, and in Christ as my Redeemer. Your conjoint name — the name

revealed in the earliest, ages of Your church, "the Lord, the Lord God — merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth" — is from everlasting, and it is to everlasting.

Let it ever be to me a gracious and consoling thought, that "the Lord reigns!" I am but clay in the hand of the almighty Potter. All that concerns me and mine, is directed and regulated by infinite wisdom and unchanging love. Neither is there anything arbitrary in Your dealings. I would lie passive at Your feet, saying, Do to me and with me as seems good in Your sight. You do according to Your will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. I will be still, and know that you are God.

I come to You through Him who has revealed and unfolded this paternal relationship, Himself the image of the invisible God. I thank You alike for the example of His holy life, and for the merits of His atoning death and sacrifice. I bring my guilt to the great Propitiation. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me! O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace! Enable me to walk worthy of You, my Saviour-God, unto all well-pleasing. Prevent me doing anything to dishonor Your holy name, or injure the advancement of Your cause and kingdom. Let me ever acknowledge Your right to do with me and mine as seems good in Your sight.

After all that You have done for me — the proofs and pledges of Your love in a life of suffering and a death of shame— preserve me from the sin and ingratitude of impeaching Your rectitude or questioning Your faithfulness. Gracious Father and Redeemer, in covenant for my salvation — calm all my feverish unrest and perplexing anxiety, with the gracious challenge, "He who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up to death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

It is by Your grace alone, that I stand. Keep me from the entanglements of prosperity; mitigate the pangs of adversity with Your divine solaces. Deliver me from all that would retard Your work within me, or that would quench the light of Your indwelling Spirit.

And loving You, my God, may I also seek to love my fellow-men. I would



sympathize with any who are in distress, whether of body or of mind. Imbue me with the tenderness of Him who would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

Let all of Your sufferers glorify You in the day of visitation. As Your children, may they remember Him who prayed the submissive prayer, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." May it be theirs to accept the cup of affliction which You put into their hand as a cup of love, saying, "Not as I will, but as You will." Take off their sackcloth and gird them with gladness.

Revive Your work in the midst of our years. Enlighten the ignorant; vivify every faint heart; rouse every procrastinator who would mock You with the wrecks of a worn and withered love. Hasten the predicted era when Your Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh; when loiterers and lingerers and waverers, shall no longer obstruct the King's highway; when there shall be "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision," asking the way to Zion with their faces turned thitherward.

Help me, good Lord, this day, in the discharge of every duty; and when my work is done, whether life be long or short, may I come forth in Your strength, more than conqueror.

I ask these and every other needed blessing, through the all-sufficient merits, and all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior.

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-first Evening**

"The Lord disciplines the one He loves; just as a father disciplines the son he delights in." Proverbs 3:12

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, draw near to me this evening, in Your infinite mercy. Hallow the tie which unites me to Yourself. Amid all earthly vicissitudes, and, it may be, amid adverse dealings, mysterious dispensations, may it be mine to hear the gracious message of You who are without variableness, "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters." I rejoice that the rainbow of promise spans the darkest clouds; and when I cannot see it at the time — when the cloud is apparently without the rainbow — faith can penetrate the gloom and discern behind it — all an unchanging covenant God, who corrects because He loves, and who loves as a Father.

I adore You for the rich blessings that are treasured up in Christ. In Him alone, is my trust for time and for eternity. To Him I look alone for salvation. Hide me in the clefts of the Rock of Ages until earth's calamities be overpast. Millions have taken shelter there, and yet there is room.

Lord Jesus, every cross loses its bitterness by having You at my side. Other portions may, and sooner or later must, perish. You are the All-satisfying and All-enduring portion of my soul. May the loss of every earthly prop drive me nearer to You. May this be my song in the house of my pilgrimage, "Whom having not seen, I love; in whom, though now I see Him not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." May it be my habitual desire to follow His footsteps and to reflect His image, to live and to walk so as to do always those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Look in compassion on Your children of suffering and sorrow. May they, too, see all tempered with gracious love; reposing in the exalted sympathy of their divine Redeemer, the King of glory, yet the King of sorrows and Prince of sufferers.

Bless my beloved friends. May we be bound up as one now in the bundle of life, and be at last found together among the golden sheaves gathered by the reaper-angels for the great harvest-home above. Seal us with the Holy Spirit of promise, unto the day of redemption.

Abide with me; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Forgive whatever I have done amiss during its hours — in thought, word, or deed. Let me lie down to sleep with a grateful heart for all Your manifold goodness, feeling that I have abundant reason to sing of Your mercy, even in the midst of judgment. I look forward to that joyous time when, fully purified alike from sin and sorrow, I shall enter within the heavenly gates and stand faultless before Your throne!

Meanwhile, however varied the teaching and discipline of Your providence, be it mine, in unshaken confidence and with unfaltering filial devotion, to call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-second Morning**

"Go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God." John 20:17

"I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." John 14:18

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, draw near to me in Your infinite goodness. Last night, as in the case of many of my fellow-creatures, I might have been called to sleep the sleep of death — not permitted to welcome again the morning light. With the renewed radiance of the natural sun, may the Sun of Righteousness arise upon me with healing in His beams. Let all vain and wandering thoughts be silenced and repressed, as I now approach Your footstool. Impart to me now, in entering on the day's duties, a restful confidence in Your mercy, a sweet sense of Your favor.

Great and gracious God, I thank You for the many proofs of Your kindness. My pathway in life is strewn with Your blessings; and there are no small mercies with You, for the least of them are undeserved.

Especially would I adore You for the crown and consummation of Your love — in the gift of Your dear Son, the pledge and guarantee of all other and lesser blessings. In Him I have pardon, peace, acceptance, eternal life. In Him I have a balm for every wound, a solace for every trial, and a steadfast hope. I delight to ponder the elevating thought, that He is ever living, ever loving; that from the throne of glory on which He sits, I can listen to the gracious accents addressed to every member of His redeemed family: "I will not leave you as orphans. As the Dispenser of heavenly gifts, I have ascended to My Father, and your Father; to My God, and your God."

O great Intercessor within the veil, reveal Yourself to me in my morning approach to the mercy-seat, and perfume my unworthy prayers and petitions, with the incense of Your adorable merits. May I feel the power of the indwelling Spirit. Subdue unmortified sin; quicken me in every good and holy way. Enthroned Yourself in my soul and life, as Lord of all, and bring me to live more constantly and habitually under the constraining influence of Your love. As once orphaned and homeless, but now "set among the children," may I be able personally to appropriate the assurance, "The redemption of the soul is precious." "I know whom I have believed."

Bless Your holy church throughout all the world. Let the story of grace, in its glorious fullness, be borne from land to land and from shore to shore. Baptize Your ministering and missionary servants with the filling of Your Holy Spirit.

I would plead with You, O my Father-God, for those connected with me by the ties of kindred, or affection, or grace. May we participate in all needed blessings, temporal and spiritual. Unite us in the common fellowship of the gospel. Watch between us when we are absent one from another, and preserve us safe unto Your heavenly kingdom.

Look in compassion on Your sons and daughters of affliction. Let the Savior speak to them also His own pacifying words — the words of the great Elder Brother — the Brother born for adversity — "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." As prop after prop that was accustomed to sustain on earth gives way — may they find in Him a sure

support which cannot be shaken. Let them rely on His pure and exalted sympathy, looking to the hand which dries all tears, and the voice which soothes all sorrows.

In His name I would begin the day with the ever-precious words which on earth He taught us — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-second Evening**

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:20

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I would give You thanks for all things. You give me "all things richly to enjoy." May it ever be mine, gratefully recognizing Your hand, to say, "I bless You for my creation, preservation, and for all the blessings of this life."

It is "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" that I would offer this my evening tribute of gratitude and praise. Accept me in the Beloved. Draw near, adorable Savior, as You did to Your disciples of old, and breathe upon me, and say, "Peace be unto you!" Bestow upon me Your most gracious favor, and uphold me with Your continual help, that in all I think, and say, and do — I may ever have a single eye to Your glory.

Especially would my thanks arise, for the unspeakable riches of Your redeeming love — for all that Jesus died on the cross to purchase, and which He is exalted on the throne to bestow. I will sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things. His right hand and His holy arm has gotten the victory for Him; a victory I never could have achieved for myself. I am made more than conqueror through Him that loved me.

It is by Your grace alone, that I stand. Unless You had been my help, my soul had often dwelt in hell. If I have been successful in resisting sin and repelling the assaults of temptation, it is all Your doing. Hold me up — and then alone shall I be safe. Let me habitually realize Your presence and the supporting aids of Your blessed Spirit. I commit myself unreservedly, soul and body, to Your gracious guidance.

"Lead me on!" If it be through sunny paths, and gentle dealings, and loving experiences, may I listen to the divine directing voice, "Follow Me!" Or if it be through suffering and tribulation, may I equally confide in the unrevealed mystery of Your ways, knowing that "all things" are working together for my good! I look forward to the time when my unhesitating avowal shall be made, "He has done all things well."

Have mercy on Your whole church. Visit it alike with the early and the latter rain. May the shower come down in its season; let there be showers of blessing. May those who make mention of the Lord, give Him no rest until He establishes and makes His spiritual Jerusalem, the praise in the earth.

Bless my beloved friends. May they too be set among Your children. Enable them, with lowly confidence, to look up to You as their Father, to Christ as their Elder Brother, and onwards to heaven as their everlasting home.

Regard with tender sympathy and love, those children of Yours, who are laid stricken at the gates of sorrow. May they be led to glorify You in the day of visitation. Even though it is a cross that raises them, may this be their longing aspiration, "Nearer, my God, to You; nearer to You!" Amid the fluctuations and uncertainties of this mortal life, may it be the joy and peace and security of all of us, to have our anchor cast within the veil.

I ask these, and every other needed blessing, in the name of Him whom You always hear, and who, when He was on earth, left us for our devotions the ever-precious words — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into

temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Twenty-third Morning

"Behold, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" 1 John 3:1

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, I thank You for the rest and the refreshment of sleep, and for all the mercies of a new day. Even with regard to outward things, I can devoutly say, "Behold, how great is the love the Father has lavished on me!" You are ever giving me new causes for gratitude, and loading me with the blessings of Your goodness.

But chiefly would I praise You, for the revelation of Your love in Christ Jesus. I can exult in the same gracious testimony borne by Your servant of old, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." I look alone to the Savior's meritorious cross and passion, to the mysteries and marvels of redeeming love in its suffering and triumph, which give Him the right now to say, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities I will remember no more;" and which will give Him the right at last to say from His throne of glory on the day of His appearing, "Behold I, and the children whom You have given Me!"

Anew, then, would I plead this morning, the ever-faithful saving, which has never lost, and never can lose, any of its faithfulness, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!" Earth has no "manner of love" like this! The kindness of the kindest, the love of the most loving human friend, knows a limit. Your love, O gracious Redeemer, knows none.

I have to lament, heavenly Father — the proneness of my heart to depart from You, to disown Your mercies, and mock You with a divided allegiance — seeking my happiness too often in things which perish with

the using. Break the world's alluring spell. Disenchant its delusive fascinations! Elevate my affections, purify my desires. May I seek to have the consciousness of Your pure, loving eye ever upon me, living under the supremacy of that elevating motive, to walk so as to please You.

Bless my dear friends wherever they are. May they, too, have many loving memories of Your great goodness. May it be their loftiest aim and ambition to be called the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Bless Your wide family of the suffering and sorrowing. Keep them from all unrighteous surmises regarding Your dispensations. May Your chastisement only quicken their aspirations after nearer, closer, more confidential fellowship with Yourself, their Father in heaven. Let every doubt and misgiving be hushed to rest with the assurance, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons."

May the bereaved look forward to joyful reunion with their beloved dead, when they shall together, and forever, be with their Lord.

Gladden me this day with Your presence. Morning by morning, as I set out on my path of duty, may it be my increasing desire to attain a nearer and closer conformity to You and to Your holy will — to have more childlike tenderness of spirit, childlike obedience, childlike fear of grieving or offending a Father so full of pitying love and mercy.

Hasten the advent and kingdom of Your dear Son, when, as the Lord our God, He shall come, and all His saints with Him, and when there shall be voices heard in heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ!" For this blessed consummation I would unite this morning with Your children throughout all the world in saying —

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."



## Twenty-third Evening

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."  
Romans 8:15

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, in this the hour of evening, A calling to bodily rest, do give me the better rest and repose that are to be found in Your favor, and in the enjoyment of Your love. Impart unto me the spirit of adoption. Enable me, as I now venture into Your presence, to dismiss all slavish fears, and to approach You with the trust and confidence of Your redeemed children.

You have vouchsafed to me the blessings of another day. Enable me always to accept of these renewed hours as a fresh proof of Your gracious regard, a renewed grant of Your undeserved mercy. And now, let me both lay me down in peace and sleep, knowing that it is You alone, who makes me to dwell in safety. All darkness is dispersed with the conscious sunshine of Your presence.

I come anew to the cleansing blood and the all-sufficient merits of my divine Redeemer. Wash out the defilements of the day. May the grace of adoption, bestowed as Your own Fatherly gift, lead me to aspirations after increasing holiness of heart and life, to the crucifixion of sin and the subjugation of self. May I be patient in suffering, calm under provocation, pure in motive, charitable in word, unselfish in deed. If there is any lurking or lingering sympathy with what is opposed to Your will, or inconsistent with my obligation to serve You, Lord -- remove it. Keep me from all repinings and misgivings at the rectitude of Your dealings—all angry thoughts, all unworthy envyings and jealousies, all resentments and recriminations. Let it be to me at once a precept and a promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Your grace is equal for all exigencies and emergencies. Overrule the designs and discipline of Your providence in fitting me for earth's duties

and training for glory, in fostering and strengthening the inner life of righteousness, and bringing my desires and affections more into harmony with Your will.

I pray for the interests of Your Son's kingdom everywhere. Give efficacy to the attractive power of the Cross. Reclaim the wanderer, rescue the perishing. Revive Your work in the midst of the years. May all Your churches share in the refreshing dews of the Holy Spirit. May no part of the fleece be dry. Arise, O Lord, and plead Your own cause!

Pity the sick, the sorrowful, the bereaved, the dying. Where human links are severed, gladden with the thought of eternal reunions. Let us all live under the salutary impression of the precarious tie which binds us to life and its blessings; and when the last night of earth shall overtake us -- may its shadows melt and merge into the brightness of eternal day!

Meanwhile, in the spirit and the language of adoption, I would close these unworthy petitions with the endearing name and devout prayer on my lips — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-fourth morning**

"He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son!" Revelation 21:7

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER in heaven, I invoke Your blessing upon the work of the day on which I am now entering. May I seek to nourish a constant and habitual sense of dependence on Your favor and love. To You all hearts are open, to You all desires are known, and from You no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the work of Your Holy Spirit. I rejoice in that paternal name which disarms all fear and hushes all

disquietude. Under its shelter I now draw near to the throne of the heavenly grace. Let me know the truth of the promised assurance, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, unto the soul that seeks Him." "I wait for God, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope."

As Yours by adoption, I would look anew with the unwavering eye of faith to the doing and dying of my divine Redeemer. Disowning all creature merit, I am complete in Him — encouraged to draw out of His infinite fullness -- grace for grace. In Him alone, I overcome. In Him alone, I inherit all things. In Him alone, I can look up to You as my covenant God, and appropriate the heritage of Your children. May my pathway heavenward be brightened by the sense of peace through the blood of the cross, and the assured hope of eternal life in Him. Enable me worthily to live as the chartered heir of so glorious an inheritance — the life of love and consecration now begun, which is to be perpetuated and perfected in heaven. Keep me from sin. Keep me from whatever is inconsistent with the love and allegiance I owe to Christ as my divine Lord and Master. Keep me humble and thankful, grateful and submissive. Keep me from the dominion of pride or selfishness. May the remembrance of the Master's example often serve to chide, as well as to stimulate every Christian grace in me. As the child of a gracious Father, may I be daily attaining a greater fitness for that Father's house and that Father's presence, where temptations are no longer felt or feared!

I pray for all Your people. Bless those who are laboring, unknown and unrecognized, in the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, as well as those who are conspicuous in fighting the battles of the faith. May all seek to occupy their assigned, it may be lowly trust, with fidelity, until You come to demand account of their stewardship.

Bless my beloved friends, whether near or at a distance. We can meet in sympathetic union at the mercy-seat, and rejoice in the assurance that the same Lord is near unto all those who call upon Him. Overrule the vicissitudes and changes of life in our homes and families -- for Your glory.

I commend to You, the wide circle of Your afflicted children. Let them indulge in no hard thoughts of Your Fatherly dealings. May the home of

bereavement and the hour of departure be transformed into the house of God and the gate of heaven. Where life's joyous music may be hushed in death, may Your children look forward to that glorious hereafter, where there is no jarring or discordant note to interrupt the everlasting harmony, and where death is swallowed up in victory!

I anew commend myself to Your gracious keeping. Protect me from danger, guard me from temptation, lead me in the everlasting way. May it be my endeavor, day by day, to pitch my tent nearer heaven and nearer to You. Meanwhile, with implicit trust and childlike reverence, conscious of my many spiritual blessings in possession, and with the covenanted inheritance in prospect, I would sum up my petitions by calling You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-fourth Evening**

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" Matthew 6:26

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29-31

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I rejoice that all events are in Your hand, and under Your disposal. You feed the birds of the air. You watch the sparrow's fall. You feed the young ravens when they cry. Nothing can happen without Your appointment. There is no chance or accident in Your dealings. All of Your dealings are dictated and regulated by a wisdom that cannot err, and by a love that cannot change. And therefore it is that, as the shadows of

evening have again gathered round me, I delight to realize Your presence and to invoke Your guardian care.

If, as Creator, the winged tribes of the earth are under Your supervision and providential rule, how much more may I, as one of Your unworthy children, repose in the faithfulness and loving-kindness of my heavenly Father! Yes, Lord, I shall trust Your heart — even when at times I fail to trace Your hand. I shall listen to Your voice of mingled comfort and rebuke — "Your Father knows that you have need of all these things!"

I come to You in the name of Him who on earth taught me these gracious lessons; who came to reveal You as "our Father," and Himself as our great and all-sufficient Savior. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world — have mercy upon me! Grant me Your peace! Wash away every guilty stain from my soul. Number me with Your saints in everlasting glory.

Precious Lord Jesus, while I look alone to Your meritorious work for pardon and acceptance, may it be my habitual endeavor to follow in the footsteps of Your holy life. May the same mind be in me, which was also in You. Make me the possessor of that charity which is patient, and is kind; which is not easily provoked; which rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Keep me from evil thoughts and selfish desires. Let me live and walk and act — as seeing You who are invisible.

I pray for my beloved friends. Bless them, and make them blessings. May all of us be able to say with united heart, "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Look in kindness on the whole human race. Terminate the supremacy of wickedness and oppression, and usher in the blessed reign of the Prince of Peace. May Your churches be valiant for Your truth. Revive Your work in the midst of our years. May Your Spirit come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.

Sanctify affliction to Your many sorrowing children. Manifest Yourself especially to those enduring unspoken trials. With Your tender touch, bind up every hidden wound, and dry every tear. If, meanwhile, no silver

lining is to be seen in the clouds, may comfort be taken in the assurance that "at evening time, it shall be light."

As You have been with me, heavenly Father, throughout the day, I commend myself to Your care during the silent watches of the night. Let me fall asleep listening to the gracious lullaby, "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade upon your right hand." And when the gates of the morning are once more opened, may it be to hear anew the benediction, "Fear not, for I am with you! My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."

"MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-fifth Morning**

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son." Luke 15:18, 19

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, the God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all — draw near to me this morning in Your great goodness. I would begin a new day invoking Your blessing. May the peace of God which passes understanding, keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Disperse all darkness, remove all doubt and disquietude, and with reverent filial devotion, enable me to approach Your mercy-seat.

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in your sight, and I am no more worthy to be called your son." Yet how great has been Your forbearance, when through much weakness and unworthiness and unwatchfulness, I have been straying from You! Too well do I truly feel and know, that in forfeiting Your favor, I have surrendered my truest peace and most abiding happiness. But, blessed be Your name, You do

not leave Your prodigal children to their waywardness and estrangement. In the midst of merited wrath, You are remembering unmerited mercy.

The gates of a lost Father's home, and the arms of a lost Father's love — are ever extended for the wanderer's return. The joyful words at times heard in the earthly dwelling, are the echoes of higher heavenly realities — "This son of Mine was dead, and is alive again! He was lost, and is found." "Who is a God like unto You, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy."

Lord, if conscious of present coldness and lukewarmness, defection and backsliding, restore unto me the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit. Keep me from those sins which most easily beset me, and which lead me from the path of duty and of safety. May it be my greatest pain to grieve You, and to requite Your kindness with ingratitude. May it be my earnest and devout aspiration, to serve You with a willing and delighted obedience, and thus in all things to glorify Your holy name.

Have mercy upon any who may have wandered to the far country, and who nevertheless in their spiritual destitution and despair, are wailing out the confession, "I perish with hunger!" Fetch Your prodigal children home to their Father's house. Assure them of the robe and ring, the kiss of welcome and forgiveness. Whisper in the ear of despondency, "God has not appointed you to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Look in kindness on my beloved friends. May they esteem it their highest honor to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. May it be theirs on the great Day, to listen to the words of the divine Redeemer, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me!" Meanwhile may grace be given them to "walk in the light, as He is in the light — that they may be the children of light."

Bless the young. Keep them in the paths of purity and peace. Bless the aged. May they experience the decline of their existence — to be the evening of their days — gladdened by Your presence. Bless the sorrowing.

Cast the healing tree into the bitter waters — and their sorrow shall be turned into joy. Amid loneliest and saddest experiences may it be theirs to avow, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him!"

I also bless Your holy name for all Your servants departed this life in Your faith and fear; beseeching You to give me grace so to follow their good examples, that with them I may be partaker of your heavenly kingdom.

Lord, shine upon my path this day and every day. Hallow its joys, ease its burdens, disarm its temptations. "I will go in the strength of the Lord God."

I anew present my filial petitions, with all conscious unworthiness to be called Your child, yet encouraged by Your own gracious welcome to address You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-fifth Evening**

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, bend Your loving eye upon me this night. The cares and duties of another day are over. I am permitted once more to draw near to Your throne of grace, and take shelter in the pavilion of Your faithfulness. If vicissitude is written on all around, with You there is no shadow of turning or change. I would abide under the covert of the Almighty, rejoicing that You are unchanging in Your Fatherhood, ever ready to support the cry of Your needy children. While they are often fainting and faithless, turning back in the day of battle -- You, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the ever gracious Parent of Your redeemed, never faint, neither are You weary. You are perfect in power, perfect in wisdom, and perfect in love. Give me now, as I approach the mercy-seat, a quickened



apprehension of my adoption privileges, and enable me, with reverence and trust, to cry, "Abba, Father!"

I thank You for the glorious method of Your own sovereign devising, by which these inestimable mercies and blessings have been secured.

"Thanks, eternal thanks be unto You, for Your unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ!" Blessed be Your name that sin's penalty has been paid, and Your people's debt cancelled, all through the doing and dying of our great Surety! Your kingdom of heaven has been secured to all believers.

My special prayer, in the spirit of the words of this morning, is that I may attain a gradual conformity to the will of my Father in heaven. Alas! O God, You know how far short I come of this lofty standard; how, on the contrary, imperfection is stamped on my every attempt to serve You. Were I to be tried and tested by my best hours and best services -- how would I stand condemned! Yet, however distant and feeble the approximation, may it be my earnest endeavor to do Your holy will, because it is Yours.

If, under the consciousness of mournful shortcoming, I have to make the constant confession, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," may I press on, seeking, by the quickening, energizing influences of Your Holy Spirit, to add grace to grace, and virtue to virtue, and attainment to attainment -- until I appear before You perfect in Zion. May Christ now more and more be formed within me, the hope of glory; and may this at least be my joyful anticipation, as it is that of all Your children, that when He shall appear -- we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!

Fit me meanwhile for the discharge of every personal and relative duty. Inspire me with the love of what is lovely -- and the scorn of what is hateful. May it be my growing experience that in keeping Your commandments, there is great reward. Give me grace to feel and to fulfill my responsibilities for the use of every talent entrusted to my stewardship, that when You come -- You may receive Your own with interest.

Let Your compassionate sympathy be largely bestowed on Your sons and

daughters of affliction. Let them know and feel assured that it is Your own way of dispensing blessing. Your people in every age, like their great Lord, have been perfected through suffering. Let them submissively welcome any dealings or discipline, however mysterious, which bring them nearer to You, and which will promote in them resemblance to the Father they love. In the night of sorrow may it be theirs, through their tears, to say, "I shall be satisfied -- when I awake in Your likeness!"

O God, hasten the happy day when all shall know You. Gracious Shepherd, fetch home Your unfolded sheep! Gracious Father, fetch home Your wandering prodigals! Gracious Spirit, let the shower of Your divine influences come down in its season; let there be showers of blessing!

I commend my dear friends to Your care and protection. May it be with them also an increasing aim to attain a gradual resemblance to the image, and conformity to the will, of their Father in heaven, and thus be filled with all the fullness of God.

With filial devotion, I would sum up my evening petitions in the ever-precious words — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-sixth Morning**

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:8-9

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, enable me this morning to worship You in spirit and in truth. "No man has seen God at any time." But I desire, with reverence and filial love, to lay hold on the glorious declaration that "the only

begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." In You, Christ, in Your divine, human person, I have the image of the invisible God. Set in this cleft of the Rock of Ages, as in the case of Your honored servant of old, You have made all the glory of the infinite Godhead to pass before me, and have blessed me with the same revelation of the divine character and attributes, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious."

I delight to follow Your footsteps on earth; to behold You feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, healing the sick and helping the helpless, calming the sorrowful, giving heart and hope to the prodigal, the wandering, the lost. And in all this mission and ministry of love, You were the great Revealer of the mystery hid from ages and generations, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." In answer to the quest, "Show me the Father," You have given the gracious answer, "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father." May it be mine to say, "From henceforth I know Him and have seen Him!"

Blessed Savior, You know my special burdens, my peculiar sources of unrest and disquiet, my cares and perplexities, the besetting sins which hamper and impede me. Make me possessor of that peace here, which is the prelude to glory hereafter. May I find that the best preservative against temptation, is realizing the infinite obligations under which I am, to redeeming love; that I am not my own, but bought with a price! Enable me with appropriating faith to say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me!" Transform me more and more into that same image and likeness. Give me a child's obedience and submission, a child's trust and affection and love. May the divine words spoken by divine lips form the motive power and principle of life: "I must be about my Father's business!"

Bless all means and instrumentalities for the promotion of Your cause throughout the world. O Lord arise, and have mercy upon Zion, and show that the time to favor her, yes the set time, has come. May the Holy Spirit come down on every branch of the church universal, in all the plenitude of His gifts and graces.

Bestow Your guardian care on those near and dear to me. May they too be able to say, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the

Father, full of grace and truth." I would leave all that concerns alike them and myself — to Your better direction, saying, "Undertake for us!"

Bless those in sorrow. Let them rejoice in the assurance that the roll of Providence is in the hand of Him who pre-eminently by experience "knows their sorrows." When the causes of severe discipline are often unrevealed to the eye of sense, may they trust "that same Jesus" who felt for them, and wept for them, and bled for them; and behold in His exalted sympathy the reflection and pledge of the Father's love, whose name and nature He came to reveal.

I invoke Your favor on this the morning of a new day. I would enter on its duties, trusting alone in the merits and mediation of the divine Redeemer, who taught us thus to call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-sixth Evening**

"As the Father has loved Me — so have I loved you! Continue in My love."  
John 15:9

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, let me go to sleep with this most blessed and amazing assurance falling on my ear. Reveal to me, however poorly and inadequately I may grasp the reality, the ineffable love existing between You and Your dear Son, that I may be enabled in some feeble measure to comprehend what is the height and depth and length and breadth of Christ's love to me — the interest He feels in me and in my eternal salvation. Come, Lord Jesus, as You did to Your wayward and erring disciple of old. Let me hear Your solemn words challenging on my part unreserved obedience and gratitude and heart-consecration, "Do you love Me?"

Feelingly alive to the infinite obligation under which I am laid to You, may it be mine in sincerity of purpose, and in the sight of the great Heart-Searcher, to make the avowal, "Lord, You know all things; You know that, despite of stumblings and faintings, of weaknesses and fears, departures and backslidings, it is at least my earnest desire to love You. Here is my heart. Take it this night and make it Your own. I lay afresh my vow on Your altar. Sprinkle my unworthy offering and imperfect service with the 'much incense,' that thus my evening prayer may ascend, acceptable and accepted, into the ear of my Father in heaven."

Come as You did at eventide to Your disciples of old, and breathe upon me, and say, "Peace be unto you!" May I know that there can be no unrest or disquietude to the soul that has fled to the unfailing Refuge; that there can be no discord or disharmony where the heart has responsively listened to that divinest music, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

May it be my habitual aspiration to walk in the path of holy obedience, listening at every turn of life, to this evening's gracious monition, "Continue in My love." Give me greater singleness of eye and simplicity of faith. May it be my growing experience that Your favor is life, and Your loving-kindness is better than life. May I seek in all things, and especially in my appointed sphere, to glorify Your holy name.

Look in great kindness on the afflicted — those who are treading with downcast spirits the pilgrim-way. Under the shadow of the cross may they too find consolation and peace, the peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

Meet my beloved friends this night on the mount of prayer. May they be able to say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." May I and they together live conscious of a true though invisible fellowship in You; and when earth's separations are ended, may we together meet where ties can never be sundered, or friendships fail.

Anew I supplicate Your blessing. Watch over me during the unconscious hours of sleep. Abide with me, blessed Savior, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. Thus may each day prove like an Emmaus journey

with You at my side; and continuing in Your love now, may it be mine at last, through the gate of death, to be ushered into its full and everlasting fruition!

Meanwhile, in that glorious anticipation, I would repeat earth's holiest, most comprehensive prayer — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-seventh Morning**

"In my Father's house are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you." John 14:2

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER— the Father who has given me the manifold blessings and endearments of an earthly home — I praise You for the glad assurance of "the many mansions." If You have bestowed upon me mercies in possession, You have promised more in reversion. I thank You for the name "house and home of my Father," the house purchased by the elder Brother, and which He has gone to prepare for the final reception of His church and people.

I come to You this morning acknowledging with gratitude, the mercies of the by-past night. May the radiance of the natural sun be to me the emblem and pledge of brighter and better spiritual realities. Shine into my heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Listen to my confessions of sin. How poor and inadequate the return I have made to You for Your superabounding goodness! Above all, how little have I realized and manifested the infinite obligations under which I am to redeeming love! I bless You that by Him who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life — the gates of these many mansions are ever open,

and the welcome ever ready — that there are mansions for all and crowns for all Your people. The best of earthly heritages must fail, but this is an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away.

Meanwhile, fit and strengthen me for the duties of life and of the earthly home. May a sense of Your presence and nearness and love, be interfused with my varied occupations. May I seek to have the character of heaven impressed on me now, that so, when called hence, the Father's heavenly mansions may be no new or strange dwelling-place, but that death may in reality be a final summons and a final welcome home.

Bless all Your sorrowing children. Let them accept with uncomplaining submission, the discipline of Your providence, however dark and mysterious. May they see and own that You, who has prepared the many mansions, are by these very dealings preparing them for their possession. Forbid that affliction should be un sanctified — that any should dare to impeach or arraign Your faithfulness. Let them trust the promised needs-be. When You bring a cloud over the earth, may the rainbow be seen in the cloud. Draw near in especial mercy to the bereaved. In the decay and perishing of earthly good — in mourning over vacant seats in the earthly home — may they know what it is to claim an indestructible heritage in the Father's house above. May the dying look to Him, who by dying has abolished death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Bless my dear friends. Make them members of that family which alone can never be disrupted or broken — linked to You and to one another in the bonds of the everlasting covenant.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. I laid me down last night and slept; I awoke this morning; because You did sustain me. Be with me throughout the coming day. Keep me from, and keep from me — all that would be detrimental to my best interests, or that would assail or imperil my peace. May the petitions of the divinely-taught prayer follow me wherever I go — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Twenty-seventh Evening

"Is not Israel still My son, My darling child?" asks the Lord. "I had to punish him, but I still love him. I long for him and surely will have mercy on him." Jeremiah 31:20

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, accept of my thanks for the renewed mercies of another day. Before I lie down to sleep, I would listen to this tender whisper of Your parental love, "I still love him. I long for him and surely will have mercy on him." Lord, I can have no real blank, when I have the conscious assurance of Your presence and blessing, and the sense of Your pardoning love. You are ever remembering me. In the midst of merited and deserved wrath, You are remembering unmerited and undeserved mercy. How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand!

Everything in myself might well sink me in despondency and despair. Everything in You leads me to peace and hope and encouragement. Keep me near Yourself. I need daily, hourly washing at the opened fountain. I need daily, hourly supplies of promised grace. Enable me ever to be traveling between my own emptiness — and the infinite fullness treasured up in Christ. Let me live habitually in an unfaltering trust in Your guidance. May my plans and purposes be subservient to Your holy will. Preserve me from what is unworthy of the Christian name and profession — from all that is unkind and unloving, all that is censorious and uncharitable, all that would exalt myself at the expense of others. Let the same mind be in me, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Bless my beloved friends. Hallow earthly bonds by making them spiritual and heavenly ones.

Pity Your afflicted ones, those environed with trouble. Make for them a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters. Speak Your own balm-word of comfort, "Peace, be still" — and give grace proportioned to the



hour of trial. May they harbor no unkind suspicions of Your faithfulness, owning Your hand alike in giving and in taking. The blessing is conferred by You, and the grant or loan is revoked by You. Direct their hearts into Your love, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Bless Your whole church. Feed every lamp with the oil of Your grace. Hasten the time when the summons shall be heard, " Arise and shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you!"

I would lie down to sleep this night feeling that it is You, O Lord, who alone makes me to dwell in safety. Give Your ministering angels charge concerning me and mine. Keep us, keep us, King of kings, beneath the shadow of Your wings; and when I awake, may I be still with You.

I ask all in the name of Him whom You always hear, and who, when on earth, taught me to call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-eighth Morning**

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, adored be Your name for Your sparing mercy. You have awakened me again to the brightness and the blessings of a new day. Defend me today, by Your mighty power; and grant that I fall into no sin, nor run into any kind of danger, but that all my doings may be ordered by Your governance, to do always those things that are pleasing in Your sight.

In the light of the sun which now shines upon me, may I have the image and emblem, the symbol and pledge, of a better radiance. I thank and

praise You if You, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into my heart. Great Sun of Righteousness, disperse the lingering shades of darkness and unbelief. Above every other mercy and blessing, may I hail, morning by morning, the brightness of Your rising. Enable me all the day joyously to walk in the light of Your countenance.

In self-renouncing lowliness, I would plead the merits of Jesus. I confess anew my manifold transgressions in all their turpitude and aggravation. I have no extenuation to offer. You are justified when You speak, and clear when You judge. Father of heaven, have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner! Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace.

And with the righteousness imputed, bestow upon me also the righteousness that is implanted. May the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, be diffusive in my heart and life. In accordance with His divine injunction, let my light so shine before men that its reality and influence may be felt and owned. May I be more and more conscious of my responsibility and privilege, as that of all Your true believing children, to "shine as lights in the world." By meekness and gentleness, by kindness and unselfishness, by integrity and stainless purity — may others take knowledge of me, that I have been with Jesus. However lowly and restricted my sphere, may it be my humble aim and aspiration to be a light-bearer, and thus to glorify my Father who is in heaven.

Bless those near and dear to me. May they, too, be linked in close and endearing filial bonds to the same gracious Father.

Compassionate all in sorrow. May those laid on beds of sickness and suffering be found shining witnesses for You, and attest by patience and submission, the sustaining power of Your grace.

Have mercy on Your church universal. Quicken and stimulate her to realize her true position as a light set in the moral and spiritual heavens to scatter far and wide the beams of truth. Amid all the enviring clouds of error, may she come forth as fair as the sun, and as clear as the moon. May many among her faithful servants be found to shine, now, as the

brightness of the sun, and at last, in the kingdom of their Father, as the stars forever and ever.

I ask these, and every other needed blessing, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior, who when on earth taught me to call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Twenty-eighth Evening

"The father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." Luke 15:22

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I commit myself to Your gracious keeping this night, as unto a faithful Creator.

How wondrous are Your loving dealings toward those who, with prodigal footsteps and truant hearts, have wandered from Your home, and justly forfeited all claim on Your pity and compassion! You are God, and not man. Had Your thoughts been as our thoughts, or Your ways as our ways, long ago would we have been denied Your presence and favor — our plea rejected, our tears mocked, left to perish with hunger, unpitied and unsuccoured, in the far country of our alienation.

But You have not so dealt with us. In figure and in parable, yet in gracious reality, You have ever waiting for Your prodigal child, with the best robe, the ring of adoption, and the shoes of liberty. You are ready with paternal compassion to meet, with paternal love to welcome.

It is thus, Father, You have dealt with me. The past is a long record and memorial of Your forbearance and faithfulness, mercy upon mercy, kindness upon kindness.

I thank You especially for the doing and dying of my divine Redeemer, through whom alone these badges and pledges of covenant love have been secured. My guilt, which in itself could not be cancelled, has been transferred to Him. Self-renouncing and sin-renouncing, I look anew to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. I rejoice to think that He is now, as the great Intercessor within the holiest of all, pleading for me — the Prince who has power with God, and must continually prevail. Make me personal partaker in His first, that I may participate at last in the glory of the second, resurrection, when "the Lord my God shall

come, and all His saints with Him."

Meanwhile, may it be my constant desire to copy His holy example, and to be transformed into His divine likeness, seeking the supremacy of goodness and purity, holiness and love — doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with You. If You send me blessings, may I ever seek to accept them with humble gratitude. If You see fit to withdraw them, let me reverently say, "Your will be done;" hearing Your voice amid the small trials and vexations of life, as well as in the midst of its great crisis hours — "Be still, and know that I am God."

Promote the cause of truth and righteousness throughout the earth. Renew the plentiful rain, whereby of old You did refresh Your heritage when it was weary.

Whatever be the outward badge of Your varied churches, may there be this common bond of hallowed union, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Hasten the time when the song of rejoicing nations will be heard, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace," and when a Father's name will be known and adored and loved all the world over.

I pray for the sick and the afflicted, the sorrowful and the dying. To the Lord our God belong the issues from death. May those bereft of near and dear friends anticipate reunion with their loved and lost amid the unending fellowships of the better world. Amid the manifold uncertainties of existence, may I keep ever vividly before me the great hereafter; and be so living, that when the supreme hour overtakes me, it may be as an angel whispering, "The Master is come, and calls for you."

Watch over me during the hours of silence and darkness. Let me rise tomorrow refreshed for service. Meanwhile, I would retire to rest and close my eyes in sleep with the divine and gracious words on my lips — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## Twenty-ninth Morning

"It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Romans 9:26

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, the God of all the families of the earth, ever living, ever loving — draw You near to me, enabling me to exult in this gracious, paternal relationship, the thought of which is so well fitted to dismiss distrust and anxiety, and to inspire confidence and affection. Another sun has risen, another morning has dawned upon me. Let me partake also of the better inner sunshine, the sweet sense of Your covenant favor, of sin forgiven and forgotten, the soul hushed to rest in realized fellowship with You. It is by Your grace I am what I am. It is Your grace which finds us. It is Your grace which saves us. It is Your grace which keeps us. It is Your grace which enables us to appropriate the privileged and honored name, "children of the living God."

Strengthen me, good Lord, for the duties which are before me this day. I cannot forecast its perils and dangers and temptations. I implore the continuance of Your sovereign, sustaining, restraining grace to keep me from falling. Hold me up — and then I shall be safe. May I know, in my happy experience, that I can do all things, and endure all things, through Christ who strengthens me. When tempted to worldliness, or sloth, or self-indulgence, forgetting and forsaking my covenant engagements, thus imperiling my spiritual interests — may I think of Him who, as a Son, with holy, unfaltering consecration, surrendered His will to the will of His Father in heaven. Conform me to His image; mold me by His holy example. In every difficult and perplexing path, may this be my guiding maxim and direction — "How would my Lord and Master have acted here?" and knowing His will, may I delight to do it.

I would pray this morning especially for others — for all the children of God that are scattered abroad. Hasten the time when the glad ascription shall ascend, "Behold, we beseech You, we are all Your children." Fetch home the wanderer. Awaken memories of a divine home and Father in

the heart of the prodigal. In the case of individuals and families and nations alike, may the promise be fulfilled, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

Pity the afflicted; comfort the mourner; sustain the dying. Be a Father to the fatherless, the stranger's shield, and the orphan's stay. May the consciousness of Your presence and favor, lessen every cross and sweeten every care.

I anew commend myself to Your gracious keeping and guidance this day. Watch over me for good; and may every power of my body and every faculty of my mind combine in devotion to Your sole service and glory. With the prayer of all prayers I would close and sum up my own imperfect petitions, saying — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Twenty-ninth Evening**

"Whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He will give it you."  
John 15:16

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I desire, on this the evening of another day, to enter Your sacred presence in the name of Jesus. Where would I be, but for such a Savior! I have no plea of my own. My best thoughts — how sinful and unworthy! My best prayers — how cold and languid, requiring themselves to be prayed for! If You, Lord, would mark iniquities — who could stand! My own heart condemns me; and You are greater than my heart. You know all things. But through Him, the ever-living Elder Brother on the throne, the all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor, I am encouraged to approach the throne of the heavenly grace. I bless You for His own assurance that no petition to the Father, presented in His name, will rise

unheard and unanswered, but that whatever we ask, if it is in accordance with Your divine and holy will, shall be bestowed.

I pray this night for the pardon of sin, the gracious sense of acceptance, peace and joy in believing, support and support for the future. Blessed Jesus, let down Your censer full of incense, that my petitions may ascend with acceptance before the Father's throne, and reach with acceptance the Father's ear. Open the windows of heaven, and shower down the promised blessing. May the thought that You are ever praying for me, as You did for Your disciples on earth, that my faith fail not, keep me loyal to You, and prevent me doing anything that would be dishonoring to Your love.

May I ever exercise a jealous scrutiny over my thoughts and words and actions. Preserve me from all pride and vain-glory; from all selfishness and covetousness; from all that would lead me to exalt myself; from all guilty and unworthy compromises with the world, the flesh, and the devil; from neglect of pious duty; from evading solemn responsibilities; from tampering with the leadings of Providence, the dictates of conscience, or the teachings of Your holy Word. In childlike faith, may this be my habitual inquiry: "What would You have me to do?" And knowing Your will, may I delight to perform it; seeking in this, as in all things – to follow the example of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and whose constant, unwavering aim and aspiration was to be about His heavenly Father's business. Let this mind be in me, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Bless my dear friends; reward my benefactors. Sanctify Your dealings to poor afflicted ones. In the multitude of the sorrows they have in their hearts, may Your comforts delight their souls.

Pity a dark and benighted world. Terminate the curse of slavery; sheathe the sword of war; turn away the battle from our gates. It is You, Lord, who alone makes us to dwell in safety.

I anew commend myself to Your watchful care during the hours of sleep and darkness. Lying down to my nightly rest in Your fear, may I awake in Your favor, fitted for the duties of a new day. Meanwhile, in full and confident reliance on the Savior's own words of promise just read, I



would sum up my imperfect with His all-perfect prayer, and in filial love call You— "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirtieth Morning**

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:6

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, who sees in secret, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike — the night shining as the day — I enter this morning the little sanctuary of devotion. Draw near to me, and fulfill Your own gracious promise as the prayer-hearing and the prayer-answering God. With the door shut, and the din and distraction of the world excluded, I would wait upon You in Your own appointed way, in the still and hallowed hour. May I worship You who are a Spirit in spirit and in truth, and know what it is to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Enable me to dismiss from my thoughts whatever is vain, frivolous, and sinful. O great Recompenser, give me that best of recompenses, the blessed sense of Your favor and love, hushing unrest and disquiet, and filling me with all peace and joy in believing.

I acknowledge with gratitude and thankfulness, the mercy which spares me from day to day — the bounties alike of creation, providence, and grace, which have been so liberally bestowed. From the humblest crumb of providential goodness, to the richest blessings of redemption, I am indebted to You. As a continual pensioner on Your loving-kindness, let me show forth my gratitude not only with my lips, but in my life, by giving up myself to Your service, and by walking before You in holiness and righteousness all my days, to the glory of Your holy name. Stimulate and quicken me in pursuing the Christian race. Let nothing in my

vacillating heart within, and a treacherous world without, dim my faith or impede my progress. Let me more and more realize the possession of the rest of grace here, the pledge of the everlasting rest of glory hereafter.

In all my ways guide me by Your counsel, and help me implicitly to trust Your faithfulness. Man's word may falter and fail, but the word of the Lord is tried. It is like the stars of the skies, "forever and ever." Amid the varying scenes of changeful life, give me strength and endurance, patience and submission, loyalty to truth and rectitude. Inspire me with a spirit of charity—the love which is patient and is kind, which is not easily provoked, which thinks no evil. I rejoice in Your own recorded promise for every step and stage of the journey, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with My eye."

To You, my Father in heaven, I commend my beloved friends. Enable them to participate in all the blessings and benefits of the everlasting covenant. May they too know the hour of prayer, with its gracious recompenses. As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, may they be made recipients of the great recompense at last — coveting, above earthly approbation, the "Well done!" of the divine Master and the righteous Judge.

Have mercy on Your afflicted ones. Recompense them also with the assurance, "Whom the Lord loves — He chastens. Let them lie passive in the arms of Your mercy, breathing only the divinely-taught words, "Even so, Father!" Other refuges may fail, other props be removed: may they find in You an unfainting, unfailing refuge and portion and friend.

Having now obeyed the injunction and enjoyed the privilege of praying to my Father in secret, I would go forth to the duties of a new morning in simple dependence on Your grace and strength. When I close the day, may I be happy in feeling that I have no saddening or accusing thought in the retrospect; enjoying rather the consciousness of having done or even desiring to do something, however lowly, in promoting the great end for which existence was given — to show forth the praises of Him who has called me out of darkness into marvelous light. So shall I now, with deepening fervor and filial love, invoke Him who sees in secret, and say — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come.

May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirtieth Evening**

"He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved." Ephesians 1:4-6

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, I thank You that You encourage me with filial boldness and confidence to approach the throne of the heavenly grace. If I am received into Your family and made one of Your children by adoption — if a wanderer once, I have now received the paternal forgiveness and the paternal welcome — it is not my own deserving, but "according to the good pleasure of Your will." Salvation from first to last, is of Your free, sovereign, unmerited grace. This will be the history of Your ransomed church and people forever in heaven: "Those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified." Bestow upon me tonight the spirit of adoption, enabling me now to cry, "Abba, Father!"

I come to You in the name of Him whom You hear always, and who is at Your right hand exalted a Prince and a Savior. All I am, all I have, all I hope for — flows from Your riches in glory through Christ Jesus. Every other mercy I enjoy is hallowed, consecrated, transfigured through Him. Blessed be Your name for His all-sufficient merits and spotless sacrifice. My best actions are full of blemishes; my purest aims and motives are mingled with selfishness; my best righteousness is marred with imperfection and defilement. But He has finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. May I stand now, accepted in the Beloved,

hearing Your divine voice saying, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more."

Give me grace to walk worthy of You unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good word and work. Wean me from all that is fleeting and perishable. Let it be my highest joy to follow You — and my deepest pain to grieve You. Even when You see fit to cross my wishes and disappoint my hopes, may I accept all as the will and bidding of a heavenly Father, the doing and the dictate of Your ineffable love. Thus, whether You bless — or chasten; whether it be mercies bestowed — or mercies withdrawn, may I equally seek to glorify Your holy name.

Graciously look on Your whole Church. Graciously look on the whole world. Fulfill Your own sure decree, when You shall gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and in earth. Hear the perpetual cry which is ascending from suffering, sorrowing humanity. Fetch home to Your fold, wanderers from the flock, and number them among the remnant of Your true Israelites.

Bless my beloved friends. If some are separated by long distance, may we enjoy unseen fellowship at the mercy-seat; and at last, in the full vision and fruition of the beatific presence, may we be reunited in those bonds which neither trial nor death can any more sunder, where sin and sorrow are no longer to be feared. Meanwhile, may we rejoice in this hope of the glory of God.

Compassionate the sorrowful. There are unknown and unspoken afflictions cognizant alone to You. Heavenly Father, have mercy on each of Your suffering children! We all have our varied and appointed seasons of tribulation. May we feel trials to be easy, and crosses to be light, when borne in a spirit of uncomplaining submission to Your divine will. When You bring a cloud over the earth, may the rainbow of promise be seen in the cloud.

Listen to these my evening petitions, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, my Savior, who, when on earth, alike unfolded the filial name and taught the filial prayer — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in

heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirty-first Morning**

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matthew 13:43

And He said unto them, When you pray, say —

MY FATHER, who has translated me out of darkness, into the kingdom of Your dear Son, draw near to me and bless me. Lift up the light of Your countenance upon me, and give me peace. May God the Lord, who has showed us light, enable me to bind my morning sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

You have graciously spared me to enter on the duties and engagements of another day. Be about my path all the day long. Let me resume my pilgrim journey, leaning always on Your omnipotent arm. I would dwell on the memories of Your great goodness, and accept these as pledges for the future. You have been my help — leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation! I would seek to meditate with adoring wonder, love, and praise — on Your kingdom of grace here, and on Your kingdom of glory hereafter. I rejoice to think of the countless multitudes who have already entered within the gates of Your church on earth, and the countless multitudes who have entered within the golden gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, members of the church triumphant, who are serving You day and night in Your temple, and shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Lord, prepare me for that bright future, by entering upon the privileges and possessions of a gracious present. May I know the truth of the words, "We who have believed, do enter into rest." Enable me now to stand arrayed, glorious and glorified, in the imputed righteousness of my divine Redeemer. I have no inherent nor personal merit. Whatever good I have, is a derived and borrowed radiance from Him, the all-glorious Light of

the world. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." It is alone in His reflected beams, that I can listen to the summons, "Arise and shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you!" May it be mine with deepest thankfulness and joy, to respond: God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into my heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. In that face — under the beams of that great unsetting Sun, the full vision and fruition of God — may I live forever. Partially now, fully then, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, may I be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.

Meanwhile, reveal Yourself more and more to me as the home and refuge and resting-place of the soul. Other refuges sooner or later fail. Their memorial perishes with them. But You are the same, and Your years shall not fail. May I know this eternal shelter in the clefts of the Rock of Ages. Hide me there until all earth's calamities are overpast. I know not what entanglements may hinder me in prosecuting my pilgrim way, what temptations may overtake me, what sorrows may darken me. But He who is with me and for me, is greater than all that can be against me; so that I may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper." I will go in Your strength, making mention of Your righteousness, even of Yours alone.

Bless the means that are being used for the extension of Your cause, for the overthrow of iniquity, and for the good of mankind. Out of weakness, may Your churches be made strong, wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens.

Sanctify affliction to Your true children. Let them feel secure in a Father's tried love. May the suffering glorify You on their couches of pain. May those called to the supreme hour of all exult in death as the door leading to everlasting life. May those mourning their loved ones rejoice in the prospect of a meeting where separation is unknown, and of receiving together from divine lips the gracious welcome, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom."

Anew I supplicate Your favor. Enable me to live more and more under the powers and realities of the world to come, cherishing a habitual impression of the surpassing magnitude of eternal realities. Let me go

forth to my secular occupations this day, panoplied in the whole armor of God. Let me seek to hear the divine word of the great Redeemer, "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." May I be enabled to shine forth now, however feebly and imperfectly, in the sphere, whatever it be, which You have assigned to me, striving not so much after great things, as glorifying You in all things. Let life be a uniform and habitual act of consecration to You, that so at last an abundant entrance may be ministered into the heavenly kingdom.

Meanwhile, with profound trust and lowly reverence I would call You — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

## **Thirty-first Evening**

"That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:45

"Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Ephesians 2:19

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him —

MY FATHER, O gracious One, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, inspire me this evening with renewed confidence and trust as I approach Your presence. How wondrous are the honors of Your believing people! Once aliens from You, forfeiting all claim to Your favor, we can now listen to the voice of paternal love: "Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

Who can realize the wealth of this divine patrimony? Justified, accepted, pardoned, adopted, sanctified, and finally glorified — God my Father,

Christ my Elder Brother, heaven my everlasting heritage and home!

I would approach You tonight as one of Your covenant children, yet feeling how little I have been enabled to realize and appropriate such spiritual privileges — such privileges and blessings in possession, such glory in reversion. You know how far short I have fallen of my best aims and aspirations. How little have I felt the evil of sin — and of my own sin in particular! How little have I cultivated and imbibed the pilgrim spirit! How inadequately have I sought the one thing needful! How often have the allurements of an engrossing world without, fostered a procrastinating spirit within! How prone to surrender imperishable interests, for things which perish with the using!

If conscious of declension, the lack of former delight in Your service and of full consecration of heart to You, give me grace to be watchful and to strengthen the things which remain which are ready to die. "Return, O holy Dove! return, O Messenger of peace and comfort and rest!" Restore, Lord, unto me, the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit. Enable me to live and walk and act as seeing You who are invisible, realizing Your presence and nearness; ever grateful and thankful for unmerited temporal mercies, but seeking that these may not be allowed to obscure higher destinies, or thwart the great design and purpose of my being, set forth in the words of this morning by infallible lips, "That I may be a child of my Father in heaven."

May the voice of rejoicing and salvation be heard in the dwellings of those near and dear to me. May they also be set among Your adopted family, and exult in the tie which unites them to the household of God.

Bless Your church everywhere. Give efficacy to the gospel message as the power of God unto salvation. Fetch home all prodigals in the far country of worldliness and sin. "Lost and found," may they be found never to be lost again. By Your omnipotent grace, may many now at a distance from You become fellow-citizens with the saints in Your church on earth, and, at last, fellow-citizens with the glorified in the church above.

Look in tenderest pity on the afflicted. May trials prove to be heart-searchers, ever leading closer and nearer to You. Comfort and sustain the



sick and the afflicted. Spare those who are useful and valued. Prepare the dying for death. Calm the waves of ebbing life. May those appointed to death see the heavenly mansions looming through the mists of the dark valley. Let them pass from a death full of hope — to an immortality full of joy. And grant, gracious God, that when my time of waiting and watching and working terminates, I too may be ready at the summons to leave the earthly watch-tower, and enter within the gate into the celestial city!

In this divine trust and confidence I would now both lay me down in peace and sleep, while praying the filial prayer which divine lips have taught me — "MY Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

**The Footsteps of Jesus**  
**Things to be sought — and things to be**

# shunned

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## PREFACE

Whatever things were written aforetime in the sacred volume — were written for our instruction and admonition. The precepts it inculcates, and the diversified incidents it records — were evidently intended for our learning on the one hand, and for our warning on the other. In the biographies of Scripture this particularly appears. When the things which are pure, and lovely, and of good report — are exemplified in the character of an individual, the practical application is, "Go — and do likewise." While in reference to those of an opposite nature, such as the daring stubbornness of Pharaoh, the ostentatious zeal of Jehu, the worldly-mindedness of Demas, and many others, the exhortation is, "Go — and do otherwise." Almost in every page, both of the Old Testament and the New, are we reminded of what we are to seek — and of what we are to shun; of what we are to flee from — and what we are to follow after.

We have a perfect exhibition of the various graces after which we should aspire, in "the man Christ Jesus," who has left us an example that we should follow His steps. In thinking as He thought, feeling as He felt, and walking as He walked — the whole of experimental and practical religion is embodied. But as the spirit which was in Him was largely transfused into, and reflected by, many of His faithful servants — it follows that while we are treading in their footsteps — that we are at the same time treading in His.

It is lamentable to think that of the many who bear the name of Christ — that there are so few who can truly say, "But we have the mind of Christ." The name of Christ, however, will be of no avail without the mind of Christ. And while a mere nominal profession is worthless to the individual himself — its effects cannot fail to be injurious upon others. Let the reader, then, allow the word of exhortation. To quote from a work recently published, "We beseech you to cultivate the temper that was in Jesus Christ. Is he like a follower of the Lamb — who is raging like a roaring lion? Is he like a pardoned criminal — who sits moping with a cloud upon his brow? Is he like an heir of heaven — who is vexed and fretted with some petty loss? Is he like one in whose bosom the Dove of heaven is nestling — who is full of all manner of malice and bitterness? A kind, compassionate, gentle, loving temper — presents one of the most

winning features of true religion; and by its silent and softening influence you will do more real service to Christianity, than by the loudest professions, or by the exhibition of a cold and heartless orthodoxy." "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:31-32.

May the perusal of the following earnest pages be blessed for the promotion of such a temper! May He, to whom the Spirit was not given by measure, impart to the reader out of His inexhaustible fullness, abounding grace; and thus cause him to abound more and more in all those fruits of righteousness, which are for his own personal well being — for the honor of the Christian cause — and the praise and glory of God!

## **Contentment — Covetousness**

"Good when He gives, supremely good,  
Nor less when He denies;  
Even crosses from His sovereign hand  
Are blessings in disguise!"

"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses." Luke 12:15.

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said — Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5.

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in need." Philippians 4:11-13

The apostle Paul exhorts us to be followers of Him; even as he also was of Christ. In the character of that distinguished saint, there is much that deserves our imitation; and among other particulars, the feelings he

cherished in reference to his outward circumstances are especially worthy of our consideration. His temporal condition was, in general, anything but desirable; and yet he was far from being dissatisfied with it. In him, contentment had its perfect work, so that he was, in this respect, perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

Covetousness and contentment are diametrically opposed to each other; and where the one is — the other cannot be. Let me then take heed, and beware of the former — and earnestly aspire after the latter. "He who loves silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase." The worldling never says, "It is enough." Like the daughters of the horse-leach, his constant cry is, "Give, give!" To the question, What is enough? The reply was once given, "It is a little more than a man has." Alas! this "little more," — what weary days and anxious nights has it occasioned!

It is from the state of our minds that contentment arises, and not from the amount of our possessions. If we are not content with those things which we have — we are not likely to be content, if we succeeded in attaining all that we desire. The desires of the soul are unbounded. Expectations of greater happiness are constantly entertained; but how seldom are they realized! The possession of all the good we may think it desirable or even possible to attain, would still leave an aching void — there would still be "a cruel something" unpossessed. But when the mind and the present condition are brought to meet — then, and then only, will true contentment be found. If our heart is brought to our condition — then our condition will then be according to our heart.

The consideration that our earthly lot is appointed by God — that it is He who fixes the bounds of our habitation — is eminently calculated to promote the spirit of which we are speaking. We are to remember that He is not merely the Creator — but the Governor of the world; and that every circumstance which transpires, is under His superintendence and control. And hence we find the people of God, in every age, passing by merely second causes, until they came to the First Great Cause of all. They heard His voice, and saw His hand — in whatever befell them.

There are some who think that it is beneath the notice of God to regard

such trivial events as those which make up our common everyday history. They would allow Him to interfere in the affairs of mighty empires; but for Him to regard insignificant individuals, and all the little circumstances of which their days are composed, does not comport, they suppose, with His greatness and majesty. But such people should be reminded that in the Divine estimation, the distinctions of great and small, of vast and minute, are altogether unknown. It is not a greater act of condescension in God to number the hairs of our head, than it is for Him to number the stars of heaven; the one being as near to His immensity as the other. Such is His infinite greatness, that in comparison with it — the mightiest world is on a level with the smallest atom.

This doctrine is clearly taught in the volume of inspiration, and is likewise confirmed by every dictate of reason. He who rules in the armies of heaven — who commissions angels and flaming seraphs that stand before His throne, saying to one, "Come!" and he comes, and to another, "Go!" and he goes — who wheels in their appointed courses the innumerable worlds which are scattered through the immensity of space — this great, adorable, incomprehensible Being, regards with tender compassion the poor little sparrow which falls unheeded to the ground, and clothes the lowliest flower with its tints of beauty. Of His care, we are warranted in saying that nothing is too great to be above it — and that nothing, on the other hand, is too minute to be beneath it!

Were the doctrine of "chance" a doctrine of God's Word, there might then be some reason in our murmuring, and some grounds perhaps for it. But if it is He who makes poor and who makes rich — who brings low and lifts up; if whatever befalls us is by His appointment or permission, whom we profess to love and honor — then, surely, contentment with our lot must be a reasonable duty indeed!

"In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." Job 1:22. This commendation refers to the spirit with which he bore the unparalleled trials which befell him — when he was hurled down, in a single day, from the highest summit of prosperity to the lowest depths of adversity! He saw the hand of God in all that took place. It was not to the invasion of the Sabeans and Chaldeans — that he traced the loss of his property. It was not to the fury of "mother nature" — that he traced the

death of his children. No! He looked farther and higher! Prostrate in adoration at the Divine footstool, he exclaimed, "I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The Lord gave me everything I had — and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!" And then it is added, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

Now, how important it is, that the same mind which was in him should be in us also. To murmur under the Divine dispensations — to be dissatisfied with the lot which has been appointed to us — to be always complaining of one circumstance or another — what is this, in effect — but to charge God with wrongdoing? It is practically to attribute folly to Him who is the only wise God, and whose knowledge and understanding are infinite! O let us beware then of a discontented spirit, remembering that God orders all our affairs! Whatever He gives us — let us thankfully receive it. Whatever He denies us — let us be satisfied without it. Whatever He takes from us — let us uncomplainingly part with it. Whatever trial He lays on us — let us endeavor patiently to bear it. We shall thus be still, and know that He is God; and we shall honor and magnify His blessed name.

Were we fully to believe, and rightly to enter into this truth — that our lot in life, with all its attendant circumstances, is chosen of God — we would, doubtless, be disposed to join with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" Wherever our lot might be cast, such would be our language. Let the sun of prosperity shine — or let the clouds of adversity lower; let our path be smooth — or let it be rugged; we would be disposed to say, "It is good for us to be here!" We may be often oppressed, being called to eat the bread of trouble, and drink the waters of affliction — but let us not rest until we can utter these words. We may not be able now to see how it is good; but let us think of the wisdom and love of Him who placed us there, and can we doubt it, whether we understand it or not? He is too wise to err — and too good to be unkind! Oh that we might then honor Him, by trusting and praising Him for evermore.

Among the many faithful sayings which are worthy of all acceptance, this is one, that "godliness with contentment is great gain." The two blessings are like the pillars Jachin and Boaz in the temple — the one with which it was founded, the other wherein there was strength. O my soul, exercise

yourself unto godliness in the first place — and then unto contentment as one of the most lovely and important of its fruits. If I am blessed with the former — then I ought surely to exemplify the latter. The possession of godliness secures to me all those spiritual treasures which are in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. I can then be addressed, as was the church of Smyrna of old, "I know your poverty — but you are rich," — rich indeed — "for all things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours!"

Others may well mourn when some part of their earthly good is taken away; for, miserable creatures! their only portion is in this life. But if I am a child of God, the consideration of what I have in hand, and of what I have in hope, should keep me from complaining, even in the midst of the greatest temporal privations!

## **Steadfastness — Instability**

"Be faithful unto death, nor fear  
A few short days of strife;  
Behold the crown you soon shall wear,  
A crown of endless life!"

"Your loyalty is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes." Hosea 6:4.

"But we are not of those who draw back unto perdition; but of those who believe, to the saving of the soul." Hebrews 10:39.

The religious feelings of many, however lively and promising, have been only of brief duration. The Scriptures abound with instances of this description; and if we would shun such a spirit of instability — let us consider what is recorded of such characters, lest we be led away, and fall from our own steadfastness.

In the history of God's ancient people, this spirit of instability appears with marked prominence. Never was a nation so favored as they were. All the ordinances of nature were again and again suspended for their sakes.



For them rivers and seas were divided, and the sun and moon stood still. The heavens were opened, and angels' food fell in abundance at their feet. "He turned the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into flowing springs." For forty years God led them through the wilderness; in the day by the pillar of cloud, and in the night by a pillar of fire. He rebuked kings, He scattered and slew mighty armies, He turned whole nations upside down — for their preservation and deliverance. In all His dealings towards them, He made it evident that He was, not merely excellent in counsel — but mighty in working.

And the great things which God did for them produced, as they could not fail to produce — a lively impression upon their minds. But, alas! it was transient in the extreme. This is affectingly shown in the 106th Psalm. "Both we and our ancestors have sinned. We have done wrong! We have acted wickedly! Our ancestors in Egypt gave no thought to His miracles; they soon forgot His many acts of kindness to them. Instead, they rebelled against Him at the Red Sea. Even so, He saved them — to defend the honor of His name and to demonstrate His mighty power. He commanded the Red Sea to divide, and a dry path appeared. He led Israel across the sea bottom that was as dry as a desert. So He rescued them from their enemies and redeemed them from their foes. Then the water returned and covered their enemies; not one of them survived. Then at last His people believed His promises. Then they finally sang His praise."

Such was the impression which His mercies produced. With glowing ardor they sang, "Who is like unto You, O Lord; glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" They sounded the timbrel, and joined in the dance. High and low, men and maidens, all united in celebrating His marvelous loving-kindness, and in extolling His wondrous works. But what is man? When most highly favored — what is he? "Then at last His people believed His promises. Then they finally sang His praise." But did they continue to do so all their journey through? Alas! not so! "But they soon forgot what He had done — and did not wait for His counsel." Their gratitude speedily evaporated! Their delightful frames and feelings soon passed away! And they went on still in their trespasses — murmuring and rebelling against Him, as if He had never rescued them, and as if they had never acknowledged His deliverance on their behalf.

A similar view is given in the 78th Psalm. God's wonderful works are there declared, that they might be held in constant remembrance, and that their record might be transmitted from sire to son, through successive generations. "That the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands. They would not be like their forefathers — a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to Him." Such was their character. There was nothing stable about them. When any extraordinary mercies were conferred on them, they were melted just for the moment; or when any visitations of vengeance were brought upon them, they were filled with fear and trembling. But the rejoicing on the one hand, and the alarm on the other — were alike evanescent. "All that the Lord has spoken, will we do!" was their language, while the terrors of the Almighty surrounded them — as when He proclaimed His law, in dread majesty, from the summit of Sinai. But no sooner had the lightnings ceased to glitter, and the thunderclaps to roar — than they set up a golden calf, before which they bowed, and to which they ascribed their deliverance!

In the time of Christ, the same spirit frequently appeared, as it has in all subsequent ages. In the parable of the sower He divides the hearers of the gospel into four classes, and one, the stony ground hearers, represents the class we are now considering. They receive with joy the word preached to them. In a transport of admiration they exclaim, "How sublime, how wonderful, how clear, how convincing! We were never so charmed in all our days — never so moved, and so melted!" But the great Teacher — He who knew what was in man — who was never deceived by any outward appearances — He testified that it would all come to nothing. They had no root in them, and therefore they could not endure. "When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word — they quickly fall away."

Many have we known, whose histories have verified this representation. They were at one time truly promising characters. They appeared to be inflamed with a holy ambition to win the heavenly crown. We saw them commence the journey, and we thought they started well. But where are

they now? Where? The tears of their friends — the sighs of their ministers — the triumphs of the enemy, answer the question! From the way of truth — they have turned aside. According to the true proverb it has happened to them, "A dog returns to its vomit, and a sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mire!" Miserable men! it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

How striking is the figure which the prophet employs in representing such characters. They are compared to the morning mist, and the early dew — which quickly fades away. These are emblems of whatever is brief and transitory. Look at the morning mist — it may be now dark and lowering; but look, again, and it is gone — not the least trace of it appears! And so with the early dew. There it is in countless drops, shining like so many glittering gems; but as the sun comes forth from his eastern chamber, and begins careering his majestic way, pouring forth the fullness of his beams on every hand — then how speedily does the morning dew vanish! Just so with the people we have described. Their loyalty disappears in like manner.

Believer, dread the thought of ever forsaking Him by whose worthy name you are called. "Will you also go away?" "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Let your motto ever be, "Onward!" Though faint — be still pursuing. Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised. He will not forsake those who put their trust in Him. Deeply conscious are you, doubtless, of your own weakness, and of the backsliding tendency of your wayward and deceitful heart; but there is One who is greater than your heart, and your safety consists in looking daily to Him for that upholding and persevering grace which He has promised to His people.

If the reader is a young disciple, let him endeavor to count the cost — and thus seek to be prepared for all that may await him. Had one and another of Bunyan's pilgrims done this, they would not have been so likely to turn back, nor be discouraged by the difficulties, nor frightened at the dangers, to which they were exposed. To you we would say then, Reckon upon meeting with much to oppose and dishearten you. Through the Slough of Despond you will have to pass. By Beelzebub's Castle, with the archers

aiming to level their darts at you, you will have to pass. Over the Hill Difficulty, and by the roaring lions, and through the Valley of Humiliation, haunted with its frightful demons, you will have to pass. And so with Doubting Castle, and Giant Despair, and innumerable pits and snares! But, after all, be not discouraged. To have that one promise fulfilled, "My grace is sufficient for you, and My strength shall be made perfect in your weakness," and you will be able to surmount them all, and thus hold on until your pilgrimage is finished, and an entrance be granted to you into the Shining City above!

O You who has endured such contradiction of sinners — help us to consider You, and to call continually upon You, lest we become weary and faint in our minds. Inspire us with a spirit of increasing steadfastness. Help us to attend with all diligence to every means which will be likely to promote this great object. May we so run the race that is set before us, that at length we may receive the end of our faith — even the full and final salvation of our souls.

## **Humility — Pride**

"The saint who wears heaven's brightest crown,  
In deepest adoration bends.  
The weight of glory bows him down,  
The most when most his soul ascends.  
Nearest the throne itself must be  
The footstool of humility."

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."  
Proverbs 16:18

"Be clothed with humility." 1 Peter 5:5

Humility may be defined as consisting in profound self-abasement before God, arising from a deep sense of our sinfulness — and in a low estimation of ourselves, as we stand related to our fellow creatures, whatever is the extent of our attainments, or the importance of the station we occupy. It is described by the apostle as a disposition which

leads us, not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think — but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Upon this subject too much stress cannot be laid, for without humility, true religion cannot possibly exist. A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms. We might as well speak of a wise fool, of a wicked saint, of a sober drunkard, or of a chaste harlot — as of a proud Christian. We may as soon expect delicate flowers to flourish in the frozen and barren regions of Siberia — as that true piety should grow in the heart that is proud and haughty. A vine might as well thrive when a worm is gnawing at its root — as that the soul should prosper and be in health, when its arrogance and pride are not subdued.

One of the Fathers of the Church, when asked which was the first principle in religion, replied, Humility. When asked which was the second, he said, Humility. And when asked which was the third, he again answered, Humility. So important was this grace in his estimation, that he regarded it as the beginning, the middle, and the end of true godliness. And we may truly say that where humility is absent, everything else in religion, is in vain. A person may possess the most splendid talents — he may have the gift of miracles, and the knowledge of all mysteries — but without true humility he is, in the sight of God, nothing but sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Without a spirit of humility — no happiness could be enjoyed in heaven. The proud man, were he admitted there, could feel no real or lasting enjoyment. The outward glory of the place might dazzle his eyes for a time — but he could not relish the society and employments of that blessed state. The honors conferred upon patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs — would be likely to excite his envy, and before long he would attempt to sow the seeds of discord among the heavenly multitudes!

Reader, if you would enjoy true happiness, both here and hereafter, cultivate a humble spirit — for without humility, you will never know true happiness. "O that lovely Valley of Humiliation," said the venerable Rowland Hill, when writing to a friend, "the safest, the most fertile spot

between the city of destruction and heaven. May you get into it, make your constant abode in it, and never get out of it, until from thence you shall be called to glory. O! I could say a thousand things in praise of this valley. The air is so healthy; the ground so fertile; the fruit so wholesome; while from the branches of every tree, the voices of prayer and praise are heard in delightful concert. While living in it no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper, since the enemy of souls cannot shoot low enough to reach us to our hurt. Take this hint from a very old man, who is just putting off his harness."

"True humility," said Matthew Wilks, "is a lovely ornament; it is the only suitable dress for a saved sinner." O let us seek then to be clothed in this robe, that we may be brought to lie low at the footstool of our Maker and Redeemer; and that in all our fellowship with each other, we may look at our superiors without envy, and upon our inferiors without contempt.

In the saints of old, this grace of humility appeared with marked prominence; and in following them as patterns for our imitation, let us endeavor to be like-minded with them in this important particular. There was Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God. How great was his humility! how profound his self-abasement! "I have ventured to speak to the Lord — even though I am nothing but dust and ashes." He was filled with a consciousness of his absolute nothingness in the presence of the Great Eternal. There was David also, who speaks of himself as "a worm and no man." Job cried out, "Behold, I am vile!"

In the apostle Paul, again, what a striking exemplification have we of this grace of humility. If self-delight were ever allowable in any individual, it would be in him; for such a laborious, self-denying, unselfish character, has, doubtless, not yet appeared — the man Christ Jesus alone and always excepted. But what were his views and feelings in reference to himself? On one occasion we hear him saying that he was not worthy to be called an apostle. At another time he says, "I am less than the least of all God's people!" And when penning one of his last epistles, he designates himself the very chief of sinners. He was brought to know himself — a knowledge, we are told, in which all wisdom centers. If we knew ourselves as he did — pride and self-delight would find no room within us!

But, above all, let us consider Him who said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me — for I am gentle and humble in heart." The heaven of heavens could not contain Him; all the fullness of the Eternal Godhead dwelt in Him; devils trembled at His rebuke, and flew from His presence to the abodes of misery; yet how gentle, how humble! Reader, aspire after conformity to Christ — in His humility. In the words of the Apostle we would say, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Against the proud — God's displeasure has been manifested in all ages. Think of Pharaoh. The language of that proud monarch was, "Who is the Lord — that I should obey Him?" But the Divine Majesty could not bear to be thus insulted; hence the puny worm with all his legions were destroyed; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Think of Nebuchadnezzar. Hear his boasting exclamation, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" But God resisted him, and he was turned from the society of men — to eat grass with the beasts of the field! Think of Herod. With what delight did he receive the applause of the people, when they cried, "It is the voice of a god, and not the voice of man!" But the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten with worms!

While, however, God resists the proud — He has promised to give grace unto the humble. The humble are the objects of His special regard. What He declared concerning Zion, He says in reference to every humble heart, "This is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." "For thus says the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place;" that is one of the palaces of the Great King, where the throne of His glory is erected — where the countless armies of cherubim and seraphim are stationed, and where perfected saints reside. But He has another place of habitation: "with him also, who is humble and contrite in spirit!"

"Thus says the high and lofty One,  
I sit upon My holy throne;  
My name is God, I dwell on high,

Dwell in My own eternity.

But I descend to worlds below;  
On earth I have a mansion too;  
The humble spirit and contrite  
Is an abode of My delight!"

You, O Lord, are high, being exalted above all blessing and praise; yet, notwithstanding Your unspeakable greatness — You have respect unto the humble; but the proud You know afar off. O Lord, subdue the pride of my heart; and help me to manifest, by my whole demeanor — that humility of spirit which is in Your sight of great price!

## **Companionship of the Godly — Counsel of the Ungodly**

"Depart from me, you wicked race,  
Whose hands and hearts are ill;  
I love my God, I love His ways,  
And must obey His will."

"He who walks with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Proverbs 13:20

"I said to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good besides You.' As for the holy people who are in the land — they are the noble ones in whom is all my delight." Psalm 16:2-3

Man is a social being. Wherever he is found, whether in a savage or civilized state, this trait more or less appears. Nor is it by man alone that this propensity is manifested. It is seen in the lower departments of the animal creation. Fish swim in schools — and insects move in swarms. Thus man and beast possess this instinct in common, as they do many others.

The social principles of our nature may become, like all other principles, the source either of good — or of evil. If rightly improved, and properly



directed — of good; if perverted and abused — of evil. How anxious then should we be to shun the latter — and to realize the former! And that such may be the case, what care should we exercise in the choice of those with whom we associate!

Reader, are you a follower of Christ? If so, select your companions from among His people. How solemn and decisive are the apostle's words, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world — becomes an enemy of God!" In the book of Proverbs we have line upon line, and precept upon precept, calling upon us to shun the fellowship of the ungodly. Into their path — we are not to enter. Solomon tells us, "Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way!" Proverbs 4:14-15. And what was the resolution of the Psalmist? "Depart from me, you evil doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."

In the history of God's people we have this duty prominently exemplified. In the experience of David, whose words we have just quoted, this was especially the case. There were three things to which he was pre-eminently attached. The first was the WORD of God. O how highly did he prize that sacred treasure! It was his daily Counselor and guide! The second was the HOUSE of God. "I have loved the habitation of Your house; and the place where Your honor dwells." And in his banishment, when deprived of the high privilege of treading its threshold, and joining in its hallowed exercises of prayer and praise, he envied even the birds that built their nests against its walls. "Even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young — at a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God!"

But in addition to the word and house of God — he ardently loved the PEOPLE of God. "I am a companion of all those who fear You — and of those who keep Your precepts." He speaks of the saints that were upon the earth, and the excellent, as those in whom was all his delight. And God appears to have blessed him with not a few of such to delight himself in. He had Nathan, so faithful and true; he had Barzillai, the Gileadite, a brother born for adversity; he had Abiathar the priest, and Zadok the scribe; and he once had Jonathan, whom he loved as his own soul; and

many more, with whom he took sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company.

How interesting, again, is the account given of what took place in the time of the prophet Malachi. It appears to have been a season when iniquity and infidelity greatly abounded. The avowal was unblushingly made, that it was vain to serve God, and that there was no profit in keeping His ordinances. But even then, there were some who were found faithful among the faithless. And among other things, they were especially distinguished by the particular we are considering, namely, their love to and their fellowship with each other. "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored His name." And, as He always honors those who honor Him, it is added, "They will be Mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up My treasured possession!" Having come out from among the ungodly, God received them; He looked down with special approbation upon them; and promised that He would at length gloriously reward them!

And so with the early Christians. "As soon as they were released," it is said, "Peter and John returned to the other believers!" This declaration that gives us a clear insight into their character as far as their fellowship with each other was concerned. They were, though a persecuted — yet a happy, loving, united family. They had to mix with the ungodly — but it was their own company which they loved.

There is something highly reasonable in the duty we are endeavoring to enforce. "Like loves like," says the proverb, "all the world over." One individual is drawn to another, and one class of men to another class — where a oneness of views, of tastes, of feelings, and of efforts — are found to exist. Whether it be in literary and political pursuits, or in the degrading pleasures of sin — we have abundant illustrations of this truth. And if such associate together, how much more should the followers of Christ do so, who are united to each other by far higher bonds — bonds heavenly in their source, and deathless in their duration!

The feelings with which we regard the people of God are a decisive proof

of our spiritual condition. "By their fruits," said the Savior, "you shall know them." And the fruits to which the Scriptures refer, are exceedingly simple and palpable. Nothing brilliant or imposing is required in order to evidence that we are the disciples of Christ. The possession of splendid talents; the distribution of large charities; the endurance of martyrdom — none of these things are represented as proofs of our discipleship. Had such been the case, only some favored few could evince their attachment to the Lord Jesus, and manifest that they were His true friends and followers. But the requirements of the Gospel are such as may be practiced by individuals in every condition; they are tests which may be applied to people of every rank and station!

How desirable a thing is it for us to be brought to know that we have passed from death to life — that that great and glorious change has taken place, in virtue of which we are made children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven! Well, it may be known. The thing is not impossible. But in what way? Not by conferring with prophet or angel — gifted with the revelation of hidden things. Not by reading our names in the book of life — that mystic volume which is chained to the eternal throne, with all the fates of men. Not by receiving from God any direct intimation of the fact, such as proclaiming from the excellent glory that we are His beloved and accepted children, in whom He is well pleased.

No, not so! It is not by ascending to heaven above, nor by descending to the depths below; but it is by means of that revealed Word, which is near us. And what is its testimony? "We know that we have passed from death unto life — because we love the brethren." Brotherly affection — a cordial feeling of attachment to all who possess the mind, and manifest the spirit of Christ — is what the apostle John fixes upon as an indubitable evidence of our personal salvation.

The question then is one of the greatest importance, "Do I love the brethren? And does my love to them lead me to delight in fellowship with them?" If we are strangers to such feelings — we have every reason to doubt our spiritual condition. "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples — if you love one another." And the converse will hold equally true — By this shall all men know that you are not my disciples — if brotherly love is not possessed and manifested by you.

Once more, if we make the people of God our companions — then we are likely to derive benefits of the most important kind from fellowship with them. "Come with us," is their invitation, "and we will do you good." They will cheer, and warn, and direct us; they will sympathize with us in our sorrows, and bring down the blessing of heaven upon us by their prayers.

Reader, beware of sinful companions! Ask the wretched youth who, with a ruined character, is now an inmate of yonder prison, what brought him to such a place — and he will tell you that it was wicked companions! Ask the poor creature who is about to terminate his miserable career on the gallows, what led him to so disastrous an end, and he will answer — wicked companions! No mind but His who comprehends the universe in its vast survey — can tell what multitudes have been ruined, ruined for both worlds — by the influence of wicked companions! Young man, shun the society of the ungodly. Flee from them — as you would from a venomous viper! Dread their abode — as you would a place infected with the most malignant pestilence. O, if sinners entice you — do not consent! Dare to be singular; learn to be decided. And whatever others may do, be it yours to aspire after the blessedness which is pronounced upon those who walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful; but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditate therein day and night.

## **Selfishness — Unselfish Love**

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Genesis 4:9

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22

"Mankind," says one, "are fallen from God into a great gulf of sinful selfishness!" "Pleasure, profit, and honor," says another, "are the natural man's trinity; and his carnal self is this trinity in unity." With most of our fellow-creatures, self is Alpha, and self is Omega — it is first and last, middle and end!

And there is too much of this selfishness in the Christian Church. "All men," says the apostle, when referring to certain religionists of his day, "seek their own — and not the things which are Christ's." Even those who have been brought to realize somewhat of the value of spiritual blessings, often manifest too exclusive a regard for their own personal well-being. It is to be feared that many in attending the means of grace, are only solicitous about their own edification and comfort. And there are some, of very high pretensions, who can tolerate no preaching but that which is addressed to believers invariably. O, have such never read of the faithful shepherd, who left the ninety-nine sheep that were safe and secure — in order to traverse the wilderness in search of the one wanderer? They would have the ninety — nine wanderers neglected — that undivided attention might be given to the few already folded sheep. To be personally comforted is their great concern. Let others perish; it matters but little — so long as they themselves are pampered and well-fed. But let us be well assured that there is something radically wrong where such a feeling exists. It is a sure sign, not of spiritual health but of spiritual sickliness, if not of spiritual unsoundness! Even were there no wandering ones to be reclaimed — this undue, inordinate panting after what is merely comforting, ought not by any means to be encouraged. It is as if we were always taking sweets and cordials, which, though they may for the time revive the spirits, would yet be secretly — but surely, undermining the strength.

It is quite natural for the people of God to be concerned about obtaining a blessing for their own souls. But the thing to be shunned is being concerned for ourselves alone. When the believer treads the threshold of the sanctuary, it is very proper for his cry to be, "O You who speak peace to Your people and to Your saints — speak peace to my waiting soul. I beseech You to show me Your glory; reveal Your smiling face, and make me joyful in Your house of prayer." But let him not forget to add, "Save now, I beseech you, O Lord; quicken the dead; alarm the careless; break the sinner's heart; open his blind eyes; and work mightily by Your truth upon the consciences of those who have never felt its saving power."

And so in reference to those practical efforts which we are called upon to make with the view of reclaiming those who are ignorant and lost. Alas!

that the interest taken in the welfare of such, should be so languid — and that the exertions put forth on their behalf, should be so few.

The reader may recollect the language which the Jewish elders addressed to Judas, when, with compunction and remorse, he returned to them the thirty pieces of silver — the sum for which he had sold the Son of God. Did they endeavor to nourish the contrition which he seemed to manifest, when he cried, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!" No — but with an indifference that must have chilled him, they replied, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

Now this is in effect, the language of all who are unconcerned about the well-being of their fellow-creatures. Tell them of the misery that abounds; tell them of the temporal and spiritual destitution of hundreds and thousands around them; tell them of the teeming millions who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, strangers to happiness and strangers to God — and their practical reply is, "What is that to us?" Ah! there is a day coming when they will see that it is something to them; and that were they guilty of no other crime than that of indifference to the wants and woes of their fellow-men, they will be consigned, with the unprofitable servant, to the place where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!

In seeking to do good to others — we are likely to get good ourselves. "The liberal soul," says the wise man, "shall be made fat, and he who waters — shall be watered also himself." Relieve the distressed; clothe the naked; feed the hungry; instruct the ignorant. Thus the blessing of those who are ready to perish will come upon you; you will enjoy the approving testimony of a peaceful conscience, that testimony which is "the soul's sweet sunshine and the heart-felt joy;" and in the performance of such acts you will be materially benefitted yourself.

There is an old proverb which says, "Everyone for himself!" We trust that the sentiment it expresses, is one with which we have no sympathy!

Be it ours to nourish "another spirit," even the spirit of the Lord Jesus, who pleased not Himself. Had it been "everyone for himself" with Him, the throne of His glory would never have been left; He would not have

appeared as a humble babe in Bethlehem; there would have been no groaning in the garden — and no bleeding on the accursed tree! Had it been "everyone for himself" with Him, the violated law must have taken its dreadful course; the vials of divine wrath would have been poured out upon our guilty heads; and ruin, unmixed, unaltered, unending ruin — would have been our portion! But let us rejoice that He espoused our cause, and that He died the sinless — for the sinful, to bring us to God. And may the contemplation of His unexampled love, shame us out of that spirit of selfishness in which we are so prone to indulge; and constrain us to live, not to ourselves — but to Him!

## **Pleasing Men — Pleasing God**

"Am I now trying to win the approval of men — or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men — I would not be a servant of Christ." Galatians 1:10

"Enoch was commended as one who pleased God." Hebrews 11:5

It is recorded in one of the gospel narratives, that certain of the Jews besought the Savior's interposition in the case of the Centurion, whose servant was at the point of death; and the plea they urged was, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." He had thus won, Gentile though he was, their esteem; and in order to testify their approbation, they came forward on this occasion, not merely to express their sympathy — but to exert their influence on his behalf.

To enjoy the favor of our fellow-creatures is, doubtless, a blessing not to be despised. The Centurion could not be otherwise than gratified by finding that he stood so high in the estimation of those among whom he dwelt; and the contemplation of the incident, simple though it is — is refreshing to every mind.

But those who make it their chief aim to please men — are evidently under the influence of a feeling which cannot be too strongly condemned. If this is the regulating principle of our lives; if we shape our whole course

and conduct with the view of attaining this object — we cannot, as the apostle states, be the servants of Christ. The true Christian acts from other and higher motives; his actions are to be always regulated by the will of God — whether men are pleased or not! With the apostles, when summoned before the Jewish rulers, our language should be, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you, rather than God."

To seek to please men is in general — a very hopeless task. Many a minister of the gospel especially, has found it to be so by painful experience. He would be of all men most miserable, if his only end was to secure the approval of those among whom he labors! As one remarks,

"If the preacher is faithful — then he is said to be too intolerant.  
If he is cheerful — then he is trifling.  
If he is serious — then he is dull.  
If he is practical — then he is legal.  
If he preaches grace — then he is an enemy to good works.  
If he is social — then he is worldly.  
If he is very studious — then he is reserved.  
If he is forgiving when misrepresented — then he is guilty, or he would resent it.  
If he pleads for his rights — then he is self-serving.  
If he is passive — then he is weak.  
If he is courteous — then he is afraid of man.  
If he is courageous — then he is crude.  
If his language is piercing — then he is coarse.  
If he is plain — then he is illiterate.  
If he is elevated — then he is too high in his style."

But let us turn to a more congenial and important theme, that of pleasing God. And in order to attain this blessed privilege, it is indispensable that we be brought into a state of personal acceptance with Him. "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit, have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.



Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Romans 8:5-8.

There is something fearfully emphatic in the above representation. It shows not merely that men are enemies to God — but that their carnal minds are enmity itself — enmity in the abstract! Enemies may be reconciled — but enmity cannot. A wicked man may become virtuous — but vice never can. Indeed, the only way to reconcile enemies is by destroying the enmity that exists between them. "We," says the apostle elsewhere, "who were once enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" but he speaks of enmity as having been consumed or destroyed. Having "abolished in his flesh the enmity" — and having "slain the enmity thereby." The conclusion drawn from all this is inevitable, that those who are in the flesh — in their natural condition of enmity and alienation — cannot please God.

It is, however, cheering to know that if our state by nature is such that we cannot please God while we remain in it; yet that there is a state of grace in which we can, and that there is a way of translation from the one to the other. We are naturally guilty and depraved; and before anything we can do will be well-pleasing in God's sight, we must, as guilty creatures — be pardoned; and as depraved and polluted — we must be renewed.

We are spiritually — to employ a familiar comparison — in the situation of a poor criminal in prison — who has been sentenced to death, and who is at the same time infected with some fatal disease. Now if such a one is only pardoned — he will soon die of the disease; and, on the other hand, if he is only cured of the disease — he must soon be executed. It is evident that he needs both — he must be both pardoned and cured.

Just so with us. We require a double cure — we must be both justified and sanctified; we must be freed from sin in its guilt — and from sin in its reigning power. Now the Savior does both. "This is He who came by water and blood;" by water to wash us from our impurities, and by blood to remove, by its sacrificial efficacy, the condemnation we have deserved. Now these two blessings should never be separated; what God has joined together let not man put asunder. "True religion," says John Newton, "stands upon two pillars — what Christ did for us, and what the Holy Spirit does in us. Most errors," he adds, "arise from an attempt to

separate these two." Before, then, we can please God, our guilty persons must be accepted — and our sinful hearts must be renewed.

Various things may be specified, with the possession and exercise of which God is declared to be well pleased. Of these, one of the most prominent is faith. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." No state of mind can possibly be more offensive to God, than that of unbelief. "Anyone who does not believe God, has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son." Unbelief is a spirit which casts the foulest indignity upon the divine character. It is a spirit which would tarnish all the glory of His infinite perfections. It is a spirit which would rob every gem which decks His crown. It is a spirit which would pluck away every pillar that supports His throne. It is a spirit which would, not merely change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; but into the likeness of the great apostate spirit himself, of whom it is emphatically said that he is a liar, and the father of it. Unbelief, then, must be a spirit which God abhors; and faith, on the contrary, or implicit confidence in Him, is a spirit which He cannot but regard with approbation and delight.

Another particular we may mention is gratitude. "Whoever offers praise glorifies me;" it must therefore be pleasing to Him. "I will praise the name of God," says David, "with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock." Let us then present unto God thanksgiving, and pay our vows unto the Most High. Let our resolve be,

"I'll praise my Maker with my breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures."

A life of holiness is another thing that may be specified. "Whatever we

ask," says John, "we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight."  
"We beseech you," says Paul, "and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more."

"The fruits of holiness," it has been strikingly observed, "which appear in God's people on earth, imperfect as they are, are on some accounts more pleasing to Him than those produced by the angels in heaven. Holiness in heaven is like flowers in spring, or like fruit in autumn — when they are expected; but holiness in a world so depraved as this, is like flowers and fruit in the depth of winter — or like the blossoms and almonds of Aaron's rod, which proceeded from a dead and sapless branch! When the delicious fruits of southern climates can be made by the gardener's skill to flourish in our northern regions, they are far more admired and praised than while growing in rich abundance in their native soil. Just so, when holiness, whose native land is heaven, is found in the comparatively frozen and barren soil of this world, which lies in wickedness, it is viewed by God with peculiar pleasure."

We see from this subject, what should be the constant aim of every believer — it is to please God. Reader, study to show yourself approved unto Him. His favor is life; His loving-kindness is better than life. And may He whose approbation outweighs a world of censure, and which transcends a whole universe of applause, says to you, after this chequered scene is over, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

## **Unity — Divisions**

"Let party names no more  
The Christian world o'erspread;  
Gentile and Jew, and bond and free,  
Are one in Christ their Head."

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."  
Ephesians 4:3

"You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" 1  
Corinthians 3:3

The Church of Christ is one. It is one family, one flock, one army, one vineyard, one body, one bride. Her God is one. Jesus, her husband and head, is one. Her privileges, her interests, her objects, her destination, are one. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

And if the Universal Church is one, should not each of its separate branches be one? But are they one? To ask the question is a taunt and mockery. Oh! if tears could bedim those eyes which gaze on the glories of the beatific vision — would not the heavenly multitudes weep and wail at the sad spectacle of the mystical body of Christ — torn and mangled as it now is! And while Heaven might weep — hell might well rejoice, as she doubtless does, with fiendish triumph, at the sight! The world which now lies in wickedness will continue to lie therein, until a divided Church is made one — one in spirit and affection at least, even if its members be not fully joined in the same mind and the same judgment.

Satan is well aware that the conversion of the world is suspended upon the unity of the Church; and hence he leaves no means untried which are likely to embitter its various sections one against the other, that his reign might be thereby prolonged. And were Christians as fully aware of the same fact, would they not be likely to come closer together? Would they not be disposed to forget their trifling differences? Would they not be willing to lose them, in the indulgence of a heavenly charity — in the noble oblivion of love? We might then hope; yes, we might entertain the assured conviction, that the set time to favor Zion had come — the time when God, even our own God, would abundantly bless her, and when all the ends of the earth would be brought to fear Him.

The above considerations are abundantly confirmed by the memorable prayer which the Savior offered on the night in which He was betrayed. Among the petitions which He then addressed to His Heavenly Father, this was one: "I do not pray for these alone — but for those also who shall

believe on Me through their word; that they all might be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us — that the world may believe that You have sent Me." The world will not believe before then. The one must precede the other. It is heaven's own plan; and to imagine that it will be otherwise, is to expect that the Savior's prayer will be frustrated, and that, out of mere indulgence to our perverseness, to our cold carnalities and unhallowed bigotries.

How desirable is it, in order to hasten this blissful consummation, that Christians should have a deep and realizing impression of the spiritual relationship which exists between the whole body of the faithful. They are all children of the same Father, members of the same Son, habitations of the same Spirit. It is the same mercy that pitied them, the same blood that bought them, the same grace that sanctifies them, the same blessed hope that animates them! Are they not all walking by the same Scriptural rule, all pressing toward the same heavenly mark, all engaged in the same earthly warfare, all hated by the same vile foes! Is not the same blood now coursing through their veins, and are they not hereafter to spend unending ages in the same heaven, surrounding the same throne, and singing the same song! How is it then that they keep so far apart from each other now? Whence those divisions and alienations which are, alas! so common? The poet asks,

"Is Christ divided? What can part  
The members from the Head?  
O how should those be one in heart,  
For whom one Savior bled!

Bound to one Lord by common vow,  
In one great enterprise;  
One faith, one hope, one center now,  
Our common home the skies.

O let us undivided be:  
Let party contests cease;  
Nor break the Spirit's unity,  
Nor burst the bond of peace.

Then shall the wondering world again,  
Admire how Christian's love,  
And know we do not bear in vain  
His name who pleads above.

We would further say — let us not give undue prominence to those minor points on which we differ. What are they, when compared with those great points on which we are agreed? They bear no more proportion to each other than did the mint, and anise, and cummin of old — to the weightier matters of the law. Need we ask, What is it, that sanctifies and saves? What is it, that cheers and supports when guilt presses down upon the conscience, or when care is corroding the heart, or when sorrow drives sleep from the eyes, or when death robs us of the friends we love, or when he is likely to lay his cold hand upon ourselves? Are they not those blessed truths in reference to which all who love the Savior are agreed? O, should there be more in matters of church government, and outward forms — to keep Christians apart; than there is in their common adoption, their common justification, their common hopes and anticipations — to bring them together!

Reader, seek to promote in every way — a spirit of greater love and unity among the followers of Christ. Mark those who cause divisions — and avoid them. Guard especially against every unhallowed propensity in your own breast, which may have the least tendency to produce the evils over which we mourn. "Lay aside all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," on the one hand: and "follow after the things which make for peace," on the other hand.

## **Things of Earth — Things of Heaven**

"O what folly, O what madness!  
That my thoughts should go astray,  
After toys and empty pleasures —  
Pleasures only of a day!

This vain world, with all its trifles,  
Soon, alas! will be no more;

There's no object worth admiring,  
But the God whom I adore!"

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things!" Colossians 3:1-2.

"Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who mind earthly things." Philippians 3:19.

The history of six thousand years has given indisputable evidence of the insufficiency of all earthly objects to yield true and satisfying enjoyment. Man has needs — which no earthly riches can supply; he has soul diseases — which no human skill can cure; he has fears — which no mortal courage can quell; he has debts — which no finite resources can discharge; and he has miseries — which no earth-born sagacity can console.

In earthly things, to whatever extent they may be possessed, there is a lack of adaptation to yield real happiness. It is recorded of Caesar, that he exclaimed, when in possession of universal empire, "Is this all?" This clearly showed that his expectations of happiness were not answered by the attainment of worldly things. From a distance, it seemed something great and enviable for mighty nations to acknowledge his sway, and submit to his scepter; but when it was actually attained, his language was, "Is this all?"

Reader, have you not often felt something similar to this? You may have set your heart upon some distant object; and oh! what were you not ready to give for its attainment! What sacrifices you made! What self-denial did you undergo! At length, perhaps, the desire of your heart was granted you. But was it what you expected? Were you not, on the contrary, led to exclaim, in the language of the disappointed emperor, "Is this all?"

It is an absolute certainty, that the things of earth cannot satisfy the cravings of our immortal nature. Wealth, fame, learning, pleasure, domestic happiness — none of these things can do it. "Whoever drinks of these waters shall thirst again," as the Savior declared to the Samaritan

woman; "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst — but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life!"

But the things of earth, besides being unsatisfying in their nature, are, at best, transitory in their duration. What are RICHES? 'Uncertain' is the epithet which the pen of inspiration employs in describing them. "Will you set your eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven!" What is PLEASURE? Something that is only for a season. What is WISDOM? More precious than rubies, if it is the wisdom which comes from above; but if it the wisdom of this world — it also is vanity, and will soon pass away. What is FAME? Often a bubble, no sooner blown — than it bursts! Yes, the earth itself is only temporary!

With the things of heaven, however, it is far otherwise. The true believer is "begotten again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead — to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, which never fades away." Such was not the inheritance of many of the angels — they kept not their first estate — but left their own habitation. Such was not the inheritance of our first parents in Paradise; from their bowers, and happy walks and shades, they were banished, and that by God Himself, because of their disobedience to His just command. Such was not the inheritance of the Jews in Canaan, for the glory of all lands was made a desolation, and its guilty tribes have had to wander over the wide earth, without a country or a home. Such is not the inheritance of the man of this world; his portion is in the present life; and that, as we have seen, will soon vanish away. But looking upward to yon glorious spheres, we can say,

"O you blessed scenes of permanent delight!  
Full above measure! lasting beyond bound!  
A perpetuity of bliss, is bliss.  
Could you, so rich in rapture, fear an end,  
That ghastly thought would drink up all your joy,  
And quite unparadise the realms of light."

A Roman general, on one occasion, when elated by the splendors of a



triumphal entrance into the imperial city, which had been awarded to him in honor of the victories he had won, exclaimed, "Ah, that it would continue!" But, alas! it did not continue. All the glittering pomp soon vanished. It floated away like a fleeting dream. And so with all earthly bliss — it will not, and cannot, continue. Had earthly things a character of abiding permanence belonging to them, men might with some semblance of reason make them the first and last objects of their desires and pursuits. Such a character, however, they do not possess. "The world with its lust is passing away!"

But, O blessed heavenly world! and O blessed beings! who, through much tribulation have reached it — never will you have mournfully to say, "Ah, that it would continue!" This fullness of joy — this unclouded vision of God and the Lamb — this sweet fellowship with saints and angels — this day without a night — this sky without a cloud — this sea without a ruffle — these ravishing melodies — this seraphic transport and exulting joy — "Ah, that they would continue!" Well, continue they will, you blessed ones! and that forever. Eternal ages as they roll their everlasting rounds, will find you in full, yes, in constantly augmenting possession of all you now inherit. "Your sun will never set; your moon will not go down. For the Lord will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end!"

In a certain town, some few years ago, at a time of great commercial distress, two friends were one day conversing on what kind of property was safest at so critical a period. One of them said that he had not much confidence in the oils, nor did he much like bank-stock, and he expressed his doubts in reference to other investments. Having done so, he asked his friend, what kind he thought best? That friend was a Christian, and his reply showed where his treasure was, and where his heart was also. In the words of the apostle, already quoted, he answered, "I have a priceless inheritance — pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" O secure, O eternal treasure! a treasure in the confident expectation of which the early Christians took joyfully the confiscation of their earthly all, knowing that they had this better and enduring substance. Reader, may their portion be yours! And then, whatever disasters may come, you will have nothing to fear.

"Set your affection then on things above — not on things on the earth." The prophet's expostulates, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," is the exhortation of Christ, "where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." O make not those things which perish in the using, the objects of your exclusive and supreme attention. Be assured that they build too low — who build below the skies! There are durable riches to be obtained, and that freely. All the blessings of the Gospel are everlasting. The salvation which the Lord Jesus procured shall be forever, and the righteousness which He wrought out, shall not be abolished.

But, alas! how many are there who mind earthly things. With the great majority of our fellow creatures, such things are first and last, they are middle and end. The curse pronounced upon the serpent is fully verified in their case — "Upon their belly they go, and dust they eat all the days of their lives." It was over such characters that the apostle wept. He saw that they were enemies of the cross of Christ, inasmuch as its great object was unaccomplished in them; for they were not crucified to the world, nor the world crucified to them. The Lord Jesus "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." And unless we are thus delivered — His sufferings and death, as far as we are concerned, have been in vain!

## **Timidity — Courage**

"Now we must fight if we would reign;  
Increase our courage, Lord!  
We'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
Supported by Your word.

Must we be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease;  
While others fought to win the prize,  
And swam through bloody seas?"

"The wicked flee when no man pursues; but the righteous are as bold as a

lion." Proverbs 28:1.

"Only be strong, and very courageous." Joshua 1:7.

The Scriptures abound with instances of great moral courage. We have a memorable exhibition of this spirit in the case of Daniel. He was one who courted not the smiles, and who feared not the frowns of men. When he knew that the decree was signed, with a serenity and undauntedness of soul befitting a saint of the Most High God — he went to his prayer chamber as usual. In the prospect of a terrific death, his purpose continued unchanged; he did not attempt to conceal his devotions; he did not endeavor to resist or elude his enemies. A den of roaring lions could not dampen his courage, nor cause him to swerve from the path of rectitude!

Think again of his three young Hebrew companions. When the impious and haughty monarch told them that if they did not worship the image which he had set up — they should be cast into a burning fiery furnace; what was their reply? "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up!"

Think of Paul, singing with his companion the high praises of God at midnight, in his gloomy dungeon, not knowing but that his life might be demanded the very next day. Think of Luther in after ages. When summoned to appear before the authorities, where it was likely that he would be exposed to the greatest danger, and when besought with the most urgent importunity by his friends to refrain from going, his well known language was, "I am called in the name of God to go — and go I would though there were as many devils in the place, as there are tiles upon the houses!" Think of the noble army of martyrs; see them standing undismayed, while the flames were kindling around them. Hear one of their number, a helpless female, exclaiming, "I cannot dispute for Christ; but I can die for Him!" — and into the flames she rushed! Here was courage of the noblest and sublimest kind — courage compared with which that of the warrior at the cannon's mouth deserves not to be mentioned for a moment.

We are not called upon, through gracious Providence, to give our bodies to be burned; to seal our testimony with our blood is an ordeal through which we, in this land of liberty, are not likely to pass. But it is still true that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution. The offence of the cross has not yet ceased even among us! The gospel is same which it was at the beginning; and its professors ought to be as much separated from a world lying in wickedness, as were the early believers. But let them be thus separated — and misrepresentation and ridicule are likely to be their portion. To the persecution of physical violence, none in this country are exposed; but the persecution of reproach and invective is not unknown — a species of persecution that is more appalling to some minds than the former. To be scoffed and sneered at is a very trying thing to many.

Not a few, especially among the young, are kept from following Christ by the fear of man — that fear which brings a snare. But should it be so? Where is the courage and dignity of such conduct? Reader, should the wit of the profane, the jest of the railer — cause you to disown the Savior, and make light of His salvation? "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and forget the Lord your Maker?" What will the frowns of your companions be to you — at the judgment bar? Will not the approbation of the Judge, then, be an ample compensation for their displeasure now? Fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

Let the Christian especially aspire after such a spirit. Let the declaration of Solomon, "that the righteous is as bold as a lion," be practically exemplified in the whole of his conduct. O, to be decided for God and for His cause! Let us fear Him — and let us fear none but Him. Let the approbation of men be a small thing with us; but let the approbation of God be a great thing — yes, everything in our estimation. With good old Baxter, let us learn to say:

"Careless, myself a dying man,  
Of dying men's esteem;

Happy, if you, O God, approve,  
Though all beside condemn."

And for the encouragement of His people, God has promised to be with them; and having Him on our side, we may well be unmoved, unterrified, of all that men or evil spirits can do unto us. This was the feeling of the Psalmist when he said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?" Almost innumerable are the exhortations given to the believer to fear not. In all ages, and under all circumstances, God has bidden him to be of good courage.

O Lord, help me to trust You, and not be afraid. Say to my soul in the hour of distress, when perils may be surrounding me, when my enemies may be rising up against me, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand!"

## Fruits of the Spirit — Works of the Flesh

"Happy the heart where graces reign,  
Where love inspires the breast;  
Love is the brightest of the train.  
And strengthens all the rest."

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22, 23.

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims — abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." 1 Peter 2:11.

Among the fruits of which the Apostle specifies is LOVE — a grace that cannot be too earnestly sought, as its value cannot be too highly estimated. Its importance may be shown by several considerations. One is, that the Savior expressed His will on the subject in the form of a new and express law. "A new command I give you: Love one another." As the great Head of the Church, possessing all authority in heaven and on earth, the Lord Jesus was empowered to enact whatever laws He pleased; it is, however, worthy of remark, that in the exercise of that high function, the only subject on which He chose formally to legislate, was the one under consideration.

But it may be said — was not a command given of Old Testament to the same effect? Was not the second table of the moral law included in the saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself?" How then could it be called a new commandment? To this we reply, that it is evident that the love which Christ inculcated was of a different kind of love to that which the law of Moses required. The love prescribed by the old law was that of benevolence; while the love prescribed by the new law is that of delight. The one was loving-kindness — that is, the love of the kind, or the love of man as man; the other is the love of man as a follower of Christ. And not merely are they different in their nature — but also as regards the considerations by which they are enforced; the great Legislator Himself, in the latter case, proposing His own example as the motive to, and the

model of, obedience. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you — so you must love one another."

Again, the importance of love appears from the pre-eminence given to it above all other gifts and graces. "And now abides faith, hope, love — these three; but the greatest of these is love." It is here shown that love is the richest gem which sparkles in the Christian's crown!

Love is greater than either faith or hope in several respects. It is so, in the first place — as it is the end for which the other two are bestowed. The great design of the gospel is to re-stamp upon man the moral image of God; and if that image consists in one thing more than another — it is in love, for "God is love." Now, the salvation of the gospel is applied by faith, and to look for its completion is the work of hope; but love is the completion itself, it is that state of mind which it is the design of God in all His dispensations to produce. A building cannot be erected without scaffolding — but the building is of more importance than the scaffolding, being the end for which it was put up; and when the building is finished, the scaffolding is removed.

This leads us to observe, secondly, that love is greater than the other graces in point of duration. "Love never fails; but whether there are prophecies, they shall fail; whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there is knowledge, it shall vanish away." The shield of faith will be laid aside in heaven, for believing will be consummated in seeing and knowing. And as faith will be turned to sight — so hope will be lost in full fruition. There will be no submission there — for the days of trial and mourning will be ended. There will be no self-denial — for there will be no cross to take up, and no burden to be borne. There will be no watchfulness — for there will be no enemy near; there will be no Canaanite left in the land; no thief can ever climb over the massive walls of the eternal city; and no foe can ever enter through its adamantine gates! There will be no prayer there — for every need will have been supplied, every sorrow soothed, and every sin forgiven. But if these graces will be absent — love will be there; and not faint and feeble as here on earth — but in full vigor and maturity! It will be there, beaming in every eye, and burning in every breast, forever and ever! It is thus a grace that will be unending in its duration. If we possess it here — then it will ascend

with us above the skies, to be the temper of our souls to all eternity.

There is another sense in which the pre-eminence of love appears. Faith and hope are comparatively selfish graces. We believe and hope for ourselves; but in the exercise of love we regard the well-being of others. Faith and hope are the channels by which the streams of joy and peace flow from God to us; but by love, we dispense of those streams to others. In the one case — we are made the recipients of happiness; in the other we become its distributors. By the former we are made the heirs of salvation, to whom the angels of God minister; but by the latter we become ministering spirits ourselves, hushing the groans of creation, wiping away the tears of humanity, alleviating sorrow, and mitigating care on every hand, and leaving a blessing behind us wherever we go!

We may observe, once more, that the importance of this grace appears from the fact, that in the epistles addressed to the early churches, there is something about love, especially about brotherly love, in them all. Addressing the Romans, the apostle says, "Love each other with genuine affection;" and again, "Owe no man anything — but to love one another." If we turn to his first epistle to the Corinthians, we have one chapter entirely taken up with this topic, where its nature is explained, and its influence strikingly represented; and in the second epistle we find many affectionate appeals on the same subject. In the epistle to the Galatians, in addition to what is stated of the fruits of the Spirit, it is said, "By love, serve one another." Addressing the Ephesians, he says, "Be followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us." To the Philippians His language is, "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the affections of Jesus Christ: and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." To the Colossians again, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints." In the epistle to the Thessalonians, we have the emphatic words, "But as touching brotherly love, you need not that I write unto you; for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Among the many things which Timothy was exhorted to follow after, one of the first was love. Just so with the believing Hebrews — the apostle was



for provoking them, and for their provoking each other to love; and in closing the epistle he says, "Let brotherly love continue."

In perfect harmony with these exhortations of Paul, are those of Peter. "Seeing," is his language, "that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto sincere love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." To refer to the epistles of John would be needless. There is nothing but love there. With an affection worthy of him who leaned on the bosom of incarnate love and compassion, he beseeches us, with the overflowings of tender importunity, as little children — to love one another. Now from all this there is but one conclusion at which we can arrive, namely, that that which is thus so prominently exhibited, and so repeatedly enjoined, must be important in the highest possible degree.

True religion, in a word, is love — and love is true religion. It is because love prevails in heaven — that religion prevails there. It is because there is no love in hell — that there is no religion in hell. And it is in proportion as love prevails in this world — that true religion prevails.

But the fruits of the Spirit enumerated by the apostle are numerous and diversified. We may, however, in accordance with the above observations, regard each and all of the graces subsequently specified, as so many modifications of the one we have been considering. What is joy — but love exulting! What is peace — but love reposing! What is patience — but love enduring! That it "suffers long, and is kind," the apostle, in another place, expressly declares. And in "kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," we have what may be described as the amiability, the beneficence, the fidelity, the unostentatiousness, and the controlling influence of the same great principle. Or should it be thought that this representation is somewhat fanciful; no one can deny that if these several qualities are not actual modifications of love — yet that they are the inseparable adjuncts of it, and that where love abounds they cannot be absent.

With the fruits of the Spirit — the apostle contrasts the fruits of the flesh. "This I say then," is his language, "walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against Spirit, and the Spirit

against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance — as I told you before — that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!" These evil passions and propensities, we are to shun as resolutely — as we are to seek the virtues, so lovely and of such good report, to which we have just referred. And how many are the considerations which should induce us to guard against those fleshly lusts which war against the soul! If we live after the flesh — if we yield our members as servants to moral impurity and to iniquity — the certain consequence will be death — a death which never dies. The word is gone forth and shall not return, "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur!" May God, in His infinite mercy, deliver the reader from such a doom!

## **Murmuring — Submission**

"Peace, all our angry passions, then,  
Let each rebellious sigh  
Be silent at His sovereign will,  
And every murmur die!"

"Why should any living man complain?" Lamentations 3:39.

"It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him." 1 Samuel 3:18.

Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. And what we are born to as men — we are born again to as Christians. We are not therefore to think that any strange thing has happened to us — if sorrow, in any of its multifarious forms, befalls us here below — since the same afflictions happen to our all our brethren.

"If you endure chastening," says the apostle, "God deals with you as with

sons." But HOW should we endure it? It should be done in an inquiring spirit. We ought to be anxious to know the cause of the painful visitation. With the patriarch of old, our language should be, "Show me why You contend with me?" It should be done also in a prayerful spirit — "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." And it should be done especially in a submissive spirit. We should not merely feel the 'chastening rod' — but kiss it. Instead of cherishing any feelings of murmuring and rebellion under the afflictive dispensations of God's providence — we should humble ourselves under His mighty hand, that He may exalt us in due time.

And how many considerations are there which should induce and promote such a submissive spirit towards affliction! If we compare our sufferings with our deserts — shall we not find abundant reason to banish every complaint, and hush into silence every murmur? Should we complain of our light and momentary trouble — when we deserve to be tormented in hell forever? Should we complain of the chastisements of a gracious Father — when we have rendered ourselves obnoxious to the sentence of a holy and angry Judge? Should we complain that God sits by us as a refiner to purify us — when He might be a consuming fire to destroy us? Should we complain that we have to pass under the rod of His love — when we might have been set up as a "mark for the arrows of His indignation, and His terrors be arrayed against us?" Could we look into the lake of fire, and have a sight of the wretched beings who are there writhing in deathless agonies — we would then thank God for the most miserable condition on earth — if it were only sweetened with the hope of escaping that place of eternal torment!

Let us think, again, of the many mercies of which we have been, and still continue to be, the subjects. "And shall we receive good at the hand of God — and shall we not receive evil?" not moral evil, for that cannot come from Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; but the corrections with which He visits His children. It is recorded that a slave, on one occasion, was presented by his master with a bitter melon, which was immediately eaten by him. Seeing this the master asked how he could eat so nauseous a fruit? He replied, "I have received so many favors from you — that it is no wonder that I should, for once in my life, eat a bitter

melon from your hand." This answer, so striking and generous, affected the master deeply — so much so, that he gave him his liberty as a reward for the noble spirit he displayed. And is there not a lesson for us to learn from this? Should we not receive our afflictions from the Divine hand with similar feelings? Should we forget our blessings, which are so many — and dwell upon our crosses, which are so few?

It would be well also for us to compare our sufferings — with what others have had to endure. The people of God have been, in all ages, a suffering people; and many of them could say with special emphasis, "I am the man who has seen affliction!" There was Job. So pre-eminent was his character, that it was said of him by God Himself, that there was none like him in all the earth; and yet in a single day he was cast down from the highest pinnacle of prosperity — to the lowest depths of adversity! In the morning, he was the richest man in all the East — and with patriarchal dignity he looked around upon the joyous circle of seven sons and three daughters. But in the evening, he found himself without flock, or herd, or child. In the morning he flourished like a stately cedar, with its verdant branches spread around; but in the evening, as if struck by the lightning's flash, his spreading honors are all scattered to the winds, and he stands like a withered trunk, solitary, and bare, and blasted. O what are our troubles — compared with his? And did he murmur? No, he adored the hand that smote him! Prostrate in the dust he exclaimed, "I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had — and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!"

Take the apostle Paul. O what had he to pass through! Bonds and imprisonments everywhere awaited him. Perils and privations of every kind he had to endure. But none of these things moved him, neither did he count his life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy.

But let us turn from the servant — to the Master, and consider Him. What was His condition during His earthly sojourn? He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, notwithstanding His infinite dignity and unsullied purity! "We suffer justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing amiss." Our sufferings are only

partial — but He suffered in every way. Ours are only occasional; for hours and days of pain — we have weeks and months of pleasure. But His sufferings were uninterrupted — they accompanied Him from the manger to the cross. What He endured, especially during the closing scenes of His memorable career, passes all comprehension. Hear His heart-rending cry, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

O shall we compare our sufferings — with His? To do so would be to weigh a mote against a mountain! Well may we say —

"Now let our pains be all forgot,  
Our hearts no more repine;  
Our sufferings are not worth a thought,  
When, Lord, compared with Thine!"

If we desire to bear our trials with submission — let us think much, then, of what the Savior endured for us. We should consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds. The disciple, we must remember, is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. And would you, Christian, wish to fare better than Him? Can the common soldier complain when he sees the commander enduring the same privations? Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows — and are you not to taste the bitter cup? He was acquainted with grief — and would you be a stranger to it? Would you wish for the friendship of that world, whose malice He had to bear continually? Would you have nothing but ease — where He had nothing but trouble? Would you have nothing but honor — where He had nothing but disgrace? Would you reign with Him hereafter — and not suffer with Him here? O say, then, with Him, "The cup which My Father has given Me — shall I not drink it?" And as you drink your cup — O, think of His.

"How bitter that cup, no heart can conceive,  
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live;  
His way was much rougher and darker than mine,  
Did Jesus thus suffer — and shall I repine?"

Another consideration that should produce a spirit of submission is, that our sorrows are not to last forever. "For surely," says the wise man, "there is an end." That end is certain. Many a mariner has been ready to hail a desired haven which he never reached; and many a warrior has reckoned with confidence upon a victory which he never obtained. "We looked," said the Jews, "for light, and behold darkness; for peace, and behold trouble." But, O you suffering saint — it will not be so with you! Your deliverance from sorrow is as sure as the purpose, the promise, the covenant, the oath of God can render it! And not merely is it certain — but it is near! "For yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." A few weeks, or months, or years more — and all will be peace and quietness and bliss forever!

And, it must be added Christian, that your end will be unspeakably glorious. "God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever!" There will be no shattered frame — no emaciated countenance — no furrowed cheek — no faltering voice in those blessed regions. There every eye shall sparkle with delight — every countenance will beam with ineffable satisfaction — every pulse will beat high with immortality — and every frame will be able to sustain without weariness, an eternal weight of glory!

O child of sorrow, think of these things. Be anxious to feel their hallowing influence, that resignation may have her perfect work, and that no murmuring spirit may be indulged in, even for a moment! In the sweet strains of the poet, we would say,

"Whatever your lot, Whoever you be,  
Confess your folly, kiss the rod;  
And in your chastening sorrows see,  
The hand of God!

A bruised reed He will not break;  
Afflictions all His children feel;  
He wounds them for His mercy's sake,  
He wounds to heal.

Humbled beneath His mighty hand,  
Prostrate, His providence adore;  
'Tis done! arise — He bids you stand,  
To fall no more."

## **Lukewarmness — Zeal**

"Dear Lord, and shall we ever live  
At this poor dying rate?  
Our love so faint, so cold to You,  
And Yours to us so great?"

"For you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." 1 Corinthians 6:20.

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold — I am going to vomit you out of My mouth!" Revelation 3:15, 16.

It is an undoubted — but mournful truth, that God is not served with diligence and zeal, by the great mass of His professing people. There are many who are at ease in Zion; they are settled on their lees, like Moab of old. What if such were to keep a diary of their doings — what if they were to write down every day what they have done for God and His cause! What a record, we have reason to fear, would it be! What solemn blanks would be presented on one page after another! Concerning how many days would there have to be written, "Nothing done for Jesus!" Concerning how many weeks, "Nothing done for Jesus!" Concerning how many months, "Nothing done for Jesus!" And alas! in instances which are far from being rare, concerning how many years, "Nothing done for Jesus!" Nothing to any purpose, nothing done with full resolvedness and devotedness of heart. O how solemn the thought! And it is still more solemn to think that such a register is kept — and that by One who knows our negligences and shortcomings far better than we do ourselves!

There are many considerations which should constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to the service of God; but the chief is the

obligations we are under for redeeming love and mercy. "You are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's!" "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich." "He who spared not His own Son — but delivered Him up for us all; how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

With equal propriety, the apostle might have drawn another inference — an inference to which the Christian, when his heart is in a right state, cannot fail to respond. If He spared not His own Son — but delivered Him up for us all; then how should we not for Him also, freely give Him all things — wealth, labor, talents, yes, life itself? While we turn aside to see that great sight — while gazing, in the exercise of faith, on that spectacle of matchless love and grace which was exhibited on Calvary — has not our language been —

"See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown!"

And then, moved and melted by the amazing scene, have we not been compelled to add —

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Our reasonable service it is, truly, to make such a surrender; but while we are ready to acknowledge our obligations, how feebly in general do we fulfill them!

In the apostles and early Christians, we have a striking specimen of the manner in which we ought to serve the Lord Christ. O what labors were theirs! What sacrifices! What sleepless vigilance! What overwhelming, all-consuming zeal! And has the Savior done less for us — than He did for



them? Were the sufferings He bore for us less ignominious, His pangs less piercing, His blood of less value? Are the blessings He bestows upon us less precious — the salvation He offers us less glorious? Is the heaven He opens to our view less attractive, its rest less sweet, its joys less ravishing, its music less melodious? All that He did for them — He has done for us; the blessings He bestowed upon them — He is willing to bestow upon us. The love He bears towards us and the blissful prospects He sets before us — are the same. Must there not be then the same obligations in both cases; and should there not therefore be a similar consecration?

And how powerful an argument for devotedness to the service of God, does the brevity of life supply! Should not the words of the great Master be ever sounding in our ears, "Work while it is day — for the night comes when no man can work." Should not the exhortation of the wise man be practically exemplified in our whole course and conduct, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom — in the grave where you are going."

That was a noble reply that was once made by a Mohammedan hero on the field of battle. Although greatly fatigued by over-exertion, and well near fainting from loss of blood, occasioned by the wounds he had received, he was yet about securing other means for rushing into the thickest of the fight. A friend who stood by, perceiving the state he was in, earnestly entreated him to retire, and permit someone else to occupy his post. The veteran stood for a moment, and, pointing with his sword to the ground, he exclaimed, "This is the place for labor;" then lifting up his hand towards his imaginary paradise above, he added, "And there is the place for rest!" How sublime a sentiment! Reader, adopt the words as your motto. Ever remember that this is the place for labor — and that there is the place for rest. Be assured that as you live for God here, so will you secure, not on the ground of personal merit — but on that of His free and gracious promise — endless repose hereafter.

It has been remarked, and the assertion is doubtless true, although it sounds somewhat startling, that there is one privilege enjoyed by the people of God on earth — that the saints in heaven do not possess. It is that of being instrumental in doing good to their fellow-creatures. The mighty warriors of the cross, who have reached their everlasting home,

will not be favored anymore in this way. Luther cannot now lift up his voice against the abominations of Popery. Whitefield cannot cross the Atlantic to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. Howard cannot dive into the depths of dungeons, nor plunge into the infection of hospitals. All the ranks of the glorified rest from their labors; their work is done. It is true that they serve God in His temple; but the service in which they are engaged appears to be that of worship, adoration, and praise. Does not this consideration loudly call upon us to make the most diligent use of all the opportunities we enjoy of doing good while we possess them. In a short time they will be gone forever!

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord!"

## **Purity of Heart — Nominal Profession**

"My dear Redeemer and my Lord,  
I read my duty in Your Word;  
But in Your life the law appears  
Drawn out in living characters.

O be my pattern, make me bear  
More of Your gracious image here;  
Then God the Judge shall own my name,  
Among the followers of the Lamb."

"Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Hebrews 12:14.

The character given of our great High Priest is, that He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." By spotless, stainless purity — was He distinguished. In Him no spot, or wrinkle, or any such

thing was found. As "the man Christ Jesus," the divine law was in His heart — and by His whole career, from the manger to the cross, did He magnify it and make it honorable. To all its requirements, He rendered uninterrupted and complete obedience. How ardently were His affections fixed upon His Heavenly Father. No idol of wealth, or ambition, or vanity, had any ascendancy over Him. How exalted were His conceptions of the nature of God; the worship He paid Him was spiritual worship; He did not make any graven image, nor the likeness of anything in heaven above or the earth beneath. How did He reverence the name of God; it was a name dearer to Him than all other names; and the dishonor cast upon it by an ungodly world vexed His righteous soul, and filled it with holy indignation. How did He sanctify the day of sacred rest, delighting in its services, and consecrating its hours and moments to works of love and mercy. How did He honor His earthly parents as well as His Heavenly Father. Notwithstanding His exalted character, He cheerfully submitted Himself to them; and when in the agonies of death, He recognized and hallowed the earliest and dearest of nature's ties, and committed His mother to the charge of the beloved disciple. How full was His heart of love and tenderness to every human being! No one ever had so many enemies to encounter — but He never conceived a single purpose of hatred or ill-will against them. Although they were for killing Him — yet for their cruelty, He returned nothing but kindness. How free was He from everything licentious, both in practice and in thought. No Bathsheba's beauty ever kindled an unchaste desire in Him. From the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes — He was entirely free. And as with the other precepts of the law — between Him and all injustice, and all falsehood, and all desires after the possessions of others — there was the farthest remove. Upon the tablet of His heart, the whole of the ten commandments were engraved, and all were embodied, in their spirit and in their letter, in His outward conduct.

As the Great Teacher who came from God, He preached to the people the gospel of the kingdom; setting forth with matchless eloquence, the doctrines they were to believe, and the virtues they were to manifest. His life was a living commentary upon the truths which He taught! Every virtue that He preached — He practiced. Did He preach separation from the world? O how separate was He from it Himself. He lived above the

world. Its forms and fashions, its pomps and pleasures had no influence over him. Did He preach humility? Never was one so humble as He. They were sincere words which He uttered, when He said, "I am meek and humble in heart." Did he preach patience and forbearance? "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent — so He opened not His mouth." "When they hurled their insults at Him — He did not retaliate; when He suffered — He made no threats. Instead, he entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly." Did He preach devotedness and zeal? It was His food and drink to do the will of His Father who was in Heaven. He went about — not for purposes of ease and enjoyment, not to admire the wonders of creation, or the treasures of art — but for the single object of doing good. Did He preach the necessity and importance of devotion?

"Cold mountains and the midnight air  
Witnessed the fervor of His prayer."

After spending the day with men in uninterrupted labors for their temporal and spiritual well-being, He often spent the night with God, seeking His face, and imploring His blessing. Did He preach love? Greater love than His, was never shown. His tears, His agonies, His bloody sweat, His cross and passion, His life and death — all proclaim, "Behold how He loved us!" In every particular there was the fullest harmony between His precepts on the one hand — and His practice on the other hand.

Child of God! we call upon you to turn aside and see this great sight. A marvelous thing it is to see One in our nature "who did no sin, neither was any deceit found in His mouth." Gaze, then, with adoring wonder, upon Him. By the eye of faith — behold Him as the Lamb of God — a Lamb without blemish and without spot.

"Looking unto Jesus" is one of the most important exhortations contained in the Word of God. And there are two aspects in which we are to regard Him, while so doing. We are, first, to look to Him as our substitute dying in our stead, giving Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for our sins. And we are to look to Him, secondly, as our great exemplar, for He left us an example that we should follow His steps.

But it is especially in His purity that we are to aspire after conformity to Him. Those who have hope in Him as their substitute — are to purify themselves even as He is pure.

To be in Christ by a mere outward name, will avail us nothing. We may carry the lamp of an outward profession — but if destitute of the oil of grace we shall never enter in to the marriage supper of the Lamb! Those only are savingly in Him — whose chief aim and object is to walk as He walked. If we are united to Him by a living faith, there is now, and there will be to us on the great day — no condemnation; but the practical proof that this blessedness is ours — consists in walking, not after the flesh — but after the Spirit.

What then, reader, should be your petition, and what should be your request? It should be, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." It should be, "Sanctify me wholly, and let my whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless, unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." It is said of the King's highway, that it shall be called the way of holiness; and the truth cannot be too frequently reiterated, that we receive the grace of God in vain, unless we are made inwardly and outwardly holy.

All the truths and doctrines of the gospel have immediate reference to this great object. Think of those ancient purposes which were formed in the solitudes of eternity, before men or angels were created. In many respects they transcend our loftiest conceptions; but, however mysterious in their nature, in their design they are exceedingly clear. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world — that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." With the purposes of God — connect the gracious call of God: "As the One who called you is holy — you also are to be holy in all your conduct; because it is written, Be holy — for I am holy."

With the promises of God it is so likewise. They are given that we may thereby "perfect holiness in the fear of God." And so with the afflictive dispensations of His providence. It is by affliction that God separates the

sin which He hates — from the soul which He loves! He chastens us for our profit — that we may be partakers of His holiness. And with the preceding particulars we are especially to connect the death and sacrifice of the Redeemer. "He gave Himself for us — that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Thus all God's dispensations, both in providence and grace, have direct reference to the purification of His people!

"The desire of happiness" it has been said, "is natural; but the desire of holiness is supernatural" — it is not what man's carnal mind will aspire after. Have you, reader, any desires after holiness? If you have, cherish them more and more. Then existence is to be regarded as a token for good. We would say, for the encouragement of the weak and doubtful, that there may be holiness — even in the desire of holiness; that there may be grace — in the desire of grace; as doubtless as there is sin, in the desire of sin.

How delightful is the thought that heaven is a land of perfect holiness! The good work, begun in the day of conviction, will then be complete. The mournful cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death," will not be heard there; for over all the principles of indwelling corruption — a final victory will be gained. To one, in the days of His flesh, and she a guilty one, the Savior said, "Go, and sin no more!" But what will be His language to His people as they are received into the gates into the eternal city? He will say, not "go, and sin no more" — but "come, and sin no more!" O blessed prospect! O transporting thought! — to sin no more — to be done forever with it — done with it in all its deceitful forms, and in all its woeful consequences!

"There we shall see His face,  
And never, never sin!  
There from the rivers of His grace,  
Drink endless pleasures in!"

## **Life Everlasting — The Second Death**

"You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at

Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore!" Psalm 16:11.

"What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." Romans 6:21.

Those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus in this world — have a prospect ineffably glory awaiting them hereafter! They have now to pass, it may be, through much that is painful; but were those sufferings a thousand-fold greater than they are, they would not be worthy to be compared with that "eternal weight of glory" of which the apostle speaks. If the believer's condition were that of the most extreme distress and poverty; if not a single beam of light were to break in upon his gloomy dungeon; if not a single drop of consolation were mingled with his bitter cup; if he had to travel through this waste wilderness amid perpetual assaults and alarms, without a moment's rest or safety — yet the end to which his manifold tribulations conduct him, will make ample amends for all!

The end of the Christian's toils and trials, is variously represented; but one of the most frequent and emphatic expressions which the inspired writers employ, is "everlasting life." To attempt to unfold the full signification of this phrase would be a fruitless effort. As brief as it is — it has depths of meaning which baffle all our powers of conception. But it is evident — taking a mere negative view of the subject — that in the state of being referred to, death will be a thing altogether unknown.

This present world — is dying world. Here death reigns, and that with a sway so absolute and universal, that nothing can resist or stand before him. The strength of man cannot resist death — the whole of his energies are vain; death stamps a cruel mockery on them all. The art of man cannot resist death — the physician himself is a dying creature, and death may seize him in his iron grasp, even while attempting to preserve the life of others. The varied conditions of man cannot resist death — on the high and low alike, he inflicts an equal humiliation. Here the mightiest conqueror is vanquished, and the proudest of monarchs finds himself a slave. The tenderest sympathies of man cannot resist death. The husband would gladly live to protect his wife from the crude assaults of an evil world; the parent would not leave his children orphans in a region where the law of kindness is so feebly felt. Death's command, however, is given

— and it must be obeyed. But there is a world where "there shall be no more death!"

But there is more than the exclusion of death embodied in the expression. In heaven there will be not merely life — but life of the highest kind. It will embrace every element of bliss. There will be perfect knowledge, and perfect purity, and perfect peace, and perfect liberty, and perfect love; and all these combined will constitute perfect life! And if, with its glorious nature, we connect its boundless duration — unending ages, far from producing any symptoms of decrepitude and decay — but contributing to preserve and augment, as they roll their ceaseless rounds, the blooming freshness and vigor of perpetual youth and beauty — we shall then have some faint idea of the import of the apostle's words, when he said — "You have your fruit unto holiness — and the end Everlasting Life!"

In contrast with the final outcome of the Christian's career, we are reminded of the fearful termination of the course pursued by the ungodly. Many representations are given of sin — but they all point to one result — namely death. Is sin a way? It leads to death. Is sin a work? Its wages is death. Is sin a conception? It brings forth death. Sin is unprofitable in its nature here, and most fearful in its consequences hereafter, for "the end of those things is death!" Yes, thoughtless sinner, the things in which you indulge, and which you have been so often exhorted to abandon — their end is death! The end of gratifying your sinful passions — of loving this present evil world — of trifling with eternal realities — of rejecting the Savior, and despising the blessings of His grace — is death — a death which never dies!

But Jesus came to deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. And by believing in Him the vilest sinner may be saved. He is the resurrection and the life; and those who are made partakers of Him, however aggravated their offences, shall not die eternally.

"I have set before you life — and death," was the language of Moses, when addressing the children of Israel. Reader, the same things are now set before you, and that in a far clearer light, and with much more solemn sanctions than they were set before the assembled tribes of old. And why are they set before you? It is that you may be led earnestly and diligently



to seek the one; and that you may as earnestly and diligently endeavor to, shun the other!

## **THE THRONE OF GRACE**

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## **PREFACE**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

The writer of the following pages has endeavored to set forth the duty—the privilege—and the blessedness of humble, earnest, persevering prayer. He has attempted no particular arrangement of the subject, but has sought to bring before his readers some of those gracious invitations and sweet promises of the Word of God, which our Heavenly Father has given to allure and attract us to a Throne of Grace.

In so doing, he has made it his chief aim to represent Christ Jesus as the only, all-sufficient Savior and High Priest, through whom alone we can draw near to God, and for whose sake alone, God has graciously promised to hearken to our prayers—to pardon our sins—to help our infirmities—and to bestow upon us whatever things He knows in His unerring wisdom to be needful, or expedient for us.

It has also been the object of the writer, to impress the necessity of private, family, and social prayer—in order to our growth in knowledge and in grace—to our continual advancement in godliness—and to the strengthening and nourishing of our souls unto life eternal. We must live in entire dependence upon Christ—in the exercise of faith in Christ—trusting Him in all, for all, with all—trusting Him with all our concerns, for soul and body—for this life and eternity—for ourselves and others—"casting all our cares upon Him, knowing that He cares for us."

In illustrating and enforcing such precious truths as these, the writer has drawn from his own past experience in a season of protracted illness, and

he has availed himself of the thoughts and sentiments of others who have realized, in like manner, the peace—the comfort—the strength—the hope and joy, attendant on humble, believing prayer.

The writer has felt, (oh, how often!) that in times of weakness and weariness—of suffering and sorrow—there is no refuge—no place of rest, which can, for a moment, be compared with the heavenly mercy-seat! There, the burdened soul may cast itself on the bosom of infinite love—there, anxieties, doubts, and fears may be freely disclosed—there, a "peace which passes all understanding," may be enjoyed—there, the world with its cares, and troubles, and sorrows, may, for a season, be effectually excluded, and in sweet communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, faith may be strengthened—love increased—hope enlivened—repentance deepened—yes, every spiritual need, and longing, and desire, Grace with more simplicity and godly sincerity than hitherto—with a livelier faith, a warmer love, a deeper penitence—with hearts more humbly dependent on His grace, and more firmly devoted to His service.

## **GRACIOUS INVITATION**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."—James 4:8

How highly do men prize an invitation to approach the throne of an earthly monarch!—how eagerly is the influence of the great and powerful solicited to secure this honor!—and how ungrudgingly are time and wealth given in preparing for the eventful day! Yet, after all, it is but the invitation of one human being to another—of a worm of earth to its fellow-worm—of a sin-stained child of Adam to its sinful and polluted brother.

Here we have the "High and Holy One"—"the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth"—"the King of kings and Lord of

lords," not only permitting but inviting and encouraging the children of men to "draw near" to His throne—to approach His sacred presence, and to make known to Him all their longings and desires. Oh! amazing condescension! Unutterable grace! Divine majesty stooping to utter lowliness—infinite purity to infinite sinfulness—heavenly omnipotence to earthly weakness! Well might the psalmist exclaim, "What is man, O Lord, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man, that you visit him?"

Reader, it is a solemn thing to pray—to "draw near" to Him who "searches the heart, and tries the thoughts of the children of men"—to enter the presence-chamber of the Almighty—to stand as on the gleaming pavement of heaven—the abode of purity, and holiness, and love—to have audience with that God, before whom the angels veil their faces, and at whose foot-stool they prostrate themselves in lowly adoration. O my soul! seek to realize when you pray, that you are on holy ground, that every desire and every word, sent up to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, are clothed with unutterable importance—that to him the very heart is laid bare—its every secret scanned by His all-penetrating glance. How dreadful a thing in His sight must be any trifling with so great a privilege!—any irreverence of thought or manner in His sacred presence!—any carelessness in spreading at His footstool the anxieties which we feel, or the needs which we would have supplied! With unerring wisdom He can discern the formal worship, from the true worship—He can compare the outward and the inward—the words which are audible, and the beatings of the heart which He alone can perceive. He can and does mark, in the various petitions offered at His footstool, which was the utterance of sincere and fervent desire, and which the thoughtless effusion of unconcerned formality.

Prayer is the nearest approach to God, and the highest enjoyment of Him that we are capable of in this life. We are then in our highest state—we are upon the utmost height of human greatness—not before kings and princes—but in the presence and audience of the King of all worlds—and can be no higher, until death is swallowed up in glory!

Yes, to pray to God is indeed a blessed privilege—how blessed, let that soul tell that is most often before God, wrestling with an undaunted faith and a holy perseverance! Oh! how it lightens the heavy burden! How it

raises the affections above the things of the world! How it seems to give new life to the drooping spirit! How it imparts new vigor to faith—new fervor to love—new intensity to zeal—to be much in communion with God! It is the consolation of the sad—the joy of the happy—the food of the soul—the source and safeguard of every benefit. Prayer averts the wrath of God—obtains the pardon of sin—conquers our vices—delivers us from danger, and inflames us with the love of God.

Prayer is the great means appointed by God for preserving the health of the soul. It is to the spiritual part what air and exercise are to the bodily part. Hungry and thirsty, the soul in prayer feeds upon the promises of God—oppressed by the heavy atmosphere of the world, the soul in prayer seems to breathe the fresh, pure air of heaven. Distracted—hindered—filled with earthly things, the soul is enabled to mount upward as on eagle's wing—it ascends to an atmosphere of holiness and joy, far above the earth; finding new employment for all the powers of its regenerate nature—the eye of faith to see—the ear of obedience to hearken—the hand of love to work—the tongue of gratitude to praise.

So great is the privilege—so blessed the employment, that it might appear at first sight strange that such a duty as that of prayer should need enforcement. When poor, weak, sinful creatures, who deserve to be excluded from God's presence, are invited—notwithstanding all their guilt and imperfection—to enter the presence-chamber and approach the very throne of the King of kings, we might imagine that no very pressing argument would be necessary to persuade to such a privilege—we might suppose that even as water by the thirsty, and medicine by the dying—that it would be seized with quick avidity, and drunk with the liveliest gratitude. But, alas! we are corrupt and fallen, and our very corruption makes unpalatable to us the means of its removal—our very fall has made it irksome for us to attempt to rise.

And even with the believer, it too often happens that the weakness of his faith arises from the infrequency and coldness of his prayers; for, assuredly, if there be declension here, there will also be declension in every part of the work of the Spirit in the soul. It is prayer that keeps every grace of the Spirit in active, holy, and healthy exercise. It is the stream, so to speak, that supplies refreshing vigor and nourishment to all

the plants of grace. It is true, that the fountain-head of all spiritual life, and "grace to help in time of need," is Christ—for "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell;" but the channel through which all grace comes, is, prayer—ardent, wrestling, importunate prayer. Allow this channel to be dry—permit any object to narrow or close it up, and the effect will be a withering and decay of the life of God in the soul. Every plant will droop—every flower will fade and lose its fragrance.

O Christian! see to it, then, that you are earnest in prayer. Be not discouraged because it brings no immediate answer, but feeling that without the blessing you desire, you must continue dull and spiritless—that your path will be one of gloom and sorrow—that you will grow daily more and more weak and feeble, let your cry unceasingly ascend, until it shall please the Lord to grant your request, until He sends a renewal of grace and strength, and fills your soul with heavenly blessing.

Remember the assurance, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you;" and if further assurance is needful, listen to the words, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart." "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry." "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer you."

Thus will you soon be enabled to realize—as you have done in times past—the efficacy of believing prayer, and, with the psalmist, you will say, "Verily, God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer." "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice; because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him so long as I live."

In approaching the Throne of Grace, we should ever strive to possess awareness of the sovereign power, majesty, and gracious condescension of the Great Being in whose presence we stand. His spotless purity—unsullied truth—and stainless rectitude—His unalloyed mercy and inflexible justice—claim the adoration and reverence even of the most exalted of the heavenly host—how then should they engage towards Him the deepest awe and lowliest homage of fallen man! We ought ever to remember how the prophet felt, when a revelation was made to him in

vision of the majesty and glory of God—when he saw the Lord "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple, and the seraphim stood, having their faces covered with their wings, crying one to another, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the whole earth is full of his glory."

When we approach the Throne of Grace we should endeavor to realize the same deep emotions of conscious guilt and utter unworthiness which filled Isaiah's mind and led him to say, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" We should "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him with reverence." We should draw near under the heartfelt conviction that we have no claim upon God—no righteousness of our own—that our only hope is in His mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord—that we are poor and needy—helpless, sinful, and unworthy—and we should earnestly beseech Him freely to pardon all our sins, and so to lift up our thoughts and draw forth our desires towards Him, that we may be enabled to call upon Him from our inmost heart, and to frame our petitions in accordance with His blessed will. Blessed be God! if thus we "draw near" to Him, He has promised to draw near to us—in mercy and loving-kindness.

Christian, hear for your comfort and encouragement these words, "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord—though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow—though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool."

And there are promises adapted to every possible state in which a believer can be placed—promises of the presence, the power, the grace, and the love of God. Does he ask to be led in paths of safety?—the promise is, "I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." Does he pray, "Leave me not—neither forsake me, O God of my salvation"?—the answer is, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Does he pray to be delivered from danger?—the assurance is given, "I am with you, to save you and to deliver you, says the Lord." Is the Christian alarmed at the enemies which compass him about?—he receives the promise, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." Does he desire spiritual instruction?—the

promise is, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way you should go." Does he faint because of the toils and perils of the way?—the promise is, "I will give unto him that is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely." Does he desire to see God's power and glory in the sanctuary?—the promise is, "I will bring them to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer." Does he need assurance of divine protection?—it is given in the words, "Behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go." "I am with you, and no man shall set on you to hurt you." Does he tremble because of his numerous transgressions?—the promise is, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own name's sake, and will not remember your sins."

Does he desire that the Lord should look upon him in mercy?—the promise is, "Thus says the Lord—To this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." Is he disturbed lest he should be left to battle with his spiritual foes in his own strength?—he receives the encouragement, "Fear not! for I am with you—neither be dismayed; for I am your God—I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." Does he fear that future perils may overwhelm him?—the promise is, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you—when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." "I will not fail you nor forsake you."

In short, for every situation, every circumstance, every event of life—there is promise of grace, mercy, and peace—there is assurance of safety here and glory hereafter—of comfort in every hour of sorrow—relief in every time of peril, and guidance in every season of perplexity. The all-comprehensive assurance is, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Precious encouragement! It comes from a kind and loving Father—from an almighty and gracious Sovereign—from Him "who says and it is done—who commands and it stands fast."

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." Yes, God is everywhere, and where He is, there is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-



answering God. Surrounded with this gracious, loving presence, the Christian may fear no danger. His every petition is heard—his every cry for help enters into the ears of the Lord God of Sabbath. "The Lord is ever near unto those who are of a broken heart, and saves such as are of a contrite spirit." "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Christian! be it yours to regard it as your highest and holiest and dearest privilege that you are permitted to "draw near to God." Pray that He would stand by you in every difficulty—that He would draw you by the cords of love and keep you ever near Him, that so you may continually enjoy, in your journey through life, the consciousness of His love—His friendship—His guardian care. Go forth to your life-duties, believing that He is at your right hand, and you shall not be greatly moved. Let thoughts of His goodness—His mercy—His love and faithfulness and watchful care, mingle with all your thoughts, and be thankful for all His benefits.

Cultivate a spirit of earnest devotedness to your Father's will—patiently do and endure whatever He appoints, and rest assured He will give strength according to your day. He will "show you the path of life," and He will at length give you to realize in your blessed experience that "in His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we humble ourselves before You, confessing that we are not worthy of the least of all Your mercies. We adore You as the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and every perfect gift, and ascribing no worth or excellence to ourselves, we would, as long as we live, render unto You due praise and unceasing thanks for Your unmerited goodness.

Holy Father, we are unworthy to be called Your children, because we have rebelled against You. We confess that we have been unthankful for Your mercies, distrustful of Your promises, and disobedient to Your commandments. We have kept back from You the affection of our hearts, and by our manifold wickedness have provoked You to cast us off from Your fellowship and favor.

O our God, we have cause to be ashamed before You, when we consider how little we have thought upon You—how often we have disregarded or forgotten You—how prone we have been to live without You in the world—how much You have witnessed, in the ungodliness of our hearts and the sinfulness of our lives, that is hateful and offensive to You.

Merciful Father, grant us Your forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ, who bore our sins in His own body on the cross, and ever lives to make intercession for us. We beseech You to draw near to us in mercy, to bestow upon us Your forgiveness, and make the light of Your countenance to shine upon us.

Give us grace also, whereby we may be enabled more faithfully to live as in Your presence. In every season of danger or of trouble may we look up to You as our very present help. In every hour of trial or temptation, may we stand in awe—lest in anything we offend You, who searches our hearts and tries our inmost being, and understands our thoughts afar off. In all the concerns and occupations of our daily life, help us to endure as seeing You who are invisible. And when our course on earth is finished, grant, O God, that we may be supported and comforted with Your presence in the valley of the shadow of death, and may at last come to the glories of Your heavenly kingdom, and there be made perfectly blessed in seeing, serving, and enjoying You forever!

Give ear, O God, to our humble supplications, and grant unto us an answer of peace, for the Lord Jesus' sake. Amen.

Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat  
Where Jesus answers prayer;  
There humbly fall before His feet,  
For none can perish there.

Your promise is my only plea,  
With this I venture nigh;  
You call burdened souls to Thee,  
And such, O Lord, am I.

Bowed down beneath a load of sin,

By Satan sorely pressed,  
By war without and fears within,  
I come to You for rest.

O be my shield and hiding-place,  
That, sheltered near Your side,  
I may my fierce accuser face,  
And tell him, You have died!

Oh, wondrous love! to bleed and die,  
To bear the cross and shame,  
That guilty sinners such as I  
Might plead Your gracious name.  
—John Newton

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Come, my soul, your suit prepare;  
Jesus loves to answer prayer—  
He himself has bid you pray,  
Therefore will not say you nay .

You are coming to a King,  
Large petitions with you bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

With my burden I begin;  
Lord, remove this load of sin;  
Let Your blood for sinners spilt,  
Set my conscience free from guilt.

Lord, I come to You for rest;  
Take possession of my breast;  
There Your blood-bought right maintain,  
And without a rival reign.

As the image in the glass

Answers the beholder's face,  
Thus unto my heart appear.  
Print Your own resemblance there.

While I am a pilgrim here,  
Let Your love my spirit cheer;  
As my Guide, my Guard, my Friend,  
Lead me to my journey's end.

Show me what I have to do;  
Every hour my strength renew;  
Let me live a life of faith;  
Let me die Your people's death.  
—John Newton

## **ANSWERED PRAYER**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"In the day when I cried, You answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul."—Psalm 138:3

What a mystery of power there is in fervent, believing prayer! That the cry of a feeble mortal should enter into the ears of the Lord God Almighty—that the infinite God should be moved by the entreaties of sinful man—the armies of heaven, perhaps, set in motion—the wheels of providence seemingly made to alter their course—the uplifted sword of judgment stayed in its descent—the powers of evil held back and restrained—and all because some poor suppliant bends the knee before the throne of grace, and pours forth in the extremity of his feebleness and necessity an urgent supplication and prayer to God!

It is not for us to unfold the laws of the spiritual world, or to demonstrate

why and how it is, that the communications of heavenly influence and favor are in any degree suspended on the frequency and fervency of our supplications. But by the infallible testimony of heaven, we are authorized to affirm that; though inexplicable by our feeble understandings, there is a mighty efficacy in the prayer of faith, and that, as in the days of patriarchs, prophets, and righteous men, who, as princes, had power with God, so, through all ages, prayer must continue to avail as much, and be still, as ever, one of the sure and sufficient means of transmitting to the faithful the blessings of the Savior's purchase. "The Lord is ever near unto those who are of a broken heart, and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." "In the day when they cry He will answer, and strengthen them with strength in their soul." "He shall deliver the needy when he cries; the poor also, and him that has no helper," for this is God's promise, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him—I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him."

And, could we read the pages of the past, we would find that that promise has never yet failed—has never once been violated. We would find that prayer—earnest and importunate prayer—has accomplished the most wonderful results. It has divided seas—rolled up flowing rivers, and brought streams of water from the flinty rock. It has quenched the flames of fire—restrained the fury of lions—and healed the poisonous bite of serpents. It has marshaled the stars of heaven against the ungodly—arrested the progress of advancing day—burst open the gates of iron—summoned the dead from their tombs—conquered the legions of darkness, and brought angels from their starry thrones. It has bridled and chained the raging passions of men—routed and destroyed vast armies of the proud and rebellious. It has delivered one man from the depths of the mighty sea, and carried another in a chariot of fire to the mansions of glory.

Christian! go to the Word of God, and there learn the power and efficacy of prayer. Jacob wrestles and prays—the angel of the Lord is conquered, and the patriarch obtains his request. Moses cries to God—the waters of the sea are divided. Again he supplicates—and Amalek is defeated. Joshua prays—Achan is discovered. Hannah prays—Samuel is born. David prays—he is rescued from a thousand perils. The wilderness, and

the rocks, and the outcasts' cave, as well as the kingly throne of Jerusalem, were witnesses that David was a man of prayer. But pass on to other names. Asa prays—a victory is gained. Jehoshaphat prays—God turns aside the fury of his adversaries. Isaiah and Hezekiah pray—a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians are that very night destroyed by the angel of the Lord. Daniel prays—the dream is revealed. He prays—the lions are restrained. He prays—the "seventy weeks" are revealed. Nehemiah prays—the king's heart is in a moment softened. Elijah prays—for three years the windows of heaven are shut up. He prays—rain descends once more upon the earth. Elisha prays—Jordan is divided, he prays—a child's life is restored. The Church prays ardently—Peter is delivered by an angel. Paul and Silas pray and sing praises unto God—the prison doors are opened and every man's chains are loosed.

And these are but a few of the countless instances in which prayer has prevailed with God. From age to age there have assembled around His footstool, multitudes of poor and needy, and wretched, and guilty suppliants; and streams of mercy have been welling forth from the fountain of grace—to refresh—to strengthen—to invigorate, and to purify. The orphan's cry has passed the distance between humanity and Deity, and God has promised to be his Father. The widow's prayer—albeit it was unintelligible with bitter sobs—has been understood by God, and He has comforted her when on her knees with the gracious assurance—"I will be a husband to the widow." The despairing cry of the downtrodden and oppressed has—like the swift arrow that cleaves the air—borne upon its wing, the burden of complaint, and suffering, and wrong—and the cruel oppressor has been crushed by an unseen but almighty power.

Yes, the weak have been strengthened—the downcast encouraged—the helpless relieved—the sorrowful comforted—the poor enriched—and often has answered prayer laid out a feast of plenty in the evening, when the morning's light broke only on poverty and need.

And better still, the prayer of faith has drawn down the warming beams of the Sun of righteousness—the refreshing showers of the Spirit of grace, beneath whose genial influences all the spiritual graces which God's own hand had planted, expanded in their fullest bloom, and diffused all around the sweetest fragrance. Prayer, with outstretched arms, has

brought from the inexhaustible reservoir above, those rich supplies of the oil of divine grace, fed by which, the Christian lamp of faith has burned with a steady and increasing brightness, until, having guided the believer through the journey of life—cheered by its gladdening ray the gloom of the chamber of death—and even darted a bright gleam of heavenly light, deep down into the dark valley through which he had to pass to the city of his God—it was there absorbed in the blaze of light that burned around the celestial throne.

Christian! you have all the encouragement you could possibly desire, to attract you to a throne of grace; and, amid the varied experiences of life, there is not a grief which may not be assuaged—not a danger which may not be averted—not an anxiety which may not be lessened—not a pang which may not be alleviated—not a need which may not be supplied, out of the inexhaustible fountain of grace, to which you are invited, and where you are ever welcome. "O fear the Lord, you his saints; for there is no lack to those who fear him." "He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust; his truth shall be your shield and shield." "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil, he shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore."

That blessed Savior through whom you are encouraged to draw near, has pledged Himself to intercede in your behalf, and to obtain an answer to your prayers. Oh, trust Him with your whole heart, for "He is faithful who has promised." The love He has already manifested and proved—yes, sealed with His precious blood, is a pledge that He will still be your friend and intercessor with the Father—that He will continue to exhibit that love, in every cross you have to bear—in every cup of sorrow you have to drink—in every treasure you are called to relinquish—in every lonely and dreary path of duty or of trial, by which you are journeying onwards to your heavenly home. He "knows your soul in adversities," and will be "your Savior in the time of trouble."

His grace is yours to strengthen and sustain you—His Spirit is yours to guide, enlighten, and comfort you—His intercession is yours to secure for you all needed blessing—His promises are yours to cling to in your saddest and darkest hours—His power is yours to defend you from injury,

to secure you against defeat—His heart is yours into which you may pour all your sorrows, and feel sure of true sympathy—His home is yours to be your everlasting abode, that where He is, there you may be also. Will not this suffice?

Listen! Are you struggling against sinful desires and habits?—He has promised to make His "grace sufficient for you." Are you cast down because you feel the law in your members warring against the law in your mind?—He has assured you that "the good work which has been begun in you shall be carried on to perfection." Are You troubled and disturbed by the vicissitudes, changes, and sorrows of life?—He tells you that if you truly love Him, He will make "all things work together for your good." And the heaviest calamities—the sorest ills which may happen, shall only seem like passing clouds, casting their dark mantle over the surface of the lake, while they have no power to disturb the deep and settled tranquillity of its waters. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

Oh, blessed assurance! What child of God has not felt the need of his Savior's support, and his Savior's sympathy?—when the language of the soul was, "Vain is the help of man;"—amid doubts, and fears, and sorrows—amid trial, and sickness, and distress. The best that man can then do, is to stanch the wound, he cannot heal it—the best, to make the tear flow less bitterly, he cannot dry it up—the best, to speak the word of comfort, he cannot carry it home to the heart. So far as permanent good goes, who has not felt the truth which Job taught his friends?—"Miserable comforters are you all."

But oh! how different, when the soul in its extremity casts itself at the throne of grace, and the earnest, importunate supplication ascends to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer! Then does comfort flow in upon the harassed spirit—then does peace—a "peace which passes understanding," pervade the believer's heart—then does faith rise with fresh vigor, and the language of the soul is that of the psalmist—"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." "In the day when



I cried you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul."

Reader! if you would know how every desire—every petition—every prayer is met by a divine promise, study your Bible carefully; and instead of brooding over your cares and troubles, your sorrows and perplexities, take them at once to the mercy-seat, and you will find comfort—relief—deliverance—hope. A few examples will suffice to show what we mean by this "searching" of the Word of God. We shall first quote the supplication—the prayer of the longing soul—and then place beside it the gracious promise and encouragement of our heavenly Father.

Prayer.—"Strengthen, O God, that which you have wrought for us."

Promise.—"He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Prayer.—"O satisfy us early with your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Promise.—"My people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord."

Prayer.—"Strengthen you me according unto your word."

Promise.—"I will strengthen you."

Prayer.—"Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on you."

Promise.—"The Lord shall help them and deliver them, because they trust in him."

Prayer.—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Promise.—"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

Prayer.—"Save your people, and bless your inheritance."

Promise.—"Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will save my people."

Prayer.—"O keep my soul and deliver me."

Promise.—"I the Lord do keep it; lest any, hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

Prayer.—"Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path."  
Promise.—"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will guide you with my eye."

Prayer.—"Incline your ear unto me; in the day when I call, answer me speedily."  
Promise.—"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him—I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him."

Prayer.—"Make me to go in the path of your commandments, for therein do I delight."  
Promise.—"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

Prayer.—"My eyes are unto you, O God the Lord; in you is my trust; leave not my soul destitute."  
Promise.—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."

Prayer.—"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths."  
Promise.—"He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths."

Father of mercies and God of all grace, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift, we bless and praise You for all Your benefits. We thank You that You have not only provided for us all things needful to sustain us in the present life, but that You are pleased also to feed us with that spiritual food, whereby our souls may be nourished unto life eternal.

Merciful Father, who has given Your own Son to be the propitiation for our sins, grant us, for His sake, Your mercy to forgive us, and Your grace to help us according to our need. Pardon all the defects of our love to You, and all the excesses of our love to earthly things.

We confess, O God, that we have been prone to trust in the creature more than in the Creator. We have leaned upon broken reeds and hewed out empty cisterns. We have turned for help and support to an arm of flesh. We have looked for guidance to the counsels of earthly wisdom, and instead of acknowledging You in all our ways, we have often walked in the

sight of our own eyes and after the imagination of our own hearts.

Pardon, O God, for the sake of Your beloved Son, whatever lack of confidence we have shown towards You; and lead us henceforth by the teaching of Your Holy Spirit to trust in You with all our hearts. Increase our faith in the promises of Your Word, and in the day when we cry unto You—answer us and strengthen us with strength in our souls. Dispose us entirely and cheerfully to cast upon You all our cares, humbly to commit to Your keeping all our concerns, and earnestly to seek the aid of Your strength and the guidance of Your wisdom in all our undertakings. Let Your Holy Spirit dwell in our hearts, to witness with our spirits that we are Your children, to sanctify us wholly, to fit us for Your service, and to prepare us for inheriting Your glorious kingdom.

Suffer us no more to live unto ourselves, according to the desires of a corrupt and sinful nature; but may He who died for us also live in us, and raise us to that better life, which is holy, blessed, and unchangeable forever. Grant, we beseech You, that, ever mindful of our high calling, we may pursue our pilgrimage on earth, with spirits looking upwards to You, as becomes those who are heirs of everlasting life.

Graciously hear us, O Father, and have mercy on us, for the sake of Your beloved Son, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Full of weakness and of sin,  
We look to You for life;  
Lord, Your gracious work begin,  
And calm the inward strife!

Though our hearts are prone to stray,  
O be our constant Friend;  
Though we know not how to pray,  
Your saving mercy send!

Let Your Spirit, gracious Lord,  
Our souls with love inspire,  
Strength and confidence afford,  
And breathe celestial fire!

Teach us first to feel our need,  
Then all that need supply;  
When we hunger, deign to feed,  
And hear us when we cry!

When we cleave to earthly things,  
Send Your reviving grace;  
Raise our souls, and give them wings,  
To reach Your holy place.  
—William Bathurst

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God of my life, to You I call,  
Afflicted at Your feet I fall;  
When the great water-floods prevail,  
Leave not my trembling heart to fail.

Friend of the friendless and the faint,  
Where should I lodge my deep complaint?  
Where, but with You, whose open door  
Invites the helpless and the poor?

Did ever mourner plead with Thee,  
And You refuse that mourner's plea?  
And still the word does fixed remain,  
That none shall seek Your face in vain.

Poor though I am, despised, forgot,  
Yet God, my God, forgets me not;  
And he is safe, and must succeed,  
For whom the Savior lives to plead.

## PROMISED HELP

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord."—Zechariah 4:6

In approaching the throne of grace, the Christian should ever bear in mind that there can be no true, acceptable prayer, without the help of the Holy Spirit. Words may be uttered, but they will be words without meaning—petitions may be presented, but they will be unaccompanied with the inward desire, "Lord, grant me what I am now praying for;"—the solemn exercise may be gone through with all the outward appearance of devotion, but there will be no real, heartfelt communion with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What wonder that gloom and disappointment should continue to rest upon the soul!—that there should be no realizing sense of comfort, peace, hope, and joy in God!

Reader! are we guiltless in this matter? Have we never bent the knee, without an earnest prayer, for the help of the Holy Spirit? Alas! if we look backward, we will have too much cause for self-condemnation. How cold and dull have our prayers often been! How marred with ignorance and imperfection! What wanderings of thought! What unreal petitions! What unfelt confessions! What indistinct desires! How has faith been mingled with unbelief—and confidence been weakened by the hesitations and promptings of doubt! The petitions of a single day may well humble us to the dust, and constrain us to add another prayer to the rest, entreating God to forgive even the sins of the prayers in which we have sought forgiveness. The wonder and mystery of grace is, not that God seems to answer so few of our prayers, but, when we consider what they are, that He should answer them at all.

Trusting in ourselves, and neglecting to entreat the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, we have failed to realize the blessedness of

heavenly communion. We have been slow to believe that He, and He alone, can lead the soul to an acquaintance with its real needs—that He, and He alone, can detect the waning grace—the feeble pulse—the spiritual decay—and can awaken sensibility—godly sorrow—and draw out the heart in penitent confession.

Without Him, the soul will remain in darkness and ignorance—sleep will fasten on every faculty, as if induced by a necromantic spell which nothing can break—the sense of adoption, and pardon, and acceptance will be lost—and the graces of faith, and hope, and humility will become enfeebled, until, through this fearful process of declension, there is but a step between the soul and death. But the blessed Spirit at length discovers to the soul, the loss it has sustained—convinces it of its departure—makes known its real condition—and leads it to the throne of grace.

Even thus is the office of the Holy Spirit described in the Word of God. "Likewise," says Paul, "the Spirit also helps our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." "Pray at all times and on every occasion in the

power of the Holy Spirit." "But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit." And our dear Lord encouraged His disciples, in view of their approaching persecutions, with the same truth—"It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you."

It is the office of the blessed Spirit to win souls for Christ—to apply to the hearts and consciences of men, in every age, and under every circumstance, the benefits which the Savior died to purchase.

It is the office of the blessed Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to show them to the soul—to reveal to us the precious benefits of redemption, and the riches of Divine grace—and to present them to us in

such a transforming, and convincing, and penetrating form, as that they shall not only become sources of abiding comfort to the heart—but active, operating, influential principles of the life.

It is the office of the blessed Spirit to be the comforter of the children of God. Yes, wherever a believer is afflicted—wherever he sheds a sorrowful tear—is pained by some heart-rending grief, or bowed beneath some oppressive burden—there is the Comforter to cheer, to solace, to sustain—pointing from the wound to its balm—from the grief to its ultimate cure—from present suffering to eternal rest at God's right hand.

It is the office of the blessed Spirit to abide with the children of God—to be in them, a dweller in their hearts—"bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God—and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Not more faithfully did the pillar cloud and column of fire of old precede Israel, until the last murmuring ripple of Jordan fell on their ears on the shores of Canaan, than does the presence and love of the Spirit abide with believers. What says Jesus?—"He dwells with you, and shall be in you." He is not a traveler to sojourn for a season, but He is a friend to abide and dwell with you—a spiritual mentor to be always near—to guide you in all seasons of perplexity—to strengthen you in all times of weakness—when you are discouraged, to uphold you—when you are wandering, to lead you back—when you are nearly overcome in your spiritual conflict, to bring you more of the strength and grace of heaven.

Reader! seek to cherish high views of the work of the Spirit. Implore His aid continually; and, while with earnestness you pray to God—"Cast me not away from your presence"—do not forget also to entreat—"Take not your Holy Spirit from me."

See! what great need we have, and what encouragement is given, to ask such help. "We know not what we should pray for." We are weak, ignorant, and short-sighted—utterly unable to comprehend the full range of consequence—in time and eternity—which may follow from our prayers, if all were answered. How little can we measure the full effect of what we desire, both for ourselves and others! Left to our own choice, we would have a lifetime without a sorrow—a path without a thorn—a cup

without bitterness—in a word, we would have one prosperous gale to waft us—and the sea of life without a ripple or a cloud. But for this ignorance, we would often find, that our prayers were like the conflict of opposing purposes—that sorrow not joy, misery not rest, would be the outcome—were our wishes to become realities—and that it would assuredly be "evil," and not "good," for us, to secure the fulfillment of all we desire. Yes, the boon which one asks, would prove his heaviest trial, the trial from which another seeks to be delivered, is perhaps for him God's best and choicest boon. We know not, indeed, what we should pray for. We need guidance and help, and, God be praised—they are offered!

"The Spirit helps our infirmities." He shows us our real needs—reveals our sin—our weakness—the fullness of Christ Jesus—all-abundance of grace—and instructs us in the great purposes of God, and the principles on which He acts towards us—or, if these are still left obscure—He bids us trust a Father's wisdom and a Father's care—yes, in all things to lie passive in His hands, and know no will but His.

Reader! not only do we not know what to pray for, but even if we did, no, even when we do, we know not how to pray for it, "as we ought." We need a clearer vision—a truer faith—a deeper repentance—a more intense fervor—and these the Holy Spirit imparts. He teaches the believer to plead the atoning blood of Christ—to come to the Throne of Grace with this great and prevailing argument. He unfolds Jesus to the soul, as being all that it needs—to give full, and free, and near access to God. He enlarges the range of spiritual sight—enabling it to look beyond the momentary present to the immense and far-reaching future—and awakens the desire that the glory of God and the great interests of His kingdom, may overrule and absorb every personal wish that may harbor in the heart.

No—His help goes further still—in inspiring us oftentimes with the words in which to express our needs and feelings—with the arguments we may use—with the promises we may plead—and the way in which to plead them—so that God, "who searches the heart," can understand those desires and yearnings which are too fervid for utterance. Prayer, ascending from a heart thus inhabited by God's Holy Spirit, rises, like the incense cloud, before the Throne of the Eternal—blended with the



fragrant incense of heaven. It will assuredly return, freighted with the richest blessings of the everlasting covenant, "even the sure mercies of David."

Christian! do you desire that your prayers should thus ascend, like fragrant incense, to the Throne of Grace? Oh! then seek for the Spirit to mold and shape the desire which He has awakened. The Friend is ever near whose help you require, and the prayer indited by Him—though its language be as the simple utterances of a child—will have an eloquence and a power of its own, and be clothed with a preciousness in the sight of God, infinitely greater than those eloquent petitions which come from the lips untouched by the heavenly fire. That must, indeed, be full of fragrance to God, which is the breathing of His own divine Spirit in the heart.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." Reader, if you would have "joy and peace"—pray for the Holy Spirit. If you would "abound in hope"—pray for the Spirit. If you would become more pure and holy—pray for the Spirit. If you would be strong for duty—for danger—and for trial—pray for the Spirit. He will enlighten your mind more and more in the knowledge of Christ. He will impart those gracious dispositions and affections, in which true religion mainly consists. He will carry on His own work in your heart, notwithstanding all the changes and vicissitudes of life, and you will find—in the day of sickness and in the hour of death—"that peace of God which passes all understanding," and that "joy in the Holy Spirit which no man takes from you," sustaining and gladdening your soul, and proving to you sweet foretastes of the joys which are at God's right hand, and of those pleasures which are for evermore.

Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before You, confessing that we are not worthy of the least of Your mercies. We adore You as the Father of Lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift. And ascribing no worth or excellence to ourselves, we would, as long as we live, render unto You due praise and unceasing thanks for Your unmerited goodness.

Oh! pour out upon us, we beseech You, Your Holy Spirit, whereby we may be led into all truth. May He enlighten, quicken, comfort, strengthen us—and mold us in gradual conformity to Your divine will.

Pardon, O God, wherein we have offended You by grieving or resisting Your Holy Spirit. Allow us not to do despite unto Him, lest He should cease to strive with us any more. Cast us not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from us. But grant that He may abide with us continually, that amid the manifold changes and trials and sorrows of this life, we may be strengthened, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and patience with joyfulness.

Grant, O God, that we may thus abound more and more in faith and love and godliness; in all holy desires, in all good purposes, in all kind and brotherly affections; in all meek, patient, humble, pure, and peaceable dispositions; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in Him, according to the grace which through Him You have bestowed upon us. May our whole spirit, and soul, and body, be established in holiness before You, and preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord and Savior with all His saints. We humbly entreat You to hear and answer us, for the sake of Your beloved Son, our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,  
My sinful maladies remove;  
O be my Light, and be my Guide,  
O'er every thought and step preside.

The light of truth to me display,  
That I may know and choose my way;  
Plant holy fear within mine heart,  
That I from God may never depart.

Conduct me safe, conduct me far  
From every sin and hurtful snare;  
Lead me to God, my final rest,  
In His enjoyment to be blest.

Lead me to Christ, the Living Way,  
Nor let me from His presence stray;  
Lead me to heaven, the seat of bliss,  
Where pleasure in perfection is.

Lead me to holiness, the road  
That I must take to dwell with God;  
Lead to Your Word, that rules must give,  
And sure directions how to live.

Lead me to means of grace, where I  
May own my needs, and seek supply.  
Lead to Yourself, the spring from whence  
To fetch all quickening influence.

Thus I, conducted still by Thee,  
Of God a child beloved shall be,  
Here to His family pertain,  
Hereafter with Him ever reign.  
—Simon Brown

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Holy Spirit, in my breast  
Grant that lively Faith may rest,  
And subdue each rebel thought,  
To believe what You have taught.

When around my sinking soul  
Gathering waves of sorrow roll,  
Spirit bless, the tempest still,  
And with Hope my bosom fill.

Holy Spirit, from my mind  
Thought and wish and will unkind,  
Deed and word unkind remove,  
And my bosom fill with Love.

Faith, and Hope, and Charity,  
Comforter, descend from You;  
You the Anointing Spirit art,  
These Your gifts to us impart.

Until our faith be lost in sight,  
Hope be swallowed in delight,  
And love return to dwell with Thee,  
In the threefold Deity.

—Richard Mant

## **THE MIGHTY INTERCESSOR**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."—Romans 8:26

When our blessed Lord—on the eve of His departure from the disciples—was pouring His sweetest and richest consolations into their sorrowing hearts—He disclosed to them the precious truth, that thenceforth they, and every believer in Him, should have two Comforters. He would still be their faithful, unchangeable Comforter in heaven, there—ever living as their Advocate with the Father—pleading their cause, and presenting the merits of His most precious sacrifice. And He would also send "another Comforter," to co-operate with Himself, that while He would be removed from earth to heaven—the other Comforter would come down from heaven to earth, and carry on the work of sanctification in the hearts of His people, until they had finished their course and entered the kingdom.

So, likewise, the Word of God informs us that they have two Intercessors. Christ is one Intercessor in the presence of God—the Holy Spirit is another, dwelling in the souls of believers. Christ intercedes that they

may become sons—the Spirit intercedes when they are sons. Christ's intercession is meritorious, and removes difficulties in the way of their salvation—by the Spirit's intercession they obtain forgiveness of sin, and all other benefits of Christ's passion. The Savior appears for them in the presence of God—while the Holy Spirit makes known the longings and desires—the anxieties and fears, which fill the soul of the believer, and to which he is utterly unable to give expression at the throne of grace. What love and sympathy towards weak and helpless suppliants! Not only will the Spirit "help our infirmities"—not only will He dispel our ignorance and teach us what to ask of God—not only will He instruct us "how to pray" as we ought, but He will "make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Yes, Christians, when words are too weak to express half the craving desires or deep emotions of the soul—when thoughts arise too big for utterance, or when—under some crushing trial, or the secret consciousness of indwelling sin—the lips utter not a word—then, the Holy Spirit interprets the thoughts, and reads the language of desire. God, who searches the heart, understands the mind of the spirit; and so, the scarcely breathed sigh—the ardent desire for Jesus—the longing for divine conformity—the silent heaving and aspiration of the heart—find acceptance with the High and Holy One. Unintelligible and meaningless to us, they have a sense and a language clear to Him who inspired them. They are not lost; God hears—God receives them all, and lays up the memory of them among His choicest treasures.

Despond and despair not, then, trembling soul, because, at times, you kneel at the throne of grace—full of all spiritual desire, and yearning for more grace—and yet are speechless, because of the very lack of words to speak your desire. It is for your comfort and encouragement such words as these are sent, "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for you with groanings which cannot be uttered." Oh, hang not back, because of conscious—felt unworthiness. If only the worthy might approach with the hope of being heard, who would venture to draw near? Unworthy you are to ask anything either for yourself or for others. Yet, you are urged and invited to come "with lowly boldness." The Spirit is ready to help your infirmities, to teach you what to pray for, and how to pray as you ought.

Oh! it is this which renders man inexcusable—it is this which makes salvation possible, and condemnation just. Men may have the Spirit's influence—it is promised in answer to human supplication—it is even suspended on the breath of prayer; and, if they will but seek for its outpouring, there is not one heart—one soul, that may not be of those who enjoy the abiding presence of the Comforter. He will abide and dwell in their hearts. There will He reside, in intimate and familiar converse with their spirits—guiding them in all their wanderings—comforting them in all their sorrows—strengthening them in all their weaknesses—and sealing and binding the comforts of God upon their souls. All His blessed influences will be directed to cherishing and feeding the flame that burns on the altar of their spiritual life—to keep away all that would desecrate and pollute that holy temple. "Having begun a good work in them, He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Having laid the first stone of that spiritual temple, He will continue to add stone to stone, until it becomes "a building in the heavens."

Reader! be persuaded, to entreat the help and guidance of this blessed Spirit, at the throne of grace. Let it be your daily prayer, that He may come down, in all the plenitude of His heavenly graces, on your soul, even, 'as rain upon the mown grass and as showers that water the earth.' You cannot live without Him—there cannot be one heavenly aspiration—not one breathing of love—not one upward glance of faith without His gracious influences. Apart from Him, there is no preciousness in the Word—no blessing in ordinances—no permanent, sanctifying results in affliction. As the angel directed Hagar to the hidden spring, this blessed Agent—true to His name and office—directs His people to the waters of comfort—giving new glory to the promises—investing the Savior's character and work, with new loveliness and beauty.

Whatever, then, be your present situation, seek the promised help of the Holy Spirit. He has a healing balm for all—the weak, the tempted, the sick, the sorrowing, the bereaved, the dying. And, unlike other 'sons of consolation'—whom a look may alienate, whom adversity may estrange, and death must separate—He will abide forever; superior to all vicissitudes—surviving death itself." Come, then, with your cross—come with your infirmity—come with your need—come with your wounded

spirit—come with your broken heart—and the blessed, comforting Spirit breathing on your soul, and inditing the petition, will "make intercession for you according to the will of God."

Above all, cultivate the habit of secret prayer. He who prays only when he prays with others, would not pray at all, were it not that the eyes of others are upon him. He who will not pray, where none but God sees him, manifestly does not pray at all out of respect to God or regard to His all-seeing eye, and therefore, in effect casts off all prayer. There are disclosures to be made—errors to be unfolded—shortcomings to be wept over, with none but God as a witness. It is by secret communion with God, that the believer becomes girded for the conflict—strengthened for the hour of trial—and fitted for the joys of heaven.

Some may peruse these pages, who have never yet sought in earnest the help of the Holy Spirit. Reader! what is all your profession worth, without this gracious—this all-prevailing Intercessor? what your name to live, while you are dead to the true life and spirit of prayer? All your profession of godliness—your outward zeal—your church membership—all is but "a fair show in the flesh;" an empty name, while you have not, and seek not, the help of God's Holy Spirit. Whether you believe it or not—among the myriads of poor, pitiable, wretched beings on the earth's surface—there is not one more helpless, more truly miserable, more an object of pity, than the man who, inwardly conscious of the duty of prayer, still dares, from day to day, to live without it. For, true it is, that the man who lives, without prayer and supplication in the family and in the closet—the man, be he peer or peasant, master or servant, who engages in life's duties, and hurries to his daily toil, without a humble and earnest aspiration to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, to bless, guide, and preserve him, is at this moment a man "without God and without hope in the world," and one who, if the dread summons of the last messenger were now to sound in his ears, would leave the world, without one true hope of immortality to sustain and comfort him.

Oh, then, if now you are sensible of the slightest motion of your heart towards God—the feeblest desire to come to the throne of grace, cherish it as your most costly mercy. It is the first gentle breathing of the blessed Spirit in your soul—it is the first pulse of spiritual life. Every solemn

thought awakened—every anxiety kindled in the soul—every desire heavenward, however feeble, is proof of the Spirit's work, which, if cherished and not checked, by the powerful obstinacy of the carnal mind, will be graciously made to result, in bringing the sinner to the foot of the Redeemer's Cross, as a humble suppliant for the free and full salvation—for the true and abiding conversion to God, which alone can fit the heart, for the reception of the Holy Spirit to dwell there as in a temple. Go then in penitence, and spread your case before the Lord—confess your sins—acknowledge your iniquity, humble yourself at His feet and God, for Jesus' sake, will receive you graciously, pardon you freely; and you will rise from your bended knees—relieved in heart—comforted in soul—prepared to follow the guidance, and to seek more and more the help of the Holy Spirit, as you journey onwards to your heavenly home.

Heavenly Father, who has graciously promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask You, grant us, we earnestly pray, this gift, for the sake of Your well-beloved Son. Let Your Spirit be shed abroad on us abundantly. Let Him be unto us a Spirit of light and truth, to guide us to the clear understanding of Your mind and will; a Spirit of power, to quicken and convert us, and to strengthen us with all needful might in the inner man; a Spirit of comfort, to cheer us in our times of trouble; a Spirit of holiness, to purify us more and more, and to make us fruitful in every good work. Grant that He may abide with us continually, making us to grow in knowledge and in grace, and filling us with His blessed and holy fruits, which are in all goodness and righteousness and truth. May He help our infirmities, rule and govern our hearts, and enable us so perfectly to attend to Your godly motions, that being strengthened by Your blessing and sanctified by Your truth, we may ever remain in the number of Your faithful and elect children, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hark, my soul! it is the Lord,  
It is your Savior, hear His word;  
Jesus speaks and speaks to thee,  
"Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me?"

"I delivered you when bound,  
And, when bleeding, healed your wound;  
Sought you wandering—set you right,



Turned your darkness into light.

"Can a woman's tender care  
Cease towards the child she bare?  
Yes, she may forgetful be;  
Yet will I remember thee!

"Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above,  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death.

"You shall see My glory soon,  
When the work of grace is done;  
Partner of My throne shall be;  
Say, poor sinner, lov'st you Me?"

Lord! it is my chief complaint,  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love You and adore;  
Oh for grace to love You more!  
—William Cowper

## **THE COMPASSIONATE HIGH PRIEST**

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16

Jesus—our great High Priest—dying for us on the Cross—living for us now in heaven—this, this is the inspiring motive, made use of by the apostle, in urging to diligence and steadfastness, in our Christian profession—this is the encouragement to "come boldly to the throne of grace."

Without this blessed truth, there could be no hope for the guilty and hell-deserving, no efficacy in prayer, and no encouragement to draw near to God. Efforts at obedience could never avail. God's violated law could never be satisfied, and the penalty of eternal death denounced against every transgressor, could in no other way be removed.

But, seeing that Christ has died for sin, we are to labor to die unto sin. Seeing that He has opened the gates which were barred against us, we are to seek to enter in. Seeing that He has purchased blessings, for time and eternity, which otherwise could never have been ours, we are to pray earnestly for their bestowal upon us. Seeing that He is now exalted to God's right hand, to give repentance and remission of sins, we are to draw near to obtain the pardon of our sins. Seeing that He pleads for us, we are to be fervent in pleading for ourselves.

Christ's death does not leave us inactive—indifferent—as some of the enemies of our religion would maintain. True, our best deeds are still of no value as regards our salvation. We cannot merit eternal life. Jesus has done all. But, for this very reason, we are to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," rejoicing in the belief that He has borne our sins—that He has suffered for them—that He has carried them into the land of forgetfulness—that He has washed us in His own most precious blood, and has clothed us with the robe of His imputed righteousness. Oh! then it is we have a motive powerful and all-constraining, to "live not unto ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again," "to follow His footsteps and walk even as He also walked"—to seek to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, and to be conformed more and more to His image—to be "crucified with Christ, and to die daily unto sin"—to "present our bodies and spirits as living sacrifices unto Him" who "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

And, to animate us in thus "holding fast our profession," the apostle declares, that "we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The Savior—when He burst the bonds of death and ascended to the right hand of God—neither resigned His priestly office nor laid aside His humanity. He was, and still is, both God and man. He was, and still is, a merciful and faithful High Priest—never weary of his office—never forgetting or abandoning it—never overlooking the wants and necessities of those whom He has loved, and for whom He intercedes. "It is finished," is gloriously inscribed on the Priest's work below; "it never ceases," is as gloriously written on the work above. Christ—as our Intercessor with the Father—is continually presenting the merits of His one, all-sufficient oblation, sprinkling the mercy-seat with blood, and burning incense before the Lord. He appears at the right hand of the Majesty on high, clothed in priestly vesture. The names of the true Israel are on His shoulders—a token that all His strength is theirs to protect them. The names are on His bosom—a token that while His heart beats, it beats for them. The voice of His pleading ever sounds and ever prevails, "Father, forgive them," and they are forgiven; "Father, have mercy on them," and mercies speed on rapid wing. The incense of His intercession ever rise, "Father, bless them," and they are blessed; "Father, smile on them," and it is light around their path. With loving interest He takes their every offering of prayer, and praise, and service. He perfumes all with the rich fragrance of His merits. He makes all worthy in His own worthiness, and thus our nothingness gains great reward.

Oh, precious thought! that we have a Friend above who can sympathize as no other can—that we have an Intercessor who can plead more powerfully than we are even able to conceive—and whose eye of love is on each one of His followers, to support, sustain, and comfort, amid daily trials, vicissitudes, and conflicts.

"He can be touched"—yes, He has learned sympathy by suffering. The incidents and the feelings of His earthly existence have not passed away. They have left impressions and results, which are deeply entwined with His present being. In the midst of His glory, He is still mindful of His

anguish. Upon His "spiritual" body, He yet bears the print of the nails; and upon His side, the scar of the wound inflicted by the Roman spear. These memorials of the past—of His earthly pains and sufferings, will never be effaced—no, nor will the crown of universal glory ever obliterate the record of the crown of thorns. "Passed into the heavens," He is still as keenly "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," as when He stood weeping beside the grave of Lazarus; or, as when He hung upon the cross, committing His bereaved mother to the care of His beloved disciple.

And, He is able still to sympathize with all the sorrows and infirmities, to which His people are exposed. "In that He himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to support those who are tempted." As He was, and is, and always will be, the very and eternal God, so is He, and so will He ever be, "the Man Christ Jesus," very God and very Man. Such is our great High Priest—divine in His ability, human in His sympathy—and, amid earth's painful trials and temptations—amid its changes and vicissitudes—amid dangers and duties, it is such a High Priest that we stand in need of. Who is the man you would desire to visit you in the house of mourning, when your agony was deep, and your perplexity overwhelming? Who is the friend to whom you would betake yourself, when the world frowned upon you, and the dark cloud gathered round you? Who is the guide you would consult, when you had lost your path, and wandered on in the mazes of uncertainty? Surely, one who had traveled the same road—one who had encountered the same perils—one who had drunk the same cup of woe, and endured the same fiery furnace. It is to a heart thus tried and experienced—to one who had thus suffered, that "the bruised reed, the smoking flax," the bent and bowed down spirit, would desire to come—to mourn with it, to raise it, to sustain it.

Such a one would be welcome to you, in the hour of sore anguish. The very look of his furrowed face, worn with grief—the very look of his expressive eye, telling that he could enter deeply into all the peculiarities of your conflict, would be balm to your wounded spirit. There would be something in his voice—in the accents he would employ, revealing to you, that he could be "touched with the feeling of your infirmities," because he had undergone those infirmities himself. And, thus it is, that the humanity of our glorious High Priest—the susceptibility that He has of

sympathy with us in all the varieties of our trials and temptations, brings Him down to our hearts—brings Him into our secret sympathies—enables us to feel that He is one with us, and we with Him, and that we may come to God through His gracious interposition, in all our weaknesses and in all our woes, with all our burdens and all our infirmities, for the path is thus made plain and simple—"He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

"Let us then," says the apostle—because we have a High Priest above—One who can and does feel for us—One who knows all our cares, and troubles, and trials—One who has Himself deeply suffered, and is therefore able to sympathize with us in all our sorrows, "let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Reader! Christ Jesus—the High Priest and Intercessor—the sympathizing Brother—is the only medium of prayer. There is no access to God but through Him. And, if there be not an honoring of Christ—in His person, blood, righteousness, intercession—in prayer; we can expect no answer to prayer. The great encouragement to draw near to God is—Jesus, at the right hand of God. He is our interceding High Priest—He is our Advocate with the Father—our Kinsman-Redeemer within the veil. Coming through Him, the poorest, the vilest, the most abject, may approach the throne of grace with lowly boldness. The all-powerful—all-helpful—all-loving—all-tender Savior and High Priest, is waiting to present the petition, and urge its acceptance, and plead for its answer, on the basis of His own infinite and atoning merits.

Come, then, you poor, you disconsolate—come, you tried and afflicted—come, you wounded—come, you needy—come, and welcome, to the mercy-seat. Ask nothing in your own name, but ask everything in the name of Jesus. "Ask and you shall receive, that your joy maybe full." "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh—and, having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near."

Reader! whatever be your need, your weakness, your trial or infirmity, do

not brood over it--but bring it to the throne of grace. The longer you bear about with you the burden under which you groan, the more hopeless and wretched you will become. But if you take it to the foot of the Cross, you will assuredly obtain relief. The very act of taking it will inspire hope; and, casting it on the tenderness and sympathy of your compassionate High Priest, you will be able to say, "I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." Plead earnestly as David did, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions." "Withhold not your tender mercies from me, O Lord; let your loving-kindness and your truth continually preserve me." "Because your mercy is good, deliver me." "Let your tender mercies come unto me, that I may live."

Surely, it is a comforting thought, that you are bringing your wishes, and cares, and anxieties to One, who knows how to pity and support—who longs to show "mercy," and to impart "grace to help in every time of need." The Savior's heart is a human heart—a tender heart—a sinless heart—a heart, once the home of sorrow—once an aching, bleeding, mournful heart. And He is still unchanged. He loves to chase grief from the troubled spirit, and to bind up the broken heart; to stanch the bleeding wound, and to dry the weeping eye; "to comfort all that mourn." Yes, Christian, if you would disclose your sorrow, to One who sorrowed as none ever sorrowed—if you would weep upon the bosom of One, who wept as none ever wept—if you would bare your wound to One, who was wounded as none ever was wounded—then, in your affliction, turn from all creature sympathy and support, to your "merciful and faithful High Priest."

He is prepared to embosom Himself in your deepest grief, and to make your circumstances all His own. He "can be touched with the feeling of your infirmity," and your sorrow. So completely—so truly—is He one with you, that nothing can affect you, that does not instantly touch Him. Your temptations from Satan—your persecutions from man, your struggles with an evil heart—your tribulations and dangers, and fears—all are known to Him, and He feels for you. Tender, to Him, are you, as the apple of His eye. Your happiness, your peace, your necessities, your

discouragements—all are to Him, subjects of deepest interest, and of incessant care. If, only, you would but lift the eye of faith, you might discover that He is with you now; and—of His faithfulness that never falters—of His love that never changes—of His tenderness that never lessens—of His patience that never wearies—of His grace that never decays—you may sing—in the storm-night of your grief. It is ever His delight, to prove Himself the strength of your fainting heart, and the support of your sinking soul—to visit you in the hour of sorrow and calamity, breathing music, and diffusing calmness, over your scene of sadness and gloom. Trust in Him, and He will be with you, in life, in death and in eternity; for His word is—"No man shall pluck them out of my hand."

Almighty Savior, in whom all fullness dwells, and who, as our merciful and faithful High Priest, have a fellow-feeling with us in all our infirmities, we humbly beseech You to grant us out of Your fullness, grace sufficient for us. We are weak and helpless. Oh! strengthen our faith, enliven our hope, increase our love, perfect our repentance. Blessed be Your name, You have encouraged us to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Lord of all power and might, we come, trusting in Your almighty strength, Your infinite goodness, and Your gracious promises. We come to ask of You, whatever is lacking in ourselves, and to be enriched by You, with all spiritual blessings. Whatever of sin or of infirmity You see in us, O Lord, forgive it, and help us to overcome it. Whatever of good Your grace may have wrought in us, be pleased to confirm and complete it, and make all that we think, and speak, and do, acceptable in Your sight. Be with us, O Savior, everywhere, and at all times; in health and in sickness, in prosperity and trouble, and in all the events and circumstances of our lives. Let Your presence sanctify and sweeten whatever may befall us. Never leave nor forsake us in our earthly pilgrimage, but abide with us, until You have brought us through all trials and dangers to Your heavenly kingdom, that we may there dwell in Your sight, and enjoy Your love, and inherit Your glory for evermore. Amen.

Savior, I lift my trembling eyes  
To that bright seat, where, placed on high,

The great, the atoning Sacrifice,  
For me, for all, is ever nigh.

O be my guard on peril's brink;  
O be my guide through weal or woe;  
And teach me of Your cup to drink,  
And make me in Your path to go.

For what is earthly change or loss?  
Your promises are still my own;  
The feeblest frame may bear Your Cross,  
The lowliest spirit share Your throne.  
—Anonymous

## **HELP AND DELIVERANCE**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"The Lord shall help them, and deliver them,...because they trust in him."—Psalm 37:40

This is one of the many sweet promises which gild the pages of inspiration, and which, so often—amid life's trials and difficulties and dangers—revive the fainting spirit, and lead the toiling, trembling one, to Him who is the sole strength of His people, and whose promises in Christ "are all yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God." For, of all the plans that may be adopted, for obtaining help in difficulty, comfort in distress, light in darkness, there is none so sure, so effectual, as that of taking a Divine promise to the throne of grace—laying it humbly before the Lord, putting Him in remembrance—and pleading with Him, in the language of the psalmist, "Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope."



The believer, then, has good ground to hope for Divine help and deliverance. He has been adopted into God's family—made an "heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ." God has loved him with an "everlasting love"—how can He fail to extend, in every time of need, that help which is required? Our dear Lord, in His last prayer, asks that His people might be so blessed. "The glory which You gave me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one—and that the world may know that You have sent me, and have loved them, as You have loved me." If, then, believers are the objects of this love of the Father, do you think, He would be unwilling to impart the needful help—to strengthen them in every emergency—and to sustain them by that almighty power which is equal to all their wants?

But further, believers are expressly said to be the property of Christ. They are His own, purchased by His blood and renewed by His Spirit. He owns them as His disciples—He pleads for them in heaven—He prays that they may be "kept from the evil" that is in the world, and that prayer must be accomplished; and, whatever strength His people require to endure trial, to meet temptation, to discharge duty, to press forward, that strength is secured by the prayer of Jesus. Thus, we find the apostle connecting the fact that believers are the property of Christ, with the undoubted truth, that all things are made to convey blessings to them. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

Besides, as we have seen, God has been pleased to promise this help, to all His believing people. He has not left it a matter of conjecture. He has assured us, that He will be their strength in every emergency—that when the dark cloud gathers He will take them by the hand—when the tempest rages He will lead them to the covert—when the limbs are feeble and tottering He will impart new vigor; and His language to the traveler Zionward is, "Fear not; for I am with you—be not dismayed; for I am your God—I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." That promise must be fulfilled, and He will continually to the end, strengthen His believing people. By His providence, and by His grace, He will fulfill His word, and support

them in every emergency.

But, while God has thus promised to be the strength of His people, His promise is associated with the use of means. Its fulfillment must be sought by exertion—by the use of appointed means. "The Lord shall help them and deliver them, because they trust in Him." It is only by the exercise of faith—faith in God's word and promises—that we can lay hold on Divine strength. We must believe these things as said for us and to us, and regard the power of God, not merely as engaged to bless others, but to bless ourselves. It is not enough to be convinced, that He has said He will never forsake His people, but the effect of that promise upon each Christian's heart should be, "I may therefore say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man can do unto me." It is not enough, to believe that God is a strength to others—each is to say, "In the Lord have I strength;" not enough, that the "Lord Jehovah is a strength and song" to others—but each is to say, "He is my strength and song."

This, be sure, is the part of true faith—to appropriate the promises God has given, and to lay hold on that almighty strength, which is secured to every believer in Christ Jesus. Weak in himself, the Christian can then feel "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might;" and with God's promise, "no weapon formed against you shall prosper," bound as a frontlet between his eyes, he may go forth, conquering and to conquer. What, though his enemy comes against him, mightier than the giant of Gath, and armed with impenetrable brass—and nothing be found in his own hand, but the shepherd's sling and the smooth stone of the brook!—yet, he may meet his antagonist without a quaking hand or a trembling thought, shouting, "Victory is of the Lord"—or, in the words of the apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

There is yet another important means, in order to obtain this help and deliverance, and it is this, continually to "wait upon God," for the communication of the promised blessing. Divine imparted strength is ever associated with this obvious duty. If God alone communicates this help to His people, it is but reasonable that they should humbly, and earnestly, and perseveringly, ask for it. "Wait on the Lord," says the psalmist, "be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart—wait, I say, on the Lord." They who do not wait on Him, must not expect, that

their negligence, pride, and indifference, should be rewarded with the comfort of Divine help and deliverance; but they who seek that help, by earnest, persevering prayer, may hope, that their experience will resemble David's, when he said, "In the day when I cried You answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul."

Reader! do you desire that the Lord should be your Helper and Deliverer? Oh, then, come to the throne of grace, and make known your request. Prayer is God's own appointed channel for imparting strength and courage to His people. He will grant the desire of your heart, for, to nothing has He more strongly and solemnly pledged Himself, than to the answering of the prayer of faith. "You shall call, and I will answer." There needs nothing but a believing prayer, to turn the promise into a performance. You may not, indeed, always receive the help you wish—the deliverance you long for, but you will receive what God knows to be best for you—strength equal to your day. More might injure you—induce self-confidence—and tempt you to lean on feeble reeds, and earthly supports. The promise, therefore, is, not that you shall experience no difficulties, encounter no trials, and be harassed by no fears, as you journey heavenward, but, that the Lord will help you, and deliver you out of them all, in His own time, and in His own way.

You will have burdens and crosses—doubts and fears—you will have many a time a rugged path to tread; but, if you trust in the Lord, and look to Him for help, you need not fear. His grace will be made sufficient for you, and His promise will be realized in your experience, "As your days, so shall your strength be." Only trust God, and, be sure, that "He is faithful who has promised."

When Jacob—fearing the approach of Esau—went to God for help, and implored Him to deliver him out of the hand of his brother, he reminded God (as it were) of His promise—"You said, I will surely do you good." It was on this account, that Jacob felt convinced, that God would now afford him help and deliverance—it was enough for him, that God had said it, for "God is not a man that He should lie; has He said, and shall He not do it? or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

This humble, but unshaken confidence, is the very soul of prayer. Come,

thus, to the throne of grace, pleading the exceeding great and precious promises of your God, and you will never be sent away empty. "Put me in remembrance," says God, "let us plead together—declare, that you may be justified." Whatever be the blessing you desire, or the help you stand in need of, put your heavenly Father in remembrance of the promise, by which He has insured it to you. It is His own direction, and, therefore, cannot be unavailing. Do you desire to have the guardian care of Him who slumbers not nor sleeps?—remind the Lord that He has said, "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." Do you long for a companion who will lead you heavenward?—the promise is, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Do you ask forgiveness?—take with you the words, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Do you seek acceptance?—He has declared, "Him that comes unto me I will never cast out." Happy is it for the Christian when he can faithfully plead, and contentedly repose his soul, upon such promises as these—he will have no cause for alarm—"The enemy may come in like a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Learn, Christian, where you ought to go with all your difficulties—to the Throne of Grace. There you are sure of help and deliverance. It is to the true Christian, the citadel where he will always find a protector to aid, and the home where there is always a Father to listen to him. "I must tell this to my God," was the affecting observation of a Christian slave, while writhing under the lash of a cruel taskmaster. There was no one else who would hear or help him—no other being who could sympathize with him or relieve him. How many are the crosses of the Christian, which ought only to be divulged to this never-failing Friend—how many sorrows which can be poured into no bosom but that of his Redeemer! It is thus, that when you are weak then you are strong—when with the prophet "your eyes fail with looking upwards," and you cry—"O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me;"—then you are sure of help, deliverance, victory.

It is by earnest prayer, that in the fullness of His sympathy, in the depth of His love, and in the strength of His all-sufficiency, the Savior is brought near. The fervent breathings—the ardent longings, which ascend from a believer's heart, gather and accumulate in the upper skies; and,

when most he needs Divine grace and strength, they descend in covenant blessings upon his soul. No real, believing prayer is ever lost, even as the moisture exhaled from earth is never lost. That thin, almost invisible vapor which the morning's sun has caught up, returns again—distilling in gentle dews or falling in plentiful rain—watering the earth and making it to bring forth and bud.

That feeble desire—that faint breathing of the soul after God, shall never perish—it was, perhaps, so weak and tremulous—so mixed with fear and anxiety—so burdened with complaint and sin, that you could scarcely discern it to be real prayer, and yet, ascending from a heart inhabited by the Holy Spirit, it was accepted by God, and was presented by our great High Priest, "with the much incense" before the Throne. Around that Throne, these prayers are gathering—like clustering angels—and, although the "vision may tarry," yet, waiting in humble faith God's time, those prayers will come back, bringing help and deliverance, so that the believer shall exclaim—"Lord, I thank You, You have heard my cry. You have kept my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice."

Oh, then, daily ask and plead for Divine strength! When you experience a temptation, turn to the Lord for support—when conscious of the rising of a rebellious temper, go to Him for strength against it—when the deceitful heart would turn you aside, ask of Him to lead you in the way everlasting. Take all your difficulties whatever they may be; the daily life and conversation—the little circumstances of every hour, with all their perplexities whatever they are—take them to your Father, unbosom them all to Him, lay them all before Him with perfect confidence, and firm reliance on His promises, and you will find, that the way to obtain confidence in regard to the greatest matter of the salvation of your soul, is to exercise confidence in small things. How can faith ever strengthen, if you do not bring it to bear on your daily life?—on your little disappointments, and vexations, and troubles—remembering that God has said that "all things shall work together for good" to those who love Him. Strive, always, to exercise an unlimited confidence in God. "Though prayer is the key that opens God's treasures, yet faith is the hand that

turns the key, without which it will do no good." And it should encourage you to do so, to remember that it is the afflictions and operations of everyday life, that call this principle into exercise; and, a very great proportion of a Christian's life, as far as he is concerned, consists in the exercise of this principle.

And, amid all your difficulties and dangers, be cheered by the thought, that "stronger is He who is with you, than all that can be against you." Oh, could we fling back the veil of flesh which now intercepts and dims our vision, and see the child of God as he is seen by the Father of his spirit and the holy angels, journeying onwards to his home—what a spectacle would we behold!—a creature, weak, helpless in himself, yet "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might;"—his every movement exciting the deepest interest—watched over by God—attended by seraphs—opposed and beset by the powers of darkness, but succored and sheltered by the everlasting arms, conducted in safety onwards and upwards, heavenwards and homewards!

Christian! be it yours, thus to lean upon the arm of your covenant God, and to place all your trust and confidence in Him—and, while fighting the good fight of faith, fix your eye upon the time, when the battle shall be over—the conflict past, and when, as the din and tumult die away upon the ear, you shall hear the songs of seraphs, and the voice of one above them all, saying, "Come up higher—take your crown, your crown of many stars, which I have promised to him who is faithful unto death."

Almighty God, our Father and Preserver, by whose merciful providence we are guided and upheld from day to day, we acknowledge our dependence on Your care, and lift up our souls in thanksgiving for Your goodness. Blessed be You, who daily loads us with benefits, O God of our salvation. Though, often, alas! we have changed towards You, You have never changed towards us. With what unwearying watchfulness have You been compassing our path, defending us from danger, guarding us from temptation, hedging up our way with thorns, preserving us with the blessings of Your goodness! When, often, on the brink of the precipice, ready to fall, Your interposing hand has saved us from inevitable destruction. When, through our own weakness and unwatchfulness, we would now have been wandering in hopeless alienation from You, You

have mercifully not allowed the bruised reed to be broken, nor the smoking flax to be quenched.

Lord, our earnest prayer is, that Your grace may still be made sufficient for us. May no spiritual foe be allowed to invade our peace or endanger our safety. May we seek, O God, from day to day, to live a life of simple faith and dependence on Your grace; with confiding love may we commit our every care, and need, and perplexity to Your better direction, feeling assured that You will guide us by a right way to the city of habitation.

Oh, give unto us hearts more sensible of Your love to us, and more full of love to You; and dispose us ever to seek our happiness in the enjoyment of Your favor, the doing of Your will, and the hope of Your heavenly kingdom. Above all would we seek a renewed interest in those covenant blessings which Christ died to purchase, and which he is exalted to bestow. All our hope is in Him; weak, helpless, perishing, we flee to Him as the help, and hope, and portion of all who seek Him. Hide us, O blessed Savior, in Your wounded side. We would overcome alone through the blood of the Lamb. May we know more and more the power of Your resurrection, and the fellowship of Your sufferings. May our every hope, for time and eternity, center in Your Cross.

Keep us ever near to You. Hold us up and we shall be safe. Help and deliver us, O Lord, for our trust is in You. May we be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation. Hear us, gracious Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen.

In sorrow and distress,  
To You, O Lord, we fly;  
In penitential lowliness,  
To You for mercy cry.

By Your own love we plead,  
Oh, hearken to our prayer;  
By Him who for our sins did bleed,  
Spare us, O Father, spare!

Our drooping minds refresh

With showers of heavenly dew;  
For hearts of stone give hearts of flesh;  
Renew us, Lord, renew.

Comfort and make us whole,  
With Your free Spirit's grace;  
Lift up, O Lord, upon our soul,  
The luster of Your face.

Constrain us to abhor  
The sins that made Him grieve,  
And never to tempt the Spirit more  
Our thankless hearts to leave.

Make us, O Lord, to tread  
The path that Jesus trod,  
Which Him from earth in triumph led,  
To the right hand of God.

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My spirit on Your care,  
Blessed Savior, I recline;  
You will not leave me to despair,  
For You are love divine.

In You my faith has stood,  
On You I calmly rest;  
I know You just, I know You good,  
And count Your choice the best.

Whatever events betide,  
Your will they all perform;  
Beneath Your wings I'll safely hide,  
Nor fear the coming storm.

Let good or ill befall,  
It must be good for me;



Secure of having You in all,  
Of having all in Thee.  
—H. F. Lyte

## MORE GRACE

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"He gives more grace."—James 4:6

Many are the hindrances and discouragements which meet the Christian in his journey heavenward; and, if he had only his own strength to rely upon, he would soon become faint-hearted, and sink down in hopeless despair. But, conscious that there is a power on his side which can carry him over every obstacle—an Arm on which he may lean for support in every time of weakness—and a Refuge to which he can betake himself whenever danger threatens to overwhelm him, he pursues his onward and upward course, assured that He who has been his Guardian and Guide in the past, will not fail nor forsake him in the future. And, ever, as he finds his progress retarded—whether by temptations from without or from within—from daily interaction with the world, or a more close and constant communion with an evil heart, he resorts to the throne of grace, that his faith may be invigorated—his love increased—and all his spiritual energies renewed and strengthened.

Thus, only, can he hope to maintain his ground, and "press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." If he gives way to indolence, he is sure to be defeated; if he attempts to encounter the adversary without prayer, he is as sure to lose his ground. He will find, that the strength in which he trusted was weakness; and that his fancied courage could not bear him through the contest.

But oh! what encouragement have we to betake ourselves to the throne of

grace, and seek Divine help and support!—what cheering promises are given to all who ask in sincerity! "He gives more grace." "The Lord preserves all those who love him." "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." "I will rejoice over them, says the Lord, to do them good." "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain you." "He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven there shall no evil touch you." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him." "Call unto me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you know not." "I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you." "I will teach you what you shall do." "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who trust in him."

And, how frequently is the assurance given, that they who humbly wait upon the Lord, asking more grace and strength to do His will—to live to His glory—and to follow the footsteps of the Savior, will receive fresh accessions, until, from "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," they are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Whoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have an abundance." "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." "Then shall they know, if they follow on to know the Lord." "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." "He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might He increases strength." "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." And Paul addresses the Thessalonians in these words, "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more."

From these and similar passages we may learn—

First, that where grace really exists in the heart, there will be an earnest desire for more.

Second, that the sure way of "growing in grace," is to strive, earnestly and prayerfully, to improve what we have already received.

Third, that there is only one source whence it can come to us—from Him

who is seated on the throne of grace, and who has promised to bestow it on all who humbly ask it. "He gives more grace."

1. Where grace exists there will be an earnest desire for more grace. Yes, he in whose heart the Spirit of God has implanted this divine principle, will not rest satisfied with present attainments—love to God and Christ will constrain him to seek after conformity to the will of God, and, conscious of his own inherent weakness, guilt and helplessness, his cry will be "Lord, more grace—more grace!" This feeling will grow, and expand, until it pervades the whole being. Every fresh struggle will be accompanied with renewed supplication—every day will be begun and ended, with another and yet another petition, that "more grace" may be imparted.

The believer, under the influence of a living faith, feels that he has much to do, and no strength of his own to carry on the work assigned. He has to be in the world, yet not of the world. He has to bear about with him the name and character of Christ's disciple, and to resist every temptation to that which his Master has forbidden. He has to struggle with spiritual enemies—with a treacherous heart—with enticements to evil on the right hand and on the left. He has to "be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"—to "set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth"—to "have his treasure and conversation in heaven"—to "give all diligence to make his calling and election sure"—to "add to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity;" that these things being in him and abounding, he may "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Oh surely, then, there is need of "more grace"—grace to be diligent and faithful—grace to be resolute and strong—grace to improve, and employ aright, and for the glory of God, talents, and opportunities, and means, and efforts—grace to make our lives sacred, devoted, and dedicated lives—grace, so that for us "to live is Christ"—grace, so that the highest end we have in view, is to "please God, and to abound more and more."

Reader, have you this earnest longing for "more grace"? If it exists in your

heart at all, you must have felt your need of it—if it is not quenched and smothered, by sinful contact with the world, you will be longing for a renewed supply. There is no standing still in the life of faith. "The man," says Augustine, "who says 'enough,' that man's soul is lost!" "Onwards!" must ever be the Christian's motto. The power of grace must wax stronger and stronger, if you would have the power of sin to wax weaker and weaker. Your daily prayer will be, "Lord, give me more grace to honor You; grace in every vicissitude and change; in all the varied phases of my being. Grant me grace for sunshine and storm, for health and for sickness, for life and for death."

And, it ought to animate and encourage the Christian, to know that the sure way to "grow in grace," is to strive, earnestly and prayerfully, to improve what has already been bestowed. Religion does not enjoin, that a man should retire from the world, and give no heed to its business and pursuits. No! it exhorts him rather to carry into the world the "grace" which may leaven the surrounding mass; to carry there a Christian temperament—love to God and man—fervency of spirit—earnestness in well-doing—and humble submission to the will of his Maker. What is required, is not inconsistent with the attention due to the interest of the present life; and experience has proved, that Divine grace grows and expands, in the midst of incessant labor and daily toil.

For a man to shun the world, is to shun the appointed sphere of duty. He may climb the mountain summit, and there—far away from all companionship with his fellows—the rock for his couch and the wild fruits for his sustenance—he may submit to every kind of toil and privation, in the attempt to live down the fierceness of passion, and to gain the victory over carnal desires; but, far more pleasing in the sight of God, are the humble efforts of that believer, who, casting his all on Jesus, prays for grace to do his duty where God has cast his lot, and who does not shun the battle of life, but fights "the good fight of faith" and "overcomes the world." The one will grow in grace—in childlike humility—and trust in the Savior's merits—the other, wielding the scourge and wearing sackcloth, will grow in spiritual pride—in the hope to purchase heaven by his own frantic and feeble efforts.

Oh! do not think, that the poor laborer, who must depart from his cottage

with the first streak of the morning, and not return until night has far advanced, and who must wear away the intermediate time in unremitting toil—do not think, that he must, of necessity, be "standing still"—that grace is making no advances within his heart, and that he cannot be progressing in the life of faith and godliness. He may go through all his labor in the fear of God—yielding himself contentedly to his lot, and acknowledging the Divine hand in its appointments, and, if he is so doing, he cannot fail to be "growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ."

"Growth in grace" is not to be expected from certain high and enraptured emotions—not from trances or ecstasies—but from the faithful exercise and exhibition of what has already been given; in your daily deportment—your deportment in the haunts of business—your deportment in your families—yes, amid all the occupations and requirements of life. Your life may present much the same general features for years; but still it may, it ought to be a growing life—abounding more and more in the service of God. You are not to expect that greater opportunities will be put in your way—so much as that you should make these opportunities out of 'ordinary things'—having an eye more capable of discerning them in common things, and being more ready to seize upon them and to use them. This is Christian principle, and what you should aim at.

Nor are you to expect, that your opportunities of exercising the "grace" given you, will be such as to attract the notice of others—no, they will lie chiefly in common things—in your ordinary duties—in your home circle, in resisting and overcoming habits of self-indulgence—habits of harshness, fretfulness, irritability of temper, or the like. "Grace" may be brought into exercise too, in bearing sickness, trial, unkindness, or reproach, with a patient uncomplaining spirit—in helping and encouraging your neighbor—in being more generous, more kind, more sympathizing—in showing more "love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"—delighting more in prayer and the Word of God—setting the Lord more and more before you—ever keeping Him in mind.

It is thus "grace" will truly grow and expand, so that every fresh duty becomes more easy—every fresh trial less painful. By bringing it into the

detail of daily life, so that it may elevate and consecrate human affection—sweeten earthly love with the deepest and tenderest sympathies—pervade duty, pleasure, and recreation—you will most surely promote the growth of that Divine principle which the Spirit of God has implanted within you.

But we must never forget, that our ability for all this comes from above; that, as there is only one source from which "grace" comes to us at first, so there is only one source from which we can obtain renewed supplies. "He gives more grace." Our heavenly Father, for the sake of His well-beloved Son, has graciously promised to renew His gifts to those who use them rightly—to increase in them true religion, to nourish them with all goodness, and of His great mercy keep them in the same. Grace is no scanty thing, doled out in pittances; the fountain is full and overflowing—the treasury is large and inexhaustible; myriads are hourly hanging on it, and drawing from it, and yet there is no diminishing. Out of that fullness all may receive grace for grace. "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Cor. 9:8

Christian! be it yours, by earnest prayer, to seek for an increase of grace. While careful to use aright what you have already received, oh, repair to the throne of grace for a fresh supply, and, be assured, that there is not a trial you can encounter—not a sorrow you can experience, not a difficulty you can meet with in your daily life, for which Jesus—in the treasury of grace—has not a corresponding solace. In the multitude of your thoughts within you His 'comforts will delight your soul.'

Not in your own strength can you tread the path of life, or make one effort to "grow in grace." Everything must come from the heavenly treasury—but oh! blessed assurance "those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing." There is no real blessing, either for time or eternity, which will be withheld from you, if you humbly ask it, for the sake of Jesus. "Hitherto," He said to His disciples, "you have asked nothing in my name—ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." And, "He who spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Look backward, and reflect how many blessings you have received in the past; and, take these as the pledges that God will be with you still, and will give "grace and strength" for the time to come. "He who believes has the witness in himself." You have the witness to the fulfillment of the most gracious assurances of your Lord, in "yourself"—in your own heart, and in your own experience. Methinks I hear you say, "Yes, I have been in affliction and sorrow, when the consolation of earthly friends was utterly ineffectual, to dry the starting tear, or to calm the bursting heart; and, at that hour, there was One who said, 'In all your affliction I was afflicted.'

"I have been in seasons of the most fearful spiritual temptation, when I had almost made shipwreck of my faith, but there was One who whispered 'My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

"I have been upon a sickbed, and—as I believed—a dying bed. I have stood upon the brink of a fathomless eternity, and, at that dreadful hour, there was One who stood by me in the watches of the night, and imparted strong consolation—there was One who said "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus; I have withdrawn the sting of death; I have robbed the grave of its victory—fear not—I will give you grace, and be with you always, even to the end."

"Blessed Lord, bend Your pitying eye of love and mercy upon us, as we venture to approach the throne of grace. We desire to look up to You through Jesus Christ, Your well-beloved Son, and to be made partakers of that peace which passes all understanding. There is no other refuge for the sin-stricken, woe-worn spirit. But, blessed be God, that we are permitted to rest on the finished work and everlasting righteousness of our dear Redeemer, and that there is in Him an all-sufficiency for our every need.

"We pray, O God, for pardoning, renewing, quickening, and sanctifying grace. Transform us by the indwelling power of Your Holy Spirit. May we seek to be more animated by ardent love to Him, whose we are, and whom it is alike our duty and our privilege to obey. Knowing that this is Your will concerning us, even our sanctification, may it be our constant

ambition, to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Almighty Savior, in whom all fullness dwells, we humbly beseech You that it may be given us to receive out of Your fullness grace sufficient for us; so that, being taught of You how we ought to walk and to please God, we may abound therein more and more. Cause us to be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and let it be the great employment of our lives to honor and serve You. May our rejoicing be the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have lived our lives in the world.

Allow us not, O God, to rest satisfied with present attainments, but according to Your promise—give us more grace. Carry us still forward in Your ways, from strength to strength, until we are fit to be translated to that better country, where we shall see You face to face, and being fully conformed to Your image, shall love You supremely, rejoice in You triumphantly, and celebrate Your praises forever.

Graciously hear us, O God, and have mercy on us for the sake of Your beloved Son, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

The head that once was crowned with thorns,  
Is crowned with glory now;  
A royal diadem adorns  
The mighty Victor's brow!

The highest place that heaven affords  
Is His—is His by right;  
The King of kings, and Lord of lords,  
And heaven's eternal light—

The joy of all who dwell above,  
The joy of all below,  
To whom He manifests His love,



And grants His name to know.

To them the Cross, with all its shame,  
With all its grace, is given;  
Their name, an everlasting name,  
Their joy the joy of heaven.

They suffer with their Lord below,  
They reign with Him above,  
Their profit and their joy to know  
The mystery of His love.

The Cross He bore is life and health,  
Though shame and death to Him;  
His people's hope,  
His people's wealth,  
Their everlasting theme.  
—T. Kelly

—————

Oh, help us, Lord! each hour of need,  
Your heavenly support give;  
Help us in thought, and word, and deed,  
Each hour on earth we live!

Oh, help us when our spirits bleed  
With contrite anguish sore;  
And when our hearts are cold and dead,  
Oh, help us, Lord, the more!

Oh, help us through the prayer of faith,  
More firmly to believe—  
For still, the more the servant has,  
The more shall he receive!

If strangers to Your fold we call,  
Imploring at Your feet

The crumbs that from Your table fall,  
'Tis all we dare entreat.

But be it, Lord of mercy, all,  
So You will grant but this;  
The crumbs that from Your table fall  
Are light, and life, and bliss.

Oh, help us, Jesus, from on high!  
We know no help but Thee;  
Oh, help us so to live and die,  
As yours in heaven to be!  
—Henry Deer Milman

## **A DIVINE PROMISE**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"Call upon me in the day of trouble—I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."—Psalm 50:15

Here is a gracious promise for the season of conflict and trial—a promise, oh! how often realized by the children of God. In their journey heavenward, they are told to expect trouble, vicissitude, and sorrow. "In the world," said the Savior to His disciples, "you shall have tribulation." Troubles are the family badge—the family pledge—the family privilege. Troubles are in God's catalogue of mercies. He does not disguise from them, that he will send affliction—that He will subject His own people to chastisement. He knows them too well—He loves them too well—to allow the unbroken sunshine—the calm, unruffled sea.

The path which the Savior trod, is the path along which every disciple must journey heavenward. As, in "bringing many sons unto glory," the

Captain of salvation "was made perfect through sufferings," so "we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom." Such, indeed, is the experience of every genuine disciple. Not far has he journeyed in the way of life, when he finds that the road to Canaan is through an enemy's country—that a wilderness intervenes, in which there is many a brier, and many a thorn; and that toil, and care, and trouble attend his onward progress. But the more his afflictions abound, the more his consolations also abound; for that Mighty One who has led him forth to the struggle, will also conduct him to the triumph. Whatever be the danger he has to face; whatever the difficulty he has to surmount—whatever the affliction he has to bear, the promise is, "Call upon me in the day of trouble—I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Christian! it is wise—it is well to reflect often on the "day of trouble," that we may learn the lessons God designs to teach us—that we may be led by our felt necessity to the throne of grace—that we may "call upon Him" who has promised to deliver us—and that, by our patience, our submission, our gratitude, we may "glorify" His holy name.

Trial and trouble are permitted, that they may bring the Christian to solemn thought. When the sun of prosperity continues long to shine—when plans are prospering, and hopes are being realized, and no cloud of sorrow gathers over his pathway—the child of God is prone to forget his true mission upon earth, and to entwine his affections around the things of time and sense. Daily, hourly contact with the world—if there be nothing to interrupt the current of what is called "good fortune"—nothing to check the ardor of pursuit after earthly riches, will, most surely, have a baneful influence on the inner life of the believer, and render him less earnest in seeking after the true and abiding riches of the kingdom of heaven.

But, God will not allow His children to continue wandering astray, wasting their energies, and squandering their best affections on the things that perish. His restraining hand will be outstretched, to rescue them from temptation, and to draw them back from the verge of the precipice. He will permit trouble to come upon them—trial after trial—until they are brought again to feel—that "life is earnest," and should be devoted to the glory of God—that religion must not be made secondary to

business and pleasure—that the things which are eternal are infinitely more precious than the things which are temporal—that communion and contact with the world can only be safe and right, so long as there is carried into it, supreme love to God, a higher place for heavenly than for earthly things in the heart, a more earnest desire to live for Christ and in Christ, than for the world and the things of the world.

The Savior has Himself declared, where alone the Christian can be safe—"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit except it abides in the vine, no more can you, except you abide in me." If such truths as these, are brought into the heart, when the hour of trouble and calamity has been made to touch and open it—when the voice of God is heard, (as it was not amid the din and turmoil of the world), who shall say that the appointment is severe, when it is declared, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom?"

Again, man was never destined by his Maker to slumber on the couch of repose, and to bask in the sunny season. He was appointed to labor and to action, to struggle with the tempest, to weather the winter of affliction. Had we no trials, what need for the exercise of patience and resignation? Had we no afflictions to encounter, and no troubles to fear, what occasion would there be for that strength of mind which enables us to brave the perils of life—to bid defiance to the evil day, and to repose firm and unshaken on the arm of the Almighty?

It is when trouble and distress come upon us, that we flee to the Rock for shelter; and, realizing our own insecurity and weakness, place our trust and confidence in the Lord. It is amid sorrow and trial, that trust in God is chiefly exercised. It is a grace which has its home amid the tempest, and derives, from amid the driving rain and beating winds, the very nutriment of its life. It grows on the clefts of the broken heart, and, from the depths of human agony, flows the voice of its consolation. Its office is to light the darkness, and fix the eye—otherwise distracted and bewildered—in singleness of hope, upon the light of a Savior's love, as it shines, like a pillar of fire, upon ransomed Israel; or, like the beacon-light, which points the sailor to the desired haven.

What is the benefit of the smile upon the lips, and the light in the heart—

when all is fair and smooth? Does not even the man of the world smile with smiling life? The triumph of the child of God is—to smile when the world frowns, and keep the light in the heart undimmed by the sorrows which surround the outward path—to say with the afflicted patriarch, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

Christian, if trouble has come upon you, put your trust in God, seek to glorify Him even "in the fires." Be assured, that He has seen it to be needful for your well-being, to lead you for a while in the path of tribulation. Oh! question not, for a moment, His love and faithfulness toward you. Only place your confidence in Him, and he will not allow the trouble—be it what it may—to go beyond what you are able to endure. God is now trying your faith—your love—your dependence upon Himself—seeing whether you can trust Him beyond the range of your partial vision; and, when His purpose is accomplished, He will remove trouble, gladden your heart, and cause you to sing of His faithfulness and truth.

Yet, further, trouble is permitted, in order to lead the Christian, not only to trust in the Lord, but to call upon Him for deliverance. Alas! how many repair to other sources, in the vain hope to obtain relief? How many attempt to escape from trouble, by some futile expedient of their own? And how many stand at a distance from God, refusing to hearken to His voice, and therefore deriving no real spiritual benefit from their affliction? Others there are, who do not recognize His hand in their day of tribulation. They dwell solely upon the trouble—the sorrow—the disappointment, and never raise their thoughts beyond it. They view it in all its distressing bearings—ponder upon every secondary cause which led to it—dwell upon all its sorrowful effects—and think how greatly such an event, if it had occurred, would have mitigated it—how surely such a line of conduct would have prevented it—how much less they would have suffered, if there had been but one little circumstance in their calamity, different from what it was. No wonder that, in so doing they miss the blessing, which they might otherwise have reaped.

Christian, be it yours to recognize and to acknowledge, in your every trouble, a Father's hand, and to hear in it, a Father's voice. That loss of worldly substance—it was from Him. That withering disappointment, the wreck of a fond hope—it was from Him. That protracted sickness, that

wasting disease—it was from Him." But all was intended for your good—to bring you to realize your own helplessness and His strength—to lead you to the throne of grace—to revive within you the spirit of earnest and importunate supplication—and to draw forth from the depths of your troubled heart, like fervent utterances to those of the psalmist, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble." "Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help." "Hide not Your face from me, for I am in trouble; hear me speedily." "Quicken me, O Lord, for Your name's sake—for Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble."

Oh! if, with a contrite and broken heart, you bend before the throne, in "your day of trouble," and thus call upon the Lord, He will assuredly "deliver you, and you will glorify Him." Never can you pray in vain, if you will but persevere in praying. Be not discouraged by seeming delay; let the value of the blessing you seek, give fresh impulse to your prayers—ask again and again, and, while you have the word of promise whereon to build, cleave fast to this, although all appearances be against you.

Perhaps, the very reason why the Lord withholds an answer, may be, that you may learn to persevere in asking—that "patience may have her perfect work"—that you may be kept looking up to Him—"waiting upon the Lord who hides His face"—"sitting daily at the posts of His doors." For, thus it often is, that the believer, as he renews again and again his supplication, and clings by faith to the Savior, saying with the patriarch, "I will not let You go until You bless me" not only gains his suit, but, through Divine grace, even as he hangs upon his Redeemer—grows like unto Him!

The work of the Holy Spirit goes on within the soul—the believer advances, step by step, in his heavenward journey—each progressive movement, it may be, small and almost imperceptible to himself, as he is taking it; yet, one by one, leading him up to unknown heights—bringing him ever nearer and nearer to the golden gate. And, the more close and frequent his communion at the throne of grace, the more is his soul filled with the "peace which passes all understanding." Conscious of a presence which the world knows not of—alone with his loving and tender Redeemer—he has a "joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle"—to Him he unbosoms all his griefs, and cares, and troubles, and from Him he

at length receives, more than an answer to his prayers—relief from present troubles, and the blessed, abiding assurance of a Savior's unchanging and eternal love.

Praying one, faint not, neither be disheartened. With the Divine promise to rest upon—the certainty that your petition will be granted, you may well be encouraged. If there be delay, it is because this delay is, in the judgment of Infinite Mercy and Goodness, better for you than an immediate answer. "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles." "Call upon me in the day of trouble—I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." What more can you desire? It is like promising the fearful traveler, that the stormy day which is overtaking him, shall not—cannot injure him. Its storms may buffet, but they shall do him no real harm. Or, it is like telling the tempest-driven mariner—not that a calm is coming on, or that a haven is near—but that—let the tempest rage as it will, not a plank of his vessel shall give way. There shall be a strain on it, but it shall bear the strain—shall weather the storm; and, when the storm ceases, be ready as ever to pursue its course. "He shall call upon me," says the Lord, "and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble and will deliver him." "I will be first a prayer-hearing, a prayer-answering God to him—then a present, and helping, and comforting God, and at last a delivering God." "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble."

Finally, since, if we are the children of God, we must look to endure tribulation, before entering the land of light and life—we should seek to be prepared for it. The current may now be flowing gently with us; but, there is not one among the pilgrims Zionward—the fairest—the youngest—the happiest and most hopeful, whose feet, sooner or later, will not have to pass through the deep waters of trouble and sorrow. They await us all; for, we are told, that of those who have entered heaven—of that mighty palm-bearing multitude, who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," one universal characteristic is, that they have come "out of great tribulation." Although so numerous that no man can number them, so diverse that all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, have there their representatives, this multitude contains not an individual who has not come "out of great tribulation." It is not, that,

here and there in that vast assemblage, there are SOME whose lot, on earth, was full of misery and woe, who had to pass through days of trouble and anguish—no, of that unnumbered number, this is universally, unexceptionably true—all came "out of great tribulation."

Sorrow once had set its seal on every heart; trials and afflictions and anxieties, pressed closely upon them—their earthly prospects were darkened by disappointment or marred by adversity—bereavement, and sickness, and poverty, and death following the track of sin, added to their mournful experience—and, with many of God's best beloved, one tear was scarcely dried, when another was ready to flow. Their days of mourning are, indeed, ended—but they came "out of great tribulation."

Christian! it will be so with you; but do not shrink. Pray that you may be prepared for trouble, when it comes. While, indeed, God is pleased to keep it from your door, it is not for you to seek it, but, rather, to take thankfully the blessings so graciously bestowed. But, should He see proper to give you "the bread of adversity and the water of affliction"—should the clouds begin to gather round you, and your day of prosperity be turned into a "day of trouble," (and oh! it does not take long to darken the brightest sky, when God has once commanded the clouds from above—there is no need of years—moments suffice—to blight the sweetest flowers and nip the choicest buds) but, should this be the will of God, come to the throne of grace, and pray that He would enable you to bow with submission, and that, in His own good time, He would be pleased to "deliver" you.

Let the language of your soul be, "Father, I know that this affliction comes to me from Your hand, and, that You love me. Not willingly, would You grieve even me, Your most wayward child. You know, that I need it. You know, that if Your chastening hand were not often upon me, I would be continually 'going astray' like a broken bow. I submit before Your justice; I acknowledge Your mercy; I bless You for Your promises of help and comfort, and my earnest prayer is, that my present trouble, may work that holy and sanctifying effect, which You have designed, and without which, I cannot be rendered fit to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."



Oh! let such a petition ascend before God, in the name of Jesus, and you will assuredly be comforted. Those gracious words will be addressed to you, which the Savior once uttered upon earth, "Let not your heart be troubled. In the world you shall have tribulation—but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world;" and you will learn, more and more, that these "light afflictions which are but for a moment," are intended "to work out for you a far more exceeding—even an eternal weight of glory."

Remember, this world is your nursery, your school—but yonder is your true and eternal home. Yet a little while, and you will leave behind you, sin and sorrow, trial and trouble—yet a little while, and the sackcloth attire will be removed, and you will be clothed in white robes. You will lay down the pilgrim's staff, to sound the notes of praise, upon your golden harp. You will emerge, from the valley of tears and the scene of suffering, to stand at the gate of the celestial city, and, there, present your credentials for admittance. Once lodged within that heavenly home, all will be peace. No tempest will beat upon you there, no storms disturb you there. The tear will be forever dried—the throbbing heart be hushed, and you will take your place—triumphant on the summit of Mount Zion, there to partake of the joys which are at God's right hand, and of those pleasures which are forevermore!

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, our refuge and defense, the strength of our heart and the rock of our salvation, enable us in every day of trouble, yes, at all times, to put our trust in You. Teach us with full assurance to look up to You, as our reconciled God and Father in Christ Jesus, who are willing for His sake to supply our utmost need; and, graciously remember Your word unto Your servants, on which you have caused us to hope, that You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon You.

We confess, O God, that hitherto we have been prone to trust in the creature more than in the Creator. We have leaned upon broken reeds, and hewed out empty cisterns. We have turned for support and help to an arm of flesh. And, instead of acknowledging You in all our ways, we have often walked in the light of our own eyes, and after the imagination of our own hearts.

Pardon, O God, for the sake of Your beloved Son, whatever lack of confidence we have shown towards You; and lead us henceforth by the teaching of Your Holy Spirit to trust in You with all our hearts. Increase our faith in the promises of Your Word. Dispose us cheerfully to cast upon You all our cares and troubles, humbly to commit to You all our interests, and earnestly to seek the aid of Your strength and the guidance of Your wisdom in all our undertakings.

"Oh, keep us from all murmuring, or unbelieving misgivings, under the stroke of Your chastening hand. Let there be no hard interpretation of Your dealings. May we see Your chastisements, tempered with gracious love, all to be needful discipline. Give us an unwavering trust and confidence in Your faithfulness, and help us to feel assured that nothing befalls us but by Your direction; nothing is appointed, but what is for our good. May we delight often to anticipate that happy time, when we shall suffer no more and sin no more, when we shall trace with joyous hearts, the long line of unbroken love and, unchanging faithfulness, and, when in Your light we shall see light."

Graciously hear the voice of our supplications, which we offer in the name of Your well-beloved Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Sure refuge of the weary soul!  
On You, when sorrows rise;  
On You when waves of trouble roll,  
Our fainting hope relies.

To You we tell our every grief,  
For You alone can heal;  
Your word can bring a sweet relief  
To every pain we feel.

Yet often when vexing fears prevail,  
We doubt the love divine;  
Our springs of peace and comfort fail,  
And all our hopes decline.

But You have said to seek Your face;

Nor shall we seek in vain;  
The ready arm of sovereign grace  
Will help before we complain.

Your mercy-seat is open still;  
There let our souls retreat,  
With humble hope await Your will,  
And worship at Your feet.

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Afflicted saint, to God draw near,  
Your Savior's gracious promise hear;  
His faithful word declares to thee,  
That as your day your strength shall be.

Let not your heart despond, nor say,  
How shall I stand this trying day?  
He has engaged by firm decree,  
That as your day your strength shall be.

Your faith is weak, your foes are strong;  
And if the conflict should be long,  
Your Lord will make the tempter flee;  
For as your day your strength shall be.

When called by Him to bear the cross—  
Reproach, bereavement, painful loss,  
Or deep distress and poverty—  
Still as your day your strength shall be.

When death at length appears in view,  
Christ's presence shall your foes subdue;  
He comes to set your spirit free,  
And as your day your strength shall be.

## CHRISTIAN JOY

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again—Rejoice!" Philip. 4:4

To the Christian, who is living near to the throne of grace, there are sources of joy unknown to all others. He can even "rejoice in tribulation," and "be glad in the Lord," although pain, and suffering, and distress fall to his lot. Not that he is insensible to trial and affliction, or that he steels himself to their endurance; not that he can gaze unmoved on the wreck of all his hopes, or behold, without a tear of agony, the beloved and cherished ones laid in their silent grave. No! no! his affections are more warm and tender—his sympathies more deep and strong—his sensibilities more acute and lively, than those of the worldling. He can feel, and feel intensely—the stroke of affliction, the severance of fond ties, the robbing of earthly joys. But then, he knows where he can go for comfort, peace, satisfaction, hope. He knows who has promised to give "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and he remembers the words of the Savior, "Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

The one great source of the Christian's joy is Christ. This, in a manner, swallows all the rest, or, rather, is the source of all the rest. The Christian rejoices because he has found Christ, "the Friend who sticks closer than a brother." The injunction of the apostle is, "Rejoice in the Lord," and again it is said, "We rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;" and Peter, referring to the surpassing joy attained by many of these early Christians, says, "In whom believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Similar is the language used in the Old Testament. David says, "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness;" and Isaiah, speaking of the true Israel, declares, "You shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One of Israel." The prophet Joel says, "Be glad, then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God." Under the heavy pressure of

affliction, Habakkuk declares, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation."

Christ is the only source of the believer's joy—God incarnate—God the Son, in our nature coming down to our low estate, to testify His love and compassion to us. Oh! there are no words which can inspire the heart with fuller joy than these, when uttered in sincerity—"He who was rich, for my sake, became poor." He who was rich—rich in the love of the everlasting Father—rich in the adoration of the heavenly hosts—rich in the glories of His own divinity—rich in the rolling worlds He had created by a word—yet, "became poor"—so poor, that He had not where to lay His head—so poor that when He asked for water they gave Him vinegar to drink—so poor, that His unpillowed head was girt with thorns in death—and all, "for my sake"—"wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities"—"bearing my sins in His own body on the tree;" sorrowing under them, enduring all their punishment, and blotting them out forever.

Believer! is not this the source—the proper source of your joy—that Jesus lived, and suffered, and died for you—that He paid "all that great debt" you owed to law and justice, and washed away the foul stain of your guilt, in His own most precious blood?

It is, also, a source of joy to the Christian, that the Crucified is now the glorified—that He rose triumphant from the grave, and ascended into glory—that he is seated at God's right hand, to wield the scepter of the universe, and to appear as the High Priest and Intercessor of His people. Oh! this thought has been a well-spring of joy to the believer. It has nerved his faith in many a hard fight—it has imparted sweetness to many a bitter draught. Jesus within the veil—the changeless Friend—the sympathizing Brother—the undying, ever-living Head—who has promised to His people, all-sufficient grace now, and certain, endless glory hereafter.

The Christian rejoices in the thought, that Christ not only "appears in the

presence of God for us," but also that He is ever present with His Church and people on earth. "I am with you always, even unto the end of the ages." "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." He is watching over, and gathering to Himself, a chosen people—chosen of God—the gift of the Father—the purchase of His blood; and He is supplying all their needs, bestowing all needful blessings, and preparing them for the enjoyment of His heavenly kingdom.

Children of God! do you not rejoice in such thoughts as these, and will you not bear witness, that, through all your trials and troubles, the faithfulness of your Savior's love has been the "very joy of your hearts?" You have had many crosses and losses—has He ever deserted you? You have been in severe afflictions, and have seen the flowers of many a 'sweet hope' wither and decay—did your Friend desert you then? Others may have proved faithless—all other help may have failed you—friendship's help, promised help, expected help—all, all may have been but as the foam upon the billow, as the footsteps in the sand—but, has Christ ever failed you? Could you, in the darkest and the saddest hour of your grief, say to Him? "Lord, You have promised what You did not perform." Will you not bear witness concerning the past?—"Not one good thing has failed, of all that the Lord has promised—all has come to pass."

Yes, and could we make our appeal to the ransomed multitude before the throne, and inquire—"You glorified spirits, did Christ forsake you? You have passed through the foaming billows of Jordan—did He leave you there? You have gone through the gloomy valley—was there no voice of love to cheer you then? You have appeared at the bar of heaven—did the Faithful One then desert you?"—with one voice would the answer be given, "No!—in all the troubles of our life—in all the bitterness of death—in all the agonies of our expiring moments—in all the dread solemnity of the judgment-seat—He has been with us—a Friend who sticks closer than a brother. The gloom of death's valley was radiant with his smile—its loneliness was cheered by His presence—its stillness was broken by His voice—its partings, its sinkings, and its throes were cheered, succored, and strengthened by His encircling arms—and with an unchanging and eternal love, He welcomed us to the Blissful Home of Light and Love."

And, if Christ is thus the source of satisfaction to His people, He has

granted to them ten thousand other sources of joy—all of them connected with His Cross and with His love. None but a Christian can say, "I will go unto God—my exceeding joy—the Lord Jehovah is my strength and song." He alone can take up the language of the psalmist, "I will be glad, and rejoice in You;" but he can do so, because God is reconciled to him through Christ, and has become his God. A covenant has been sealed and ratified through the blood of the Cross; and the attributes of God, once so full of terror, are become his shield, his stronghold, and his triumph; and he can think of all the glorious perfections of the Almighty, and then say, "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy." His resistless power, His infinite wisdom, His unchanging fidelity to His word—all these are sources of triumph to every one who, having believed in Christ, has become a child of God.

So, also, he has joy, in the thought of the promised influence and aid of the Holy Spirit. Others may undervalue or make light of this precious doctrine—to him it imparts real and abiding joy. To know and realize, that this Holy One is ever near, as a comforter, sanctifier, and guide—that He will be a strength in weakness, a light in darkness, and a support in adversity—that He will continue to purify and enlighten and sanctify the soul, until it is prepared for glory—that having begun the good work He will not desist until He has completed it—oh! this is, to every true child of God, a source of unmingled joy—"the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

And then, all the blessings which flow from the Cross, fill the Christian's heart with joy. We might appeal to the experience of every true believer, that it is a joyful hour, when the load of guilt is removed from the conscience—when he is enabled by faith to receive the simple tidings of a full and free salvation—when Jesus is realized as a personal, an all-sufficient Savior. Yes, even although there is not firm assurance, if faith has imparted a glimmering of hope—if, touching the hem of the Savior's garment, we know that virtue has come out of Him and entered into us—oh! is there not a joy we would not barter for worlds?

When the jailer at Philippi, who was trembling in the prospect of destruction, received the blessed tidings and embraced the exhortation—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"—we are told

"he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." So is it, with every pardoned sinner, who, standing on the verge of ruin, has been arrested by sovereign grace—he is enabled to say with David, "I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

And, not only has the believer joy when he thinks of the danger he has escaped—the pardon he has received, but, when he reflects on the many great and precious things which are his by believing on Christ. He can now look up to God with filial confidence and say, "Abba, Father!" He can come with lowly boldness to the throne, and ask from God, any or all the blessings in the covenant of grace. No longer need he fear a frown or dread a refusal, (except of what would injure him,) "for, being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—by whom also he has access by faith into that grace wherein he stands, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

He can feel assured, that all his needs shall be supplied from the fountain that is inexhaustible—and that "no good thing" will be withheld from him. He can trace every mercy—every blessing, to the hand of God, and know that God has sent them—not in the lavish munificence of the universal monarch—but, in all the kindness and tenderness of a loving Father. Oh! it may well make every providential mercy doubly sweet, to trace it, first, to God as a Father, and then, to Christ who has obtained it for us; and to be assured, that as long as the Christian lives, he shall never—if he humbly asks—never lack the supplies of grace, by which he may continue faithful to the end of his earthly pilgrimage; and, strange, indeed, it were, if the believer could meditate on all these things, secured for him by the blood of Christ—on pardoning, sustaining, comforting, and sanctifying—yes, all-sufficient grace, and not rejoice in that blessed Savior, through whom they are all conveyed to his soul.

Further, this joy pervades, as it were, the whole of Christian life and experience. There is joy in faith—in hope—in love—in communion with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit—with the faithful in heaven and earth—with the holy ones who have laid aside their armor—and with those who are still upon the battle-plain. It is joy to the Christian, to reach another eminence in piety—to ascend another step in his heavenward



journey—to feel that there is within him, more and more of that conformity to the Divine will, and resemblance to the Divine image, which the Spirit of God will continue graciously to impart, until he stands before the throne—sanctified, perfected, triumphant in his Lord!

Christian! are not all the engagements of your life as a believer, calculated to minister to your joy? Do you not feel, that every act of kindness brings its revenue of delight?—that every labor of love, engaged in for the Savior's sake, yields satisfaction and pleasure to the soul? And so with regard to the duties you have to discharge to God. Is it not a happiness, to unburden your cares and anxieties at a throne of grace?—to render your fervent tribute of thanksgiving and praise?—to interrupt the onward current of business and employment, by hallowing the Sabbath, and imploring a fresh accession of spiritual strength for the battle of life? Is it not an engagement full of holy joy, to ponder the Word of God?—to dwell on some heart-cheering promise?—to meditate on some glorious truth—overflowing with Divine compassion and the tenderest love?

Yes, it is joyful thus to obtain a nearer and clearer view of God, as our God in covenant—as pledged to be our surety and defense. It is true happiness thus to enter into communion with our Father in heaven—to be able to say, while bending over the sacred page, "Oh! how I love Your law! Your statutes, Lord, are right, rejoicing the heart—I delight in Your law after the inner man"—and, to anticipate that brighter and better time, when we shall see our Savior face to face—when communion shall be no more interrupted—when those sublime truths, which are now viewed, "through a glass darkly," will be as clear to us as the noon-day, and our souls will reflect the pure and unspotted image of our Savior God.

Nor, is it, only, in his own progress and experience, that the Christian rejoices. He has a pleasure and satisfaction—only short of what he derives from being saved himself—in seeing others rescued from the grasp of the destroyer, and brought into the family of God—in hearing the anthem of praise rising to the Redeemer from other ransomed souls—in tracing the progress of religion in those around him!—in observing, with what joy aged Christians are walking in the ways of God, and anticipating the glory that is to be revealed—in marking the young believer, "growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ." These, and similar things, afford the

greatest delight and satisfaction to every Christian mind, so that, in the words of the apostle, he may "rejoice evermore."

But it may be asked, where this joy has been imparted—has it no interruptions? It has, and very frequently. The best Christian has not always a joyous day. Our sins make sorrows needful—our lack of watchfulness may bring disquietude and doubt, and, instead of "rejoicing in the Lord," our hearts may be filled with despondency and gloom. Christian! if you have not this joy "abiding" in you now, you have cause for alarm; for, be assured, it is suspended, not from any lack of love on the part of your Savior, nor from any forgetfulness of you by the Holy Spirit, but, because you yourself have become less watchful, in guarding the citadel of the heart.

Christian joy can only be realized, when Christ reigns there, alone and uninterruptedly. If the world is permitted to occupy a larger share of the affections and the heart—if plain and known duty is neglected—if the means of grace are carelessly used—if in all your efforts, your duties, and your services—whether in the Church or in the world, you do not entreat the Divine blessing and the Divine aid—then the Spirit of God is grieved. He withdraws His cheering influence; and it is utterly impossible to have the peace and joy, which flow from the inward, abiding presence of the Savior—and which is the work—the entire work, of His Divine Spirit, the true and only comforter.

No power in the universe can rob you of it; none, but yourself, can even diminish it. "Your joy no man takes from you." What the power, or love, or presence of man can create—the power, or hatred, or absence of man can destroy. But, the joy of the believer has a different origin, and, as no man bestowed it, so no man can take it away. It has God for its author—the living Rock of Ages for its ever-flowing fountain—the Holy Spirit for the golden channel, which it conveys into the heart. Thus, coming from the fountain of joy, it is of immortal origin—and, is far above the reach of mortal enemies. All the sorrows of earth—all the temptations of hell, are vain against this joy. So far from being diminished by what would crush earthly happiness, and reduce the stoutest heart, without Divine grace, to hopeless dejection—it is only realized more fully, amid the raging fury of the hurricane, or the dreary gloom of a starless midnight. Then the

anxious soul flees to God—then the promises are clasped to the heart—then the fidelity of the Savior's love is tested—then the sweet consolations of God rush in upon the soul, and there rises—louder than the loud winds—in the dark night of grief, and trial, and difficulty, the believer's song—"Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

It burns within that bosom, where every earthly hope is extinguished. The night dews of affliction and disappointment may fall thickly upon it—the storms of sorrow may beat heavily against it—the winds of adversity may howl fearfully around it—but, like those fabled lamps of which we read, that, century after century, illumined the sepulchers of the east—burning with calm and steady light, amid the desolation of all earthly things—unchanged and unextinguishable; so does this joy—this living spark struck off from the great source of light and life—outlive all deaths, all changes, until it accompanies the freed spirit of the believer in whom it dwells, back to those abodes of joy from whence it came.

Christian! if you desire thus to "rejoice in the Lord," you must live near to the throne of grace—you must pray for a more lively faith in the efficacy and power of vital godliness, to cheer the heart in the darkest and dreariest hour. Remember! it is God's will, that you should be happy and cheerful every day—that you should find joy in everything around you—a pure, sinless, increasing joy—and, that you should pass through all life's vicissitudes, rejoicing in the love of Christ, and in the hope of glory. Strive, then, to live up to your privileges—to rise to all the joy that is set before you—and, to shed on all around, the bright and cheering rays of true religion.

Tell the men of the world, and, let them see by your example and spirit, that Christianity is not the gloomy thing they imagine—that a life of holiness is a life of real happiness—of happiness for time and for eternity. But, oh! tell them, there is something gloomy—the joy, which blazes for a moment like a dazzling meteor, and then vanishes forever—the hopes, which are dependent on worldly possessions and worldly pleasures—and, which made Solomon, who had experienced them all, cry out in the anguish of disappointment—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"—the delights of sin, which bring the flush to the cheek, and kindle rapture in the eye—but, at the last, bite like a serpent and sting like an adder. Tell

them, it is a gloomy thing to be drawing near to the grave with no true hope of heaven—to know that there are mansions of glory, but to have no title to their possession—to stand before a throne of judgment—while mercy withdraws, and judgment proclaims—"it is too late!" Oh, tell them—and you will remove the guilt of their blood from off you—that it is a miserable choice, to prefer the world's pleasures, to the happiness which Christ bestows—and the glory yet to be revealed.

And be it yours, to retain the possession of your joy, by abiding in your Savior's love—by living daily upon His fullness—resting beneath His shadow—lovingly obeying all His commands—submissively receiving all His chastenings—joyfully welcoming all His rebukes—unhesitatingly following all His leadings—glorifying Him in mercy and in trial, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and adversity; until that blessed hour when He will take you home, and you will "drink of the river of His pleasure," and partake of "the joys which are at God's right hand" forevermore.

Heavenly Father, we draw near unto You in the name of Jesus, and we humbly beseech You to hearken to our supplications. Oh, give us filial confidence in approaching the mercy-seat, rejoicing in the mightiest of all Beings as our Father and Friend.

Grant that we may have peace and joy in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Enlighten our minds in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that we may rejoice in the Lord always. Strengthen our faith; enliven our hope; inflame our love; increase our consolation; inspire us with all holy gladness and assurance of spirit, and seal us unto the day of our final redemption.

May we delight in You as our chief joy, and be enabled truly to love You, heartily to trust in You, and wholly to give up ourselves to Your service. Blessed be Your name, for the assurance, that in all our duties, you will be our Help; in all our difficulties, our Counselor; in all our trials and dangers, our Protector; in all our sorrows, our Peace and Consolation. Whatever in Your providence You send, make us to be heartily content with Your blessed will. Do not allow us to forget You in prosperity—or to think ourselves forgotten by You in adversity. Teach us to acknowledge and adore You in all Your gifts; and when earthly comforts fail, and

streams of earthly happiness are dried up, may we still rest confidently on the arm of our covenant God, and say, Yet will we rejoice in the Lord, and joy evermore in the God of our salvation.

Oh! allow us not to grieve Your Holy Spirit, but may He abide with us continually, gladdening our hearts, and filling us with His blessed and holy fruits, which are in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. May we be strengthened, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and joyfulness.

Continue, O God, amid all the vicissitudes of life, to impart to us that inner sunshine which no outward darkness or trial can obscure. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds, and, when death comes, may we fall asleep in the glorious hope of a joyful resurrection. Amen.

O Lord, my best desire fulfill,  
And help me to resign  
Life, health, and comfort to Your will,  
And make Your pleasure mine.

Why should I shrink from Your command,  
Whose love forbids my fears,  
Or tremble at the gracious hand  
That wipes away my tears?

No, rather let me freely yield  
What most I prize to Thee,  
Who never have a good withheld,  
Or will withhold, from me.

Your favor, all my journey through,  
You are engaged to grant;  
What else I lack, or think I do,  
'Tis better still to lack.

But ah! my inward spirit cries,  
Still bind me to Your sway;

Else the next cloud that veils the skies,  
Drives all these thoughts away.  
—William Cowper

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Lord of my life, whose tender care  
Has led me on until now,  
Here lowly at the hour of prayer,  
Before Your throne I bow;  
I bless Your gracious hand, and pray  
Forgiveness for another day.

Oh! may I daily, hourly strive  
In heavenly grace to grow;  
To You and to Your glory live,  
Dead else to all below;  
Tread in the path my Savior trod,  
Though thorny, yet the path to God.

With prayer my humble praise I bring  
For mercies day by day:  
Lord, teach my heart Your love to sing,  
Lord, teach me how to pray!  
All that I have, I am, to Thee  
I offer through eternity.  
—Anon.

## **MUTUAL PRAYER**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"Pray one for another."—James 5:16

One of the most consolatory truths of our holy religion is, the communion of saints. Scripture teaches us, that believers in Christ are bound together in the ties of a holy brotherhood—members of the same household of faith; and that the Holy Spirit, who makes them one body, makes them also one with Christ Jesus, and unites them all together in Him. Hence arises the sacred duty, alas! too seldom remembered—of each believer, evincing a sincere and heartfelt interest in the welfare of those around him, and of his bearing them on his heart, and pleading in their behalf at a throne of grace.

How precious, and how comforting, such prayers are to the children of God, we may, learn from passages like these—"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying for us." "Pray for us...I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." "In God we trust, that He will yet deliver us; you also helping together by prayer for us." "I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you."

And, if Paul thus anxiously desired, to be remembered at a throne of grace by Christ's believing people, he was equally earnest in offering up petitions in their behalf. "I make mention of you always in my prayers." "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of you in my prayers night and day." "Therefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power."

Christian! to deepen your interest in the members of that family to which you belong, to excite your sympathy and your prayers in their behalf, reflect for a little on the glorious privileges you enjoy in common, and on the closeness of that union, which exists between all who have been truly admitted into Christ's Church. And, by Christ's Church we mean, not any particular communion, not any visible church singly, but the collective body of all true believers, "the blessed company of all faithful people;" all who, in every country and in every climate, have been adopted into God's

family, been made the sons of God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and are partakers of the Holy Spirit—who have the same glorious "hope of their calling," that "when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then they also shall appear with Him in glory."

What, then, are some of the peculiar privileges—what is the condition of the members of this Church?

They have union with GOD. "Our fellowship," says James, "is with the Father." Now, all communion is reciprocal. God is the Father, believers are His sons. He is the original source of their grace and happiness. He bestows on them the inestimable gift of Christ, and all the grace treasured up in Him for them; and they, receiving that grace, return to Him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. He imparts to them of His love. He sheds it abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and they love Him in return, and give Him the free-will offering of grateful hearts. They hold communion with Him by prayer at the throne of grace. He grants their petitions and the grace they need, according to His will.

They have union with CHRIST. "Our fellowship," says Paul, "is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." He stands in a similar relation to His people, as the head in the human body, to its several members. In other words, Christ and His people are so identified, that His merits are accounted theirs, and their prospects are bound up with His. He communicates to them of His divine blessing and glory, and they are "made the righteousness of God in Him." Becoming, as it were, a part of Christ, forming, in the words of the apostle, "one body," they appear before the throne, as if, instead of having incurred the divine wrath by their apostasy, they had, with Christ, fulfilled all righteousness, and earned a title to everlasting glory. In Him, His people suffer unto death. In Him, they exhaust the cup of wrath. In Him, they taste the bitter pains which sin deserved. In him, they pay the uttermost farthing into the scales of justice. In Him, they endure until each attribute of God requires no more.

O Christian, what an exalted privilege is this! That even we—who are all vileness by sin—if, only, we are one with Christ by faith, are made "the righteousness of God." To be reckoned righteous were much—to be made



divine righteousness is far more. What words can express—what numbers reach the height of such an honor! Christ's worthiness for our unworthiness—His sinlessness for our sinfulness—His beauty for our deformity—His meekness for our pride—His forgiveness for our backslidings—His love for our hate. In a word, His fullness for our emptiness—His glory for our shame—His perfect righteousness for our manifold unrighteousness. Yet "this honor have all the saints."

And they have union with the HOLY SPIRIT. "Don't you know," says the apostle, "that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." This communion of the soul with the Holy Spirit, is manifested and cherished on His part, by communicating to it holy desires—by shedding upon it His sanctifying influences—by giving it heavenly light, and knowledge, and hope, and peace, and all spiritual consolation.

And, on the part of the believer, it is sustained by meditation upon the Word—by earnest prayer—by diligent use of all the appointed ordinances of God's Church—and by studying to "walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless." In the Church of Christ, the same blessed Spirit pervades each separate soul—purifying it from the dross of sin—elevating it above the world, and tracing upon it that faint outline, which shall yet reflect, with ever-brightening effulgence, the Redeemer's glory.

Yes, it is one Spirit that fills Paul and Peter and John with all their ecstasy of bliss—with all their effulgence of holiness, before the eternal throne, and which now works good desires, good counsels, just works, in the feeblest of the saints and of the children of God, here below. It is a spark of the same heavenly fire, which there beams forth in all its unclouded splendor—which there exerts its gracious and illuminating power, and begins "the day-spring from on high," which shall shine on "brighter and brighter to the perfect day," and then progress in everlasting effulgence. The saint on earth and the saint in heaven, are alike in union with, and are moved by, the Spirit of God. And, oh, how precious and comforting is that communion which exists between the spirit of the believer and the Spirit of the living God!

Christian! you are no stranger to this sweet communion. Often, you have knelt at the throne of grace, wearied with care and toil—oppressed in heart, as with a crushing burden; and you have risen from your knees, with the burden gone—refreshed in spirit, revived and comforted in heart. Or, you have taken up the sacred volume, to learn more of the will of God—and as you read page after page—full of words of grace and promises of love—you were enabled to discover and realize your own personal interest in the things spoken of. "That promise speaks to me!"—"That Savior is my Savior!"—"This God is my God forever and ever!"—"He is mine and I am His!"—and your heart burned within you, with ardent love.

Oh! it is thus, in close, endearing communion with the Holy Spirit, that we "grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ"—that we attain more and more of "the mind that was in Christ Jesus"—and that, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is thus that we obtain glimpses of our eternal home—that we see our title to that glorious inheritance, where communion will never more be interrupted, but where—with an holy brotherhood, we shall, through endless ages, unite in celebrating the praises of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let us, then, seek more and more to abide in close and intimate communion with the blessed Spirit. It is one of the most precious privileges—one of the choicest blessings we can enjoy on earth—it is a cluster of grapes from Eshcol—it is a draught from the river of the water of life—it is a flower from the eternal garden of bliss—it is a ray from the celestial throne—it blends time with eternity—it mingles earth with heaven—it is a glory begun below—it is an oasis in the dreary wilderness, where the soul is invigorated, gladdened, and refreshed.

Believers have union with the whole body of the FAITHFUL. Union with the head, of necessity, ensures union with all the members. The Church of Christ is dispersed throughout the world—it is separated by difference of language—of rank—of age—of circumstance; but, being partakers of one Spirit and one faith, they are of one heart and one mind in the gospel. They are of one heart and one mind with respect to the real object of faith, Christ Jesus, and they unite consequently in one pursuit, namely,

the glory of God. There may be much variety of outward form and expression. The minds of men are various—their modes and habits of thought—their original capacities and acquired associations, infinitely diverse; but we do not speak of the lifeless unity of 'mere form'. Biblical unity consists in submission to one single influence and spirit—the living Spirit of God—which animates each soul, and cements all together, by the sacred and eternal bond of love. And this is the privilege of believers. There is an intimacy of union—there is a closeness of endearment, in the family of Christ, which has no parallel in the world.

For, however it may seem to the unbelieving and the skeptical, a mere day-dream and fancy—however, sometimes to the Christian's own heart, saddened and sickened by division, and discord, and rivalry, and strife, and envying, it seems too much like a shadow, rather than a blessed reality—"yet, nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure," and His true people "have the same love one to another." They are taught of God to love one another; and, meet where they will—whether beneath the hallowed roof of their early home, or amid the wilds of a foreign land—they feel bound by indissoluble ties; they are "all one in Christ Jesus"—they are all zealous for God's glory, and the advancement of the Savior's kingdom—and, in proportion to their faith, and progress in holiness, they are animated with the desire for conformity to Christ, and the steadfast purpose to "lay aside every weight," and to "press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Such, then, is the communion of saints with the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, and also with each other. Surely, then, the apostle's exhortation is most fit and right, that we should cherish a warm and affectionate interest in our brethren in Christ Jesus—that we should desire their prosperity, and seek to promote their well-being. As mariners in the same vessel have a peculiar claim on each other, from being shipmates—or, as soldiers who have mounted together the same deadly breach, have a peculiar claim on each other, from having shared a common danger; so Christians have a peculiar claim on each other, in virtue of their common relation to Christ and the Church, and because one great object is before them—the honor and glory of the Triune God.

Alas! that differences should ever be permitted to divide or alienate those

who are so closely united—who share in common such exalted privileges and blessings. Yet, it is no easy task to free the mind from all sectarian bitterness—to keep the heart clear of religious bigotry—to combine zeal for our own communion, with love to the whole universal Church, "the household of faith." Still, it is the duty set before us as disciples of Christ; and His royal law is not to be set at naught, because it is hard of performance. A time is coming, when the divisions of Ephraim shall cease, when the rent robe of the Redeemer shall again be seamless, and of one entire piece throughout. Why should not that promised time be antedated even now? Why should not churches of various names, but of "one body and one spirit," move, like yon glorious planets on high—each in its own orbit, yet all in harmony, around the Sun of righteousness? Why should they not, like the tribes of Israel—each bearing its own standard, but all collecting round the ark, move onward—standing together under the cooling shadow of the cloudy pillar, and, reflecting together the brilliant splendors of the fiery symbol, that led the consecrated host through the wilderness?

Christian! be it yours to seek the peace and prosperity of the whole spiritual Zion; and, this you will do most effectually by earnest prayer, and the cultivation of personal religion. The olive branch can never flourish, but in the rich soil of personal piety. Let that soil be impaired, and the bitter weed of contention—the thorn, the bramble, and the brier of angry controversy, will flourish luxuriantly. Man departs from his brother by departing from God, and he comes closer to his brother by coming closer to his God. Oh! if the disciples of Jesus were to pray "one for another" in the true spirit of the Savior's universal love, where would divisions, envy, hatred, pride, and selfishness find a place? Instead of that cold, evanescent thing which men call charity, we would have Christian charity—all-forgiving, brotherly affection, mutual prayers and labors of love, uniting the hearts and the hands of men, so that, once more, it might be said regarding them—"Behold, how they love one another!"

In the Church of Christ there is not one, however humble his position—however limited his sphere of influence—who may not be helpful to some fellow-traveler Zionward—who may not be the honored instrument, of drawing down the divine blessing, on some weary, toil-worn pilgrim—on

some bereaved and stricken heart. Look around you, Christian, and, if you are truly one who has realized the preciousness of union with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and, thereby, of union with the faithful in Christ Jesus everywhere—you will soon discover many, for whom it is your duty and your privilege to pray.

You will pray for the members of your own family—that the love of God may be more abundantly shed abroad in their hearts—that they may follow the example of their Savior Christ, and be made like unto him—that they may be refreshed with the dew of His blessing, and may walk in love, as Christ also has loved them. You will pray for your relatives and friends—that they may be kept steadfast in the faith, and zealous in the cause of their God—that the blessed Spirit may, in all things, direct and rule their hearts—and that their path may be as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. You will pray for those of your acquaintance who are anyway afflicted or distressed in mind, body or estate—that it may please God to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities—giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy outcome out of all their afflictions. You will pray for your ministers—that it may please God to endue them with heavenly gifts—that they may be wise to win souls, and may themselves shine as the brightness of the skies and as the stars, forever and ever. You will pray for the prosperity of Zion and the peace of Jerusalem—that it may please God so to guide and govern it by His good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians, may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. The sorrow—the affliction—the distress—the anxiety—the misfortune of others—all will be made subjects of prayer by you—and you will entreat the Lord so to sanctify His dealings with them, that they may learn the lessons He designs to teach—and, that the discipline they are called to undergo may conduce towards their advancement in holiness, and growth in grace.

Even thus, by "praying one for another," Christians may greatly help one another. The master may be vastly helped by the godly servant, and the servant may be, in turn, aided by the godly master. The prayers of the one for the other, may draw down the divine blessing—and, that peace, and

harmony, and mutual confidence, which prevail in the family and the place of business, may result, from the earnest, importunate, and persevering prayers of the one for the other. So the parent may be greatly helped by his praying child, and the child be strengthened and encouraged by a praying parent. The one, may find his cares removed—his duties rendered more easy—his anxieties fewer—and the other, may be led safely on in honor, truth, and rectitude, and held up in the slippery paths of life—while the secret of all this may be, the mutual prayers of parent and child. So the minister may be vastly helped by his praying people, and the people be helped by the praying minister. They, apparently, have nothing to do with preaching the Gospel, but, it may be in answer to their prayers, that the Gospel is faithfully and successfully preached in a neighborhood. It is thus in the power of the poorest in a congregation, to aid his pastor in his every preparation for the pulpit—to strengthen him for every pastoral visit, and to uphold him in every effort for the spread of Christian knowledge. Silently, yet effectually, he may be acting through every sermon, and through every labor of his minister.

The minister, on the other hand, by his prayers, may be supporting the humble worshiper in all the duties of his daily life—and may have much to do with those upright and straightforward habits, and that conscientious, painstaking industry of the hearer, which are winning the approval and the confidence of his employer. And thus, every relation of life—every station in society—may be sanctified and blessed, through the instrumentality of earnest, believing prayer.

Christian! you may be powerless, by your own efforts, to relieve your friend out of his present difficulty or distress. Pray for him, in the name of Jesus, and a mightier arm than yours will be outstretched in his behalf. You may find your words of consolation all too weak to stem the tide of sorrow, or to calm the tempest of severe and unexpected calamity. Pray for the anguished, stricken one, and the Heavenly Comforter will descend—the soothing "peace, be still," will be uttered, and, from the depths of that troubled heart, will arise the tribute of gratitude and praise. You may have found counsel, warning, and advice, all unavailing to arrest the wayward child—to bring back to honor and virtue, the wandering prodigal. Oh! pray for him, to that loving Savior who came to seek and

save the lost—pray until your suit is granted—pray, until, with repentant step, the loved one returns to his Father and his God.

You may have dear and cherished friends in a foreign land—exposed to many perils—beset with countless temptations and, oftentimes, your heart trembles with anxiety and fear, lest they should go astray and forget their duty to their Savior and their God. Pray for them fervently, even as you love them, and that eye which never slumbers nor sleeps, will watch over them and that grace and strength they need so much, will be made sufficient for them. You may have met with coldness and ingratitude, where you expected affection and regard.

You may have suffered from calumny, misrepresentation, and envy. You may have been injured and wronged. Pray for the spirit of forgiveness—pray that the hearts of your enemies may be softened—that they may be led to see and acknowledge their wrong-doing, and that your own heart may be kept free from anger, malice or hatred.

Thus praying in sincerity, you will not only realize a peace and calmness stealing over your own spirit, but they who have been your foes, may be turned into friends—they who have striven to do you wrong may be led to do you justice, and without reservation or hesitancy, you may be able to utter the petition, so frequently uttered rashly and insincerely, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Reader! faint not, neither be discouraged, if your prayers be not immediately answered. Rest assured, God has wise reasons for the delay. Parents! pray on, and, when you are lying in the churchyard, the blessing you longed for, may become the portion of your children. Friends! pray for those whom you love, and, when your voices are forever silent, and your prayers here are exchanged for praises in the upper sanctuary, another and yet another, may, in answer to your petitions, be brought within the Savior's fold. Christians! pray for your ministers, and, long after you have passed away from earth, these servants of God may, through the earnest supplications you made unto God in their behalf, be nerved with tenfold courage for the battle against evil, and may have multitudes of souls given unto them, as their joy and crown of rejoicing. Ministers! pray for your people, and, although, for many years, you may

go in heaviness of spirit—seeing no fruit of your labors—the time is coming, when your prayers will be crowned with blessing, and your efforts shall not prove in vain in the Lord.

Oh! then "be instant in prayer," and leave the results with God. "Pray one for another," that you may receive all needful grace in your progress heavenward—working grace for a working hour—striving grace for a striving hour—suffering grace for a suffering hour—dying grace for a dying hour—grace for sunshine and for storm—grace for prosperity and for adversity—grace for the family, the closet, the sanctuary, and the place of daily toil—grace for health, for sickness, and for pain—grace for manhood and for old age. With glory in prospect, and the hope of heaven animating your spirit, be this your feeling with regard to your brethren in Christ—

"One brotherhood we dwell in Him,  
One Church above, beneath,  
Though now divided by the stream,  
The narrow stream of death.  
One army of the living God,  
To His commands we bow,  
Part of the host have crossed the flood,  
And part are crossing now."

O Lord our God, who dwells on high, and are worshiped by unnumbered hosts of glorious spirits, that cease not to render to You pure and perfect homage, look down on us, Your fallen and sinful creatures, from heaven the habitation of Your holiness, and hearken to the voice of our prayers.

We bless You, O God, for the high and holy privilege of communion with You, and with Your well-beloved Son, and with the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Oh! do give us the spirit of adoption, that looking up to You as our Father, we may at all times, place our confidence in You, and in Jesus Christ our Savior and High Priest. Let Your Spirit witness with our spirits that we are the children of God; and through His indwelling in our hearts, may we be sanctified wholly, fitted for Your service, and prepared for inheriting Your glorious kingdom.



We beseech You, O God, to bestow upon us Your heavenly grace, whereby we may increase and abound in love toward our brethren in Christ Jesus, and toward all men. Give us to realize more and more that we are members of the same family, partakers of the same promises and blessings, and heirs of the same glorious inheritance. Make us to be kindly affectioned to our brethren, ready to bear with their errors and infirmities, and to do them good as we have opportunity.

Teach us, in imitation of Your beneficence to be generous and compassionate towards our fellow-men, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us, to walk in love as You have loved us, and from the heart to forgive one another, even as you, for Christ's sake, forgive us.

God of all grace, we beseech You to pour Your Holy Spirit upon all flesh, that the wilderness may become a fruitful field, and that the whole earth may be filled with Your glory. Unite all Christians in Christ their only Head, correct all their errors, heal all their divisions, and dispose them to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Bless all in sorrow, and sanctify their trials. Strengthen all who suffer, and give to them Your Spirit of comfort. Provide for the poor—protect the helpless—heal the sick—support and prepare the dying.

Graciously hear us, O God, and accept of us through Jesus Christ our only Mediator. Amen.

Blessed be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love—  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne  
We pour united prayers;  
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear,  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.

When we at death must part—  
How keen, how deep the pain!  
But we shall still be joined in heart  
And hope to meet again.

From sorrow, sin, and pain,  
We all shall then be free;  
And perfect love and friendship reign  
Through all eternity.

They who seek the throne of grace  
Find that throne in every place.  
Let us live a life of prayer;  
God is present everywhere.

In our sickness, in our health,  
In our want, and in our wealth,  
Let us look to God in prayer—  
God is present everywhere.

When our enemies prevail,  
And our heart and spirit fail,  
'Tis the time for earnest prayer—  
God is present everywhere.

Then, my soul, in every strait,  
To Your Father go, and wait—  
He will answer every prayer—  
God is present everywhere.

## **PERSEVERING PRAYER**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6, 7

There are some of the injunctions of the Word of God regarding prayer, which the ungodly and prayerless turn into ridicule, because they know not, neither can they understand, the "things of the Spirit of God." Attaching to the words of Scripture a meaning which they do not bear, they endeavor to weaken the faith of the Christian, or to fill his mind with doubt and anxiety, by the false insinuation, that an impossible duty has been assigned—that God demands more than man is able to perform. They point to such passages as these—"Pray without ceasing"—"Continue instant in prayer"—"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"—"In everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Now it would be impossible to comply with such injunctions, if they meant the ceaseless utterance of words—the constant and idle expression of wishes and desires—if the Christian were required, amid the duties and the business of life, to be continually sending up petitions to God—to be ever occupied in kneeling at the throne of grace and making known his requests unto God. But, God demands no impossibilities of His children, and therefore such injunctions must have a different meaning. And the true, scriptural meaning, will not long be difficult or doubtful, to those who have, in any measure, realized the value, the blessedness, and the privilege of prayer.

The exhortation, then, of the apostle, to the Philippian Church, means, first, that prayer should be the pervading spirit of the Christian life—that it should be, as leaven, fermenting the whole substance of our moral being—a sentinel, continually keeping watch over our unguarded movements—a sanctified enclosure, fencing us round by the protection and presence of God. Like those bright and glorious orbs which revolve in

the skies above us—no sounds may be uttered—but the language of the heart unceasingly ascends to the Father of spirits, and enters into the ears of the Lord God Almighty. There may be no form—no utterance of language—it may be a tear—a sigh—a wish—a hope—a desire—a groan—but the whole Christian life is pervaded by the spirit of prayer.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered, or unexpressed—  
The kindling of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast."

The formation of plans—the carrying on of daily duty—the going forth to encounter any difficulty or trial—the bearing up under reproach, injury, or wrong, are all thought of, in subjection to the will of God, in prayer. The Christian man will not absolutely say, "I will do," "I will not do," until he has thus committed the matter, in prayer, to God. It fills his heart as he opens his eyes to another day—and, a silent prayer is breathed, that its dangers may not injure his soul—that its good may be received with thankfulness, and its evils may be averted or shunned. It enters into all his hopes and desires, so that they are always, "If the Lord will." When an evil thought rushes into the Christian's heart, it finds that the spirit of prayer is there to meet it—when a subtle temptation creeps stealthily through the soul, if it has been thus exercised, there is comparatively but little upon which it can lay hold, and it retires without having drawn him into sin. It is thus that he realizes prayer as a perpetual safeguard against the attacks of the adversary; and, living under its sacred influence, he has the blessed consciousness of living near to God. God dwells in him, and he in God—the Divine image is reflected upon his soul, for "God is light, and he who dwells in light, dwells in God and God in him."

Under all circumstances and in all conditions, this spirit of silent, yet earnest, believing prayer, may have its power upon the heart. Its home is the Christian's bosom—its hallowed influence pervades the Christian's life—it brings down the happiness and peace of heaven itself into the Christian's soul, so far as these can be enjoyed in this imperfect state of being; and, it is, in truth, the most elevating, comforting, and transforming, of all the duties, in which the Christian can engage on earth. It brings him nearest to his God, and his God to him. There are no

circumstances in which it can be crushed—no peculiarities of place in which it may not be indulged. In the time of adversity—when earthly blessings are removed—this spirit sustains the soul, by leading it to "cast all its care on God who cares for it." In the hour of bereavement—when the home is desolated and the heart is wrung—this spirit calls Jesus to look upon the desolated home and the torn heart, and reminds Him, that when on earth, He once shed a tear over a scene like this; and, there is no thought of a removal of the sorrow, except by the spirit of prayer, which can alone cope with the sad, desolating power of grief.

Thus the Christian realizes, that, at all times, he has comfort and help at hand—that his communion is with an ever-present and all-sufficient God—that he may keep up an communion with heaven, to which the most rapid communication and the closest converse of earth, supply not the equivalent. He realizes, too, that no calamity is too great—no event too trivial—to be carried to the throne of grace, and laid before the Lord—that he may detail his every sorrow in the ear of Divine sympathy—that he may repair with every difficulty, to Divine wisdom—and seek the supply of every want, out of the Divine resources—and this, not once, or for a short period at stated times, but at any moment—at every time of need. Whatever be the day of distress, it is a day for prayer. Whatever be the time of calamity, it is a time when prayer is available. Joy is a fitting season for prayer, and sorrow a fitting season too; the times of poverty and wealth—of sickness and of health—may all be leavened with the spirit of habitual prayer. The crosses which mar the Christian's peace—the vexations which oppress his spirit—the clouds of earthly disappointment which sometimes come—are all fitting themes for prayer.

As there is no danger which is above the power of God, so there is no concern which is beneath His care. Therefore, the believer learns "to pray always," or, as the apostle tells us, "in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God." The gate of prayer is always open, and the winged prayer will, in an instant, bring the Savior near—bring Him in all the intensity of His love—in all the fullness of His grace—in all the abundance of His strength—and in all the sweetness of His sympathy, and assurance of His death-destroying might, into the faint and failing heart. "The sorrows of death," says David,

"compassed me, and the pains of hell took hold upon me—I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord—O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you."

But, while the Christian may thus, in everything, hold sweet, unbroken communion with heaven—and, through all the duties and trials of daily life, may cherish and retain the spirit of prayer—he will have his special sacred times with God. Times of meditation and prayer—times which only sickness or imperative necessity will ever permit him to invade or to interrupt—times when the world and the things of the world are forgotten, and the soul draws fresh nourishment, and strength, and hope, from pouring out its desires and longings—its supplications and entreaties, at the throne of grace, and, anew, asking help against coming toils and trials, from its gracious and compassionate Heavenly Father.

How often these seasons should be, or how long they should be, we have no express commandment of God. He would trust to our love and gratitude—to our sense of the greatness of the privilege—to our consciousness of need—to our remembrance of past joy experienced, in holding communion with the Father of our spirits and the Redeemer of our souls. And oh! if we have known the blessedness of communion with God—if we have realized the peace—the comfort—the joy of believing prayer—no rule is required. We will count it no hard duty which we must do—we will not ask, Can we live without it? but we will regard it as the noblest exercise of the soul—the most exalted privilege—and the purest pleasure on earth—to pour out our heart before our Father, and to send up holy desires to the Throne of Grace.

No true Christian—who has set his affections on things above—who has taken up his cross to follow Jesus—and who is striving to walk even as He also walked—will live without closet, and family, and social prayer. He will seek retirement and seclusion, where he may "alone with God" unburden his spirit—where he may make confessions, reveal anxieties, and present petitions—which he could not unveil to any human ear. And he will repair to the family altar, that, with his children and dependents, he may thank God for family mercies, acknowledge family sins, and

entreat the Lord to continue family blessings—to impart Divine grace, guidance, and strength, amid family trials, difficulties, and labors. And, knowing that he is but one of the unnumbered family of God scattered throughout the world—that there are many beyond his own family circle, who stand in need of his sympathy and his prayers—or, with whom he ought to unite in the worship and service of God—he will take part in social prayer, and unite with his brethren in Christ Jesus, either in the assembly where only "two or three are met together in the name of God," or in the sanctuary, where, with the congregation of God's people, he may wait upon the Lord in the appointed ordinances of His Church, and hallow the Sabbath, in obedience to the Divine command.

But, the exhortation of the apostle goes even further than this, and implies that, in every condition and circumstance of life, Divine guidance, and help, and counsel, should be sought in prayer. There are many, who flee to a Throne of Grace in times of extremity, but who are strangers to it when all is calm and tranquil—who never imagine that the help of God is needed quite as much in prosperity as in adversity—in health as in sickness. "When trouble is upon them," says Scripture, "they will pour out their souls unto God." "In their affliction they will seek me, says the Lord." Yes, they know they cannot, in such trying circumstances, bear up without the help of Heaven—they feel the utter insufficiency of human resources, and the weakness of human trust—and they cry unto the Lord for help. They pray in the tempest, but are silent in the calm—they implore deliverance from the sick-bed, but not the fear and love of God to keep and guide them in the day of health—they make their complaint under the pressure of calamity, or the burden of distress, but they ask not for a thankful spirit in the midst of their plenty and prosperity.

The true Christian, however, realizing his own feebleness and his entire dependence on the grace and help of God—"in everything makes known his requests unto God"—not merely in times of tribulation, when the storm has driven him to seek for shelter—not merely in days of sickness and trouble when he stands as it were on the brink of death's dark flood—but when everything is bright and prosperous, and when health and vigor animate his frame. If in sickness, he prays for patience—in health, he prays for a thankful spirit. If in adversity, he prays that God may not

forget him—in prosperity, he prays that he may not forget God. He makes known his requests, not merely for spiritual, but for temporal blessings, knowing that his temporal and spiritual lot are inseparable, and that, in the arrangements of both, he cannot and ought not to rely on his own judgment and discretion, but on the gracious promise of God—"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

He is conscious, that he can take no step—engage in no enterprise, which may not, for good or evil, have an effect upon his everlasting happiness; and, therefore, he prays that he may be guided in the right way—that the step he is about to take, may be such as God will approve—that every movement of his, may be attended with the Divine blessing—that, in whatever duty he is engaged—in whatever society he mingles, God's presence may accompany him, and that, throughout all, he may be enabled to "walk worthy of the vocation with which he has been called."

Christian! be assured, this is the only way in which to tread safely and securely the path of life—in everything you undertake—in everything you purpose to follow out—whether in your family or in the world, to make known your requests unto God, and to ask His blessing, His guidance and His support. He has graciously permitted you to lay everything—(be it great or small—important or trivial, in human view)—before Him in prayer, and He has promised to direct and guide you. "Trust in the Lord, and do good—so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

Oh! from how many false and sinful steps might we be preserved, if before venturing upon them we had all formed the habit of praying!—"May the angel of God's presence go with me where I go, and be with me where I am." What confidence would it impart in the midst of doubt and perplexity, if every duty—every project—every undertaking, were preceded by humble and earnest prayer for Divine guidance and direction!—if the Christian, when surrounded by difficulties, and beset on every hand by obstacles—which seemed to indicate that the step he had taken was a false one—if he could say, "I took this step under Divine direction—I embarked in this enterprise, after I had sought counsel of the



Lord. Difficulties may have arisen—obstacles which I did not anticipate may be lying in the way—the waters may seem to be troubled—and the vessel appear to labor, but I set out under the best pilotage. Every sail was filled with the breath of prayer, and I will therefore calmly entrust my all to Him who said, 'I am with you always, even unto the end.'

Reader! the assurance of the inspired apostle is, that if "in everything" you thus "make known your requests unto God," then, "the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus." The peace of God! a peace which the heaviest storms shall not disperse, nor the wildest tempest terrify—a peace, which will remain unbroken when earthly props are removed, and earthly stays are taken from you—a peace, which will enable you, amid the wreck of fondest hopes, and the ruin of the most cherished plans, still to repose on the bosom of infinite love, and to say, "Here I find rest—here no troubles can reach me—here I still enjoy the peace which passes all understanding."

We do not say this is always the experience of the believer; but, that it is not so, is owing to the weakness of his faith, and not the lack of willingness on the part of God to impart the blessing of peace—is owing, it may be, to the fact, that he has not "in everything made known his requests unto God." He has kept back something which still disquiets and alarms—something which he is afraid or unwilling to reveal at the Throne of Grace.

For, observe it must be "in everything" that the heart must be laid bare before God—"in everything," that the matter must be committed to His care. You are not to ask His counsel and then follow your own—you are not to "cast your care upon God," and then in distrust of His providential goodness, to take back the burden upon yourself; but, when you have unburdened your soul of a request, you are to leave all in the Lord's hands—when you have made known your desire, you are to leave the mercy-seat, like Hannah, "with a countenance no more sad." The warm sunshine of promise, should dry up every tear and dissipate every cloud of unbelief, for, "whoever puts his trust in the Lord, shall lack no good thing."

Not, that you are to cease from effort after prayer, or relax your diligence

in the Christian race. If you leave God to do all, God will leave you to do all. He will refuse to grant your request, until He discovers, that, along with prayer, there is diligence—that you are really desirous to "stir up the gift of God which is in you." You must, then, both in regard to temporal and spiritual matters, combine the two duties—you must labor and pray—you must fight and pray—you must watch and pray—resist and pray. You are to strive, as if all depended upon yourself, and yet, knowing that the blessing can come only from God—that He only can give you success, that He only can ensure a successful outcome.

"Pray then with all prayer and supplication," and "watch thereunto with all perseverance." Trust God at all times, and pray that you may have the fulfillment of the assurance, "My presence shall go with you." That will lighten the darkest hour and assuage the acutest suffering—that will throw a gleam of sunshine over the gloomiest, and add a luster to the brightest scenes of life. With God by your side, what have you to fear? He will guide you over every difficulty, and protect you in every danger. You will learn, day by day, more of your Father's care in protecting—your Father's goodness in assisting—your Father's authority in correcting, and your Father's love in chastening. In joy and in sorrow—in health and in sickness—in prosperity and in adversity, you will realize the meaning of that sweet promise—"Kept as the apple of His eye."

While in the world, there will be vicissitudes in your experience; but, the care of your heavenly Father will provide for all. You may be "led about"—from gardens of Eden, smiling with the flowers of hope and the tree of life, to dreary deserts and unploughed seas of sand—from Nebo's heights with the beauteous scenery of Canaan in view, to the valley of Baca and its well of tears—from the river "whose streams make glad the city of our God," to the sterile shores of the Dead Sea—from the beams of mid-day brightness, to the solemn gloom of midnight—from the merry hearth and home of loving friends and cherished sympathies, to the cold churchyard and broken hearts. Yet, fear not—All is the work of your Father's hand! He will not leave nor forsake you, and His "peace which passes all understanding, will still keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus."

And the time is near at hand, when He will fulfill all your desires, and more than answer all your prayers—when you will enjoy the peace and

the rest of heaven itself—no more to be disturbed or broken by earthly disappointments, cares, and troubles—when the shining of your sun will be unclouded—when, with a grateful heart, filled with the recollection of all that God has done for you—of your Savior's unchanging, faithful, and undying love—you will strike your golden lyre and sing in sweeter tones than ever fell on mortal ears—"Unto Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father—to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen."

Most merciful God and Father, who has taught us to be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto You; we cast ourselves on Your care, and humbly ask of You those things which are necessary—for the body as well as the soul.

Grant us, we beseech You, such a competent portion of earthly blessings, as Your wisdom sees to be suitable and expedient for us. And whatever You are pleased to send, make us to be heartily content with Your blessed will. Teach us to acknowledge and adore You in all Your gifts, and when earthly comforts fail, to joy evermore in the God of our salvation.

Above all, O God, grant that our spiritual desires may be more and more abundantly supplied, through the fullness of the blessings of Your Gospel; to the end that, growing in knowledge and in grace, our souls may be strengthened and nourished unto life eternal. May it please You in all our undertakings to encourage us with Your favor, to further us with Your help, and to grant us such success as seems good to You, who orders all things well and wisely for us.

Oh, take us henceforth under Your heavenly guidance and protection. In all our ways may we acknowledge You, that You may direct our paths. In whatever state Your providence has placed us, may we be enabled to walk with You in newness of life, constantly trusting in Your fatherly care, seeking at all times to be instructed by Your wisdom, and earnestly striving, not only in our outward deeds, but in our inward thoughts and affections, to be entirely devoted to Your service.

Graciously hear us, O God, for the sake of Your well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Father of Love, our Guide and Friend,  
Oh, lead us gently on,  
Until life's trial-time shall end,  
And heavenly peace be won!  
We know not what the path may be,  
As yet by us untrod;  
But we can trust our all to Thee,  
Our Father and our God!

If called, like Abraham's child, to climb  
The hill of sacrifice,  
Some angel may be there in time;  
Deliverance shall arise—  
Or, if some darker lot be good,  
Oh, teach us to endure  
The sorrow, pain, or solitude,  
That makes the spirit pure!

Christ by no flowery pathway came;  
And we, His followers here,  
Must do Your will, and praise Your name,  
In hope, and love, and fear;  
And, until in heaven we sinless bow,  
And faultless anthems raise,  
O Father, Son, and Spirit, now  
Accept our feeble praise.  
—W. Josiah Irons

—————  
Heavenly Father, to whose eye  
Future things unfolded lie,  
Through the desert where I stray  
Let Your counsels guide my way.

Lord, uphold me day by day;  
Shed a light upon my way;  
Guide me through perplexing snares;  
Care for me in all my cares.

All I ask for is, enough!  
Only, when the way is rough  
Let Your rod and staff impart  
Strength and courage to my heart.

Should Your wisdom, Lord, decree  
Trials long and sharp for me,  
Pain or sorrow, care or shame,  
Father! glorify Your name!

Let me neither faint nor fear,  
Feeling still that You are near,  
In the course my Savior trod,  
Tending still to You, my God.  
—Josiah Conder

## A SACRED PLEDGE

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

"All the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God."—2 Cor. 1:20

These words are a sacred pledge to the child of God, that his prayers will be heard and answered—that every petition, every longing and desire will be fulfilled, in so far as they may conduce to his present and future happiness.

And why? Because the believer is one with Christ—and of the Savior it is written, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell." "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Now, this fullness, both of wisdom and grace, is intended for the benefit of Christ's Church and people. "All things are yours—for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Our Savior frequently dwelt on this precious truth—the oneness which existed between Himself and His followers—in order to assure them that, whatever might be their need—their desire—their emergency—they had only to reveal it unto Him—only to draw near in faith, and with lowly boldness, to a Throne of Grace, and they would receive, out of His infinite fullness, all that was lacking in their sinful selves. Their very existence was bound up with His. "Because I live, you shall live also"—and, if they would be spiritually strong, healthy, and vigorous—if they would, like Him, resist every temptation—do battle with every form of evil—and be able to say as He had done, "My food and drink is to do the will of my Father who is in heaven," then must they "abide in Him," "grow up into Him in all things," follow the example which He left them, and have the "mind which was in Him." It was in this spirit He offered up the prayer in behalf of all His followers, "that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be one in us;" "I in them and you in

me, that they may be made perfect in me."

By various emblems, too, He shadowed forth this truth. He compared Himself to the vine—His people to the branches springing from that vine, and deriving life, nourishment, support from thence. He is represented as "the foundation and the chief corner stone" of the spiritual edifice—His people "the lively stones" built up on Him; and, in order to impress deeply this innermost union of Christ with His people He becomes a "living corner stone," in whom "all the building grows unto an holy temple in the Lord." Again, He is represented as the Head of a mystical body, whereof believers are the component members—as a bridegroom, while His Church is the bride—as a Shepherd, His people the sheep under His watchful care. Thus are the most striking emblems employed, to intimate the closeness—the intimacy—the completeness of this mysterious and most blessed union.

Christian! this is your ground of hope and encouragement in drawing near to the Throne of Grace—in supplicating Divine mercy—in imploring Divine aid—in making known to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, the longings and desires of your heart. It is in virtue of your union with Christ—that sin is blotted out—guilt is cancelled—the curse is averted—justice is satisfied—God is reconciled. It is in virtue of your union with Christ, that the promises of the covenant of grace are yours—that the riches of heaven's treasury are yours—that all that is Christ's becomes your portion and inheritance. It is in virtue of your union with Christ, that His grace is yours, to strengthen and sustain you—His Spirit is yours, to guide, enlighten, and comfort you—His intercession is yours, to secure for you all needed blessing—His power is yours, to defend you from injury, to secure you against defeat—His heart is yours, into which you may pour all your sorrows, and receive His sympathy—His home is yours, to be your everlasting abode, that where He is, there you may be also.

Oh! what comfort and encouragement in the saddest and darkest hour, amid the sorest ills and the heaviest trials of life—to know that, though unworthy in ourselves to ask anything of God, we may draw near "in Christ Jesus," and feel sure that we have in Him, not only an all-prevailing Intercessor, but One united to us by the closest ties—who is deeply interested in our welfare—One for whose sake the Father will

withhold from us no good thing. What more is needed? What more can be desired? Christ as God all-powerful—Christ as Man all-gracious—Christ as God able to save—Christ as Man ready to sympathize—Christ as God alone worthy to present a sufficient atonement and sacrifice for sin—Christ as Man "in all things made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people. For, in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to support those who are tempted."

Reader! do you realize the preciousness of this truth—that, to be "in Christ," is to have everything the soul can require, in time and throughout eternity? This is the only real wealth. Earthly possessions pass away—fame, riches, honor—all these are but painted toys—but this is the pearl of great price—the treasure above all treasures—the enduring inheritance. To be "in Christ," is to "have happiness and heaven." He is essential to every soul, and where He is, the root of everything else that is required—truly longed for by a human being—is there too. Henceforth, "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The Son of God became the Son of man that He might make us sons of God forever. By His dying He destroyed death, and by His rising to life again, He restored to us everlasting life.

No wonder, the apostle, when contemplating this wondrous truth, should exclaim, "You are complete in Him." Yes, believers are complete—they have a fullness in Christ which nothing can exhaust—a love which passes knowledge—a strength which is omnipotent—and a faithfulness which cannot be questioned. And the more they dwell upon it, the deeper becomes the conviction of their own weakness and Christ's sufficiency—their own emptiness and His fullness—their own ignorance and His wisdom—their own utter inability to keep the path of duty, and their daily, hourly need of Christ to animate, sustain, and guide them.

You are complete in Him. Yes, it is absolute; unconditional; perfect; eternal—for "the word of the Lord endures forever"—"perfect in Christ Jesus." What words are these, from the same man, who says, "In me dwells no good thing?"—"When I would do good, evil is present with me." May we understand this more frequently, and learn to rejoice in Christ Jesus, while we learn, also, to have no confidence in the flesh. It was so



with the apostle. He felt that anything was too hard, the simplest thing too difficult, without Christ; the work before him only became possible—easy—when the promise was fulfilled—"My grace is sufficient for you; and my strength is made perfect in weakness." Then he could confidently say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

And the same lesson, namely, that of his own weakness and Christ's sufficiency, is frequently brought home to the believer. By painful and pressing trials—by reverses and misfortunes—by humiliating defeats in the conflict against temptation, is he reminded, that "in him dwells no good thing"—that his own strength is weakness—his own wisdom, folly. He is driven away from self—from all confidence in the flesh, to Him who alone can guide and sustain him. He is rendered more suspicious of inward pride, and, therefore, more earnest in prayer.

And this is the secret of all Christian progress—more earnest in prayer, for supplies of grace—and such supplies of grace will ever be found sufficient. Yes, Christian, although in your daily course you seem to struggle in your duty, and though nothing seems to go on satisfactorily, be assured of this, so long as you are really looking to Christ and relying upon Him—so long is He working in you by His Spirit—however difficult may be your tasks, you will make progress. You perhaps may never perceive it—you may not appear to make a step in advance—but, be not discouraged. Remember, "All the promises of God in Christ are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God;" and these promises are yours.

Suffering Christian! take comfort, and, painful as your trials may be, still come to the Throne of Grace, and humbly claim the fulfillment of those promises, which are yours in Christ Jesus. You will not be sent empty away, but will assuredly receive "grace sufficient" for you. Such has ever been the experience of God's children. Faith has achieved its grandest conquests on straitened and sorrowed fields. God leads His people to Himself through ways that they know not. He sets before them, sometimes, in His deepest love, larger and harder tasks. He beckons them on to steeper heights—with sharper rocks, where they must climb with pain and difficulty. He calls them on and upward, with His own animating voice, to some more splendid, because more grievous sacrifices; but, even when the gloom of darkness seems to have

enwrapped them in its folds, they are reminded, that "all the promises of God in Christ are yes, and Amen"—that these promises are theirs, in virtue of their union with Christ. A hand of love is outstretched, and with Jesus by their side, they advance more rapidly, and with firmer step, towards their heavenly home. On the heads of some of His children, God sets special sufferings as crowns of honor—as signs of what great things He has yet in reserve for them, because He will make these crosses, ladders of light, whereby they shall ascend nearer to Himself.

One of the hardest lessons which the children of God have to learn by the seeming rejection and refusal of their requests, is the wisdom and the love of God, in thus apparently thwarting their wishes and desires, and crushing hopes which they fondly cherish. Hard it is to find out the wisdom of such apparent hindrances—how are we to be put forward and upward, by being put back and cast down—encouraged, by being rebuked—prospered, by being baffled. When the company in the "Pilgrim's Progress" had to sit up all night watching at the house of Gaius, Great-heart kept them awake with this riddle—"He that would kill must first be overcome," and, the truth in it has been practically dug out—by trials that broke sleep—through many a hard fortune—in every Christian experience since. It needs wakeful watchers, spiritual eyesight, to read that riddle of life—how defeat helps progress, how a compulsory standing still speeds on—how humiliation exalts—how putting a cross upon the shoulders lightens the burden of the race.

But, Christ has solved the wonder in His own cross—and, in virtue of their union with Him, believers are enabled to do so likewise. They discover that, standing still at the right time—in the right way—is the right purpose—is the surest advance—that waiting on God, enables them to surmount obstacles too great for their own feeble powers, and that the failure of their favorite plans has often proved the richest success of the soul. Let the 'pressure of trouble' drive them down from their own giddy heights of pride and self-confidence and they will come upon the primary foundation, and grow strong out of the rock.

Grief after grief brings us to joy—broken in spirit, we are made whole—humbled, we are exalted—often defeated, we yet gain the victory—and our progress heavenward, is hastened by the very things which we

imagine would certainly retard it. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." "In six and in seven troubles," the believer is tried, but in six and in seven troubles, the believer is strengthened; and the various changes and trials of life—the apparent non-fulfillment of God's promises—are all intended to work together for his good—that he may be driven from man to God—from earth to heaven—from broken cisterns to the true fountain—that he may be brought to feel "what is there here to trust in?—where is the arm on which I can lean?—where can I go for support? I have found everything earthly to be unstable, changing, evanescent. In You, O God, and in You alone, can there be no change—Your Word is truth—great is Your faithfulness—therefore to You I fly for refuge, comfort, strength, holiness, and peace.

Reader! as now we draw our meditations to a close, we would, earnestly and affectionately, press upon you the solemn truth, that if you would make progress in the divine life—if you would enjoy inward peace, comfort, hope—if you would "abide in Christ," and glorify your Father in heaven by "bearing much fruit," then you must cultivate the daily habit, of revealing all your longings and desires, to your God and Savior at the Throne of Grace. In this respect, it is not one act of faith that makes us "complete in Him." "We grow up into Him." We are not molded all at once into the image of Christ, we must be "renewed day by day." The divine life of the soul is a breathing life, and its breath is drawn from "fellowship with Christ". Christ is as needful every moment, as He is the first hour of conscious believing on Him. We need Him every night and morning, every struggling, toiling day, as much as when at the beginning of our spiritual history, He makes the sense of His grace and truth dawn upon the soul.

Oh! strive to apprehend this glorious truth—to realize more of a personal, abiding union with Christ, by living near to the Throne of Grace, and by a daily conformity to His image. It is God's declared purpose to give you success in your effort. Rest upon this thought—carry it ever in your heart—do not forget you are called to this glorious work—to go on, from day to day, into more entire conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. This must be your constant aim, and effort—to part with and to master, every evil

desire and passion, until it might with truth be said of you—"He is a Christian, because he is like to Christ." This is your "calling" always to make progress in it, until the last moment of your earthly existence—yes—when your faculties fail you, and you are confined to the bed of sickness, or it may be, the bed of death—the period of active service passed—and, nothing left for you but to bear the will of God—even then will the transformation grow more rapid and complete, up to the last moment, and each of the disciples of Christ shall, in the last faltering moments of death, become like his Master, before he soars away to participate in that Master's glory.

And, Christian, if it would strengthen your faith in the promises of God, and in the efficacy of earnest prayer—if it would encourage you in your difficulties and struggles against sin, to know that Christ is near—to hear Him speak—to take hold of His strengthening hand—know that He is nearer still than this. Every pure thought that rises in your bosom is Christ's suggestion—every holy desire and resolution, the proof that He is at hand—every kindling of the spirit into devotion, the unconscious recognition by the spirit of His heavenly presence. Open the door of the heart to Him, and the very mind and soul of Jesus will pass into yours—your spirit will be suffused with His—the very heart of Jesus will be beating within your bosom. Christ will be in you "the hope of glory," and "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, you will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Most gracious God, in whom alone dwells all fullness of light and wisdom, illuminate our minds, we beseech You, by Your Holy Spirit, in the true understanding of Your Word. Give us grace to receive it with reverence, and humility, and sincere faith. We bless You for the gracious promises which You have given us in Christ Jesus. Dispose us cheerfully to cast upon You all our cares, humbly to commit to Your keeping all our interests, and earnestly to seek the aid of Your strength, and the guidance of Your wisdom, in all our undertakings. Show us more and more the divine fullness and sufficiency of our Lord and Savior, for our spiritual needs. May we receive and rest upon Him alone, as able and willing to save us unto the uttermost. Give us grace continually to abide in Him, that we may bear much fruit. May He be formed within us the hope of

glory. As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so may we walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith, and abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Blessed Savior, do abide in us, and make us wholly Yours. Enable us more faithfully to live as in Your presence. In every season of danger and of trouble, may we look up to You as our very present help. In every hour of trial or temptation may we stand in awe, lest in anything we offend You. And when our course on earth is finished, grant, O Lord, that we may be supported and comforted with Your presence in the valley of the shadow of death, and may at last come to the glories of Your heavenly kingdom, and there be made perfectly blessed in seeing, serving, and enjoying You forever. Amen.

Rejoice, believers, in the Lord;  
He makes your cause his own;  
The hopes that rest upon His word,  
Can never be overthrown.

Though countless foes beset the road,  
And feeble is your arm,  
Your life is hid with Christ in God,  
Beyond the reach of harm.

Though God be veiled from mortal sense,  
Faith sees Him always near,  
A guide, a glory, a defense,  
Then wherefore should you fear?

For sure as Jesus overcame,  
And triumphed once for you,  
So all that love His blessed name,  
Shall triumph with Him too.

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Oh, how kindly have you led me,  
Heavenly Father, day by day!

Found my dwelling, clothed and fed me,  
Furnished friends to cheer my way!  
Did You bless me, did You chasten,  
With Your smile, or with Your rod,  
'Twas that still, my step might hasten  
Homeward, heavenward, to my God.

Oh, how slowly have I often  
Followed where Your hand would draw!  
How Your kindness failed to soften!  
How Your chastening failed to awe!  
Make me for Your rest more ready,  
As Your path is longer trod;  
Keep me in Your friendship steady,  
Until You call me home, my God.  
—Thomas Grinfield

## **THE STORY OF NAAMAN THE SYRIAN** **An Old Testament Chapter in Providence and**

# Grace

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## INTRODUCTION—THE CONTRASTED RIVERS

"Aren't the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" 2 Kings 5:12

One gospel memory alone is connected by clear inference with the Abana

and Pharpar, but that is a very interesting one. It must have been in the waters of these rivers of Syria which Naaman loved so well, that Saul of Tarsus was baptized into the name of "that same Jesus" who met him on the Damascus highway, and transformed the persecutor into a chosen vessel of mercy. In these days when so much stress is laid on "sacramental efficacy" and the alleged virtue of "apostolic succession," it is surely worthy of note, that the holiest of saints, the greatest and most eminent of inspired apostles, had the baptismal rite administered to him, not from the sacred streams of Kedron, or Siloam, or Jordan, or other waters in the land of his fathers, but from "the golden river" of pagan story. Moreover, as there was no real or imaginary charm in the element, neither was there in the administrator of the ordinance. He received the sacramental sign by sprinkling or immersion, not from Peter, or James, or John—not from any apostle, or boasted "successor of the apostles," but from the hands of a humble, lowly, unknown disciple—"one Ananias"—whose best apostolical succession was his simple faith and brotherly love (Acts 9:17, 18). Surely that one act of Christian baptism, specially appointed by God Himself for His greatest disciple, minister, and missionary, conveys an impressive testimony and rebuke to all "who teach for doctrine the commandments of men," that "neither is he who plants anything, neither he who waters, but God that gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7).

Nor can we wonder that the comparison on the part of Naaman, between the one only river of Palestine and these mountain streams of Syria, should have been depreciatory as regards the former. Art, combined with the foregone conclusions of enthusiastic travelers, has done its best to make the "Waters of Israel" beautiful and picturesque. But these (and we speak of the Jordan specially)—though ever enshrined, independent of all accessories and surroundings, in the sanctuary of holiest thought—must be content, so far as 'natural attractiveness' is concerned, to accept the unchanged verdict of the Syrian commander. Disguise it as we may, no memory of Palestine is so disappointing. The Jordan, at its most consecrated portion—the spot where in all likelihood the miraculous crossing took place, possibly not very far from the still holier locality of the Savior's baptism, and with greater probability still, where at the summons of the Baptist "there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea,



and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:5)—is uninteresting in the extreme. Its waters are flanked by enormous mud-banks, partially and poorly hidden by coarse vegetation; a reedy jungle relieved by no pebbly shore—no rocks tinted with lichen and moss—no bright foliage to hang in graceful tresses over the brown torrent. It is with a shock, those who are conversant with the clear, limpid waters of other countries, gaze for the first time on the stream associated to them with recollections so hallowed—whose very name, in manifold ways, has been incorporated in sacred-hymn and song—"the Border river," washing the shores of "the Better Land"—the "shining fields" "on the other side Jordan." In one word, after having visited both the streams of Syria and of Palestine, we can emphatically endorse the verdict pronounced 2800 years ago—"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"

But we hasten from these features of mere local and geographical interest, to illustrate the "imperishable spiritual lessons" suggested and unfolded in this graphic tale of the pilgrimage of a Gentile soldier from his distant Lebanon home to the land of Israel. That river of which we have just spoken, transmuting barrenness into fertility, life into death, was to have its moral counterpart in the case of this cleansed leper and heathen chief.

The 'votary of Rimmon' is made a 'trophy of Divine grace', and, by loyal adhesion and allegiance to Israel's God, becomes the first of that "handful of grain in the earth upon the top of the mountains," the fruit whereof is one day to "shake like Lebanon" (Ps. 72:16).

The writer, fully conscious, in the subsequent pages, of his shortcomings in the treatment of an interesting subject, cannot better draw these introductory remarks to a close, than in the words of D. Rogers, an old and quaint divine of the seventeenth century, who has written a copious volume on the incidents of this same chapter, and who thus terminates his dedicatory epistle—"Therefore, to conclude, I shall desire you, good reader, to apply yourself with your best care and prayers to peruse what God has herein presented you withal; and if you pick anything out, bless Him, and pray for me."

## THE LEPER-WARRIOR

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria—he was also a mighty man of valor; but he was a leper."—2 Kings 5:1

"The king of Aram had high admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy."—2 Kings 5:1

Many are the pleasing and graphic incidents interspersed throughout Old Testament story, which have the scene of their occurrence laid in the Land of Promise. In the narrative, however, whose lessons are at present to engage our attention, we are called to cross the northern boundary of Lebanon to the contiguous kingdom of Syria, the long and troublesome rival of Israel. A period of quiescence had now happily supervened between the Hebrew tribes and their hereditary foe. King Benhadad and Joram were, for the time, on amicable terms, and a peaceful domestic picture opens to us, like a gleam of sunshine amid the storms of war.

Every country in the world has been proud of its illustrious soldiers. We may well believe that the empire of which Damascus was the capital, would not be behind in doing homage to military genius—that her highest honors would be heaped on "a mighty man of valor." Such was NAAMAN, the most conspicuous among the group of figures in our narrative chapter—"the Earl marshal," as an old writer calls him, "to the King of Aram"—the commander-in-chief of the Syrian hosts, the favored idol of a warlike race. Not long before, he had returned flushed with triumph at the head of his troops from the land of Israel. "By him," we read, "the Lord had given deliverance to the Syrians." According to Jewish tradition (in the

Midrash Tehillim ) it is he who is spoken of in the last chapter of 1st Kings, as the "certain man who drew a bow at a venture, and smote Ahab between the joints of the harness," thereby deciding the fortunes of the day at Ramoth Gilead. By others, he is described in person as of colossal stature—the Goliath of the north—a giant cedar in Lebanon. We may picture him, at all events, as a man of consummate abilities—the trusted adviser of his king—the pride of the army—his name a household word alike in the palaces of Damascus and among the hamlets of Syria; invested, doubtless, by his master with the most distinguished insignia in the power of royalty to bestow—badges of "barbaric pearl and gold" conferred alone on rare personal prowess and in recognition of illustrious deeds.

His home, we may farther imagine, would be one of the "paradises" in that 'wilderness of gardens,'—a palatial dwelling, furnished and beautified with richest fabrics from looms of the old city—trophies of victory adorning its walls, shields and bucklers and spears that had been gathered as spoil in many a hard won fight—with all in external nature that could minister pleasure to eye and ear—the murmur of streams, the music of birds, the floral wealth of the most productive "climate of the sun."

So far, too, as we can gather from a few scattered hints contained in this brief narration, if we except the quick resentment and impatience of contradiction incident to the training of one born to be obeyed, Naaman's character seems to have been a noble one. He was not only "a great man with his master," but "honorable"—of an unblemished reputation. We may, moreover, claim for him (what is rare in such a proud position of eminence and power), traits of amiability, benignity, goodness. His was not the haughty and arrogant demeanor which forbade confidential freedom of communion with those in lowlier station. His servants were not afraid to call him "My father;" nor did a Hebrew slave tremble (as she would have done in the presence of a tyrannical superior) to offer kindly counsel on his behalf. Her affectionate interest in his circumstances, at once bespeaks her favorable regard for her master.

But there is something preying on that lofty soul. NAAMAN is supposed to mean "beautiful," "lovely," "goodly to look upon." Alas! the name in his

case was little else now than a cruel mockery. A foul worm is shriveling up the gourd which trellised the earth-bower of his glory—a pestilential touch has turned his gold into base alloy. The most dreaded of Eastern diseases, and that, too, in its most malignant form, has assaulted his body, and will soon convert it into a living, loathsome charnel-house. If he had been a Hebrew by birth, he would have been doomed to cheerless solitude—shut up night and day, the lonely tenant of a darkened chamber, separated hopelessly from the outer world, and denied communion with his own domestic circle—warning all who came near him of the contagious nature of his plague, by the utterance of the cry, "Unclean! unclean!"

"Room for the leper! Room! And as he came,  
The cry passed on.  
Forthwith, aside they stood—  
Matron and child, and pitiless manhood—all  
Who met him on his way, and let him pass.  
And onward through the open gate he walked  
A leper, with the ashes on his brow,  
Sackcloth upon his loins; he seemed like one  
Whose heart is with an iron curb repressed,  
Crying, 'Unclean! unclean!'"

Although it is evident from the narrative, that this rigid seclusion, so imperative in the case of the Jew, was not enforced in the country north of Hermon (for Naaman continued to discharge the duties of the highest civil office of the state), yet his must necessarily have been the most miserable of existences. The red spot, the well-known herald symptom, must at least have appeared, which would end in the ulcered face, the shriveled skin, the croaking voice, the glaring eyes, the decayed fingers (soon rendering him unable to draw the bow which had served him heir to his renown), the wreck of memory, the premature decay of a tortured body, the depression and despondency of mind, the constant dread of imparting to others the terrible disease, the feverish and chronic restlessness which made life a burden. That ever-present thought—rather, we should say, that terrible reality—would pursue him everywhere, dogging his heels like a hideous spectre. It would haunt him

as he sat with his chiefs by watchfire and camp on the tented field. It would dim and fret and darken the hour of triumph, when amid the blare of trumpets and shout of citizens, he rode in the chariot of victory through the streets of Damascus. When he headed the festal throng, and entered Rimmon's Temple with his master, it would seem as if the grim idol, in some fit of wanton, retributive vengeance, had set upon him this terrible brand—selected him as victim of the supposed curse-mark of earth's avenging deities, which even the Hebrews considered to be Jehovah's visible scourge, and which they called "the finger of God." Of no avail to him were the thousand charms of his Eden-home. Each setting sun, as it tipped Hermon's crest with gold, chronicled the nearer approach of the enemy his valor could never vanquish.

Such was NAAMAN. "He was a great man with his master, and honorable, BUT he was a leper."

1. Let us learn from this touching history, the vanity of all earthly glory. On the lintels of that princely home in Aram's princely capital, are written the words, "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of grass." He who seemed to have been once "fair" and "beautiful" as he was brave and generous, may have the Prophet's wail appropriately uttered over him—"How is the staff broken, and the beautiful rod!" His beauty "consumes away like a moth." Our hero, whose martial deeds the matrons and damsels of city and village, like those of Israel, had celebrated with timbrel and harp, would envy the lot of the fettered captive or squalid beggar in the cells or streets of Damascus.

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in man, in whom there is no help."  
"Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity!" In vain have courtly physicians lavished on him their skill. In vain have the balsam-orchards of the Abana distilled their healing treasures. In vain have sorcerers and magicians exercised their occult arts. In vain has he, again and again, in piteous supplication bent his knee in the national sanctuary, and loaded the shrine of the idol god with propitiatory bribes. The malady is inveterate. That plague-spot embitters every hour of life, and throws the shadows of despair on an anguished future. Earth has no remedy to soothe his tortured spirit; he looks forward to the quiet rest of the grave as the only and welcome release from his load of misery. As the vile

worm, in a long future age, refuted the asserted divinity of King Herod; (Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God. So he was consumed with worms and died)—so did this cruel monitor whisper the humbling lesson in the ear of the warrior—"Let not the mighty man glory in his might!"

"BUT he was a leper." True picture of human life! Go the round of existence—mark these varying waves which fret and chafe on its shores. Who is there that has not to tell of some similar shadow projected on an otherwise bright—it may be the brightest path—some flaw in the strong building, some blot on the fair temple pillar? Let us gather a few testimonies.

Here is one who has all that the world can bestow; BUT, as in the case of Naaman, disease is blanching his cheek, and appointing him wearisome days and restless nights. What to him, his ingots of gold and lavish luxuries and lordly palaces, with these weary vigils of pain and suffering, which rarest skill and tenderest affection strive alike in vain to mitigate and abbreviate?

Here is another (Daniel 5), with full health and strength; the magic circle of home is unbroken; no olive plant is missed around his table. He had boasted, moreover, in the multitude of his riches; he had won his coveted place amid 'the aristocracy of wealth'—the golden gate and key had been, as he thought, securely reached and won, opening into pleasure, ease, and splendor. But, "in the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the palace wall, 'Mene, God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it!'" His worldly means, which he was a lifetime in amassing, have taken wings to themselves and fled. One wave of adversity has strewn the beach with the fragile ruins. Seated amid the wreck of his gilded treasures, he pursues in silence the monotone of wounded pride and disappointed ambition—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit;" while an inward voice, like the whisper of some avenging angel, seems to take up the parable, "Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth

you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment." (James 5:1-3).

Here is another, into whose lap the fabled horn of plenty has been poured. In addition to the possession of that mere vulgar wealth which is the satisfying goal of so many, he has honors, family possessions, pride of rank, resources of intellect, cultivated tastes. He has risen to honorable distinction, and enjoyed the pageantry of power. Before him Fame has blown her trumpet. He is drinking, apparently to the full, luscious draughts of earthly glory; fondled and caressed by fawning crowds, the world points its finger, and says of him, "There, at least, is a happy man!" BUT, alas! it knows not the secret wound that is preying on his spirit and poisoning the fountains of life. It knows not how he has to lock up in the depth of his heart of hearts—the story of his profligate son; how his very affluence is extorted to pay the wicked debts or to feed the riot and excess of a profligate life.

Here is another, occupying some similar coveted pinnacle of distinction, who has reached the goal of success, and outdistanced his fellows in the uncertain race. BUT, muffled from the world's eye and estimate, "the heart knows its own bitterness." That very success has roused the spleen of jealous rivals. Maligned, misunderstood, vilified, he is doomed to bear in silence the shafts of envy—it may be, the treachery and detraction of trusted friends.

Here is another, who has health and wealth, and unbounded material prosperity. Poverty has never darkened his dwelling; the whisper of malice has never ruffled his peace; troops of true-hearted associates gather around his hearth; the widow and the orphan have been blessed out of his abundant treasure, and he himself has been made richer thereby. BUT, ah! another and more terrible foe has made sad incursions on his homestead. The names to him most familiar and best beloved have been carved on tombstones. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not." He can add his sorrowful testimony to myriads of broken hearts, that no golden key or golden gate can exclude the sleepless foe—no golden bridle can rein in the "pale horse." His "but"—his soliloquy—is the saddest of all—"You have put lover and friend far from me, and my acquaintance into

darkness!"

We need not enlarge. That little exceptional word "but" qualifies every condition of life, whatever the characteristics of that condition may be. It blurs the gilded ceilings of the rich; it leaves its impress, in diversified form, on the dwellings of the poor. It clips and ruffles the soaring wing of proud intellect. It puts its drag on the triumphal chariot in the hour of ovation. It is God's voice addressing the crowd of weary humanity—"Arise, and depart, for this is not your rest; it is polluted!"

2. This leads us to note, as a second general lesson, that we should regard our trials as designed by God for our good. Naaman's trial was indeed no ordinary one. Of all humiliations, what to him could be more chafing and galling? We know how captivating in the eyes of Orientals, were outward attractions—personal form and lordly demeanor and bearing. How touchingly the minstrel king laments the "beauty" of Israel—the twin heroes fallen in high places, who were "swifter than eagles and stronger than lions." Here was "the beautiful"—the admired leader of the Syrian armies—who was accustomed to be foremost in the fight, and last in the field—about to become helpless as a child, fit to be occupant not of the martial tent but of the leper-house—"from the sole of the foot even unto the head no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:6). And yet in his case the parable was expounded—"Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14). From that leper's couch there rose, as in the patriarch's night-vision, a ladder reaching to heaven. He, who, in an earthly sense, here renounced and forfeited the name "beautiful," was to be clothed upon with the beauty of the God of Israel, and to have a name given him better than that of sons or of daughters!

And is it not so with the Lord's people still? His dispensations are often incomprehensible. His name to them is that which He gave to Manoah—"Wonderful," "Secret," "Mysterious." That wearing sickness, that wasting heritage of pain, these long tossings on a fevered, sleepless pillow; where can there be love or mercy there? But the silence and loneliness of the sickbed is the figurative "wilderness," where He "allures" that He may "speak comfortably unto them, and give them their vineyards from thence" (Hosea 2:14, 15), rousing them from the



contemptible dream of earthly happiness, from the sordid and the secular, from busy care and debasing solicitude, to the divine and the heavenly!

Or, that unexpected heritage of poverty—the crash of earthly fortune—the forfeiture of earthly gain—the stripping the walls of cherished and familiar treasure, and sending those 'nursed in the lap of luxury' penniless on the world—where is God's mercy or love here? But it is through this beneficial, though rough discipline, that God weans from the enervating influence of prosperity, leading them to exchange 'the mess of earthly pottage' for 'the bread of life'—perishable substance for the fine gold of heavenly gain and durable riches.

Or, that cruel blighting of young hope and pure affection—the withering of some cherished gourd—the opening of early graves for the loving and beloved; holiest ties formed, but the 'memory' of which is all that remains. Where is God's kindness and mercy in creating bonds only to sever them; raising up friends only to bury them?—the plaintive experience and utterance of the lone mother in Israel, that of many—"Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me!" (Ruth 1:20).

But the 'shallow rills' are dried by Him, in order to lead to the 'great Fountainhead'; the links of earthly affection are broken, in order that stronger and more enduring ones may be formed above; the rents have been made in the house of clay, only to render more inviting "the building of God—the house not made with hands"—stimulating to live more for that world where there are no "buts"—where all is perfection—where we shall stand without a "but" and without a fault before the throne.

Yes, suffering Christian! believe it—your trials are designed by Him who sent them, as in the case of Naaman's leprosy, to bring you nearer Himself. They are His own appointed gateways, opening up and admitting to great spiritual blessings. The mother eagle is said purposely to put a thorn into her nest to compel her young brood to fly. If God gave us no thorn—if He never disturbed the downy nest of our worldly ease, we might be tempted to remain grovelers forever. He knows us better; He loves us better. The day will come when these "buts" in our present lot,

will extract nothing from us but grateful praise; when we shall joyfully testify, 'Had it not been for these wilderness experiences—that leprosy—that protracted sickness—that loss of worldly position—the death of that cherished friend, I would still have been clinging to 'earth' as my portion, content with the polluted rill and the broken cistern, instead of drawing water out of the wells of salvation.'

As it was Naaman's malady which revealed to him his wretchedness and misery, and impelled him to cross the heights of Lebanon to the Prophet's home in Israel; so are God's children, by means of diversified trial, roused to the conscious reality of their spiritual danger—aye, and often too, to the presence and power of foes, fiercer than the beasts of prey which haunted these Syrian mountains. Thus are they prepared to listen, as they would not otherwise have done, to the Divine voice, as Naaman listened to it, though in another acceptation of the words, "Come with me from Lebanon—look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. ... Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire with spikenard; spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices—a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (Sol. Song 4:8, 13-15).

3. We may gather a third lesson—Not to envy others; but to be content with our own lot, whatever that may be. We little know what trials may be lurking in what seems an enviable position of life—what 'adders' may be sleeping in the flowery bank, or amid the bed of roses—what rottenness and decay may be under the covering of virgin snow. "I was envious at the foolish," says Asaph, "when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble, as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning....When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely You did set them in slippery places; You cast them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly

consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:12-19).

Let us not be covetous of earthly greatness or exaltation—of climbing higher the 'dizzy pyramid of human opulence or ambition'. If we reached the envied summit, we might in all likelihood find new vexations and trials to which we are strangers in a humbler and lowlier lot. Though God has appointed a diversity in human rank, we believe there is a greater equality, a nicer proportionate adjustment in human happiness, than is at first supposed. The increase of riches or of honors brings too often only new cares, anxieties, and responsibilities. True substantial happiness is not dependent on circumstances, but on mind and character. Pass from many a splendid mansion in city or suburban life, its inhabitants pampered with all that wealth and luxury can give, but where, at the same time, there is pride or jealousy, or the smouldering fires of guilty passion—pass from this to some shepherd's hut in one of our lonely mountain glens, the abode of honest toil, essential virtue, and simple religion—where the debasement of malignant envy, and the effeminacy of demon vice are unknown—around whose frugal table a group of Nature's children are lovingly gathered—and say, whether true sterling happiness is found under the gorgeous glitter—or under the smoky rafter? Rather have the cottage with the "great gain" of godliness and contentment, than the palace without them. "A little that a just man has, is better than the riches of many wicked." Whatever be our earthly condition; whether it be at the extremes of opulence and poverty, or the commoner lot of lowly mediocrity, be this our alone object of aspiration and ambitious desire—to have God as our portion—the possession of that loving Father's smile, which transfigures, and beautifies all we are and all we have—transmuting the basest metal into the gold of Ophir. The poorest, so far as the world is concerned, if they have an interest in these better riches, can adopt as their own, the Apostle's paradox—"Having nothing, yet possessing all things."

"O Thou bounteous Giver of all good,  
Who art of all Your gifts, Yourself the crown;  
Give what You can, without You we are poor,  
And with You rich, take what You will away!"

4. Finally, before closing these preliminary remarks, let us admire and

adore the Divine sovereignty. What more unlikely subject to be humbled in the dust—brought to take the place of a little child, than that ignorant idolater of a heathen land—an utter stranger to the true Jehovah; inflated, as he could hardly fail to be, with the pride of rank and the pride of conquest; accustomed to adulation and flattery; moreover, with the scar of leprosy to stir into rebellion, every feeling of his better nature? It would seem easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for this commander of the hosts of Syria to seek for mercy at the hands of the God and the Prophet of a hated race! But that God had loved him with an everlasting love; and He will take His own means of saying "to the north, Give up," and of bringing this son "from afar." God goes to this poor victim of a loathsome disease, racked with torture amid the splendid mockeries of regal garments, and downy pillow, and tapestried chamber, (yet truly a bed of sackcloth and ashes), and says, "Though you have laid among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold" (Ps. 68:13). Oh, how wondrous are these sovereign purposes and decrees of Jehovah! Who can resist, "who has resisted His will?"

We love to think, that all events are in His hand—from the creation of worlds and the revolution of empires, to the fall of the raindrop and the sparrow—and that the complicated wheels of providence are ever revolving and evolving nothing but good. Is it nations, hatching schemes of wicked war, and wild ambition, and aggrandizement? How comforting to think that there is an eye upon every such seething cauldron of human passions! that there is a hand covering the craters of these slumbering volcanoes, preventing the imprisoned fires bursting forth until the Lord gives the word. No, more, that when the lava-stream breaks forth on its mission of desolation and judgment, it is only for an appointed season and an appointed reason; and that His own Church will come forth from the fierce boiling cauldron "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." There is One in heaven who has the hearts of kings in His hands, and who turns them even as He turns the rivers of waters. "O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. ...Behold the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, shall lop the bough with terror, and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled! And He shall cut down the thickets of the

forest with iron, and LEBANON shall fall by a mighty One" (Isa. 10:5, 33, 34).

And He who rules over worlds and empires, rules over the individual human spirit; controls, in the case of each, the empire of thought and the fitful human will. See how, by the power of His omnipotent Spirit, He led this haughty soldier of Damascus; how in time He conquered the pride of rank, the pride of fame, the pride of riches, the pride of heathen religion, the pride of self-independence, and made him a monument of His grace and mercy! As we gaze upon Naaman in his solitary chamber, with ulcered body and reddened eye, shunned by his fellows, weary and desponding of life—moreover, the votary of a pagan divinity, and shrinking, as we would have thought, from recognizing the hand and owning the power of the tutelary deity of his country's enemies—we may well, on all human calculations, adopt the hopeless words of the Prophet in more than their literal sense—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" But what is impossible with men is possible with God! By a variety of simple coincidences in His providence, He is to bring the leper-warrior, like the Hebrew king, to disown all human confidences, and to say, "In the Lord put I my trust!" (Ps. 11:1).

Shall we, moreover, ask—What was it that recommended Naaman to the notice and regard of the Jehovah of Israel—leading Him to select that 'wild olive tree among the rocks of Syria', to be grafted into the true olive tree? Was it his valor, his victories, his warlike demeanor and noble bearing, his political sagacity or astute statesmanship, or brilliant talents? No! these were but the qualities of earth; there was nothing god-like about them; they won only the hosannahs of this world. Personal claim on God's favor—he had none. The whole secret of His selection is thus unfolded—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." "I will call them my people who were not my people" (Rom. 9:25). God had, in the sovereignty of His own divine decrees, from all eternity inserted the name of this Aramite chief in higher and better than any military roll-call—one among a noble army of spiritual warriors who have since in every age "fought the good fight of faith, and laid hold on eternal life."

It is worthy of remembrance that the Divine Redeemer, in the course of His earthly ministry, took this same story of the Syrian soldier to enforce

and illustrate the theme of which we speak. "And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:27). The lepers of the covenant-nation were passed by. The leper of a Gentile kingdom—and that kingdom, too, the sworn foe of Israel—was selected. Still does the same Lord, "who is rich unto all that call upon Him," love to manifest and magnify His sovereignty, and the sovereignty of His grace, in hardened hearts which He breaks, and stubborn wills He subdues, and proud spirits He brings to lie low and submissive at the cross of His Son! Still He can fashion the unlikeliest and unshapeliest stones for His heavenly temple, and show that it is not of him that wills nor of him that runs, but of Himself who shows mercy. "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zech. 4:6, 7). "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are—That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:27-29). Side by side with Rimmon's shrine, is to be erected a new altar-stone, with the strange inscription carved upon it by a proud heathen, "JEHOVAH ROPHI"—"I am the Lord that heals you."

Are there any who read these pages, to whom the taint of a deeper and more malignant disease than that of Naaman is adhering, which is excluding them, as effectually as did the leprosy among the Jews of old, from all holy fellowship; and specially from fellowship and communion with the Great Father of Spirits—leaving them "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise?" All that you have, in the shape of material bliss, will avail you nothing in this dreadful self-isolation from goodness and from God—an isolation in which you feel you cannot in happiness live, and in which you dare not expect in peace to die. You may, like Naaman, have the world smiling on you—Fortune strewing your path with her capricious favors—your name borne on the plaudits of the multitude; but there is a fretful ulcer, a moral virus within, which poisons and destroys all outward good. Is there no

voice of mercy, no message of peace for you, and such as you? "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?"

Yes! the gospel discloses a wondrous way, by which the spiritual leper— (and that, too, even if his case should be the worst—apparently excluded hopelessly from the camp of the true Israel), may have a new name given, and become in the true sense of the word—"Naaman," "beautiful." He who is the alone Ideal of "the Beautiful"—who appropriates to Himself the name of "the Beautiful Shepherd," who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11), thus addresses you—"Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson (red and revolting, like the hue on the skin of leprosy), they shall be as wool" (Isa.1:18).

A deep sense of the vileness of sin, and a longing to get rid of it, combined with the realized consciousness of your own inability to do so, are the only conditions of acceptance and cure. It is said in a striking verse, "He will beautify the meek with salvation;" and yet again, "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way." "The meek"—who are they? The contrite, the lowly, the broken-hearted—those who, like the Syrian warrior, are willing to cast all their own grounds of cobweb-confidence "to the moles and to the bats"—who, turning their back on the Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, and their face toward the waters of Israel, are ready to say, in the words of one who keenly felt the pain and bitterness, in a spiritual sense, of the leper's separation from the camp of the true Israel, and longed, above all, for reinstatement in the forfeited love and fellowship of Him whose favor is life—"Purge me with hyssop" (the leper's appointed means of purification), "and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...For You desire not sacrifice, else would I give it; You delight not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:7, 10, 16, 17).

## THE LITTLE CAPTIVE MAID

Now groups of Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy!" 2 Kings 5:2-3

The God of heaven has high purposes of love and mercy in store for this idolatrous leper!

How is he to be reached? By what means, and through what instrumentality, is he to be brought up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and have a new song put into his lips? We are irresistibly led to recall the case of another "great and honorable man"—"as touching the righteousness of the law blameless"—who was arrested many ages afterwards, within sight of the same Syrian palace and capital; when a glorious light from the midday skies struck him blinded and speechless to the ground, and unfolded to his inner gaze the adorable Lord, whom he was persecuting. Will the God of Israel employ a similar miraculous agency and intervention now? Will He make bare His holy arm in the sight of heathen Damascus—congregate the prophets of Rimmon by the banks of Abana and Pharpar, as He did those of Baal, not many years before, on the heights of Carmel—and demonstrate, by the instantaneous cure of their hero, that "Jehovah alone is the Lord"?

Varied are the arrows in His quiver. He can, if He will, adopt great means to effect small purposes; and He can use the weakest and feeblest instrumentality to secure great purposes. He commits, in the present case, the treasure to a tiny earthen vessel, that the excellency and the power may appear to be altogether of Himself.

Among the 'trophies' of conquest in the halls of this warrior, there is a



living one. During the last campaign, the victorious troops of Benhadad, when ravaging the towns and villages of Israel, had taken, as part of their booty, a little girl, who had become a maid in Naaman's household. Like another northern chieftain of more ancient date (Judges 5:30), the commander-in-chief of the armies of Damascus may have claimed as his prescriptive right, possession of the young Hebrew captive; and, either from sympathy to her fate, the attractiveness of her disposition, or the grace and loveliness of her person, (possibly all combined), he gave her over to his wife, to become one of her slaves or female attendants.

Perhaps, however, it is not needful for us to infer, from the narrative, any such regular incursion and plunder of the Syrian soldiers, to account for her presence in the home of Naaman. She may more probably have been the victim of lawless private adventurers—seized by one of those marauding bands (here spoken of as "groups of Aramean raiders"), who kept the mountain borderland of Israel in a state of chronic terror. In those crude and savage times, more especially were the passes of Lebanon infested with plunderers, who waylaid caravans to and from Damascus, or made a sudden midnight attack on the defenseless villages of the Hebrews, carrying off their children, and selling them as slaves in the markets of Syria.

The brevity and simplicity of the Scripture account, leaves untold and unrecorded those circumstantial, which, in other narratives, would have given pathos and romance, to the story of this raid and captivity of the young girl. We are left to surmise all the young creature must have felt on that wild night of terror, when, wrenched by these pitiless mercenaries from the arms of those she loved, she was hurried in cruel indignity across the rough gorges of Hermon, ignorant alike of her own destiny and of the fate of the cherished ones she left behind—the bitter memory cleaving to her sensitive spirit of their ineffectual tears and stifled, unavailing prayers—the cry, it may be, of parental anguish ascending unheeded amid the flashing of swords and the bursting of smoke and flame—involving hamlet, vineyard, and oliveyard in mournful desolation and ruin. Then, perhaps, the sad sequel of being conveyed for sale to the slavemarket of the capital, where the most recent travelers to Damascus tell us there is conducted, at this hour, the same despicable trade.

Be all this, however, as it may; whether as part of the spoil of a victorious army, or a private purchase from a slave-dealer, this we know, that the God who had directed the steps of that captive maid to an alien land, had a high purpose to subserve in appointing as her destiny the dwelling of the Syrian warrior.

As has already been incidentally observed, we think it may be inferred from the whole story, that she had become affectionately attached to Naaman, and was sincerely touched by his misfortunes. Moreover, she had carried with her to the place of captivity many sacred and devoted memories of the land of her birth. She had probably been the inhabitant of a pious Hebrew home, where the name of her father's God was adored, and His prophets were revered. She had witnessed her new master's sufferings. She may have listened to his many mournful soliloquies, as with hurried step he paced his solitary chamber by day, or made its walls resound with his moans by night. If she had been the 'down-trodden flower' which most of the heathen slaves at that age of the world were, she must have muffled her own feelings of tender pity, and allowed her tears to flow in silence; dreading him, moreover (from her hereditary impressions), as bearing in his person the outer and visible symbol of a divine judgment. But it betokens the kindly and friendly atmosphere in which she moved, when we see this little captive hastening unabashed to her mistress, and with all the fullness of a sympathizing heart, and the tear of kindly devotion trembling in her eye, exclaiming, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy!"

Had she seen the illustrious successor of the Tishbite? This we know not. As the prophets of Israel (and none more so than Elisha) were continually on the move, going from city to city, and from hamlet to hamlet, it is possible her youthful imagination was full of remembrances of his venerated form and holy words. At any event, she had heard of what Israel's God had done by his hand; and when she thought of the miracles wrought by his instrumentality, and which had filled Palestine with his fame—dividing the waters of the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah—transforming into sweetness the bitter fountains of Jericho—and above all, restoring to life the Shunamite's son, we need not wonder at her

young and ardent faith and love kindling at the thought, "Can He, who has thus stormed death itself, and spoiled the great spoiler of his prey, not cure my master? I shall at least seek to requite his kindness towards an unprotected slave, by making the attempt!"

Her childlike nature has an instinctive assurance, that the God of her fathers is not the exclusive, unloving, isolated Being which then, as now, stern sectaries and narrow bigot Rabbis would make Him—that He had lately revealed Himself to the greatest of all the prophets—not in the tempest, nor earthquake, nor fire, but in the "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Her footsteps, perhaps, may at first have faltered; her young heart may have been full of misgivings. Many in her position would have been repelled with the thought, that to venture on such a suggestion would be unwarranted and rash presumption. "But the thing is from the Lord." She is willing, with a heroine spirit, to brave and dare all—the smiles of the incredulous, the frowns of the disapproving, the scorn of fawning courtiers. No time can be lost—delay may be fatal. The horrible disease is already projecting on the path of Naaman, the shadow of death. So, committing her cause to a Mightier than all the mighty ones of earth, she ventures into the presence of her mistress and makes her unselfish and impassioned plea.

There are many LESSONS to be derived from this simple incident. Let us note—

1. God often works by FEEBLE means. A girl—"a little maid"—a hated Hebrew—a slave. What influence can she have on a man whose name was so lately the pride and terror of all Syria? As well speak of an infant uprooting the monarch oak tree, or turning the course of the roaring mountain-torrent.

Not infrequently, by small, and apparently inadequate instrumentality, does the Divine Being magnify His own greatness and power. Even in the natural world, great results are often accomplished by trifling agencies. It is a little insect that rears in the sea-caves its tier on tier of coral rocks—the wreckers of navies, and the dread of the mariner. The snow-flake, which drops with velvet footfall to the earth, loads the avalanche which bears terror and destruction among Alpine valleys and their smiling

hamlets. It is the tiny acorn, of which the child can make a plaything, that is the germ of the giant oak—the former wooden-wall of our island home—the old type and safeguard of a great nation's strength.

So the Almighty, at times, uses the feeblest and unlikeliest means to effect His purposes. He who employed the crowing of a rooster to melt the heart of Peter, and the dumb donkey speaking with man's voice to rebuke the madness of the Prophet, can consecrate the humblest, and even lowest things, to be the ministers of His will and the preachers of His truth. Who need ever despise the day of small things—when we see a young maiden from the valleys of Palestine, preparing, by a few simple words uttered in faith, a pathway for a royal chariot—and better still, leaving to all subsequent ages the legacy of a story of grace, which has interested and moved every heart where the Bible is known and loved?

Yes, it is often not the powerful sermon—not the wasting sickness—not the desolating bereavement. These are often allowed to pass unheeded; their echoes falling fainter and yet fainter on the soul, like the dying reverberations of the retreating thunder. But how often is "a word in season"—a child's look or saying, a simple tract, a passing funeral, a loving memory from the grave, the tender and sincere ways of the departed, the hymn of infancy, the mother's prayer lisped at a time we almost fail to recall—how often are these slender arrows winged with unutterable blessings! These are the "little maids" of Naaman's house—little wedges inserted that rend the rocky heart in pieces—little levers, which, in the hand of God, elevate and regenerate the whole moral being.

2. Learn, that ALL of us, in our varied spheres, may exert an influence for good. Let none say, "My sphere is worthless, because limited; my influence is unavailing, because restricted and circumscribed. Who would listen to so feeble a voice—who would be swayed by so humble an example as mine?"

Who dare say so—after perusing the story of the Hebrew maid? If ever one seemed to be excluded, by her position, from doing anything influential, it was this helpless slave-girl—this forgotten flower—this 'exotic' in a heathen palace, drooping its dewy leaves in an alien soil. But the law of kindness was in her heart; and out of the abundance of the

heart the mouth spoke. Out of the mouth of this babe, God perfected praise because of her enemies, that He might still the enemy and the avenger (Ps. 8:2). Her gentle, unselfish, self-denying conduct is worthy of all note. If she had been like many—like most—plucked crudely away from her paternal hearth and home, and doomed to a life of slavery—she would have resented the injury. If feelings of retaliation had influenced her, she would have watched with malicious pleasure the progress of the disease that was sapping her master's frame. She would have kept secreted, in the depths of her heart, the knowledge of the great Prophet who might in the name of his God bid it forever away. But acting on those 'gospel motives and principles', afterwards revealed, of "love to an enemy"—"overcoming evil with good"—with no resentment in her bosom, but with that bosom bleeding only at the sight and cries of a fellow-sufferer, she rushes to her mistress, and with earnest tones offers her plea—"I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy!"

Perhaps we may be warranted to infer more from the narrative. Who knows, but in that lowly, childlike bosom, the good seed of everlasting life may have early been sown and taken root; that the blessings of her father's God may have lighted up her own soul with peace and joy, and that she may have long been yearning with desire, to impart to her heathen master and mistress those glorious truths regarding Israel's Jehovah, which had made her own country and her own heart what they were? Perhaps, in her solitary hours, the imprisoned bird may have wondered with herself—"How can I sing the Lord's song in this strange land? When shall I have the favorable opportunity of unlocking the long pent-up secret, which, for weary months I have been desirous of telling to this darkened household?"

She may often have gone, as an attendant on her royal mistress, to the house of Rimmon; and gazing there in sadness on the senseless idol, the psalm of her own minstrel-king may have come to mind—"For our God is in the heavens, and He does as He wishes. Their idols are merely things of silver and gold, shaped by human hands. They cannot talk, though they have mouths, or see, though they have eyes! They cannot hear with their ears, or smell with their noses, or feel with their hands, or walk with their

feet, or utter sounds with their throats! And those who make them are just like them, as are all who trust in them." Psalm 115:3-8

The opportunity she has long desired seems at last to offer itself. Now is the time for that caged "nightingale" to warble the notes that had long struggled for utterance, and "to sing the songs of Zion in the darkness of Syria." Her prayers are heard. It is said in one of the Psalms, "The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those who published it." But now, when the Lord gave the word, feeble was the voice of her that published it. Yet "as arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth" (Ps. 127:4). How much was dependent on that proclamation!—how much was bound up in the few words that fell from the mouth of that child!—how many were destined to be affected by them! Syria—her king—her hero-chief—his household—his soldiers—multitudes in Israel—and we in every age.

We know not where her dust was laid at her decease, whether in Naaman's mausoleum at Damascus—resting side by side with the warrior's ashes—or in her own native valley in Palestine—"gathered to her fathers." But this we know, that her epitaph has been in all lands and in all hearts, and that at this hour she "being dead, yet speaks."—That little wave, rising at the gate of Syria, is rippling still!

Would that we might all fully realize the lesson which is here taught us—that there is no such thing as a person without any influence. We must either be like the aromatic plant, distilling fragrance, or like the upas-tree, casting around us the shadow of death. Let us seek to live, that while we live, the world may be the better for us, and when we die, the world may miss us.

Remembering too that it is small things, done from pure beneficent motives, which often stir the main tides of human feeling. It was a little matter for a slave-girl to think kindly and considerately of her master; but unless it had been for that thought and utterance, the vast cavalcade we shall come by and by to notice, with royal implications, closing with a miraculous deed, would have been unknown, and the world would have missed one of the most touching interludes in the inspired drama. God promises to those who are faithful over a few things, that they shall be

made rulers over many things. "He accepts according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not."

3. May we not, akin to this, and arising out of it, be taught another lesson—the value of little kindnesses? It is only the few in the world who are able to afford the large and munificent gift. But all are capable, in some way or other, of making their fellows happier, by gracious words and ways and deeds. That Syrian slave had neither silver nor gold. If she had, they could have been of no avail in smoothing Naaman's anguished brow. She had nothing but a feeling heart—sympathy for a wretched sufferer. One thing only in the world could she do for him—she could tell him of an old prophet in Israel, whose word might, in the name of her God, cure him, when all the skill of Damascus had failed. She lisps, in a few simple words, the kindly thought; and no sooner has she done so, than the servants and chariots are ordered to be in readiness. She has planted the 'seeds of hope' in that 'bosom of despair'.

How many there are, who, so far as the world's wealth is concerned, have little in their power—many who sigh for more than they have, honestly believing that if they had more, they would be more bounteous in their liberality and more munificent in their deeds of kindness than their present limited means will allow! To such be it said—Do not covet the gifts you do not have—but make use of what you do have. If you cannot give your golden tributes of generosity, you can do, what in God's sight is equally acceptable—you can, by tender deeds of lowly love, by unselfish interest in the sufferings and needs and sorrow of others, cast largest portion of all into His treasury. The daily visit to a bereaved neighbor—an unobtrusive call at a poor man's home—kindly advice to the young and inexperienced—the little attention shown to the unbefriended orphan or stranger—the small meal taken to the bedside of the invalid—devotion to the tottering steps of age, or bearing with its infirmities—these are a few of the thousand little kindnesses which in the sight of God and man are of great price!

We might see the replica of this little slave of Naaman's household—speaking gently to the morose and peevish, and returning good for evil. Or, climbing the dark stair where poverty languishes in misery and rags, carrying the feeble pittance which love has spared, or giving to the palsied

hand the cup of cold water. Or, the Sabbath-school teacher plying his or her humble labors, where all, perhaps, seems cheerless and unpromising. Or, perhaps the little daughter in a household smoothing the brow furrowed with pain, calming with loving looks and loving ways the fretted bosom, carrying music in her step and sunshine on her face, and causing, by these thousand winning ways, the irritabilities of natural temper to fade and melt at her approach like the mists before the beams of the morning.

You to whom God has given the will and the way of exercising this blessed law of kindness—do not covet greater or costlier possessions. You have the noblest of fortunes. Your wealth is inexhaustible. The wealth of the hand we do not depreciate (the rich may be noble almoners of God's bounties). The wealth of the head we do not depreciate. Intellect—sanctified, exalted intellect, is treasure greater than gold ingots. But the wealth of the heart is the greatest of the three. You may have neither money nor intellectual gifts—but if you have the large soul (loving and beloved) you will be remembered when gold will have perished, and intellectual sky-rockets will have melted into darkness. Having a golden heart, you will be "like Jesus." You will resemble Him who "pleased not Himself"—who "went about continually doing good." It was a saying of one of the world's greatest men, "Caesar and Alexander conquered by weapons—Jesus Christ conquered by love."

And above all, how noble the mission of those, who, by little ways and little agencies, are the means, like the Hebrew maid, of saving a soul from death—leading even one spiritual leper to better than all the waters of Syria! Young man! young woman! let the story of one, in age like yourselves, tell you what may be done by "a word spoken in due season." Shall we give wing to our imagination, and travel down to that Day of God—when small and great shall stand before Him? Yes! Naaman the Syrian warrior is there, waving the palm-branch of better than all earthly triumphs—and as he casts his blood-bought crown at the Redeemer's feet, his eye ranges along the white-robed multitude until it rests on one who is a slave no more. With exulting heart he bears testimony—"That was the angel of mercy whom God sent to my soul—and her message of love was blessed, not only to me, but to many in my land!"



The Almighty Judge puts a star into her crown; and that feeble candle, which of old shed its trembling light in an earthly household, shines henceforth as the brightest of the skies—yes, and having turned many unto righteousness, "as the stars forever and ever!"

4. Let us learn, as a closing lesson, to be slow in interpreting, or rather in misinterpreting, the providence of God. Never was providence darker, apparently, than when that young maid, nestling, as we have pictured her, in some quiet home, or, like a young gazelle, roaming in her innocence the pastoral valleys and mountains of Naphtali—was snatched away by ruffian hands in war or raid—compelled to exchange her freedom for slavery or worse, in a land and city of aliens—her youth and sex, her tenderness and tears pleading in vain with her captors to avert so miserable a fate. Where is the Jehovah of Israel? Can He wink at the barbarous deed? Can He allow villainy and wrong to triumph over goodness, purity, and truth? Why has He left unanswered these prayers of disconsolate Hebrew parents? Why is this Rachel left to weep for her child un comforted—the cry of one of His own chosen flock over her stolen lamb, unheard by the ear of the Shepherd of Israel?

Yes! picture the feelings of that maiden's mother as she looked down from some crag in Lebanon on the burning cottage, and saw—worse than smoke and flame—her youthful child slung on the saddle-bag of some Syrian horseman—away from her sight forever, to endure a life of drudgery, infamy, shame! How would she pray that the sods of the valley might rather cover that loved one's form; and, beating her bosom in the anguish of despair, exclaim, "Has God forgotten to be gracious, and has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

But, fear not, disconsolate one! Dry your tears! The Lord is her keeper—He will give His angels charge concerning her. He has a great end to serve, which only He can discern through that smoking hamlet and those piercing cries. That flower plucked from your bosom is to be planted by the rivers of heathen waters, to bring forth its fruit in due season, and to fill with its fragrance a heathen palace. Yes, this little censer is to scatter its perfumes through all ages. For wheresoever this Bible is read, and this Old Testament gospel preached, that which this Hebrew child has done, will be told as a memorial of her!

So, are we not often led, in premature haste, to harbor guilty surmises as to the rectitude and wisdom and faithfulness of the divine procedure? Confronted with baffling providences, the reason of which puzzles and perplexes our best ingenuity, are we not tempted at times to ask—"Why these unanswered—no, defeated prayers? Why is the urgent plea not only left unheard, but responded to in the very way we most dreaded and deprecated?"

Remember the very case suggested by the story of the captive maid! Many a mother pleads, in earnest faith and importunate supplication, that God may so overrule, so as to prevent her son going to some place or position of peril or temptation. How is her prayer at times answered? Her child is sent to the distant, dreaded 'Damascus', instead of being continued under the happy fostering influences and salutary restraints of home. In silence and solitude, and under the bitter consciousness of frustrated wishes, she is driven to give way to the plaintive soliloquy, "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord, and my cause is disregarded by my God!" Just so, thought and reasoned an illustrious name in the roll of Christian parents—Monica, the devout mother of Augustine. He tells us in his "Confessions" that she had prayed earnestly—pleaded night and day, that the God she served would not permit her son to fulfill his own wish and intention of leaving his home and going to Italy. She too truly feared the vices and contaminations of the Roman capital. Yet her prayers were not heard. To Italy he went, and in Rome he sojourned; and the yearning heart he had left behind, could only picture, in her hours of lonely agony, the moral shipwreck of all that was dearest to her. But the journey and the resort so dreaded, became to Augustine his spiritual birthplace. That city of moral darkness was made to him a Bethel for the visions of God, where he erected his life-altar, and vowed his eternal vow.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. "A man devises his own ways; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Oh that we could believe that at times the denial of our prayers may be the best—the kindest—the paternal answer to them; that when crossed and thwarted in our aspirations after what we think is for our good, we are tempted to pronounce, with the patriarch, the hasty verdict—"All these things are against me!"—we could trust the All-loving

to guide our steps, not according to our finite and fallible wisdom—but according to the counsel of His sovereign yet gracious will. Many of His own children, like that little maid, have had to confront what was bitter and painful—leaving the quiet nooks and valleys, for the storm-clouds of Lebanon and the stern trials of Damascus life. Let them trust their sure, unfaltering Guide, that He will bring light out of darkness; and show that, as in her case, in an apparently adverse destiny, there are undreamed-of blessings in store, either for themselves or for others. Many is the Christian, who, in the calm retrospect of life, can tell, that either light first broke on his own clouded spirit, or messages of mercy and support were borne to others, "as he journeyed towards Damascus!

## **THE PILGRIMAGE**

So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. "Go and visit the prophet," the king told him. "I will send a letter of introduction for you to carry to the king of Israel." So Naaman started out, taking as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter to the king of Israel said: "With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read it, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can kill and give life? He is only trying to find an excuse to invade us again." 2 Kings 5:4-7

"I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy!" 2 Kings 5:3

This artless child-utterance opens an unexpectedly door of hope to the diseased and despairing hero, and puts a new guiding-star into his midnight of darkness.

Who that has witnessed can ever forget the occasion, as relatives are gathered around some couch of sickness, where the sands of dear life are fast running out—the pulse feebly ebbing, the parched lips and languid eye proclaiming too surely that the Valley is at hand—when suddenly

there occurs a change for the better; the signs are observed of returning animation; the sinking strength rallies and revives; and anxious ears listen to the soft whisper that passes from the physician's lips—"There is hope!" Or who that has been out in a storm at sea, the waves running mountains high, the tempest roaring through the shrouds, the bravest and manliest abandoning themselves to blank despair—who can ever forget that moment, when the contending elements, as if weary and worn with conflict, listen to the mandate, "Peace, be still!" Anon, the wind changes; there is a break in the troubled sky, and the helmsman, lifting his voice amid the moanings of the blast, announces the joyful tidings, "Out of danger!"

Akin to such feelings must have been the emotions of the Syrian chief, as this young ministering angel of hope, in the guise of a domestic slave, drops these strange, mysterious, scarcely credible balm-words of comfort. And such, too, but in a far more intensified form, are the feelings of every soul, when it passes from a condition of danger and peril and death, into a state of peace and safety and life—when, "dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death," it first catches up the music of that divine message—"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!" "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." "Whoever believes on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Yes; blessed be God, these and similar declarations are addressed to every spiritual leper in this sin-stricken world—to all the diverse crowd in its leper-house of morally diseased, whatever their circumstances or social position; whether clothed in luxury or in rags; whether, like Naaman, having "the boast of nobility, the pomp of power," or their only birthright, that of poverty. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." As with the warrior of Damascus, so with them—they have a gracious "invitation," a "letter of commendation" to the King of kings. There is a Greater than the greatest Prophet in Israel, who can "recover them of their leprosy."

We may pause for a moment to note, in the case of her master, what we have already done in the preceding chapter in connection with the story of the little captive servant—that God works by means. He might, if it

pleased Him, perform His will and sovereign behests immediately; but He does it mediately—by methods, sometimes complex, sometimes simple. He might, by a verbal mandate, have demolished the walls of Jericho; but He appointed the instrumentality of the Ark procession, the blast of rams' horns, and the shout of the soldiers. He might at once have routed the hosts of Midian in the Valley of Jezreel; and with the breath of His mouth scattered them as chaff before the whirlwind. But He commanded His elect hero to employ the similar instrumentality of pitchers and lamps, trumpet-soundings, and battle-cry.

We may wonder, indeed, at first sight, what was the cause of so cumbersome and protracted a plan for effecting the leper's cure, as is here described to us—what the object and necessity of preparing these chariots and horsemen, these bags of gold, and changes of clothing; subjecting the sufferer to a long and tedious journey across the northern passes of Palestine, through the forests and villages of Naphtali and Ephraim. Why not rather send the Prophet of healing to the palace of Damascus? or, easier still, let the Jehovah of Israel exercise His own supreme prerogative, and the glow of health would in a moment thrill through the hero's veins. As with the slave of another pagan soldier in later times, He had only to "speak the word," and he would have been made whole.

In addition, however, to its being His customary and normal method of operation, God had special reasons, in the case of Naaman, for the employment of such varied instrumentality—He was desirous of manifesting His power in the sight of a whole people. The omnipotent utterance would have been sufficient for the leper's own cure; some delegated messenger from heaven might easily have been sent to that solitary chamber on the mission of restoration, and the recovered warrior thus have been brought to recognize the divine sovereignty.

But the Great Being, "who works all things after the counsel of His will," would have the captive Hebrew maid become a preacher to Naaman's nation. He would magnify His own name in the eyes of Syria—yes, and in the eyes too of disloyal and degenerate Israel, who had been lapsing year after year into an entire apostasy. The military cavalcade is mustered. The Aramite princes and heathen priests may laugh it to scorn—they may smile at the credulity of their chief, thus giving heed to the sayings of a

slave-girl—selling himself, even more ignominiously than a brother chieftain of a former age, into a female's hands (Judges 4:9); but he is before long to head that returning procession back in triumph, the mountain-passes of Hermon and Lebanon resounding with song—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. 34:6). "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. 107:13-15).

But to proceed with the verses placed at the head of this chapter.

1. Naaman's first impulse, before setting out on his journey, was to go and tell the King—"So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said." (ver. 4). Before he can adopt the suggestion of the young Hebrew, he feels it his duty, though the most exalted of Benhadad's subjects, to go to his sovereign, make him acquainted with his design, and receive the royal sanction.

This reads us the preliminary lesson, regarding even the minor, ordinary, everyday details of life—to be careful in observing its proprieties and courtesies. "Be courteous"—"Let all things be done decently and in order," are alike moral and religious obligations. No one was bolder and braver, had a loftier sense of independence or a profounder scorn of hollow conventionalities, than the Great Apostle of the Gentiles. Yet see his Christian etiquette—his refined and delicate consideration for the rights and feelings, it might be even prejudices of others, illustrated in that beautiful Epistle to Philemon—the epistle which has so well been designated "the letter of the Christian gentleman."

Rudeness and boorishness, lack of respect for seniors and superiors, proud self-assertion and presumptuous dogmatism, especially in youth, are as much opposed to the spirit of the gospel as anger and wrath. The believer has been likened to an anagram which is capable of being read up and down—every way, and in all lights. Moreover, we believe it will generally be found that the manliest and noblest are the most courteous. It is the vulgar, the upstart, the shallow thinker, who is the self-willed and

presuming—who crosses and violates the civilities of life, and refuses to concede "honor to whom honor is due."

In the case and conduct of Naaman, whose position might have tended to nurture other feelings, we have a pleasing instance, alike of the soldier's chivalrous obligation of duty to his king, and the citizen's deference to his superior, when, on the first blush of this strange pilgrimage, on so strange an errand—"So Naaman told the king."

But is there not also a higher spiritual lesson here for the Christian in his hour of difficulty and peril? When environed with perplexing paths and providences, and at a loss which to follow, swaying between the opposing forces of inclination and duty, may he not—ought he not, like Naaman, to resort to to the King of kings—"So Naaman told the king!" of what is burdening his spirit? How important before embarking, like the Syrian chief, on any arduous undertaking, deciding on any important enterprise of life, to spread out our case before God, and bring our doubts and perplexities to the test of prayer. Let a skeptic world in these days deride and dispute, as it may, the efficacy of such petitions; those who have had personal experience in the past of the divine guidance and direction, know the blessedness of access to the Throne of Grace—the assuring touch of the Golden Scepter—whether it be in deciding on a profession, or in entering on some new opening of business, or in emigrating to the distant colony, or in forming the marriage relation. They know how alike sacred is the duty, and how comforting the privilege, of repairing to the presence-chamber of the Great King in heaven, and saying, "Lord, what will YOU have me to do?"

If others there are whose plans and purposes are unsanctioned and unsanctified by prayer—who, unlike the Father of the Faithful, pitch their tents before they pitch their altars—who enter on duties and form connections without once seeking Heaven's blessing; those who are "taught of God" know how differently they can brace themselves for life's journey and pilgrimage, for crossing its Hermons, traversing its valleys of Achor and Baca, if they have listened to the inviting voice, "Come with ME from Lebanon, with ME from Lebanon."

If the altar were erected first, and then the tent, how many tears and

trials might afterwards be saved! Look at Lot, in his selection of the well-watered plains of Sodom. In the resolve of that moment of impulse, he took no heed—no account, of his soul's best interests. He came not to the choice direct from his bended knees. He rushed with a carnal spirit down to the rich pasture-lands and luxurious capital. And what was the result? A life of insult; mocking for himself—worldliness for his family; linked to an ungodly partner—his daughters married to the vile and degraded; his home at last a mass of charred ruins; his wife a calcified pillar; his own old age blackened with unparalleled infamy. Had he sought the Lord's will at that memorable hour, when he stood with his patriarch-uncle on the heights of the future Bethel, surveying the land he had in his choice, he might have been guided to a decision that would have rescued his name from degradation and shame. But, the divine blessing unsolicited, he ventured on the brink of temptation—He was "a brand" "in the burning;" the mercy of his God alone plucked him from it, and made his spiritual history—the epitaph on his tomb—to be this—"Saved, yet so as by fire!" (1 Cor. 3:15).

2. Observe Naaman's departure and journey. "So," we read, "Naaman started out" (ver. 5). His promptitude, in the true soldier-spirit of instant surrender to duty—"Go, and he goes," is noteworthy. No sooner does he hear the proposal of the young Hebrew maid, than he immediately takes measures to reach the Prophet in Israel. There are no delays, no questionings, no procrastination. Had he given way to such, the project would in all likelihood have been rejected and abandoned. Insurmountable obstacles would have presented themselves. The length of the road; reasons of policy and state; the humiliation involved in a great Syrian warrior going to seek a favor at the hands of a Hebrew prophet; the ridicule such an expedient might bring upon him among his own countrymen—more than all, the utter hopelessness of such a pilgrimage. The disease had advanced too far—it had baffled the best skill in Damascus—it was known to be incurable.

But he confers neither with himself nor with others. No sooner is the possibility of a remedy mentioned, than he grasps, like a drowning man—this rope that has been unexpectedly thrown for his rescue. The proximity of the Hebrew territories must have doubtless made him familiar with the



miracles accomplished by the hand of the prophets of Jehovah. He believed that what had been done in the case of others, could be done in his; and strong in faith—giving glory to a God yet unknown to him, except by name, this Gentile stranger leaps into his chariot, and pursues his way. We feel already sure it will be a prosperous mission. When conviction passes into resolution, and resolution still farther into action, the battle is always more than half won. As we see the train of horses, servants, and chariots winding through the passes of the Lebanon, we feel that this moral hero has already obtained his double conquest, and that we shall in due time hail him as a monument of mercy and grace!

How unlike the case of many in spiritual things; who stagger through unbelief; allowing solemn warning and conviction to pass unheeded—conjuring up to themselves some supposed necessity for postponement and delay—resolving to set out on the pilgrimage at some time, but "not yet"—imagining the chariots and horses of salvation to be at their call whenever they wish, and their malignant leprosy a thing that may be safely postponed for a deathbed cure. As Naaman felt, so well may they—that restoration may be with them "now or never."

The king said to the sufferer, "By all means, go!" It is thus our Lord speaks. This is the Great Physician's prescription to the seeking soul—Wait not a moment—linger not in all the plain—confer not with any earthly adviser. Let the chariots be ordered. Hasten! flee for your life! "By all means, go!" for a long eternity is suspended on the resolve.

And yet, while we have thus abundant reason to admire and imitate the faith and promptitude, the boldness and tenacity of purpose in this half-enlightened heathen; let us merely advert, in passing, to what will be more specially noted by and by—how hard it is for the natural man to receive the salvation of the gospel as a FREE gift. We go not in the 'empty chariot of faith'; but we must take along with us our wagon-load of gifts and treasures to strengthen our claim, and to count as some equivalent, if not payment, for our cure. We go, as if the astounding spiritual gift—the unbought and unpurchasable blessings of the covenant, were to be obtained with money. Our query is that of the young man in gospel story, "What good thing shall I DO, that I may inherit eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16).

Brilliant and attractive as was the spectacle of all this gay company moving through the land of Israel, we would rather have seen Naaman sitting alone in his chariot (like the Ethiopian Treasurer of a future age), with nothing in his hand or in his bag, but "the King's letter."

Yes; how reluctant we are to resort to the great Heavenly Healer "just as we are"—needy bankrupts and beggars in His sight—saying, "Silver and gold have I none"—money and changes of clothing, good deeds and merits, gifts and attainments, virtues and amiabilities—I leave them all behind me in this pilgrimage of grace. I come with no mental, or material, or moral bribe in my chariot—I have nothing but this King's letter—this Bible, in which is written, as my title and passport, "The GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Naaman "started out." In order to give vividness to the unique story, we are tempted to allow rein to imagination, and endeavor to picture, in thought, that brilliant procession as it issues forth from the western gate of Damascus—the same gate, probably, which assumes at this day the somewhat imposing and high-sounding title of "THE GATE OF GOD." Conspicuous would be the chariot of the chief himself, the war-armor now replaced by some appropriate emblem of peace. Like all eastern cavalcades (and we may well believe specially on such an occasion as this), the royal caravan would comprise a vast retinue of servants, wearing their rich turbans and costly hats—with fine horses and camels and donkeys to convey tents and provender, with the already-mentioned gifts—ingots of gold and silver from the Treasure-house of the capital—and ten sets of the best clothing—holiday suits or state dresses of silk.

We may further imagine, that, as in most similar expeditions, in order to escape the intolerable midday heat, they would start at early morn, or rather while many of the brighter stars were lingering in the heavens. They have crossed the long level plain—the northern plain of the Sahara—athwart which the mists of night are still brooding, disclosing here and there the graceful tops of palm-trees, like floating islands in a lake of cloud. The sun is just beginning to light up the distant mountain peaks of "many-headed" Lebanon, and to tip the dewdrops gemming the tangled shrubs which line the way, as we see them commencing the long ascent

by the stream of Pharpar up the flanks of Hermon. If Naaman had been in the habit of listening, in his Syrian home, to some of the songs of Zion on the lips of the Hebrew captive, he might now have appropriately transferred "the traveler's psalm" to his own circumstances, as the great border mountain rose high above them—"the tower of Lebanon which looks towards Damascus" (Sol. Song 7:4); "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1, 2).

They have wound their way along the rugged steep—strewn doubtless then, as now, with fragments of black tar; and, crossing the watershed, begin to descend by the swift torrent of the Hasbeya river. The land of Israel is soon fully in view; already their eyes fall on places associated with illustrious deeds. The old walls of Hazor, which, with their military memories of Barak and Sisera, could not fail to be interesting to a warrior, are at their right—the plateau of Bashan is on their left—while the mountains of Naphtali and the more distant hills of Ephraim and Samaria lie between, and blend their summits with the horizon.

There are spots, too, close at hand, which in the future, are to receive a still holier consecration. Some height among those gigantic spurs or eminences, with the winter snow still visible in the crevices, was, in a far distant age, to form the scene of an incident of surpassing and unparalleled splendor, converting, for the time being, this "Hill of God" into the vestibule—the gate of heaven; for it was on this "high mountain" that the Lord of glory was in the days of His incarnation transfigured; when His face, and the very garments of those that were with Him, vied in brightness with the snow on the ridges above.

As they continued their descent, the green knolls and patches of pasture-ground are interspersed here and there with gigantic forest-trees and underwood—the haunt of the or the timid gazelle. They have now reached the base of the kingly mountain; pausing, perhaps, as is the custom of caravans to this hour, by the gushing fountain, around which, in subsequent times, rose the palaces of Caesarea, and where Herod, on a picturesque cliff, amid groves of olive and oak trees, erected a temple to Augustus. Leaving upon their left the ancient city and sanctuary of Dan, they would skirt the reedy jungle which borders the lake of Merom (the

scene of Joshua's last battle with the confederate Canaanite chiefs), tapering tufts of papyrus, mingling with thickets of oleander and sycamore. Thence their route would lie, either along the course of the Jordan to the then secluded lake of Gennesaret, or, more probably, by the great western itinerary which led through the soft undulating hills which enshrined the Refuge city of Kedesh, the sanctuary and capital of its tribe—a city which doubtless then (as we venture from personal inspection to pronounce it now, in its desolation and ruin), must have been the most "beautiful for situation" and surroundings, among the towns of northern Palestine.

As they emerged from the park of oaks and terebinths which clothed the foot of Tabor, one place unseen, towards the right, nestling amid its green hills and oliveyards, would, to the Chief of the expedition, had he known its future, been of surpassing interest. For it was in the synagogue of NAZARETH that lips which "spoke as never a man spoke" mentioned him by his name—"Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). The Good Shepherd, whose mission was "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," there made personal reference to one of those "other sheep" not of His fold, "whom He was also to bring," and cause to "hear His voice"—the first fulfillment of the gracious words, "He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out." "I have called you by your name, you are mine" (John 10:3; Isa. 43:1).

They have now crossed the plain of Esdraelon, alike the great battlefield and granary of Palestine—the most extensive stretch of fertile land on which their eyes had rested since they left the gate of Damascus. Tabor, the Kishon, Gilboa, Jezreel, and other names familiar in Israelitish story, are around them, all bristling with warlike recollections. Similar remembrances there must have been also, though unrecorded in the sacred narrative, of scenes in which the leader of the band had been himself conspicuous. He must have been gazing on the very hill-tops which recently possessed a very different significance to him, when blazing with the watchfires of the hostile Hebrews. Strange must have been the thought, that he was now a humble suppliant in the very territories of those, with whom the soldiers at his side may have met, not long before, in deadly conflict—now a helpless patient and invalid,

seeking the merciful aid of a Jewish prophet! Strange, too, must that brilliant equipage have seemed to the primitive villagers as it swept along—the chariot devoid of those hostile emblems with which, a short time previously, they had been so sadly familiar; neither bowman, nor spearman, nor armor-bearer; the servants only carrying weapons sufficient to protect the wagons which contained the regal presents—"750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing."

But, not to indulge in further conjectural detail; Naaman's pilgrimage has, in a higher metaphorical sense, a parallel and counterpart in the case of every true believer—the soul in its quest after God, and salvation, and peace. Various are the experiences of that journey, from the earliest hours of struggle and disquietude, when first brought face to face with the unsolved problems of death and what is after death—when the reality and virulence of the 'spiritual leprosy' is revealed, for which no earthly remedy is adequate—onwards to the time, when, at the cross of Christ, and in the revelation of the Father's love in Him, feverish unrest is quieted, and the inquiry of aching spirits is answered—"What must I do to be saved?" Happy they, who in the chariot of faith have been led to undertake that momentous journey which is at last to end with the outburst of praise for "salvation found"—"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68, 69).

3. Let us note Naaman's RECEPTION. The journey is accomplished; the chief and his entourage have reached Samaria, the capital of Israel, situated on its steep hill; a city "which combined, in a union not elsewhere found in Palestine, strength and beauty." Naaman sends one of his troop to the palace of Jehoram with the royal letter of Benhadad. The monarch reads it. Commencing, doubtless, with the customary oriental complimentary salutations, it continued—"With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy."

The perusal leads to a burst of indignant anger. It seemed little else than an insult; an arrogant imposition on royal credulity; the studied, designed occasion of a fresh quarrel. He and his people were just recovering from the staggering blow dealt, not long since, by the hand of Benhadad. He sees in the letter only a pretext for starting war again—for anew ravaging

his territories and deluging his valleys with blood. By the customary method of giving expression to strong emotion, Jehoram tore his clothes in dismay; and treating the proposal as the taunt of a blaspheming heathen masking his own political ends—"This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can kill and give life? He is only trying to find an excuse to invade us again." Alas! will the monarch of Israel—the head and ruler of the theocratic tribes—refuse to give glory to whom, as it specially became him to testify, glory is due?

As we have already observed, Naaman could not fail to have heard of the astounding miracles which the God of the Hebrews and His prophets had performed in former as well as recent times; how their national annals were a record of marvelous supernatural agency and deed—and if worship of the calves of Bethel had not blinded and demoralized him, the eye of Jehoram, from his kingly capital, might have lighted on more than one eminence suggestive of miraculous intervention in the past. The comparatively recent wonders wrought by the hands of the Great Tishbite might now have been vividly before him; and when this miserable leper, the wreck of military glory, stood in his presence, passing strange that he did not call to mind that beneficent servant of the Most High, on whom Elijah's mantle and spirit had fallen; who recently had power delegated to him, that in the case of the Shunamite's son, he was able to resuscitate from the dead. The leper's hopes seem in a moment to be frustrated and extinguished, his errand fruitless, his pride wounded, his journey an ignominious failure.

How often does this accord with everyday experience! Just when our worldly anticipations seem brightest—the long journey successfully terminated—the aspirations of a lifetime on the eve of accomplishment—some unexpected reverse crosses our wishes, gives the lie to all our dreams of happiness, and we are left apparently, like Naaman, to retrace our lonely way.

In spiritual things, too—the way to the cross, and beyond the cross to the crown—from the gate of earth to the "Gate of God" in the true Canaan, is not all smooth. It is a journey, with all the vicissitudes of a pilgrimage—effort and toil; sunshine and shade; mountains of difficulty; valleys of humiliation; bright gleams and golden sunsets, alternating with somber

clouds and murky vapors; Hermon-dews of divine influence and sustaining strength, with fainting and thirst of the arid land—a treeless desert, where no water is—the marching forth with timbrel, lute, and song of praise one day; the next, encountering narrow strait and extremity of peril; when, like Israel, with the sea on one side and the bluff cliffs on the other, our cry is, "We are entangled, the wilderness has shut us in!"

Yes, through what hosts of spiritual foes and hindrances that chariot of faith has to find its way—skeptical doubts; demon passions; depressing and depraving worldliness; the pride of nature; the arrogance of reason; the tyranny of self; the moral weakness which cowers and vacillates under the world's frown, and dreads the world's censure—"truly, a great fight of afflictions."

But, still, on the chariot moves; and faith, imparting fresh courage, inspires the song, "O my God! Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember your kindness—from Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar. I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life." Psalm 42:6-8

Thus does the pilgrim-soldier, hindered, but not baffled; wounded, but not overcome; "cast down, but not destroyed;" pass onwards, through all hard experiences, into the paradise of God's peace—"peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"—"peace through the blood of the cross."

We may imagine, in the case of Naaman, the 'conflicting feelings' that burned in his bosom as his faith was now thus severely put to the test. He has allowed himself to be duped and deceived; the toil of that journey has only mocked him in the sight of Syria and Israel; or, what was worse, served to stir up a fresh quarrel between the rival kings. Must he now turn his horses' heads, and, sick at heart, sullen and morose, retrace his way to a dishonored grave amid the cypresses of Damascus? With his confidence shattered in all he had heard of Israel's God, is he to die a blinder votary than ever, of the helpless god Rimmon? What is he to do? He has come to a standstill. It is humiliation either to remain or to return.

Benhadad has failed him—Jehoram has failed him. The lesson is anew read to that disconsolate warrior—"Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils."

But man's extremity is God's opportunity. He who "leads the blind by a way they know not," will fulfill, in the case of this earnest seeker, His own promise—"Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass—and He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday...Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down—for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Ps. 37:5, 6, 24). There is no cause for despondency. The last word of his royal master may have sounded in his ears (as, in a spiritual sense, it ought in ours), "But all means, go!" or, like Moses' call to Israel in their moment of terror and apparent defeat, "Go forward!"

Yes, brave warrior! continue your journey with undaunted soul across these Hebrew mountains. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). The Sun of Righteousness will before long arise upon you with healing in His beams. There is one, at all events, praying in your behalf in distant Damascus; and the effectual fervent prayer of a Hebrew slave-girl, as well as of a righteous man, avails much. Her prayer is to be answered. Healed in body and restored in soul, she is yet to welcome you back through "The Gate of God," with the new song in your lips—"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord." Psalm 118:17-19

## **THE REMEDY AND ITS REJECTION**

2 Kings 5:8-12

But when Elisha, the man of God, heard about the king's reaction, he sent this message to him: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he



will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of leprosy." But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would surely come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! Aren't the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

In some lowly dwelling, situated near the forest of palms by the banks of the Jordan, near Jericho, the great Prophet of the times was at present sojourning. The character of Elisha presented a marked contrast to that of his distinguished predecessor, Elijah. Elijah was bold, stern, impetuous—his life and mission had their appropriate emblem in the earthquake and tempest and flame, on which he gazed from the mouth of his cave in Horeb. Even the remarkable close of his existence was in keeping with his previous history—swept to heaven in a whirlwind, with horses and chariots of fire. The life of Elijah's successor was symbolized by "the still, small voice" which followed the other manifestations of the divine Presence. The one has been well called the Peter, the other the John, of the prophetic age. The soul of Elisha, however, like all true and noble natures, was stirred to its depths by any infraction on the honor of his God. Gentle as a lamb in his daily walk and conversation, when the name and glory of the Great Being he served were at stake, this righteous man was bold as a lion.

The journey to Palestine of the warrior of Syria was of too much importance and interest to have its fame confined to Samaria. A rumor of the pilgrimage of the illustrious Aramite had reached the forest-home of the prophet. It may possibly be, he had learned the purpose of Naaman's mission by express communication from heaven; as also, that Jehoram, who ought to have known that there was both a God and a prophet in Israel, had only in a fit of unworthy petulance and passion rent his clothes, and put the final extinguisher on the Gentile's cherished hopes.

Elisha cannot brook the insult done to Jehovah. Unless prompt measures are taken, the disappointed soldier may return in sorrow and despair to his heathen land more idolater than ever, and the innocent Hebrew slave may have to pay the forfeiture of her young life for her rash and unavailing counsels. Many of the world's gigantic wars have been born of trifles. Many battlefields have sprung from alleged petty wrongs—"injured sensibilities." May not all Syria, in the present case, be roused into new conflict to resent the indignity offered to her hero?

Independent, however, of this, it is enough for the Man of God to hear, that there is a soul at unrest—a sufferer who has come so many leagues from his home, seeking that help which his own deities were impotent to afford. Accordingly, a messenger (probably Gehazi, or one of the young men of the School of the prophets) is despatched to the Palace of Samaria, with a message to the Israelitish monarch, saying, "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel!" Noble is the attitude and bearing of Elisha; he speaks God's word before kings, and is not ashamed; no, he ventures to withstand his anointed monarch to the face, because he was to be blamed. All the magicians and soothsayers and physicians of Syria had been unable to render aid to the leper. But this humble man, in his quiet retreat amid the jungles of the Jordan, stands forth like another Daniel to interpret the dream, and to magnify the power of "the most High God, who rules in the kingdom of men."

Nor can we fail at this point to admire the conduct of Naaman, considering his constitutional impatience. Baffled and duped and crest-fallen, with his pride stung to the quick, we might have expected that the peremptory mandate of a Jewish Prophet would have been received with disdain; that he would have turned at once, and retraced his steps to his Damascus home. 'If the king of Israel' (so we may imagine the soliloquy of the injured Chief) 'gives me such poor encouragement, and vilifies the letter of my royal master, what am I to expect from the Teacher of Gilgal?' He wisely, however, muffles his inward feelings of irritation and wounded vanity. "Skin for skin; all that a man has will he give for his life." This abject sufferer is not to be deterred in the prosecution of his pilgrimage by an initial discouraging reception. The utterances of the Hebrew slave

outlive the chilling words which dropped in his ear from the throne at Samaria. He resolves forthwith to repair to the Prophet's home. Accordingly, in the next incident of the story, we see him setting out there, with his horses and servants and chariot.

He reads, in this, a needful lesson and rebuke to us, alike with regard to earthly and spiritual concerns. Is it the lower and more subordinate earthly view? How many an important position in life has been forfeited by injured pride, or paltry wavering and irresolution. One step more, and the goal would have been reached. But a fit of passion, a momentary yielding to hesitancy or selfishness, a morbid dread of the world's censure, or even, it may be, a feeling of mistaken duty or false sentiment, has lost the one golden opportunity, and there is found no place of repentance, though it be sought carefully with tears.

So too in spiritual things. By reason of doubts and misgivings—fightings within, and adverse providences without—how many are like the disciples of old, who, on listening to what appeared to them the Master's "hard sayings," from that time walked no more with Him" (John 6:66); like the children of Ephraim, "armed and carrying bows," yet turning defector in the day of battle; putting their hand to the plough, yet looking back, they have this verdict pronounced by unerring lips on their desertion—"Unfit for the kingdom of God." Naaman, and those who inherit in its higher, diviner sense, Naaman's spirit, are at this juncture of his story like the Magi of old, who, though they lost for a while their guiding-star, still journeyed on, assured it would again gladden them with its radiance. It did reappear; and "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." In the case of the Syrian hero, and in the case of all, who, to withstand in "the evil day," have taken to themselves "the whole armor of God," the gracious promise is fulfilled—"Wait on the Lord, be of courage, and He shall strengthen your heart."

Nor was it Naaman alone, whose heart was strengthened in the present emergency. Elisha, in his own case, and as the type and representative of all God's faithful ambassadors in every age, would receive fresh encouragement and heart-cheer in the prosecution of his life-labors. He had sent the authoritative direction (of which we have spoken) from his dwelling at Gilgal. But with all his apparent boldness and magnanimity,

he must have had his own secret misgivings as to how it would be received. In all likelihood, laughed to scorn, or treated with contemptuous silence, he would retire to his solitary chamber to bewail, through discouraging tears, the complaint of many before and since—"Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Little do ministers of the gospel know, when often, in the weakness of their own faith, they may have rushed to the hasty inference that their words are not received, and their work is not prospering; when their hands are hanging down, and their knees are feeble, because no visible response comes to their message—little do they know the Naamans there may be—anxious, perplexed, fevered spirits—who, all in earnest about their souls and heaven, are anxiously listening for needed guidance in their search of the healing waters.

Nothing is told regarding the particulars of the journey to Gilgal. We are left to surmise, that after leaving the beautiful capital of Samaria, with its vine and olive-clad terraces, the cavalcade would probably sweep along the valley flanked by the memorable slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, where another son of Damascus—old Eleazar—had, centuries before, encamped with his master under "the Terebinths of Moreh." If the leper-chief had passed the mouth of that valley nine hundred years later, he would have listened, from the lips of a Greater than Hebrew prophet, to words that would have exactly met his case—"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Continuing, possibly, by Bethel, with its dream-memories, they would proceed down the long descent of Ai and Michmash among the mountains of Benjamin—the gorge which is known by the modern name of the Wady Suweinit, now comparatively bare—then covered with a dense forest; and at the time that Naaman passed, doubtless associated with the recent terrible assault, made on the mocking youths of Bethel, by the bears which roamed its thickets. In due time they would reach the north-eastern side of the extensive palm-forest adjoining the old "City of Palms." There Gilgal stood, on a rising ground or 'swell;' and, surrounded with this sylvan sanctuary, looked down, five miles distant, on the waters of the Jordan. No difficulty would be experienced in finding the lowly

home of the Prophet. His name, in all that region, was familiar as a household word. Specially would it be held in grateful remembrance in connection with the spring, which, as "the Fountain of Elisha," bubbles up to this day fresh and clear; the healing of whose waters, by his miraculous agency, conferred so inestimable a blessing on the dwellers in that sultry plain.

"So Naaman," we read (ver. 9), "went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house." What was the reception accorded to him? We expect, from all we know of the gentleness and goodness of Elisha's character, that he will not be lacking in politeness or civility, to the Syrian noble. We expect to find him on the outlook for the distinguished stranger; ready to receive him with that honor, to whom (from his rank) honor was due. In the immediately preceding incident in the Prophet's history, when he observed, in the distance, the Shunamite approaching his other home at Mount Carmel, he was not contented with patiently waiting her arrival. He hastened to meet her; and not being so swift of foot as his servant Gehazi, he gave him instructions to run with all speed, and to inquire, "Is it well with you? is it well with your husband? is it well with the child?" (2 Kings 4:26).

But where is Gehazi now? There is neither appearance of prophet, nor of prophet's servant, nor of prophet's son, coming through the glades of the forest to do homage to the great captain of the armies of Damascus. The troop is allowed to wend its way unnoticed up the gentle slope which was crowned by the prophet's house. Moreover, when they do arrive, the Prophet does not personally appear. He contents himself with sending what, at first, seems an uncourteous message by the lips of another. Never, doubtless, had the ear of that warrior been similarly welcomed at the gates of castle or palace—much less at the door of a lowly cottage.

We may well believe there was a reason for this. We repeat, we may feel assured that when one of the great men of the earth stood at his door surrounded with a stately retinue, Elisha, both as a citizen and as a prophet, would not, by lack of deference to one of eminent rank and position, have wantonly violated alike a social obligation and a divine ordinance. What, then, it may be asked, was the cause of the unceremonious message and reception?

We answer, first of all, the Prophet may probably have felt (to use a common but expressive phrase) that there were "times for everything". All this pomp and circumstance might have been appropriate enough for a season of jubilee—for the ovation of a conqueror—but it was unseemly and unsuitable for the present occasion, that a miserable leper should come decked out in the trappings of state. It would have been more befitting to ask an audience with dust on his head, and sackcloth on his loins. Further, Naaman perhaps undertook, and now was completing, his pilgrimage, under the impression that his rank and fame and renown—backed up with that wagon-load of costly gifts and treasure—gave him an irresistible claim on the services of the Prophet, and on the Prophet's God. He came to Gilgal, more with the feeling that he was honoring Elisha by allowing him to effect his cure, than cherishing emotions of gratitude in anticipation of the healing he expected to receive at his hands.

"What!" (might be his thought, as he alighted at the modest doorway), "is it the inhabitant of such a dwelling as this, that is to restore me? Verily, it will be the proudest deed of his life!" The man of God was not one of those servile, subservient spirits who would barter principle or duty by a base truckling for favor. If he had been a fawning flatterer of the world, influenced by the common weaknesses and frailties of a weak nature—he would have gone forth from his cottage, bending before the imperial chariot. He would have condoned the warrior's pride and haughty bearing; and overlooking the untimely and ostentatious display of splendor, would have said, "Behold your lowly servant, O Naaman! Speak your will, and it shall be done."

His conduct, however, was regulated by the sublime maxim, which, in future ages, molded and swayed a greater than Elisha—that if he pleased man, he was not worthy to be called the servant of his Lord. He would have the princely petitioner at his gate to know, and would teach us also, that, in the Divine sight, every human creature occupies spiritually the same humiliating level—that in matters which concern the soul, God is "no respecter of people."

The first and the last lesson of the gospel is HUMILITY. In every shape,

and under every phase and guise, "God resists the proud." It is the saying of the Redeemer Himself, "Except you become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

By this reticence, with its tacit reproof, the Prophet would further tell, that "the kingdom of God comes not with observation." "The battle of the warrior is with garments rolled in blood." Earthly conquests are marked by pomp and parade, with floating banner and flourish of trumpet and beat of drum. But the moral world has been turned upside down (yes, the little world of thought and feeling within every individual bosom), is regenerated and revolutionized—by what? By means of an ancient Book written by vinedressers and herdsmen, fishermen and publicans; or rather, by the secret, remedial influence of a great principle which that Book unfolds. The Jewish Temple which crowned the summit of Moriah, rose in mysterious silence—"There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building" (1 Kings 6:7). The Church of Christ, God's living Temple, is not reared amid noise and pomp and plaudits. It is not dependent on wealth, or grandeur, or eloquence; on pride of rank, dazzling ritual, force of intellect and parade of learning—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zech. 4:6). "The Lord is in His holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20).

But to pass to the next point which claims our attention in the narrative. Let us listen to Elisha's MESSAGE—"But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be cleansed of leprosy." 2 Kings 5:10

There is the gospel—the gospel message, the gospel remedy—"Go and wash." Unto every spiritual leper we are empowered and commissioned to echo the words of the Prophet. Yes, and to add the sure promise, the glorious sequel and certainty, "And you will be clean." It is not the word of man, it is the declaration and assurance of God Himself.

Observe these two things regarding Elisha's directions for cure.

(1.) It was a simple method. Nothing surely could be more so. The Jordan

was seen flowing amid its reeds, willows, and oleanders, a few miles from the prophet's door; a brief hour would have completed the sevenfold washing. Nor was this repeated washing anything strange and uncommon to Naaman. As an Oriental, he was accustomed to it every day in Syria. Copious marble baths and fountains, fed from the streams of Lebanon, formed the adjuncts of every dwelling; much more so of a palatial home like his.

(2.) It was a cure that involved no labor. It demanded no bodily austerities, no mental torture, no material penalty. Not a mule or camel need be unladen of its burden; not a bag need be opened; not a robe shaken from its folds. "Go and wash"—that is all! Who does not expect to see and hear the leper, in the ecstasy of the hour, first invoking blessings on the head of the Prophet, and then, calling to his charioteer—"Lose not a moment! give rein to the horses! Slack not their speed until you get to the banks of the Jordan! Israel's God helping me, this night, before the sun set on the hills of Benjamin, I shall be myself again, and on my way back to Damascus with a new song on my lips." With the swiftness of another Jehu, the son of Nimshi, we are prepared to see the impatient soldier driving impetuously down the gentle slopes to the river's brink.

2 Kings 5:11— But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would surely come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!"

We have had chiefly cause to admire the Syrian hitherto. Up to this point we can even make allowance for his weaknesses and foibles, considering he was an idolater, taking into account also other extenuating circumstances. But we must now alter and modify our verdict.

Poor human nature, unexpectedly, but too truthfully, reveals itself. Those infirmities are dragged to light which are the same in all countries, and under every variety of skin. He feels himself an injured man. He had expected that the Prophet would have come forth from his dwelling with dignified demeanor; that, after the manner of an Oriental magician or sorcerer, he would "wave his hand" (or enchanter's rod), pronouncing a series of mystical words, calling upon the God of the Hebrews in some



such imposing manner as doubtless he heard Elijah had done upon the heights of Carmel, on the occasion of the defeat of Baal's prophets.

And then, if any direction had been given, or any miracle wrought, he supposed it would be something on a great scale—something involving vast agency, startling and overpowering in its accompaniments and effects. To employ the graphic description of Krummacher—"He expected that the commencement would be made with a variety of formalities and strange phenomena; that then the wonder worker would appear arrayed in an unusual dress, and with an awe-inspiring countenance, his gestures mysterious and dreadful, his steps measured, his movements solemn and enigmatical, many dark sayings and proverbs in his mouth, and in his right hand a staff, a golden censer, or something of the kind. Then, after having drawn a magic circle, that he would proceed to conjure invisible things, call upon the name of God, and that finally there would be a handling of the leprous person in a solemn manner, a majestic imposition of hands, a significant touching of the wounds and ulcers, and such-like imposing and fantastic ceremonies. Such was the kind of fanciful image that presented itself to Naaman's soul."

But, when the simple washing seven times in Jordan was all that was mentioned, he stalked away in wonder, his eye flashing with resentment at the supposed insult. "What!" we may imagine were his thoughts, if not his words, "dare he thus speak to me, a Noble of the Syrian court, the idol of my army, the confidential adviser of my sovereign? Dare he offer me a wanton affront by so beggarly a prescription? I came thinking this to be a land of miracles, where the heavens were opened, and angels traveled up and down on celestial ladders, and chariots of fire were seen on its mountain-sides. But I am befooled! I was sent first to the King—he took my letter as the pretext for a fresh quarrel. I come now to his Prophet—he has not the civility even to receive me at the door of his dwelling. When he sends his servant to me, it is with the child's message—to go and wash this leprosid body in yonder foul Jordan—which I could do, better far, at home, in Abana and Pharpar. I have been foiled, cajoled, and hoodwinked—made the butt for both nations' scorn—tossed like a broken reed on the waters!" Thus saying, he beckoned his charioteer to turn the horses' heads, "and he went away in a rage."

How difficult for many to be humbled even under the severest dispensations of providence! Sickness, leprosy, bereavement—do not of themselves necessarily soften the heart, or lead with the teachableness of children to the acknowledgment of no way and will but the divine. Sad it is when the effect of these is the reverse—to sour the temper, and to foster pride, murmuring, and rebellion. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can curb the wayward spirit, mold the stubborn will, and bring us to sit in filial submission at the feet of our Great Master.

It is evident that Naaman had settled in his own mind, the manner in which his cure was to be effected. The Prophet's method was far too ordinary and commonplace. He would himself have liked some participation in the remedy. And as to the particular direction regarding the Jordan immersion, his eye falls on the turgid river wending through mudbanks in the valley below, and then his memory reverts to the pure, clear, crystalline streams murmuring amid the groves and avenues of Damascus. "If I wash at all," he says, "I shall do it in my native golden rivers. This despicable Hebrew river shall not have the glory of my restoration."

Is not the feeling of Naaman, and the offence of Naaman, the "offence" of the gospel still? To the pride of the carnal heart, it is too simple a thing to be saved by faith—to be indebted from first to last, for our eternal welfare, to the doing and dying of Another. And also, it is an unlabored cure. The self-righteous legal spirit will cleave, if possible, to the old terms of "work and win." Human nature, (as we had occasion to observe in the preceding chapter in connection with Naaman's gifts) desires something of its own, with which to enforce and substantiate its claim on the divine favor—prayers, virtues, self-denials, charities. As in the case of the Roman Catholic, or Mohammedan, or Pagan devotees (for the principle is the same, despite of all creed diversities), there is a desire for the performance either of some great achievements or of some painful austerities. Let it be the trumpet of chivalry summoning crusaders to wrest the Lord's tomb from the hand of the infidel—let it be a pilgrimage to Mecca with bare and bleeding feet, over hot, burning sands—let it be the votaries of Brahmah, or Vishnu, or Kali, holding up their arms until these become rigid and withered in their sockets—let it be a lonely

existence of mortification in monastery or hermit's cell, severed and secluded from the amenities of life—let it be the bestowment of manifold goods to feed the poor, casting with lavish hand golden gifts into God's treasury—it matters not. The longing and ambition with many is—instead of presenting the true "King's letter," signed and sealed with the King's own signet, and having these gratuitous contents—"By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"—to be able at last to knock at the gate of heaven with a chariot-load of good works and merits, and, pointing to them, to say, "Behold, Lord, what I have done to purchase and secure my crown!"

Yes, we repeat, how hard it is to strip away all pleas of self-righteousness, to disown all creature-confidences, all "deeds of law"—to ignore in thought as well as word the utterance of the presumptuous pleader in the Temple of old—"God, I thank You that I am not as other men are!"—and to come as needy beggars to the foot of the cross, saying, in the words of our best-known hymn—

"Not the labor of my hands  
Can fulfill Your law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone—  
You must save, and You alone!"

Whoever you be whose eyes fall on these pages—old or young, rich or poor, convicted of many sins or few sins, we have but one prescription—"Go and wash!"—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Mix up nothing of your own with His. Abana and Pharpar are rivers, but not the river. It is very notable that though the directions to Naaman were simple, they were precise, stringent. He was to wash in Jordan; and then he was to wash, not five times, or eight times, but seven times. There is but one way—God's gospel way, the specific way, the revealed way, and "neither is there salvation in any other." See that you refuse not him who speaks. See that you perish not, with safety in view. This Syrian was within sight of healing—yet, in the rash pride of his heart, he was about to forfeit his only remaining chance of cure. The divine word was sounding in his ears, the waters of Jordan were gleaming before

his eyes; yet, by one heedless, impetuous resolve, he was on the point of forfeiting all the good of his long pilgrimage—ready to turn his back on an offered favor, and to rush to a leper's grave in a heathen land.

How many have their too truthful portraiture reflected in his! By manifold ways, and through manifold instrumentalities, in this Christian realm; by press and by pulpit, by the living voice and by the silent volume, they have the streams of salvation pointed out to them—aye, flowing at their side. They are "almost persuaded to be Christians;" but by reason of pride and self-righteousness and guilty procrastination, they reject the offered mercy, and lapse into their old self-complacency and indifference. Reversing the direction of the chariot, and flinging the reins loose on the coursers' necks, their sad history is thus briefly chronicled—"The way of peace they have not known;" "You knew not the time of your visitation" (Rom. 3:17; Luke 19:44).

It is, moreover, a mournful reflection, how small and insignificant are often the causes which lead those of fair promise to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. It is sad enough the wreck of the noble vessel, wrestling with the storm far out in the trough of the sea—but it is sadder still, to see it go down within sight of the harbor, when the voices of distress can be heard on shore. It was sad, of old, for the manslayer to be overtaken by the avenger of blood on his way to the Refuge-city, but sadder still to be cut down, just as he was within shadow of the gate, and the citizens were crowding the walls cheering on his lagging and wearied steps. Reader, take home the solemn admonition, "Beware lest you also, being carried away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call you upon Him while He is near." "If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever!"

## **MAN'S THOUGHTS AND GOD'S THOUGHTS**

But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "Behold, I thought he would surely come out to meet me! I expected him to wave his hand over

the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!" 2  
Kings 5:11

In the preceding pages, we have described Naaman's journey from Damascus—his discouraging reception by the King of Israel—the message sent from Elisha which brought him with his chariot, horses, and servants to Gilgal—and his haughty rejection of the cure propounded to him by the prophet.

Before we pass to consider other historical incidents in the sequel, the three simple words which are placed at the head of this chapter arrest our attention. The lips of the Syrian captain were not the only ones that have uttered them. They are, it is to be feared, a formula used by thousands and tens of thousands among ourselves. Let us suspend, for a little, the thread of the narrative; and, standing in imagination by that lowly door on the heights of Jericho, gather a few solemn reflections from the exclamation of the leper-chief—"Behold, I thought!"

(1.) How often are these words employed with regard to the dealings of PROVIDENCE. In the midst of mysterious dispensations which befall us, whether as individuals or as communities, how apt are we to impugn the Almighty's faithfulness, question the wisdom of His procedure, and set up our wills in opposition to the divine. Is not this oftentimes the silent utterance of the misgiving heart—"Behold, I thought"—it were better had such an event been ordered otherwise?

"Behold" (to take no unfrequent illustration, in which not personal interests but the welfare of the Church seems involved), here was an honored Ambassador of Christ, a faithful witness of the truth, unwearied in his endeavors to awaken the careless, comfort the mourner, soothe the suffering, and befriend the dying. Though others might be arrested in the midst of health, and laid on couches of languishing, "I thought," that for the world's good, and the glory of the Master he served, a rampart of defense would have been thrown around a life of earnest love and zeal and unselfishness like this! Yet while other weaklings and "Ready-to-halts" are spared, this standard bearer—this Asahel, swift of foot and daring in deed, has fallen in the field, just when his courage and heroism and example were most needed to nerve his comrades and turn the tide of

battle.

Many decayed, gnarled 'trees' are left to occupy their place in the forest, while the strong of stem, and green of leaf, and majestic in form, are rooted up. Old crumbling 'pillars' are allowed to remain, while polished shafts, fresh from the quarry, have been struck and shattered with lightning. Where is He who guides with unerring rectitude the destinies of the universe? "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" "Surely the Lord does not see, neither does the God of Israel regard!"

Or, to take the case which comes most deeply home to the individual heart, where is the mercy or tenderness in that sudden vanishing of life's summer dream—that crude demolition of the most cherished vision of earthly bliss? "Behold, I thought" that His dealings to His own, were those of a Father; not retributive and judicial, but paternal—that I could see no hand and hear no lullaby but love. Why has the promised parental solicitude been superseded by the harsh voice and the rebuking rod? Why has the All-loving belied His own saying, "Lord, look down from heaven and see us from your holy, glorious home. Where is the passion and the might you used to show on our behalf? Where are your mercy and compassion now? Surely you are still our Father! Even if Abraham and Jacob would disown us, Lord, you would still be our Father. You are our Redeemer from ages past." (Isa. 63:15, 16).

What is the answer to these and suchlike unworthy surmisings? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isa. 55:8). To the eye of sense, however baffling and mysterious be the ways of the Supreme Disposer, it is not for us to "think," but to believe; not to question, but, like Job, to kneel and to adore—not to say, "Behold, I thought" that Your judgments are right, and I have been deceived; but, I know that they are right, and that You in faithfulness have afflicted me—not, "I thought" that "all things are working together for good;" but, "I know" they are so. If we allowed our own shortsighted wisdom to sit in judgment on the divine procedure, each one of us would at times be a Naaman, tempted to turn away in sullen discontent and anger from many a providential message.

The disciples on their way to Emmaus were cherishing such a spirit. With

their back to their Lord's cross, and their faces bent on the ground, they muttered in despair, "We had hoped ('behold, we thought') it had been He who would have redeemed Israel." Little did they dream, amid these pensive musings and carnal reasonings, that the Messiah of their nation and of the world was walking by their side! Martha and Mary were cherishing such a spirit, when they rushed to the uplands of Bethany and gazed with wistful eye across to the Moab mountains, "as to a world beyond the grave," for a tarrying Lord. If their inmost souls had been disclosed—if we could have listened to their words, we should have heard them thus pouring out their disconsolate soliloquy—"Behold, we thought" Jesus would not have lingered so; we thought His omniscient eye and omnipotent love would have discerned and pitied our tempest-tossed bark in its sea of sorrows. It is unlike His kind heart thus to mock our grief. It is unlike His righteous wisdom thus to single out His and our loved brother for a premature grave. "Behold, we thought" that, darkened and desolate as other homes in Judea might be, the last light He would have extinguished would be that in our Bethany dwelling—the last star expunged from the skies, one so bright with promise.' No, hush, unbelieving one, your thoughts; "Did I not say unto you, if you would BELIEVE, you should see the glory of God?"

Oh for an unquestioning faith! Naaman "thought" when, in the circumstances, he had no right to think; when alike his privilege and his duty was to listen to and obey the voice of Jehovah's prophet. So ought it to be with us; not venturing to arraign the faithfulness and love even of dispensations the most inscrutable; but rather, in reverent submission to say, amid crossed wills and frowning providences, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak. He will speak peace to His people and to His saints."

(2.) But these three brief words admit of more solemn interpretation, and more solemn lessons still—if we connect them with the sinner and with an eternal world—or rather, with that Great day when God's mundane providential government—the season of probation being ended, He shall judge the world in righteousness, and apportion everlasting awards; rendering "to every man according to his deeds—to those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality—eternal life; but unto those who are contentious, and do not obey the

truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil." If we can dare, at such a crisis of the spirit's history, to suppose a remonstrance, would it not be framed or prefaced by this—"BEHOLD, I THOUGHT?"

Let us anticipate the scene. Let us conjure up some of those "thoughts" which, up to that moment, may have deluded and deceived—but which will then dissolve like a rope of sand.

"Behold, I thought," we may suppose one to say, "that I was as good as my neighbors." I saw no reason for curbing passion and leading an overstrict life. I brought myself to regard the tendencies and vices of a corrupt nature as 'pardonable weaknesses', too readily crediting the condoning verdict of my fellows, as they laughed at my scruples, and told me that there was no great harm after all in indulging these failings and foibles—that I was but a child of Adam at the best, and that no perfection was to be looked for here. If I were selfish and worldly, or the victim of lawless appetites, I thought I was at least no worse than crowds of loveless, narrow-minded, depraved souls around me, who had no higher law dominating their actions than this—"All seek their own." I was satisfied with conforming to the conventional habits and tastes and maxims prevalent in the society among which my lot was cast. Associating religion with sackcloth, self-denial and gloom, I shook off the oppressive burden, and came to glory in my imagined freedom, trusting—"thinking"—that all would go well with me at the last."

And is not this the very dream which many are daily cherishing—the false and fatal rationalization, which is lulling and luring them to destruction? They are content to measure themselves by themselves, and to compare themselves among themselves. With blunted moral sensibilities, and confounding moral distinctions, they invoke upon themselves the doom of the prophet—"Woe unto those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness!" Their lives are regulated and their characters molded by the principles and practice of the world around them. In the quaint words of an old writer, "they set their souls by the town clock, and not by the sun in the heavens." Their creed is, "Religion may be well enough in its way, but we must keep it in its own place;" and they mandate it as an intruder, into the poorest and lowest



corner of their daily life. They hear its warnings as they listen to some funeral bell tolled on rare occasions. Flippant pleasure, keen moneymaking, unrighteous mammon, seductive vice—these are the guests to whom they throw open house and hall, while the other is treated as the beggar at their doors, to whom they toss a coin to get rid of intrusive importunity.

"Why"—we may interpret their inward musing—"why this grim strictness, this 'puritanical punctilio' about the moralities of life? A plentiful and lenient allowance must be made; and will be made, at the last, for constitutional frailty and passionate impulse. If betrayed into deflections from the path of duty and rectitude—if the TEKEL of the old palace-wall be written on the chambers of conscience, it is the motto which belongs to millions as well as ourselves. We have looked behind the world's hollow pretenses and gilded professions, and our comfort is, that we are at all events, not worse than the average specimens of frail humanity. Let others, if they please, dwell within curtains of sackcloth and in the tents of Mesech; be it ours to fill the luscious bowl of pleasure—with the old Epicurean, to "live while we live"—to enjoy life's capricious sun while it shines—the haunt of folly, the dazzle of amusements, the jovial song, the sparkling wine-cup. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Should there be one whose eye traces these lines, who may be harboring, even in a modified form, such perilous fallacies, trusting to such refuges of lies—risking the bridging of the eternal abyss with a few rotten and worthless planks—thus tempted to say, with multitudes of self-deceived, "Behold, I THOUGHT I was standing all secure." My brother! take home to yourself this timely word of warning—"When you THINK you stand, take heed lest you fall." "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know this—that for all these things God will bring you into judgment" (Eccles. 11:9).

Let us again take our place amid the congregation at the Great Assize. Another, we may suppose, will then be ready to say, "Behold, I thought" I might with safety procrastinate. I thought I could presume on a strong pulse and vigorous arm and unwrinkled brow. I thought I had a long future yet to build upon—not an autumn-tint seemed to be on the leaf—

the sun was yet far from the western sky—I was floating down the stream with arms folded, apparently secure in my bark, little imagining that the waterfall was around the bend. I was convinced of my folly, when I found myself suddenly in the swirl and vortex of the dark waters. I am here to bear dreadful testimony to the truth often listened to, but listened to in vain, that "as men live, so do men die!"

And is not this, too, the daily reasoning of multitudes? Procrastinator! if the hand of death were now to arrest you; if you were now to be laid on the pillow from which you are never again to rise—the dream of life, with all its vanities and hopes and schemes vanishing in an instant, what would you say? Would it not be, "Behold, I thought it was yet time enough; I never anticipated a summons so sudden as this. True, conscience, the unsparing monitor and messenger, visited other doors—the gloomy funeral-crowd I saw passing along the street, ought daily to have reminded me of my own certain mortality. But I did not expect the 'fatal rider' would so soon drive his steed at my own dwelling. My 'golden castles' were not completed; my fields were not yet added to. I was weaving for the future, endless purposes regarding a religious life—but death has come when I was all unprepared and unready—like the leap of the forked lightning, or as the lurking assassin. Oh! I never dreamt of this rush and invasion of "the thief in the night! Behold, I thought"—and the voice fails and falters; it cannot complete the sentence. The swiftly moving spirit from the region of thought, passes at a bound into the region and world of dread realities!

Why, it may be asked, revert so often to this unwelcome theme of 'the peril of postponement'? Just because it forms the submerged rock that has strewn the sea of life with more of mournful wrecks than any other. Every returning Lord's-day, sermons in thousands of British churches are preached, in which the danger of delay is made special subject of faithful monition—God's servants enforcing the abstract lesson by instances in their own experience—strong frames prostrated, gleaming eyes dimmed, young voices silenced, the boom of the great billows thus brought solemnly and impressively near. Yet what is the effect? Awed into solemnity while the message is delivered and the warning brought home, how many go away worldly and callous—neglectful and godless as ever!

Tomorrow finds the impressive exhortation stifled and overborne in the hum of business, just as if it had never been spoken—or, if it does recur, the old soliloquy will recur along with it, and hush it into new oblivion—"Soul, you have goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry!"

Moreover, what often tends to foster procrastination in the case of such, is, that the crude "thought" and theory of the spiritual life which they entertain, is a false and defective one. That "thought" frequently shapes itself into a 'religion' consisting in a series of outward impersonal acts—or, to express it differently, enrolment in a spiritual society called "the Church"—that enrolment involving little more than subscription to a few doctrinal truths and formulas—a mechanical process which can be satisfactorily effected at any time—thus leading to rest in the comforting anticipation of what is called "a deathbed repentance"—a safe and ready transportation into a world of spirits, aided by priestly absolution and the supposed efficacy of sacramental grace. (MacDuff is here referring to the "Sacrament of the Sick" which Roman Catholics depend upon to convey them to heaven—editor.)

We dare not limit the power and sovereignty of divine grace, even at the close of a misspent life. Doubtless it is a possible thing for a soul (like the Prophet's predicted nation) to be "born in a day"—for the spiritually blind, like our own globe emerging from its enshrouding chaos, to be translated at once out of darkness into marvelous light. But not so is God's 'customary and normal method' of procedure. Moreover, religion is an education—the outcome of a life. The mature Christian is not he, who, a stranger to all spiritual progress and development, is content with being fenced round with orthodox articles of faith, unimpeachable dogma and forms. But rather, one who has set before him, as his grand object and goal, conformity to the divine character—assimilation to the divine image.

The crude and shapeless block, as it comes fresh from the quarry, is not fashioned and transformed by a touch—for its place in the heavenly temple. Only after laborious efforts in the workman's hands, is it fitted to be a cornerstone, "polished after the similitude of a palace." A day of solemn reckoning will wake up many to the consciousness of present self-deception, who are now cherishing the delusion that they can safely and

indefinitely relegate to a dying hour, the work of soul preparation—in other words, the remolding and reconstruction of their spiritual character—and by the muttering of a confession at life's close, pass at once into the fruition of a holy heaven and a holy God!

True it is (we cannot too often reiterate the cheering truth), that the unlimited invitation is given, irrespective of all times, unhampered by all conditions—"Him that comes unto me, I will never cast out." True it is, the faithful trader even on one talent, will not be excluded from the promised recompense of the Great Creditor. The hired laborers of the eleventh hour will not be forgotten or disowned by the Lord of the vineyard. True also it is, that in the Father's house there are many mansions. There are those who are "least" as well as "greatest" in the kingdom; those who are to move in distant orbits, as well as those who are to bask in the near radiance of the Central Sun—yes more, we doubt not many a prodigal, on whom we may have uttered our harsh verdict of exclusion, will find his way to the paternal halls, and be hailed with the paternal welcome. But yet, nevertheless, neither dare we fail to remember the words of "Him that is holy, Him that is true; who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens." Listen to these words! In the blaze of that righteous tribunal they will flash condemnation on many daring and presumptuous ones—"Him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me on my throne." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." "Then shall the righteous" (those who have made it their aspiration to reach the lofty divine ideal) "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Again, let us pass down the gulf of time to the same solemn hour. We may imagine the avowal of another to be this—"Behold, I thought that God would be too merciful to punish. I thought that He would never surely visit such stern retribution on the creature of His own hands. I thought, when I came really to confront His bar, that He would either modify His recorded threatenings—or else, perhaps, by a great unbounded exercise of His love, would grant a universal reprieve and amnesty. I thought, when I gazed on His outer visible creation—I saw no hieroglyphic of wrath. I saw love pencilled on every flower—I heard it murmured in every breeze, sung in the chorus of birds, proclaimed by the gleaming sun by

day, and serenaded by the silent stars at night. Moreover, in looking around me on the moral world, I imagined some dim foreshadowings might be seen of the divine oblivion of sin and reluctance to punish. Sentence against an evil work was not, in the earthly economy, executed speedily. I saw, oftentimes virtue languishing unrewarded, and vice raising unrebuked her brazen forehead. When the Almighty did these things, and 'kept silence', behold, I thought that He was 'altogether such an one as myself!' I dreamt not of the necessity of the exercise of His justice—that though He pities the sinner, the holiness of His nature requires him to punish sin. The first glimpse of His righteous judgment-seat has dissipated the delusion. I am brought to read in the name and memorial of a merciful God—that He will by no means clear the guilty."

To refute similar "thoughts," to which, it is feared, multitudes are clinging, and who, in doing so, reduce the unchangeable Creator to a level with the vacillating creature—it is enough, surely, to point to the Incarnation and Passion of the Divine Redeemer, and the dreadful lessons which cluster around them. Can we—dare we, for a moment venture on the supposition, that God would have visited His innocent Son with such unparalleled anguish—that He would have inflicted on Him that shameful death, if He could otherwise have revoked the penalties annexed to transgression—if that mercy which endures forever, could have silenced the voice of righteous retribution, and conferred on the sinning, an unconditional pardon? The entertainment of the idea is equivalent to representing Gethsemane's garden and Calvary's cross as two superfluous scenes of woe—and the Eternal Father (we say it with reverence) as subjecting the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory to a needless tragedy of blood and suffering!

Let that "cross and passion" read another and far different lesson. If sin required so dreadful an expiation from the Innocent, what will it require from the guilty? If God poured out the vials of imputed wrath on the head of a spotless Immaculate Surety—what will He do to the bold, defiant scorner of His grace—the rejecter of "so great salvation." "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

Once more. From another crowd in that Great day of retribution, there will be heard the utterance of a more fearful "thought" still—"Behold, I

thought that the whole world of spiritual realities was a myth—that religion was a falsehood—that God and heaven were illusions of fond fancy—that hell was 'a tale and nightmare of priestly terror'—Revelation a repertory of artful and antiquated forgeries which superstition had palmed from age to age on a gullible world. I thought that there was light enough in my own intellectual nature to guide me. I heard the priests of the Temple—the recognized interpreters of the oracles of God—proclaim truths which were unaccredited and unauthenticated by any other testimony. External nature seemed to belie them. They spoke of 'the end of all things'—the dissolution of the existing world order—the coming of the Son of God in the clouds of heaven. I looked abroad on the material earth, with its canopy of skies—it seemed to anticipate and echo my own skeptic thought—"Where is the promise of His coming?" All things continued as they were. There was no cloud in all the horizon—no shadow to warn of coming vengeance. Seasons revolved, and suns rose and set, and men bought and sold—the world seemed as buoyant with youth as ever. I thought to myself—Why practice a life of self-denial, as I see others do, on a 'mere possibility'? The visible testimony of the globe I live on, is more reliable than the conjectures of some old parchment scrolls and devout dreamers. I shall take my chance of these alleged premonitions of coming wrath. Reason shall be the priestess of my altar, and Pleasure the enshrined goddess. Mine shall be the happy creed, of death an eternal sleep, and the grave a last, long home, whose slumbers no fictitious trumpet-peal of Judgment shall ever break!"

How many, in this age of rampant infidelity and unbridled licence, are deluding themselves with these very "thoughts"—the infidelity of the head, stimulated by the worse infidelity of the heart, (for it is "in his heart" the fool has said, "There is no God"). None, doubtless, who peruse these pages, are thus wrecked on such unhappy shoals of error; despite of an outward religious profession, clinging to the horrible creed and vague hope, that, after all, there may be no personal Deity—no retributive judgement—that death may be annihilation—eternity a blank! But we may well give the needful word of warning—"Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief!" "Beware lest you also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

There is no subject more important than the relation of 'Reason' to 'Faith'—and Faith to Reason. We do not dethrone the latter from her own place—her God-assigned place—in the moral economy; "We speak that we do know." Reason, if rightly employed, ought to have her own mission; not as the antagonist—but as the sister and handmaid of Faith. But the command of Christ is not, "REASON yourself unto me," but, "Come unto me." "BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Do not begin, first, to cavil at the doctrine—to raise up mists of unbelief between you and the Sun of righteousness—to find out flaws and scars in the temple-pillars. Enter the sacred shrine. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The Divine injunction, with reference to those skeptic imaginations, is a message of tender compassion and love—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his THOUGHTS, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, and He will abundantly pardon!" (Isa. 55:7)

Finally, what is the great lesson to us all from this subject? That it is now time to take God at His word. Like Naaman, we "think," and pause, and hesitate, when the divine injunction and exhortation is, "Only believe." When a child receives a command from his parent, he does not first weigh, and ponder, and question its propriety—he does not say, "Behold, I thought" that so and so would have been better; but he DOES it; he obeys. With him the parent's word is law. Reader, that is what God expects and demands of you. Not to subject to a hard and rigid analysis His dealings either in providence or grace, but simply to ask, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

Oh! let there be no hard thoughts on your part with reference to Him. His thoughts, towards you, are thoughts of mercy. "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them. If I could count them, they are more in number than the sand." Be it yours to breathe the prayer of simple faith, docile reverence, filial love—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know MY THOUGHTS, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

## SEASONABLE ADMONITION

"And his servants came near, and spoke unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, wash, and be clean?"—2 Kings 5:13.

To resume the narrative. We left the Syrian warrior when he had just received the humbling and unexpected message from Elisha, to wash seven times in Jordan. Chafed and irritated, he could not tolerate the imagined indignity. In a moment the cavalcade turned. With knitted brow, and smarting with injured pride, he had his back on the Prophet's home, and his face towards Damascus! Nothing but the divine intervention could now save him! If we had not indeed already known the sequel, we would have considered his case as hopeless, and looked upon that cavalcade as a funeral procession, wending their way to a leper's grave!

Not a few, doubtless, can recall similar perilous seasons in their own history, when, in some sudden gust of passion or of temptation, they have turned a deaf ear to the voice of Providence. By one rash "thought," one depraved act, one ungodly counsel, they have been ready to sacrifice and surrender a lifetime of promise, making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience—that, too, with the waters of salvation (like the Jordan at Gilgal) in sight—and spiritual guides, like Elisha, faithfully directing their way. But God has mercifully borne with their folly—manifesting patience and forbearance, where there might righteously have been rejection and abandonment. He has not cast them off—though they were on the point of casting Him off. He has sent His 'servants', like those of the Aramite chief—to reason and expostulate—to warn of guilt and danger—to put a restraint on demon-passion—and turn the helm—when the rocks would have been otherwise struck and the ship hurried in the blinding tempest to irrevocable doom. Yes, how many have to tell—But for these messengers appointed to plead with us—a faithful Friend, Sickness, Affliction, Bereavement—we might this day have been journeying



backwards, each to his own Damascus, with the fouler gangrene—the deeper taint of moral leprosy—claiming us as its hapless victims!

But let us proceed to gather, from the verse heading this chapter, a few plain, practical LESSONS chiefly bearing on everyday conduct and life.

1. Let us mark the effect of timely ADMONITION. The caravan has commenced its retreating movement; the procession is actually wending its way from the Prophet's watchtower up the pass of Ai, soon to be lost from view among the glens of Ephraim—when Naaman's Syrian attendants duteously approach the side of the chariot, saying, "My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? how much rather then, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?"

The first impulse of these servants might have been very different. Nor could we have wondered, or condemned them, if they had keenly felt and promptly resented a supposed insult—venting their indignation against the discourteous prophet who had so duped both their leader and themselves. Sulkily falling back in the rear of the procession, and leaping on their saddles, they might have held on their way in sullen silence. Or, taking a more favorable view of their feelings; supposing they had not thought so hardly of the Prophet's message as their master had done, we might, at all events, have imagined them saying to one another, "Would that he had assented to the directions of this Hebrew! But we dare not interfere. It would ill become us to interject our opinion. It would be the height of presumption to venture an admonition. It is to be regretted that a gust of ill-timed passion should ruin the whole object of the journey. We are, however, only menials and dependants; our duty, in any circumstances, is to remain passive. It would be at our peril to incite such a hurricane. It might be instant death to intermeddle with the 'chafed and galled lion'. Let matters take their course—he will be the sufferer—it is nothing to us."

Not so! Theirs might be the more daring and riskful, but it was "the most excellent way." They exemplified, by their conduct, the truth of the saying, "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" Ah! how much evil in the world (yes, too, and in the little world of our individual influence) might often be averted by well-timed admonition! How often, by a guilty

silence, do we allow great opportunities for good to pass away! How many vessels, driven on the sands of unbelief or profligacy, might, humanly speaking, have been saved, had the beacon been pointed out in time, and the voice of counsel and warning been judiciously lifted up! Had that parent been more faithful in checking the incipient tendency to dissipation; had that employer, to that friendless young man environed with the temptations of city life, spoken solemnly and seriously, now that he was removed from the hallowed restraints of the old homestead. Yes; and those poor, hapless wrecks of society, who dishonor their name and sex—wretched outcasts from virtue and peace—how often might they too have been snatched as brands from the burning, if some earnest, tender, faithful word had been whispered in their ears—if a cruel world, in the first moment of suspicion, instead of turning its back coldly upon them, hurling envenomed darts of slander and reproach and scorn, had acted the nobler and more Christian-like part—of pleading with the yet unseared and sensitive conscience—urging instantaneous return to the good old paths—saying, as the great Lord of conscience did to one such pining, withered flower, whom others had mercilessly trodden and trampled under foot, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."

2. A second lesson we may learn is, to beware of the latent pride of the human heart. The servants of Naaman, in their admonition with him, seize at once on the reason of his disappointed and outraged feeling. "My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it." Their master would have preferred, and doubtless expected, some instruction that would have been flattering to his pride and vainglory. It was, as has been already noted, the insignificance of the Jordan washing that was offensive and distasteful to him. If the Prophet (as we have had also occasion to illustrate in a previous chapter, but which again meets us more appropriately here)—if the Prophet had required of him the performance of some great feat, or subjected him to some great privation, or demanded some costly sacrifice, he would probably have unhesitatingly assented. Had it been the toil and effort of a lengthened pilgrimage, or the pain of bodily penance—had it been the charging of royal fees from his Syrian possessions—herds of cattle, the pride of Lebanon's cedars, or the wealth of olive-groves by the Abana—he would, without much reluctance, have taxed his princely revenues to

liquidate the debt. But to undertake all that tedious journey, and simply to be told at the end of it, and as the result of it, to "wash in Jordan"—there was no heroism, no chivalry, about that! It was what the humblest Jew who lived near its banks was in the habit of doing daily. To obey such an injunction, would be to put himself on a level with the peasants and farmers and slaves in the Hebrew villages around. The old blood of the warrior was roused—the resolve was taken—and the homeward journey commenced.

The conduct of Naaman has here, too, its faithful analogy and counterpart in the opposition of many to the gospel plan of salvation. They have no idea of being saved in the same manner and on the same conditions, as the vilest and most abandoned. Give them some special and exceptional recipe and prescription for their acknowledged spiritual maladies; let them get into heaven by the entrance which admits the honest, and virtuous, and reputable, and charitable. But to put them on the same footing—to make them walk in the same pathway and to bathe in the same stream as yonder profligate and drunkard and liar—men once of demoralized habits, degraded principles, and vicious life—the pride of nature revolts at the thought! They must have a 'respectable method' of restoration, or they will reject and repudiate the revealed one.

It was for this reason the gospel proved to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness. The son of Abraham, with his long pedigree, his pride of national descent, his covenant privileges, and punctilious performance of ritualistic ceremony—the Greek, with his boasted worldly wisdom and his systems of refined philosophy—could not tolerate the idea of being placed on a level with the ignorant and vile—with slaves and publicans, sinners and harlots—and of being brought to own, as their Savior, the crucified Son of a Hebrew laborer—a lowly carpenter of Galilee!

This, however, is that gospel's first and indisputable lesson—to count all native excellencies and graces and endowments and virtues—as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. At His cross the rich and poor must meet together, for He, the Lord, is the Redeemer of them all. Great and base—noble and despised—the man of fair character and irreproachable life—as well as the lowest profligate bathed in tears of

penitence and shame—all must endorse the one utterance and employ the one prayer—"God be merciful to me a sinner!" The hungry He fills with good things, while the rich (in their own estimation) He sends empty away!

3. We may also learn here that God is glorified by obedience to His will in LITTLE things. Naaman was willing enough to do "a great thing." He was unwilling to stoop to do a little one. How many there are—and that, too, in "the religious world"—who are ready and eager to enlist in some bold and startling enterprise—ready for a life of high consecration in a large and influential sphere, but who dwarf and dwindle into inaction and listlessness in a small and limited one. In some prominent position on the Church battlements, they are all ardor and devotion, all activity and zeal; but they have no taste nor patience for subordinate place or lowly duty; prepared to undertake the toilsome pilgrimage, or to embark in the herculean task—but ready with a refusal, whenever anything so insignificant is mentioned as the Jordan washing.

We believe we have abundant warrant for the assertion, that those most glorify God, who, without the often false stimulus of outward and secondary motives, perform gladly that class of humble, unostentatious deeds and services, which, requiring no intellectual effort, no brilliant gifts, are unacknowledged by the world's approval—unapplauded by the world's hosannahs. Such, assuredly, will not be unowned or rejected by the Great Recompenser, because they have nothing better or costlier to offer.

While it is said of "the mountains" (the Church's great ones) that they shall "bring peace to the people," "the little hills" (the Church's humble, unknown, obscure ones) are to do so also "by righteousness" (Ps. 72:3). Let none be coveting opportunity for the execution of ostentatious labors, or for occupying conspicuous positions, as if these enjoyed a monopoly in the divine favor and approval. The hewer of wood and drawer of water in the Tabernacle and Temple of old—if (what might be deemed) his drudgery were performed from a principle of obedience and lowly fidelity—served the God of the temple, as much as the High Priest with his breastplate gleaming with the Urim and Thummin.

Motive is everything with the omniscient Heart-searcher! And He is satisfied, if we fulfill with a good conscience our apportioned place and destiny, whatever that may be. The little firefly illuminating the darkness in the balmy plains of the south, is one of the tiniest lamps in God's magnificent Temple of night—a mere glimmering spark compared with other and nobler Altar-fires of moon and stars in the same great sanctuary. But that insect does not refuse to rise on its wings of flame, because unable to emit a greater amount of light; it is content to shine with the luster assigned to it in its humble place in the universe, and the Creator is glorified thereby.

The insignificant, "nameless rill" does not refuse to sing its way to the ocean, because, on the opposite side of the mountain or valley, a mighty torrent is thundering along, and bearing in its course a larger and wealthier volume. It carries its appointed tribute to the sea; and He who "sends forth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills," expects from it no more. "She has done what she could," is the divine word of approbation. The one lowly talent conscientiously traded on, will receive its own, with interest. The widow's mite and the cup of cold water are owned and accepted, and the intention and desire would be accepted, if there were no mite and no cup to give.

"I would not have the restless will  
That hurries to and fro,  
Seeking for some great thing to do,  
Or secret thing to know;  
I would be treated as a child,  
And guided where I go.

"So I ask You for the daily strength  
To none that ask denied,  
And a mind to blend with outward life  
While keeping at Your side;  
Content to fill a little space  
If You be glorified.

"And if some things I do not ask  
In my cup of blessing be,

I would have my spirit filled the more  
With grateful love to Thee;  
More careful than to serve You much,  
To please You perfectly."

4. Let us learn, from the servants of Naaman, a similar lesson to that which we drew, in a former chapter, from the example of the little captive maid—the divine art of speaking kindly. If these servants had, with coarse and blustering demand, assailed their master, the likelihood is they would only have added fuel to the flames and augmented his anger. But, though naturally irritable, and from his rank and preceding behavior, impatient of contradiction, they knew Naaman was not ungenerous nor inaccessible to courteous and well-meant admonition. Coming up, therefore, to the side of his chariot, they addressed him by the affectionate term, "My father."

Let it be our uniform endeavor to cultivate, in daily communion and conversation, this 'grace of manner and speech'—this gentle, kind consideration for the feelings, it may even be the foibles and infirmities, of others. Some there are, wittingly, others unwittingly, who cannot convey a remark or an advice but in rough and rugged tones—harshly grating on feelings that may be more delicately strung than their own—leaving behind displeasing memories—sometimes inflicting wounds that a lifetime cannot heal.

On the other hand, what a winning power there is in kindness! How softly and musically the wheels of daily life revolve, when they are touched and softened with this "excellent oil!" What conquests it can win over the morose and sullen, the selfish and irritable!

The moral of the old fable is true to the letter, which describes the conflict between the wind and the sun, as to which one would induce the traveler, most readily to part with his cloak. The tempest takes the initiative. But the whirlwind of passion—stormy rage, and angry tones—only lead to the wrapping of the cloak more closely around. The other competitor plies, in turn, his milder influences. The sun shines—the gentle, glowing beams of kindness begin to play—fold by fold is unloosed—the triumph is complete.

In the iron viaduct, greater is said to be the bending caused by the solar rays, than when the heaviest train is passing over it. So the genial influence and sunshine of kind words, can bend and subdue when nothing else can. As in the great war of the elements among the cliffs of Horeb—what the earthquake, the hurricane, and the fire fail to effect, is often compassed and insured by "the still, small voice."

A gentle child, to recur to a former illustration, smoothing the furrowed and anxious brow, can ward off tears and summon smiles, and bend and alter stern purposes, which the world's cold reasoning, dogged mandates, and imperious tones could never accomplish. "Be kind one to another—tenderhearted." "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." Speak gently—act gently. It is an inexpensive way of dispensing blessings—a cheap road to favor and regard—whether it be master to servant, or parent to child, or neighbor to neighbor, or friend to friend. We need the interchange of loving sayings and doings, amid the rough contacts and blasts of life. When wagons on the world's highway come into collision—when the wheels are locked and the bales tumble into the mud—the gospel method is not for the wagoners to pull up the team and to vent on one another a hailstorm of wrath, when both are likely to have a share of the blame—but to see, rather, who will be the first to leap down, extricate the goods from the mud, and do their best to make the thoroughfare smooth again.

Alas! that lack of courteous, considerate, gentle dealing, by word and deed, is often "the fly in the apothecary's ointment," which spoils and injures character otherwise estimable, and takes happiness and brightness from otherwise favored homes. Let us again remember here, the conduct and example of the Great Master. Prophecy had, ages before the Incarnation, prepared the world for the advent of One into whose lips "grace (kindness) was poured;" who would not "strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets;" who "would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." How exactly did the character and actions of the Christ of Nazareth accord with the prefiguration! "And all bore Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22). See Him in His hour of deepest abasement, when He most needed the presence and wakeful sympathy of

His trusted followers—how graciously and tenderly, even when administering a rebuke, He tempers it with a merciful apology for their slumbering and unwatchfulness—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And when the most faithless and renegade of their number has, with cruel aggravation, disowned and denied Him—see, when confronted on the shores of Tiberias, how his injured Lord, oblivious of all the past, has no harsher reproof to utter than that contained in the thrice-repeated refrain—"Simon, son of Jonah—do you love me?"

5. Once more; the same lesson again claims our attention, in the case of these Syrian servants, which we have, also in an earlier chapter, deduced from the story of the captive maid—the possibility on the part of all (however lowly their rank, and however secular their calling) of exercising a beneficial influence. It is one of the many heresies of modern days—not in the region of dogma, but of practice—that effort and work, whether religious or philanthropic, belong mainly, if not exclusively, to those who are invested with priestly and ministerial gifts and qualifications, and that, outside these accredited 'orders', responsibility ceases. How different are the teachings of Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New! Naaman, this imperious Syrian captain, is soothed, calmed, made to relent—by whom? Not by God's Prophet—Elisha does not interfere—he keeps within the walls of his Gilgal dwelling, and attempts personally no admonition with the irate warrior.

It is the word of the servants, which arrests the chariot, and alters the petty and otherwise fatal resolve. If these servants had reasoned, as many now-a-days do, they would have said, "If the man of God chooses to reject the cure, let him do so. That leprosy being connected with sin, the dealing with it is a religious matter. We do all that is required of us, if we faithfully perform our secular work, whether it be that of bodyguard, or camel-driver, or charioteer. It is not for us to usurp the office of teacher or judge. Business has its allotted and recognized sphere and season, and so has religion. We keep to our province, let the priest keep to his." Or, translating it into modern phraseology—We have to do only with buying and selling, with bargaining and trading, with bills and exchange, with business and counter.

Or—Are there servants in our household doing our drudgery—strangers,



it may be, from distant homes, who might be the better now and then for a kindly word, a pious advice, or salutary warning?—this is the vocation of their religious instructors, not ours; the less we meddle with their ways and affairs the better.

Or—There is one we know who is undergoing severe family affliction; we cannot fail to be cognizant of the cheerlessness of his position, and the solitariness of his heart. A word, or letter, or message of sympathy, would tend to soothe his anguished spirit. That unused book in our library, that "Afflicted Man's Companion," might prove a comfort and solace as he sits down at night by his lonely fire, and misses the face of wife or children. But this is not our concern. To be "sons of consolation" is no work of ours.

Or—Yonder is our early friend; his presence was often used to gladden our home, and we valued his cheerful society. He has, as the world calls it, "forgot himself." He is trembling on the brink of the precipice. We might, by timely stretching out our hand, or by a judicious word now spoken, yet save him from perhaps sadder deterioration. But what business, after all, is it of ours to interfere, or what thanks shall we get for our pains? Let the chariot move on, and the leprosy-spot increase—if his minister's visit and the Sunday sermon cannot reclaim him, what chance have we?

The servants of Naaman furnish us with a more hopeful—a more brotherly view than this. No, we would venture to aver, that agency and intervention akin to theirs, often reaches and succeeds, when, what might be deemed and called "influential instrumentality" fails and falters. Perhaps, even if Elisha had come out on the present occasion, and pled with that galled and fretted Syrian, he could not have prevailed half so powerfully, as his own personal servants. His interposition might have been spurned and rejected, while theirs was accepted and triumphed.

Specially under the higher and nobler spiritual dispensation under which we live, let us never forget, as members of the Christian priesthood, our individual responsibility in the sphere which we are called to occupy. To each one, whatever be his position or circumstances, the command of the Great Husbandman is imperative, "Son, go work in my vineyard" (Matt.

21:28). Nor is it unworthy of note, for the encouragement of those whose sphere is limited, that all throughout this inspired narrative of the Syrian leper, we have nothing but a series of humble agencies. The chariot of the warrior was set in motion by a little Hebrew slave. The next personage mentioned was a potent and influential one—Joram, king of Israel—he could do nothing. The next was the servant of this unostentatious prophet, sent to invite Naaman to Gilgal. Then, we have his own personal attendants here remonstrating. And finally, we have the washing in Jordan—an unworthy stream, compared with the Abana and Pharpar of his own Damascus.

Who dare decry or depreciate the smallest and unlikeliest instrumentality? "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation" (Isa. 60:22). Lowly may be the means God employs in speaking to us, as He did to Naaman. As our chariots move on in life's highway, let us listen meekly to the humblest providential voices; and regard them as divine delegates, beckoning us to turn our back no longer on the waters of salvation, but to close with the free invitation; or, if we have already thus closed, to cling with greater trustfulness and faith to the sublime simplicity of the gospel plan and message—"Wash, and be clean!"

## THE CRISIS AND THE CURE

"Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God—and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean! And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him."—2 Kings 5:14, 15.

Naaman's stormy passion is calmed. In accordance with the direction of Elisha, and yielding to the advice of his faithful attendants, he submits to the appointed means of restoration. We may picture in thought, the cavalcade moving from the Prophet's door along the low level plain towards the banks of the river. Shall we farther venture the supposition, that the time was at the approach of evening, when the sun was setting, and the Moab mountains were already assuming those purple and roseate hues so familiar to travelers at this day—one of the few features indeed in outer nature, unchanged since the times of the Syrian.

There are, generally, one or more, signal and momentous epochs which occur in every life, and especially in the lives of those who have left their mark and impress on the world. The night when Abraham was led out by his Almighty Protector to gaze upon the glories of an eastern sky, as the emblem and prophecy of his vast progeny. The night when Jacob wrestled with the angel-God at Peniel, and came forth halting, yet victorious; inspired with new and nobler impulses for the future. The, noontide hour, when the woman of Samaria owned the Pilgrim at the well of Sychar as the expected Messiah, abandoned forever her immoral life, and drank of the living water. The season and spot when "the anxious inquirer" in the desert of Gaza (Acts 8:26-39), had the darkened page he was reading illumined with glorious light, and when, the quest of a long pilgrimage gained, "he went on his way rejoicing."

Among historical instances in the Christian Church, we may instance the hour when Augustine obeyed the irresistible impulse awakened by the divine voice—"Take it up and read—take it up and read;" or when Luther, overtaken in the storm of thunder, and a lightning-bolt bursting at his

feet, felt encompassed by the terrors of death; and throwing himself on his knees on the highway to Erfurth, became from that hour an altered man.

Similar, also, are individual experiences of everyday occurrence; when the favorable turn takes place in alarming sickness; when the life of some dear child, "balanced in a breath," is unexpectedly restored; when the preaching of the gospel comes home "in demonstration of the Spirit and with power," and the guilt and folly of a futile, wasted, neglected past is vividly realized, tearfully bewailed, and earnestly renounced. These, and similar critical seasons, become the birthday of nobler purposes and resolutions—"I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help. For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light." (Ps. 56:12-13).

Such was the crisis we have reached in the story of Naaman, when we read of him (ver. 14), "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God—and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." We may picture the conflict of emotions, while, stepping down from his chariot, he disrobed himself of his gorgeous attire, and was about to plunge into the muddy stream—the expectant crowd of soldiers gathered around, all anxiety as to the result. It is done! The Lord of the Hebrews has been true to His word—"He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and he who has no helper" (Ps. 72:12). The words of Joshua, uttered in a former age, near the same spot, have a new application and significance with reference to the Gentile chief—"Behold the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth passes over before you into Jordan!" Naaman was henceforth included among "the sons of the stranger who join themselves to the Lord" (Isa. 56:6), on whom the divine promise is bestowed—"I will give them—in my house, within my walls—a memorial and a name far greater than the honor they would have received by having sons and daughters. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!" (Isa. 56:5).

As he emerges from the waters, he feels the glow of new health tingling in his veins. No flower-bud, if gifted for the moment with sensation, could

so feel the transition, when the closed petals bursts open at the summons of spring and sunshine, and blooms in loveliness and beauty. No creeping caterpillar could so feel the transition, when, from the dull and torpid cocoon, it becomes cognizant of "the tremble and flutter of its golden wings" and soars aloft in resurrection attire. If that man clasps his deliverer in tearful gratitude, who has snatched him from a watery grave, and brought him dripping to the shore; what must have been Naaman's emotions of "wonder, love, and praise" to that God who had delivered him from so great a death, and replenished him with joyous life?

Nobler and better too than outward healing, he felt, from that hour onwards, that he was renovated in soul as well as in body. Rimmon and his brotherhood of lying deities were henceforth abjured—a bill of divorcement was written against them all—"In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold to the moles and to the bats." In the words of Krummacher, "the obstinate heathen with his 'I thought,' is left behind in the watery grave of the Jordan. The crude warrior, who was almost beside himself with rage and vexation, died; and a person, gentle and peaceful as a dove, has risen from his ashes."

'Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.' Thus speaks the man who, a few hours before, went about in the fetters of the most deplorable darkness. The infernal charm is dissolved; the snare is broken; the bird has escaped. A new creature, born of God, stands in unveiled beauty before our eyes." That triumphal band, inconspicuous in numbers, which wound its way from the fords of the Jordan up to the heights of Gilgal, possessed elements of lofty and sacred interest which belonged to no Roman procession ascending the steps of the Imperial Capitol in its palmy days. Naaman himself was familiar with the jubilant throngs that were used to welcome his own victorious legions through the gates of Damascus; but grander and diviner hosannahs than those of earth were greeting that chariot of peace, and its crowned and "beautified" conqueror.

Indiscernible to human vision, as were the chariots and horses of fire disclosed by the Prophet of Gilgal on the mountain at Dothan, the angels of God were now encamping round this new 'trophy of divine power and mercy'. Clad in nobler armor, and richer attire than could be furnished by

spoils of earthly conquest, he could take up, in spirit, words which were before long to be sung by the great prophet-minstrel—"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness " (Isa. 61:10).

But without farther anticipating, let us endeavor to gather one or two of the more palpable practical reflections which this new turning-point in the story suggests.

1. Observe the power of God's upholding and sustaining grace. We have already commented on the sovereignty of that grace, in choosing a wild olive-tree from the soil of heathendom. We have now to note how that same grace, in another form, shielded the rash, impetuous warrior, when he had seemingly entangled himself in the toils of the great adversary, and his romantic pilgrimage was about to be ingloriously cut short by an outburst of wounded pride. "Surely in vain," says the Wise Man, "the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov. 1:17). The Jehovah of Israel had not only, as we have seen, marked that Gentile Syrian from all eternity as His own, but, as in the case of each of His true people, having begun a good work, He will carry it on. For a moment, indeed—to follow the metaphor of the Hebrew philosopher—the net seems to have been too successfully and fatally spread; the ensnared victim—that haughty eagle from the cliffs of Lebanon—lies, apparently, with broken pinion and ruffled plumage, fluttering in the dust—or rather, when the cage was opened for freedom and flight, he dashes the wings of passion against the enclosing bars, rejecting in his folly, the offered blessing. We can well imagine, that if there was one person in the Valley of Jericho, less likely than another to listen to the calm words of 'reason', it was this blinded, imperious, unreflecting child of nature. If Naaman had been left to himself, he never would have returned to Damascus, the leper he had left it—with the foul spot on his brow, and disappointed rage, like a demon from the abyss, torturing his spirit—the last state of that man would have been worse than the first!

But "is there anything too hard for the Lord?" "The wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." As we see the chariot retracing its way to the Hebrew Prophet's dwelling, and

the hero of the armies of Damascus already reaping that hardest of victories—over his own selfishness and pride—are we not constrained to feel that it is no mere power of human persuasion and admonition that has effected the change of purpose, stilling the waves of that stormy soul, and saying, "Peace, be still!" We behold in it the interposition of Him who "makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and restrains the remainder of His wrath." When nature was ready to fail—the vessel about to founder on the rocks—grace came to his aid, and effected the needed rescue. "He gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might He increases strength."

Some, possibly, as they ponder the narrative, may mark in its features notable resemblances to their own past experience; how at some memorable period of their history, when, forgetful of the way of duty and obedience, the too pliable chariot-wheels, obeying the impulse of passion and prejudice, selfishness and unbelief, were speeding onwards to destruction—a hand, stronger than human, reined in the wild steeds—some mysterious influence (call it what they may), confronted them, like the messenger of old, who, with glittering sword stood in the pathway of the Moabite Prophet, and a voice louder and diviner than that of either ministering or avenging angel was heard saying, "Turn! turn! why will you die?"

Truly "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;" that is, they are independent of all human caprice, willful waywardness, fitful passion. But for His sustaining and restraining grace, how many would have been swept down, like rotten trees, before the hurricane. How many have reason to make the confession on life's retrospect, "Unless the Lord had helped me, I would soon have died. I cried out, 'My foot is slipping!' and your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me." (Ps. 94:17, 18). How many have to point to words which, in an age long subsequent to that of Naaman, were uttered by divine lips to one who partook not a little of the mingled elements in Naaman's complex character—"Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat—but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not" (Luke 22:32).

2. Let us mark the difference between relenting and unrelenting passion. Naaman "went away in a rage." This was reprehensible enough. Anger

has been well called "a short madness." Few things are more humiliating than to see a man the deplorable and misguided victim and slave of his own irascible, ungovernable feelings—his bosom the crater of a burning volcano pouring down its hot lava-stream, a torrent of liquid fire—and that, also, too patent and visible to all around.

But worse, is the case of sullen, implacable anger. Bad enough is the fierce eruptive outburst of passion which expends itself in its own vehemence. But, sadder far, is the calm, vindictive, settled feeling—the confirmed, chronic malevolence—the devil-spirit, which seems to defy being exorcized; which no persuasion can melt, and no approach of kindness can mollify or subdue. You might as well attempt to move the world, as turn the wheels of that man's chariot. All the while he thinks himself a martyr. There is to his own apprehension an imagined heroism and chivalry about his stubborn, unrelenting anger. With morbid, sullen self-complacency he encircles himself within these moats of wounded pride—pitied by none but himself.

It might have been so with Naaman. He might have muffled himself in his warrior-cloak, and the frown which gathered on his brow at the Prophet's door might have deepened as he proceeded on his way. In dogged silence he might have listened to his servant's admonitions, or ordered them, in a tempest of rage, back to their camels. He might have entered Damascus cursing the God of Israel, and vowing summary vengeance against the hated Hebrews and their lying prophets. But the voice of kindly admonition had prevailed. "A man's pride," says the Preacher, "shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. 29:23). This "great and honorable man" is willing to be reasoned with, even by inferiors, and by them to have the folly and infatuation of his rage pointed out. The chariot is turned, and the next moment he is on his way down to the Jordan Valley. "He who rules his own spirit is greater than he who takes a city." "Be angry, and sin not—do not let the sun go down upon your wrath."

Who does not recall a nobler example for imitation? Think of the "Greater than Solomon"—across whose pure human soul no gust of angry passion ever passed its sirocco-breath—"Who when He was reviled, reviled not again—when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed himself to



Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

3. Let us observe, farther, the recompense of childlike obedience and unquestioning faith. "So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him." 2 Kings 5:14

It may have been a great struggle for the balked and humbled hero thus to return. It may—it must, have cost him no small effort to carry out these second thoughts. But it is "the instruction of the man of God"—and that is enough. Perhaps, too, when he reached the banks of the muddy river, and discerned, more vividly than he could do at a distance, the contrast with the crystal streams of Damascus, inclination would renew its promptings to cancel his purpose and resume his homeward journey. But, again, he remembers "it is the instruction of the man of God." The child-spirit has risen to the ascendant; the better nature and better resolve are dominant—on he proceeds, staggering not through unbelief.

Be it ours to cherish a similar devout, unquestioning reverence for the commands of God's inspired servants in His Holy Book; recognizing in their contents, not what man's wisdom teaches, but what the Holy Spirit teaches. Not receiving just so much as suits our dispositions and inclinations, or that squares with our carnal reasonings, and rejecting the rest. Not exclaiming, as Naaman in his folly did, "Behold, I thought!" (the essence alike of modern rationalistic philosophy and theology) but as he came to say, in his better mind, "Behold, I believe." Reason, untempered and unchastened by the spirit of faith, turns many a chariot in these days, from the door of the prophet and the prophet's God—indulging in the defiant spirit of the scoffers in the time of Ezekiel—"Ah, Lord God! does he not speak mysteries."

Others, venturing on more daring assertion, can see in the sublime simplicities of Scripture teaching, only the worn out and effete truisms and crudities of bygone centuries, out of harmony with an age of boasted advancement—an age which demands that revealed doctrines be accepted or rejected by what is called "the inner consciousness." God's inspired utterances dare not thus be degraded, by being subjected to the caprice of human manipulation. The true principle of the philosophy, applied to

spiritual as to material things, ought to be this—not, "What do you think?" but, "What do you read?" not carving out our own hypotheses and conceptions on the sacred tablet of truth, but seeking, modestly and humbly, to decipher the divine hieroglyphics already there, and to the interpretation of which, faith and prayer together, afford the golden key.

Our use and treatment of the secular, in life's everyday experience, may well teach us a lesson in the higher regions of divine speculation. We do not analyze the bread we eat, or the water we drink, or the rays of the sun in which we bask, before venturing to enjoy the nutriment and refreshment of the one, or the brightness and warmth of the other. So it should be in our dealings with God's Holy Word. If we approach it with a carping, dogmatic, skeptical spirit, we shall never turn the wheels of the chariot in the direction of the waters of salvation. Once deflected from the old path of childlike docility and reverential submission and teachableness, there will be little chance of return. There are things, doubtless, in Revelation, which, to our limited reason, are "hard to be understood." It was not to be expected that "the deep things of God" could be all made patent and perspicuous, in a present economy, to our limited apprehension. Whatever is really needful for our personal salvation, is revealed in the pages of the lively oracles as with the light of a sunbeam. And if there be other vexed questions or unsolved problems there, trust the divine Author of the Book that He will one day be His own interpreter; and vindicate, regarding His inspired words, the truth of the Psalmist's saying regarding His works, that they are "right" and "done in truth." Meanwhile, let it be ours to recognize in these utterances, not merely the sayings of the men of God, but the statements of "holy men," who "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:21).

The quickening power of the Word, be it remembered, is the special result of the operation of that divine Agent on the receptive heart. "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia, "that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). We may well say, with the Ethiopian eunuch, as, seated in his chariot he read the Scriptures, "How can I understand, unless someone should guide me?" But was it not the Savior's own promise, with reference to the great gift of the Paraclete contingent on His ascension—"He will guide you into all truth" (John

16:13); "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (16:14); "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" (14:26); "He will show you things to come" (16:13).

Oh for docility of faith to follow the instructions and leadings of that Holy Spirit, though these, at times, may refuse to dovetail with our preconceived theory and cherished speculation—wounding the pride of nature, and turning the impatient steeds and their chariot from the beaten highways down to places of humiliation! The vision of divine influence and power, seen by one of the minor prophets, was not among the cedar-clad heights, but "among the myrtle trees growing in the valley" (Zech. 1:8).

4. Let us gather, as a fourth lesson, the divine faithfulness, as manifested in the completion of Naaman's cure—"And his flesh was restored, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." It was all as the Prophet, under divine direction, had declared.

We have already pictured in thought the scene. The leper descending into the waters of the Jordan—his servants remaining in suspense on the river-bank, watching with bated breath during these critical moments. Again and again, in obedience to the command of the Hebrew Prophet, does he plunge overhead in the stream. Six times has the immersion been repeated. But the faith and obedience which triumphed over pride and self-will, have as yet no indication of recompense. The leprosy still asserts its cruel sway over the ulcered body. Unbelief may have been tempted to make a final assault on the warrior, and, if possible, to carry defeat in the very moment of victory—just perhaps, as of old, within sight of the same spot, when, after six successive "encompassings," not a few hearts among the host of Joshua would be tempted to discredit the success of the divine injunction for the leveling of Jericho's ramparts. But, as on the seventh appointed round of that strange procession of the Covenant symbol, accompanied with trumpet-blast and shouting, Jericho, the capital of the Jordan Valley, became a ring and a heap of ruin—so was it now with Naaman.

Plunging boldly, for the seventh time, into the turbid waters, he proves that the word of God is unchangeable. He comes forth a healed man! The

Ethiopian has changed his skin, and the leopard his spots—no, not only so, he stands before his servants, as we have already noted, a trophy and miracle of grace! A deeper taint than that of earthly leprosy has been purged away from his soul. The allegorical "great sheet" of a later age, in which the entranced apostle of Joppa saw clean and unclean animals indiscriminately mingled—is anticipated in the case of this Gentile of the Gentiles. In a truer and higher sense than appertaining to his mere physical frame, "he is not to be called common or unclean," "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel." "Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."

Have we not the same ground to confide in the faithfulness of God to His declarations? "Your testimonies are perfect; they are entirely worthy of our trust." (Ps. 119:138). In outer nature, we have a standing and continual pledge and guarantee for the divine veracity—the regular alternation of day and night; sunset followed by morning dawn; spring treading on the heels of winter, and summer waiting with elastic step and beaming countenance, to pour her treasures into the lap of autumn. The stars in their courses move as obediently to the divine command at this hour, as they did 3000 years ago—"They continue this day according to Your ordinances—for all are Your servants" (Ps. 119:91). If God's volume of external nature be so undeviating, truthful, unerring—surely much more may we trust the volume of Revelation. All the promises therein are yes and amen. Jehovah himself, in a remarkable passage in the book of Jeremiah, takes the one covenant charter, written in visible characters on the material scroll, as a security for the fulfillment of the provisions in the charter of grace—"Thus says the Lord, If you can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, and that there shall not be day and night in their season, then" (but not until then) "may also my covenant be broken with David my servant" (Jer. 33:20, 21). "He is faithful who promised" (Heb. 10:23).

On that same memorable occasion when, in the synagogue of Nazareth, our blessed Redeemer made reference to the case of "Naaman the Syrian"—it is added, "All bore Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22). How many in bygone centuries—how many among ourselves, would be ready and able

to bear similar attestation to the fidelity as well as graciousness of these divine utterances? Naaman himself, could he be summoned from his silent sepulcher among Aramite warriors, would be the first to offer his assenting testimony—acknowledging (what he may have been unable to see at the time)—the necessity and fitness of the various preliminary steps in the procedure of the God of Israel. Would he not say to each trembling, misgiving heart, "Trust that God of Israel—He will be better than His word. I came seeking only cleansing for the body, He has delivered my soul from death:" He has "forgiven all my iniquities" as well as "healed all my diseases, and redeemed my life from destruction." He has "satisfied my mouth with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103:3-6); "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Ps. 34:8).

Reader! have you thus "known and believed" the love and the word of God? Have you tested His faithfulness, specially in the promise of all promises—the gift of all gifts? Have you gone, like Naaman, to wash in the river of redeeming grace—the fountain of a Savior's atoning blood? or are you forfeiting the blessing, by indulging unnecessary misgivings as to your warrant to appropriate it? Be not faithless, but believing. Conjure up no erroneous impressions as to the inapplicability of the sure word of promise to you. It embraces all. All are warranted, all are welcome—"Him that comes unto me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

On the other hand, reject this way of salvation, and there remains "no more," no other, "sacrifice for sin." Oh, if this Gentile idolater listened to the voice of a humble Hebrew prophet, turned his chariot, and submitted to what must have been, to his proud spirit, a humiliating cure—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" But why should any continue thus either to neglect or to reject? Why not credit God, that "He says what He means, and means what He says"—and laying your finger on the immutable, uncanceled, promise of the divine Promiser, thus urge the plea of an old pleader at the Mercy-seat—"Do as you have said!" (2 Sam. 7:25). Why not respond to the simple exhortation (quoted in the title-page) of one, who, in his God-given gifts of bodily healing, has earned the lasting gratitude of thousands in a suffering world, not to speak of the healing leaves which he loved to pluck and to give from the

Tree of Life—"Can you not stoop down, wash like Naaman, and come out clean—come out a king?"

5. A farther point we may notice is, the GRATITUDE of the restored warrior. If he had been influenced by any remains of a spirit of selfishness and domineering pride, he would at once, after obtaining the cure, have given orders to his charioteer to evade the dwelling at Gilgal, and drive, by the nearest road, back to Syria. 'The Prophet,' he might have said, 'refused to grant me a personal audience. I need not now hold myself his debtor. I felt slighted by his not according me the homage to which, from my position, I was entitled—sending merely one of his servants with an oral message. I shall have my retaliation now for his discourtesy. Besides, why need I linger in this land of the Hebrews? I have got what I wanted. Why tarry to perform a mere piece of formal civility? After all, there may be no miracle in the matter. It may be some peculiar sanitary virtue in these Jordan waters which required neither Prophet nor priest to impart.' And so, he might have hastened to his Damascus home, to bow once more in the Temple of Rimmon, and forget all he owed to Jehovah and His Prophet.

No!—He went back to the man of God "clothed with humility;" to lay at his door the tribute of a grateful heart, and to make one of the noblest confessions a once blinded idolater ever uttered.

May we not learn from Naaman's example, the simple but often-forgotten lesson, how grateful and fitting is the remembrance and acknowledgment of kindness. Nothing is baser or more unworthy than to requite good deeds and loving labors—it may even be generous friendships—with coldness, rudeness, indifference, neglect. How often in this selfish world are those to be found, who have not a smile of thankfulness nor a word of gratitude for gifts conferred—heartless, pulseless, loveless beings—who grasp and take all they can get, as matters of course; proving, it may even be, at the end, like the frigid serpent of the fable, which stung the warm hand of the benefactor whose pity had reanimated it. Or, like the ten lepers of gospel story, whom our blessed Lord healed, but only one of whom returned to render thanks for deliverance. By all truly magnanimous souls, acts of goodness and beneficence can never be ignored or forgotten.

Look at David's gratitude for the many proofs of Jonathan's kindness, after that generous heart had long ceased to beat. How he loved the limping cripple Mephibosheth for the sake of his friend, and gave the daily substantial evidence of these uncanceled obligations, by having a seat reserved for the orphaned youth at the royal table! Or look at a later example in the same beautiful life—David's royal gratitude in the hour of returning prosperity and triumph—an hour when such debts are often, by ignoble people, apt to be forgotten. Barzillai, a brave old chieftain from the glens of Gilead, came to meet the restored sovereign near the very spot where Naaman now was, in order to offer his congratulations, and see the King of Judah safely across Jordan. He had come, not long before, with timely support and refreshment, when, in a season of humiliation and disaster, the son of Jesse was a fugitive from his throne and palace. The moment of ovation has not dimmed the memory of these seasonable gifts, and the still more seasonable sympathy of the benefactor. To this Patriarch Sheikh is also offered a special place at the royal table, and a heart-welcome to the royal dwelling in Jerusalem. Barzillai pled exemption, on account of his years, from the distinguished honor. But the king would not allow him to depart until he had imprinted on his furrowed cheek the kiss of grateful affection—"And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place" (2 Sam. 19:39). Nor did death itself extinguish these memories. In his last testamentary words, the names of Barzillai's children were commended, in sacred legacy, to the gratitude and love of David's successor (1 Kings 2:7).

Or, to do no more than simply refer to a New Testament illustration—listen to the prayer and benediction of one of the noblest hearts that ever beat in a human bosom—"May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in prison. May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ's return. And you know how much he helped me at Ephesus." (2 Tim. 1:16, 18).

To the Great Almoner of blessings, alike temporal and spiritual, are we as thankful as we should be? After some special token of providential goodness to ourselves or our households—when the Almighty Disposer in

His infinite mercy, relieves our fears, and with gracious deliverances crowns our fondest hopes and prayers—when, for example, raised up from protracted sickness, during which, the hope of restoration was faintly cherished, and the shadows of death appeared to be gathered ominously around—as the result of His restoring mercies—have the chariot-wheels always returned to the door of the Lord God of Elisha with tributary gifts of acknowledgment—whether these be in the shape of material thank-offerings poured into His treasury—or the better and more acceptable sacrifices of a purer, diviner life-consecration—we, as grateful recipients, exclaiming—"The living shall praise You, as I do this day!" "Your vows are upon me, O God, I will render praises unto You!"

Or rather, while the prayer has been heard and strength is restored, has the recorded vow of the sick-bed been forgotten, and the reproof too truthfully merited—"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away" (Hosea 6:4). The Christian's whole life, in the present world, may well be an anthem of gratitude; and its twofold theme will be prolonged and perpetuated in the Church above for the Redeemed in heaven are represented as still employed in singing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb"—the song of Providence and the song of Grace (Rev. 15:3). Yes—however feeble and stunted it may be here, the believer's gratitude will then rise to its true and noble proportions, as, in the fullness of the divine vision and fruition, it contemplates the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of God in Christ!

6. Finally, let us deduce from the passage a new illustration of individual influence—"Then Naaman and all his company went back to the man of God. They stood before Elisha." 2 Kings 5:15

Unless Naaman had reconsidered his resolution, retraced his steps to Jordan, and washed in its waters, his attendants could not have been spectators of the miraculous cure. They would have gone back to Syria, like himself, bigoted idolaters as they came. But having witnessed the immersion and its supernatural results, they gladly accompanied him to the house of the Prophet, to join in the tribute of thanksgiving.



Is it a bold or unwarranted supposition, that the captain of that company was not the only one then and there brought to confess that there was no true God save the God of Israel? Is it not more than probable, that some of these heathen attendants had been led, in consequence of their master's restoration, to a similar acknowledgment—that they returned to their land, all of them profoundly impressed with the might of the Hebrew Jehovah—a few, it may be, resolved to bow in the Temple of Rimmon no more, but to exchange the impure and licentious rights of Astarte and Baal, for the simple worship of the God who dwells between the Cherubim?

How often do we find that those, like Naaman, as he is now pictured to us anew standing at the door of Elisha—or like penitent sinners resorting to a Greater—come not alone? They come "with a company." A minister of God, himself baptized with a fresh baptism of the Spirit, is personally raised and transfigured into a higher and diviner life—but his people—it may be a great congregation—are led to share also in the new consecration. A godly master, who has earned the appellation alike by precept and exalted character, brings his workmen to know of better than worldly wages, and to embark in their daily toil under the sway of loftier principles. A parent, by exemplary piety, consistency of conduct, singleness of motive, integrity of life, is made instrumental in securing as the name of his household "Jehovah Shammai"—"The Lord is there"—training and preparing the family on earth to become one family in heaven. A godly officer—one of the Naamans of modern times—who has himself fought the good fight of faith and laid hold on eternal life, has sounded in camp and barracks, a better than military bugle-note—numbers, alike among rank and file, rally responsive to the summons, and a higher victory and purer kingdom is won!

We dare not, however, forget the solemn converse. There is an ungodly as well as a godly influence. There are ungodly masters sowing profligacy and infidelity among their workmen. There are ungodly parents, traitors to an immortal trust, neglectful of the best interests of those committed to them—by their own mournful aberrations, deflecting their children's footsteps from the path of duty and the ways of God. There are ungodly pastors, not heeding to feed their flocks with understanding and the fear

of the Lord; either keeping back the saving truths of the gospel, or setting up a low standard of piety—preaching smooth things—the trumpet giving forth an uncertain sound—and the slumbering multitude entrusted to their care, are unprepared for the battle.

The picture of the 'rich man' in the parable is surely one of the most impressive in sacred story. His own misery seemed to be nothing, compared with the consciousness of the evil influence he had exercised on others—the dread of having involved those of his own flesh and blood, who would naturally be molded by his example, in his own guilt and doom—"I beg you, therefore, that You would send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment!" (Luke 16:27, 28).

But let us not close with words or pictures of terror. Let the eye rather fall, once more, on the restored and regenerated Syrian, hastening with a new song on his lips across the plain of Jericho. Let us listen to old Jordan as it murmurs along, uttering, through the sacramental scene just witnessed on its banks, the great New Testament truth, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." In Naaman we have a living epistle—a glorious Old Testament attestation to the power of God and the grace of His gospel. In one who, as the leader of their hereditary foe, had shed the blood of Israel and bowed in the temple of an obnoxious idol—we have an encouraging assurance that no adverse position, no unfortunate circumstances, can keep us back from the healing waters. No previous sin—no previously erroneous "religious views"—can disqualify us from seeking and obtaining salvation.

Let us only, like him, be brought to renounce all personal claim and title to the exercise of a mercy and grace whose glory it is to be free—leaving nature's laden chariot behind us, and listening to the beautiful words of the great Hebrew Prophet and preacher of a subsequent age—words which still ring in undying echoes, as they speak of unbought and unpurchasable blessings flowing from better than all earthly streams—"Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money—come, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price!" (Isaiah 55:1)

## CONSECRATION

2 Kings 5:15-17

Then Naaman and his entire company went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "I know at last that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Now please accept my gifts." But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gifts, Elisha refused. Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer any burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord.

No longer, as before, does NAAMAN, in unsubdued pride of spirit, remain seated in his chariot at the door of Elisha. With every trace of his disease obliterated—his recently loathsome flesh and skin changed into that of a little child, he stands in the presence of his benefactor, calling himself "your servant;" and surrounded with his retainers, gives utterance to the sentiments of a full and jubilant heart. If, on the former occasion, the lesson on his conduct was this, "God resists the proud;" we are called now to see how "He gives grace unto the humble." The alabaster box is broken, and the fragrance of the soul's best ointment ascends to God and man. As we see him already bringing forth fruits fit for repentance, we are reminded of the inspired metaphor—"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth his fruit in his season" (Ps. 1:2).

While doubtless he would consider that a debt of deepest obligation was due personally to the Prophet, it is equally evident that he recognized in the man of God, only the delegate and envoy of a Greater. Behind the direction of the human agent, "Go, wash in Jordan," he listened to "Thus says the Lord." The feelings of his heart and of the hour, were they interpreted, could not be more appropriately expressed than in the

opening strain of the later song of the children of the captivity, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good—for His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. 107:1, 2, 14, 15.)

Let us note these two points, as they are here brought before us in succession—Naaman's avowal of his faith, and the expression of his gratitude.

I. Naaman's confession of FAITH—"And he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." This was no ordinary acknowledgment, when we remember by whom it was made. It was a confession, moreover, not whispered confidentially into the ear of the Prophet of Israel, but made, boldly and unblushingly, in the presence of his own heathen servants. Well might the warrior dread the consequences, on his return to Syria, of the adoption of an alien religion. It would, in all probability, compromise his position at Damascus. It might draw down upon him the displeasure of Benhadad, and alienate the goodwill of princes and nobles. Would he not be regarded as a traitor to his country—a wretched apostate from the faith of his ancestors, who had publicly dishonored the guardian divinities of the nation? His life might be the penalty for his religious defection. But he has counted the cost, and is prepared to abide by his resolution.

Observe also, that it is not a mere temporary renunciation of his pagan creed, or a nominal adhesion to that of the Hebrews. He has resolved to renounce idol-worship forever—"Your servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." He may forfeit, in the eye of his countrymen, his illustrious name and reputation. He may be no more "honorable" with his master. He may be subjected to misrepresentation, ridicule, and scorn. He may, and doubtless will, feel himself in that most trying of positions, where he has to fight the battle and stem the current alone. But how can he dare forget or renounce the Great Jehovah of Israel, who had "answered him, and set him in a large place"—the Almighty Being to whom he owes his life? What

are the honors which a grateful people may have conferred—what the value of the jeweled emblems which glitter on his bosom, compared with all that has been bestowed by Him whom he has been taught to regard and revere as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

"From henceforth," says Paul, "let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17)—words in which he may probably allude to the infirmity of 'defective vision' from which he had suffered, ever since his eyes were blinded by the blaze of the Shekinah glory on the way to Damascus; as if Christ—his new Master—had from that hour 'marked,' or "branded" him, as his slave and servant. So could Naaman—though in an opposite sense—say, regarding his purified physical frame, freed from the degradation-marks of suffering and misery. When he thought of the living servitude, temporal and spiritual, from which he had been mercifully delivered, he might well say, "O Lord, truly I am Your slave; I am Your slave, You have loosed my bonds. Gentile and idolater as I once was, You have marked me as Your own. And shall I dare now cowardly to deny You? After such indubitable proofs of Your power and mercy, shall I go back a fettered spiritual captive, to offer, with a debauched and demoralized conscience, a hypocritical sacrifice to a senseless idol?" No! at all risks, he casts in his lot with the true children of Abraham. He avows, as Ruth did to Naomi, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16, 17).

He returns to Damascus, determined to re-enter on the faithful discharge of his military duties—laying his sword, as before, at the feet of Benhadad—rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but equally resolved to render to the true God the things that are His. Great would be the trial of his faith and constancy, when his solitary altar was set up in the midst of a city wholly given to idolatry, and, when thousands were doing homage at the great festivals of Rimmon, to find his voice alone silent amid the festal throngs. But he will prove "a mighty man of valor" in fighting these, as well as other and far different battles. He resolves, "Whatever others do, as for me, I will serve the Lord." In the case of an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, the divine promise is to be fulfilled—"They will thrive like watered grass, like willows on a riverbank. Some will proudly

claim, 'I belong to the Lord.' Others will say, 'I am a descendant of Jacob.' Some will write the Lord's name on their hands and will take the honored name of Israel as their own." (Isa. 44:4, 5)

What a rebuke to many, who, from cowardly motives, or from unworthy reasons of carnal expediency, shrink from making a bold and decided avowal before the world, of loyalty and allegiance to their heavenly King, the Savior who died for them. Assuredly, if Naaman had been swayed and victimized by that severest of all temptations—the dread of human censure—he would have returned to Damascus idolater as he had left it; buried all the memories of Gilgal and Jordan in ungrateful oblivion, and burned incense, as aforetime, before the shrine of Rimmon. But God has not given to him "the spirit of fear, but of power" (2 Tim. 1:7). He cannot so degrade and humiliate himself at the bar of his own conscience, as to return to his native city with a lie in his right hand. He could not distrust the evidence of his own senses. Jehovah had wrought in his behalf, alike for soul and body, what all the sorcerers and magicians, all the conjurors and necromancers, all the medicines of Damascus had failed to accomplish—and he resolves to return, a missionary and propagandist of the new faith. For so doing, he may forfeit office and influence, name and fame. He may no longer lead the troops of Syria out to battle and victory—the garlands that wreath his brow may be removed, and given to some subordinate, staunch in his fidelity to the traditional faith of his country—ready to defend alike her hearths and altars. But he rises superior to these, and such like possibilities of national dishonor and humiliation awaiting him. As his chariot is turned from the land of Israel towards the Syrian metropolis, he could say, in the words of a later spiritual hero, "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe." (Heb. 12:28)

Reader! go and do likewise. Let the example of a brave Gentile soldier nerve you to range yourself openly under the standard of the Great Captain of your salvation, and manfully to make the avowal before the world—"I serve the Lord Christ." We know well (especially in the case of the young) the taunt and ridicule which such an avowal may often involve. Peculiarity of position and circumstance may render it no easy

matter, in the name of your God, to set up your banners. The weapon with which Satan has defied—aye, too, and defeated multitudes, is the weapon of ridicule—we are not ignorant of his devices. But He who is for you, is greater than all that are against you. Resolve to adhere to the maintenance of Christian principle, undeterred by sneer and frown, ridicule and reproach. Trust God, and He will disarm all difficulties and cover your head in the day of battle—out of weakness making you strong, enabling you to wax valiant in fight, and to turn to flight the armies of the aliens. Thus letting "your light," (not the light of sectarian rivalry, or intemperate bigotry, or offensive parade of goodness and godliness; but the light of a Christian profession and creed endorsed and countersigned by a pure, holy, consistent life)—letting such a light "shine before men," others will "see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

II. Naaman's GRATITUDE. Note his gratitude to the human agent. It was not the mere thank-offering of the lip. He desires the Prophet to receive some substantial proof of his heart-sincerity. From these bags of gold and silver, and changes of clothing, which loaded mule and camel in his cavalcade, he says, "Take a gift from your servant." But Elisha, doubtless courteously, but peremptorily, refused the offered gift—"As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none; and he urged him to take it, but he refused."

What were the Prophet's reasons for this refusal? They were probably twofold.

(1.) He wished that God should have all the glory of the leper's cure. Had he assented to the proposal, and received the gift, it might have led to the inference that he arrogated some of the honor of the miracle to himself—that it was the arts of priestcraft, some mystic charm in the directions he had given, which had made the washing effectual. Elisha would have Naaman to know that he was the mere earthly vessel—the instrument in the hand of a Mightier, by whom the stricken chief now stood in perfect soundness in the presence of them all. His language, as he repudiates the offered benefaction is—Not unto me, not unto me, but unto the God I serve, give glory for His mercy and for His truth's sake!

(2.) Had he accepted the present, it might have damaged and compromised, in distant Syria, his own character as Jehovah's Prophet. Not without semblance of justice, he might have been charged with some mercenary, ulterior motive, when he volunteered the message to the King of Samaria—"Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." When the warrior had gone back to Damascus, and his servants had told how costly a memorial and recompense had been left at the Prophet's dwelling, a hundred tongues might have been ready to denounce the covetous spirit of the Hebrew magician and wonder-worker—the old taunt might have been launched on the lowly occupant of the dwelling at Gilgal, that in his vaunting message to the King of Samaria to send the leper to him without delay, he was only desirous to make a gain of godliness.

We may learn from this Old Testament story what a noble thing it is, and specially living under the light and responsibilities of a better dispensation, to manifest an unselfish spirit; ready, if need be, to surrender personal good and worldly interests for the sake of Christ; to forego anything that might, indirectly, tend to have our religion, misjudged in the eyes of others. Paul's was a noble resolve; and the apostolic maxim in this, and other things, should shape our principles of action—"Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall." (1 Cor. 8:13)

But not only does Naaman wish to give a token of his gratitude to Elisha; he is anxious also, by an external action, to testify the deeper and more sacred obligations under which he is laid to Elisha's God. He accordingly requests permission of the Prophet, to carry with him, back to Damascus, two loads of earth; evidently to be utilized and consecrated for some religious purpose—"but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer any burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord." 2 Kings 5:17. We are led to pause and inquire, what was the object more particularly contemplated in this unusual request.

(1.) We recognize in it, his desire to render obedience to the will of Jehovah. There was a special divine injunction given to the Israelites, that their altars should be constructed of earth—"An altar of earth you shall



make unto me" (Exod. 20:24). It is not a little remarkable, that the command in that same passage is followed up by the promise—"In all places where I record my name I will come unto you, and I will bless you." Who knows but that Naaman, now standing within the walls of a school of the Prophets, may have been informed of this very promise made by the Lord he had confessed to be his God?—that if he reared in heathen Damascus his altar of earth, and there recorded Jehovah's name, that faithful God of all the families of mankind, would fulfill His part of the covenanted assurance; and make it one of the "all places" where He would come and bestow His blessing. As that promise was given strictly in connection with the "altar of earth," when the little mound of Palestine soil was shaped or enshrined for its destined purpose by the grateful Syrian, he could point to it and say, as he invoked the divine benediction, "Remember the word unto Your servant upon which You have caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49).

(2.) Another reason for the petition doubtless was, that, as a Gentile proselyte, he wished to carry with him to his own home, some permanent memorial of his visit to the country of the Hebrews, and of the wondrous cure effected on him by the Hebrews' God. It is evident this feeling must have mingled in his request; for if he had merely desired to obtain a portion of earth from the territories of Israel, sufficient for the construction of an altar, what need was there of carrying it the whole distance from Gilgal? Why not wait until he and his troop had crossed the hills of Ephraim and Naphtali, and then have laden the mules with their burden? But not only must it be Israelitish soil, it must be from the very scene of the restoration, to make it a significant memento of the miraculous healing.

It would thus be, First, a perpetual remembrance to Naaman himself, of his vows and obligations. He had now publicly renounced idolatry—Rimmon and all his idols he had utterly forsworn. But the restored chief knew (as who does not?) the fickleness of the human spirit. His heart was now thrilling with emotion, warm with the memory of his recent cure. But the hour might come when these memories would not be so vivid—when, dimmed by time and distance, he might be basely tempted to abjure his adopted faith and rejoin the multitude in their adoration of the

national idol. If ever seduced to such perjury, the Earthen Altar, strangely unique amid other Syrian shrines of marble, would read a rebuke to his faithlessness. It would remain a perpetual protest against idolatry. Every glance at that heap of alien mold would remind him—"Your vows are upon me, O God."

Add to this—the very earth of which the altar was constructed, would be a keepsake of the land to which he owed so much—a hallowed remembrance of the scene around the willows and palm-groves of Gilgal.

There is a wondrous charm which Romanism has perverted for its own uses, but the spell of which lies deep in our emotional natures, in the possessing and treasuring memorials of sacred scenes and sacred spots. We speak not of a spurious veneration for those paltry relics which superstition often has enshrined in gold and silver caskets, and before which she burns her incense and waves her censers—such as the bones and dust of real or imaginary saints. But who ever gazed, without interest and emotion, on bark cut from the old olives in Gethsemane, or pebbles from the shores of Tiberias, or flint and agate from the rocks around Bethlehem and the Kedron? Nor need we go for holy scenes and associations so far as to the land of Palestine. Who does not value and garner the leaves gathered from the grave of buried love? Who does not cherish the Bible, on whose flyleaf parental affection has put the imperishable inscription, when perhaps the hand that traced it is mouldering in the tomb? Who does not treasure the pilgrim-staff on which some hoary grandfather leaned, or the chair on which venerable age gave forth lessons which time cannot obliterate?

It was with kindred feelings Naaman carried away his two loads of earth. He doubtless desired to retain, in sacred remembrance, that never-to-be-forgotten scene at Jordan and Gilgal. If there was no art to portray the actual landscape, here was a simple, but most impressive and significant method of fixing its memories in his heart. In the courtyard of his palace—or it may be in the very hall, whose marble pavement, in the torture of his disease, he was used in former years to pace—there, in the scene of his misery and despair, he rears this monument of faith and gratitude; and when his own dust mingled with that of other illustrious dead in the sepulchers of Syria, and perhaps no living voice in his household would

be raised for the glory of Israel's God; here would be an enduring monument and manifesto of the faith of the old hero; he, being dead, would, in his speechless altar, still speak!

Who can tell, moreover (while thus incidentally referring to Naaman's death and burial-place), but that a portion of that earth may have been specially reserved or appropriated for his funeral rites. We know how eagerly the soil of "holy places" has been, and is still, prized by Orientals in connection with sites and places of sepulture. We have heard how the Hindoo values, above all spices and ointments, the vessel filled with the reputedly sacred water of the Ganges, to be placed by his dead body, and afterwards by his tomb. We know with what fondness, for the same purpose, the Hadji pilgrims carry in the folds of their green turbans, or next their bosoms, a few grains of earth gathered at Mecca. We know the story which has given to Europe the most interesting (we are tempted to add, after personally visiting it), the most magnificent, of all her graveyards; how the Pisans, in the Middle Ages, brought, on the occasion of their invading Palestine, shiploads of soil from a spot overlooking Jerusalem; and among these "loads of earth" the most distinguished of her citizens and nobles eagerly sought the honor of interment. We know how the Jew, when poverty or age prevent him traveling back to the valley of Jehoshaphat—the Valley of tombs—appreciates, as the most cherished equivalent, a handful of debris from the base of Zion's Temple; that in his lonely grave in a land of exile, he may, in the last long sleep, lay his head on the consecrated soil. Who knows but some such motive may, at the time, have suggested itself to Naaman, in soliciting from the hands of the Prophet the strange request we are considering; that when he died, his own fond wish may have been fulfilled and gratified, to have his embalmed remains resting on a pillow of that earth, which his mules bore from the scene of his cure and conversion—a singular, miniature "sacred spot" amid the royal tombs of Damascus?

Once more; he erected this altar of Hebrew earth, possibly for the purpose of offering sacrifice. That once proud, self-righteous leper, had already, by his humility, offered one acceptable sacrifice—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." But during his present sojourn in the land of Israel, and in this brief interview with the Prophet, who can tell but that

he may have been, partially at least, initiated into deeper mysteries. The offering of "cattle from a thousand hills," would probably be no strange thing to him in the ceremonial rites within the Temple of Rimmon. But in this new earth-altar there is the suggestion of "better sacrifices than these." Though even to an Israelite himself, in his dim typical dispensation, the coming Redemption was obscurely revealed, may we not imagine that Naaman, along with the materials for his earthen shrine, carried with him into heathen Syria, the foreshadowings, at least, of the great oblation—"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In that same injunction in the book of Exodus to which reference has already been made, regarding the altar of earth, it is added—"You shall sacrifice thereon your burnt-offerings and your peace-offerings, your sheep and your oxen."

When Naaman returned to Damascus, raised his lowly memorial, and the smoke ascended from his burnt-offering, the Lord God of Israel would smell a sweet savor. He would see, in the person of the offerer, a type of those Gentiles—monarchs and warriors and mighty men—who would yet cast their swords and shields, their crowns and scepters, at the feet of Immanuel, and acknowledge Him as Lord over all—in accordance with that striking inscription, which, in the midst of Mohammedan bigotry gleams to this hour, in Greek characters, on the facade of the oldest and grandest temple in Damascus—"Your kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations."

Let this remarkable passage in Naaman's history read a lesson to us all. Are there any, on whom may have recently been bestowed gifts and pledges of the divine goodness; some special providential deliverances; some peculiar tokens of spiritual blessing? Go! gather your burden of earth—take it with you to your dwelling; erect, in the midst of your family, your altar of gratitude, and write upon it the indelible inscription—"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me." We know not what may have been the results of Naaman's piety in his Damascus home. The symbol of his faith and love (his earthen altar), may have been handed down, as a precious heirloom and keepsake, from generation to generation; his children's children may have gazed on it, and loved to rehearse to one another the story of their great ancestor's

disease and cure.

Let the Christian remember this; that the altar he erects—in other words, the piety of a holy, God-fearing consistent life—does not die with him—his example descends, as the noblest of heritages, to his offspring. Nor, be it added, does anything so tend to hallow and consecrate the earthly home, as the erection of a Domestic sanctuary, where morning and evening "the voice of rejoicing and of salvation" is heard. Sad are those dwellings "unwhitened by prayer"—unblest with the incense-cloud; on whose doors the entry is inscribed, "No altar here." Where shall we go to gather example and reproof for such prayerless homes? Shall it be among the dwellings and tabernacles of Israel? or in following the footsteps of prophets and apostles? Shall we enter the abodes of primitive believers—the Simeons and Annas, the Marys and Lydias of gospel times? No! we travel in imagination to witness a military procession toiling along one of the steep and narrow gorges of ancient Palestine. In the rear of the imposing caravan, two mules are seen groaning under a strange earthen load. It is a heathen of a dim and unprivileged age, carrying away materials for a domestic altar whereon he may serve the true God, and around which he may gather his household.

Who will dare plead the cares of family or the strain and stress of business, or worldly opposition after this? Naaman had the responsibility of the Syrian armies and the weight of government on his shoulders; yet he had time to erect his home-sanctuary and offer his daily sacrifice. Thousands of pagan eyes may have flashed displeasure upon him; but the spiritual hero fought a braver than his earthly battles, and has left a nobler than champion's epitaph inscribed on his tomb. He began his journey a leper and a heathen—he washed in Jordan, and was cleansed—he returned home, and reared his altar.

Beautiful type and delineation of the true Christian! He begins his pilgrimage a "miserable sinner." He washes in the stream of salvation, and is cleansed. His "altar of witness" is erected—the vow of allegiance and love is publicly recorded and devoutly observed. And when his journey is finished—when he reaches his true home in the skies, his nobler indestructible 'altar of gratitude and love' is upreared with the inscription—"thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

## SCRUPLES OF THE NEW PROSELYTE

"However, may the Lord pardon me in this one thing. When my master the king goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, may the Lord pardon me when I bow, too." 2 Kings 5:18

We left Naaman, in the preceding chapter, all joy. It was with him the flush of a new springtime—alike in both bodily and spiritual being. The 'torpor of winter and death' had given place to the gleaming of green woods, the release of icebound rivulets, the song of gladsome warblers as they hailed the return of grove, and flower, and sunshine—"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land" (Sol. Song 2:11, 12). Elastic with this resurrection of life and hope, and with a heart overflowing with gratitude, he stood at the door of Elisha, and made the bold avowal of his faith in Israel's God.

But these spring-tides of feeling have their ebbs as well as their flows. In our highest moments of inspiration we are soon reminded that the struggle-hour is at hand. 'Transfiguration-scenes' and experiences are temporary and exceptional. "In the world" is the normal condition of the human spirit. How to bear itself amid secular and often unholy contacts—and amid base, coarse, and sinful compliances, that is the stern problem which by the best must be faced and mastered.

Naaman's thoughts begin to travel back from the banks of the Jordan and the Prophet's dwelling, to his distant home. Soon must he mingle once more in the crowd and din of the heathen city—soon must he be back again at court, to resume the demanding duties of his station, as General of the Syrian hosts. His feelings and position were very similar to those, which from time to time the Christian, under a new and better dispensation, experiences in coming from the holy ordinance of the

Lord's Supper, where his thank-offering has been presented, and his eucharistic sacrifice and vow have been made and recorded.

Emerging from the sacramental waters with thoughts full of recent pledges and memorials of God's love, Naaman knows that the hum of the old Damascus world must burst upon him before long. The memories of Gilgal and the Jordan must be superseded by sterner realities, amid the duties and cares and temptations of life. Happy are those who, in such circumstances, though they have left Mount Gilgal, have taken the earth with them for their life-altar of gratitude and thanksgiving; saying, in the spirit of the old patriarch of Bethel, as he awoke from his desert-dream and poured the anointing oil on the stone—"Then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:21, 22).

There might well have been, in the case of Naaman, many causes of anxious foreboding in the prospect of resuming his court and military duties. But the picture presented to us in these verses is true to nature and experience, when, by some momentary and accidental association of ideas, one peculiar thought or anticipation dominates all others, and keeps for the time exclusive possession of the soul. The feeling or suggestion which now flashes across the mind of the cured warrior rankles like an arrow in his bosom, disturbing the peace of the present hour. With a childlike spirit he makes the cause of perplexity known to Elisha, and solicits his advice. Let us state what it is.

He remembers that his royal master Benhadad is still an idolater; that at particular times he was in the habit of going, for purposes of worship and high festival, to the Temple of Rimmon. Moreover, that it was part of Naaman's own official duty, as commander-in-chief, to accompany the king—a duty, the non-performance of which would entail the resignation of his office. The warrior has that confidence in Benhadad's magnanimity and liberality of spirit, as to feel assured that he will not, on account of a change of religion, degrade a tried and trusted officer of his household from his rank and official position. He will still continue him general of his troops as before.

But what will be Naaman's own duty with regard to that heathen temple?

Will he not compromise his character, as a proselyte and worshiper of the true Jehovah, by setting his foot across its threshold?—dare he venture with impunity—dare he, without dishonoring the great Name he has sworn to venerate, venture to join the heathen procession? No more—Benhadad, on entering the temple and approaching the idol, was in the habit of leaning on Naaman's arm. When the king bowed or prostrated himself, his Naaman was obliged, in appearance, to bow also. Even this 'semblance of homage' to the Baal of Syria disturbs Naaman's sensitive conscience. Yet how can he manage to evade the duty? We repeat, he seems not to doubt or question that his master will grant him (to use a modern phrase) the fullest toleration in his creed. He would concede to him an exemption from "religious duties," from which others dared not plead exemption; but he would not be so ready to release Naaman from official attendance at this temple ceremony.

Would it be lawful, would it be expedient to go, with the royal arm locked in his—could Naaman, as the king's adjutant, perform this state duty without being identified as a worshiper? The troubled chief resolves to unbosom his scruples to the Prophet Elisha. "However, may the Lord pardon me in this one thing. When my master the king goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, may the Lord pardon me when I bow, too." 2 Kings 5:18. Let us pause for a moment in passing, and mark—

(1.) Naaman's sincerity and forthrightness. He does not muffle his feelings. If he had been like many, he would have masked his doubts, concealed his difficulties, waited until he reached Damascus, and then solved them as best he could, by some questionable compromise between principle and expediency. He might have said, 'What is the use of injuring myself in the eyes of this Prophet—risking his reproof and indignation. I shall put the key in the wards of my heart, and keep that scruple imprisoned there.' No! the cause of perplexity is out at once. He makes a clean acknowledgment of it, and solicits advice. His eye was single; he had a simple, honest desire to know his Lord's will, and knowing it, to do it.

(2.) Mark his sensitive conscience. He had no thought of worshipping Rimmon. The old Syrian deity holding the symbolic pomegranate, was



from that hour a senseless idol. It was the mere posture, the semblance of adoration—and no more, which caused Naaman these scruples. But the very 'appearance of approving' an idolatrous rite aggrieved his conscience. Was not the crossing of that idolatrous threshold doubtful? Would it not seem in the eyes of his fellows—of his soldiers—of his king, as if he were indifferent to the honor and glory of the true God? He may possibly (and he might imagine so himself) be over-fastidious on this subtle question of conscience; but unless he had it resolved on the authority of God's Prophet, it would sorely disturb his homeward journey. His sunny dreams of Jordan and Gilgal would be haunted and scared with visions of Rimmon's Temple; and of himself, with broken vows on his head, doing obeisance at the idol shrine. He resolves to take this 'case of perplexity' to the Prophet of Israel.

Would that we had more of such tenderness of conscience—in business, in the world, in the everyday relations of life—that we more honored and revered Conscience as God's own viceregent, feeling that in fighting against the sacred monitor, and disowning the responses of the divine oracle, we are fighting against God!

(3.) Note Naaman's faith—his determination, at all hazards, to cleave to Jehovah. For there is every reason to infer, that if the Prophet had given a negative to his request—pronounced the accompanying his master to Rimmon's Temple to be incompatible with his religious duty, he would have acted on his decision—he would have been willing to renounce pay and place—surrendered all he had, rather than dishonor that holy name, and give occasion to Jehovah's enemies to blaspheme. And noble evidence it is of strength of faith and integrity of purpose, when in critical circumstances, and in those special emergencies when conscientious scruple stands confronted face to face with worldly and professional interests, we are willing to take God's word and to abide by it, even though duty demands the renunciation of material good—the taking up of the cross—denying ourselves earthly honor and advantage. We shall be no losers at last—"Those who honor me," says God, "I will honor." It may be, like the tempest-tossed disciples on Lake Tiberias, to steer our way through boisterous wind and buffeting waves. But if it be at His bidding, He who "constrained His disciples to get into the ship" (Matt. 14:22) will

bring us, sooner or later, to the haven where we would be.

And how does Elisha reply to the question of the proselyte? Naaman, perhaps, would expect—and perhaps we expect, to hear the Prophet's denunciation of the proposal. We look for a response in the spirit and words of the old Tishbite—"How long halt you between two opinions—if the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." Are we not ready to picture the frown of stern indignation on the brow of the man of God, and to imagine him exclaiming, 'It cannot be! By thus identifying yourself with heathen abominations you would only draw down afresh the vengeance of Heaven. The leprosy now washed away in the Jordan would again cleave unto you forever, and you would go forth anew from the idol's temple, a leper white as snow. Dream not thus of dishonoring your vows—of attempting to serve both God and Rimmon. Go, tell Benhadad, that rather than mock the Jehovah whom you have covenanted to serve, you will consent to be degraded to the most menial drudgery; that the keys and sword of office will readily be surrendered, before you darken the portals of the sun-god.'

This, however, is not his answer. He does not indeed say, 'You may bow—your conscience is too tender, you are unnecessarily sensitive and scrupulous.' He leaves it still with him an open question; and without pronouncing any final or authoritative deliverance, he gives the simple benediction, "Go in peace." Elisha knew he could place reliance on the recent convert. He could trust his new strength of purpose, his principle, his sincerity. He knew well the trials of faith to which he would be subjected on his return to Damascus—the envenomed darts that would likely be hurled upon him by those who would have no sympathy with his alien religion. If Elisha had, by a withering negative, at once forbidden the request, and declared, 'Bow in Rimmon's Temple you dare not, even in semblance,' he might have greatly and unnecessarily perplexed him, in this the first hour of his spiritual experience. But he knew that "to the upright there would arise light in darkness" (Ps. 112:4)—that the day would come when the anxious inquirer would have his difficulties satisfactorily solved. Meanwhile, therefore, he says, "Go in peace;" 'I know my God will go with you. He will guide you aright. He will give His angels charge concerning you, to keep you up in all your ways. I know you

will never be guilty of dishonoring Him in the eyes of the heathen. He who has delivered your soul from death—will He not deliver your eyes from tears, and your feet from falling?'

In the words of an excellent writer, "he knew that it was not good to put 'old wine into new bottles,' and to load the tender feelings of the weak disciple with duties most painful and difficult even to the strongest, or to expose him to the most trying of all opposition, the sneers and sarcasms of his companions. Elisha foresaw that the time would come, when the seed so lately sown, and now scarcely in the blade, would become the strong and powerful tree, and he was content to wait for this. He therefore treated the tender plant with gentleness."

Let us not, however, mistake the Prophet's deliverance. Let us not construe it into a formal sanction of doubtful expediency or worldly conformity. Many there are, who would willingly enlist this passage on their side, to draw such a conclusion—who would make it their authority for conforming with some questionable—and more than questionable—maxims and practices. They would willingly retain their religious profession—the outward semblance of fidelity to God and His righteousness, and yet claim the sanction to go and bow in some Rimmon-Temple.

The Bible is always consistent; and there can be nothing in this isolated passage, contradictory to its manifold other express sayings and injunctions. God demands the whole heart; He will be satisfied with nothing short of it; and when any competing object comes between it and Him, that object must be removed. "No man," is the utterance of the Great Teacher Himself, "can serve two masters." "He who is not with me is against me." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." "Let us therefore," says the apostle, "go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." Is Naaman, then, to be made an exception to all this? Is he encouraged by the Prophet of Gilgal to act on different principles; to serve two masters; to offer allegiance alike to God and to Baal?

No! it is obvious there was no such sanction given, thus to serve Jehovah in the land of Israel and Rimmon in the land of Syria. This would have

been one of the most pernicious of modern dogmas—that all creeds and beliefs are the same. Neither did the convert shrink from confessing the true God before his fellows. He was ready to brave all, and, if need be, to lose all. His confession we have already listened to—it was that of no lip votary, no hypocritical dissembler, no spiritual coward, whispered in a corner—he made it publicly, in presence of all his heathen servants. He had nothing to be ashamed of. Taking with him in his cavalcade the two loads of earth, to form a public altar—was not the deed of a man wishful to evade the light and to hide his religion under a basket.

Elisha, knowing that he was dealing with an earnest soul, one who wished really to glorify the true Jehovah, tells him to proceed on his journey in "peace"—that the Gracious Being he had avouched to be his God would teach him in His own good time a more excellent way. If Naaman's had been a poor, miserable, half-hearted belief and profession—a compound of his ancestral and adopted faith, the Prophet might have required to meet his question with a strong prohibition. But he seems to say, 'I know, that as a learner in the school of truth, you will be instructed aright. In your case the promise will be fulfilled—"The meek will He guide in judgment, and the humble will He teach His way." (Ps. 25:9). "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord."'

It is the same, or a similar question to that of Naaman, which is often addressed still, and especially by those who are young in the life of faith, to their religious teachers and guides—'Can I, as a Christian, venture where pleasure and taste, and it may be companionship which it were hard to renounce, would all lead me—to places of fashionable, some would say, frivolous amusement?' Again, 'Can I accept that post of advancement, or continue in it, without being suspected of selfish, calculating, carnal motives, or without being tempted to a dereliction of principle?' Again, 'Can I continue in that social circle, or prosecute that secular calling, without lowering my standard, compromising character, and dishonoring God?'

We pronounce, at present, no verdict on these hypothetical cases, and especially on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of this or that worldly amusement. On the one hand, there may be, and there is with many, a morbid and unhealthy shrinking from the acceptance of much happiness

in this beautiful earth of which God has made the human heart receptive—the "all things" He has given us "richly to enjoy"—what regales the ear and delights the eye, and refines and elevates the taste. On the other hand, it is equally certain there are manifold resorts, pleasing and pleasurable, and some of them apparently innocuous, resorting to which, may be like treading the edge of a volcano—threatening their frequenters with continual risk of being scathed with the fire.

But if, in such "cases of conscience" we were dealing (as Elisha knew he was dealing), with a sensitive, honest, upright, God-fearing individual, who really wished to know the path of duty and to be divinely guided, we would say with the Prophet, "Go in peace." Do not involve yourself in needless perplexities. Your difficulties will in due time be solved and your path made plain. If you can utter the prayerful desire to the Heavenly Light—"Lead me, Lord!"—"Teach me the way wherein I should walk; I lift up my soul unto You"—then, frequent these amusements so long as the dictates of your new and better nature accord a sanction. If such resorts run counter to your spiritual advancement—if they hinder and impede your heavenly walk, and interfere with the love and allegiance you owe to Christ as your divine Lord and Master, you will soon come to discard them. You will soon have them superseded by different tastes, new likings and preferences. You will soon cease to find satisfying enjoyment, in what are counterfeits of the true. You will soon discover that there is no honey to be extracted from such "untrue rocks"—no living water to be drawn from such leaky, broken cisterns. You will soon serve yourself heir to nobler aspirations and purer enjoyments. When you enter that temple of Rimmon, and witness the senseless and sinful rites, you will turn away with averted face. Your own enlightened judgment will teach you, as possibly it taught Naaman, that the two are incompatible. As you lean on your Master's arm, conscience will make a coward of you. It will whisper, 'As a spiritual Israelite, as a true-hearted Christian, you are out of your place here.' "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16).

We may learn, too, from Naaman's question and Elisha's reply, that our conduct—what an apostle calls "our walk and conversation"—will be

molded and regulated according to the state of the heart with God. If the heart be right, all will come right. The stirred pool may take a while to settle into its normal state of clearness and quiescence—there may, for a time, be dulled and distorted images on its ruffled surface, but soon it will become like a calm mirror, reflecting truth, purity, and righteousness.

How different from Naaman were many of the characters with whom our Savior came in contact in the New Testament! How different were His dealings with Pharisees whose hearts were not right! In the external observances of the law they were scrupulously correct. They tithed their anise, mint, and cummin; they made broad their phylacteries; they whitewashed persistently the sepulchers of the prophets; they were punctilious in creed and external forms; they would not speak to a Samaritan; they would not for a moment bow in a Rimmon temple—if they came within sight of it, they would shake the dust off their feet. But they devoured widows' houses; they oppressed the poor; they despised justice, judgment, and mercy. They were quick enough to discern the mote in their brother's eye; but they did not discern the beam in their own. Incarnate Truth, Purity, and Justice, could not say to such, "Go in peace." He could pronounce nothing but impending woe and judgment—His withering words of condemnation were unsparing, uncompromising, sharper than any two-edged sword.

On the other hand, see how tenderly He dealt with sensitive consciences. Nicodemus, who came by night seeking instruction in the kingdom of God; or the weeping penitent, who crouched at His feet, bedewing them with tears. He did not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. He tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, and laid no trial or temptation on His people heavier than they were able to bear.

The subject, indeed, of this chapter, is one on which it becomes us to speak with 'extreme caution'. Let none gather from it the impression, that they can follow Naaman's example—leave duty an "open question," and enter with impunity the great Rimmon-Temple of the world. True, Daniel could remain unscathed in heathen Babylon. There were saints in Nero's household; and many a brave young Christian has done noble battle with the irreligious influences among which his lot has been cast. But, to revert to the same beacon and warning selected for example in a former chapter

—"Remember Lot's wife!"—remember Lot's family! See what contact with the irreligious and godless did! See the result of entering the gates of Sodom—tampering with a world lying in wickedness—trying to serve God and Mammon. There is—there can be, no blast of the silver trumpet, "Go in peace," sounded in the ear of such—"There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked."

Remember the twofold apostolic motto and watchword—the warrant for liberty and the warning against license—"Use the world," (that is the sanction for liberty; in lawful enjoyment of all earthly good—for stretching our sails on its summer seas and basking under its summer skies)—"without abusing it," (that is the admonishing warning bell from rock or lighthouse, when these seas are treacherous, and when, unknown, we may be gliding over the unseen reef). Keep off 'debatable' ground. Keep clear of positions and situations where your faith is likely to be imperilled. Beware of living what has been called a "border life;" hovering on the confines of the kingdom of light—and the kingdom of darkness. It is the irresolute of the army who are the first to break rank and flee; whereas the smallest battalion, if staunch and valorous, can stand the charge.

Remember, many there are who enter the world unvisited by Naaman's scruples, who have none of Naaman's dislike for its base and sordid compliances. For such to enter Rimmon's Temple is to court certain ruin. These God addresses in language of unqualified prohibition—"What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness—and what communion has light with darkness—and what concord has Christ with Belial—or what part has he who believes with an infidel? Therefore come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17).

God's own gracious benediction is, "Go in peace." And if, from peculiar circumstances, you may be led at times into difficult and perplexing paths—your footsteps perhaps trembling on the threshold of some questionable or forbidden resort, seek to hear His voice alone, and be prepared to follow the summons—"This is the way—walk in it." Looking up to Him who has promised to "keep in perfect peace" the mind which is stayed on Him, and which trusts in Him (Isa. 26:3), may this be your

prayer—"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced, but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others. Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord; point out the right road for me to follow. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all those who keep his covenant and obey his decrees." (Ps. 25:1-4, 10). Thus shall the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

## **A VOICE OF WARNING**

2 Kings 5:20-27

But Gehazi, Elisha's servant, said to himself, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him." So Gehazi set off after him. When Naaman saw him running after him, he climbed down from his chariot and went to meet him. "Is everything all right?" Naaman asked. "Yes," Gehazi said, "but my master has sent me to tell you that two young prophets from the hill country of Ephraim have just arrived. He would like 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing to give to them." "By all means, take 150 pounds of silver," Naaman insisted. He gave him two sets of clothing, tied up the money in two bags, and sent two of his servants to carry the gifts for Gehazi. But when they arrived at the hill, Gehazi took the gifts from the servants and sent the men back. Then he hid the gifts inside the house. When he went in to his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" "I haven't been anywhere," he replied. But Elisha asked him, "Don't you realize that I was there in spirit when Naaman stepped down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to receive money and clothing and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and servants? Because you have done this, you and your children and your children's children will suffer from Naaman's leprosy forever."

When Gehazi left the room, he was leprous; his skin was as white as snow.



In the opening sentences of last chapter, we compared the new life, natural and spiritual, infused into the restored warrior, to the revitalization of the earth, when, coming forth from her "winter dormitory," she assumes her robes of spring, and all outer Nature, with its song-burst and flower-burst, participates in a common joy. In the verses, however, which are now to occupy our thoughts, that bright spring sky is suddenly overcast; and we have to watch an unexpected cloud passing over the landscape. We seem almost to wish that the touching story of the Aramean general, so complete and unique in itself up to this point, had closed here without any supplementary incident—that the curtain had fallen as the Syrian caravan begins to move on its homeward way, and the good Prophet has poured his benediction on the head of its chief.

Yet, too, ever and anon, with divine wisdom, does the Bible in its inspired narratives, by some 'qualifying statements'—some 'somber touches' in its pictures, keep before us the memories and evidences of "a present evil world," and of the spirit that still "rules in the children of disobedience." Amid its notes of sweetest music, there steal, as if at measured intervals, strains of disharmony and dissonance, to remind us that the heart—yes, even the heart that has been molded and disciplined by godly and godlike influences, is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

We are mostly accustomed, doubtless, in pacing the sacred sculpture-gallery, to contemplate its spiritual heroes—elevated characters, who present us with a lofty ideal of the saintly and spiritual life. But, intermingled here and there, as if to impart value by contrast, we have specimens also of the depraved, the demoralized, the "devilish"—those who seem haunted and victimized by degraded vice and demon passion—"lewd fellows of the baser sort," who have "given themselves over to a reprobate mind," and broken loose alike from the restraints of conscience and the laws of God. Such is the iron visage, on its gloomy pedestal, we are called on now to confront amid his nobler compeers.

The case of GEHAZI is one of not a few, which unfolds to us what the human spirit would be, were it uncurbed and uncontrolled by restraining grace. It utters one of the many warning voices heard from the gates of

Eden onwards—"When you think you stand, take heed lest you fall." If the topics suggested in our preceding chapters have been mainly profitable for our "instruction in righteousness," this closing one embraces more especially lessons of "rebuke and correction." While in Naaman, we have had a favorable representative of character (molded by divine influences) occupying a high social position; we have had in the little captive maid, as well as in the warrior's own camp-servants, equally favorable specimens of those in the opposite pole of the social system. Beautiful and attractive, indeed, up to this point, is the picture of the mutual relation subsisting between master and servants. But in Gehazi—the new study which arrests our attention, we have, alas! as sad an illustration as could be furnished, whether in truth or fiction, of an unprincipled and untrustworthy dependant—one who conformed to no one requirement in the triple code of the prophet Micah—neither "doing justly, nor loving mercy, nor walking humbly with God."

If Abraham's steward, old Eleazar of Damascus, as a faithful, conscientious servant, had left still a fragrant name and memory in the city of his birth, not perhaps unknown to Naaman—here was another, a child of Abraham, a steward also in a holy household, but all unworthy of his pedigree—a withered branch of the stock of Israel, dishonoring the parent stem, "twice dead, plucked up by the roots"—and who, in the same ancient capital, could hardly fail to have his own dreadful memorial in all time to come, as having made himself the unfortunate heir to the leprosy of the great Syrian soldier.

The story, so familiar in itself, may be briefly recapitulated—Naaman had, with a full heart, taken leave of the Prophet; and, perhaps, if there were one memory in that farewell more deeply impressed on the soul of the grateful warrior than another, as he commenced wending up the steep gorge to Ai and Bethel, it was the magnanimity of the man of God in positively refusing anything of recompense or reward. Elisha had done his duty, and glorified his heavenly Master in the eye of a Gentile stranger. He asked no more, and would take no more, than was included in this sublime consciousness. But if the Prophet of Gilgal, in the simplicity of his nature and the strength of high principle, was willing thus to forfeit the chance of so rich a booty, there was one who saw at a

glance that, by a bold stroke—a skillful, unscrupulous artifice, he might outwit his superior, and realize the dream of a covetous youth. These festal garments, and these bags of silver, are not everyday chances of plunder. What is to hinder seizing the glittering prize? Their possession will emancipate him from a position of dependence and poverty, and secure him an ample competency for life. His resolution is taken. Either with a blasphemous imitation of Elisha's divine watchword, or, as others have surmised, uttering the vulgar ruffian-oath on the lips of foul-mouthed Arabs to this day—he thus pursues his guilty soliloquy. "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him." 2 Kings 5:20

There is no time to be lost. Down he steals from the wooded height, unobserved, as he thought, by the unsuspecting Prophet. With fleet foot he follows the caravan. Naaman at once perceives and recognizes him. We are struck with the incidental touch of 'courtesy' in the highborn Syrian (is it not one of the first-fruits of his newborn nature? the first sacrifice of the humble spirit?) It was but a few hours before, when, in his pride, he scorned to descend from his chariot at the door of Elisha—now he leaps down from it to receive his benefactor's servant! He had been possibly impressed, during his brief stay at Gilgal, with the devotion and sincerity of these sons of the prophets, of whom Gehazi was one—and he offers this expression of respect. "Is everything all right?" is the brief question with which he addresses the young messenger who now draws breath at the side of his chariot—"Is everything all right?" he asks with anxiety, for he is fearful that some sudden disaster had in the meantime overtaken the man of God.

With calm composure, the response is ready and given—"All is well." But his hot haste demands explanation; and this, too, is volunteered in the shape of an ingenious lie, so readily improvised, that we think it abundantly proves the utterer to be already adept in lying. The fabrication was this—that two young men from the prophetic school on Mount Ephraim, had unexpectedly arrived at his master's house with a tale of impoverishment and need. To relieve the necessities of these two imaginary students, the sordid petitioner solicits, in Elisha's name, some

of the treasure which he had so lately declined. Naaman, with no thought of trickery, is only too willing to manifest his gratitude. In accordance with the words addressed to a Gentile of a later age, and one in spirit not unlike himself, he takes the bread intended for the true children, and casts it to dogs (Matt. 15:26).

In the generosity of his nature, he insists on doubling the amount of silver. Not only so, but two Syrian servants are told off to transport the goodly gift in safety. When they had reached the hill—some hiding-place near the Prophet's dwelling—the nefarious treasure is artfully concealed by Gehazi, and the Syrian transporters are quietly dismissed; for the cunning and politic finishing-touch is added in the narrative—"He sent the men away, and they departed."

To all appearance this first part of the plot has succeeded to perfection. Not only is the spoil secured, but, better than all, the arch-plotter flatters himself he has quietly got rid of the only witnesses who could incriminate him, and that he has successfully eluded Elisha's detection. With brazen face, unabashed effrontery, "he went in," we read, "and stood before his master." The Prophet, in common with noble natures, was himself open, generous, ingenuous, transparent—never, probably, would Elisha have dreamed of such possibilities of treachery. But the divine voice which had on other occasions whispered in his ear more joyful communications, had apprized him of the present baseness and treachery.

Indignant that truth, and the God of truth, should be thus wantonly insulted and compromised, yet without any of the vehemence of resentment which the deed and moment, we might think, would have justified—he puts the question to the deceiver, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Gehazi was, however, is still equal to the occasion. And to face the suddenness of the query, another lie is ready as an auxiliary to its predecessor—"I haven't been anywhere." His injured master in a moment denounces and exposes the web of deceit so artfully weaved. He tells the false-hearted delinquent and knave, how, with penetrating glance, he had read his inmost thoughts and tracked his guilty footsteps—"Don't you realize that I was there in spirit when Naaman stepped down from his chariot to meet you?"

The scoundrel's mouth is closed—the withering words fall like a flash of scathing lightning upon him—"Because you have done this, you and your children and your children's children will suffer from Naaman's leprosy forever!"

What a change! The culprit had entered the familiar door reveling in the success of his iniquity—the future gleaming with visions of ease, luxury, and independence. In a moment the mirage is dissolved! Through the same portals he goes forth as if smitten by an avenging angel, like another Cain with the brand of infamy upon him—"a leper as white as snow." Truly, says the Preacher, "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of those who seek death" (Prov. 21:6).

Let us endeavor to gather a few of the lessons with which this final scene in the narrative is replete.

1. Let us note the danger of unimproved and abused spiritual privileges. Gehazi's religious advantages, in all probability, began at a date prior to the time and mission of Elisha. One tradition speaks of him as the boy who sped at the bidding of the Elijah Tishbite to the top of Carmel, to watch the rising of the expected cloud over the Mediterranean, precursive of the longed-for rain. This, at all events, we know, that seven years previous to Naaman's pilgrimage, he was the witness of Elisha's greatest miracle, when he brought back the Shunamite's son to life. Doubtless, during these intermediate years, he had seen many other signs and wonders authenticating his master's divine call. He had mingled with the youths—his own contemporaries and fellow-students—in the college of the prophets—and, above all, in common with them, and more than them—he had been the privileged eye-witness of the pure, exalted character and consistent walk of his honored superior.

He might well have had his own life molded by the silent influence of so bright and godlike an example. Is it too much to imagine, that in their solitary journeys from village to village, traversing frequently the whole extent of the Holy Land, from Carmel to the Jordan, they had oftentimes sung together the same Psalm, and united in the same prayer—that words of holy counsel were ever and anon dropped from the lips of the prophet, into the ears of his younger attendant? Something of the feeling which, in

an older generation, Eli cherished for the child Samuel—or the later feeling which Paul cherished for his son Timothy—must this foster-father have entertained for the companion of his long and varied labors. The good Prophet possibly may have even hoped that the mantle of true prophetic succession, which had dropped on his own shoulders from the hands of Elijah, would be transferred to this "son in the faith," when his time also arrived to be gathered to his fathers.

But, like Judas under a greater and diviner Master, the disciple of Elisha becomes a renegade and traitor in the midst of rarest privilege. And alike awfully sudden and humiliating is his fall. We cannot believe that such a scheming of crime was a mere impromptu act, the result of unpremeditated impulse—as if some spirit from the abyss had its first grapple with a hitherto pure and holy soul, and carried it by one fierce assault. We suspect, as has already been indicated—that the adder must have been for long nestling and nurturing in his bosom—biding its time. The process of heart-hardening had been, it may be slowly and imperceptibly, but too surely progressing.

What we shall immediately find was his master-passion, gathered to its aid others that became willing accomplices and abettors. All unknown to the trustful Prophet, Gehazi had probably become restless and ill at ease under his life of enforced poverty, devotion, and self-denial; and when the tempting prize is within reach, and the guilty resolve is taken, he scruples at no means to gain his end. Who could for a moment have dreamt, that that privileged attendant of the holiest man of his age, was carrying, under an assumed guise, a demon's depravity, such as would have been spurned and repudiated by the lowliest camel-driver in Naaman's retinue.

Alas! however, such is a mournful fact—that no fall is so low and so fearful as the fall of a man "once enlightened," and who has "tasted of the heavenly gift." No fall into sin is so dreadful as the apostasy on the part of one who has "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come." None is so rapidly and mournfully demoralized as the Prodigal who has gone to the far country, resolved to stifle early conviction, to be oblivious of mother's prayers, and father's counsels, and summons of church bell. O saddest of all catastrophes, when "the end of those things

is death!" The same sun which, in the case of a healthy though leafless tree, evokes by its warming beams latent life, when it shines on the noxious pool or stagnant pond, only elicits and diffuses corruption. The religious training and pious fellowship which softens and ameliorates the docile, teachable heart; if abused and rejected—will only serve to stir up the natural, innate tendencies of evil. Mournful experience testifies, that it is not familiarity with divine themes, nor communion with devout people, which can insure a holy walk and consecrated life. On the contrary—unless God's grace be given and superadded, a man may, like Gehazi, be slumbering at the foot of a Bethel-ladder traversed with angels and music with heavenly voices, and yet be dreaming and scheming baseness, villainy, and fraud—his mouth full of cursing and bitterness—the way of peace unknown—ready at any moment when the temptation comes—to rush "against the thick bosses" of the Almighty's "shield."

Indeed, this intimate familiarity with spiritual matters, unless watchfully guarded, may have a tendency rather to diminish their effect on life and practice; engendering unconcern—culminating, it may even be, in cheerless unbelief. It has been well said, that if the mortician—constantly surrounded with mementos of dissolution—is liable (just because habituated to the spectacle), to be least of all men impressed with the lessons of the grave, the uncertainties of life, the certainty of death, and the grandeur of immortality—it is the spiritually privileged—those breathing a holy atmosphere, and moving in the circle of holy influences, who have greatest need to cherish remembrance of the apostolic watchword, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Those who have all these outer surroundings of pious home and Christian training faithful preaching and holy sacrament—temple-work and temple-life—who have stood, like Gehazi, at triumphant deathbeds, and watched departing souls, borne in the chariots of salvation, singing the hymns of Paradise—may have most need to prefer as their habitual prayer, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out" (Matt. 8:11, 12).

Let us write "Beware" on our seasons of loftiest privilege—and on our

moments of highest inspiration. "Beware" of a spirit of indifference to divine things, harboring anything that would blunt the fine edge of conscience, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God; allowing religion to become a weariness; outwardly professing godliness—while inwardly in league with the world, the flesh, and the devil. If the path of destruction be once entered on, it is difficult to turn aside, or to retrace the upward way. How often those, who at first only allowed themselves a 'slight deflection' from duty, and who would, with a Hazeal's scorn, resent the imputation of baser and fouler deeds, have gone on from weakness to weakness, until their bosoms have become a moral charnel-house—a hell of guilty passion, godless lust, and hopeless despair!

One of the saddest, if not the saddest of Bible utterances is this, "Ephraim"—(the loved—the trusted—the privileged—the "dear Son"—God's "pleasant child")—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone!"

2. A second lesson we may learn from the story of Gehazi, is the certainty of sin's detection. It was a boldly-conceived, and a boldly-executed scheme, of the audacious criminal. As with the prophet of Nineveh, when he embarked in the opportune vessel at the port of Joppa, just sailing for Tarshish—everything seemed to promise and insure him success—the unsuspecting natures of the two principals, Elisha and Naaman—the long distance that would soon separate the warrior from the Prophet—so that suspicion, even if roused, would lack 'confirmation'—then the convenient hiding place, where the ill-gotten treasure was stowed away, among these limestone crags and their tufted thicket and herbage. The crafty plotter had nothing further to do, but to preserve his own look of naivety and innocence; and the first favoring moment (in the absence of his master, or at dead of night, when the other occupants of the dwelling were asleep), he might transfer the booty to some place of greater safety; disposing of the rich garments, in exchange for gold, to the first traveling caravan of merchants he would meet on the way to Philistia or Egypt, and investing the silver in the purchase of sheep and oxen, vineyard and oliveyard, in one of the fertile glens of Ephraim.

Yes, the luxurious, independent future is all pleasantly mapped out before him. He sees himself the owner of an estate; barns built, granaries stored, abundance laid up for many years; servants and slaves reaping his corn,



pressing his grapes, and serving his table; his life, too, of leisure and luxury.

Such were the air-castles which Gehazi, in common with thousands of accomplished graduates in crime, have reared for themselves. But he forgot, or tried at least to bury from remembrance, the truth which he had embodied in his own thoughtless imprecation, that "Jehovah lives!"—that there is an eye above, keener to detect than that of warrior or prophet—that the true God of heaven has, employed in His service, retributive agents, swifter than the heathen's avenging furies, who dog the heels of crime, and do not allow the world to forget the old warning, "Be sure your sin will find you out!" "If I ascend up into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:8-10).

It is true, that sentence against an evil work is not always (indeed, is seldom) executed speedily. God many times seems to "keep silence"—to be like the Baal of Carmel, "asleep." The daring and presumptuous venture their own skeptic conclusions on this patience of the Most High, in thinking Him "altogether such an one as themselves"—"The Lord does not see, neither does the God of Jacob regard" (Ps. 94:7). If, however, there be in the present state, exceptions to this great retributive law in God's moral economy—if the theft, or lie, or deed of darkness perpetrated under cloud of night, escapes detection—there is a day coming when every such Gehazi will be brought to stand naked in the presence of the Great Heart-Searcher, and the truth become a stereotyped reality in the next—"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

And as the detection will be sure, so also will the punishment be commensurate with the crime. In the case of Gehazi, most befitting was the nature of the retribution. He would rob the restored Commander of his festal garment—a 'white garment', too, he shall have in return, but very different truly from the one he has avariciously taken—a garment of dreadful import, which in a terrible sense shall "not wear out"—for it shall go down a frightful heirloom to his children's children. It is a robe of leprosy—"white as snow." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for

whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap!"

3. A third lesson we may draw from the narrative is, the tendency of one sin to generate another. When the moral sense becomes weakened, and moral restraints are withdrawn, the 'horde of demons' gather strength—the 'avalanche of depravity' acquires bulk as well as velocity, in its downward course of havoc and ruin. "These wild beasts—the wolves of the soul—may hunt at first singly, but afterwards they go in packs, and the greater number increases the voraciousness thereof." When the citadel of the heart is carried by assault, one bastion after another is dismantled, and its treasure abandoned to the enemy. The Reaper angels, in the final harvest of wrath, are pictured as gathering, not single stalks, or even sheaves, but bundles to be burnt."

Mark the sad experience of Gehazi—

1. Note his COVETOUSNESS. Avarice was the besetting sin of his nature—the prolific parent of all the others. He was among the last, indeed, who ought to have succumbed to it. What position, one might have thought, more favored—more to be envied, than his? It was angel-work, surely—that to be the confidant and associate of Jehovah's greatest living prophet; away from the din and turmoil and sin of busy cities; free from the cares and anxieties of a coarse, secular calling—living in an atmosphere of holy and blissful seclusion—yet no unnatural, hermit life either; but alternating devotion and study, with active work in his often-journeyings to and from Carmel, along with him whose delight, like that of a Greater, seems to have been "going about doing good." What a school for faith, and love, and charity—the nurture of generous thought and philanthropic deed!

But an enemy came and sowed tares in that promising field—the furrows too readily received the accursed seed, and the crop of covetousness choked the better and nobler portion. For some pieces of silver and a few costly garments, he, who might have been faithful to death as the loyal servant of the man of God, sold his honored birthright, and stooped to a deed of unparalleled lowliness. Come and read on the tomb of one whose name might otherwise have had its place on the roll of Hebrew worthies—"For the iniquity of his covetousness was I angry—and smote him!"

(Isa. 57:17)

2. But the motive-power of covetousness roused into action other depraved, and, until now, slumbering forces. We have to note next, his UNTRUTHFULNESS. Isaac Watts' child-hymn, in simplest child-language, expresses in brief the sad experience of this covetous attendant—"For he who does one fault at first, and lies to hide it, makes it two."

In rushing after Naaman's chariot, he accomplishes his robbery and pillage by means of a brazen falsehood—a plausible, ingenious story; and then, on returning with cool effrontery to the presence of his master, the unexpected questioning to which he is subjected, only serves to elicit another denial. When he went in to his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" "I haven't been anywhere," he replied. 2 Kings 5:25

Among the diverse and multiform ranks of evil-doers in our fallen humanity, there are none more degraded and hopeless than those recruited by the liar. From most other sins there is ever the possibility of emancipation and recovery; but in the case of the 'traitor to truth', conscience gets debauched and demoralized, and the moral perceptions blunted. Add to this, the convicted soon awake to the discovery, that through their unreliable words and ways, their worldly reputation and character become irreparably injured and impaired. How scrupulously should we seek to "buy the truth, and to sell it not!"

Under how many specious forms and counterfeits is the beauty and purity of this "pearl of character" disfigured, by the artful equivocation—the mental reservation—the circuitous policy—the disingenuous intrigue—the trick of trade—the gilded compliment—the fashionable apology—the polished evasion—the unmanly insinuation—the bold exaggeration!

Ah, beautiful virgin Truth! when shall we see you, arrayed in your pure white garments, lighting your vestal fires in this treacherous, unreliable, overreaching world? There is a noble ring in your voice which cannot be mistaken—truth of word, truth of character, transparency of conduct—"the true life." Among the many messages needed, in a degenerate age, to be with trumpet-tongue proclaimed from press and pulpit, none is

more urgent than that suggested by the Apostle's text—"Therefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor."

God is emphatically the God of Truth—"A God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is He." Gehazi—and not only Gehazi, but his children's children—"his descendants forever," would be a perpetual standing commentary in Israel of the Psalmist's denunciation—"You hate all the workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak lying. The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps. 5:6).

3. Scarcely distinguishable from Gehazi's sin of falsehood—akin to it, and a part of it—(a sister spirit of evil)—let us note still further, his HYPOCRISY. Bad enough and base enough was the nefarious lie; but the guilt of it was specially aggravated by his 'pretending better things'. Had he been untrained and untutored in higher duties—a rough mountaineer, who did mere manual drudgery and labor of hewing wood and drawing water for the school at Gilgal—or had Elisha unwittingly taken into his household service, one of the moral waifs—the pests and scum of society, that doubtless haunted Judean towns and villages as they do our own—we could not have so wondered at his becoming the prey of sudden and great temptation, and even fencing round his bold sin by a bolder falsehood.

But he was, as we have seen, for a long course of years, the trusted and disciplined attendant of the man of God—with whom he had constantly mingled in religious and solemn duty, and borne the staff and mantle of the prophetic office—no, if we mistake not, himself one of the sons of the prophets—an aspirant to the sacred calling. He doubtless could not fail to be well known throughout all Israel. The calm and stately demeanor of the gentle Elisha could not be hidden from the youth who traveled at his side, and sped on his errands of mercy. What a shock to this kind-hearted master, when, all in a moment, his eyes were opened to the base, sordid, grasping, lying ways of him who had given proof and promise of other and better things—who had abused his confidence—wounded his unsuspecting nature—compromised his integrity in the sight of Naaman—done his best to brand him with having as shrewd an eye to his own interests as the most avaricious slave in heathen Syria, or the most mercenary, time-serving priest in Rimmon's Temple.

This deceit and trickery, in Gehazi's case, was double treason before high heaven. He was the Old Testament parallel—the living counterpart, of the 'withered fig-tree' on the road to Bethany, which received the dreadful doom from the lips of 'injured Truth'—not so much because it was a fruitless cumberer, as because it was a base pretender. If it had been content with the avowal of its barrenness—extending its 'bare' stems like skeleton—mere arms in the midst of that fig-grove—it would, in all probability, have been passed without comment. But it mocked the eye of the spectator with deceitful foliage; appearing as if it had gratefully yielded to the influences of spring suns, and dews, and rains—an attractive rustling sheen—but hid no fruit behind. The malediction falls upon it—the blasted, withered leaves next day strew the turf of Olivet. The miracle stands forth in sacred story, the one solitary act of doom in Christ's ministry of love—"Let no fruit henceforth grow upon you forever."—"How soon is the fig-tree withered away!"

Significant picture of the hypocrite—the base alloy that would pass itself off for pure gold—the false life that mimics and counterfeits the true—like the sprinkling of virgin snow that covers treacherous pit or festering corruption—the man of saintly appearance, who, like Gehazi, utters his perjury—"swears to his own hurt," under the garb of religious pretension and sanctimonious profession—a wretched actor on the stage of unreality, who even makes these artificial disguises auxiliaries in accomplishing vile intrigue; and base, worldly schemes. No sin so heinous as this.

It has often been noted that our Divine Redeemer, in His discourses and sayings in the days of His flesh, had words of kindness, encouragement, and mercy to the very publicans and harlots—the lowest dregs of the Jewish population. The greatest outcast from purity, was allowed to kiss His feet, and bedew them with tears. The one class for whom He has nothing but withering words—on whom He discharges arrows of wrath, and judgment, and woe—are "pharisees! hypocrites!"

But we shall not close this series of meditations with so gloomy a theme as the stern lessons derived from the contemplation of a vicious and vitiated life. We shall rather take one parting glimpse at that cavalcade

vanishing from sight amid the mountains of Ephraim, with the two strange loads of earth borne in its midst—the warrior-chief and his entourage, perhaps, together waking the echoes of the valleys through which they pass with songs of grateful praise.

We might have wished to know the sequel of that striking history. It would have interested us to have had further described Naaman's return to the old capital—his entrance within 'the Gate of God'—his meeting with his glad and wondering household—his tribute of special gratitude to the little Hebrew maid—his ministering angel—in whose case later prophetic words had a remarkable fulfillment—"The feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them" (Zech. 12:8)—the erection of the earthen altar, close, it may be, by the Abana, whose musical stream would now recall other and more hallowed river-memories. May we not even picture the rejoicing proselyte as High Priest in his own dwelling, gathering his family around the pile of consecrated dust, singing the new hymn of his adopted faith and trust—"God is the Lord, who has showed us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord—for He is good; for His mercy endures forever!" (Ps. 118:27-29)

On Naaman's future, however, the sacred narrative is silent; and it is not for us to attempt to lift the veil and indulge in conjecture. Doubtless he would come to know, that the new and higher life on which he had entered, purchases no exemption from struggle and conflict and fierce temptation—that all who live godly must suffer persecution—that his altar, with its holy earth, would in itself be no charm against the corruptions of his own heart and the wiles of the Great Adversary—that though he had returned among the mountains of Lebanon no longer the blinded pagan he had left them, there were still in their midst, in a truer and more perilous than literal sense, "lions' dens and mountains of leopards." Let us hope and believe that he lived and died, another Daniel in Babylon; maintaining a consistent and unsullied character; against whom neither the votaries of Rimmon nor the courtiers of Benhadad could bring any weightier accusation than in the case of the other—"Our

only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the requirements of his religion." (Dan. 6:5).

We can with greater confidence picture Naaman, now, "on the other side Jordan"—within the Gate of God—in "the city which has foundations;" made "more than conqueror"—his old name invested with a new celestial meaning—"beautified with salvation"—singing, in concert with the multitude which no man can number, "the new song"—even the song of the crowned victors who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father—to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 1:5, 6).

While, in the case of Gehazi, we have the toll of a warning bell beckoning us off the rocks in life's treacherous sea; in Naaman—who by better than any earthly title or earthly promotion was "Captain of the Lord's host"—we have a bright beacon-light shining on the heavenly shore, and inviting us to cast anchor in the same sheltering haven. That great salvation—which, through the symbol of washing in the waters of Israel, was so free to him—is equally free to us. There are chimes stealing down from the upper sanctuary, sounding in our ears the glorious invitation and welcome—"Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The same benediction breathed upon him, is breathed upon us—a benediction proceeding from the lips of ONE mightier than Hebrew Prophet, and who surrendered His own life that He might have a right to utter it—"Go in peace!" Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives!" (John 14:27)

# **CLEFTS OF THE ROCK**

## **The Believer's Grounds of Confidence in Christ**

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## **Preface**

In a quaint but powerful way, MacDuff presents various aspects of the person and work of Jesus, as various 'clefts in the rock' in which the believer can hide himself for protection, comfort, and strength in his pilgrimage to his heavenly home.

"O my dove, which is in the Clefts of the Rock."  
—Solomon's Song 2:14

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Your riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill Your law's demands:  
Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone:  
You must save, and You alone!

Nothing in my hand I bring;  
Simply to Your cross I cling;  
Naked, come to You for dress;  
Helpless, look to You for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly—  
Wash me, Savior, or I die!

While I draw this fleeting breath—  
When mine eyelids close in death—  
When I soar to worlds unknown—  
See You on Your judgment throne—  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee! —Toplady

The name of this Volume will best interpret the design of its pages. They purpose, however inadequately, to set forth the leading grounds of safety and security, comfort and peace, which are to be found in the adorable character and completed work of the Divine Redeemer--"Clefts," to the shelter of which we can repair, alike "in all time of our tribulation and in all time of our wealth,"--in the prospect of "the hour of death and of the Day of judgment." To every believer, the words of Balaam's parable in a nobler sense may be applied, "Strong is your dwelling-place, and you put your nest in a rock," or those of the great Prophet, as rendered in the Septuagint translation, "His place of defense shall be in a lofty cavern (or cleft) of the strong Rock." It is the complex Person of "IMMANUEL, God with us"--the might and majesty of Omnipotence in conjunction with the tenderness of humanity--"Our God, yet our Brother--our Brother, yet our God," which makes Him the sure and unassailable Stronghold He is. The 'Clefts,' where His people are invited to flee, are in a Rock--but, that Rock is "THE ROCK OF AGES!" Contemplating His Deity, they can utter the Psalmist's challenge, "Who is a ROCK like OUR GOD?"--yet they can add, "A MAN shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

It was the consciousness of being sheltered in these divine clefts, that enabled the great Apostle to say, in his own name, and in the name of all in every age who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them--"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Tribulation--Distress--Persecution--Famine, and the other adverse forces included in his enumeration, are so many waves dashing against THE ROCK--trying to 'separate,'--gathering their united strength to sweep from the secure shelter. But in vain. They are beaten back in succession with Faith's challenge--the reproof, not of bold haughty presumption, but of lowly believing confidence and heavenly trust--"In the name of a Mightier, we bid defiance to your might!" 'Who shall separate us?' "I stand upon a Rock," says Chrysostom, "let the sea rage, the Rock cannot be disturbed." "My flesh and my heart fails," says an older saint, "but God is the Rock of my heart and my portion forever."

"It has pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell." As on the head of Christ, under the emblem of a King, there are represented "many crowns"--so, under the metaphor of a ROCK, there are represented many clefts. One Rock, but diversified grounds of confidence and trust; each one uttering a silent response and invitation to the quest of the weary soul--"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

The emblem of a Rock, as thus applied to the Divine Redeemer, is at once sublime, beautiful, and appropriate--suggestive as it is of strength, durability, shelter, safety. It speaks of nature's noblest monumental columns--concurrent with creation--as fresh as at first sculptured by the great Craftsman--older, grander, and more lasting than obelisk or pyramid, or most colossal work of human power. Over these rocks, have the winds of heaven continually swept. Age after age has the sun discharged upon them his quiver of golden arrows--but resisting all

changes--defying all elements--outliving all political convulsions--no wrinkle can be traced on their majestic brow--now in sunny robes of roseate light--now gleaming in the moonbeams with silver mantle--now swathed in white garments of cloud--now curtained in raging tempest--now their echoes awoke with the trumpet of peace--now with the clarion of battle--but every hoary peak remaining immutably the same. Such, is "The Rock of our Salvation!"

Each Reader will doubtless have his own associations with the figure; derived from some memorable scene in nature. The Writer may be forgiven a personal reference, if he venture to allude to the spot where his own thoughts invariably revert when the imagery of "The Rock of Ages" is before him. It is in one of those magnificent valleys among the Alps of Piedmont, visited in early youth, sacred to the heroic sufferings and triumphs of the Vaudois. There, a mountain, clothed at the base with varied fruit and forest trees, is crowned with a wonderful rampart of natural rock. Castelluzzo is pointed out to this day, by the descendants of the martyred Waldenses, as the place into which, during successive persecutions, when the adjacent valleys were desolated by fire and sword, their fathers often fled with their wives and little ones for safety. All the deeper was the impression made by this singular stronghold, from having been first seen, in descending the Italian side of the wild pass of La Croix, when the whole valley beneath was shrouded in fog. It towered in solitary grandeur above the sea of mist, and seemed, from its height, like an island suspended in mid-air. It has, or rather had, several remarkable peculiarities--as if the God of nature purposely upreared it to be a rampart for His oppressed people. Though of lofty elevation, it was rendered so accessible, that even mothers and their infants, with the aid of stronger hands, could avail themselves of its shelter. It had a cleft or opening on one side, by which alone it could be entered. It contained a spacious cavern, in which, fuel from the adjoining forest was readily stored, and at times corn and wild fruits were garnered from the neighboring productive slopes--while, in the center of the cave was a never-failing spring of water, which, in the hour of peril, completed the necessary supplies of the rocky citadel. The Divine promise was thus more than once literally fulfilled in the case of many noble sufferers for the truth, "He shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the

munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." Once within it, the weakest felt secure. A handful of men, stationed at the entrance, by rolling down masses of stone (easily disintegrated from the sides and top of the cavern), could defy the assault of disciplined soldiers.

The loftiness of the Rock--so often, seen wreathed in glorious cloud--the cleft--the one cleft--the accessibility--the spaciousness of the cavern--the secure shelter--the "fountain opened"--might well suffice to suggest mental pictures of a Greater and sublimer reality--"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!"

We shall end these prefatory words with an appropriate anecdote--may its concluding utterances be our own in a similar hour. It is the well-authenticated story of a Highland mother, who, at the close of spring, was suddenly overtaken, in a wild glen among the mountains, by what was long recalled by her fellow-villagers as "the Great May storm." After attempting in vain, for some time, with her infant in her arms, to buffet the whirling eddies, she laid the child down among heather and ferns, in the deep cleft of a rock; with the brave resolve, if possible, to make her own way home through the driving sleet, and obtain help for her little one. She was found by the anxious neighbors, next morning, stretched cold and stiff on a snowy shroud. But the cries of the babe directed them to the rock-crevice, where it lay, all unconscious of its danger; and from which it was rescued in safety. Many long years afterwards, that child returned from distant lands--a disabled soldier, covered with honorable wounds. The first Sabbath of his homecoming, on repairing to a city church (where he had the opportunity of worshiping God "after the manner" and in the cherished language of his forefathers), he listened to an aged clergyman unfolding, in Celtic accents, the story of redeeming love. Strange to say, that clergyman happened to be from the same Highland glen where he himself had spent his youth. Stranger still, he was illustrating the Divine tale with the anecdote, to him so familiar, of the widow and her saved child! A few days afterwards, that Pastor was summoned to visit the deathbed of the old soldier. "I am the son of that widow," were the words which greeted the former, as he stood by the couch of the dying man. "Lay my bones beside hers in the churchyard among the hills. The prayers she used to offer for me have been

answered. I have found deliverance in old age where I found it in my childhood--in the cleft of the Rock; but it is--THE ROCK OF AGES!"

May He, who of old attested with a voice from Heaven, "This is my Beloved Son," add His own blessing to this feeble attempt to direct the inquirer's eye to these glorious "Clefts"--to unfold and illustrate the grandest of all revealed truths--"the mystery of godliness--God manifest in the flesh." May the perusal of what follows, enable both reader and writer to subscribe with greater confidence to the Prophet's exhortation--"Trust in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is THE ROCK OF AGES!"

## **THE DEITY OF CHRIST (part 1)**

"The Word was God."--John 1:1

"Let no man go about to entertain the thoughts of the Great Mystery of Godliness, but with a ravished heart. You who are a Spirit, and therefore immaterial and invisible, to expose yourself to the view of earthen eyes; You who are an infinite Spirit, to be enwrapped in flesh; You an all-glorious Eternal Spirit, to put on the rags of human mortality; You the great Creator of all things, to become a creature; You the Omnipotent God, to subject Yourself to miserable frailty and infirmity; O mystery transcending the full apprehension of even glorified souls! Cease, cease, O human curiosity, and where you cannot comprehend, wonder and adore." --Bishop Hall, 1574.

So spoke one who had folded his wings, as none other ever did, in "The Clefts of the Rock," who, as none other before or since, had obtained response to the invocation of the great Hymn-- "Let me hide myself in You!"

Sheltered in these sublime crevices during three privileged years on earth, overshadowed and canopied, as it were, by that mighty Presence, he could utter the testimony, not as hearsay evidence, not as a dry

theological dogma, but as a blessed experimental truth, gathered from divine lip and look and heart, during the enjoyment of the closest contact and fellowship with his living, loving Lord--"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. For the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

The cardinal foundation-truth of all theology thus stated in the prologue alike to the Gospel and the Epistles of the Beloved Disciple, is the supreme Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Other shelters would be worthless and unavailing without this. Indeed, it is not so much a "Cleft in the Rock," as THE ROCK itself, on which the Church of the future, and with it the hopes and aspirations of world-wide humanity, are built. It is the keystone of the arch. Remove it, and the whole superstructure collapses. More than ever, Luther said regarding justification, is it "the doctrine of a standing or a falling church." Take Deity from the tree of life, and its every leaf withers. Take Deity from the Rock, and its majestic places of refuge are turned into sand-clefts; it ceases to be a "Rock of Ages."

It is fit that we should commence themes which in future pages are to engage our thoughts, with what thus gives to that Rock its most glorious and distinctive title. There are special eras in the history of the Church, when truths we have been accustomed to receive with implicit unwavering trust, are either openly assailed, or sought to be shorn of their proportions and strength by the covert negations of a destructive criticism. Surely of all forms of apostasy and error, that is incomparably the greatest, which would tend in any way, whether by bold assertion or evasive statement, to shake and undermine the believer's faith in the Godhead of his adorable Lord. Doctrinal subjects such as this may not possess the interest of others. We may prefer themes, such as several of those that follow, which come home to the conscience, and stir the affections and the heart. But it is needful, surely, and profitable also, at times to remove the debris--expose to view the great foundation of the

Christian temple, and vindicate the peerless dignity of Him who to us as His people, ought to be, and we trust is, "fairer than the children of men."

What more sacred thing is there on earth than to defend the name and honor of a beloved friend? If a parent's worth and goodness were assailed, his honor impugned--who that has the spirit of a son would not rush to beat off the unworthy thrust, and to throw the shield of protection over injured goodness and worth? What shall be said when the glory of Him is tampered with, who is better than the best and dearest of all earthly relatives? Who dare be silent, when Arianism and Socinianism are endeavoring to pluck the regal crown from Immanuel's brow, making this very Bible (the mirror of His glory) to reflect unworthy humanitarian views of His official character and Divine Person? If these "foundations are destroyed, what will the righteous do?"

Let us, then, obey the summons of the Prophet, and adopting his words, "go into the clefts of the Rock," to behold the glory of the Redeemer's Majesty.

"What do you think of Christ?" "Who is this Son of man?" "All the city was moved, saying, Who is this?" "Is He no more than the first of the shadows of the past--the first of memories--the first of biographies--the most perfect of human ideals? Is He only an ideal after all? Does He reign only in virtue of a mighty tradition of human thought and feeling in His favor, which creates and supports His imaginary throne?--or is He a super-angelic Intelligence, sinless, and invested with judicial and creative powers, but still separated from the inaccessible life of God by that fathomless interval which parts the first of creatures from the Everlasting Creator? Can He save us from our sins? Can He blot out their stains and crush their power? Can He deliver us in our death-agony from the terrors of dissolution, and bid us live with Him in a brighter world forever?" So states Canon Liddon, an able writer, the momentous problem that is now for a little to occupy our attention.

Be it our endeavor to approach, with chastened reverential spirit, the sacred oracles, as the great and only court of appeal--the sole arbiter on this as on all other doctrinal questions. With the assent, alike of an enlightened intellect and sanctified heart, may we be prepared to



subscribe to the comprehensive article first promulgated by the Nicene Fathers, and now for long centuries incorporated in the creed of Christendom--"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God--Begotten of His Father before all worlds--God of God, Light of Light, VERY GOD OF VERY GOD!"

Let us begin by rehearsing a few of our blessed Lord's own declarations regarding His divinity, and then see how these are borne out and supported by the inspired penmen. In other words (although we use the simile with all reverence), let us hear His own divine assertion of claims to supreme dignity, and then summon witness by witness to substantiate these. In doing so, we have to go over ground which has been often previously traversed. Farther, from the necessarily brief and inadequate treatment of which our space admits, we can do little more than quote some of the leading proofs in support of the great doctrine. May He whose special divine office it is to glorify the Redeemer, take of the things that are Christ's, and show them unto us!

Let us listen, first, to one or two of the testimonies which Christ Himself gives regarding His Divinity. We may premise, however, that His own utterances constitute by no means the strength of the argument. On the contrary, while on the one hand He does not shrink from a bold manifesto, or vindication of His divine prerogatives, when the occasion imperatively demands it, there is, at the same time, a marked and peculiar reticence in the assertion of His personal claims. And this itself forms a strong and direct testimony to the forcefulness of these. So unlike an impostor, who would have taken every opportunity of loudly enforcing his pretensions. "I speak not of Myself." "Believe Me for the works' sake."

In the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus was addressing the Jews in the Temple Treasury, and meeting their virulent cavils and carnal prejudices, as they boasted of their pedigree, and challenged what they deemed His blasphemous assumption of superiority over the great Father and founder of their nation. He makes the distinct announcement, not only of His pre-existence, but of all that was implied in the possession of the Divine incommunicable name of JEHOVAH. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I AM." Not "I was," but "I AM"--the Great Underived, whose lifetime is Eternity--that Eternity comprehending a

dateless past--a changeless present--a limitless future--ever living in the sublime consciousness of His own Being. From Everlasting to Everlasting--the same!

Again, at the Feast of dedication in winter, when walking in Solomon's porch, He was interrogated by the same skeptic auditory as to His pretensions. While declaring His prerogative to confer on His sheep the gift of eternal life, He concludes with the assertion, "I and My Father are one." The Jews present had not misapprehended His meaning. They viewed it as being "blasphemous." On remonstrating with them for their threat to stone Him, their reply was, "For a good work we stone You not, but for blasphemy; and because that You being a man make Yourself God." Doubtless He would have disclaimed and corrected their impressions had He considered them erroneous. So far from this, however, He only adds confirmation to His previous testimony. "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though you believe not Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father, and no man knows the Son but the Father; neither knows any man the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." "My Father," He again says, "works hitherto, and I work"--anew, explicitly claiming coequal power and parity of working in nature and providence with the Eternal Father. Could there be such an assumption of jurisdiction, identifying and associating Himself as One with the Supreme Maker and Sustainer, "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fains not, neither is weary," if He were not divine?

If there was any locality or object more than another associated to the Jew with deepest sacredness, it was his Temple. The Temple!--the former abode of the Shekinah, the visible dwelling-place of deity. Hear how the divine Redeemer speaks of Himself in presence of Jews, and under the very shadow of the imposing temple--"Verily I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the Temple."

Listen to some of His last divine utterances, when, in the words of the beloved evangelist, "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and went to God" "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me." "He that has seen Me has seen the Father."

How strange would the assertion have been (on the supposition of mere creatureship), when He speaks of the boon of His indwelling presence, as being of equal value and preciousness with that of the Father! Had the vast interval existed which must always sever the holiest created from the Uncreated, would not His language rather have been this--'I, your Lord and Master, will dwell with you; but the boon of My indwelling will be nothing to the Greater presence of the Supreme God'? But what says He?--"If a man loves Me, he will keep My words--and My Father will love him, and WE will come unto him, and make OUR abode with him."

His sublime intercessory prayer is an indirect, but continuous attestation to the same great truth. What striking and remarkable words these were, in connection with the time He uttered them! They were the words, not of a conqueror, but of, apparently, a doomed man, one about to die. Yet, how the halo of Deity seems to encircle His devoted head, as He speaks--"And now, O Father, glorify Me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was." "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I am glorified in them." "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are." "That they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You." "I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it; that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them." His works are the works of God; His will is the will of God; His glory is the glory of God. To dishonor the Father is to dishonor Him. To love the Father is to love Him. "Could we have heard Him forgiving sins; asserting His right to do so; summoning the world to yield up its heart to Him; to make its homage to the Father a pattern of its homage to Him; could we have heard this without feeling that God must be present in the person of the mysterious Speaker; that the throne of deity must be, in a sense, come from heaven to earth?" (Harris' Great Teacher)

When His work is finished, and He is on the eve of leaving this world, He departs, asserting and claiming the attribute of omnipotence--"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." When He returns to the beloved disciple in Patmos, as "one like unto the Son of man" in His glorified humanity, He wears the unmistakable symbols of deity--"His head and His hair are white, like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes are as a

flame of fire." He rides triumphantly in vision through the heavens, having on His vesture, and on His thigh, a name written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords;" while these are some of His sublime utterances to the trembling and awestruck worshiper, regarding His omniscience, His eternity, and His power--"These things says the Son of God, who has His eyes like unto a flame of fire, 'I am He that searches the reins and hearts.'" "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come--the Almighty."

And once more, carrying our thoughts onwards, to the consummation of all things--the end of His mediatorial reign over the Church militant--in one of His most sublime parables, He claims the dignity of Supreme judge of mankind at the great assize, "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

To the same effect He declares in John, "For as the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them; even so the Son quickens whom He will. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." "It is not incredible that God should raise the dead; but it is absolutely incredible that any other being should." (Dr. Pye Smith.)

In looking forward to that Day, when the Almighty "shall judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained," do we ever think of what is implied and involved in the complex, superhuman task of being Judge of all? It assuredly demands the possession of qualifications centering in One, 'to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden;' who, with unchallenged supremacy and discriminating wisdom, which Omniscience alone possesses, can weigh all the thoughts and purposes, the motives and actions, the subtle springs of conduct, the extenuating circumstances in each individual case and life; and that too extending over countless millions of souls--whole

centuries thronged with living and accountable beings; none able to resist His might, or to evade His scrutiny. What created power, what angel or archangel from the ranks of loftiest intelligence, could undertake such a judgement as this? Who but the Great Being who sways the scepter of universal empire--in other words, JEHOVAH--could claim and challenge such peerless prerogatives? "Our GOD shall come, and shall not keep silence. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people."

Such are some of the Savior's own declarations regarding His Divine claims.

Before proceeding, as proposed, to gather some of the more important attestations of the inspired writers to the great truth, it may be well for a little to advert, from the early place they occupy in Old Testament story, to those indirect but still remarkable testimonies, known as "Theophanies," or God-appearances; the anticipatory advents of Messiah to the Patriarchal and Jewish Church, under the title of the "Angel of the Lord," or "the Angel the Lord," the Angel JEHOVAH. "This Person claims an uncontrolled sovereignty over the affairs of men. He has the attribute of omniscience and omnipresence. He performs works which only omnipotence could. He uses dreadful formulas, by which the Deity on various occasions condescended to confirm the faith of those to whom the primitive revelations were given--'He swears BY HIMSELF;' His favor is to be sought with the deepest solicitude, as that which is of the highest importance to the interests of men. He is the object of religious invocation. In the most express manner, and repeatedly, declared to be Jehovah." (Dr. Pye Smith.)

The earliest of these "apparitions," or personal manifestations of Jesus, is recorded in the life of Abraham, when the patriarch was seated at his tent-door in the plains of Mamre. "The Lord" (that is, JEHOVAH, as the Hebrew word means) appeared to him. "He lift up his eyes," we read, "and looked, and lo! three men stood by him; and he bowed himself toward the ground," in customary obeisance. Though in angelic form like the others who accompanied Him, we are left in no doubt as to the superior and preeminent dignity of one of these three. Two of the heavenly messengers, after partaking of a patriarchal meal, withdrew on

their mission to Sodom. The third, however, tarried with the patriarch. But of Him we read, "And the Lord (JEHOVAH) said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" "Abraham stood yet before JEHOVAH." "Behold now," says the Father of the Faithful, "I have taken upon me to speak unto THE LORD, who am but dust and ashes." And again, "Shall not THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH do right?" And then we read, "The Lord (JEHOVAH) went His way."

We find the same Angel appearing to Jacob in a dream, and reminding him thus of the most memorable hour of his earlier history, when in visions of the night, above his stony pillow at Bethel, troops of angels seemed to line a celestial ladder; and a voice, more magnificent and divine than that of angels, addressed the wanderer from the heights of heaven, "I am the GOD of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar, and where you vowed a vow unto me." At a future crisis-hour, He revealed Himself to the patriarch at Peniel, where "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." That mighty Wrestler changed the name of the Pilgrim-Father from Jacob to Israel; and He assigned as the reason, "For as a prince have you power with GOD and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen GOD face to face, and my life is preserved." That incident, with its sacred recollections, years on years afterwards, rose up before the dimming eye of aged Israel, as on his deathbed he summoned Joseph and his two sons to impart to them the farewell blessing. Thus does he advert to that mysterious personage at Jabbok, "GOD, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the GOD which fed me all my life long unto this day, the ANGEL which redeemed me from all evil." The Prophet Hosea adds this comment on the same memorable occurrence in the life of Jacob--"By his strength he had power with GOD--yes, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto Him--he found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke with us; even THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS; The Lord is his memorial." Observe, this majestic Being, who first appeared in the gloom of that midnight hour as a man, is here designated not even an incarnate angel, but as "God," and "THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS."

Passing to the next era in Israel's history. To a careful reader of the whole

story of the Exodus, and the wanderings, it will be manifest that the divine Being who preceded the camp, by day in a pillar of cloud and at night in a pillar of fire, was none other than this same Covenant-Angel of the patriarchal Church. Out of the midst of the flaming bush it was the Angel JEHOVAH who spoke to Moses, and gave him his commission to the court of Pharaoh. That bush was itself a significant symbol of the twofold nature of the promised Redeemer--not a giant cedar or graceful palm, but a stunted desert tree, "a root out of a dry ground, having neither form nor loveliness." Yet glorious as an emblem of Deity--for "the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Moses said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when THE LORD (JEHOVAH) saw that he turned aside to see, GOD called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon GOD. And THE LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt (for I know their sorrows); and I have come down to deliver them, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land."

But how, it may be asked, are we authorised to identify the God who spoke here to Moses, with the Covenant-Angel, the Lord Jesus Christ? If we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, and read the historical defense of Stephen before the Jewish Sanhedrin, we shall find the first Christian martyr thus referring to the same incident. "There appeared to Moses, in the wilderness of Sinai, an Angel of the Lord in a flame of fire;" and again, "Moses was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel, which spoke to him in the Mount Sinai." It is plain from these passages, taken in connection, that the living God--the JEHOVAH of the burning bush, and "the Angel (of) THE LORD"--are one and the same; moreover, that this Covenant-Angel announces as His purpose not only to deliver Israel, but by His personal guidance to conduct them to Canaan--"I will bring them up out of that land to a good land." So that all the subsequent manifestations of divine power in that unparalleled march--the rebuking of the Red Sea, the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, the final dividing the waters of the Jordan, were the doings of Him who, in answer to the interrogation of Moses as to the name and authority of their august Deliverer, replied, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM. Thus

shall you say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you." Blessed testimony! that the Angel of the pillar-cloud--the eternal God, who thus declares His ineffable name "I AM"--whose chariots, as described by the Psalmist, were "twenty thousand, even thousands of angels in Sinai, in the holy place;" before whom "the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God, even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, "the God of Israel;" is the very Savior of whom another thus speaks, in reference to that same great epoch in Israel's history--"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bare them and carried them all the days of old."

Our limits forbid tracing, with any minuteness, the references to this Covenant-Angel on other occasions and periods throughout the theocracy. We need only allude, without comment, to the familiar instances of His appearances to Hagar, who named the place where the angel of God called to her out of heaven, "God, You see me"--to Joshua, as "the Captain of the Lord's host"--to Gideon, at his wine-press, when the names "God," and "Angel of God," given to the mysterious visitant, are also significantly interchanged--to Manoah, who dreads instant death from seeing "the Angel of the Lord" face to face--that Angel subsequently revealing his name as "Wonderful" or "Secret" to Zechariah, "as presiding over the affairs of the world; directing the ministrations of superior intelligences; protecting, vindicating, and interceding for the oppressed Jewish Church; the Messiah, the Savior, the Priest upon His throne, the Intercessor; and not less certainly described as possessing the attributes, exercising the sovereignty, and wearing the holy and incommunicable name of Jehovah."

Who else, in these varied cases can this be, but the divine Redeemer anticipating His incarnation--Jehovah in very deed dwelling with man upon the earth--a few favored members of redeemed humanity permitted to entertain, not angels, but the God of angels at unawares?

But it is time we now hasten to gather a few of the more prominent testimonies to the divinity of our Blessed Lord, furnished by the inspired penmen alike of Old and New Testament Scripture.



Among many Old Testament assertions, we may begin with that remarkable passage in the Book of Proverbs, where Incarnate WISDOM is represented as speaking of His own eternal subsistence with the Father; dwelling alone with Him in the yet unpeopled solitudes of Immensity, before throngs of worlds and intelligences had occupied space. Who can read the following sublime passage, and resolve the Divine Being there described, as hostile critics would do, into an Eastern metaphor or poetic impersonation? "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled; before the hills was I brought forth--while as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there--when He set a compass upon the face of the depth--when He established the clouds above--when He strengthened the fountains of the deep--when He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment--when He appointed the foundations of the earth--Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him--and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." (Prov. 8:22-30.)

Passing to that which is known peculiarly as the 'prophetical era,' let us listen to the strains of the evangelical Prophet. While he speaks, in one sentence (respecting the future Incarnation,) of "the Child born" and the "Son given;" he adds, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father" (margin, 'the Father of Eternity'). Again, "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name IMMANUEL, (which, being interpreted, is God with us"). It was this adorable Immanuel--Christ as God--whom the same Prophet beheld in magnificent vision--"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." He describes the seraphim with veiled wings crying one to another, "'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory,' and the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." And then the awestruck prophet is represented as exclaiming, "Woe is me! for I am undone, for

my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." The inference that this "Jehovah of Hosts," to whom the seraphim bend in lowly adoration, is the Lord Jesus Christ, is no gratuitous assumption. Appealing to the Gospels as our authority, we there find the apostle John, after quoting the passage, making the distinct declaration--"These things said Isaiah when he saw His (Christ's) glory, and spoke of Him."

Listen to the testimony of Jeremiah, "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is the name whereby He shall be called, JEHOVAH our Righteousness." Zechariah, in a verse of sublime but terrific poetry, represents the sword of justice as awaking from its scabbard to "smite the Shepherd." But to that Shepherd is applied the term, 'Equal of the Lord of Hosts,' "the man who is my Fellow." Hear the testimony of one of the minor prophets--that most interesting and comprehensive of Old Testament predictions which Micah gives regarding the Person of Christ, embracing alike His divine and human nature. While pointing to Bethlehem-Ephrathah as the honored birth-place of the incarnate Son, in language whose meaning can admit of no doubtful interpretation, he proclaims, in the same breath, His eternal existence--"But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."--(Marginal reading "from the days of eternity").

We may close these emphatic attestations with the striking words of Malachi, who seals up the Old Testament vision--"Behold, I will send My Messenger, and He shall prepare the way before Me--and JEHOVAH, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom you delight in, says the Lord of Hosts." In this concluding prophecy, the promised Messiah is again brought before us as the Covenant-Angel--the Angel of the old Theophanies; the same divine, mysterious Being who, at the dawn of the Mosaic dispensation, announced Himself as the "I AM," "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob."

We proceed from the Prophecies to the Psalms. Many of these in their

literal--most of them in their secondary meaning--refer to Christ--not a few form an ascription of praise to the Messiah-King in His supreme divinity. To attempt even an enumeration of such would be quite beyond our limits. We must restrict ourselves to three, in which special and undoubted references to the Redeemer are made by writers in the New Testament.

The first of these is the application by the Apostle Paul (in Eph. 4:8) of a verse in the 68th Psalm--"Wherefore, He says, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Now, it would be obviously doing violence to all principles of fair interpretation, forcibly to isolate this verse from the preceding and following context, so as to make it stand alone in its reference to Messiah, and regard the rest of the psalm as alluding to another. If this verse speaks of Christ, it is only reasonable to apply all the other portions to Him. Let us hear, then, the ascription to this same majestic Being, with which the sublime "Song of Victory" alike opens and closes. "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered--let them also that hate Him flee before Him." "Sing unto God, sing praises to His name--extol Him that rides upon the heavens by His name JAH, and rejoice before Him." "Sing unto God, you kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord--To Him that rides upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old--lo, He does send out His voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe you strength unto God--His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, You are glorious out of Your holy places--the God of Israel is He that gives strength and power unto His people. Blessed be God."

A second proof, gleaned from the same ample storehouse, is in the Pauline reference to that grand oration which closes the 102d Psalm. If there be an allusion, as unquestionably there is, in the first instance, to the individual case of the inspired penman (conjectured to be some pious Israelite at the era of the Babylonish captivity, bewailing alike his personal afflictions and those of the Church of God), there is doubtless throughout the psalm a secondary reference to a Greater. We have a foreshadowing alike of the true Humanity and true Deity of the world's coming Redeemer. There is the wail of the suffering Man, in conjunction with the majesty of the everlasting God. In the verse of the psalm

immediately preceding the apostle's quotation, we listen to the prayer of the Sufferer, the appeal of the Savior's sinking human nature to His Father--"He weakened My strength in the way; He shortened My days. I said, O My God, take Me not away in the midst of My days." The reply of the Father follows. It is the sublime assertion of the supreme Godhead of His divine Son, as the unchanging and everlasting--"Your years are throughout all generations. Of old have You laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure; yes, all of them shall wax old like a garment--as a vesture shall You change them, and they shall be changed--but You are the same, and Your years shall have no end."

One other similar proof from the Psalter, is that, for which (in applying it to Christ), we have the express authority of the same apostle in the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is contained in the 45th Psalm; in which the writer speaks of the things "touching the King;" and indites, in glowing metaphor, a royal "wedding song,"--on the bridal day of Messiah with the Church, His betrothed spouse. While with reference to the humanity of the "mighty One," he speaks of Him as full of grace, "fairer than the children of men," having "grace poured into His lips;" he proceeds immediately to celebrate the glories of His deity in language of reverential homage and adoration, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever!"

At the risk of breaking the continuity of the subject, we shall reserve the remainder of the proof for next chapter. What has been already advanced, indeed, independent of other testimony, might well lead us to repose in calm confidence in this majestic 'Cleft of the Rock;' and to appropriate with unwavering trust, as alike the foundation article and the crown and consummation of our faith, the opening invocation of the noble Hymn of the ancient church; (are we wrong in saying the grandest uninspired Hymn ever penned?) "We praise YOU, GOD!"

## **THE DEITY OF CHRIST (part 2)**

"The Word was God."--John 1:1

"That Christ is truly God is manifestly declared, in that Paul attributes the same things equally unto Him, which he does unto the Father, that is, divine power, as the giving of grace, the forgiveness of sins, peace of conscience, life, victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell. Now to give grace, peace, everlasting life; to forgive sins, to make righteous, to quicken, to deliver from death and the devil, are not the works of any creature, but of the Divine Majesty alone. The angels can neither create, nor give these things. Therefore these works pertain only to the glory of the Sovereign Majesty--the Maker of all things. It must needs follow that Christ is truly and naturally God." –Luther.

In the preceding chapter, a rapid survey has been taken of the more important scripture attestations (and more especially those contained in the Old Testament), to the supreme Godhead of the Redeemer.

We proceed to complete the proof, by referring to a few of the leading assertions of the inspired writers in the New Testament, in support of the same cardinal truth of the Christian system. We must refer the reader, who wishes more minutely to prosecute inquiry, to those ampler treatises compiled by masters in Israel, wherein the faith of the Church in the Divinity of her Lord has been nobly vindicated.

To begin with testimonies contained in the GOSPELS. We shall not attempt to enter on the proof from miracles; although to these, our blessed Lord Himself pointed, as special attestations to His divine mission. When the Baptist sent some of his own disciples from the prison of Machaerus with the query, "Are You He that should come, or do we look for another?" what was the Savior's reply? With what proofs did He confirm and authenticate His Messiahship in the eyes of these wavering and misgiving followers? He stretched forth His hands on the surrounding groups stricken with sin and suffering--the palsied with their tottering limbs--the blind with their sealed eyes--the fever-stricken with their burning lips--the demon-possessed with their wild and vacant stare--"He healed them ALL;" and then, pointing the messengers to the masses thus restored by His omnipotent touch and word--the closed eye opening to the light of day--the halting cripple leaping with joy--the dull ear of the

deaf unstopped--the fevered couch emptied of its tenant--the wild raving maniac led gently as a child--"Go," said He, "Go your way, and tell John what you have seen and heard."

Let us, however, rather restrict ourselves to a few of the direct statements contained in the Gospels and Epistles.

We may begin with another testimony of that same great Forerunner to whom we have just alluded. "John bore witness of Him, and cried saying, This was He of whom I spoke, He that comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that comes from above is above all."

More explicit still is the witness of the other John. When he wrote his Gospel, the venerable Saint of Ephesus was the last survivor of the apostolic band. Well might the eagle, with its strength of wing and soaring flight, be deemed by the early Christians his most appropriate emblem--reaching, as he did, altitudes attained by no other in the regions of uncreated light and glory, as if basking in the very beams of the unveiled Sun of Righteousness! "Impatient," says Augustine, "of setting his foot on the earth, he rises, from the very first words of his Gospel, not only above earth and the span of air and sky, but above all angels and invisible powers, until he reaches Him by whom all things were made." Surely if there had been no other proof in Scripture, this sublime epitome of the teachings of the favored apostle (part of which heads this and the former chapter), would of itself suffice to settle the question--"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made."

What language could be more forcible or conclusive? "This passage," to take the testimony of Griesbach among those of a hundred scholars, "is so clear and so superior to all exception, that by no daring efforts of either commentators or critics can it ever be overturned, or be snatched out of the hands of the defenders of the truth." There is, in these utterances of the beloved Disciple, nothing figurative--nothing parabolic. They consist of a series of simple propositions--the articles of a creed, which John, in an age when heresy was rampant, left as a sacred legacy to the Church of

the future as to the supreme divinity of the Incarnate Word--the "Image of the Invisible God."

But we cannot linger on the testimonies of the Gospels. Eliminate from these the fact of His absolute Deity, and they become incomprehensible. You try to quench the radiance which beams out on every page. As it has been well said, "Reduce Him to a mere teacher like Plato, or a Prophet like Isaiah, and it is as if the Gospels were emptied of their meaning. The very substance of the doctrine is gone--the teaching of Jesus is little more but a tinkling cymbal. All that sublime mystery which has nourished the souls of saints in all time, is then rightly pronounced the most defective portion of His teaching. If He is not God, the divinest side of His doctrine becomes the most vulnerable. It can only subsist, if beneath the formulas is felt the throb of a life which is truly of God."

Passing from the Gospels to the EPISTLES. Although not directly a proof of absolute Godhead, let us begin with Paul's assertion, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich." "Though rich"--what could this mean on the supposition that Christ was a mere man? His lowly birth--His manger cradle--the carpenter's home at Nazareth--all these render the reference surely to His "riches" inappropriate. He was, in earthly condition, the poorest of the poor; a Galilean peasant; who had at times not where to lay His head! Moreover, on the supposition of mere manhood, how could there be "grace" manifested by Him in assuming our nature? Where would be the condescension in a man taking upon him the common garb of humanity? The whole force of the apostle's words is lost on such an hypothesis. But take the true view of this noble passage. Regard the writer as speaking of the mighty stoop of Infinite Godhead, and all becomes plain!

We may select as our next reference, that contained in the same Apostle's Epistle to the Philippians, in which he clearly and indubitably claims for Christ the possession of a nature and perfections immeasurably superior to the most exalted and glorious of dependent existences--in other words DIVINE. "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." "God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Stronger and more emphatic still is the Apostle's language in another sublime passage, where he anticipates the very heresies of later centuries, and controverts the erroneous views of those who would assign to Christ no more than an exalted place in the ranks of creatureship, making Him 'an inferior workman, creating for the glory of a higher Master--for a God superior to Himself'--a passive instrument rather than an original and originating agent. He vindicates His dignity and glory as Lord, 'in His creative power, His eternal existence, His heirship over the universe--that universe, the theater on which He is to accomplish His purposes and display His perfections...ascribing to Him, therefore, infinite power, infinite wisdom.' "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers--all things were created by Him and for Him and He is before all things, and by Him all things are held together."

It has been well observed, that "while the Epistle to the Hebrews lays almost more emphasis than any other book of the New Testament upon Christ's true humanity, it is nevertheless certain that no other book more implicitly asserts the reality of His divine prerogatives." Let us listen to the impressive exordium--"God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and UPHOLDING all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels said He at any time, You are My Son, today have I begotten You? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son? And again, when He brings in the first-begotten into the world He says, And let all the angels of God worship Him. And of the



angels He (only) says, Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flaming fire. But unto the Son, He says, Your throne, O GOD, is forever and ever."

We have already listened to the apostle John in the opening of his Gospel. Let us now hear the same honored disciple in the opening of his Epistles. We may repeat the introductory words--"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.)" Again, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding that we might know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and (the) eternal life."

Another indirect class of evidences is furnished conjointly, by passages, contained in gospels and epistles, in which adoration is rendered to Christ. We know that worship or adoration is given to God alone. We know, moreover, from various statements in the Old Testament, how jealous the Divine Being is of giving His glory to another. "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." When John, also, fell at the feet of the angel, and was about to render him an act of homage, he was rebuked by the words, "Do not worship me. ... worship God." The very fact, therefore, of the Son having adoration ascribed to Him, forms surely the strongest testimony, that not only is He higher than any angelic being, but has a title to deity itself. We have already heard our blessed Lord Himself claiming the prerogative, "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." "That at the name of Jesus," says the Apostle, "every knee should bow." More than once in the apostolic benedictions, He is put on an equality with the Father, as if entitled to receive parity of homage--"The grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit." And if we pass from the Church militant to the Church triumphant in heaven, described in the Book of Revelation; as an appropriate close to all, we listen to the divine ascription of the "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the

Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." No testimony or tribute to the Savior's supreme Divinity can go beyond this, in its impressiveness and sublimity. We behold, in wondrous vision, concentric circles of worshipers in the upper sanctuary--"angels, living ones, and elders." They are represented as gathered, in devoutest adoration, around a slain and wounded Lamb, gazing on these mysterious symbols of suffering in a place where suffering is unknown--The Rock of Ages furrowed with mysterious clefts and crevices! From one of these circles (the inner favored group of redeemed humanity), there comes the ascription which they alone are qualified to utter, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." But the key-note thus struck by the white-robed band, is taken up by teeming myriads, reaching to the outskirts of illimitable space. All creation becomes vocal with the hymn to the same enthroned Lamb, once more associated and identified with the Supreme God--"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honor and glory and power, be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four-and-twenty elders fell down and worshiped Him that lives forever and ever." "And the four living ones said, Amen. And the four-and-twenty elders fell down and worshiped HIM THAT LIVES FOREVER AND EVER."

Such then, briefly and imperfectly summarized, are some of the leading scriptural attestations to the Savior's Divinity; and we would say to all readers on the retrospect, "As wise men, judge." Are we prepared to bow with reverence before Him, and to say in words of more emphatic adhesion and acknowledgment than those of Nathaniel, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel?" or, like one who loved Him as her son, but adored Him as her God--"My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior? or with the once doubting, but now convinced and believing Thomas--"My Lord and my God?" Let us seek to grasp and realize the full grandeur of this Truth of truths; to have it more frequently before us as a subject of devout contemplation--that the Christ of Nazareth, the Savior of Calvary--He who bled for me as Man upon the cross, and pleads for me on the throne, is the Mighty Jehovah; that He was before all things; that

He reared every arch and pillar in the Universe Temple. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, that brings out their host by number--He calls them all by their names." Before these stars were made, before these altar-fires were lighted in immensity, before man or angel or seraph, throne or dominion or principality or power existed, this all-glorious Being lived--one in essence and substance with the Eternal Father.

Any lowlier view of the nature and dignity of Christ would not suffice. It would be like blotting out the sun from these visible heavens to attempt to erase the supreme divinity of Jesus from the creed of Christendom. No angel, no creature could save me. The incarnation of the highest archangel before the throne, and his voluntary substitution as a sacrificial offering for my sins, would be a simple impossibility. No creature of God can atone for the sin of a fellow creature. The fact of creatureship would vitiate the work of such a surety. As a creature, though the loftiest and purest, his life is not his own. He is himself a pensioner on God's bounty. In dying for me, and forfeiting his life, he would be forfeiting that which was not his to give.

Add to this, if Christ be no more than the first and most exalted of angels, He would necessarily be devoid of the attributes and prerogatives of Deity. Divest Him of these, and how dwarfed and limited immediately become His capabilities, alike as Intercessor and King. If a mere creature, even though on the pinnacles of creature-being, how could He be omnipresent with His Church? He could listen afar, so to speak, to the hum of the world's swarming population, as we do from window or balcony, on some great festal occasion, to the multitudinous voices--'the loud stunning tide' of the surging throng beneath, without being able to catch or discriminate one articulate utterance.

But He must be God--He must have the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience, to enter into every separate home and take cognizance of every separate heart, and have an ear for the music of every separate prayer, and a hand to wipe every falling tear. As our Great High Priest on the throne, He is said to wear the breastplate gleaming with the names of all His covenant Israel. But how could He thus bear them, in the sense of knowing each individual name, if that heart of His did not throb with the

pulses of Deity? How could He control the destinies of the Church and of the world if "all power" had not been His of right? How could He be "unchangeable" if His own will and purposes were dependent on a Higher? Christ a mere man! Then what a mockery to say to slumbering millions, "Awake, you that sheep, and arise from the dead, and CHRIST shall give you life." Oh, if He be but a creature, though the highest in rank in the heavenly peerage, I cannot confide to Him my eternal destinies. If He who bowed His head on that cross be a mere man and no more, I cannot look to Him as the Rock of Ages! A creature! as well pillow my head on the unstable wave. But blessed be God, I can plant my foot upon the living Rock of His deity. I can trust in Him, not as a prince, or as the son of man, in whom there would be no stay--but I can "trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is THE ROCK OF AGES." Invoking Him as such, I can with devout confidence of a gracious answer, join in the prayer, "O GOD the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!"

Indeed, independent of the imperative need of Deity to qualify Him to be a complete Savior, we cannot read the record of His own wondrous life, without seeing in it the element of supporting Godhead. What but Deity could have upheld Him in His own trial hour? Look at His temptations in the wilderness and the garden! What but the Rock of His Godhead could have stood, as wave after wave rolled against it? Adam was a pure and glorious creature. But when these same billows swept over him, he was borne away like a reed on the waters. Satan was once a pure and glorious creature (supposed to have been at the head of all created intelligences), a chieftain and lord amid principalities and powers. The billows of temptation in his case, also, came--he was driven with his legions down into the fathomless abyss. If Christ had been only a creature, how can we dare predicate of Him that He could have better withstood the assaults of evil? But as these crested breakers surged against 'the Rock,' we know how they receded, chafed and buffeted. The Prince of this world came and had nothing in Him!

Reader, enter this glorious Cleft! Come, adore the mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh"--the Divine Being who created by His word--who sustains by His providence--who, as the God-man, redeems with His

blood. Come, contemplate His nativity, with its mystic star and shining hosts of angels, the silence of night made vocal with celestial song. Come, behold His wondrous works. See, as we have just been beholding, sickness taking wings at His word. See demons crouching rebuked in His presence, and yielding reluctant admission to His claims. See Him reading the inmost thoughts of an outcast sinner at the well of Samaria. See Him claiming power to forgive sin by the palsied couch at Capernaum. See the waves of His own Gennesaret having their turmoil quelled--rocking themselves to rest at His omnipotent "Peace be still." See Death casting his iron crown at the feet of the Lord of life--its fettered Victim bursting the bands that swathed him.

Does the Socinian say, Who but man could shed these tears at Bethany? Yes, we reply, but who, save God, could speak these words, "Lazarus, come forth!" Come to the cross of Calvary. See the sun hiding his face at the death-throes of his Almighty Maker, and earth heaving convulsive to her core! See the mysterious Sufferer encircling with a halo of glory the brows of a dying malefactor, and in the hour of His own deepest humiliation, opening the gates of Paradise to the vilest and most miserable of sinners! Come to His own grave, the sepulcher at Golgotha--behold the crowning proof of His divinity, when "declared to be the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the dead." See Him standing as the God-man with His vacant sepulcher behind Him--with all the chains and bonds and missiles of Satan, meant for His destruction, now gathered as trophies of victory. Come, see the pictures drawn of His future universal reign, by psalmists and prophets--"the Great jubilee of pardoned humanity," when welcomed as Prince of Peace, King of kings and Lord of lords, to the throne of universal empire--Midian, Ephah and Sheba--(the Bedouins of the desert--the children of the far east), hastening on dromedaries with their gold and incense--the ships of Tarshish, the symbols of the civilization of the west, bounding over the waves with their costly offerings of fidelity and adoration. The glory of Lebanon on the north, and of Ethiopia in the south, is laid tributary at His feet--the wealth of the material creation, beautifying and adorning the place of His sanctuary--His dominion extending "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

That dominion secures deliverance, redemption, peace--the numbers of His spiritual adherents--the members of His Church, are likened to doves flying to their windows--flocks of living souls, "whose wings are covered with silver, and their feathers with yellow gold," speeding for shelter and repose into the clefts of this mighty ROCK--and yet room for all! See kings and princes casting their crowns and scepters before Him, esteeming it an honor to be servants and vassals of a Mightier--His name enduring forever--continuing long as the sun--"the whole earth filled with His glory" the voice of a great multitude heard in heaven--increasing until it is like the voice of many waters--deepening into the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns."

And then, as the Drama of Time is in the act of closing, behold Him coming "with clouds" (clouds, the invariable symbol and emblem of deity,) every eye seeing Him--behold Him seated "as the Ancient of Days"--His garment "white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool,"--His throne like the fiery flame, and wheels as burning fire; thousand thousands ministering to Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him. Yes! let the Unitarian take His Gospel without Godhead in it--let Infidelity attempt to reduce the Person and mission of the adorable Immanuel to that of the mere Founder of a new system of divine philosophy, a new Head of a religious school--be it ours to pay a nobler and truer homage to Him who is unveiled to us in sacred story as "the Word," "the Life," "the Light," "the Truth," "the Omnipresent," "the Heart-searcher," the "Beginning and the ending," the Creator of worlds, the Redeemer of souls--the Wonderful--the Adored of angels--the appointed judge--the enthroned King--the I AM of eternal ages! Be it ours to testify that the struggles and toils of 1800 years have not been made, to defend and vindicate a monstrous delusion--that thousands of crowned martyrs now in heaven have not shed their blood to uphold a lie. Be it ours to see in Him, the Creator who has plerished the universe with worlds--the glory of illimitable Godhead enshrined in a human tabernacle--aye, and better still, be it ours to be able to say in reverential faith, as we fall adoring at His feet, "This God shall be our God forever and ever!"

We would only imitate the example of the Psalmist, and in conclusion,

call upon all creation to rise and do homage to this its Incarnate Maker. Praise Him in the heavens! Praise Him in the heights. 'O Sun of this great world, both eye and soul,' reflect His glory! Moon! take your silver lyre--strike your harp in the praise of your God! Stars, gather your brilliant gems as a coronal for His brow! Floods, rise and thunder forth His praise. Every flower that blooms, come and waft your fragrance around the rose of Sharon. Lispering infancy, come with your Hosannahs. Penitence, come bathed in tears. Sorrow, come in the extremity of anguish to this Divine Sympathizer, this living God yet your Brother. Youth, come with your green ears of consecration. Manhood, come in your strength. Old age, come leaning on your staff. Come, saints and prophets of olden time! Come, noble army of martyrs! Come, you heavenly hosts! cherubim and seraphim, gather in to the universal homage! Let the Church triumphant echo back the strains of "the Church throughout all the world"--"YOU ARE THE KING OF GLORY, O CHRIST--YOU ARE THE EVERLASTING SON OF THE FATHER!"

## **THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST**

"So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us." John 1:14

"The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of His immense love, became what we are, that He might make us what He is." –Irenaeus, 169.

"There is no room in the inn for the Child miraculously born--the earth does not receive its God. He has no suitable dwelling-place in all the world. He whom heaven and earth cannot contain, lies in a manger!" – Simon de Cassia.

"If Jesus were God only, and not man, He could not suffer anything whereby to satisfy Divine Justice. If man only, and not God, He could not satisfy Divine Justice, even though He suffered. If man only, His

satisfaction could not be sufficient for God. If God only, it would not be suitable for man. And, therefore, to be capable of suffering for men, and able to satisfy God, Himself must be both God and man." –Bishop Beveridge.

"The one true and perfect Flower which has ever unfolded itself out of the root and stalk of humanity." –Trench.

In the previous chapters; the endeavor was made, as fully as our limits would admit, to adduce scriptural proof in support of that foundation-article of our most holy faith, the supreme divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ--"The Word was GOD." Let us, with a similar devout and reverential spirit, now turn our thoughts to another great cleft in the Rock of Ages, the correlative doctrine of the Savior's Humanity; when (adopting the translation or paraphrase of the apostle's words, made by an exegetical writer of the fifth century), "hiding His own dignity, He took the condition of extreme humiliation, and clothed Himself in the human form."

"So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us!" What a transition! What a stoop for that Infinite Being whom we found proclaiming Himself the Alpha and the Omega, writing His name on the Palace-walls of Eternity, "I AM THAT I AM!" for "The Ancient of days" to assume the nature and take the form of a cradled infant, sleeping on a virgin mother's breast!--the Plant of heavenly renown to become "a root out of a dry ground," without beauty or loveliness! We have no plumb-line to sound the depths of that humiliation--no arithmetic by which it can be submitted to any process of calculation. To use an illustration, which has been pertinently employed; if we can entertain for a moment the startling supposition of the loftiest created spirit in heaven abjuring his angel-nature, and (suddenly metamorphosed,) becoming an insect or a worm, we can, in some feeble degree, estimate the descent involved in the transformation. But, however great the disparity, they are both creatures of God, though at the opposites of being.

But, for the Illimitable, Everlasting Jehovah, Himself to become incarnate; the Creator to take the nature of the created; the Infinite to be joined with the finite; Deity to be linked with dust--this baffles all our



comprehension! We can only lie in adoring reverence, and exclaim with the apostle, "O the depth!"

If such an idea had been suggested to reason, how it would have been rejected as impossible and inadmissible, a wild and unwarrantable dream of imagination. What we have to deal with, however, is not a matter of vague theory or speculation, but a marvelous historic fact; for, "Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth," God has "in very deed dwelt with men on the earth!"

We shall not consider it necessary to occupy space in quoting passages of Scripture in proof of the Savior's Humanity; for the present is not (in our days at least), like the theme of last chapter, a disputed, controverted one--a keenly contested question in polemical divinity, demanding that we sift scripture by scripture, text by text, in vindicating and defending it. Assuming its truth, let us proceed to offer a few general remarks, on the nature of that humanity which the adorable Redeemer took into union with His Godhead.

I. It was a REAL Humanity. Notwithstanding what has just been said, as to the general acceptance, in the present age of the Church, of orthodox views on the subject of this great collateral doctrine of the Christian system, the reader may doubtless be aware, that one of the earliest phases in which Antichrist revealed himself in the primitive Church, and one of the forms of error which the Apostle John was called specially to combat, was a denial of the veritable assumption on the part of the Redeemer, of the nature of man. "Many deceivers," says he, "are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." They regarded His Incarnation as a mere phantom or illusion; that His sufferings were not real, but apparent; because His Godhead-nature made the endurance of agony impossible. Their conception of these sufferings seems to have resembled the impression produced in gazing on the desert mirage--the feeling of a reality, though it be no more than an optical deception.

But the language of the sacred writer is implicit and incontrovertible--"So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us", " (or, as that expression means in the original,) "tabernacled among us." He pitched

His tent like a Pilgrim in the midst of human encampments; and it was beneath the curtains, so to speak, of a true humanity, that Deity in His Godhead-nature resided. With one notable exception, to which we shall presently allude, that tent was exposed, like the others which surrounded it, to the violence of the moral elements. "He suffered, being, tempted." "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." "He bore our sins" (not by 'simulating sufferings' which He did not really endure)--"He bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

In speaking, however, of the Savior's real humanity, we must be careful to avoid another heresy of the early Church, and to MAINTAIN THE DISTINCTION OF THE TWO NATURES. There was no intermingling of these two natures. The Godhead was not merged in the humanity, neither was the humanity blended with the Godhead. There was no alteration of the divinity in its appropriation of the veil of flesh; neither was the human element transmuted by its union with supreme Godhead. "He was God in all that was godlike, and man in all that was manlike." In a word, He was the infinite Jehovah; and yet the Brother-kinsman in distinction of nature, but in the unity of an all-glorious Person. In the words of Owen, "Each nature does preserve its own natural essential properties entirely into and in itself; without mixture, without composition or confusion. The deity, in the abstract, is not made the humanity, nor on the contrary, the nature of the man Christ Jesus is not deified; it is not made a God; it does not in heaven coalesce into one nature with the divine by a composition of them. It is exalted in a fullness of all divine perfection, ineffably above the glory of angels and men. It has communications from God in glorious light, love, and power ineffably above them all; but it is still a creature."

It is unnecessary for us to dwell on the evidences borne in the Redeemer's earthly history to the reality of His human soul. Going back in reverential thought to the secluded home at Nazareth, we see, both in His physical and mental development, accordance with the ordinary laws and conditions of our nature. Mentally, we see Him "subject to His parents," "advancing in wisdom." Physically, we see Him "growing in stature," progressing from the helplessness and dependence of infancy and

childhood to matured youth--yes, and in order that even in this respect He might fulfill all righteousness, Himself paying by His daily toil the penalty of the original curse--"In the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread."

It is indeed a wondrous thought, and one which must forever dissociate humble labor from dishonor or disgrace, that in union with the infinite, incomprehensible nature of Him who planned the worlds--who of old, from everlasting, set rule and compass on the face of the deep, meting out the heavens with the span of His hand, and "without whom was not anything made that was made,"--might be seen the lowly Son of the lowly Mary, busied at His reputed father's bench in a peasant's cottage--shaping the instruments of farming--the drops of labor falling from His forehead!

There is a well-known authentic instance of an earthly monarch, entering in the disguise of a craftsman one of our own dockyards; laying aside, for the time being, royal attire for the artisan's rough garb. But what was that? Merely the dimmest shadowy type of this mystery of Incarnate Love--of Him, who though in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant of servants! And through all the incidents of His future life, may His veritable humanity be traced. Take one example--His "creaturely dependence" on God, as manifested in His habitual habit of prayer. We see Him rising "a great while before day," and resorting alone, either to the depths of some grove on Olivet, or to the solitude of the higher and more secluded mountain retreats above Bethsaida and Capernaum--there pouring out His soul, now in calm thankfulness and praise, now in strong crying and tears, into the ears of His Father in heaven; and finally, with the same breath of supplication, commending into that Father's hands His departing spirit.

Reader, rejoice in the testimony afforded in the life and ministry of Jesus, to His real assumption, of our nature. "In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest." In your sorrows, you can think, Jesus sorrowed. In your temptations, you can think, Jesus was tempted. In your tears, you can think, Jesus wept. In the anticipation of your very death-hour, you can

think, Jesus died!

"In every pang that rends the heart,  
The Man of sorrows had a part."

II. It was a PURE and SPOTLESS Humanity. In speaking of the Word made flesh and tabernacling (or tenting) among us, we have already incidentally remarked, that there was only one respect in which that mysterious tabernacle differed from the surrounding human encampments. It is this--that the Son of Man was "yet without sin." "He was holy, harmless, undefiled." "He wore the manacles of the curse entailed by the apostasy of men"--but no more. Amid ten thousand contaminating influences around--mingling in the midst of scenes of temptation, "He did no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth." As the ray of light falling on what is either physically or morally polluted--the noisome marsh--the plague-stricken city--the abode of villainy, still retains its purity; so this divine Life which was "the Light of men," moved amid sin's robber-haunts--a world of moral debasement and pollution, and yet remained undimmed and untainted.

His was not the mere outward drapery of goodness, which sometimes is seen to screen the realities of the fallen and corrupted heart; not like the verdant ivy which, with its graceful festoons, often conceals the crumbling ruin; not the apparently clear well, which, when stirred, reveals the sediment of its miry, slimy depths; not the apparently translucent lake sleeping before you in summer mid-day in calm loveliness, but which, on the storm being let loose, becomes a wild inland sea of turgid mud.

But rather a golden goblet filled with living water--with no deposit or admixture of evil. His soul no wicked passion ever disturbed; His brow no anger ever clouded; His serenity no insults ever ruffled. He could make the triumphant challenge, "Who of you convinces Me of sin?" Every pulse of that stainless nature beat responsive to the will of a Higher, and gloried in this conscious subjectivity.

And it was in every way needful, as the Surety and Substitute of His people, that He should be so. As one chip or flaw in a statue vitiates the

work of the sculptor; as one speck--one grain of sand in the telescopic lens, renders it worthless to the optician; so, one taint of pollution in the soul of the incarnate Redeemer--one flaw in the beautiful moral image, would have vitiated His whole work as our Surety. The true paschal sacrifice must be the immaculate Lamb of God. "You are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, and without spot."

III. And yet, let us carefully note, that though a sinless, it was a SUFFERING humanity which the Savior of the world assumed.

And we may begin with what, to a holy and elevated Being, is ever the intensest form and experience of suffering--the suffering arising from moral causes; the continual presence of moral evil, and the subjection to fierce temptation; for "He was in all points tempted even as we are." We have just seen that He was incapable of sin, and therefore incapable of yielding to the assaults of evil. But why such exemption? Was it because of the immaculate earthly nature? We cannot think that this would be in itself sufficient to account for His immunity from succumbing to temptation; for if it had, then, as has been well remarked, Adam, as a perfectly pure and sinless creature in Paradise; and Satan, with all his host of once pure and sinless angels, could on this supposition never have fallen--never have swerved from their allegiance and love.

In the case of the adorable Redeemer, it was the Godhead which sustained the humanity, and made it impervious alike to the malignant assaults of human agents, and to spiritual wickednesses in high places. The very fact, however, of this untainted purity, made Him exquisitely sensitive to all contact with sin! We cannot wonder that it was so. Imagine, even on earth, a virtuous and elevated mind cast by circumstances into constant companionship with the vile--the debased--the degraded--those whose every thought and utterance is pollution--what refined torture, beyond any pang of mere physical suffering, would it be to such to be doomed to a lifelong association like this! How intense, then, beyond what imagination can conceive, must His sufferings have been, whose sinless nature had to encounter, day by day, every varied phase and form of evil; the baseness and treachery of man, the malignity of demons, and of the father of lies!

Nor was it moral suffering alone to which He was subjected; His physical nature inherited all the innocent frailties of humanity. As Isaiah says, "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses." He was "the Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He hungered, and thirsted, and wept. He felt fatigue of body, as well as anguish of soul. He was thankful to rest, a weary pilgrim, by a well on the wayside. He was glad to sleep on the ruffled bosom of the lake, with a coil of ropes for His pillow. Though with a moral grandeur superior to earth's noblest heroism, He "set His face steadfastly" to encounter the hour and power of darkness--yet it was accompanied with deepest soul distress and mental perturbation--"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I held in anguish until it be accomplished."

When the trial hour arrived, He needed, as we do, the prop of human presence and sympathy--"My soul is exceeding sorrowful"--"tarry here, and watch with Me." Drops of blood, the symbol of His agony, fell from His brow, before that brow was wreathed with thorns, or His body pierced with iron nail or soldier's spear. If He had been exempt from all this, He would have lacked one of the great qualifications of a complete Surety-Savior, that is, the capacity of entering with tender sympathy and compassion into the sorrows and sufferings of His people. But "we have not an High Priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." There is not, as we have already noted, the trial which afflicts His brethren, which did not in an inconceivably intenser form afflict Him. Ridicule, unkindness, the abandonment or treachery of trusted followers--bodily pain--mental anxiety--man-desertion and God-desertion--the bitterness of bereavement--the decease of beloved friends--death itself.

Yes, and there was, in all these sufferings, one ingredient from which we are mercifully exempt. Our sufferings and sorrows come upon us generally by surprise--unknown, unanticipated--in His case, all were marked out, by the foreknowledge of His Godhead, to His omniscient eye. How comforting and consoling, is our divine Redeemer thus identifying Himself with our tried, tempted, woe-worn humanity!

Moreover, in stooping to assume our nature, He selected not the exalted condition, but linked Himself rather with poverty and distress and

dependence. The poorest and the humblest, the most wretched and forlorn, might catch balm-words of comfort from the lips of Him who often had not where to lay His head. How different, in this respect, from the mythical incarnations of pagan story! When the favored gods of Olympus come down to earth, it is in some shape or form which leaves their subject-mortals awestruck and crouching at their feet. Such was the incarnation, also, of the Messiah expected by the Jews. Owing to His lowly birth and circumstances, the Christ of Nazareth was not their ideal Savior. He was not the "Angel-God," who spoke to their Fathers in the wilderness, or who came in vision to their exile prophet on the banks of Chebar. In their dreams of His advent, they thought of Him as some ineffable Being with "the paved work of sapphire under His feet, and as it were the body of Heaven in its clearness;" or speaking to them out of the cloudy pillar, or under the overshadowing wings of the cherubim.

We repeat, had He appeared thus, He could not have identified Himself with His people nor they with Him. But when He comes, it is leading a life of poverty and humiliation. His heart bled for every form of human wretchedness. The feeblest cry of human suffering never reached His ear in vain. He wept over obduracy of heart, as well as sorrow of spirit. What a fountain of love is His soul as His last hours drew on! With what majestic utterances does He plead, in the sublime prayer of the upper room, in behalf of the Church throughout all the world! With what exquisite pathos did He comfort the disciples in the prospect of separation! With what tender sympathy did He speak to a sorrowing mother in farewell accents from the cross! The words of Isaiah are a truthful commentary from first to last on His earthly pilgrimage--"You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat." "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die."

IV. This leads us to observe still further, that the Redeemer's was a BROAD and COMPREHENSIVE humanity. It was so in several respects. One of these may be best illustrated by contrast with the character of His precursor, John the Baptist. Of its own peculiar type, John's was a remarkable specimen of a consecrated nature--bold, heroic, earnest, unselfish, self-sacrificing, he was quite the man needed for the times. But

he was abnormal. His life was not the pattern or mold which was to shape that of the average Christian of the future. The desert was his home. Austere, unsocial; severed from the world's stir and bustle, and from family claims and amenities, he initiated the existence adopted by thousands of recluses in after ages. The ascetic, however, is not the noble side or type of humanity. That better phase Jesus adopted.

The towns and cities and villages of Galilee and Judea were His places of residence. He subjected Himself to no extravagant self-mortification. He mingled in the world. He cared not for the stigma that He was "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, the friend of tax-collectors and sinners." He sanctified with His presence occasions of joy and domestic communion. He was found, now at a tax-collector's house, now at the feast of a rich Pharisee, now at a marriage scene--a festive gathering, and taking His disciples along with Him--now in the bosom of a Bethany home, clinging to congenial hearts--Himself, the Dove of Heaven, loving to fold His weary wing, from time to time, in these human rock-clefts--there escaping from the windy storm and tempest.

He would thus reveal Himself as a Brother, not in the false acceptance of the recluse, away from the haunts and sympathies of men, but One mingling (as He knew the mass of His people in all coming time would do), in the throng of a work-day world, and the rough contacts of common life; moving in the midst of human hearts and homes, ministering to human sorrows and grappling with human temptations. Yes! let us think of that lowly nature of His, in its capacity of identifying itself with every class and every phase of being; embracing in its amplitude those who had hitherto been neglected and disowned.

ROME was accustomed to deify the manly virtues alone--Strength, Courage, Heroic endurance. GREECE wreathed her chaplets around the brows of her intellectual heroes, her poets and philosophers, her sculptors and painters; but the weak, the ignorant, the oppressed, had none to vindicate their cause until He came, who pronounced "Blessed"--not the great, or rich, or powerful, or learned--but the meek, the lowly, the poor in spirit, the persecuted, him that had no helper! Hence, as we have already seen, groups composed of every diversity of character tracked His footsteps and hailed in Him a Brother. Stern, strong men like



Peter; intellectual, thoughtful men like Thomas; loving and meditative men like John. 'Penitence' crept unabashed to His feet, and bathed them confidingly with tears. 'Sorrow' came with sobbing heart and speechless emotion to be comforted. The 'poor' came with their tale of long endured misery. 'Infancy' came stretching out its tiny arm, and smiled delighted in His embrace.

While He rejoiced with those who rejoiced, He wept with those who wept. The fainting multitudes moved Him to compassion; the one suppliant in the crowd who touched His garment-hem, arrested His steps and evoked His mercy. Every weary wandering bird, with drooping pinion, seemed to come and perch on the thick branches of this mighty Cedar of God! Or, to change the figure, we have pictured to us, in living spiritual reality, a Fountain of infinite mercy--a vast pool of Bethesda--its porches crowded with every diverse type of character, bearing the superscription, "He heals them all."

See Him at last on the cross, with His arms extended, as if in this same comprehensive humanity He would embrace mankind--or, when rising silently from the Mount of Ascension, with outstretched hands He poured His benediction on a receding world! Little had earth imagined the blessing when 'Incarnate Mercy' walked her ungrateful soil! If the princes of this world had known it, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory!"

"O my Dove, who is in the clefts of the Rock." O Believer, who have sought and found shelter in the glorious crevices, come and anew take refuge in the contemplation of the perfect Manhood of the adorable Son of God! Delight often to think of Him as a Brother in your nature. It is because they come welling from the depths of a human heart--because their music vibrates on a human lip--that the words are so unspeakably tender, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Exalted, indeed, and full of comfort is the truth unfolded in the preceding chapters--transcendently glorious is that cleft of the Rock, the Supreme Deity of Christ; but in one sense more comforting to downcast, fearing, aching hearts, to think of Him as "God with us!" Hence, when the old

Prophet, looking down the vista of ages to the glorious gospel shelter, would single out the element in the contemplation most precious and consolatory, what does he select? Is it that JEHOVAH, in the might of His omnipotence, is "a refuge and strength, a present help in trouble?" No! But "A MAN shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of waters in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." A MAN!

Man is not always so. Earthly friendships are not thus stable and enduring. Often have we to write, under the sense of bitter estrangement, over the memories of bygone fellowships, "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." "Cursed be he that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm." But here is one glorious exception. You that are out buffeting the storm, exposed to the whirlwind blast of the desert, battling with care, harassed with anxiety, prostrated with bereavement, stricken with conscious guilt, longing for safe rest and anchorage from earth's sins and sorrows--can understand the deep meaning of the central words in the importunate prayer of blind Bartimeus at the gate of Jericho--"Jesus, O Son of David (O Elder Brother), have mercy on me!"

And that Humanity, as we shall have occasion more specially to observe hereafter, is now on the Throne, and will be FOREVER. We have noted in the opening chapter, that he who loved on earth to pillow his head on the bosom of his Lord, when he subsequently saw that Divine Savior in the splendor of His ascension glories, "fell at His feet as one dead." But he knew in a moment, by the touch of the gracious hand, and the tones of the unchanging voice, that it was "that same Jesus,"--"I am He that lives!" Oh blessed truth, Jesus lives--as a glorified MAN! For me, in human nature, He once walked and wept and bled on earth. For me, in human nature, He now pleads in heaven! It will be from glorified human lips the welcome will at last be given, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom!"

Can we echo the prophetic utterance of a saint who lived long antecedent to the Prophet of Patmos; and who, through a glorious vista-view of the future, was able triumphantly to exclaim, "I know that my Redeemer (lit. My Kinsman) lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and that though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my

flesh shall I see God."

The shadowy patriarchal creed of a distant age and dispensation, was subsequently translated into the personal experiences and hopes of a New Testament apostle. Entering into this new cleft of the Rock of Ages, can we make Paul's fervent words our own?--"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day!"

## **CHRIST THE SURETY-SUBSTITUTE**

"Christ has also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." –1 Pet. 3:18

"The Lord redeemed us with His own blood, and gave His life for our life, and so effected our salvation." –Irenaeus, 169.

"To the sinner, doomed to eternal punishment, and unable to redeem himself, God the Father says, 'I take My only begotten Son and give Him for you.' The Son says, 'Take Me and be redeemed.'"

"Holy Father, look down from the height of Your sanctuary, and behold this mighty sacrifice which our great High Priest, Your Holy Child Jesus, offers for the sins of His brethren, and have mercy on the multitude of our transgressions." –Anselm, 1093.

"By His passion which He suffered, He merited, that as many as believe in Him, shall be as well justified by Him, as though they had never done any sin, and as though they had fulfilled the law to the uttermost. He changes places with us. He takes our sins and wickedness from us; and gives unto us His holiness, righteousness, justice, fulfilling of the law, and so consequently everlasting life." –Latimer, 1549.

"My debt is very great, and I am not able to pay anything thereof. But I trust in the riches and bounty of my Surety. Let Him free me who became Surety for me, who has taken my debt upon Himself." –John Gerard, 1606.

Mysterious, but most precious Cleft in the Rock of Ages--the VICARIOUS work of Christ as our Substitute and Surety!

It seems incumbent on us, thus early, in the consideration of our great theme, to contemplate the Divine expiatory Offering taken "outside the camp, bearing His reproach"; placing upon His own head the crown of thorns, that He might place upon ours a crown of glory; having, in the

might of His glorious Person overcome the sharpness of death, that He might open the kingdom of heaven to us and to all believers.

We concede, at the outset, that such a method of atonement is quite beyond the suggestion of mere reason. Tried by the boasted "verifying faculty," or "principle of congruity" of some modern theological thinkers, it would at once be rejected as unsatisfactory and untenable. Natural law dictates, as the ordinary and equitable course of justice, that for personal guilt there must be personal retribution--"The soul that sins, it shall die." Fatal and destructive, however, would it be to the reception of all revealed truth, were the inquirer to demand summary rejection of every doctrine, at variance with preconceived idea or natural law. What God has unfolded and recorded, it is for us meekly, and with unquestioning docility, to receive. And if there be one truth more vividly and expressly dwelt upon in Scripture than another, it is that of a Surety-Savior, suffering in our room and stead. If there be one utterance more frequently proclaimed than another, from Genesis to Revelation--from Abel's first sacrifice, to the last song of the ransomed, as they gather round the slain Lamb in heaven--it is this, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin!"

Socinianism, and its modified rationalistic theories, in exalting the goodness and boundless beneficence of God, overlook or discard two great cardinal truths, which, despite their attempted rejection, everywhere assert themselves in the pages of Revelation--that is, that SIN is an infinite evil, entailing and demanding an infinite penalty; and that GOD, the Almighty One to whom we are responsible, is a moral Governor, requiring the vindication of His violated law. While "mercy and truth go before His face," "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." Not that there is any implied conflict or antagonism between the divine Holiness and Love--these two attributes of the Supreme Being must ever act in strictest harmony. But regarding Him as infinitely just and righteous, as well as beneficent and merciful, it would be to impeach His moral character, and to subvert the immutable principles on which His government rests, were He to grant indemnity to the guilty without any expression of His hatred at sin, or of His obligation to visit it with just, proper, and suitable punishment.

As "God absolute," indeed, it may be affirmed, and with truth, that He can do anything. As God absolute, He has the sovereign power to confer on His rebellious subjects a free, unlimited pardon--a universal amnesty. At His omnipotent mandate, every rebel-chain could be broken, and this revolted race again placed within the sphere of His regards.

But what He could do as the Almighty Sovereign (with reverence we say it), He could not do as the Righteous Lawgiver. As such, He is under a moral necessity, arising out of His own holy nature, to dispense His laws with equity. "It became Him, of whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The whole teaching of Scripture represents Christ the Son of God, as identified in law with those He came to redeem. As Adam (to use the theological term of our old divines) stood the representative or federal head of the first covenant; so Jesus, the second Adam, the Lord from Heaven, stands as the vicar of His Church, in the room and stead of each of its members. Having voluntarily taken upon Him their responsibilities, He must endure in His person the penalty annexed to their transgressions.

We have already seen, in the former chapter (in speaking of His assumed humanity), that He was Himself "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He had no personal complicity in our guilt--and we must therefore beware of the unwarrantable phraseology of those who speak of Him in connection with His vicarious work, as "becoming a sinner." We only, however, use the words of Scripture when we say "He became Sin." He was reckoned and dealt with, in the eye of the divine law, as guilty; as if the condensed transgressions of the millions He came to save ("His unknown agonies," as it is significantly expressed in the Greek Liturgy), were poured into His mysterious cup. All the bitter experiences of His passion, the mocking, the scourging, the jeers and taunts, the thorn-crowning, the God-desertion--were His due, not personally, but by imputation. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Different indeed, in kind, was the penalty endured by this Almighty Substitute, from what sinners themselves would have suffered, had they been left to undergo the full measure of punishment due to their

transgressions. It belonged, however, to the Great Creditor to accept some satisfactory method, by which the infinite debt might admit of being discharged, without infringing the rights of justice, or lowering and violating the sanctity of His law. And, owing to the dignity of the Sufferer's Person, this Atonement rendered by Christ was of surpassing value. It was THE SUBSTITUTION OF INCARNATE DEITY. The altar of His Divine nature sanctified the gift, and imparted a priceless worth to the divine oblation. As "God manifest in the flesh," He was free from the law, and the obligations of creatureship. Had He been less than divine, He could not possibly have obeyed for another. As a creature, He could not have transferred to another the merit of His obedience. Moreover, on the supposition, for a moment, of the admissibility of substitution in the case of an angelic being; one creature-substitute could only at the utmost discharge a single debt. It would be creature for creature, life for life. But owing to Christ's peerless dignity as the eternal Son of God, not only was He above the obligation of all natural law--"a law unto Himself," having "power over His own life;" but the sacrifice of the Divine Victim was of that infinite value, that the One offering was deemed sufficient to effect the ransom of "a multitude which no man can number."

On this account, His whole work has received in theological language the appellation of a "satisfaction." It was, in the eye of God's righteous law, a glorious and all-sufficient equivalent. It met all the requirements of Sovereign Justice, Righteousness and Truth. Remitting the myriad liabilities of an insolvent world, the Great Creditor signs a full discharge. The holiness of His name and nature, and the righteous principles of His moral government, remain intact and inviolate.

But let us proceed to examine the assertions of Scripture, and observe how this great truth of Christ's substitution runs throughout the Revealed Word like a golden thread. It would require a volume to do justice to the subject--little more can be overtaken here, than to glance at a few of the more prominent Typical, Prophetical, and Apostolic testimonies.

I. The TYPICAL testimonies of Christ's vicarious atonement. The idea of substitution is interlaced and interwoven with the whole Mosaic ritual. The voice of "the blood of sprinkling" spoke in wordless eloquence on the altars of Israel, as they ran daily with the blood of slain victims. Not a few

of these were fellowship, or thank offerings--but the vast bulk of them were penal and expiatory. Not only so, but what we wish especially to note at present is, the remarkable testimony they afford to the principle of vicarious suffering--that the blood of the animal was shed in the place or stead of another. Every offering was a ransom for the sin, or for the life, of the human offender. It was life for life, blood for blood. The victims were subjected to the penalty incurred by the transgressor--there was a symbolic imputation of his guilt to them; and thus, typically, these sacrifices "were ordained to take away sin."

We see this vicarious, or substitutionary element, in Israel's INDIVIDUAL sacrifices, offerings made to expiate the sin of individual offenders. The offerer brought his victim, laid his hand upon its head, and made confession of his crime. "He shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him."

Again, as regards the guilt of THE WHOLE CONGREGATION, the command was given, "They shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord, and the bullock shall be killed before the Lord. And the priest shall make an ATONEMENT for them, and it shall be forgiven them."

Or, once more, as perhaps the most expressive of all types of the Great Substitution; on the solemn anniversary of THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, the High Priest, clad in his linen garments, appeared as the Representative of Israel. Two goats (constituting one offering) were brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. The people stood round in speechless solemnity. The one was immolated (that is--sacrificed); its blood was carried within the veil, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat. Laying his hands on the head of the other living animal, he made confession over it of all the sins of the people; and then, with this load of imputed guilt, it was led away into the depths of the wilderness never more to be seen. Hear the significant appointment of God Himself--"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tabernacle, and the altar, he must bring the living goat forward. He is



to lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the sins and rebellion of the Israelites. In this way, he will lay the people's sins on the head of the goat; then he will send it out into the wilderness, led by a man chosen for this task. After the man sets it free in the wilderness, the goat will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land."

Leviticus 16:20-22

What type could possibly be more significant than this?--the imposition of hands, accompanied with confession of sin--the sins of "all Israel"--typically transferred to the innocent substitute. The countless iniquities of Christ's people are surely seen meeting on the head of the great Antitypical Scapegoat--the atoning Sacrifice of Calvary, who has borne them forever away into a land of oblivion. If all this substitutionary ceremonial ritual had no reference to the Divine Antitype--then we ask, What was its design?

Standing by itself, without this New Testament 'anti-type', it is not only a meaningless appointment, but (again, with all reverence we say it), it would have been an appointment unworthy of God. There is no natural connection whatever (there is rather an inherent unfitness and incongruity), between the slaying of a mere animal, or the laying the hands on its head, and the expiation of human guilt. "It was impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats" (even heaps on heaps of slain irrational beasts, which are so far beneath in dignity the nature of the transgressor) "could take away sin." There was an utter inefficacy and inadequacy in such to expiate moral guilt. The very conscience of the offerer repudiated such a thought. They were powerless to pacify the soul under a sense of its sin, and to remove the Divine displeasure--"For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them." But the whole of this strange, bloody ritual receives at once a wondrous significance, when we connect it with more precious blood, and a more precious Life--with the imputation of our guilt to the Lamb of God--"Christ our Passover sacrificed FOR US."

II. Let us pass from the typical, to the PROPHETICAL testimonies of the vicarious sufferings of the Redeemer. Two among several other passages may suffice.

The first, is the 53d chapter of Isaiah; that wonderful Old Testament picture of the Savior's humiliation. Again and again is the truth we are now unfolding there brought prominently before us--that the Lord Jesus took our sins actually upon Him--that He suffered in our room and stead.

Ver. 4, "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."

Ver. 5, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

Ver. 6, "The Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all."

Ver. 8, "For the transgression of My people was He stricken." "By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

Ver. 12, "And He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many."

What could be more explicit than these varied statements?--that He who rose up before the Prophet's vision as "the Man of Sorrows," was really the Substitute of the guilty; enduring the stripes that were due to us--carrying the load of sin we should have borne. Though sinless Himself, yet, as the Vicar of His people--enrolled--"numbered, among transgressors."

The other prophetic passage we may cite in confirmation of the doctrine, is from the Book of Daniel. That Prophet, speaking in the most explicit and indubitable language of "Messiah the Prince," who was "to finish (the) transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness," adds, "And after threescore and two weeks (of years) shall Messiah be cut off" (by death), "but not for Himself." He was to suffer, but it was for no sin of His own, for no personal demerit. He was to finish the transgression of His people, to discharge their debt, by the offering of Himself--and the Prophet immediately adds, that having thus completed

His atoning work, "In the midst of the week, He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." The substance having been revealed, the shadows melt away. The Divine Antitype having come--the great Antitypical Sacrifice being offered, the ceremonial ritual is abrogated; all other sacrifices and oblations are abolished.

III. We proceed now to advert to the APOSTOLIC testimonies in support of this same cardinal truth--Christ's substitutionary atonement. In doing so, we shall attempt little more than simply quote a few appropriate verses, in themselves so clear and explicit as to require no comment. Observe, however, the force of the preposition "for," as denoting substitution, which occurs in most of them. "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died FOR the ungodly." "He was made sin FOR us, who knew no sin." "Made a curse FOR US." "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up FOR us all." "He was delivered FOR our offences." "Christ was once offered to bear the sin of many." "Who gave Himself FOR us." "He gave Himself FOR us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor." "Christ has also once suffered for sins, the just FOR the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "Who loved us, and gave Himself FOR us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity." "Now once in the end of the world has He appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree. By His stripes we are healed."

And if we ascend from the testimony of the Church on earth, to that of the Church glorified in Heaven, it is the same. "You have redeemed us to God by Your blood." "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

If language has any meaning, these and other passages are surely conclusive. We repeat, the preposition "for," so often employed in these verses, undoubtedly supposes and implies substitution--one put in the place or room of another. "Christ died FOR us"--not as the Socinians say, that He died for our good, for our advantage; not that He became incarnate merely to be the Revealer of the Father's love, a spotless Example, the Ideal of perfect humanity (though this, as we shall subsequently show, was included as a subordinate object in the divine mission); neither that His sufferings are merely to be regarded in the

light of "afflictions" or "calamities," similar to what His people are often called upon to undergo in this life; but, He came as the law-fulfiller--the sin-bearer. Sin and guilt were not only in a figurative, but in a literal sense laid upon Him.

Take away this feature in the doing and dying of Jesus, and the Incarnation is shorn of its glory; and the whole 'typical economy' becomes an enigma. It resolves itself into a mysterious, incomprehensible, wasteful expenditure of blood and animal suffering; and the Apostolic writings become a mass of distorted reasoning. But, accept the view of Christ as a vicarious Sacrifice, a real Substitute for human guilt, dying in the stead of transgressors, then the whole mystery is solved. Then there is a tongue put in every bleeding wound of every expiring victim--a halo encircles the fire and smoke ascending from every altar. These proclaim in dreadful, but significant symbolism, what He to whom they pointed expressed in His own simple utterance, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We may conclude, by refuting one false and erroneous deduction with which some have ventured to charge this doctrine, that is, that it is derogatory to the benevolence and beneficence of God; that it represents Him in the unamiable and unloving light of a rigorous Exactor, who requires His wrath to be appeased by the blood of an innocent Sufferer--no, further, that as the natural consequence of entertaining such a dogma, our affections are necessarily transferred from the exacting inexorable Lawgiver, to Him who, by His voluntary anguish and death, has effected the reconciliation. Such repulsive views of the Divine Being, however, are false and empty assumptions, containing an utter perversion of Catholic teaching and Scripture language.

What is the true Bible representation? God is there brought before us, as we have already seen, infinitely Holy--immaculately Righteous--inviolably Faithful and Just--His law uncompromising in its demands, rigidly exacting in its penalties. This Almighty Being is represented, moreover, as requiring an adequate sacrifice and satisfaction--no, in a bold figure, as summoning the sword of Justice to "awake against the Man who is His fellow." But, if we draw aside the veil, and look still

farther into the secrets of the Divine counsels, we shall see that the motive-principle of all was the Father's divine compassion and mercy. It was not the substitution of the Great Sacrifice that was the cause of God's love to our world. That love not only existed antecedently in the Divine mind, but it was that infinite Love which prompted and devised the amazing plan of redemption. "God so loved the world"--"GOD commends His love." GOD "spared not His own Son." It was His originating love which provided the Lamb for the burnt-offering. The true method, therefore, of viewing the Atonement of Calvary is to regard it, from first to last, as a stupendous plan of Divine Sovereign Grace and Mercy exercised in consistence with Justice and Truth--a rainbow, indeed, seen with a dark background of suffering and wrath, but in whose blended tints and colors "mercy rejoices over judgment."

Reader, are you able fully to accept--no, to rejoice in this stupendous doctrine, and by faith to appropriate its sublime verities? to view it, not as a beautiful figure, a typical fiction, but as a sober reality, denoting and asserting a veritable transference of your guilt to the Lamb of God--a glorious crevice in the Rock of Ages, in which you may fold your wings and sink to rest as you sing, "He loved me, and gave Himself FOR me?"

Rejoice, also, that that transference has taken place; the negotiation is completed, the Substitute has been provided, the ransom has been paid. It is not a matter which now remains in suspense and unaccomplished. Many on earth have noble and lofty intentions which have never been fulfilled. Many a high enterprise has been devised; but the enthusiasm wears past, the opportunity is lost, or the resolve is strangled at the birth. Not so with this great salvation. What Christ undertook He has performed. He does not utter the unavailing soliloquy and lament in His heavenly palace, over an apostate world, which David did on the occasion of the death of his ruined child, "Would God I had died for you." He has died; He has fulfilled His covenant-pledge as our Surety. Our lost inheritance has been recovered. The prophetic words have become now the utterance of an historic fact--He HAS seen of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied!

Well do we know that the doctrine we have now been considering, is in these modern times disliked by many; by not a few rejected. We do not

hear it enunciated in our systems of theology, nor proclaimed in our pulpits, as its importance demands. Many prefer coming with Cain's bloodless offerings of thanksgiving (the deist sacrifice) rather than, like Abel, bringing the bleating victim from his fold. They are willing to behold Christ the Son, but not Christ "the Lamb of God." They build the temple, but they disown the altar. Believer, be it yours ever to look to the lintels and door-posts sprinkled with blood. Clasp this glorious truth to your heart of hearts--Christ your Substitute. All He did, reckon as having been done by you. When He was prostrated on the cold earth in His soul-struggle in Gethsemane, or when He trod the blood-stained path along the dolorous way, or when He uttered the Eloi-cry on the cross--think, it was your sins that were draining these drops of anguish, and extracting these strong cryings, and pleadings, and tears.

Blood is death; and if by faith you be sprinkled with the sacred token, you are reckoned to have died in the Surety. When He gave His precious, peerless life, it was equivalent to your giving yours. Be assured that this is the only view of the death of Jesus that will stand the test and scrutiny of Scripture; or that, as a strong and all-sufficient rock-cleft, will be able to ensure solid and satisfying peace in believing. It is not the philosophic divinity which consists in the deification of mere virtue--it is not eliminating these peculiar doctrines of the cross, and substituting cold negations, that will pacify conscience.

"Jesus, Your blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed,  
With joy I shall lift up my head.

"When from the dust of death I rise,  
To take my mansion in the skies,  
This all my hope, this all my plea,  
That Jesus lived and died for me."

Let what will form your alone stable and satisfying trust then, be the ground of your hope and confidence now. Accept Him, unhesitatingly, as your Surety- Savior, "the end of the law for righteousness." See how He has "blotted out the handwriting that was against you, and has taken it

out of the way, nailing it to His cross." See how God, the injured Creditor, has cancelled your obligations. Never again, in point of law, can your legion-sins appear; they are obliterated forever. Let the mightiest angel in heaven be delegated to go in quest of these sins! Let him roam creation! Let him search every corner of the earth, and every cavern of old ocean. He will come back from the mission with the tidings--"The iniquity of Israel is sought for, and there is none; and the sins of Judah, and they are not found." "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

## **CHRIST THE PROPITIATION**

"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."-  
-Rom. 3:25

"Happy is he alone, to whom the Lord does not impute transgression--to have Him propitious to me against whom alone I have sinned. When my soul is troubled with the view of my sinfulness, I look at Your mercy, and am refreshed." –Bernard, 1123.

"The Everlasting God be praised! We have a remedy and a sure helper. Christ the Son of the living God has fulfilled the law for us, to deliver us from sin." –Latimer, 1546.

"Under this shadow, O my soul, refresh yourself. If your sins fear the hand of justice, behold your sanctuary; if your offences tremble before the Judge, behold your Advocate ; if your creditor threatens a prison, behold your bail. Behold the Lamb of God, that has taken your sins from you." – Francis Quarles, 1592.

"Sprinkled with His atoning blood,  
Safely before our God we stand;  
As in the Rock the Prophet stood,  
Beneath His shadowing hand." –Keble.

A similar cleft in the same Great Rock--a kindred subject to that which it was our endeavor to unfold in the preceding chapter, invites our thoughts in the present. It would be easy, indeed, to limit ourselves to a cursory examination of these views of sacrifice and oblation in the outer court of the Earthly, before we pass within the veil of the Heavenly Temple, with its redeemed worshipers and ministering seraphim. But we deem it needful, in the first instance, to have our confidence well assured on the procuring cause of all that wealth of present privilege and future bliss--to see and acknowledge the Divine necessity there was, in bringing many sons unto glory, that the Captain of their salvation be made perfect through suffering. Unless the Rock had been "stricken," "smitten of God," there could have been no 'clefts' in it. Take away the sacrificial element from the Incarnation of the Redeemer, and you sweep from beneath the feet every stable and reliable ground of confidence and safety. Let others speak slightly and disparagingly of "dead dogma," and affect the possession of breadth and liberality of sentiment in rejecting with a sneer what they presume to call "special theories of atonement." Be it ours rather, with humble reliance on the teaching of that Spirit promised to "guide into all truth," to have our faith on such great foundation verities "grounded and settled;" and conscious of having attained a sure footing on what cannot be shaken, to be able to say, in the simple couplet of the well-known hymn--

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand,  
All other ground is shifting sand."

Once more, then, under another form, let our thoughts revert to the central, kernel doctrine of our most holy faith--CHRIST THE PROPITIATION, "Whom God has set forth to be" (not merely the Ideal of human perfection, the Manifestation of a life of stainless virtue and sublime self-sacrifice, but) "a Propitiation through faith in His blood."

That word "Propitiation" occurs only three times in the New Testament--in the present passage of Paul's Roman Epistle, and twice in the Epistles of John. The original word, as is well known, refers to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle or Temple. It is the same expression which is found in the ninth chapter of Hebrews, and there rendered "mercy-seat"--"The Cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat;" or as



it is more faithfully, perhaps, translated in most of the old versions of the English Bible by the word propitiatory.

This covering of the ark was made of fragrant acacia-wood. Its lining and corner-pieces were of pure beaten gold. It was protected by the overshadowing wings of the Cherubim; while the Shekinah, or symbol of the Divine Presence, in its dreadful cloudy splendor, rested between. Once every year (on the Great Day of Atonement) the Jewish High Priest entered the Holiest of all. The warm blood of the slain victim, sprinkled on the "Propitiatory," flowed down on the pavement, where he stood as the officiating representative of the nation. The root word (the verb) from which the term Propitiation in the original is derived, signifies "to appease wrath," "to turn away anger."

It speaks of an offence, and an offender; and the typical "Propitiatory sacrifice" comes as a shield, or guard, between the offender on the one hand, and the Being offended on the other. It is scarcely needful to pause, in order to explain the expressive symbol; and how the Israelitish type is fulfilled and illustrated in the person and official work of the Divine Antitype. As we found in the previous chapter, God's law has been dishonored, its sacredness violated, its penalties incurred. Let us not be misunderstood. We must fastidiously guard, as most derogatory to His glory, against the use of language that would, by remotest implication, impute to the Great Supreme anything analogous to those vindictive passions resident in the human bosom. He is "offended," because of the infinite holiness and rectitude of His nature. He must, as a moral Governor, uphold intact and without compromise, every jot and tittle of His law, and maintain the honor and majesty of His Throne. His justice and righteousness dare not be impeached in the eyes of the other sections of His vast empire.

Darius the King, we read, made a decree, and set his royal seal to it. It led to the inevitable destruction of an innocent man. That night, sleep was banished from the royal pillow--no sound of harp or flute or dulcimer was heard, during those gloomy watches, within the palace walls. He had "labored until the going down of the sun to deliver Daniel;" but all in vain. Why in vain? Why might not that Eastern despot, whose will was law, have in a moment ordered the release of the captive Jew? No,

"Know, O King, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, that no decree nor statute which the King establishes, may be changed." In a far higher, loftier, more solemn sense is this true of Him by whom kings reign. The statutes of the Eternal are unchangeable. "A man's heart devises his (own) way," but "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." The pillars of His Throne have immutability to rest upon; and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

But the blood of the Great Surety has been shed; the Lamb for the burnt-offering has been immolated (sacrificed); the Veil is rent in twain; the prophetic hymn of the angels at Messiah's birth has had its exalted strains fulfilled--while glory has been secured to God in the highest, peace has been proclaimed on earth, and goodwill to men. And now, as the sinner stands, like the High Priest of old, in front of the Mercy-seat, we see, significantly symbolized, at once the offence, the offender, and the Great Propitiation. Inside the ark were deposited, among other sacred things, the two tables of stone, on which are inscribed the words of the Eternal decalogue. That law demands satisfaction. Had it not been for the lid of which we have just spoken, these imprisoned commandments would leap like fiery swords from their scabbards, and mingle the worshiper's blood with his sacrifices. Like a shield, however, the Propitiatory intervenes!

Even in its material adornments it was typical; the acacia-wood was emblematic of the real humanity of the Divine Propitiator; moreover, the fragrant acacia-wood pointed significantly to His purity and sinlessness; while the golden border and golden clasps at the corners, with equal impressiveness symbolized His Deity--the Deity and Humanity conjoined, but not blended or intermixed. Behold, then, we repeat, the sinner within that dreadful sanctuary--the law unabrogated, unrepealed, uttering its denunciation--"The soul that sins, it must die!" The Cherubim bending over the mercy-seat, appear, as they point to its symbolic covering, to proclaim the words which head this chapter--"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation!" While the worshiper, through his representative, drawing near with the blood in his hand--sprinkling it above the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat, until the purple stream falls on the floor, offers the plea as he points to the Propitiatory--"Behold

our shield, look on the face of Your anointed."

Or, again, in still more impressive words--"God be merciful to me a sinner." We say, in more impressive words; for it is remarkable and well worthy of note, that in this prayer of the Tax-collector, the verb translated "be merciful" corresponds with the Greek for "propitiation." "Be propitious," he cries; but it is mercy by sacrifice; it is mercy through the atoning blood of the Great Surety. Blessed meeting-place between offending man and an offended God!

If we can venture for a moment to personify the attribute of JUSTICE, we see her clad in vestments of stainless purity, with the sword in one hand and the balances of equity in the other. As we follow her within the Veil, we behold her standing by the Propitiatory with sheathed weapon, side by side with Mercy. We can hear her, within the very shadow of the decalogue, uttering the glorious words--"The Just God, yet the Savior;" "the just, yet the Justifier"--yes, singing in concert the special song of the sister attribute, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, because His MERCY endures forever!"

Before we close, let us note the special declaration made by the apostle regarding this divine Propitiation, "Whom God has set forth" a word which in the original means "set publicly apart," "manifested publicly for some great end or object." There are many ways which will suggest themselves, in which the Eternal Father, the Originator of the scheme of Redeeming Grace, has "set forth" the Son of His love, as Mediator and Surety for the fallen.

He was set forth from all Eternity in the divine counsels. In the archives of Heaven His name and purpose were recorded--"In the volume of the book it is written of Me--I come to do Your will, O God." He was set forth in the very hour of the Fall, in the first promise of Redemption; as well as in the "coats of skin" of the first sacrifices, with which the guilty pair covered their nakedness. He was set forth in Noah's altar-fires on Ararat; in the glorious tints of His rainbow, and in the Covenant of which it was the symbol.

He was set forth in the Patriarchal Church, in Abraham's offering on

Mount Moriah, and in Jacob's ladder at Bethel.

In the Mosaic Church, He was set forth in the sprinkling of the lintels and doorposts; in the smitten rock and bronze serpent. He was set forth, more fully still, in that vast and complicated ceremonial, upon every part of which is significantly inscribed "Not without blood,"--"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

He was set forth in the Prophetic Church, from Jacob's earliest prophecy of the Shiloh, and Balaam's of the Star, to Malachi's last glowing figure of the Sun of righteousness.

And then, when the fullness of time came, He was more peculiarly 'manifested.' The morning stars, and the sons of God, that had sung responsive their jubilant anthem at creation's birth, again meet to celebrate in joyous strains the birth hour of an Incarnate Deity! The Shepherds of Bethlehem, and the Wise Men of Arabia (the representative Jew and Gentile, the representative rich and poor), gather around His cradle, not in a palace, but at a manger, to sing 'Glory to the newborn King.'

Again and again, and with ever-growing publicity, was He manifested in the eyes of His Church. At His baptism, He received (as viceregent, or substitute,) a sinner's rite at a sinner's hands, accompanied with the proclamation from the excellent glory, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In His transfiguration, He was set forth, indeed, in the first instance, in the majesty of His Godhead, robed in the Shekinah cloud--the "white and glistening" clothing--delegates from heaven and earth met to do Him homage. But even in that scene of transcendent brightness, it is as the Propitiation He appears; for it is a memorable feature in the transaction, that these lofty messengers from the Church triumphant, in their converse with the members of the Church militant, talk, not of His supreme dignity, nor of the coming and resultant glory of His Messiahship, but "they spoke of the death which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem."

As the closing scenes of His public ministry thicken upon us, how pre-eminently (almost exclusively) is it as the Propitiation He is revealed.

Gethsemane, the Judgment-Hall, the house of Caiaphas, the dolorous way, the dreadful culminating scene, when, raised above the ground, He hung on the cross an ignominious spectacle; when Jew and Gentile exhausted their weapons of ruffianly taunt and mockery, with scourge, and nail, spear, and thorn; and when, after man had done his worst, over and above all, the cry was heard from the Lord of Hosts, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd!"

It is in the same light (as the Great Sacrifice and Oblation--the Satisfaction for His people's sins), He has been set forth for the last eighteen centuries in His own appointed ordinances--specially in the proclamation of His glorious Gospel, and in His great memorial rite, with its simple yet significant commemorative symbols. He is set forth in the varied experiences of His people, in their every season of exigency and trial. These are too numerous to admit of being specified.

At no time are His presence and grace more signally exhibited and realized than at the hour of death. It is then, looking to the golden 'shield' of their covenant-Ark, that His spiritual Israel, like the old band of wilderness warriors, pass dry shod and brave-hearted through the border river, to the shores of the heavenly Canaan. The cheering assurance uttered 3000 years ago, has lost none of its comfort, "Behold the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth passes over before you into Jordan!" In one of his Patmos visions, the beloved disciple beheld "the Temple of God," and "the Ark of his testament." What was this, but the symbolical disclosure of the Great Propitiation; as He was witnessed by the dying martyr Stephen, and by triumphing multitudes in subsequent ages at a similar hour? "I see Heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

A grander and sublimer revealing of His Person and dignity (afterwards to be considered), will take place on the day of the "manifestation of the sons of God,"--emphatically designated "the day of His appearing;" when still, as the Son of Man, seated on His Throne of Glory, "every eye shall see Him." He will be set forth finally, as we shall come also more particularly to note, through all Eternity, in the midst of His Church triumphant; still as the Propitiation; wearing the mysterious memorials of suffering in the blessed world where suffering is unknown--while this

is to form the eternal hymn and ascription of His ransomed--"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing, for You have redeemed us to God by Your blood!"

On a review of these imperfect reflections, are any prompted to ask the urgent question--"How am I to obtain the shelter of such a Rock-cleft as this? How can I procure access and welcome to the true Mercy-seat?" There are no barriers of exclusion. The veil is rent; the approach is free; the Propitiation is made yours, "through faith in His blood."

How many among the votaries of a false and spurious Christianity, are looking to Christ through material relics--pieces of the so-called true cross, fragments of the spear or thorn-crown, or the seamless robe! We are called to look "through faith." How many more are groping their way to Him through propitiations of their own--penances, and prayers, and fastings, and flagellations. The propitiation is completed--"Whom God has set forth." If the Jewish High-priest, as he stood at the mercy-seat, instead of sprinkling the blood, had stripped the jewels from breastplate and mitre, and flung them on the sacred chest, what would all have availed? Nothing. There was but one offering efficacious there--an offering composed not of 'pearls from the ocean, or gold from the mine;'--"When I see THE BLOOD I will pass over you." Significant testimony to the alone method by which pardon and peace are procured, through the atoning work of the Great Antitype, "the one true, perfect, and all-sufficient oblation!"

Oh, believer, who is in this cleft of the Rock, exult in your inviolable security! Sheltered therein, the curses of the law are made impotent. As the angel came down by night to the camp of the Assyrians, and strewed the Judean plain with their corpses, rendering every weapon powerless which the dead warriors grasped in their hands; so has the great Angel of the Covenant--the true "Prince who stands for the children of His people"--descended in the deep night of the world's darkness, and made the arm of the law, with all its denunciations, incapable of inflicting so much as one wound.

The efficacy of the blood of Christ is INEXHAUSTIBLE. The book of

Revelation unfolds 144,000, with lustrous robes, washed and made white in it; and still the Propitiation is "set forth;" still the way into the Holiest and to acceptance is open. Come, approach it, with this one only passport to pardon and forgiveness in your hand. See the old, but ever-binding and obligatory Tables of Sinai's law, screened out of sight by the intervening barrier--hidden, as a covenant of works, by the better work of Jesus. God has set Him forth as a Propitiatory. He (the true 'shield, and lifter-up of your head'), "stands between the living and the dead, and the plague is stayed!"

## **CHRIST THE MANIFESTATION OF THE FATHER**

"Who is the image of the invisible God."--Col. 1:15

"God is not called the Father of Vengeance, but the Father of Mercies." – Bernard, 1123.

"Let us accustom ourselves more and more profoundly to sink into the blessed mystery of our most holy faith; so that we may correct all transcendental, vague thoughts about God, by setting Christ at once before our eyes. He is the Visibility of the Invisible, as far as, and in such way, as that may be seen. Even in the heavenly 'beholding' throughout Eternity, there will be no showing of the Father out of and apart from Christ." –Stier.

A new and most blessed Rock-cleft is now to engage our thoughts. In the two preceding chapters, we have endeavored to extract grounds of confidence and trust from the contemplation of Christ as the Surety-Substitute, and as the Propitiation for the sins of the world. In doing so, it behooved us to dwell on the character of the Supreme Being as a Moral Governor--the Holy, the Righteous, the Just, the True, the inflexible Guardian and Dispenser of Laws based upon principles of everlasting rectitude, demanding the payment of penalties annexed to transgression. But having laid this broad and needful foundation; beholding every

attribute of the Divine nature magnified and made honorable in the Cross of the Divine Sufferer--bringing a revenue of glory to God, and of blessing to the human race; we shall now proceed, in the light of that Cross, to consider a new revelation of the Almighty. We have pondered Jehovah's character as Lawgiver and Judge. We are now to regard Him manifested in Christ, in His beneficent, paternal character as a FATHER.

It is worthy of remembrance, as appropriate alike to the present theme, and to the title of this volume, that when God, in long ages preceding the Incarnation, made a revelation of Himself to Moses, it was in reply to the request of the 'lawgiver' (a request which embodies the urgent query of humanity), "I beseech you show me Your glory" and, as if to shadow forth the great mystery of a coming dispensation, the Divine Being "set him IN THE CLEFTS OF A ROCK, and made all His glory to pass before him." As the mystic, undefined Presence of the Great I AM, swept by the face of that mountain watch-tower--nature's shrine; the proclamation of the Sacred Name was sounded in the listener's ears.

But what was the Revelation? Not, God, dreadful and terrible, enshrined in the blackness and darkness, the lightnings and tempests, which so lately played on the mountain-top frowning over His servant's head; but words composed of letters as if written in bright sunbeam--"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." It is this typical vision of Moses, fulfilled and realized in the Person of the adorable Antitype, which is to occupy our contemplation in the present chapter. We are invited to enter "the Clefts of the Rock" to behold the glory of Jehovah. But, as in the case of the Jewish Lawgiver, it is to have our fears calmed and our trust established, by an apocalypse (an unveiling, or revealing), not of majesty or terror, but of ineffable paternal love.

What is God? The foundation truth of all theology, and indeed of all thought, has been the perplexing problem of every age. Who is He? What is His character? What are my personal relationships to Him, and His to me? Nature contributes her own quota to the solution of the question. This invisible One is visibly imaged and understood in "the things He has made." Wondrous and diversified are the illustrated pages of that Great book in showing forth His praise. These are formed of woods and mountain, lake and river; of vernal sky and summer verdure; of virgin



morning, noontide brightness, dewy eve; night with her sable mantle woven with gems, the silent pageantry of moon and stars; the song of birds in the groves, the music of streams, the hues of flowers spread in profusion over hill and dale, the solemn chant of winds, the many voices of the ceaseless sea.

And not only so; but as we gaze on this beautiful world-temple, full of beneficent agencies and gracious provisions, what are all such combined, but endless affirmations of the wisdom and power, the graciousness and love, of the Omnipotent Framer and Sustainer. In this Temple does every one and every thing speak of the glory of His natural perfections. And yet, the witness so eloquent in proclaiming and authenticating His Being, pronounces at best only a partial deliverance on His other moral attributes. Farther, the choir of nature's vast shrine is not always in harmony. Its notes are at times grating and dissonant. These bright skies have, ever and anon, their dark clouds and deep-voiced thunders. These winds at times revel with their wild music over devastated fields or shipwrecked crews. That air which wafts the perfume of flowers, and transmits the sweet note of birds, is at times the highway of the noisome pestilence and the destruction that wastes at noonday. The pang of suffering, the wail of death, the corruption of the sepulcher, refuse to countersign the testimony otherwise borne to a God who is all love. No, rather, in a thousand ways, do they indicate or assert the existence of estrangement between the Creator and the creature. With these anomalies--these mysterious phenomena, alike in the material and the moral world, which of us, trusting alone to the light of nature, but would be forced to cry out in bewilderment, "Verily You are a God that hides Yourself?"

When we turn from nature to other solutions, the darkness and perplexity only seem to thicken and deepen around us. We go in vain to heathen philosophers and their systems; and that, also, at the most refined era of the world, when the human intellect was under the most favorable conditions to grope its way to the highest spiritual verities. The brain which contrived in poetry the most fascinating creations of human imagination, or which compiled massive laws of wisdom which have guided and molded modern intellect and politics, manifested only failure

here. The chisel which could embody its thoughts in breathing marble, and bequeath its wondrous conceptions as heirlooms to admiring ages alike in sculpture and architecture, could, in its conceptions of the Invisible Spirit, only carve the confession of its powerlessness on an Athenian pedestal, "To the unknown God!"

When we go to the temples of heathen worship--with rare exceptions, they have a still gloomier and more perplexing response, in their bloody slaughterhouses, and reeking altars, and groaning victims. Whether it be the Moloch of Moab, or the Baal and Ashtaroth of Phoenicia; or Jove enthroned as King in Greek and Roman Pantheon, grasping Olympian thunderbolts; or Kali and Vishnu of Hindooism, or Thor and Odin of Scandinavia; we have, substantially, the same expression of their conceptions of the mysterious Invisible Abstraction worshiped as God--a Great Being, or Beings, with a reserve of power, absolute in their decrees, vindictive and implacable, the object of dread and dismay; few weapons in their infinite armory but what are whetted for retributive vengeance. Those heathen votaries, groping after the knowledge of a Supreme Ruler, had "neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape;" and their crude guesses at the dreadful reality, molded in imagination a living embodiment of terror, to whom judgment was no strange work.

Or even if we turn (where we might have expected a more reliable and authoritative interpretation of the Oracle) to the Jewish "El Shaddai," "Jehovah," or "Elohim,"--was not this Infinite One invested, even by them, with similar awe? Is He not addressed by prophets, and sung of by psalmists, as "dreadful in His holy places," "The Great and dreadful One," "The Jealous One;" with "wrath kindled," "The fiery stream going forth before Him;" "Bowing the heavens, and coming down, with darkness under His feet;" sending avenging angels to the earth, to smite with sword and pestilence--this the invocation of His worshipers, "The Lord reigns, let the people TREMBLE."

We listen to one revelation of Himself, that He dwells "in the thick darkness." A prior one, on that thick darkness being for the moment unrolled, was in "the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice those who heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more." They beheld Him and feared Him, as "the Lord of

hosts." At the march of this great God of armies, "the earth shook, the heavens dropped." "A fire goes before Him and burns up His enemies round about--His lightnings enlightened the world--the earth saw and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." "Say unto God, how dreadful are You in Your works! through the greatness of Your power shall Your enemies submit themselves unto You."

Even when we turn to the aid given to their conceptions of the Divine Personality, a mystic cloud covered the mercy-seat of their Temple, shrouding it from every eye but one, and that one could dare approach it only with blood. Well might Paul call this economy of the Theocratic nation, by the name of "the ministration of condemnation." A favored few of the favored people had indeed penetrated that darkness. After the wind and earthquake and fire, they had heard "a still, small voice," and had been taught to sing, "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God," "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusts in Him," "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever."

Through the discourses of their Prophets, and the hymns of their Psalmists, many had groped their way to some dim apprehensions of the Divine Fatherhood. Still, to the mass of the Jewish nation He was the Great Incomprehensible; answering them, as He did Job, "out of the whirlwind;" leading them to endorse the utterance of one of the friends of the same Patriarch, "Can you by searching find out God?"

With many, moreover, who live under a better and brighter dispensation, are there not similar distorted views entertained of the nature of Jehovah? They think of Him as a mighty Architect, who has piled infinite space with His handiwork--omnipotent, omniscient--dreadful in His holiness, inexorable in His justice, implacable in His vengeance. They have fully apprehended the partial revelation of Him as the punisher of sin, but they have failed to enter the "cleft" of the true Rock, and to gaze on the glorious complement of His character, as the Gracious and Merciful, the Father and the Friend. We repeat, that it is when within these clefts of the Rock of Ages, that latter and more gracious revelation, as in the case of Moses, is given.

The paternal relation of Jehovah to His people is manifested in the Person of Him who came to our world the Incarnation of the Divine Spirituality, the Image and Representative of this Invisible God--the unveiler of the essential perfections of Deity. "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He is Himself the articulate answer to the query of His impatient disciple, "Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us"--"He that has seen me," was the reply, "has seen the Father." As there had been a patriarchal, a legal, and a prophetic dispensation--so now Christ comes as the founder and exponent of a filial one. To take the significant opening words of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews (not as they are rendered in our version, but as they have been rendered in the full force of the original), "God who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by a Son." "In creation," says a writer, "He is a God above us; in the law He is a God against us; but in the Gospel He is Immanuel, a God with us, a God like us, a God for us."

Most delightful surely and comforting is this theme of contemplation--Christ the Revealer of the Father. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Well may He be designated by this appropriate term. For just as 'words' are the outward audible expression of silent invisible thought, so Christ is the expression of the Invisible God--the utterance and embodiment in human shape, of Him who revealed Himself in the dimness of an earlier dispensation as "secret," "wonderful," "incomprehensible."

As the natural eye is dazzled by looking on the material sun in his noon-day splendor, and requires some medium through which to gaze on his brightness; so, no man can see the face, or comprehend the character of God, but through the Divine medium who came to our earth--the reflected "brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person." "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The glorious train of the Divine attributes descended and filled the Temple of His body, and over the portico of that Temple stands inscribed in unmistakable characters, "God is love." The false conceptions of Him, as a Being

dwelling in thick darkness, ought to be forever dispelled. What says the Apostle, as he points to Him who is "light, and with whom is no darkness at all"? "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But this brings us more specifically to inquire, What is the character of this Great God, as manifested and reflected in the Son of His love?

We have only to track the divine footsteps of the Redeemer on earth, and (to use the Apostle's simile), there to behold "as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." What do we see? A Being, indeed, of infinite holiness--unsparing and uncompromising in His rebuke of iniquity, sternly denouncing sin in all its forms, driving with a scourge the sacrilegious traffickers from His Father's house, proclaiming the impending and certain doom awaiting incorrigible sinners, the workers of iniquity; even predicting by discourse and parable the dreadful verities of a judgment-day, and pronouncing everlasting doom on the impenitent and unbelieving; on all traitors to their trust, on all neglectors and squanderers of committed talents; thus repeating, in words not to be misunderstood, the very truth which fell on the ears of Moses in his Rock-cleft, as the sublime voice and vision were dying away--"And that will by no means clear the guilty."

But yet, in combination with this, we are called to contemplate ONE of infinite purity, beneficence, tenderness; whose delight was to feed the hungry, to heal the diseased, to help the helpless, to comfort the bereaved; feeling for them; weeping for them--in His parables, giving a welcome to the Prodigal; in His daily communion, never scorning a suppliant's request, or a penitent's tears; listening, even in His expiring agonies, to a cry for mercy from a felon at His side; accepting the widow's mite; making generous allowance for the lack of watchfulness at His own greatest crisis-hour on the part of trusted disciples; pardoning, with the tenderest of rebukes, the aggravated sin of a faithless follower; the prayer, trembling on His dying lips, of forgiveness for His murderers.

Reader! take in, at a glance, this wide comprehensive view of the Savior's life and ministry, and in it you have a picture and impersonation of the

character of God. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." "From henceforth," says Christ, pointing to Himself, "You know the Father, and have seen Him." "I and My Father are one." Yes, there is God! Isaiah's names and titles seem to receive new appropriateness and significance-- "the everlasting FATHER," "Immanuel, God with us." You have obtained, in the person and utterances of that pure, spotless, and beneficent Being, a reply to the words of the Great Prophet--"To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness will you compare unto Him?"

In the beautiful Sermon on the Mount, the Divine Teacher, in His spoken words, exhibits before the mental eye of His hearers His Father's hand, in painting the lily, feeding the raven, and watching the sparrow's fall. But it has been well said--"When He would reveal the Father's heart, it is not by His words and discourses, but by His deeds and actions." That life of beneficence and goodness sets His own utterance in golden lettering, "GOD SO loved the world!" The very title of "Father," well near unknown under a former dispensation--how He dwells upon it!--how He delights to interweave it with parable and miracle, and intercessory prayer, and last agony, and first Resurrection-words! Well He knew the tender associations the name and image would call forth among the millions who pondered the story of His incarnation. He would have the sacred earthly relation transfused into the Heavenly. As He puts His people into the clefts of the Rock, and makes all the glory of His goodness to pass by; the proclamation is made, "My Father, and your Father, My God, and your God." He would have them to know and to feel, even in the house of their earthly tabernacle, that they are pacing a Father's halls--a dwelling frescoed and decorated with a Father's love!

Although He himself, their Lord and Savior, is no longer visibly present to the eye of sense yet, having been thus embodied once in human form as the reflection of the Father's character, faith can follow the glorious Image within the veil; and with all the memories of that holy life in view from Bethlehem to Olivet, the key-note to the 'divinely taught' prayer can be struck with filial gladness and joy--"Our Father who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name!" It has been beautifully said, "In all our endeavors to raise our thoughts to God, the 'idea of Jesus' comes to our aid like the mystic ladder of the patriarch's dream, and they ascend and

descend upon the Son of Man." Yes! thanks to the mystery of His holy incarnation for this full and perfect unfolding of the character of Jehovah.

In the Old Testament dispensation, the revelation of God in His Temple evokes from the lips of the worshiper the tremulous exclamation, "Woe is me, for I am undone, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." In the New, the experience of the beholder is this--"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In the Old Testament dispensation, the first miracle of the Viceregent of God was turning water into blood. In the New, the first miracle of the Divine Viceregent, the Image and Representative of the Father, is turning water into wine. In the Old Testament dispensation, in answer to the question, "Who is this King of glory," the reply is heard, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." In the New Testament dispensation, in answer to the same question, "Who is this King of glory?" there comes, in varied language, like an echo from the Rock of Ages, the response--thus embodied in the uninspired utterance of universal Christendom--"You are the King of glory, O Christ, You are the everlasting Son of the Father!"

Believer, exult more and more in this sublime revelation of God. We have already listened in the prologue of John's Gospel, to the Beloved disciple's testimony alike to the Deity and humanity of Messiah--"the Word was God" "the Word was made flesh." In the equally sublime prologue to his Epistles, when he speaks of "Him who was from the beginning," and of his own amazing privilege of gazing upon "the manifested Life," he proceeds to deliver a special message confided by this Great Revealer of the Father--"This then is the message which we have heard of Him, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Strange that this message should be so often misinterpreted, that the beauties of holiness should be disfigured with the presentation of repulsive and distorted views of the character of Deity. The Romanism of the Middle Ages, which, in Church, and Cathedral, and wayside shrine, depicted the Divine Being (either in person or by the ministry of avenging angels), inflicting every device of material torture, seems, as we have already remarked, to be perpetuated in the minds and creed of many Protestants. Who can wonder that under such gloomy systems of misnamed 'orthodoxy,' the thought of God is a

thought of servile terror, which dogs the footsteps like a hideous spectre, and makes the fondest longing of the aggrieved heart to have Him dethroned from His world.

How different the entire scope of the Savior's teaching. His whole object was, "to allure us to God; to win the world to an appreciation of the Father's excellence"--to unsay and repudiate this inversion of His own Word, an inversion which in the case of many might thus be rendered, "God is darkness, and in Him is no light at all." If that Savior's life was a life of love, full of all that was gentle and tender and good, 'Every feature, He seems to say to us, 'that is attractive in Me, is to be found in the character of Him whom I represent. I am an Image of the Divine mind, reduced to dimensions capable of human comprehension; to know Me is to know the Father, "from henceforth you know Him, and have seen Him." By all I have done, by word or deed, it is He who is commending His love to you.'

What a new force and beauty does there not seem to be, in the challenge of the great Apostle, when read in the light of God's paternal character to us and our filial relation to Him--"He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things" (Rom. 8:32). 'After giving you,' he seems to say, 'such a pledge of His parental love, can you for a moment suppose that He will exact from you one unnecessary sacrifice, or refuse one really needed blessing within the compass of Omnipotence to bestow?' Every dark letter of mourning and lamentation and woe in the roll of Providence, thus becomes radiant with love.

In seeing Jesus, you see the Father. In asking Jesus, you ask the Father. The names are interchangeable. "Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you." Oh how near does all this bring the great God Almighty! How it represents Him, as regarding with discriminating love each member of His redeemed family; caring for their needs, sympathizing with their sorrows, bearing with their infirmities; loving them--we had almost said doating on them as a Father. How different from the heathen conception of their deities, living in the isolation of a voluptuous calm; far removed from the concerns of earth, devoid of all personal interest in those from whom nevertheless they demanded cruel



offerings, and over whom they were often represented as reveling in bloodthirsty malignity.

"God in Christ," "God with us"--"with us," as truly as Jesus was with the anxious Nicodemus, or with the sisters of Bethany, or the widow at Nain, or the disciples tossed on their midnight sea, or the downcast mourners at Emmaus. "God with us"--brought down from the regions of infinite abstraction--challenging our perfect confidence and trustful love--lifting the veil of the Holy of Holies, not to disclose altars drenched with blood, piled with instruments of torture, and resounding with groans of victims, but "to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His Temple."

Children of God, and heirs of Glory! go, breathe your loved and time-worn litany, with the consciousness of a new and glorious meaning and trust--"O God, the Father of heaven! have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." O my gracious Father! I will measure You no longer by any low human standard. Let the kindness and gentleness and beneficence of Him who walked this earth as Your image, teach me evermore to repose unhesitatingly in the everlasting love of Your infinite heart. I will cling to this glorious shelter--in this Rock-cleft "I will lay me down in peace and sleep;" for God is my Father; and GOD IS LOVE!

## **THE IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST**

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever."  
–Hebrews 13:8

"Build not your nest on any tree of earth, seeing God has sold the forest to Death. But rather soar upwards to the sure and immutable refuge in the Clefts of the Rock." –Samuel Rutherford.

"What a blessing that the Anchor of our love is firmly fixed beneath the cross of Christ; for such a friendship is sure and lasting, not merely held

fast by the 'silver cord of life,' which may be snapped in a moment, but embedded in the cleft of the Rock forever." –Hedley

It is the tritest of sayings that everything here is given to change. If the calm blue sky above us were a mirror, what a scene of vicissitude would it reflect! The natural fabric of the world is a monument of mutability. Its aqueous and igneous rocks--strata piled on strata--are so many chapters written on stone tablets, registering successive revolutions. Hill and valley contain in many cases the repositories of extinct races and forms, animal and vegetable--a shelved museum of sepulchered generations. Where the hum of cities now ascends, yes, where mountains raise their heads, the murmur of old ocean once was heard. In marine deposits she has left the unmistakable trace of her footsteps. While on the other hand forests once grew, and living creatures roamed, where now we see a waste of waters, and listen only to the boom of the sounding billows.

Passing from the world's material to its historical annals. These are one long record of change. Nation has succeeded nation, dynasty has succeeded dynasty, as wave follows wave! Excavators in the old kingdoms, alike of East and West, have dragged buried capitals from the tomb of ages. The axe and shovel have disclosed streets grooved with the wheels of chariots, and adorned on either side with the winged symbols of now vanished power. The owl screeches and the jackal howls amid the tenantless wastes of Babylon. The fisherman spreads his net where the green waves laved the Palaces of Tyre. Earth's history and that of its peoples is a humiliating alternation of rise and fall. There has been a constant weaving and unweaving of the web of nations. The magnificent kingdom of Alexander is no sooner made, than it is dismembered and partitioned. The Roman eagle for centuries wings its magnificent flight over a prostrate world; but at last it falls with wings collapsed, and other birds of evil omen from the forests and swamps of northern Europe build their nests in the eaves of the capital. In our own time, who can predict for one brief year what the destinies of contemporary nations may be? what thrones may rock, what scepters may tremble or fall from the feeble hands that grasp them!

If we turn from nations past and present to the record of individual history, how sadly do we see the same vicissitude written, from the smiles

at the birth to the tears at the death. Who that has lived for half the threescore and ten but can bear witness? Who that has measured out the fourscore, but can bear more emphatic testimony still? We go back to revisit the haunts consecrated by the remembrances of youth--How changed and metamorphosed often are its most treasured memorials! In vain we search for the ancestral trees under whose shadow we sat, or the pendent willows that used to kiss the passing rivulet. Strange faces appear at the windows; other hands till the soil; other worshipers crowd the pews of the village church, and another voice speaks from its pulpit. The group that was used to gather under the paternal roof--how the inevitable wave of change has swept over and dispersed it! Many may vividly recall the day--the hour, when that full circle that was used to gather round the hearth was first broken; that day when you stood by the shore and waved the last farewell to a departing brother, who in sailing to a distant land left the first empty chair behind him. Alas! the first instalment of other inroads, other changes yet to follow. Some can speak of more sacred breaches--these hearths pillaged of beloved tenants called to set sail to further shores.

And if not of their own circles, cannot all tell, how the friends of their youth, the companions of their boyhood, the associates of their manhood, shipload after shipload have sailed from the shores of time, bound for "the silent land"--that land from whose destination no voyager, no traveler returns. Death is ever busy at work reaping the green corn, as well as gathering in the yellow sheaves. Sepulchers seem to lie along our path. Year by year well-known faces are missed, in the market, the street, the sanctuary. And even if these friends of bygone times are spared, how changed from what many remember them! The once buoyant youth now with silvered hair and furrowed brow; the once athletic frame now stooping with the load of years; the once clear and vigorous intellect now clouded and impaired--memory sharing in the wreck of the crumbling outer tabernacle--nature lapsing into her second childhood!

Some may have to recount changes sadder and more sorrowful still than bereavement--breaches in affection; the friendships of early life cooled and alienated; an unmeant word or unmeant deed undoing and obliterating years of communion; the door rudely closed where the heart

has lavished its best stores of kindness. What shall we say of human hopes that have been blighted, human joys that have evaporated like a snow-wreath! golden harvests which the flood has swept away just at the reaping--rock-pillars that have turned out to be sand-pillars; flowers that have drooped, and paled, and died, before summer began--what promised to be a brilliant sunset, only a few fitful pulsations of quivering light, and then, a dull watery setting!

And not to pursue these reflections, we need go no farther than examine our own individual minds, our tastes, feelings, opinions, course of life, daily associations and occupations. How constantly changing! The man of fifty is no more like the child or youth, than the oak of half a century is like the sapling or acorn from which it sprang. Molded by ten thousand influences either for good or for evil, through a succession of years, we may almost fail to recognize our former selves!

Our spiritual history too, how vacillating!--strong one hour, weaklings the next. On our Carmel heights today; under our juniper trees tomorrow--today we fancy ourselves Asahels, swift of foot; tomorrow "unstable as water!"

Yes! Human life, outwardly, inwardly, is a "shifting spectacle;" so says the apostle of it. He compares it to the moving scenes or characters in the old Grecian theaters--"the fashion" (or the drama) "of this world, passes away." Over the "yesterday" of the past, and the "today" of the present, the clouds of heaven are chasing one another. The waves of its seething, restless sea, are tossing and tumbling in fretful disquietude. And whether these changes have been from prosperity to adversity--or adversity to prosperity; converting life, with some, into a golden viaduct, with others, into "a bridge of sighs," they conduct alike to the one final goal. The path of sorrow as well as the path of glory "leads but to the grave."

Oh! amid this heaving ocean of vicissitude--amid severed friendships and buried loves--amid these crude heart-tearings of human caprice and surging passion, is there no spot whereon we can plant our foot--no rock-cleft where the wandering, tempest-tossed dove can fold its weary wing and sink in repose?

This brings us from the mutable to consider the Immutable.

The words which head this chapter, proclaim the unchanging love of Christ--an Immutability--arising (as has already been fully considered in previous chapters), out of the Infinite perfection of His own Infinite Being, as "God over all, blessed forever," and yet as "Immanuel, God with us." What He was in the Yesterday of the eternal past when dwelling in the bosom of the Father, He continued at the time of His incarnation, when still, as God, in very deed He dwelt with men on the earth and He shall continue to be forever! We are reminded of some gigantic Alpine peak unsealed and unscalable by human footstep--covered summer and winter with virgin snow. It seems to look down with kingly demeanor on the angry elements beneath. While these are holding wild riot, it has not a jewel in its icy crown displaced--not a ruffle made in its glistening mantle--not a wrinkle on its everlasting brow. Emblem of the Rock of Ages. Though in His human nature--as the Man of Sorrows--the Surety and Representative of the fallen, furrowed with flood and tempest--"His Visage more marred than any man's, and His form more than the sons of men,"--in the calm glory of His adorable Godhead He is "without variableness or shadow of turning." Amid the alterations in earth's material framework, the convulsions of nations, the fluctuations of human thought and feeling, He remains immutably the same. The march of events works no change in Him--"The Lord sits upon (yes above) the water-floods--yes, the Lord sits King forever!" Blessed truth! the unchangeableness of Jehovah-Jesus--"O come, let us sing unto the Lord--let us make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation."

Specially comforting is it for us to connect the Savior of the present, with the Savior who lived and loved of old, in the days of His humiliation--to go the round of His deeds of mercy; to cull from gospel story all His words of encouragement, His sayings as well as His doings, and transfer their perpetual unchanging solace to ourselves! Did He invite the weary? Did He give the assurance that as the Good Shepherd He came to seek the lost--that as the Son of Man He had power on earth to forgive sins? Did He dry the tears of disconsolate mourners by proclaiming Himself as the Resurrection and the Life? In sealing up the vision and prophecy, did He give, as His last utterance to the Church, the precious invitation,

"Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely?" Each of these sayings, and many more, come to us this day with the same reality and freshness as when they first welled forth from these lips of love and tenderness.

Other declarations of earth's wisest and greatest may have lost their power and meaning--but Christ's sayings are forever true and relevant. Other highways may be broken up by the lapse of ages--but this highway of golden words and promises and deeds remains unaltered. Other fitful gleams of light have been cast on the Christian's dungeon-wall for a few moments and then vanished--but these, like Vestal fires, are to burn on forever.

Believer, amid the fitfulness and uncertainty of earth and earthly things, come and enter into this Rock-cleft of a Savior's unchanging faithfulness. "Trust not in man, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help."

It may be that some who read these pages may have had, or may be even now having, painful personal proof of that mutability, uncertainty, evanescence and transitoriness, of which we have spoken. You may have felt by experience, how often those joys, which like the bright berries in the summer woods are beautiful to the eye, prove bitter to the taste; how often the loveliest cloud in the life-sky condenses at last into a shower and then falls; how the loveliest rainbow-hue dissolves; how riches take to themselves wings and flee away; capricious fortune forsaking, often just when the golden dream seems most surely realized! But "HE has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Have you never observed, that while in the course of a long succession of years the scenery on a river's bank may be changed, the river itself remains the same? Formerly it was used, it may be, to flow through secluded woods--its waters, murmuring by forest glades, where the wild deer stole down on the silent eve undisturbed by human step. Now hives of industry are lining its course; ponderous wheels are revolving, and the clang of hammers are resounding, where the woodman's axe alone was formerly heard. But the river itself, unchanged and unchangeable, carries its unfailing tributary-torrent to the main.

So it is with Him who is as "the River of God." The earthly valley through which that river flows is a scene of change. But onward it rolls its own glorious volume of everlasting love. "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved!" "Behold," says the same Immutable One, in another metaphor, "I have engraved you on the palms of My hands." Not on the mountains, colossal as they are, for they shall depart; on no leaf of nature's vast volume, for the last fires shall scorch them; not on blazing sun, for he shall grow dim with age; or on glorious heavens, for they shall be folded together as a scroll. But on the hand which made the worlds, the hand which was transfixed on Calvary, the hand of might and love--I have engraved you there. No corroding power can efface the writing, obliterate the name--you are Mine now, and Mine forever!

AGED Christian, old inhabitant of the forest, the frosts of winter silvering your branches--you who feel yourself left alone; too advanced in life to make new friendships, and none, even if you formed them, that could fill the blank of old ones--blessed, we say for you, with your own years failing, your own strength impaired, your loved ones taken from your side, to lift your tearful eye on the Great Unchanging, and to say, amid these slanting shadows, and stripped boughs, and wintry skies--"But YOU--oh, YOU, are the same, and Your years shall not fail!"

DESPONDING Christian (it may be erring and backsliding one), you who feel clouds and darkness dimming the brightness of former days, cast down because of your coldness and deadness. Past or recent sin may have covered you with shame and sorrow. You may, like the disciples, have slept glorious opportunities away. You may be wondering if Christ can still cast on you, as once He did, a pitying eye. Your mournful soliloquy and pensive musing is this--"Surely my way is hidden from the Lord!" Be comforted. "If we believe not, He abides faithful. He cannot deny Himself." You may have changed towards Him--but He is unchanged towards you. The clouds may intervene, but the unchanging Sun shines the same as ever in the skies. Looking away from your own fluctuating self, you may revert with chastened confidence to the day of your spiritual espousals, when you knew and felt that He loved you; and then take

courage in the conviction that His love is unchanged, that it can admit of no diminishing nor decay.

BEREAVED Christian, you who have been called more specially to experience the sorrows of life, how consolatory to know that there is one prop that cannot give way, one Friend beyond the reach of vicissitude, who is working out your soul's everlasting well-being in His own calm world, far above and beyond the heavings and convulsions of ours. One who is the same amid storm and sunshine, births and deaths, marriage peals and funeral knells--of whom you can say, amid the wreck of all human confidences, "The Lord lives, and blessed be MY ROCK!"

No more. When, we ask, is the thought of the immutability of Christ most precious to you? Is it not just when your own heart and your own flesh are fainting and failing--when lover and friend are put far from you, and your acquaintance into darkness? Like trees which the winds of autumn have stripped of their leaves, you are led, in the very wrestling with these storms, to moor your roots firmer and faster and deeper in the Rock of Ages! You can tell alike as your experience and your confidence--  
"Our lives are like the shadows  
On sunny hills that lie,  
Or flowers which deck the meadows  
That blossom but to die.

A sleep, a dream, a story,  
By strangers quickly told;  
An evanescent glory  
Of things that soon grow old.

But You--THE ROCK OF AGES  
For evermore have been;  
What time the tempest rages  
Our dwelling-place serene."

Yes, sheltered in these clefts, you can feel the glad assurance, that no desolating wave which has swept away your earthly moorings, can ever separate you from the love of Christ. You can see the rainbow of the covenant resting majestically on the stormy billows, and read on its



luminous scroll of ruby and emerald and gold the glorious superscription--"I am the Lord, I do not change."

## **THE SYMPATHY OF JESUS**

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." –Hebrews 4:15

"This happiness Christ gives to all His--that as a Savior He once suffered for them, and that as a Friend He always suffers with them." –South, 1633.

o Sirs! there is in Jesus something proportionable to all the straits, necessities, and desires of His poor people." –Thomas Brooks, 1635.

"Jesus is the great sympathetic nerve of the Church, over which all the oppressions and sufferings of His people distinctly pass. Surveying this scene of overtoiled labor, and sleepless anxiety, and wasting solicitude, in which mortals are embroiled, the voice of Jesus--the Friend of man--the tender Sympathizer with human woe, is heard rising in tones of the kindest compassion." –Harris.

The Rock Christ--the Rock of Deity--the Rock high above the lower valley--mantled in clouds, as if veiled with cherub's wings; inaccessible to human footstep--its glorious summits the privileged home of angels. What affinity can there be between this Mighty God and puny man--between Omnipotence and weakness--Deity and dust?

Affinity, yes more than affinity there is! That Rock, whose top, like the Patriarch's ladder, reaches to heaven, has its base on the earth. The Great Redeemer, as we have already seen, combines the attributes of Godhead with the attributes and characteristics of a true and veritable humanity. To one of the most beautiful features of that humanity--the divine Sympathy of Jesus--this new Rock-cleft introduces us.

Among the heart's most sacred and hallowed emotions, none is surely more hallowed than Sympathy. In these dependent natures of ours, who, in the season of need has not longed for it--and when it comes, has not welcomed it like the presence of a ministering angel? Others working with us, feeling for us--sharing our toils, helping us to carry our burdens; entering into our hopes, our joys, our sorrows; to see the responsive tear glistening in the eye--all this is a mighty strengthener and sustainer amid the vicissitudes of chequered life.

The lonely fisherman on the stormy sea has his midnight of weariness, and it may be of peril; is charmed, as he glances towards the light gleaming in the hut on the shore, and thinks of the wakeful vigils of the loving hearts within. The soldier in his camp under the starry heavens, thousands of miles intervening between him and his native soil, is cheered by the very tread of the sentinel, or the breathing of the slumbering forms around him--or he remembers the far-off home and those whose sympathetic spirits are with him--and the thought is like cold water to a thirsty soul. The martyr at the stake has been often nerved for endurance by the whisper of "Courage, brother!" from the fellow-victim at his side. How the Great Apostle in his Roman dungeon--when he was "such an one as Paul the aged" was cheered by the visits of congenial friends, such as Timothy and Onesiphorus! How touchingly does the illustrious captive invoke God's richest benedictions on the latter and on his household, for "often refreshing him and not being ashamed of his chain."

If human sympathy be thus gladdening and grateful, what must be the pure--exalted--sinless--unselfish Sympathy emanating from the heart of the Great Brother-Man? It is of this, we shall now speak; and taking the words which head this chapter to lead our thoughts, let us consider these two points embraced in them--The sympathy of Jesus, the Great High Priest of His Church; and the one exceptional characteristic here mentioned, that, "Though in all points tempted as we are"--it was "Yet without sin."

Genuine Sympathy requires that there be an identity, or at all events a similarity of nature, between him who sympathizes and the object of sympathy.

The holy Angel, when he sees the children of fallen humanity in sorrow, may pity; but he cannot sympathize with them. Why? Because he never himself shed a tear; his nature never felt pang of trial, or assault of temptation. We see the worm writhing on the ground--we know it is in agony--suffering pain. We pity it--but we cannot sympathize with it. Why? because it is in a different scale of being.

Even in the case of the human family, in their condolence with one another--the finer elements of sympathy are lacking, unless they have passed through the same school of experience. Look at the BEGGAR on the street--the man or woman in ragged tatters, with half-naked children in their arms, singing for a livelihood from door to door. Who, in the majority of instances, are found most ready to respond to the appeal for support? Observation will prove, that it is not the rich, not even the middle class; most frequently it is the poor themselves. We have often marked such charity willingly doled out by the laborer, returning from his place of toil at meal-hour, in workman's attire--one who perhaps himself had known the bitter blast of adversity--what it is to have closed factory doors and silent shuttles, and at whose blackened fires grim poverty once sat--his sympathy arises out of identity of experience with the sufferers.

The BEREAVED tell the story of their swept and desolated home to a friend--a friend too, it may be, full to overflowing with natural feeling. He may listen with heartfelt emotion to all they have to say--but he has never laid a loved one in the grave--death has never invaded his dwelling--the overwhelming wave of bereavement has never left traces of desolation on his soul. Another comes in. He may not have the same natural strong emotions or sensibilities. But he has consigned treasure after treasure to "the narrow house"--he has himself waded through the deep waters--the woes of others have been traced and chiseled in his own heart of hearts; and consequently the very deeps of his being are stirred. More than one endorsed letter has been sent, in recent years, by our beloved Queen, to those in high places who have been called to exchange crowns and coronets for weeds of mourning. These, under any circumstances, would have been a grateful and prized expression of royal condolence. But how much more touchingly and tenderly such utterances came home to those bleeding hearts, when the writing, within its deep border, was known to

be blotted with the tears of kindred widowhood!

The same remark may be made with reference to PREACHING. How often do we hear trial dwelt upon in our pulpits by the lips of youth--young (and nevertheless faithful) servants of their heavenly Master, who expatiate on the deathbed, the grave, the broken heart, the wilderness-world, earth "vanity and vexation of spirit." But yet (say as they will), they have only adopted the phraseology of others--they speak from no experience--they believe it all to be true, but they have never felt it to be true. Their words therefore come home with little power; they may even grate upon the ear, as being, in the lips of the declaimers, unnatural and inappropriate. But bring some aged, venerable man--some old veteran in the school of trial, whose memory and soul are ploughed and furrowed with deep scars; whose friends in the unseen world number as many as in this--Listen to him, as he pours oil and wine into the mourner's bosom! How pulse beats responsive to pulse, and heart to heart. He has been "touched with a fellow-feeling," for he has been in all respects tried even as they. He has been in the furnace himself; the arrow of comfort and sympathy comes feathered from his own bosom; and when sorrow and trial are the theme of his preaching, he speaks feelingly, because he feels deeply.

All this has its loftiest exemplification in the sublime sympathy of the Son of God. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" Why? Because "He has been tempted in every way, just as we are." His is a deep, yearning, real sympathy arising out of His true and real humanity. His was not an angel-life. He was not, as many falsely picture Him, half Angel, half God--looking down on a fallen world from the far distant heights of His heavenly throne. But He descended, and walked in the midst of it, pitching His tent (as we have seen) among its families--"He did not take on Himself the nature of Angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." The Great Physician lived in the world's hospital. He did not write out His cures in His remote dwelling in the skies, refusing to come into personal contact with the patients. He walked its every ward. With His own hand He felt the fevered pulses; His own eyes gazed on the sufferer's tears. He stood not by the fiery furnace as a spectator, but there was one in it "like the Son of God."

To leave us the less doubt as to His capacity for entering into the feelings and sorrows of His people; note His own longing after sympathy. In the Garden of Gethsemane He could not pray the prayer of His agony without it--"Sit here, while I go and pray yonder." How cherished to Him was the family home of Bethany, just because He could there pour out the tale of His own sorrows in the ears of congenial human friends. Even at the last scene of all, how sustained He was by human presence! "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene." Oh blessed thought! He knows our frame; for He had that frame Himself. "Behold the Man!" Every heart-throb you feel evokes a kindred pulsation in the bosom of the Prince of Sufferers; for "He that sanctifies, and those who are sanctified, are all of one (nature)."

But let us advert to one or two special characteristics.

(1.) It is a PRESENT sympathy. He IS touched with a feeling of our infirmities. "I know their sorrows"--not, 'I have known them once, but have now forgotten them in My state of glorification; I once bore this frame of yours, but the human nature is merged in the divine.' No. "I AM He who lives."

"Though now ascended up on high,  
He bends on earth a brother's eye;  
Partaker of the human name,  
He knows the frailty of our frame.

"Our fellow-sufferer yet retains  
A fellow-feeling of our pains;  
And still remembers in the skies  
His tears, His agonies, and cries."

(2.) Another characteristic is that of INTENSITY. Relationship is one of the elements which generates and intensifies sympathy. A man feels for the sufferings of a fellow-man--but if that sufferer be a relative, connected by ties of blood or affection, how much deeper the emotion.

A stranger standing on the pier, seeing a child or youth struggling in the

waves, would feel an uncontrollable impulse to rush to its rescue. If a swimmer, he would plunge into the sea, and cleaving his way through the surge, would make every effort to snatch the child from a watery grave. But what would be his feelings in comparison with those of her, who, from the same spot, beheld in that drowning one the child of her bosom? The pity of the former would be coldness itself in comparison with her combined emotions of anguish and tenderness.

The dwellers in the wild valley of Dauphiny, who saw the eagle bearing the infant in its talons to the lofty rock, were moved with horror at the scene, and made several brave efforts to effect a rescue. But it was the mother alone, whose love bore her with fleet foot from crag to crag, until reaching the perilous crag, she was in time to clasp the living captive to her bosom, and say--"This my child was dead and is alive again, it was lost and is found." Such is the intensity and tenderness of the love and sympathy of Jesus, the "living Kinsman"--He who is Parent, Friend, Brother, all in one. "Lord, behold he whom You love is sick"--"Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him"--"As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you."

(3.) The sympathy of Christ is a **COMPREHENSIVE** and **PARTICULAR** sympathy--embracing not only all His Church but every individual member of it. It takes in the whole range of human infirmities; outward troubles, inward perplexities, unspoken griefs with which a stranger dare not meddle. No trial, no pang, no tear, escapes His eye. With a microscopic power "He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust," as if we stood alone in the world, and individually engrossed all His solitudes. A grain of sand, almost imperceptible, affects the tender organ of sight. This is the Bible emblem of the divine-human sympathy--"He that touches you, touches the pupil of His eye."

How varied were the methods by which Jesus, when on earth, expressed His sympathetic love and thoughtful compassion! Not to rehearse familiar instances already given, see how, in order to dispel their misgivings, He joins the two disconsolate followers on the way to Emmaus, how He appoints a special meeting to clear up the doubts of Thomas. His last earthly thought on the cross is providing a home for a mother and a disciple--"Woman, behold your Son!--Son, behold your

Mother!"

(4.) The sympathy of the Divine Redeemer was ACTIVE--not a mere emotion evaporating in sentimental feeling; the casket without the jewel. There are those who can be touched by reading the pages of a romance, who shed tears over the columns of a newspaper; yet who, though thus able to indulge in fictitious griefs, stretch out no hand of substantial support to the needy; who, like Priest and Levite in the parable, can see a wounded fellow-being, and leave him half dead.

Not so Christ--He is the world's good Samaritan, binding up the wounds of aching humanity. He was sent to "heal the brokenhearted;" and nobly did He fulfill His commission--"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I GO that I may awake him out of sleep." The Divine Consoler never mocked the children of sorrow with a stone when they asked for bread--saying, in the cold heartlessness of the mere sentimentalist, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled." He "went about doing good."

(5.) His was, moreover, an ABIDING sympathy. The world's sympathy is often short-lived. It cannot penetrate the depths and recesses of the smitten heart. It cannot make allowances for intense grief. It offers its tribute of condolence at the moment; but if the heart-wounds remain unhealed, it has its own harsh verdict on inordinate sorrow. The ripples in the water where some treasured bark has gone down, have closed again; the world's vessels cross and recross the spot, but no vestige, no legend of the catastrophe is left on the unstable element. Sorrowful anniversaries come back, but they are all unnoted, save by the bereft one, who has learned to lock up these sacred griefs and to weep alone. There is ONE, abiding, unchanging Sympathizer--the Immutable Savior! The moss may gather over the tombstone, and almost obliterate the lettering--but no corroding hand of time or of years--  
"Can e'er efface us from His heart,  
Or make His love decay."

The sympathy of the dearest earthly friend may be evanescent; brother may be estranged from brother, sister from sister--friend from friend. But "there is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother."

We can do little more than notice, in closing, the 'exceptional clause' in the Apostle's statement, that this Great High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and tempted in all points even as we are, was "yet without sin."

Does not this one sentence, however, neutralize, or at least render much inappropriate and inapplicable, of what we have already said? If perfectly sinless, how could He be tempted? and if not tempted, how could He feel? If perfectly sinless, how could He enter into the most poignant part of our woes, the assaults of corruption, the wiles of the Great Adversary?

We must be careful to guard with jealousy this precious jewel in the Savior's humanity, His "IMPECCABILITY." He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." He could utter the unanswerable challenge, "Who of you convinces Me of sin?" There was no affinity in His nature with sin or temptation. Apply the lighted torch to the loaded cannon, it will at once give out its voice of thunder because loaded with the explosive element. But, apply the fuse to that same piece of artillery in which the fulminating ingredients are not; it will remain mute and harmless as the rocks and stones around--and the timid bird can nestle safely in its barrel.

So it was with the sinless nature of Christ. Temptation, in His case, was the lighted torch applied to the uncharged, unloaded cannon. Ignition was impossible; for affinity there was none between the Tempted and the Tempter.

But though incapable of sin, and incapable of temptation in the sense of being overcome by it, He was not incapable of suffering by it. "He SUFFERED, being tempted." The very holiness of His nature--the very recoil of His spotless soul from evil--made the presence of sin, and of temptation, the cause of unutterable anguish. And these same refined sensibilities impart to Him now, a livelier and acuter sympathy for those who are tempted; just as the purer the glass, or the brighter the metal, the more visibly are they sullied if breathed upon.

Though the Prince of this world came and found nothing in Him--though no device could drag Him from His steadfastness--though the sinless One



rolled back wave on wave of temptation, and sent the Adversary away, thwarted among his legions of darkness; did He not feel, with a shrinking and sensitiveness all His own, that Tempter's presence and power? Hear the testimony and exclamation of His own lips--"Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour, but for this cause I came unto this hour."

When He was standing in meek, silent majesty in Pilate's Judgment-Hall--the Lamb speechless before His shearers--Incarnate Truth in the midst of error, impiety, and blasphemy--or on the cross, while listening to the cruel taunt and ribald jest of the passers-by--did He feel nothing? Though breathed in silence, here is His prophetic experience--

"My enemies surround Me like a herd of bulls;  
fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed Me in!  
Like roaring lions attacking their prey,  
they come at Me with open mouths.  
My life is poured out like water,  
and all My bones are out of joint.  
My heart is like wax,  
melting within Me.  
My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.  
My tongue sticks to the roof of My mouth.  
You have laid Me in the dust and left me for dead.  
My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;  
an evil gang closes in on Me.  
They have pierced My hands and feet.  
I can count every bone in My body.  
My enemies stare at Me and gloat.  
They divide My clothes among themselves  
and throw dice for My garments.  
O Lord, do not stay away!  
You are my strength; come quickly to My aid!  
Rescue Me from a violent death;  
spare My precious life from these dogs.  
Snatch Me from the lions' jaws,  
and from the horns of these wild oxen."

Psalm 22:12-21

Believe it--it is not a sinful nature, or sinful practice, that makes us feel a deeper sympathy with our fellow-sinners. As it has been well observed, when David was living in scandalous and unrepented of sin--when his conscience was blunted, and prayer restrained before God; then he had no sympathy--no mercy for the cruel author of a hypothetical case of violence and wrong. When Nathan told him the story-parable about the ewe-lamb--"The man that has done this," said David, "shall surely die." Sin hardens the heart; blunts the sensibilities. It is the highest and purest specimens of humanity who are the kindest, best, most tender. What, then, must it be with the Great Ideal of all excellence; the sinless God-man Mediator?

Yes! if I wish a true, perfect sympathizer, I look to Him, who, while He had (and He has at this moment) a real humanity, is, at the same time, "the Holy One of God"--"tempted," "yet without sin;" and exult in the Prophet's words of comfort--all the more because of His infinite purity--"A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Reader, do you know what it is to take refuge in this glorious Rock-cleft, the Sympathy of Jesus? There are crisis-hours in our lives when more especially we need strong support--when, like Jacob at Bethel, we are all alone in a desolate place--the sun of our earthly happiness set, and our summer friends gone. Or like John, as he wandered in Patmos, the sole survivor of the Apostolic band, old fellow-disciples and companions removed--like a tree left solitary in the forest. These are the times when the Savior delights to come, showing us the ladder which connects the pillow of stones and the weary sleeper with the heights of heaven--or, as in the case of the lonely exile of the Aegean Sea, raising us from our prostrate condition, and whispering in our ears His own gentle accents of reassuring peace! It is when the tempest is fiercest, we know the preciousness of such a Refuge--"When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I!"

## THE TENDERNESS OF JESUS

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out." Isaiah 42:3

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young." Isaiah 40:11

"He has never yet put out a dim candle that was lighted at the Sun of Righteousness." –Charnock, 1628.

"Upon Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, and was adorned with the acclamations of a King and a God, He wet the Palms with His tears, sweeter than the drops of manna, or the little pearls of heaven that descended upon Mount Hermon; weeping, in the midst of His triumph, over obstinate, perishing, and malicious Jerusalem." – Jeremy Taylor, 1613.

"When our heart does but relent, His melts; when our eye merely pities, His affections yearn. How many vices and defects of ours does He smother, how many indignities does He pass by; and how many affronts does He put up with at our hands, because His love is invincible." –South, 1633.

"Shall not the Redeemer's tears move you? They signify the sincerity of His love and pity--the truth and tenderness of His compassion. His tears were the natural genuine expressions of genuine beneficence and pity." – John Howe, 1630.

The TENDERNESS OF JESUS is a Rock-cleft, which, though nearly allied to that spoken of in our last, seems to suggest and to claim a special consideration.

A writer has remarked, that the only occasion during our Lord's public ministry, on which He laid claim to any human excellency, was when He uttered the words recorded in Matthew's Gospel--"I am meek and lowly in heart." This is not the character which the world values. These are

rather some of its self-laudations, its loudest trumpet-blasts--'I am great, I am rich, I am courageous, I am cultured, I am learned.' It does obeisance to "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power." As we had occasion to note in a previous chapter, the old Pagan qualities eulogized and canonized were bravery, manliness, heroism, and the like. Humility, meekness and gentleness were unknown in their calendar of virtues. It was reserved for the Prince of Peace to claim as His special characteristic that He cast away no bruised reeds--that He trampled out no smoking flax!

What a contrast here, also, with other religious teachers, in the weapons employed for the propagation of their tenets. Fire, and sword, and scimitar, have in most instances paved the way for spiritual conquest. Indeed, unlike their Master, even the best of His own Apostolic band had no milder method to suggest in dealing with schismatics. In imitation of the Fiery Prophet, they would have called down lightning-bolts from Heaven on the churlish Samaritans. Peter's unsheathed sword would have dealt deathly vengeance on the High Priest's Servant. But in both cases there was an instantaneous rebuke from the tender lips of their Lord--"The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." "Put up again your sword into his place, for all those who take the sword shall perish with the sword."

"He had no curses," says an eloquent divine, "for His foes--no blows for His enemies. Such was His gentleness, that when He might have shaken the earth and rocked the thrones of tyrants, and made every idol-god totter from its blood-stained throne, He put forth no such physical power, but still stood with melting heart and tearful eyes, inviting sinners to come to Him; using no lash but His love--no battle-axe and weapon of war but His grace."

In dwelling for a little on the Gentleness and Tenderness of Jesus, let us begin by referring to one or two Old Testament prophetic intimations regarding this special feature in the character of the predicted Messiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," said Isaiah, "because He has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the meek. He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted." "You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the

heat."

Oriental kings and potentates of old delighted in OSTENTATION and DISPLAY. Solomon rode in his cedar chariot, with his body-guard running in glittering attire by his side, their hair covered with dust of gold. But see how prophecy describes this Greater than Solomon, as He goes forth in triumphal state--"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem--behold, your King comes unto you--He is just, and having salvation; LOWLY, and riding upon an donkey, and upon a colt the foal of an donkey." TENDERNESS was the sweet fragrance that was to exude from every leaf and blossom of the Stem of Jesse--"He shall grow up before him as a tender plant." The watchmen in the Canticles, when they met the dejected spouse, wounded her and tore off her veil. When she met her Lord, she receives no angry word--no look of upbraiding. "He shall deliver the needy when he cries--the poor also, and him that has no helper." "You are fairer than the children of men; grace (graciousness, tenderness) is poured into Your lips."

Passing from prophecy to its fulfillment; the whole ministry of Jesus on earth was the picture of which these are the framework. The opening act of that ministry is the proclamation of His tenderness. The earliest public utterances of a king or statesman are generally taken as indicative of the policy and principles which are to regulate his future career. How beautifully was the initial text He Himself selected in the synagogue at Nazareth, illustrated by a life and example of gentleness and love. Not, like the manifesto of many public men, misrepresented through fickleness and caprice, or the delirium of success--their promised acts and deeds of generosity and benignity lapsing into coldness, and selfishness, and austerity. As we watch the crowds of helpless and diseased, sick and fevered, orphaned, friendless, and dying, who thronged the way wherever He went, we see how the tenderness of His words was endorsed and countersigned by His equally tender deeds.

Let us go and stand by that PORCH OF MERCY and witness the throng, as severally, they approach with their tale of anxiety and perplexity--sorrow and sin.

Here is one! He comes by night. When the evening shadows have closed

around Jerusalem, and no unkindly human eye is able to track his footsteps, he sneaks to those gates of compassion. His soul is fevered and restless. He is sick at heart with the worn-out conventional forms of Judaism, and longing to hear of the principles of the new Kingdom. How tenderly does the Great Teacher listen to the questions of this anxious inquirer, in the anguish of his first convictions, and unfold to him the wondrous story of God's everlasting love!

Here is another! An avaricious tax-gatherer; one who, in all probability, in common with the class to which he belonged, had preyed upon widows and orphans in extorting his unscrupulous gains; one, moreover, who, on account of his extortionate calling, we may well believe had seldom or ever listened to a kind or generous word from his brother townsmen of Jericho; rather, who had been subjected on all sides, and not undeservedly, to suspicion and distrust. Strange and novel must have been the gleam of tenderness in that eye which scanned him among the thick branches of the sycamore; remarkable the kindness conveyed in the intimation which fell on his ears, "Zaccheus, today I will abide at your house." The word of the infinitely pure One, awoke sensibilities that were dormant, or rather, which had been crushed and stifled by an unsympathizing world, and "he received Him joyfully."

Here is another! He is the most bruised and broken of all--one who had imagined himself strong in faith, giving glory to God; but who had ignominiously bent before the blast of temptation and had denied his divine Master with oaths and curses. Can there be anything of tenderness manifested towards the renegade Apostle? Surely he has placed himself, by his heinous guilt and craven cowardice, beyond the pale of forgiveness. No! when we might have thought the heart he had grievously wounded was alienated from him forever, there was first a "look" of infinite love--a melting glance, which sent him forth to weep bitter tears over foul ingratitude; and subsequently a message, entrusted to the Angel-guardian of the sepulcher and conveyed by him to the three women, "Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter." 'Go, tell the most faithless of My followers, that even for him there is still a place in My tender regard. Go, tell this wandering bird with drooping wing and soiled plumage, that even for him there is a place of shelter still open in the clefts of the Rock.'

No more--when Jesus met him subsequently on the shores of Gennesaret, instead of dragging afresh to light painful memories of abused kindness and broken vows, all now too deeply felt to need being recalled; no severer utterance for unworthy apostasy was pronounced, than the gentle rebuke conveyed in the thrice-repeated challenge, "Do you love Me?"

Or, if we may revert to a yet earlier scene in His ministry, it is the occasion on which 'degraded guilt' was brought face to face with 'perfect Purity and Innocence'. He does not palliate the enormity of transgression. By no means! But He who read the heart, makes it an opportunity of proclaiming what His mission is, as a mission of forgiveness. He utters, in the case of the sinner who then confronted Him (as in that of the other weeping Magdalene who bedewed His feet with her tears), the gracious absolution, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more." He again refuses to break the bruised reed and to quench the smoking flax; to send a wreck of misery out, unsuccoured, amid the black night and the howling pitiless winds. "Go and learn," He seems to say, "what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Indeed, when pronouncing some of His most impressive woes and threatenings, He appears, at times, as if He dreaded lest any broken-hearted one might misinterpret His sayings, and construe His wrath against sin and hypocrisy, as indicating a lack of consideration to the penitent. Take as an example the occasion when He had been proclaiming stern words regarding the contemporary "sinful generation;" more especially rebuking them for their blind unbelief in the midst of light and privilege; declaring that for those cities which had scorned His message (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum), it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. He seems suddenly to pause. The storm has exhausted itself. Possibly amid the crowd who had just listened to these utterances of wrath, His Omniscient eye discerned some trembling outcast--some brittle reed or sapling bending beneath the hurricane. He will not allow it to be broken. He will not permit the wind and earthquake and fire to pass, without being followed by a 'still small voice'--and then it is, that the words (unparalleled in their tenderness and beauty among all He ever spoke)

come like a gleam after the tempest, or like a rainbow encircling with its lovely hues the angry spray--"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

In His last prayer preceding the Passion, how touching are His pleadings in behalf alike of His disciples and His Church! More like a mother's tenderness over her defenseless children, when, leaving the parental care, they are sent forth lonely and unbefriended to face and fight the battles of life in an ungenial world.

In the climax of His own humiliation, when nailed to the cross of Calvary, how tenderly does He commit His dearest earthly relative to the keeping of His dearest human friend! How tenderly in the extremity of anguish and soul-desertion, does He speak words of heart-cheer to the dying thief at His side! How tenderly does He plead for those who had entwined the thorn-crown around His bleeding brows, and driven the rough iron into those hands which had never been employed save to cure--never uplifted except to bless!

On the Mount of Ascension, when the gates of heaven were ajar, and its distant hallelujahs of welcome to "the King of glory" were already wafted to His ear--how tenderly He breathes a farewell on the orphaned band; as if all His thoughts and all His love were still centered on those He was about to leave behind Him--the last vision imprinted on their memories being that of His arms uplifted in benediction!

When He meets the beloved disciple in Patmos, and the awestruck beholder, dazzled with the luster of His glorified humanity, falls at His feet as one dead--how tenderly is he reminded that he is in the presence of the same unchanged and unchanging ONE, on whose bosom of love he had often pillowed his head on earth. At midnight, years before, on the dark, stormy surface of Gennesaret, the Spirit-form he and his fellow-disciples so much dreaded, spoke the reassuring word, "It is I; do not be afraid!" "That same Jesus' comes down now from the still waters of the river of life--the nightless city of the crystal sea, with the same well-remembered soothing lullaby--"He laid His right hand upon me, saying, 'do not be afraid!'" It was, yet again, "as one whom his mother comforts." Oh, when the aged Evangelist and honored Prophet retired to Ephesus, in



the evening of his life, to put in writing personal experience of the Divine dealings, well might he say (regarding these and other remembrances, indelibly impressed on him, of his living, loving Lord), "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!"

Let it, however, be very carefully noted, that there was nothing indiscriminate in the tenderness of Christ. It was tenderness towards the weak, the poor, the helpless, the penitent, the erring. There was, as we have already had occasion to remark, no tenderness towards sin. On the contrary, there was uncompromising severity towards all wrong-doing and hypocrisy, oppression and untruthfulness. How unsparingly He lashed the vices of the age! With what withering words He confronted and combated Pharisee and Sadducee! When the tears were scarcely dry which He wept over Jerusalem, the scourge was in His hand driving the sacrilegious traffickers from the Temple-courts, who had converted the most sacred ground on earth, into place and opportunity for ministering to their own avarice! "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" was His voice of stern rebuke, as the guilty crowd fled affrighted from His presence.

Side by side with the Parable of the Vineyard laborers, wherein, even at the eleventh hour, a welcome was offered and wages given to every unhired idler in the market-place--we have the Parable of the Blighted Fig-tree on the heights of Olivet (with its pretentious foliage--"nothing but leaves")--stretching out its skeleton arms to heaven, a monument of vengeance--this the malediction uttered against it by these same lips of compassion--"From now on, let no fruit grow upon you forever!"

Reader, do you know the preciousness of the Rock-cleft on which we have been dwelling? amid the rough blasts of life, to take shelter in the Tenderness of Him whose love is better, truer, more enduring, than that of the kindest and most loving of earthly friends? Have you learned to sing amid the moanings of the storm--

"Jesus, Refuge of my soul,  
Let me to Your bosom fly;  
When the waters o'er me roll,  
While the tempest still is high?"

Do you know what it is, as one of the sheep of His pasture, when weary and footsore, panting, and burdened--to run to this Infinitely gracious Shepherd, who, in the beautiful metaphor of Isaiah already quoted, delights to carry the Lambs in His arms and gently to lead His burdened ones?

WHAT ARE THESE BURDENS? They are many and diversified.

With one, it may be that of CONVICTION OF SIN. You may have reached the momentous time in your spiritual history, when conscience has awoken from the 'low dream of earth' with quickened sensibility--when forgotten sins are brought before you in vivid memorial; the obligations of a misspent life flashing upon you the reality of a hopeless bankruptcy; and you feel how utterly vain is the plea with which you have long sought to delude yourself--"Have patience with me, and I will pay You all." You may feel, to change the figure, that in yourself you are the most worthless and abandoned of prodigals; that you have righteously forfeited a place within the paternal halls! But, He is waiting your return. He sees you, haggard, hunger-stricken--sick at heart. He watches the first indications of penitential sorrow. While yet "a great way off," He is ready with the fond embrace and the kindly welcome. Wondrous tenderness, surely, do these His own words describe, in that surpassingly touching parable--"His Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." What! the riotous living--the spendthrift life--the debasing companionship, all forgotten? Yes, by that one kiss of forgiveness, all is buried in everlasting oblivion!

With another--it may be the burden of declension and backsliding--the guilt of apostasy from a first love--the decay of the inner life. Permitted sin and permitted worldliness have superinduced languor and lethargy. You are not what once you were--you have lost tenderness of conviction--you have blunted the fine edge of conscience--the old ardor in the divine race is gone; you have allowed the tooth of earthly cares to corrode--petty vexations and annoyances to eat out the kernel of religion--"the little foxes" have entered unchallenged the soul's vineyard and spoiled the grapes. None more bruised and broken than you. The flax, once burning clear, gives forth now nothing but noxious smoke--polluting and

poisoning the atmosphere of your spiritual being! Despond not. The forgiving love and tenderness of Christ can meet your case. Burdened one, He your Shepherd is willing gently to lead you also. He will rekindle these smouldering ashes of a dying love--He will "strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die."

What says He, by the lips of the Prophet, to His backsliding people? (and He says the same to you)--"you keep right on doing all the evil you can"--(as much as to say--'You could not have done worse'). "Yet," He adds, "O Israel, My faithless people, come home to Me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever. Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God and committed adultery against Him by worshiping idols under every green tree. Confess that you refused to follow Me. I, the Lord, have spoken!" Jeremiah 3:12-13

With another, the burden may be of a different kind. It maybe the burden of SORROW AND TRIAL. He may have touched you to the quick. It may be the woundings of friends--hardships in leading a religious life--the jeers and mockings of ungodly companions, or those of your own household. It may be the loss of worldly substance, or the blighting of fond affection, or the yawning chasm made by death and bereavement--these and similar causes may have made you weary and heavy-laden--or left you a broken bruised reed on the world's highway. You may be unable to trace the mystery of the Divine dealings--you may be even tempted to indulge in unworthy surmises regarding the Divine faithfulness!

What a blessed Rock-cleft for you also, in the tenderness of Him, who, being a disciple Himself in this school of affliction, is able to enter with exquisite sensitiveness into all your sorrows. That apparently 'rough voice' of the true Joseph to His brethren, is 'tenderness in disguise'. He will not speak too roughly. He knows what you can bear. He will temper the wind to the shorn lamb--He will make this sorrow, whatever it is, fruitful in blessing--"For thus says the Lord--as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it--so will I do for My servant's sake."

So tender is He, that He feels what is done to His people as if it were done to Himself--"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" The faintest sound of

woe still, as of old, arrests His ear. As in nature, He alike guides the planets in their orbits, and watches the fall of the sparrow; as He alike tends the kingly sun and the lowly dewdrop--so in the moral and spiritual world. While He receives the archangel's homage, He listens to the cry of the infant on its knees--or notes the tear and the wail of the widow in her agony. Like His own shepherd in the parable, He rejoices to go after the lost one--the worst truant of the fold--"until He find it."

O You, into whose lips grace is poured!--You Mighty One!--Yet infinitely tender!--ride forth in Your glory and in Your Majesty, "because of truth and meekness and righteousness!" Forbid that it should be, in the case of any perusing these pages, as with Jerusalem of old--that tears of compassion should be accompanied and followed by words of reproach and doom. "How often would I have gathered you!" How often would I have rescued the broken reed, and fanned the smoking flax--carried the feeble lamb, led the burdened, and given rest to the weary--"but you would not--therefore now is your house left unto you desolate!"

Blessed be God, that voice of kindness still sounds in our ears--that waiting Savior--though His "head be wet with dew and His locks with the drops of the night"--still stands knocking, with tones of tenderness on His lips, and the hoarded love of Eternity in His heart! The Great Apostle had many incentives to use, many golden chains with which to moor the tempest-tossed to the Rock of Ages. Among these is the very theme of our present chapter--"Now I Paul beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." It was indeed no new or original argument. It was that taught and enforced by his great Lord Himself--when He said, in the memorable words already quoted, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me--for I am gentle and humble in heart."

The traveler who refused to part with his cloak at the bidding of the furious chilling wind, surrendered it to the warming influence of the sun. What the tempests of the law--"the terrors of the Lord"--fail to effect--may be accomplished, and often is accomplished, by the gracious beams radiating from the true 'Sun of Righteousness'. Let us own their potency. Let us fall down, vanquished by His gentleness.

Blessed Savior, let the tenderness of Your deeds on earth--the tenderness of Your invitations to the weary and the burdened--the tenderness of Your tears wept over Jerusalem--the tenderness of Your words spoken in Your death-agony, salvation to the felon and forgiveness to the murderers--let these and other memories of gospel story--like a peal of heavenly bells, summon me to enter the opened gates of mercy. Let me listen to them, as the many-toned voices of the Beloved inviting to flee to the 'Clefts of the Rock.' There, safe--secure--at rest forever, and with the blessed consciousness of all the elevating, ennobling privileges to which Your bleeding love has exalted me--may it be mine to say in the triumphant words of the Psalmist, "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; and Your right hand has held me up, and YOUR GENTLENESS HAS MADE ME GREAT."

## **CHRIST THE PEACE GIVER**

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." – John 14:27

And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. He said, "Peace be with you." –Luke 24:36

"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." –John 16:33

"Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." –Romans 5:1

"The heart never rests until it finds rest in God." –Augustine, 410.

"Jesus came to me in the third watch of the night, walking upon the waters. He stilled the tempest in my soul--and lo! there was a great

calm!" –Halyburton, 1670.

"Oh, that I might effectually recommend to you the full possession of that precious legacy of our blessed Savior--peace." –Hall, 1574.

No shadow of the "Great Rock in the weary land," is more precious to the children of humanity than this. The circumstances in which the Savior uttered these words were interesting and peculiar, and give a deep pathos to His declaration. It was at a time, one would have thought, of the deepest unrest and anxiety to His own soul; a time when the saying, "My peace I give unto you," would have seemed a strange and questionable blessing--for the shadows of the cross were gathering around Him; the Prince of darkness was prowling on His path; and the dreadful scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary were close at hand. And yet it was then (yes, at the very moment when the Rock of Ages was wrapped in portentous gloom), that Jesus speaks of the calm and the rest awaiting those who find shelter in its clefts. He was delivering His final charge to His disciples; imparting to them directions, comforts, and promises--His farewell benediction. Some consolation, higher than earth could afford, was needed, when the Shepherd was about to be smitten and the sheep to be scattered. In the clouds of that dark, troubled horizon He sets the rainbow of covenant Peace. His utterance was more than a promise--it is couched in the formula of a last Will--a Testamentary deed. It is the dying legacy which the Prince of Peace bequeaths to His Church and people in every age.

Taking these words of Jesus more specially to guide our thoughts, let us advert to three, out of many characteristics of this priceless legacy.

I. It is A WELL-FOUNDED PEACE--and in this respect it is "not as the world gives." By reason of the great original apostasy, the soul of man has lost its peace; and fallen nature, not unaware of the loss, yet all ignorant where the forfeited blessing is to be recovered, is engaged in a perpetual effort to effect the restoration. In ten thousand ways does the world "minister to a mind diseased," singing its siren lullaby--"Peace, Peace;" while, from the unsatisfied aching voids of the heart, the echo is returned, "No peace." The object desired being too often sought either at forbidden or at polluted fountains, multitudes fail to secure the coveted prize.

The Peace enjoyed by the believer in Jesus, is full, complete, satisfying. It rests on the broad foundation of His atoning work and sacrifice, ratified by the Father and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. It is the death of the Divine Testator which enables us, by law, to enter on this bequeathed heritage--"Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the Testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead--otherwise it is of no strength at all while the Testator lives." Never was a Will so "proved" and "attested" as this. The adorable Redeemer surrendered His precious life, in order that (in the words just quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews) it might be rendered "of force." Moreover, unlike all mere human and earthly Testators, He rose from the grave and ascended to His Father's right hand, to see its provisions and bequests implemented. He who executed this testamentary disposition is still our Advocate in the Court of Heaven--and, as such, He will take care that all His heirs are granted the purchased blessings.

It is a peace founded on the principles of everlasting truth and everlasting righteousness. As its primary condition, it secures alike the vindication of the divine law and the manifestation of the divine glory; for the Angels who came to announce the restoration of the lost heritage, sang--"Glory to God in the highest," before they proclaimed "Peace on earth." Let us think of it, then, as a peace purchased by Jesus--"Peace through the blood of His cross." In no other way could it have been procured. By no other could it be bestowed. No voice, but the voice which exclaimed in dying accents, "It is finished," can say to the troubled tempest-tossed soul--"Peace, be still."

In the familiar Bible narrative, we see the heathen sailors rowing hard to bring the vessel to land, in whose hold was the fugitive Prophet. It was in vain. "The sea raged, and was tempestuous"--wave after wave baffled strength of oar and muscle. What then was their recourse? The sacrifice of the one life was demanded and surrendered for the sake of the others. So it was with the true Jonah. When He was taken and cast into the deep--that deep was hushed into a calm--its fury stilled--every tumultuous billow rocked to rest--"The sea ceased from her raging." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." As it was sin that was the cause of disharmony, so the Redeemer, by His

propitiatory, meritorious sacrifice, has taken that cause away. He has effected the atonement, ("at-one-ment.") "He is our peace, who has made both one." We are "made near by the blood of Christ."

In a striking passage in Isaiah, God and man, by a bold figure of speech, are represented as at war with one another--God "going through the wicked" as "briers and thorns" and "burning them up together." But a gracious alternative is also provided and offered--"OR, let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me." "He SHALL." Peace is uncertain and precarious in other things. It is often a hollow truce, which hushes for a time the clang of arms, only to have the strife resumed. But it is certain here--for the "one offering" of the Great Peacemaker, who is God's "Strength,"--"the Arm of the Lord"--"the Man of His right hand"--has given Him the prerogative to utter the words, "You shall find rest unto your souls."

Let all those who are going about seeking peace and finding none, shelter themselves under the eagle-wings of this glorious truth. That peace is no simulation--no counterfeit. There is no flaw in these title-deeds. It is a perfect peace--peace with God above, and peace with conscience within--peace secured by the Sufferer on the Cross, and ratified by the Kingly Intercessor on the Throne. Like the weary bird, after tracking its way across long leagues of waste ocean, the believer can sink into the crevice of the Great Rock, and sing the song of an older heir of covenant blessings, "Return unto your Rest (your Peace), O my soul."

II. Another characteristic of the peace of Christ is, that it is a PRESENT peace; and as such, "not as the world gives." The world's visions of peace are most generally prospective; the world's notes are promissory. Many of its best blessings are mere hopes and wishes for the future. Its hope 'deferred' too often makes the heart sick. Its future is full of air-castles in due time to be raised; but when the longed-for season of realization comes, how often they turn out to be airy nothings, "baseless fabrics of a vision."

Many a man has a lifetime to wait, before the hopes of youth are fulfilled; and when the wealth or the leisure he has aspired after, or the broad acres he has hoped to inherit come to him, frequently he cannot enjoy



them. The zest of life is over; the tinted soap-bubble he has for long years been inflating collapses, and new worries and troubles take the place of the old ones! Not so the peace of Jesus. It is a peace, indeed, largely of future enjoyment in a better world; but it is a peace, if not in degree, at least in kind, possessed in the present also. The moment the offers of grace are closed with and accepted, the charter of peace is put into the believer's hands. He receives the first instalment of the gracious benefaction, "We who have believed DO enter into rest." "All who believe are justified." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "I AM pacified," says God, "towards you." "Beloved NOW are we the sons of God."

The Prodigal, in returning to his Father's house, had not first to undergo years of probation before he received the kiss of peace and reconciliation and love; he had not to wait until the flush of health had filled his sunken cheeks, or until clad in proper attire he could venture into his Father's presence. No--just as he was--in all the rags of the 'far country'--with haggard face, and trembling limb, and sunken eye--he receives the paternal welcome, and gets the best ring, and robe, and shoes, put upon him.

Reader, think of this! If you have been brought, self-renouncing and sin-renouncing, to the foot of the cross, the peace of God and of His Christ is already yours. If that peace had been in any way your own procuring, then might its attainment be effected only after years of laborious effort. But being purchased, you have only to come and accept it as a free gift, a blessed gratuity; being bequeathed to you, you have only to claim joyfully the inheritance, and enter on its possession--"giving thanks unto the Father, who HAS made us fitt to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." It was a common salutation among the Jews in entering a dwelling of old, "Peace be upon this house." So Jesus, standing by the threshold of every believing penitent soul, says, as He said to His gathered disciples on the evening of His resurrection day, "Peace be unto you." "My peace I GIVE unto you" (not "I shall give"). "O, my dove, who is in the clefts of the Rock."

III. A third characteristic of the peace of Jesus is, that it is a PERMANENT peace--and as such, it is "not as the world gives." Many of

the world's best blessings, those which are considered to minister most effectually to outward happiness and inward tranquillity, may be ours today--but be gone tomorrow. We have no pledge or guarantee for their continuance. They are fed from the low marshy grounds of earth, dependent on fitful seasons and capricious showers. But the peace of Christ being from Heaven, is a perennial stream; it is fed from surer supply than glacier Alps, and it rolls on in undiminished fullness and volume, in summer's drought and in winter's cold.

It is the greatest of mistakes to suppose that mere outward things--fame, wealth, property, honors, give peace. It is often the reverse. They give care and anxiety. They give birth to envyings and jealousies, to discontent and ingratitude. They are as often a man's curse as a blessing. But the peace of Jesus is irrespective and independent of all outward accidents. It bears up and sustains amid the annoyances of business, the crushings of poverty, the weariness of sickness, the pangs of bereavement, the shadows of death.

Yes! if you would wish to understand the true meaning of that phrase, "the peace of God which passes all understanding," go to the believer's dying couch; see (what may be witnessed again and again) when earth is dimming from the view--when the footsteps are standing on the threshold of the mysterious spirit-world, and all that is held dear is to be parted from forever. Listen to the words so often whispered, "All is peace--perfect peace." And as the color fades from the cheek, and the smile of heaven suffuses the now hushed and silent lips, oh, how is the promise--(realized indeed, all through life--but never more so than in life's closing hour)--how is that promise then fulfilled--"You will KEEP him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."

Among the glorious army of MARTYRS, who have then witnessed and exemplified the sustaining peace of God, those at all events familiar with Scottish annals, may recall one whose calm heroism is made more memorable in a familiar picture. There God's noble-minded servant is represented reclining on a crude couch. He has the horrors of execution before him on the morrow; yet he lies in tranquil slumber, like a babe on its mother's breast. When the waves of death are dashing at his feet, he calmly reposes in this Rock-cleft of peace! Well may the gifted author of

the "Pilgrim's Progress" give the name of "PEACE" to the chamber "in which Christian lay," and whose "window opened towards the sun-rising."

We may conclude with a word of EXPLANATION, and a word of exhortation.

It must not be imagined, from what has been said, that the believer's history is one of unclouded calm--a sky in which there brood no storms--a path in which there lurk no briars. That strange paradox of the apostle will be true to the last in the Christian's experience, "sorrowful yet always rejoicing." Paul, even when he speaks of peace, exhorts to have "the feet SHOD;" for, notwithstanding its possession, the road is often a rough and a thorny one. The same voice which proclaims, "My peace I give unto you," adds, "In the world you shall have tribulation." The way to peace is often through the channel of unrest and trial; just as the water that sleeps quietly in the pool has found its way there over jagged rock and foaming cataract.

The disciples' way to land, and that too at their Master's bidding, was through a stormy sea, "toiling in rowing." The Israelites' road to the rest of Canaan was through the barren wilderness. Jacob's way to spiritual victory, and a peace to which he was a stranger before, was through a night of wrestling and soul-struggle. The afflictions of life--temptation without and corruption within--are ever and always ruffling the calm repose of the soul, and reminding that true peace and abiding rest are above. "Beloved," says Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." This is the history of every harpist on the glassy sea, "These are they who came out of great tribulation."

Amid all trials, however, it is the believer's consolation, that, despite of outer disquietudes, the true peace of Christ itself cannot be disturbed. The former are only like the surface-heavings of the ocean. That surface alone is fretted and ruffled. Go down into its unexplored depths, among its luscious wildernesses of sub-marine seaweed--its coral rocks and wondrous mosaic of pebble and sand, and all is peaceful and still. No rolling billow is heard there--no roaring breaker--no scream of storm-

birds. So with the soul! In its lowest, truest depths, all is peace. The ship may be tossed, but its moorings are secure. In the same sentence in which the pressure of present corruption impels Paul to cry out, "O wretched man that I am;" he adds, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He bemoans the tossings of the frail bark in one breath--he remembers the strength and security of the anchor in the next.

The believer's subjective peace, the calm assurance or consciousness of his interest in Christ, may be often assailed. But the peace itself cannot be. The clouds, engendered by sin and weakness and unbelief, may at times obscure from his vision the rays of the Sun. But the Sun, notwithstanding, shines brightly as ever. Once that peace is his, he knows it never can be finally forfeited. The flowing of the spiritual river may be impeded; there may be opposing rocks which here and there disturb the even course of its current--but it will surmount them all, and mingle its waters at last in the ocean of eternal peace and love in heaven.

Meanwhile, beware of creating such obstructions as will tend to mar your peace--indulged sin, or neglected duty. You may be personally responsible for diverting the river from its channel, and leaving your soul "a dry and thirsty land where no water is." "Great peace," says the Psalmist, "have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." Keep out of the way of temptation; avoid the brink of the precipice if you would avert a fall. Keep beyond reach of the fire lest you be burnt. "Oh," exclaims the great Giver of peace, speaking to His backsliding Israel, "Oh that you had hearkened to My commandments, then had your peace been as a river." What is the apostle's recipe for the preservation of peace? "Be anxious for nothing," says he, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving . . . and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts." Walk," he again enjoins, "in the Spirit;" and what is the result? "The fruit," he adds, "of the Spirit is love, joy, PEACE."

Let us add yet a word of EXHORTATION. Some may fancy themselves in the happy position of not requiring this gospel blessing of which we have been speaking. They are undisturbed by any fears of guilt. They know no accusations of conscience. They contrive to banish the thought of death and what is after death. Aye, even when they come to that solemn crisis

hour, the Psalmist's description may be true of them--they have "no bands in their death; their strength is firm."

Is this, however, peace? Yes. But it is the peace of the cemetery. The dead "know not anything." No voice reaches the ears in that silent land. The voice of affection, the sobs of the disconsolate, may break over the grassy turf; but they hear them not. The "loud stunning tide of human care" may go surging past the narrow homes--the speechless tenants listen to no footsteps; the clang of battle may be heard raging close by, profaning the sanctity of 'God's acre;'--the sound of no trumpet or clarion, no clash of arms nor roll of drum, wakes one echo in that 'empire of oblivion'; silence sways her unchallenged scepter. It is the dread stillness and peace of death! Beware of such a peace of the soul as this. It is possible to continue, even to the last, self-deluded and self-deceived, and to die with a lie in your right hand. But be assured, from such a peace there will be a terrible awaking. It is only the portentous silence which, in the outer world, holds nature silent before the bursting of the thunderstorm. "There is no peace"--there can be no peace, "says God, to the wicked."

Be it yours to ascertain, before it be too late, on what foundation your peace rests. Give up the vain dream of procuring peace in anything short of Jesus. No wealth can give it; no wealth of money, no wealth of intellect, no wealth of affection. Live near the cross, and peace is yours. "How beautiful upon the mountains" are the feet of the divine messenger who "publishes peace!"

You may now be racked with care, fevered with disappointment, and, worse than all, bound and fettered with sin. Like the maniac of old dwelling among the tombs, you may be roaming the moral wastes, crying and cutting yourself with stones. One voice alone can tame you, and change the storm of the soul into a calm--that one is JESUS. There (at His cross and His feet) you will have possession of peace--peace from the condemning sentence of the law--peace from the accusations of a guilty conscience--peace amid the trials of life--peace in the prospect of approaching dissolution. You will have peace in the gladdening, sustaining conviction that all events are under your Redeemer's control--that He orders all that concerns your temporal and eternal well-being. You can sleep securely in the tempest, for the helm is in the hands of Him

whom these winds and waves obey. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever."

Speed, then, your flight, O weary wanderer, to the true Ark. The true Noah, the "Rest," the Peace-giver, invites you within. Seize the olive-branch, and wing your way across the stormy waters. The bough on which your earthly nest was built, may have been felled by the axe or broken by the storm; but "He is our peace." And as driven by the windy tempest your cry is, "O Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, grant me Your peace!"--O Rock of Ages, cleft and smitten for me, grant me Your shelter!

May it be yours to listen to the glad response, "My peace I give unto you"--"Though you have lived among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

## **CHRIST A SAVIOR TO THE UTTERMOST**

"He is able also to save unto the uttermost, those who come unto God by Him." --Hebrews 7:25

"Who is a God like You? None can pardon as You do. None can pardon so freely; none so fully; none so eternally; none so effectually, as You do. It is all one to You, whatever the sins are; and all one to You, whose the sins are; so long as they come ask pardon of You. --Caryl, 1670.

The pressing, urgent question with a thousand thousand anxious souls--overwhelmed with the weight of aggravated transgression--is this--"Can this God-Man-Redeemer--this Surety-Substitute--be a Savior for all indiscriminately? A shelter and refuge for others, can these Rock-clefts be open for the guiltiest?" It is the old controversy that Satan has with many--whom he first goads on to presumption, and then, when entangled in his meshes, he seeks to drive to despair. Many such has that merciless warder shut up in the deepest dungeons of "Doubting Castle"--gloomy cells, where the sunlight is forbidden to enter--and rung over them the

knell of 'extinguished hope'. The crushing thought of personal unworthiness--the memories of guilty bygone years, rise up before them like avenging angels.

What! this Savior and salvation for ME--it cannot be! I have plunged madly into sin--not, like others, because I have never been warned--never counseled--never known the tenderness of a mother's prayers, nor the sanctity of a father's entreaties, nor the privileges of a hallowed home. I have been oblivious of all these. Even now, I seem to listen (though in years long gone by), to voices which I have lived basely to scorn--to counsels I have trampled on--the retrospect all the sadder by the reflection that the lips which spoke them are hushed in the grave--and the arms that of old cuddled me, as on Sabbath night I knelt by the loved knee, are mouldering in the tomb.

What! Christ receive ME, with all that diary of a misspent, godless, defiant life unveiled to His omniscient eye!--deeds of foul depravity--outbursts of fiery passion--malignant purposes of revenge--dishonest deals in business--undermining my neighbor and my friend's name and character to advance my own--secret crimes which have involved the ruin of the innocent--my own ship fatally sunk--but worse far than this, miserable wrecks for which I am guiltily responsible, strewing the shores. Mine is not, as it is with many, a mere upper layer of iniquity; but it is deposit on deposit--strata piled on strata--the mournful consolidation of a life of sin; ten thousand echoes ring along the dreary corridors of the past, "lost! lost! lost!" "Surely my way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God."

No not so! Aggravated as your case is, it is never hopeless; you cannot hear your spiritual death-knell tolled, so long as you can read the golden letters which head this meditation--"Able to save unto the uttermost." You may have been to the uttermost a sinner--you may have gone the sickening round of all life's follies--run riot of its whole enchanted circle--no prodigal may have ever wallowed deeper in the mire and morass than you. O Israel, you may have destroyed yourself--there may be not one redeeming feature in your case--not one gleaning left for the grape-gatherer--you may be a stripped, defenseless, degenerate Vine--fit only for the axe and the cumberer's doom.

But hearken to the words of God--"In Me is your help." "I know the thoughts which I think towards you--thoughts of peace and not of evil!" "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." "I--even I"--the very Being you have most deeply injured--whose Spirit you have grieved--whose mercies you have scorned--I, the Almighty Creditor, am ready to grant and sign a full pardon--"Him that comes unto Me I will in nowise cast out." The Stronger than the strong man armed, sounds the silver trumpet of jubilee, "He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." And blessed have been the millions who have heard that joyful sound!

There is indeed one sin mentioned in Scripture, but only one, which debars any soul from the Savior--the sin which is left purposely wrapped in its own undefined dreadful mystery--"the sin against the Holy Spirit!" But if there be, in the case of the most apparently hopeless, one breathing of penitence--one prayerful aspiration after a nobler being, then we believe we are warranted in saying, that which is called "the unpardonable sin" you have not committed. If you had, your heart would have been utterly impervious to conviction--all the avenues of conscience would have been closed. Like the fool spoken of by the Psalmist who has reached the climax of his hardihood, you would have remained callous and indifferent to every pleading voice, alike in Providence and grace--despising the credulous weakness of those around you who are listening to 'the idle tales,' and saying in your inmost heart--"No God for me!"

However far therefore you may have fallen, if the feeblest sigh of contrition be still heaved, it demonstrates that you are still a 'prisoner of hope,' and gives you encouragement to "turn to the stronghold." One warming beam of the Sun of Righteousness finding its way amid the frigid icebergs of your moral being, is evidence sufficient that you are not left icebound in the winter of eternal desertion; in one word, that yours is not the sin that is beyond the reach of forgiveness; but that we are abundantly warranted to address you now in the glorious words, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, and He will abundantly pardon." "Why sit still?" says Bunyan, in



his "Jerusalem Sinner Saved"--"arise. Why stand still? 'Begin at Jerusalem' is your call and authority to come. Therefore, up! and shoulder it, man! Say, Stand away, Devil, Christ calls me--stand away, unbelief, Christ calls me--stand away, all you my desponding apprehensions, for my Savior calls me to receive of His mercy."

Let us not, however, in these encouraging thoughts, be misunderstood. Let none say--If such be the gracious, unrestricted offer of the Gospel--if Christ can save the vilest and the basest--if He can save at the very verge and extremity of life, may I not live now as I please, and trust to His mercy at my deathbed? No! That Gospel of pardon and forgiveness is not for the future, it is for the present moment. The words are not--"He SHALL be able to save to the uttermost," but "He IS able"--not "he who SHALL believe," but "he who believes shall be saved." You can put no presumptuous reliance on a deferred repentance. Moreover, be assured, the farther you advance in willful unbelief and impenitence, the harder will it be to put an arrest on your downward course. The stone, as it descends from the mountain top, increases in momentum and velocity. Each new bound it takes, is alike greater and swifter, until with a final leap it disappears. Every hour you live unsaved, you are bounding, like that stone, with accelerated speed, down the dark precipices.

The child's hand can stop in its course a ball of snow as it is loosened at the hill summit, but who could arrest its rush, when grown into an avalanche, it thunders onward from crag to crag towards the Valley. Add to this--by guilty presumptuous delay, you miss the present joy and happiness of forgiveness--the joy, while walking through this world, while mingling in its cares and duties and trials, of rising above them all, under the elevating consciousness "I am forgiven;" and of joining in the sweet melody--"O Lord, I will praise You, for though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comforted me!"

One other closing thought suggests itself, by laying emphasis on the first word of our motto-verse--"HE is able to save." Christ is not only a Savior to the uttermost, but He is the only Savior. Reject Him, and "there is no more offering for sin." "Neither is there salvation in any other." "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, who is Jesus Christ." How many are reluctant to accept of this truth in all its unqualified

freeness. They would sincerely raise up some personal work in the matter of their justification. They refuse to entrust to the great Physician their entire cure. They would gather some of the balm of Gilead with their own hands--they would weave some of the web of merit on their own loom. Others would vaunt their good deeds, and make these excuse and palliate their bad deeds; striking a balance between merit and demerit; presuming that by a law of moral compensation, the average will fully entitle them to God's favor. Others hope to meet the undischarged debt of the past and condone shortcomings by a better future, giving the promissory-note to the great Creditor, "Have patience with me, and I will pay You all."

But what says Jehovah? "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is NO Savior." Nothing dare come in the place of the one work of Immanuel. The giant deed of His doing and dying must stand alone in its integrity, admitting neither substitute nor supplement. "Salvation," says the Psalmist (from first to last), "salvation belongs unto God." Those attempting to thrust in something of meritorious SELF, only put stumbling-blocks in the king's highway. They only load the wings of the dove with needless encumbrances--hamper and retard its flight to the clefts of the one Rock of safety. They are trusting their anchors, not to a chain of iron but to a cord of thread. They are doing what will all be undone. They are ploughing the sand only that it may collapse in its own furrow. They are laboring in the fire only to have the result of their toil consumed. They are building on the bough of the tree whose roots the winter flood is fast sapping, instead of having "their nest in a rock."

"He only," says the Minstrel King, "is my Rock and my Salvation." "Lord, save me, else I perish," said Peter, as, with sinking step, he turned his eye from the unstable billow to the Divine Being at his side. Perhaps it was with this Gennesaret memory recalled, that he could, long afterwards, proclaim to skeptic Jews and mocking heathen the noble confession of his faith--"There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved."

Ah, when shall the self-deceived and self-satisfied learn, not to come, like Naaman, to the door of the true Elisha, with ornamented horses and magnificent chariot filled with gifts, expecting to be told to do some

"great thing?"--but ready, at the bidding of the Gracious Physician, to go with their incurable leprosy straight to the waters of the living stream, and there "wash and be clean." "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money--come! buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."

You, then, who are wandering "in the wilderness in a solitary way," your soul fainting within you, mocked again and again with the mirage of life, the hollow nothingness of this painted world; or you, perhaps, whose wilderness experience is different; the hot blinding wind of trial unexpectedly overtaking you, strewing your caravan on the desert sands, and leaving priceless treasures hidden from your sight--oh turn from the perishable to the imperishable; turn from torn tents and shattered canvas to the only secure shelter, saying, "The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Thousands on thousands, with drooping wing and wailing cry, have flown for refuge beyond the storm-clouds of earth to these glorious Rock-clefts, and yet there is room; pardon for all, peace for all, heaven for all. Hear the sainted multitude, as, in garments whiter than snow, they cast their crowns before the throne and pour forth their eternal anthem to the one Savior--"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood!"

## **CHRIST RISEN**

"The Lord is risen indeed!" –Luke 24:34

Among the many Rock-clefts of the believer's trust, pre-eminent in importance and value is the Resurrection of Jesus, forming as it does the crowning proof of the Redeemer's divine mission.

In the hour indeed of deepest humiliation, when pouring out His life's blood on the cross, there were not lacking signs and miracles which evidenced and proclaimed His Godhead glory. There were wondrous symbols in the heavens, and strange convulsions on earth. The shrouded dead rose from their graves. The High Priest was disturbed in his

devotions by the mysterious rending of the temple-veil. The sun was draped in darkness as if his race were prematurely run. But, along with these, there were also startling contrasts.

His marred visage is motionless, in death. He who saved others seems powerless to save Himself; He has perished with a felon's excruciating torture. The funeral rites are over. He who raised others from the tomb, is Himself laid lifeless in the sepulcher. The stone is rolled to the mouth of the cave, and the fond hopes of the disconsolate disciples seem crushed forever--"We hoped it had been He that would have redeemed Israel." But on the third day the Divine Conqueror rose triumphant. The glad tidings are circulated from lip to lip, "The Lord is risen indeed;" and from that memorable moment He was declared in apostolic teaching, to be "the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." As this was the most important fact of all the incidents of the incarnation to have established on clear and decisive evidence (Christianity as a system must stand or fall with it), so did God provide that it should be accredited and authenticated by "many infallible PROOFS." Let us in a few words enumerate these.

The Jewish authorities made sure His sepulcher. It was a sepulcher hewn out of a rock--leaving being thus impossible, except by the one entrance. A band of Roman soldiers were stationed around it, to whom sleeping on watch would have been dishonor and death. A clear passover moon, also, defied the abstracting of the body by stealth in the dark.

And with regard to the testimony of the disciples, it is incredible, when all the circumstances are weighed, that they could be either deceivers or self-deceived. What motive could a handful of illiterate, unsophisticated men have had, in secretively possessing themselves of a dead body, and upholding an imposture? What possibly could induce them to circulate and uphold a cunningly devised fable, when persecution and imprisonment was their only recompense for doing so? Peter had more than once shown a craven spirit. What could have made this Feeble-heart become "bold as a lion," if we resolve that boldness into a mission through the world to defend a lie, and at last to be crucified, as tradition asserts, in a more cruel form and with more intense physical suffering than his Master? And the same is equally true with regard to all the

others. There was nothing conceivable for these unlettered, simple-hearted fishermen to gain, by propagating an enormous falsehood. It could bring them neither riches, nor worldly influence, nor renown. It would infallibly draw down upon them scorn and contempt, if not bonds and suffering and death--martyrdom, as in the case of James, with the sword--long exile and lonely banishment as in the case of John.

Paul, also, like "one born out of due time," had surrendered all his hopes of earthly distinction to uphold the fact of a risen Savior. Wonderfully does he unfold and vindicate this cardinal article of his creed, in that noble treatise on the Resurrection, contained in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians. His pleadings are not like the pleadings of a deceiving advocate--a man who was propping up a desperate and untenable cause--it is the grand exposition of one who would stake his all, yes, life itself, on his fervid heartfelt utterances.

While they had thus no conceivable object in deceiving others, it is equally impossible and improbable that the apostles could themselves have been deceived. It is true they were plain men, but they were no fanatics. They were just such a jury as in this country would enlist our confidence, in submitting a case for decision, which required no more than the testimony of their senses and average powers of discrimination. Though unskilled in the world's wisdom and philosophy and science, they possessed honest minds, capable of taking broad and commonsense views of things. And if some would aver, that, as the disciples of Christ who had accompanied with Him, they were likely to be biased in their opinions, and more disposed than others to be credulous--we know from their own conduct, on the day of alleged resurrection, that it was not so--rather the reverse. They were slow to believe--their faith had been shattered by the crucifixion-scene. When the Risen Lord appeared, not a few doubted; others denounced the wondrous tidings of a vacant sepulcher as "idle tales;" one would not give his assent until he could have tangible evidence of the fact. Not until he had touched the gash of the spear and the holes in the hands and feet, would he renounce his incredulity, and give in his adherence, as he did, by the emphatic utterance, "My Lord and my God."

Add to this, for the space of forty days after the resurrection, they had

been familiar with their Lord's presence--so familiar, as to make sure of His personal identity. Their eyes had seen--their ears had heard--their hands had handled the Word of Life; enabling them to give the united testimony (James, Peter, the twelve, the "five hundred brethren at once"), "This Jesus, God has raised up, whereof we ALL are witnesses." In truth, few historical facts are so well authenticated; and those who refuse to admit its evidence as sufficient, must be incredulous and skeptical about other remarkable events in the world, based and established on ordinary data. Reject the truth of the Resurrection because the evidence is inadequate, and the annals of the past must become a blank; skeptical on this, we must be skeptical on the most important incidents of profane history. Xenophon and Herodotus, Tacitus and Livy, Gibbon and Macaulay, need not have written. Their facts are myths--and the last four thousand years of the world are a chaos.

From what we have said, then, we may cease to marvel at the pre-eminent importance assigned by the inspired writers to this great sheet-anchor of the Church's faith. From the frequency with which they allude to it, even the peerless truth, Christ crucified, seems to give way in their estimate to Christ risen. And for this reason, as we shall subsequently show, that the one would be valueless without the other. The glorious light, illuminating the tomb of Jesus, throws its radiations on almost every other doctrine of the Christian system. The believer's justification, regeneration, sanctification, resurrection, glorification--each has its halo of glory borrowed from that vacant sepulcher. "The Resurrection" seems, with the sacred penmen, to be the article of a standing or a falling faith. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Paul, to his cultured auditory on Mars' Hill, preached "Jesus and the Resurrection." "It is Christ," says he, "who died, YES RATHER who is risen again." Once more, in the concluding benediction of the great Epistle to the Hebrews, it is the Redeemer's Resurrection which is specially singled out as the mightiest of God's mighty acts--"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

We shall cease to wonder at the relative importance assigned by the apostles to this soul-stirring doctrine, when we briefly glance at three, out of the many glorious truths, which cluster around it.

I. It was the public token of the Father's acceptance of the work of Christ. God, by thus raising Him from the place of the dead, and not allowing Him to see corruption, expressed His full and unqualified satisfaction with the great atoning Sacrifice. At the commencement of His Son's ministry, He had given public attestation to His divine mission by the heavenly voice and the descent of the dove. He would now at its close, give visible demonstration that the crowning oblation was accepted, and that the expiring cry, "It is finished," uttered on earth, had been heard and ratified in Heaven. "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father." The demands and penalties of the law having been discharged and fulfilled by His obedience unto death, it was now consistent with the honor of the Father's name, that "His Beloved should be delivered," that "He should save with His right hand and hear Him." The Surety-Substitute descended into the lonesome prison-house of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him within its rocky cavern. If one single sin had remained unatoned for, the stone would to this hour have remained sealed, and the hopes of untold millions been buried along with the Captive. Death stormed the citadel. For a moment its walls trembled under the assaulting foe, and the Divine Vanquisher seemed the vanquished. But it was only His heel the serpent touched--no more! He had completed the work which the Father had given Him to do. He could not be held captive by death. The superincumbent stone (befitting symbol of a violated law) has been rolled away, and two white-robed angels are seated in the deserted tomb, to tell the glad news, "The Lord is risen!"

The believer can now triumphantly exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Satan, death, and hell, are chained as trophies to the wheels of His conquering Chariot. He leads these "captive multitudes

captive;" taking from them all the armor wherein they trusted, and dividing the spoils. As we behold Him, on that early morning of a new dispensation, carrying in his hand the iron crown of the King of Terrors-- a voice proceeding from the excellent glory seems to repeat the old assurance, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

"Lord of Life and Glory," says Bishop Hall, "is there any weak soul that makes doubt of Your complete atonement for his sin; of the perfect accomplishment of the great work of man's Redemption? You raised Yourself from the dead leaving that prison of the grave whence You could not have come, until You had paid all." Or as Bishop Reynolds similarly expresses it, "Therefore the Lord sent an angel to remove the stone from the mouth of the Sepulcher; not to supply any lack of power in Him, who could Himself have rolled away the stone with one of His fingers; but as a judge, when the law is satisfied, sends an officer to open the prison doors to him who has made that satisfaction, so the Father, to testify that His justice was fully satisfied with the price which the Son had paid, sent an officer from heaven to open the doors of the grave, while his Lord came forth from His bed-chamber."

II. Almost identical with this view, and arising out of it, the Resurrection of Jesus was a pledge of the believer's complete justification. In manifold passages of the New Testament a 'oneness' is represented as existing between Christ and His Church. Every notable official act in the Incarnation was performed by Him in His federal character, as our covenant Head and Representative. When He died, it was reckoned as if His people had died with Him. "I am crucified," says the apostle, "with Christ." "Reckon also yourselves to be dead unto sin." And when the buried Savior rises victorious from the grave, the Church, His mystical body, is represented as rising with Him. "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Him from the dead." And again, to the same effect, believers are spoken of, as being "quicken together with Christ."

As our adorable Redeemer left behind Him in His tomb the mementoes of victory, so the believer, by virtue of this union with his Lord, becomes a partaker in the same great Resurrection triumph. With every fetter of condemnation struck off his limbs, every brand of condemnation effaced



from his soul, he walks forth "alive from the dead" claiming as the glorious security of his new resurrection-life, that because Christ lives he shall live also. Thus God the Father, by raising the Living Head, sets His seal to the pardon and justification of all the members. "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

Yes, coming to the empty grave of Jesus, we can see in these scattered trophies the pledge and guarantee of our own spiritual emancipation. Written on that tomb are the words--"It is God who justifies, who is he that condemns?" However much we may delight to stand under the shadow of Calvary's Cross, and listen to the Conqueror's dying words, declaring the work finished and the victory won--with not less holy but rather augmented interest do we approach the mouth of the sepulcher, there to be the privileged auditors of tidings fraught with everlasting consolation--"He is not here, He is risen, as He said; come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Reader, remember too, in the light of that sepulcher, that yours is a completed justification. By virtue of your living union with your living Savior, your acceptance with God is not a question that remains indeterminate and unsettled. It has been settled--the accounts have been closed--the debt liquidated. "Now," says the apostle, "if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death has no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once--but in that He lives, He lives unto God. Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin--but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Standing with your feet on that displaced grave-stone, and your eye heavenwards, you can join with Paul in challenging the heights above, and the depths beneath, ever again to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord.

III. The Resurrection of Jesus was a pledge and pledge of the Resurrection of His people. "If a man dies, will he live again?" is a problem insoluble by natural religion. What is called the argument from analogy, when we come rigidly to sift it, is really at best not an argument. It is an illustration, a corroboration, no more. To take two well-known and familiar instances. The farmer casts his seed into the furrow--these

handfuls of seed, laid in winter in an earthy sepulcher, rise in spring exultant from their tomb. No, more, they become, in harvest, fields of yellow corn a hundredfold multiplied. Can analogy fairly point to this, as a triumphant demonstration and prophecy of the body's resurrection? It is a type of it--but no proof of it. And why? Because that buried seed, or rather each individual grain, is not dead. Inert, lifeless though it seems to be, it has within it the germinating principle--the latent element of vitality. The earth of the field into which it is cast is not its grave. It is the nurturing home of a still living thing, which the clods of the valley only serve to foster and develop. Or look at the example of the torpid chrysalis, which in summer starts into resurrection beauty in the form of the butterfly. That chrysalis, also, inanimate as it seems, is not lifeless. Vitality is within the repulsive shell. It is in a dormant state. No more. It only waits the return of summer suns and summer skies, to awake from its sleep of darkness and begin its winged existence.

But it is altogether different with the body of man laid in the grave. The analogy is imperfect--rather, it completely fails. There is here no dormant state--no mere condition of torpor. It is utter death--decay--dissolution--brotherhood and sisterhood with the worm and corruption. It is dust resolved into dust--ashes resolved into ashes--earth resolved into earth! Thus, however suggestive these be as illustrations (and we are abundantly warranted to take them as such), they form no proof whatever of the certainty of the body's future and final resuscitation. They are beautiful guesses of a great truth culled from the Volume of Nature--but that is all. And when the solemn question is propounded over the grave--"Son of Man, can these bones live?"--Reason can give no more--natural theology can give no more--than the modest answer of the prophet--"O Lord God, You know."

But coming to the grave of Jesus, there we have the problem solved. The Great Abolisher of death has brought life and immortality to light. We hear Him proclaiming, "I am the resurrection and the life," and the gladdening truth is caught up and echoed by one after another of the "glorious company of the apostles." "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies." "Christ being raised from the dead dies no more, death has no more dominion over Him." "Begotten

again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Who by Him do believe in God, who raised Him up from the dead."

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of those who slept." The First fruits--either as a sheaf, or the earliest gatherings of the harvest--were of old taken with pomp and rejoicing to the Jewish temple, and "waived" there "as an offering before the Lord"--the pledge alike of corn-crop and vintage before long to follow. So has the Divine 'Sheaf' (if we can venture, with reverence, to apply the symbol) been waived in the Heavenly Temple, the pledge of a coming harvest of immortal redeemed spirits, the fruit of His soul-travail. Nor is it unworthy of note, that there was a remarkable correspondence between the olden Israelitish type and the antitype. The offering of the first fruits of barley harvest among the Jews, took place on "the morrow after the Sabbath" that is, on the third day after the passover. Jesus was crucified on the passover-day. He was laid in His grave on the Jewish passover Sabbath. But on the third morn He rose--the very day in which these first fruits of the land were offered in the temple. As the type was being presented in the earthly courts, angels were bearing to the Heavenly the tidings of a risen Antitype. They carried the First sheaf, the glorious pledge of a mighty harvest--gathering in the morning of the general Resurrection, when 'the Church throughout all the world,'--the vast family of the ransomed from earliest to latest eras--would be assembled before the supreme tribunal, to listen to the words of the enthroned Judge, "Behold I and the children which God has given Me!"

It was that Resurrection hour for which Jesus Himself is represented as longing from all eternity, when pillowed on the Father's bosom. Then He joyed "according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." He seems to bound over intervening ages; and with His eye first on His own vacant tomb, and then on the myriads His Resurrection foreshadowed, He is represented as exclaiming--"I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plagues! O grave, I will be your destruction!" No wonder that the Resurrection of Christ has been for the last 1800 years a joyful day--that our Sabbaths are its solemn

commemorations. It was the truth of all truths among the primitive believers. It was not the day of His death they made their Sabbath, but the First day of the week--the day when the sadness of the weeping women at the sepulcher was turned into gladness--and their watchword at meeting (the word of congratulation and welcome) was not "the Lord has died," but "the Lord has risen." It was with them a day of praise, more than for confession; for psalms of thanksgiving, more than for penitential tears. Conscious that a new and nobler Genesis had dawned on a benighted world, they sung in responsive melody, "This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it."

The pledges of the outer material creation are welcome and joyful. If we hail with grateful spirit the first budding of early spring in grove and field, because in these we see the pledge that soon nature will be arrayed in her full robes of resurrection beauty--with what feelings ought we to stand by the sepulcher of our Lord, and see the buried Conqueror rising triumphant over the last enemy! Do we not behold in Him, the harbinger of an immortal spring-time, or rather a glorious harvest, when the mounds of the earth, and the caves of the ocean, shall surrender what they have held for ages in sacred custody, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality," and the summons shall go forth, "Awake and sing you that dwell in dust." "Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming!"

Not satisfied with His own Resurrection as a pledge of His people's, Jesus gave, in the course of His ministry on earth, four striking confirmatory attestations to the same gospel truth; and as has been noted, there is an impressive and significant sequence in these four successive instances of victory over death. The first was in the case of Jairus' daughter. She was "now dead;" the last enemy had only just gained his triumph. The second was the case of the son of the widow of Nain--"He was carried out"--death had for two days put his icy brand on the pale brow. The third is the case of Lazarus, a farther step in the progression--"he has been dead four days"--corruption begun. The final case was on the occasion of the commencing Easter of the Church, when from the graves which had previously been opened by the quaking earth and rending rocks, "many

bodies of the saints which slept arose." If the proof had rested with these four illustrative instances of resurrection, we might still have been staggered. They were only temporary resuscitations--no more. They effected only a transitory respite from the iron grasp of the King of Terrors.

Lazarus and his restored compeers had the gloomy portals a second time to enter--these withered flowers were revived only to decay--their dust is probably at this moment reposing in one of the Valleys around Jerusalem. But the great Conqueror dies no more, death has no more dominion over Him. He carried away with Him forever the gates of Hades. "You will not leave My soul in the place of the dead, neither will You allow Your holy One to see corruption."

Come then, believer, enter into this cleft of the Rock. How it disarms death of all its terrors, to hear the unconquered Lord of Life proclaiming through the bars of the grave, "I am He who lives. I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." In Adam, the first federal head, we are hereditary bondsmen--"in Adam all die." But in our second Head, the Lord from heaven, "shall all be made alive." The grave is converted into a bed of repose, where the sleeping but redeemed dust "rests in hope."

You who have priceless treasures in the tomb, think of this! "So He gives His beloved sleep"--"them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." True, that "house of our earthly tabernacle" at death, is a "darksome ruin." That dust is resolved into its kindred dust. The constituent elements of the dismantled framework are incorporated with new forms of matter. Sad and terrible truly is dissolution in all its accompaniments. We do not wish to strew that dismal path with flowers. Death, from the earthly view of it, is not irradiated by one gleam of sunshine. The slow and gradual wasting and decay, the fading of the bloom from the cheek, the languor of the eye, the wearisome days, the long night-vigils, the mind participating in slow degrees with the wreck of the body, memory often a total blank, even the fondest look and the fondest name eliciting no response! Then the close of all--the silent chamber, where "echo slumbers;" the noiseless footfall, the mute crowd of mourners, the grave, the return to the silent dwelling, and the vacant

seat--O Death, truly here is your sting; O Grave, truly here is your victory!

But the day is coming when all these memories of woe shall vanish, like the darkness before the morning sun. When the spoil of plundering ages shall in a mysterious way be all restored--when, as in the Prophet's Valley of Vision, bone shall come to bone, and sinew to sinew; the old loving smiles of earth will be seen again in the newly glorified body, purged from all the dross and alloy of its old materialism--the drooping withered flower reviving, beauteous and fragrant with the bloom of immortality!

But for the Death and Resurrection of Christ and the blessed hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life in Him, how cheerless, how repulsive would be every thought of the grave. How we might well shrink from all its associations, and make the very mention of the name of loved ones a proscribed and forbidden theme--saying, Consign them, as soon as may be, into cheerless oblivion--let them sleep on in their clay couch, unremembered; draw close the grassy curtains around them--whisper not that word into my ear, it only brings memories of darkness and annihilation!

No, no!--talk not of the living as among the dead. "Weep not;" he or she "is not dead but sleeps!" "Why do you weep?" was the question of the risen Conqueror, as He gazed on a tear-dimmed eye on His Resurrection morn. The Christian's grave need be watered by no tears; for Jesus has converted it into the vestibule of heaven, the robing-room for immortality. Oh! to live as "the children of the resurrection;" as those who are waiting for their Heavenly Father's final adoption--"the redemption of our bodies." We know not the constituents of the higher natures of the invisible world--what are those angel-forms which move in ceaseless errands and ministries of holy love, doing God's pleasure. But no elevation of their immortal being can be higher than that of those, who, from dust, are destined to spring into union (we had almost said assimilation) with deity, "fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body." No more shall there be the elements of decay; no more "the sentence of death in themselves;" no furrow ploughed on the cheek, no wrinkle of age on the brow; but when stars shall fall from their orbits, and worlds succumb to the present laws of decadence, they shall still be in the immortal youth of undying life!



## CHRIST ASCENDED

"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things."--Eph. 4:10

We have listened in our last, to the glorious tidings, another echo from the Rock of Ages--"The Lord has risen!" We have stood in thought by the entrance to the vacant sepulcher; seen the stone rolled away, and angel-warders telling of Him "Whom God has raised up; having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be captive by it."

When the now reassured disciples were fully certified of the amazing fact, may we not well imagine that the thought which would suggest itself to their minds, dominating all others, would be this--"Is He now to remain with us?" Is the adorable presence of this Conqueror of death to be given as a permanent inheritance and boon to His Church? No, further, "Is the time now arrived for the often-predicted Messianic reign, when we, as His privileged assessors, are to be seated on twelve thrones--the tribal heads in a new and more blessed theocracy?"

No! Strange and startling, surely, the first message must have been which the Risen One sends them. He bids the weeping disconsolate Mary dry her own tears and theirs, but not with the gladdening assurance that He is now to continue forever in their midst, as a Friend and Guide, to cheer them with His fellowship, and animate them with the tones of His living voice. He sends rather the unexpected announcement--that He must speedily leave them--"Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father, and to My God, and your God." Accordingly, as is minutely described in the sacred narrative, after remaining with His infant Church for forty days subsequent to His resurrection--thus affording His followers ample time and opportunity to have their convictions established, on irrefutable evidence, regarding the reality of that great event--and after giving all requisite instructions relative to the proclamation of His Gospel and the extension of His Church and kingdom, the Divine Master led His more privileged disciples



out "as far as to Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them--and it came to pass that while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven."

Let us enter this new "Cleft of the rock;" and under its shelter, meditate on the grounds of confidence and joy which the believer has in the contemplation of his Lord's Ascension. In doing so, let us state and endeavor to illustrate, two leading and prominent reasons among others, why it was thus necessary and expedient that He should "go away"--why it behooved, not only that Christ should have "suffered these things," but also to have "entered into His glory."

I. The Ascension of Christ formed the divine attestation to the full completion of His mediatorial work. We have already seen, among other great truths which cluster around the Resurrection, that it may be regarded as a public declaration on the part of the Father, that the wages of sin were all paid--that the penalty of the law had been borne in the person of the Surety-Substitute, who was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

But legal release from the condemning sentence of the law, was not the whole which the Redeemer undertook in the salvation of His Church. It was indeed a vast part of it--to have the chains struck off, the prison-doors opened, and the glorious words pronounced, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The work undertaken by the Great Surety from all eternity had, however, far more stupendous issues. It contemplated nothing short of recovering to man ALL that he had lost and forfeited by the fall. Not only was the flaming sword of the cherubim to be turned away, or quenched in the blood of His cross, but the closed gates of a better than earthly Paradise were to be re-opened. Not only was the divine law to be vindicated and magnified; but the divine love--that love which bathed in sunlight-beams the groves of the first Eden--was to be restored, and the happiness of that endearing communion revived, when "the voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day." In one word, Paradise lost was to be Paradise regained. Having overcome the sharpness of death, the great Forerunner was to open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

How was this glorious achievement--this wondrous consummation to be certified? As the Resurrection of Christ from the dead constituted the public evidence and testimony of the remission of their sins--so His entrance into heaven was to form the pledge and guarantee of His people's final glorification. We have already seen, that in all the more prominent and important events of His previous ministry on earth, the adorable Redeemer stood as the Representative of His people; that they were identified with Him--reckoned as participants in His mediatorial work. When He DIED, it was legally counted as if they had died along with Him--when He ROSE, as if they had risen along with Him. So now when He ASCENDED, it was also in His federal or representative character as the Vicar of His Church.

Believers--the members of His mystical body, though still left in earth's "Valley of Vision" amid scenes of corruption and death, to grapple with sin and temptation--are yet, again and again, spoken of in Scripture, as if they had already received (by anticipation in the Person of their Head) the great covenanted reward--already been "made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Let the following passages in proof suffice--"Who HAS raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ." "For our citizenship IS in Heaven." "You have come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God--to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." "Who HAS made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."

We rejoice, indeed, to contemplate in the ascension of the Redeemer, the fit reward of His own sufferings and humiliation--the fulfillment of His own last prayer, "Now, O Father, glorify You Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was." "When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "Sat down"--a significant figure--the emblem of rest. The mighty work is done--the Victor is reposing at the close of the campaign--"His rest shall be glorious." But it is more than this. We see in Him the Precursor of a mighty multitude which no man can number, who, in His ascension and glorification, have the pledge and prelude of their own.

To take a feeble earthly simile. A brave leader, in capturing a city, takes possession of it, not for himself, but in the name of the Sovereign and of

his or her people. So does the Divine ascending Conqueror, in entering the Heavenly Jerusalem, take possession of it in the name of His Church on earth--"the Queen" who is yet to "stand at His right hand in gold of Ophir." The words of the Prophet, in which he speaks of the members, we may apply for a moment, in part, to their great Head--"He shall enter," says Isaiah, "into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in His uprightness." He, their Representative, enters into His own purchased peace--the enjoyment of His stipulated reward. And "they" (they His people) "shall rest!" Their work too is done; for He has done it for them--and if they have not yet entered, like their Precursor, into the realms of heavenly peace--if the night of earth must intervene before the morning break--they may "rest in their beds" and dream of a glorious day-dawn--even of "walking in the uprightness" of their crowned and exalted Redeemer--waiting for the joyous hour when His voice will be heard--"Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust." One in mystical union now, they can anticipate the hour, when they shall be one in full vision and fruition, and so be "ever with the Lord."

And, moreover, as it is God the Father who is represented as the efficient Agent in all the previous parts and stages of the Redeemer's mediatorial work--"God so loved the world"--"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation"--"It pleased the Lord to bruise Him"--"Whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead"--so this same adorable First person in the Ever-Blessed Trinity, is described as setting His seal to the great public act of ascension and enthronement--welcoming, in the Person of the Representative Head, all the believing members. "HE has set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places" "Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name." When we hearken, therefore, to the Father saying to His Divine Son--"Sit on My right hand"--we listen, in that coronation welcome, to more than a personal address. We hear in it the authority addressed to His Church for the glorification of all its members; that they are served heirs in Him to their regal honors--that will they be in possession of the stipulated reward. "With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought--they shall enter into the King's palace." It is the Father welcoming the Elder and the Prodigal Son in one, within the patrimonial halls. As He looks to the once ragged and tattered outcast,

now wearing the best robe and jeweled ring and glittering sandals, and then from Him to a truer "Elder Brother" than that depicted in the parable, even the Divine Being who had brought back the wanderer from spiritual poverty and death to blessedness and life--He exclaims, "Son, You are ever with Me, and all that I have is Your. It was fit that we should make merry and be glad--for this Your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

II. Another special reason for Christ's Ascension, was in order that the gift of the Holy Spirit might be conferred upon the Church. When that first intimation to His disciples of His approaching departure fell from the Savior's lips, we may picture to ourselves the agonizing feelings of the attached and loving band. 'What!' would doubtless have been their exclamation, had their individual and united thoughts found utterance in words. 'What! Go away! Can it be that these brief years of sacred and devout communion are to vanish like a dream? Can it be that we are to be severed from Him who has been to us better than the best of masters and the fondest of parents?--that we are to be left as sheep without a shepherd, orphaned, forlorn, in a desolate world? This is death indeed.'

Stranger still, perhaps, would be the first impression made by the words in which the sudden announcement was conveyed. "It is necessary." How can it possibly be so? How can it possibly be better, for us, timid and inexperienced mariners, to be left without our Pilot to buffet these stormy seas? How can it be better for us, a helpless and trembling flock, to be deprived of the Great Pastor's presence; abandoned to grapple, as best we can, with the briars and thorns of the wilderness? How often has He sought that among us which was lost, and brought again that which was driven away, and bound up that which was broken, and strengthened that which was sick! When the storm was gathering overhead, and the wolf was prowling on our path, we had this sure cleft--the shadow of this "Great Rock" ever to repair to, for safety and repose. But now, we shall be left unsheltered and unsuccored in the dark and cloudy day! Oh, need we wonder that as the Divine Redeemer, on the occasion referred to, looked around on the sad faces and, perhaps, tear-dimmed eyes which at that moment met His own, He added, "And because I have said these things unto you, sorrow has filled your hearts."

But having stated the startling fact, He proceeds to assign one very special reason for this departure and its expediency— that is, that there was a divine Agent, a heavenly Comforter, to come in His stead--whose presence in the Church would compensate, and more than compensate, for His own absence. "It is necessary for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." In His valedictory discourse, again and again does He revert to the same cheering truth. As there is often some one prominent thought which fills the mind of a dying parent when he gathers his children around his couch, some one special charge which he endeavors by reiteration vividly to impress on their memories--so does this coming of "the Comforter" seem to be the leading thought or theme of consolation on which the Redeemer fondly dwells, as His own dying hour approaches.

The advent of the glorious Third person in the adorable Trinity is elsewhere, in more passages than one, said to be contingent or dependent on the Savior's departure. "The Holy Spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified." No sooner did the ascension take place, than the bereft men of Galilee returned from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem, to wait, according to the last injunction of their ascending Lord, "for the promise of the Father." Day after day they continued in profound expectancy of its fulfillment. In the little room--the upper chamber--where the infant Church was gathered--ofttimes, we may well believe, would the cry ascend, 'Lord, fulfill Your gracious assurance! Did You not say, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." Remember this word unto Your servants, upon which You have caused them to hope!'

And there were more reasons than one for their anxiety. The advent of the Paraclete would confer new spiritual powers on themselves--communicating superhuman strength for their gigantic labors, out of weakness making them strong, giving efficacy to their teaching, opening hard hearts and prejudiced intellects and seared consciences to the mighty truths of the Gospel--in one word, inspiring them with the certainty of success in an otherwise hopeless enterprise. But more than

this--It was of the last importance to have some outward and even miraculous attestation to the fact of the Savior's ascension. These disciples had been the witnesses of His humiliation, some of them had been present at His baptism in the Jordan, others at His agony in the Garden, and His death on Calvary; they had climbed (some by slow incredulous steps) to a firm assurance of His Resurrection. All these momentous facts had, moreover, been authenticated and accredited by heavenly signs and witnesses--the descent of the dove and the voice at His baptism--the angels strengthening Him in His agony--the rocks rending, the graves opening, and the heavens darkening at His crucifixion--the angels in white sitting within His vacant grave. But now He had vanished from their view!--a cloud had received Him out of their sight. He had told them He was about to ascend to His Father and their Father. They had accompanied Him to Bethany; they had seen His glorified shape borne upwards on the wings of a cloud--higher and yet higher that Divine form rose, until, reducing into a speck, it was lost in the hazy distance. Was all this an airy dream--a strange delusion? It could not be; their senses could not be mistaken, their eyes could not have been deceived in the loved and well-known Person--their ears could not have been deceived in the tones of the loving voice and its last tender benediction.

But how is their belief to be verified? It is not, in the case of the Ascension, as it was in the case of the Resurrection! They could visit personally and scrutinize the Tomb. They had it in their power orally to sift and compare the testimony of witnesses. But they have no longer access to the ascended and glorified body, to ascertain by touch its personal identity with that of their own beloved Master who was crucified. They cannot follow that chariot-cloud in its mysterious flight; they can send no messenger; they can delegate no Mary up to these untraveled heavenly heights with the question--They have taken away my Lord, tell me where they have laid Him!

It was all important therefore, that, as in the case of the other momentous incidents in the Incarnation, some visible miraculous sign should be given to the Church, to attest and certify the reality of the Savior's reign at the Father's right hand. Such a distinct proof He Himself promised before

He departed, in the descent of the Holy Spirit. With what intense and longing eagerness, then, must His disciples have looked for this crowning evidence of their Lord's mission and divinity. It would be with them the testing, or rather the confirmatory, article in their creed. Let there be failure in this last promise, and they would be driven back again on their own faithless exclamation, "We TRUSTED it had been He who would have redeemed Israel." As day after day elapsed, how trying would be the postponement! Often would the question pass from lip to lip, 'Is there no sign yet of His appearing? Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?' No weary watcher on a stormy sea, no lonely castaway on a night of tempest, would more wistfully long for the dawn, than these anxious twelve!

But come it does at last. "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, unto the soul that seeks Him!" On the day of Pentecost--assembled in loving communion ("they are all with one accord in one place")--suddenly, a rustling is heard. It is the "sound of a rushing wind;" and forked radiant flames, like tongues of fire, crown the heads of the praying disciples. The Lord descended of old, first in the tempest, then in the fire, and then revealed Himself in "the still small voice." But on this occasion it is not the soft whisper, it is the voice of power--"the Power of the Holy Spirit." That rushing wind symbolized the bestowment of a new energy in proclaiming the glorious truths of the Gospel. Though numerically feeble, a mere handful of untutored and unlettered men, their Lord has given the word, and great is the company of those that publish it. Hear with what remarkable boldness and confidence Peter (the inspired minister of that hour) speaks, regarding the wondrous attestation of the Savior's ascension, which had just been given. How fully we feel them to be the words of a man whose whole soul had now, by that miraculous confirmatory sign, been finally and forever surrendered to the service of his exalted Master--"This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all are witnesses--therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has shed forth this, which you now see and hear. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ."

Yes! glorious proof and assurance that "that same Jesus" who had

vanished from their sight a few days before, from one of the slopes of Olivet, had really entered heaven and taken His seat on His kingly throne! By that baptism of fire, the Ascension is left no longer a matter of faith, or conjecture, or probability. It is proclaimed a great fact in the development of the scheme of Redemption. The feeble infant Church on earth may unite with the ingathered ransomed of the heavenly Jerusalem--"You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive." "The Lord has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our King, sing praises."

The true Joseph's exaltation being completed, He can send the message of comfort--the grain-sacks of spiritual blessings to His brethren. Our Heavenly Ambassador having entered the celestial courts, and signed as Mediator of the Church the great treaty of peace, can send now back a glorious Divine delegate, loaded with gifts, which He can dispense "even to the rebellious"!

Who, indeed, can read the wondrous story of these days, as it is simply recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, but must be conscious that a new era had dawned on the Church and on the world! It is remarkable, that in the days of the Savior's personal ministry, the number of conversions was small. Even His Divine words and wondrous works seemed to make comparatively little way in breaking down Jewish prejudice and Gentile unbelief. After three years of preaching and miracle--what was His success? See the muster-roll of the Church immediately before Pentecost--"The number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty." He seemed purposely to restrain His own power, in order to magnify the grace and work of the Holy Spirit in the new dispensation which this Divine agent was to inaugurate. No sooner, however, are the windows of heaven opened, no sooner does the Promised Comforter descend, than unprecedented results follow. Hard hearts are broken, blinded eyes are opened, dry eyes are unsealed, and scoffing souls propound the question, "What must we do to be saved?" The Lord is once more in His holy place, as in Mount Sinai--rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks. "You, O God, did send a plentiful rain, whereby You did confirm Your inheritance when it was weary."



Oh when the wondering disciples are witnesses of these moral miracles--thousands on thousands flying as doves to their windows, and nations, through their representatives then gathered at Jerusalem, "born in a day"--whatever may have been the sorrow with which they once heard of their divine Master's severance from them; however deeply, since the hour they parted from Him on Olivet, they might have missed His personal companionship and love--they would cease at all events now to marvel at His saying or to dispute the expediency of His announced purpose--"It is necessary for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Lord, come! hide us in this new cleft of the one Glorious Rock--and as the Beloved Disciple tells us he was "in the Spirit," when his eyes were opened to the transcendent visions and his ears to the wondrous words of his ascended Lord, so may He open our ears to receive the soul-stirring message which gave heart-cheer to the lonely exile of Patmos, "Fear not; I am He who lives and was dead, and behold! I am alive for evermore!"

"Grant, we beseech you, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Your only begotten Son the Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens--so we may also in heart and mind there ascend, and with Him continually dwell, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end."

## **CHRIST THE INTERCESSOR**

"Who also makes intercession for us." –Romans 8:34

"He who might have been placing a vial of wrath in the hand of every angel around His throne, with a commission to pour it out on this

rebellious world until it was utterly consumed, is standing at the moment, at the altar of incense, presenting our prayers for mercy, and officiating there as our great High Priest." –Harris

With the contemplation of every new Rock-cleft, the "treasures hidden in Christ" seem to grow upon us, not only in number and variety, but in value and preciousness.

This is specially the case in meditating on the Redeemer as the INTERCESSOR of His Church and people. In that beautiful grouping of the great apostle's "Confidences" in his divine Lord, to which we have more than once adverted, the crowning one is that which heads this chapter--"It is Christ who died; yes, rather, who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God; who also makes intercession for us!" It is when climbing, step by step, he reaches this height of his high argument, that he turns round with the challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

The intercession of the Savior is based on His atonement. It has been well defined as "the efficacious virtue of the atonement perpetuated by a divine official act." Some theological writers have ingeniously drawn an analogy between creation and providence, atonement and intercession; that just as Providence is the sustaining of the creative work--so that if Christ's continual upholding arm were withdrawn, the outer material world would soon lapse into disorganization--so, the intercession of Jesus is the carrying out, and carrying on, of His propitiatory and mediatorial work--the complement of the great salvation consummated on Calvary.

The Atonement, indeed, is in itself complete; just as this natural creation, (to revert to the analogy), was complete, when it came in all its glorious mechanism from the hands of God, and was pronounced "very good." But in order to perpetuate the benefits of Redemption, and make them available for His people, it is needful for Him, as the High Priest, to continue His priestly office "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens--a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man." The temple-service of old was the shadow of these sublime heavenly things. The Jewish High Priest, having offered on the great day of Atonement the sacrificial oblation on the altar

of burnt-offering, attired himself in a dress of pure white linen--linen robes, and linen belt, and linen mitre, white from head to foot. Thus arrayed, he carried the blood in one hand, and the censer of live coals in the other, into the Most Holy place. Beating some fragrant incense small, he mixes it with the burning coals. A grateful cloud arises--the whole Temple Court is redolent with the perfume, and enveloped in smoke.

Significant type, surely, of Him who has entered through the rent veil of His own crucified body into the Holiest of all; carrying with Him the memorials of His own precious blood-shedding and the fragrant incense of His adorable merits. As the Jewish High Priest sprinkled the blood on the pavement before the mercy-seat, as well as on the mercy-seat; so, our, Divine High Priest sprinkled His blood first on the floor of earth where He shed it, and now He sprinkles it on the throne of heaven. There, with the true incense and fire He pleads. Attired in the white linen vesture of His perfect obedience and righteousness, He confesses His people's sins--He stands between the congregation in the outer court of earth and the Divine Shekinah-glory. The mercy-seat is sprinkled; He waves the fragrant censer--and the whole heavenly house is filled with the odor of the incense.

We dare not, indeed, presume to speculate or dogmatize on the MANNER of this intercession. It is a silent inarticulate speech and pleading. The voice of Abel's blood is represented, by a bold figure, as crying from the ground. That blood, it need not be remarked, was in reality mute. So doubtless is it with our Divine Intercessor. There may be no articulate accents, no audible utterances. He sprinkles no material blood. But this we know, that He has carried with Him to His intercessory throne a glorified body, still bearing the visible marks of earthly humiliation and suffering--the perpetual memorials of His atoning sacrifice--so that that blood may still be said to have a voice before the throne--"The blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than that of Abel." When on earth He poured out His soul "in strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, He was heard in that He feared." In heaven, He pleads in silence; His wounds are His argument; He is heard in that He suffered!

But in this, we are anticipating. We shall proceed, as the most befitting

method of illustrating the great truth, to enumerate one or two characteristics of the Savior's intercession.

I. It is a **RIGHTEOUS** Intercession. This is the attribute which specially suggests itself to the apostle John in his First Epistle, where, under a new figure, he thus speaks of his Lord's intercessory work--"We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." "The Righteous"--a word which refers not so much to the righteousness of the Savior's person, as to the righteousness of His claim in behalf of His people. It is the Divine Advocate appealing to the equity of the Judge--resting His plea on the majesty of justice. An earthly counsel is only the hired and often a dishonest pleader. The righteousness or unrighteousness of the cause he has espoused is no matter to him. His sole object is to gain his client's case; although even in the successful conducting of it before an earthly tribunal, he may have the unuttered conviction of guilt and criminality, and that justice is evaded or perverted. Varied, also, are his appeals to the pity of the jury or the mercy of the judge. Many a cause is determined, not on its merits, but by skillful and adroit pleadings, by dexterous sophistry, or by the wizardry of eloquence!

Not so is it with the Great Intercessor. He pleads not, indeed, the personal innocence of His clients. On the ground of their own merits, they stand, in the sight of heaven, convicted and condemned--destitute of all argument to support their cause. But they are made righteous through the righteousness of Him, their federal Head and Surety-Redeemer. The merits of His obedience and death constitute His plea on their behalf. It is because "He bore the sin of many," that He makes "intercession for the transgressors." In thus, therefore, advocating the cause of His people, it is not the plea of the suppliant imploring mercy--the appeal of an servile petitioner. It is a plea of right. It is the triumphant Conqueror claiming His stipulated reward. It is the Covenant-Surety claiming the fulfillment of the Father's promise.

Addressing His Father in His last intercessory prayer, He appeals to Him in His character of Righteous. "O holy Father," "O righteous Father." All the blessings of the atonement which are to us the free gifts of free grace, are to Him of debt. They are the purchase of His dying love. They come to Him, and through Him to us, as an old writer expresses it, "with the mark

of the cross and the print of nails." This Righteous Advocate, standing before the throne, has only to utter His omnipotent formula, "Father, I will!" And all that is within the compass of omnipotence to bestow is His--"Son, You are ever with Me, and all that I have is Yours!"

II. This leads naturally to a second characteristic resulting from the one just mentioned-- that is, that it is a PREVAILING Intercession. Jesus is emphatically "the Prince" who has power with God and "prevails." All power has been committed to Him. Him "the Father hears always." They are His own remarkable words in the 16th chapter of John--"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf."

What does He mean by this? Is it not that the very mention of His all-prevailing name in the Father's ears, will be sufficient to ensure the request of His people being heard and their claims regarded. "Ask in My name." As if He had said, 'It will dispense with the need of My formally pleading on your behalf. It will itself be a passport to the Father's kind regard. So intensely does He love Me for My work's sake and righteousness' sake, that you have only to give utterance to "the name that is above every name," and its music will unlock to you the heart of God.'

How prevailing that name and that plea moreover must be, when we look to the host of petitioners who are warranted to use it. It is a beautiful part of the vision of the pleading covenant-angel in Revelation, with "the censer full of much incense" in his hand, that they are "the prayers of ALL the saints," which, perfumed with His adorable merits, ascend before God's throne and are accepted! It is not merely the pleadings of patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, men strong in faith giving glory to God. Neither is it the prayers enshrined and intoned in imposing ritual, rising from the great congregation amid ornate temples, and borne on the wings of enchanting music--but the groan, the glance, the tear, the tremulous aspiration of smitten penitents, the veriest lisping of infant tongues; the unlettered petitions morning and evening of the cottage

home, where the earthen floor is knelt upon, where the only altar is the altar of the lowly heart, and the sacrifice that of a broken and contrite spirit. It may be affirmed of the Father regarding one and all of these pleadings of the Divine Intercessor, in the prophetic words of the Psalmist, "You have given Him His heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of His lips."

Nor, having Him thus as our prevailing Intercessor, do we stand in need of any other auxiliary, any other advocacy. On the great day of atonement in the Jewish Temple--service of old, no Levite, no subordinate Temple officer was permitted to assist the High Priest, either in the sacrificial offering, or in the subsequent carrying of the blood and incense. No voice within the veil was allowed to be heard, but his. The congregation stood in the outer court. No other footstep dared venture within the holy precincts. There were crowds--thousands on thousands close by. But this solitary priest is unaided, unaccompanied, at that solemn hour. Alone he pled; alone he sprinkled the blood; alone he waved the censer.

In like manner, Christ has entered alone into the holy place, having Himself obtained eternal redemption for us. The solitary Surety on earth, He is the solitary Intercessor above. No other voice pleads with the Father; no other priest or minister, saint or angel, can be of any avail in coming between the sinner and God. As on earth He made the prophetic announcement, "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there are none with Me" so, standing by the golden Altar above, and stretching down the golden scepter, He, and He only, has the right and prerogative to say, "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

III. It is a PERSONAL Intercession. It is not a mere general advocacy for His Church in its collective capacity--like Aaron rushing between the crowded masses of living and dead when the plague was stopped--but pleading for individual members of that Church with an individual, personal interest, as if each separate case enlisted His sympathy and engrossed His regards. As the High Priest of old wore on his breastplate, gleaming with Urim and Thummin--not the one word Israel--but the separate distinctive names of all its tribes--so also with the Great Antitype. It is not His Church in the aggregate, but the name of each

separate believer He has imperishably engraved on His heart. He, the Great SHEPHERD, seated on the heavenly hill and looking down on the earthly pastures, "calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out." He, the great CAPTAIN of Salvation, gazing down on His fighting warriors in the earthly battlefield, is represented as exclaiming, "Him that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white clothing, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father and His holy angels." He, the mighty INTERCESSOR, watching the assaults of the great Accuser of the brethren, is comforting every faint-heart with the old words addressed to a tempted disciple, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for YOU that your faith fail not."

How does John (in speaking of Jesus the Intercessor under the title of Advocate), introduce the Divine Pleader's name? Is it, "If His Church, if His people, if His members sin," they may rush in a crowd to the Intercessor on high, and cast their conjoint petitions at His feet or into His censer? No! there is a beautiful individuality--unit by unit in the mighty family of the ransomed have the comfort of it, "If ANY MAN sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." Blessed truth! As in His own impressive parable of the Good Shepherd, He follows the ONE erring wanderer until He finds it--the one stray sheep engrossing all His sympathies, as if He had no thought, no room in His heart but for the ONE.

So also, in His intercessory work. He has a loving regard for each separate child of His redeemed family; He carries the case of each before God. The 144,000 harpists on the sea of glass--the representatives of the Church of the glorified--do not exclude His tender concern in those who are still suppliants in the outer courts. His Infinite wisdom, power, and love, are the Divine guarantees that none can be overlooked; none left unsuccoured. An invisible golden chain links every tempest-tossed vessel to the eternal throne. Zechariah's description of Joshua, the High Priest, is a faithful portraiture of each saint of God to this hour. Satan at his right hand ("the public prosecutor") resisting him; pleading against him; advocating his overthrow. But at his other side stands a Defender mightier than the mightiest--the Divine Angel-Intercessor, saying, "The

Lord rebuke you--Is not this (this ONE) a brand plucked out of the fire?" And that personal intercession will never cease, from the hour when the believer is first brought a lowly suppliant to the foot of the cross, until the final petition (unheard by weeping relatives in the death-chamber on earth) ascends from the lips of the Great Intercessor in heaven, "Father, I will, that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory."

IV. It is a MERCIFUL and COMPASSIONATE Intercession. On earth the successful mediator for the oppressed and suffering--the successful philanthropist--is, generally speaking, not the man of stern nerve and iron will; but rather, the possessor of keen and tender sensibilities, who can himself enter into the tale of sorrow; who, it may be, from dear-bought experience, can make the cause of the wretched his own. The most potent advocate of the captive, is he who has himself been familiar with the wrongs he denounces. He who would most successfully plead--indeed, who has most successfully pleaded the cause of the slave, is the man who is the liberated slave himself; who has had personal experience of the cruelty and indignity of the tyrant's scourge.

Jesus is a compassionate Intercessor--"a merciful"--as we have seen Him to be a "faithful High Priest;" for He can enter with liveliest sensibility into all the diversities of His people's experience. Their every pang and sorrow He has Himself endured. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted." What a confidence this merciful character of the Great High Priest gives in approaching His intercessory throne, and soliciting His direction and guidance! Even on earth, what a joy and comfort it is in seasons of difficulty, to resort to a tried and loving friend, in whose tenderness and affection you can place unhesitating reliance! What an ease to unbosom in that brother's ear the difficulty that is harassing you, and solicit his wise and faithful counsel! Jesus is this Blessed resort in all time of your tribulation!

What a privilege, when Providence is dark and duty is perplexing, to repair immediately to this "Wonderful Counselor;" to take your case, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's letter, spreading it out before Him in prayer, and saying in simple faith, "I am oppressed, undertake for me." An earthly advocate may ably conduct the cause confided to him, and



vindicate or assert disputed rights. But it is not, we repeat, necessarily any more than the work of a hired pleader. He may never have seen his client's face, or claimed his acquaintance, far less his friendship. Not so the Heavenly Advocate. "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." "He is not ashamed to call us brethren." "I have called you friends." In the Epistle of James, God--"the Lord Almighty"--is said to hear the cry of the defrauded reaper--the common laborer--when he utters the appeal of oppressed and downtrodden poverty. How much more will the cries of His spiritual children enter with acceptance into the ears of their Intercessor! How tenderly will He compassionate, protect, defend, those whom He has redeemed with His own precious blood!

V. Finally. It is an UNCHANGING Intercession. Under the Levitical economy, the intercessor for the nation was removed by death. It was a temporary, hereditary, transmissible priesthood. Ever and always the nation was clothed in sackcloth, as they mourned their departed ecclesiastical head.

Not so Jesus! "This man because He continues ever, has an UNCHANGEABLE PRIESTHOOD." He is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. Many a good and righteous cause on earth has been lost by the death of its advocate. But our Advocate, as He is without beginning of days, is without end of years. As the tinkling bells of the High Priest's vestments were heard by the crowd in the outer court, while he himself was ministering within the veil--the sound conveying to them the assurance that he was still engaged in the solemn act of intercession--so the ear of faith can still catch up the music of these sacred chimes--these silver bells in heaven--"Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!"

The Jewish Hierarch acted as the nation's Intercessor for one day only--once every year--and for only a part of that one day. But, day without night is our Intercessor pleading. He never intermits; His love never cools; His ardor never decays! The true Moses on the Heavenly Rephidim, His hands never grow heavy; for of Him it is sublimely said, "He faints not, neither is weary." Nor, we believe (and as we shall in a subsequent chapter more fully unfold), will He ever entirely abdicate His

office as the Divine medium of communion and communion between God and His people. Even in the Church triumphant, "the Son," we read, is "consecrated for evermore." "He ever lives to make intercession for us."

Thus, then, have we endeavored briefly to illustrate some of the characteristics of the Redeemer's Intercession; as a Righteous Intercession; a Prevalent Intercession; a Merciful Intercession; an Unchanging Intercession.

In conclusion, let us seek to receive this great truth, not as a figure of speech, but as a glorious and sublime verity. Not a few are at times tempted to say, 'If Christ were still among us; if He still trod our streets as once He did those of Nazareth and Jerusalem; if He ministered on our shores as once He did on those of Jordan and Gennesaret; if PENITENCE could still creep, as it did of old, unbidden to His feet, to pour out in silent tears its tale of sorrow; if trembling CONVICTION could sneak (Nicodemus like) under the curtain of night to listen to the Heavenly Teacher's loving tones; if SORROW could rush, as once it did, with throbbing emotion, and cry out, "Lord, if You had been here, our brother would not have died;" if I could take my darling child, as once the Jewish mother did, and hurry through the crowd to receive the omnipotent touch and the healing word, all would be different.

But alas! He is invisible. I am told to pray; but in vain I look for that countenance of compassion. In vain I listen at my threshold for that footfall of love! My sick chamber is like John's place of exile, a lonely Patmos--but, unlike him, I behold no one in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I see no symbol, I hear no voice! I pray, but it is to a Savior-Intercessor I do not see!

"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed--blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." "Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Yes! prayer can still carry you into that glorious and glorified Presence, and the hand of faith can still touch as though He was on earth, the hem of His garment! Jesus of Nazareth still passes by. The spiritually blind and impotent can still breathe the prayer for mercy--for He ever "lives!"

Think for a moment what it would be were that intercession suspended? Or, recurring once more to the analogy with which we started, think what this fair creation of ours would be, were the Divine Providential hand to be withdrawn! All would immediately collapse! Chaos and night would again rise to the ascendant, and the world rock to ruin. And what would be the result to the spiritual world--the Church--were the intercession of its Head intermitted? How would every Asahel become a Ready-to-halt; every warrior's hand drop paralyzed on the battle-field. It is sad to be deprived of the loving sympathy and counsel of the earthly friend we most valued--when distance separates, or coldness estranges; or (saddest of all) when death puts his irrevocable seal on the sweet counsels of the past.

What must it be were we deprived of the prayers and counsels and sympathies of Jesus! See that you forfeit not these by sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Oh, saddest of all responses from the Heavenly Oracle is that of this Righteous Intercessor, when He looks down on His faithless people "hastening after another god," and says, "Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into My lips."

God grant that we may know, from personal experience, the blessedness of resorting to to such a Rock-cleft as this--"He shall hide me in His pavilion, in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me, He shall set me up upon a Rock." The Divine Intercessor, the Mighty Pleader before the throne issues the gracious invitation--"Come, My people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors behind you--hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." Let it be ours to respond with the ardent aspiration, the votive prayer--"Be to me a protecting rock of safety, where I am always welcome. Give the order to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress." Psalm 71:3

# CHRIST THE KING

"On his robe and thigh was written this title-- King of kings and Lord of lords!" Rev. 19:16

In speaking of the Ascension of the Divine Redeemer in a preceding chapter, we have already so far anticipated consideration of the Rock-cleft which is now to engage our attention--the Kingship of Christ--"Set as King upon His holy hill of Zion"--made "Head over all things to His Church." But the theme is one which volumes cannot exhaust. Well might the inspired Psalmist thus speak of it. "My heart overflows with a beautiful thought! I will recite a lovely poem to the king, for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet."

How sweet should be the music of these words to every believing heart--"He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death--even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name--that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

When He disappeared from the sight of the eleven disciples on Mount Olivet, His extended hands poured a priestly benediction on these representatives of the Church of the future. But it is as a King He is next pictured to us in the page of inspiration. In the lofty poetry of the Psalmist, it is as a King He enters heaven. The summons of His attending retinue outside the celestial portals is--"Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." The response is made, "Who is this King of glory?" And the reply is returned, "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord Almighty, He is the King of glory."

His Regal office, indeed, did not date its commencement with His reign at the right hand of God. In human language, that was only the date of His public investiture with royal honors--when, in phrase borrowed from earthly coronations, He was said to be "anointed with the oil of gladness

above His fellows,"--after being "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, He was crowned with glory and honor." But His Kingship had a more ancient pedigree. He was designated King of His Church from the ages of eternity. "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth was." Among other types, His royal dignity was foreshown in the person of MELCHISEDEK, who was "King of Salem as well as Priest of the Most High God." Also in the people of King DAVID and Solomon--the former, with more special reference to the years preceding His resurrection, when He was "the Man of sorrows"--reproach often breaking His heart--a King in the midst of enemies--while SOLOMON, in the splendor of his reign, was typical of the risen and glorified Head of His people; riding forth in the chariot of salvation, surrounded with the valiant of His spiritual Israel; inaugurating, as the ascended monarch of the Church, the services of the Heavenly Temple.

His REGAL POWER was predicted by the lips of patriarchs and prophets, from the Shiloh of Jacob to the Messiah-King of Zechariah. And when His advent in the flesh did take place; though His only apparent palace was a stable at Bethlehem, and His throne a manger; yet, even at His birth, representative potentates were present to do Him homage, bearing their KINGLY GIFTS of "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." Throughout the period of His Incarnation--though wearing a garment of humiliation and a crown of thorns--He was clothed too with an invisible robe of glory and honor. Like some of our own ancient monarchs, He was King in disguise; a sovereign in beggar's garb. Ever and always the golden tassel of royalty revealed itself under the assumed ragged attire--while, on one memorable occasion, branches of royal palm strewed the highway across Mount Olivet--and the air rang with the acclamation--"Hosanna to the Son of David--Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!" In the very moment of His deepest abasement, in answer to the interrogation of a heathen judge, "Are You a King, then?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say."

It is important, moreover, to regard the Kingly office of Christ as the complement of His Priestly functions. Or, rather, it is the combination of the two which imparts to the believer surpassing comfort and confidence. As the great covenant angel, He has both the censer and the scepter;

while standing robed by the altar, He has "a crown of pure gold put upon His head." All earthly rule is but the shadow of this great prototype of Sovereignty. The correct view, indeed, to take of Christ's Kingship, is not that of a mere figure or emblem derived from the rule of earthly monarchs; but rather are earthly crowns and scepters derivations and emanations from His great central everlasting throne. They have their archetype or primal pattern in the kingdom of heaven--in the Person and dignity of Him who is "forever sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens."

The earthly sovereignty with which we are familiar, may serve to suggest a few simple thoughts regarding the mediatorial Kingship of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, our exalted King, has a THRONE. It is a throne of Righteousness. Righteousness is at the foundation of all rule. History and experience are ever reading and rereading, that the earthly throne not established in righteousness--based on tyranny and wrong--bolstered up by oppression and treachery--will, sooner or later, totter to its fall. The Intercessory and Kingly offices of Christ, are alike founded on the great work of righteousness wrought out and completed by Him on earth. "Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash around His waist." "This is the name whereby He is called--The Lord our Righteousness." It forms the theme of adoration alike of His Church below and of the Church of the first-born in Heaven, as they "speak of the might of His awesome acts and the glorious majesty of His Kingdom." "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows. All Your garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made You glad."

The Lord Jesus, our exalted King, has a SCEPTER. It is called "the rod of His power" "The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion." By it He is said to rule in the midst of His enemies. As His throne is a throne of righteousness, so this "scepter of His kingdom is a righteous scepter." In the proclamation of the Gospel, His design is to vindicate the righteousness of His law in the salvation of sinners, and to foster and advance the cause of righteousness among His people. That Gospel is "the little Book" which the angel in the apocalyptic vision held in his hand,

when he was seen flying with it open in the midst of heaven. In the eye of the world's wisdom, a "little Book," a little Scepter, a feeble rod. But "the wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." "Is not My word like as a fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" "The Spirit of the Lord," was the opening sentence of the Messiah's ministry, "is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach glad tidings to the meek." And when that ministry was terminating, and He was about to delegate the rod of His power to others, this was still the parting apostolic commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Nobly did His followers fulfill His royal decree. Hear the boldest and bravest of these ambassadors--the great apostle of the Gentiles. Whether he stood amid the soldiers and senators of imperial Rome, or among the merchant princes of Corinth, or the sailors on the Adriatic Sea, or the cultured philosophers on the Athenian Areopagus--hear him proclaiming, as he holds out the same golden scepter delegated to him by his heavenly King--"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ--for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

This suggests, that Jesus Christ our Divine King has, like earthly sovereigns, subordinate officers to carry on the administration of His vast empire. We cannot withdraw the veil which screens the upper sanctuary. Could we do so, doubtless we should find "the spirits of the just made perfect" engaged in ceaseless embassies and ministries of love in behalf of their exalted and glorified Head--employed in bringing to Him royal revenues of glory from distant worlds. In one of the beautiful figurations of the Apocalypse, the armies of heaven (angelic natures as well as the redeemed) are represented as "following Him upon white horses."

But we know with certainty that He has appointed such officers in His Church and kingdom on earth, to gather in "ransomed spoil" against the day of His final appearing and enthronement as Lord of all. He has selected, moreover, these subordinate ministers of His court, not from among angels, not from among the unsinning inhabitants of heaven; but from those whom He has purchased with His own blood--dust and ashes--earthen vessels--with no badge of distinction or human greatness--often

purposely the weakest instrumentality, that the excellency and the power may appear to be of Him alone. "As My Father sent Me," said He, as He invested His disciples with divine authority, "even so send I you." These specially gifted and endowed office-bearers of the Gospel age, clothed with miraculous powers needful for laying and consolidating the Church's foundations, are indeed now withdrawn. But while the extraordinary ministrations have ceased, the ordinary remain. The "prophets and apostles" have been followed by "pastors and teachers"--and though claiming no 'apostolic succession' in the conventional sense of the word--no gift of tongues or of prophesying--yet we assert and maintain the Divine institution of the pastoral office. The King has still heralds, as of old, to prepare His way before Him; and these in their turn are charged by Him to commit their work to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Ministerial power is derived, not from priestly ordination or hereditary virtue, but directly from the King Himself. "To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." As the earthly King has his viceroy and ambassador at foreign courts, empowered to speak in his sovereign's name, and to vindicate his sovereign's rights, so He has committed unto His servants "the ministry of reconciliation," and empowered them thus to deliver their high command--"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we beg you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God."

As an earthly King has SUBJECTS, so has our heavenly King. His mediatorial sway is indeed, in one sense, UNIVERSAL--"His kingdom rules over all;" "All things were created," not only by Him, but "for Him." His true subjects, however, are composed of the Church, which He has redeemed with His blood--chosen by Him "before the foundation of the world." "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed HIS PEOPLE, and has raised up an horn" (horn, the type of kingly rule) "of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." These, His people, are said to become "willing in the day of His power." What day is that? Doubtless it is the momentous era in their lives, when, by the



efficacious grace of His Spirit, they are brought to surrender their weapons of rebellion; to renounce the service of Satan, and enroll themselves under the banner of their Savior-King. To effect this result, at times the terrors of the law are employed--those arrows which "are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under Him." At other times, "the still small voice" proves, as in the case of the prophet, more efficacious than tempest, and earthquake, and fire. The heart is conquered and won by love. A TWO-FOLD CHANGE is at that great crisis-hour undergone.

There is, first, a change of state. The new-born subjects of the King are enrolled among the pardoned. Enemies once, with the sentence of death recorded against them--they receive a full forgiveness--a royal amnesty is extended to them--they are "accepted in the Beloved;" From being by nature and practice (to use the simile in the Song of Solomon), like "pillars of smoke," they become redolent "with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." Captives once--the chains are struck off; prodigals once--the home of their Father is thrown open. God in His judicial character justifies them--in His paternal character He adopts them. They are received into the number and invested with all the privileges of Sonship.

But, in addition to the change of state, that "day of power" brings along with it a change of character. It not only captures the citadel of the heart, which had long held out against the heavenly King, but all its storehouses and resources are now willingly laid in tribute at His feet. The understanding is enlightened, the affections purified, the will renewed. The body, which was formerly the slave of unrighteousness unto sin, is now consecrated to His service. Inspired with love and loyalty, His people reverence His laws. It is their supreme delight to serve and honor Him. Their interests are identified with His. Their obedience is not the coerced duty of the slave, but the delight of a voluntary heart-surrender. The moral and spiritual transformation is likened to the working of that mighty power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

More than this--just as in the case of friends with whom we are in the habit of daily and familiar communion, we insensibly catch up their tone

and manner and conversation, and imbibe their tastes and likings--so it is with believers and Him, who, though a King, delights to call them "friends." They gradually become assimilated to the Divine character. They imbibe His spirit; they reflect His image. "The King's daughter," like her Lord, becomes "all glorious within; her clothing, is of wrought gold" (the inwrought graces of the Spirit). So that it may be said of Christ's true people as of the brethren of Gideon, "each one resembled the children of a king."

Thus then the subjects of this Divine Mediator receive the double blessing of having their natures changed as well as their sins pardoned--or as this is briefly but beautifully stated by Peter in his address before the Jewish council, "Him has God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

Does the personal question here occur, 'HOW are we to become the subjects of this exalted Sovereign? What is the passport of admission into His royal favor and within His palace-gates? Have we to fight our way to it, like desperate men, through blood and death? Have we in our own strength to scale inaccessible ramparts before reaching the city of the great King?' Listen to the words of the beloved disciple, "As many as received Him to them gave He power (or the right) to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name." We have no merit in the attainment of these royal privileges and prerogatives. They are all derived from grace and bestowed through faith. The hand which "delivers from the power of darkness" translates also into "the kingdom of His dear Son." The charter of our rights is delivered to us in the same way as the cure was dispensed to the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple--"In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk." Or, to employ an older Bible simile, He, the true Ahasuerus, extends the regal scepter, and of His sovereign good pleasure confers the rich blessings of His spiritual kingdom.

While, however, it is by grace we are redeemed, we must never forget that HOLINESS is the distinguishing badge of all true subjects of the Savior's rule. This is the characteristic of "the nations of those who are saved"--a holy people. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might

sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, without having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that it should be holy and without blemish." If we are partakers of this heavenly citizenship, inhabitants of this glorious spiritual empire, let us listen to the word of power, divinely recorded as the test of our loyalty and allegiance, "As He who has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of conversation."

One other observation is suggested by the analogy between an earthly and heavenly sovereign. As a truly great earthly king has ever in view THE GOOD OF HIS SUBJECTS, so it is with our gracious Redeemer. In His beneficent administration, He has constantly and invariably at heart the welfare of each individual member of His spiritual realm. The children of Zion may well be "joyful in their King." They may trust His combined power, and wisdom, and faithfulness; for all things, by immutable covenant, are working together for their good. Jesus is depicted in one of Zechariah's visions, as a royal warrior, riding in the midst of His Church on a "red horse," while "red horses, speckled and white," are in the same vision represented as forming His retinue--varied colored providences--some "white" (clearly understood), others "red and speckled" (or mottled). But all providences are under His control. Even when He afflicts, He afflicts not willingly. Chastisement is one of His love-tokens. This royal Shepherd often seeks out His flock in "the dark and cloudy day." He will not allow trial to go too far. He will not allow His people to be tempted above what they are able to bear. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations." We may well, in all that concerns us and ours, TRUST HIM IN THE DARK; remembering that He is infinite in His wisdom and boundless in His resources. Let "the shout of a King" be in the midst of His spiritual Israel. He has but one object in view in all His dealings with them--the "bringing many sons unto glory." And He will not leave His work undone until their salvation is complete. They may well take up the words of the prophet, and say with triumphant assurance, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us!"

We have thus briefly contemplated some of the characteristics of the rule of Christ over His Church and people. But there is one special phase of

His sovereignty constantly unfolded in Scripture, to which we may make a brief reference in closing. It is the exercise of that SOVEREIGNTY OVER HIS ENEMIES. While we are told of "the rod of His strength out of Zion" by which He rules His people, we are told of a rod of iron by which He "breaks" His foes; "dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel." As the warrior of Edom, He is represented, with blood-stained clothing, coming up from the overthrow of His adversaries--first of all, indeed, "speaking in righteousness--mighty to save;" but to those who reject that righteousness, mighty to destroy and to condemn.--"The Lord," we read in Psalm 110, "said unto my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool." "And I saw," says John, "heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He who sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness does He judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns."

The power of His enemies is only temporary--the triumph of His own cause is certain. "The rod of the wicked" will not always "rest upon the lot of the righteous." Despotism, Tyranny, Atheism, Popery, Infidelity, and the other foes of His Church and forces of evil, may do their worst. But every anti-Christian confederacy will at last be broken like a cobweb. "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet."

It is a comforting and elevating contemplation, and especially in these days, to think of Christ as King of nations, as well as King of His Church--King of Providence as well as King of Grace--and making all events work out His own ends for the advancement of the cause of righteousness. He who manifested Himself in olden time, by His visible interpositions, as God of nature--who made the material world, alike earth and skies, subservient to His purposes--putting a drag on the burning axles of the sun--causing the stars in their courses to fight against Sisera--drying up the tongue of the Red Sea--making the hail of heaven--the white arrows of His quiver--to accomplish the conquest of Israel's foes--("When the Almighty scattered kings, it was white as snow in Salmon")--this sovereign Mediator superintends and controls the revolution of the still more complex and often apparently capricious wheels of Providence. He "holds the stars (emblems of political rulers) in His right hand," as well as "walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

See how in the bold figure used by the Prophet, He put a bit in the mouth of haughty Sennacherib! That heathen king was the instrument, employed by a Mightier, for the needed chastisement of apostate Judah-- "But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind." Never, doubtless, did that tyrant dream, that his whirlwind march through the passes of the Lebanon, so graphically described by the inspired narrator, was at the dictate and to fulfill the sovereign purposes of the great God of armies. He would have spurned the thought of being the rod of Jehovah's anger and the "staff of His indignation." As such, nevertheless, he was employed--the minister of divine retribution; and then, when he had done his work, his legions were scattered like chaff before the whirlwind!

"I am Jehovah of hosts," says the Divine Messiah, "and besides Me there is no God." And all the plottings and counter-plottings of tyrants and despots, civil and ecclesiastical, will be similarly overruled for the spread of His cause, and the defeat and final overthrow of His enemies--when they shall be "consumed with the breath of His mouth; and destroyed with the brightness of His coming."

'Prince of peace, take to Yourself Your great power, and reign!' "Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O most mighty, with Your glory and with Your majesty, and in Your majesty, ride prosperously!" We know the day is coming when You shall be "King over all the earth, and Your name one"--when You shall become, as prophecy has described You, "the Desire of all nations"--when to You as the true Shiloh, shall "the gathering of the people be." "Violence shall no more be heard in Your land, wasting nor destruction within Your borders." The nations of those who are saved shall walk in the light of Your millennial glory. The shout of jubilant loyalty recorded in the Canticles will have its true fulfillment in that great coronation-day--"Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." What a mighty multitude will bow down before that chariot of victory, in which are yoked the white horses of salvation--a multitude with palms in their hands, out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people--the Bride of the King--seated alongside her Lord, wearing on her person the costly jewels (her royal dowry) of "glory, honor, immortality, eternal life!"

Let us, in conclusion, hear this Warrior-king, standing, as He did of old before Joshua with a sword drawn in His hand, and asking each of us individually, "Are you with Me or against Me?" Reader! have you ever pondered all that is comprehended in the reality--"AGAINST Him?" Let Balaam's description be true of you now--one whose "dwelling is in the clefts of the Rock;" so that the same soothsayer's other dreadful words may never be verified in your experience--"I shall see Him (I shall see these clefts), but not near; I shall behold Him, but not near." "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him."

## **CHRIST THE JUDGE**

"For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead." –Acts 17:31

"Because of His alliance with man's nature; because of His sense of man's infirmities; because of all He did and suffered for man's sake as the Son of man, the Son is that Person of the Trinity who is the most fit as well as most worthy to be man's Judge." –Burgon.

"He will take His seat upon a throne infinitely exceeding that of earthly or even of celestial princes, clothed with His Father's glory and His own--surrounded with a numberless host of shining attendants. In the meantime, O my Divine Master, may my loins be girded about, and my lamp burning, and my ears be watchful for the blessed signal of Your arrival." –Doddridge, 1702.

It is the well-known climax of the most sublime of Litanies, "In the Day of Judgment, good Lord deliver us!" Happy are they who have obeyed the

summons of the great Prophet--"Men will flee to caves in the Rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth"--and who can thus appropriate the strong confidence embodied in the dying testimony of the chief of apostles--"I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." "Where are you?" was the shuddering question which rang amid the blighted bowers of Eden, when "the voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day." In a far different sense will that question yet come to be uttered. Alas! in the case of thousands on thousands, the only reply will take the shape of an invocation to rocks and mountains to become barricades in the futile attempt to evade Omniscience.

But on the other hand, the response of earth's first apostate will have a new and glorious meaning in the lips of each member of the ingathered Church, who, washed in the blood and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, has fled to Him for safety--"I heard Your voice and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself!" Hid myself in Christ; hid myself in the Rock of Ages! Even now may we be enabled, with some good measure of triumphant assurance, to take up the often-repeated words, and sing them in anticipation of that Great Day with its glorious shelter and hiding-place--

"When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See You on Your judgment throne--  
Rock of Ages! cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

It will be observed that the verse selected to head this chapter, and which we may take to guide our thoughts in considering the lofty theme, connects the present Rock-cleft with one already dwelt upon. There is a connection stated between the Resurrection of Christ, and His appearance as judge of all mankind. After announcing that the world is to be judged in righteousness by the Man of God's ordaining, Paul in his address to his Athenian auditory, is represented as adding, "Whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead." Jesus, in the course of His public ministry, had announced two great truths to His hearers, both wearing the stamp of strangeness and

improbability. The one, that He Himself was to die, and by His own inherent power to rise again; that after being laid in the grave, He was to come forth on the third day alive from the sepulcher. And in order to fix this astounding fact in their memories, He associated it with the remarkable analogy or prefiguration in the history of one of their own prophets--"As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Or yet again, investing their honored Temple with a typical significancy, "Destroy this body, and in three days I will raise it up." This was the one well-near incredible fact.

The other was still more marvelous-- that is, that at some indefinite period of the future, in the exercise of the same power by which He was to quicken His own body, all the millions that ever trod this world were to be awakened from the sleep of death, and cited at His righteous judgement. Everlasting awards were to be apportioned. Those who had done good were to come forth to "the resurrection of life," and those who had done evil to "the resurrection of damnation."

Now the first of these two marvels had been accomplished. The Resurrection of the Redeemer we found to be a historical fact, certified and accredited by "many infallible proofs." And by the fulfillment of the one prodigy, God has set His seal to the indubitable certainty of the other. As surely as the crucified and buried Jesus of Nazareth came forth triumphant from His tomb on the appointed third day, so surely will the slumbering myriads of mankind--the dust of ages and centuries--awake at His summons to judgment. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live."

We may make one other preliminary remark suggested by these words of the apostle. They vividly impress upon us the CERTAINTY of that day and that tremendous scene. Other events and transactions in the world are uncertain; their occurrence is contingent on circumstances. In that unwritten roll of our varied futures, there is no one event of which we can feel infallibly sure, except our death. But this Day of judgment is as great an historical verity of the future, as the Resurrection of Christ is of the past. Even the period is not left unfixed and indeterminate. Utterly beyond the presumptuous guesses of human soothsayers, (for "of that



day and that hour knows no man,") yet it is known to God. "He has appointed a day." The day is written in the Book of His decrees; and every hour is bringing you and I nearer its solemnities. "Surely," says the now reigning King, as He makes the last inspired communication to His Church, "Surely I come quickly."

What will be the EVENTS of that day?

Let us note, first, THE BELIEVER'S CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY as he contemplates the Person of the enthroned Judge. God is to judge the world in righteousness "by that MAN whom He has ordained." It is "the Son of Man" who is then to come in His glory. He is to come, indeed, in unutterable majesty as the Supreme Jehovah--the co-equal and co-eternal of the Father. But He is to come also in His own glory, as the Mediator of His Church--the effulgence of His Godhead is to be tempered with the tenderness of His humanity. As my Kinsman, my Avenger, the Brother in my nature, the Lord who died for me, who is now pleading for me, He is to stand on that latter day on the earth; to vindicate my cause, to wipe off every aspersion on my character, to ratify my pardon and acceptance before an assembled world, and joyfully to proclaim, in the presence of His Father, as He points to the trophies of redeeming grace and love around Him, "Behold I and the children which You have given Me!"

Observe next, THE SPHERE OR EXTENT OF HIS JUDICIAL PROCEDURE. On that appointed day He is to "judge the WORLD." All that have ever lived are to be gathered within the area of that supreme, tribunal; "Before Him shall be gathered all nations." "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God." Not one shall be missing! From earth's teeming mounds--from ocean's hidden caverns. The pauper from his shroud of dust--the king from his gilded monument. Consecrated and unconsecrated ground alike will yield what they have long held in custody. "Every eye shall see Him;" every knee shall bow before Him; either in the reverence of adoring love and joy, or in the unutterable anguish of despair. How solemnly does the Apostle bring home to each of us, alike the universality and personality of that vast assemblage--"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Next, let us note THE ONE ATTRIBUTE WHICH WILL THEN BE CONSPICUOUSLY DISPLAYED. He is to "judge the world in righteousness." It is to be a throne of uncompromising equity. It is said of the Divine Conqueror of the Apocalypse, who, on His white horse, now heads the armies of heaven, that in "Righteousness He does judge and make war." We never can speak too much or too often of the Reign, or of the Throne of Grace. We never can proclaim too urgently the glad welcome which awaits every stricken penitent. We delight to picture that Throne with its rainbow canopy, and the inscription which surmounts it, "Faithful and just to forgive sins." But the day will come, when the rainbow-tints shall melt and merge into the color of pure white (the type of pure untainted justice)--"I saw," says John, "a great white throne." Righteousness, we have again and again seen, has been the foundation on which the whole work of the Atonement was raised, and Righteousness will form its closing act, the top-stone of the completed Temple.

Nor are we left in ignorance as to the PRINCIPLE which will regulate that righteous judgement. "He will judge every man according as his work shall be." "And the dead were judged every man according to their works." The silence of the hushed assembly will be broken by this statement, coming from lips from which there is no appeal--"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

Let it not be supposed that these sentences and awards in any degree encroach on the grand central Gospel truth of salvation by grace--salvation without the deeds or works of the law. Every glorified and happy saint that day will be justified by faith, and by faith alone. If he be accepted, it is "accepted in the Beloved;" if righteous, it is because he stands clothed in the surety-righteousness of his Redeemer; if saved and sheltered, it is because he is sheltered in the "Clefts of the Rock."

But good works, as the RESULT and FRUIT of faith, will, in the case of all Christ's people, be required, not as the grounds of acquittal, but as the EVIDENCES of the reality of their union with Him. In the case of the impenitent, their recompense will be in accordance with life antecedents; so that their future condition will only be the continuance and

perpetuation of present character. In their case, evil deeds will form the ground of condemnation, "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." "The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Our Lord's saying will have, in the case of all such, a dreadful but truthful fulfillment, "Wherever the carcass is, there shall the vultures" (of retribution, the vultures of their own sins) "be gathered together." The master lusts, tyrant passions of the present, will form their future tormentors.

Let none forget or overlook the moral aspect of that majestic assize, as the great SIFTING-DAY OF CHARACTER--the Day when the Books of Conscience, and Memory, and Privilege, are to be opened; when life--all life--every page, and chapter, and line in the biography--will be resuscitated and enlivened; when hypocrisy, with its subterfuges, will be exposed; the thousand masks and disguises torn from the faces they have successfully screened, as they confront Him "whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace." In the present economy, unerring judging is impossible. The righteous and the wicked are found together promiscuously. The good and the bad fishes are in one net. The tares and the wheat are in the same field. The sheep and goats browse on the same pasture. Vessels, some to honor and some to dishonor, are found in the same family, the same community, the same church.

But not so in that Day. He, who judges "in righteousness," will separate the one from the other. When the angels with sickle in hand, of whom we have spoken, receive the mandate, "Thrust you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe," the myriads mown down by these celestial Reapers are to be bound in distinct and separate bundles; some for the heavenly garner; others to be "cast out." The great gulf of separation is fixed forever. "Watch, therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Reader, are you prepared for this hour of solemn judgement? Are you able to look forward to it with joyful hope and expectancy as the day of your complete and final glorification; when the Lord, the Righteous

judge, will confess your name "before His Father and before His holy angels," and welcome you "to inherit the kingdom?" It is "the day of the REVEALING of the sons of God." It will then be found that God's people were in this world often hidden--unknown; often their goodness and graces and virtues unacknowledged, misrepresented, or scorned; their failures or inconsistencies unduly magnified and exaggerated; their light hidden under a bushel, or prematurely quenched by persecution and death. But "THEN shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!" That second coming was to the early Christians their cherished harbor of refuge in the midst of environing storms--"And to wait for His Son from heaven." "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ." "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draws near."

Moreover, it is well worth noting, that in the inspired epistles, it is not the day of death which is spoken of or LOOKED FORWARD TO BY THE CHURCH WITH JUBILANT EXPECTATION, but THE DAY OF CHRIST'S APPEARING. It is that day which gives the sacred writers their strongest motives and incentives, not only for the urging of watchfulness, but for the cherishing of hope, faith, and joy. Need we wonder at this? Death is no pleasing theme--though the Christian's last enemy, it is an enemy still--'the King of Terrors.' But the second Advent of the divine Savior--is identified with final triumph over death; when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality; and the saying shall be brought to pass as it is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" Not only so, but that "vile body" (itself a part of the redemption-purchase) will come forth from the dishonors of the grave, fashioned like the glorious body of its glorified Redeemer.

In the experience also of God's people this "blessed hope" has calmed, and cheered, and elevated many a pilgrim in his passage through the dark valley. It is said of a distinguished judge of the English bench that, on sending for Archbishop Usher as he felt death approaching, he declared to that pastor, that amid all the collected stores of human learning and erudition he had in his rare library, there was but one sentence on which he could rest with comfort, and that sentence was from holy Scripture--"The grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared unto all men,

teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

How many anguished, BEREAVED mourners, also, have had their grief calmed and their tears dried, by this same sublime antidote of the great Apostle, as he points them on to the second coming of their Lord, and associates that coming with the restoration of their beloved dead! "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him." At that blessed season when "the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God"--amid these revived friendships and indissoluble reunions, "God"--the God on the throne--the Brother-man--"shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Nor is the anticipated joy of that Day altogether a personal and selfish one. No small element of it is the believer's joy at the GLORY which will then encircle the brow of his adorable Lord. It will be the PUBLIC ENTHRONEMENT OF JESUS of Nazareth. He will come "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired of those who believe." All the humiliations of His first coming--the manger--the carpenter's home--the unsheltered head--the nights of wakeful anguish--the scorn, and taunt, and jeer--the piercing thorns--the bitter cross--the ignominious sepulcher--all, all now exchanged for the shout of welcome--"Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him."

How often, among His own people on earth, is He dishonored--wounded in the house of His friends--the unsullied glory of the Master tarnished with the blemishes and inconsistencies of the disciples. But not so on that Day. Even these marred, blotted, imperfect images and reflections, shall then, at least, become perfect copies and transcripts of their glorious divine Original--"We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "I saw," says John, "the Holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a

bride adorned for her husband."

Let us only remark, in closing, that the best preparation for His second coming to judge, is to rest, with firm believing trust and confidence, in His first coming to save. "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and to those who look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." Seek to be now forming the character you would wish to have completed and perfected, when the Advent shall take place--"Let every man that has this hope in him purify himself ever as He is pure."

Whatever your earthly duties be, do them nobly, purely, faithfully--keeping, amid the rough wear and tear of a work-day world, a conscience void of offence. Not like some of the enthusiasts of the Pauline age, who, in the erroneous anticipation and interpretation of that Advent, deserted their posts of duty, and surrendered themselves to an existence of dreamy contemplation--but rather, in the midst of your laborious callings, glorify in these the Lord who redeemed you--prosecuting your prescribed path, whatever it be. Only remembering thus to pursue, with the loins girded and the lamps burning, and being like those who are waiting for the coming of the Lord.

With such a glorious inheritance reserved for God's children, what are earth's pomps and vanities? How do its riches, and honors, and ambitions pale into utter nothingness before the approaching blaze of that advent throne! "Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments." Blessed is he, who, in whatever calling he is called, therein abides with God. Thus remaining expectant in this glorious Rock-cleft, we can mark the rainbow-arch which spans the sky of the future, connecting the cross with the crown; and say, in lowly believing confidence, with one of the Church's noblest watchers, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me AT THAT DAY!"

## **CHRIST REIGNING OVER HIS CHURCH**

# FOREVER

"He shall reign forever and ever."--Rev. 11:15

The contemplation of the sublime themes which, in the preceding pages, have occupied our thoughts, would be incomplete, without advertng, however briefly, to the grandest and most glorious Rock-cleft of all--the confidence which the believer enjoys in the anticipation of the reign of the glorified redeemer in the midst of his triumphant church, throughout the ages of eternity.

In the preceding views of Christ's character and work, and of the official relation in which He stands to His people, He has been brought before us as "the shadow of a Great Rock in a weary land." During their wilderness travel, when the fierceness of the desert heat, the sirocco-breath of fiery temptation and trial, is beating on their unsheltered heads, they know the blessedness of journeying to these secure refuges, and of hiding themselves there "until the indignation be past." But when "the dry and thirsty land" is ended, and Canaan entered--when the twin foes, Sin and Death, have been finally conquered, and the ransomed multitudes are ushered amid the glories of a sinless, sorrowless, deathless immortality--is "the Great Rock," then, to become only a memory of the past--recalled only as a sheltering covert while sojourning among the mists and glooms of the Valley of Tears?

No; if we can with reverence use the simile; like that strange mass of rock, the Rock of the Sakrah, which the traveler to Jerusalem who has seen it, can never forget--rising in mysterious impressiveness in the very midst of the old Temple area--so shall the Rock of Ages remain conspicuous, through everlasting years, in the center of the glorified Temple of the true City of God--Yes, a Rock, with its sacred clefts and fissures standing in the midst of "the house not made with hands"--whose walls are salvation and its gates praise! Stripping it of metaphor, Jesus is to reign forever in the midst of His saints. His humanity will, in the future, be co-eternal with His divinity. Of His mediatorial kingdom and government there is to be no end.

We seem, indeed, to gather from various passages of sacred Scripture, that the regal sway which at present He exercises over His enemies, human and Satanic, is, at "the end of all things"--the winding up of the present dispensation--to cease. Now (adopting, the application of the words of the 8th Psalm made by an inspired writer), God has "put all things under His feet." To the Prophet of Patmos, we have seen Him represented in vision, not only walking in the midst of His Churches (symbolized by seven golden candlesticks), but holding the seven stars in His hands. Now, He is exalted not only to be Head of His Church, but Head over all things FOR the Church. As the adorable Guardian of her blood-bought rights and prerogatives, He sways the scepter of universal empire in her behalf. "Say among the heathen that the Lord reigns--the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved--he shall judge the people righteously." But this portion of His mediatorial sway, "the KINGDOM OF CHRIST over this world," is to be surrendered, so soon as the last member of His triumphant host has entered within the walls of the heavenly city--placed forever beyond the hostility alike of wicked men and of blaspheming devils.

The limits of His reign are defined alike in Old and New Testament Scripture. Listen to the language of ancient prophecy--"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at My right hand, UNTIL I make Your enemies Your footstool." Or hear the apostolic testimony claiming in Him the fulfillment of these same words--"He must reign UNTIL He has put all enemies under His feet." "THEN comes the end, when He shall have delivered up (this part of) the kingdom to God even the Father that is, when He shall have put down all (wicked, and impious, and oppressive) rule, and all authority and power."

Not only so, but when the triumph over His own and His people's enemies is complete, He gives over this subsidiary administration into the hands of the Father. The affairs of the universe are henceforth to be conducted as they were previous to the incarnation. Like a mighty river which has finished its course, and which mingles its waters in the everlasting volume and the rest of the ocean which gave it birth, that part of the mediatorial sovereignty, which extends beyond the pale of the ingathered and glorified Church, will be merged and absorbed in the sway



of God absolute. "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God" (in the only true Pantheistic sense, rescuing the word from its modern perverted meaning) "may be all in all."

On the other hand, (and this aspect of the subject which now concerns us), as the Mediator of His glorified Church in heaven, there are to be no limits set to the tenure and exercise of his Kingly and Priestly offices. As it is expressed in the prophetic Psalm, to which we have just alluded, with reference to His royal Priesthood--"You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek;" or in the emphatic comments on the same, given in the Epistle to the Hebrews--"Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abides a priest continually. Made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. This Man, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. He ever lives to make intercession--He is consecrated for evermore."

In the most impressive of His own parables, the Redeemer seems to speak as if "the end of the age" were thus to form the true commencement of His limitless reign. For then it is He calls Himself, for the first time, by the title of "the King,"--as He invites His blood-bought subjects to inherit the kingdom He had won.

Similarly, in the parable of 'the Pounds,' when, under the figure of the nobleman "returning from the far country," He is spoken of as "having received the kingdom;" so far from abdicating His mediatorial scepter, "His appearing and His kingdom" are spoken of as identical, dating from the hour when He shall judge both the quick and the dead. It is His coronation-day, "the day of His espousals, the day of the gladness of His heart." "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready."

The title given to Him by the great Apostle, and upon which we have dwelt, as one of the most blessed of the believer's Rock-clefts, will have an eternal meaning and signification--"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and FOREVER." In that sublime figure in the Apocalypse, referred to also in a previous chapter, we behold the glorified Mediator under the

emblem of a SLAIN LAMB, with the scars of earthly suffering still visible--(the impressive memorials of His anguish and bloody sweat--His cross and passion)--adored by a multitude which no man can number--even by "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands." Their ascription indicates the duration of His sway--"Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

Similarly, in the still sublime passage and vision of the white-robed and palm-bearing multitude, that same Jesus, in His offices of immutable love--the same adorable Redeemer, under His suffering title, and designation of the "Lamb"--is represented, in the midst of the throne, as "feeding them," and "leading them to the living fountains of waters;" and with the identical hand that was nailed to the cross "wiping away all tears from their eyes;" as if Eternity's comment on the precious words of the old prophet, now so familiar to us, "A MAN shall be as...the shadow of a great Rock!"

At the sounding of the seventh angel, the voices in heaven which proclaimed His final conquest of the world-kingdoms, are heard proclaiming, "He shall reign forever and ever." And, not to dwell on other delineations of the future, given in the same inspired record, the sublime closing vision of "the Holy City, New Jerusalem" with its river, and trees of perennial fruit--attests alike the termination of the reign of evil--"the curse,"--and the perpetuity of the reign of Christ--the Author and Dispenser of all "blessing"--"There shall be no more curse but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him."

From these then, and other similar passages in holy Scripture, we gather the exalted truth, that, though the "subsidiary sway of the divine Redeemer over His foes, human and angelic," is to be terminated, He is to "reign over the house of Jacob forever"--that through the endless years of eternity, the Rock of Ages, with its glorious clefts and unscalable heights, is to remain bathed in the sunlight of heaven. His redeemed are still to love Him as Mediator, while they adore Him as God. "You set a crown of pure gold on His head. He asked life of You, and You gave it to Him, even length of days forever and ever." "His name shall endure forever. His name shall be continued as long as (yes, longer than) the sun." "Your

throne, O God, is forever and ever." "If I go to prepare a place for you," was His own gracious declaration, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there you may be also."

The perpetuity of that mediatorial office and reign over the Church of the First-born, we may regard in a twofold light. (1.) As the stipulated REWARD OF THE REDEEMER'S SUFFERINGS on the part of the Father--the fulfillment of glowing words spoken centuries before the Incarnation--"When You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

(2.) The continuance of His official character and administration, is represented by Christ Himself as THE PLEDGE AND GUARANTEE FOR THE PERMANENCE OF HIS PEOPLE'S BLISS. "Because I live, you shall live also." Their lives are "hidden with Christ in God." They "shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." They "sit with Him upon His throne." His presence as Mediator constitutes the divine tenure, by which, as kings and priests they hold their crowns and censers. So that, if we dare use so strong a simile, that Rock of Ages must first crumble in pieces, before they can be divested of their inviolable bliss--their blood-bought privileges. The song of earth will thus be echoed and perpetuated by the Redeemed around the throne--made the never-ceasing anthem of heaven, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord--let us make a joyful noise to THE ROCK OF OUR SALVATION!"

Most blessed and elevating thought!--the whole redeemed Church--under the Psalmist's beautiful emblem of a dove--with its once soiled and ruffled plumage, now "covered with silver and its feathers with yellow gold," flashing back the glorious sunlight--delighting still, as on earth, to perch in these eternal Rock-clefts--no longer "hastening its escape from the windy storm and tempest," but folding its wings in the perfected bliss of everlasting rest and everlasting love!

Here on earth, the Church is represented as only seeing her Beloved "through the lattice,"--obtaining brief and passing glimpses of Him. Here the Rock of Ages is beheld often through looming mists, or at all events,

gleams of sunshine alternate with obscuring clouds. Not so in that bright world! Nothing is there to dim, or darken, or blur the vision. "We shall see Him as He is."

In a nobler sense than that of present security, "we shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The closing petition of His own priestly prayer will be everlastingly fulfilled--"Father, I will that those also whom You have given me be WITH ME where I am, that they may behold My glory." Who can tell but that in the revelation of that glory, it may be with the Church in heaven as with the Church on earth, that the Divine Being can only be discerned mediately; that no one (no, not even a glorified saint) can gaze on the unveiled lusters of Deity. The words may hold as true in a world of blessedness as in a valley of tears--"No man can see My face and live." How then shall the great Jehovah be most appropriately revealed to the eyes of adoring worshipers? Shall it not be through the same divine medium by which He was unfolded to His Church on earth--when as the Christ incarnate they beheld His glory--the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; "the Image of the Invisible God?" Thus revealed as "the slain Lamb" with scars and blood-marks--thus revealed as "the smitten Rock" with its clefts and gashes--these will be, to the Church triumphant, EVERLASTING REMEMBRANCES ALIKE OF THE VILENESS OF SIN, AND OF THE VASTNESS OF JEHOVAH'S LOVE!

In closing these transcendent themes, let the solemn--all-important personal question press itself with ever-renewed and augmented earnestness; can we (each of us) with some good measure of humble yet triumphant confidence, appropriate Christ as OUR God and Savior? Are we able in any feeble degree to make the noble avowal of the great Apostle our own--"To me to live is Christ?" Are we cherishing, in any humble measure, as our life-long aspiration, that we "may win Christ, and be FOUND in Him." Found in the Rock-clefts now, are we able to make the challenge of an assured present acceptance and peace--"It is God who justifies, who is he that condemns?"

Found in the Rock-clefts in all the times of our present TRIBULATIONS, are we able, amid the fragile blessings and fleeting pleasures of earth--to claim a better and more enduring portion, and to say, "My flesh and my

heart fails, but God is the Rock of my heart and my portion forever?"

Found in the Rock-clefts in all time of our present BLESSINGS; are we able to disown perishable refuges; and exulting in divine and more enduring confidences, to tell as the secret of true happiness--"In the Lord put I my trust, why do you say to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain?"

Found in the Rock-clefts in the hour of DEATH; while the silver cord is fast loosing, and the golden bowl is in the act of being broken; as life, and those whose presence and smile have made life joyous, are fast dimming from sight, shall we be able thus to triumph in Him who alone is "without change"--"The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted?"

Found in the Rock-clefts on the Day of JUDGMENT--shall we be able then, as we look unawed on passing heavens, a dissolving earth, and burning worlds, to exclaim--"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Found in the Rock-clefts through all ETERNITY; under the consciousness of their unassailable security, shall we be able to enter into the Apostle's words, when (conjuring up in his enumeration every possible form of antagonism and evil), among others, he defies "things to come"--the cycles of eternity--ever to separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

"And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy. All glory to him, who alone is God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to him, in the beginning, now, and forevermore. Amen." Jude 1:24-25

O ROCK OF AGES! swathed in clouds of light,  
Whose heights unclimbed, never foot of angel trod--  
Ancient of days--Almighty--Infinite!  
Older than Nature's eldest-born--Great God--

We praise, we bless, we magnify Your name!  
And as before the birth of Time were Thou,  
So, through unending ages still the same,  
Past, present, future, one eternal Now!

You did descend from everlasting bliss,  
In manger born, to raise us up on high;  
A woe-worn Pilgrim in earth's wilderness,  
Wedding our finite dust with Deity.

Around Your path no blazoned banners wave;  
No jeweled diadem Your brows adorned;  
Your cradle borrowed, and a borrowed grave;  
Servant of servants, poor, despised, and scorned!

The spotless Lamb is to the slaughter led,  
The Son of man and Lord of Glory dies;  
For us! for us! He bowed His thorn-wreathed head:  
O mystery transcending mysteries!

The mighty triumph is at last complete,  
Hell's myriad hosts are vanquished and uncrowned,  
Death lays his scepter at the Victor's feet,  
And captive millions rise with chains unbound.

Nor this alone--He left His Throne of light!  
The secret hid from ages past to tell;  
The Revelation of the Infinite,  
The Image of the Great Invisible.

A Father's love disclosing unto all;  
The poor, the lost, the burdened, the oppressed  
Not one excluded from the gracious call--  
"Come unto Me, you weary, and have rest!"

Peace for the guilty, stung with conscious sin;  
Peace for bereaved ones wailing for their dead;  
Peace amid waves without and storms within,

The troubled soothed, the mourner comforted.

O Savior God, ascended up on high,  
You true High Priest within the Temple-veil,  
To all that call upon You ever nigh,  
"Prince who has power with God, and must prevail;"

You who do reign Your Church's Lord and Head,  
With many crowns upon Your regal brow,  
You who shall come to judge both quick and dead,  
Great Rock of Ages! hide Your servant now—

That when archangel's trumpet is pealing loud,  
"When every mountain shall a Sinai be"  
When sun and moon shall wear their sackcloth shroud,  
Creation in her final agony—

"Found" in Your clefts, and shielded by Your might,  
From Your blest love and presence nothing may sever;  
Earth's shadows merged in Heaven's unclouded light,  
Securely sheltered in THE ROCK, FOREVER!

# THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

**"I myself will tend my sheep and have them  
lie  
down, declares the Sovereign Lord." Ezekiel  
34:15**

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## **1. THE FLOCK ASTRAY**

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." Isaiah 53:6

Mournful is this opening picture. It is composed of no quiet pastoral scene with verdant meadows and glassy waters—the watchful sheep reposing under the loving eye and guardianship of their Shepherd. Shepherd and fold are forsaken. Bleak desolate mountains or rugged wilds, stretching interminably on every side, are covered with the scattered flock!

The Bible contains many impressive descriptions of our state of alienation from God. The star wandering from its central sun

—"wandering stars." The prisoner bound in fetters of iron pining in his dungeon. The vessel driven from its moorings plunging in the tempestuous sea. The prodigal, self-exiled from the joys and amenities of home, feeding on the garbage of the distant wilderness. But we question if any figure more simply yet more graphically delineates the natural estrangement of the heart than that of the stray sheep. There is not only conveyed the idea of our lost condition, but the tendency to wander further and further through the bleak dreary wastes of an ever-sadder ruin. The sheep is proverbially the most helpless of animals. Others, by the power of natural instinct, can succeed in avoiding danger; or, if they lose their way, they can retrace it with ease. The sheep can do neither. When once it has wandered from the Shepherd's eye, and from the footsteps of the flock, instinct seems to forsake it; is incapable of return.

What a graphic two-fold picture of apostasy is here! "We all like sheep have gone astray." ALL have strayed from the Shepherd (that is the universal characteristic), and then it is added, "We have turned every one to his own way." Each has some bye-way or separate track of sin, down which, or along which, he rushes, widening his distance from the Shepherd-love of God. You may perchance have seen, in early morning, the shepherd opening the gate of the fold, and the sheep scattering themselves over the mountain side. You can follow in thought a wayward company—some stragglers of the flock—wandering beyond their appointed pasture. For a while they keep together along the green sward or heathy common. But, by and by, they are broken up into separate groups; these again into smaller still; until wanderer by wanderer seems to pursue each its own lonely path of danger. The bleat of each of these lost sheep seems to express its misery and helplessness; its sense of utter loneliness and isolation—away from the flock, and (what was more than all to the sheep of eastern countries) away from the Shepherd; roaming the mountains conscious of the forfeiture of his protection and tender care.

And is this not a picture—a faithful and graphic picture—of every sinner by nature; a spiritual wanderer—away from God—uttering the inward cry of restless misery on the bleak mountains of alienation and sin? His state is one of utter loneliness and homelessness. He has lost his fold and his

Shepherd—and in losing his God, he has lost his all.

Suppose that by some fearful catastrophe we were suddenly bereft of all our inlets of physical enjoyment—the organs of sight and hearing—of taste and smell, all the avenues by which the manifold pleasures of God's wondrous and lovely world open to us. If that glorious landscape, that azure sky, that gleaming sun, these spangled nightly heavens, were in a moment to be palled in blackness—the shadow of death. If the sweet perfume of flowers, wafted on the breath of the summer winds, were unfelt; if the pleasant tones of the human voice, the song of birds, the music of the waterfall, the noise of the forest, the wild cadence of the murmuring sea—suppose all these woke no responsive chords on the broken harp—the ear being closed to which they discoursed their melody.

No, more, let us suppose losses tenderer still. You who cling with doting fondness to your household treasures, enshrining them in your heart of hearts—suppose that, by some fell swoop, your hearth was in a moment swept and rifled, that death severed all you loved on earth from your embrace, and left you in a blighted world, isolated and alone. The son you expected to lean upon as your prop and staff taken from your side—the loving daughter, whose tender care smoothed the furrow on your brow, parted from you—her ingenious ministries of love and tenderness suddenly arrested. How intolerable the desolation resulting from one or all of these physical deprivations and domestic calamities! And yet, if we but pondered it aright, what would all be, compared with the thought of being severed from God; He who pities as a father; who loves as a mother; who comforts as a friend; who tends as a shepherd; who is as a God only can be! His favor is not only conducive to life, but it is life. To quench His light in the soul, is to quench the sun: it would be equivalent to plucking yonder blazing central fount of glory from the midst of its dependent planets, and leaving them to wheel their tortuous way in the blackness of darkness. Bereft of Him, we are bereft indeed. What a reality and deep pathos are there in the Psalmist's appeal—"How long will You forget me, O Lord, forever?" A lost sheep! a lost soul! lost its peace—its rest—its happiness—its eternal safety—"What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

We know, indeed, that one most sad and fearful feature, in connection

with this truth of human alienation and depravity, is the utter recklessness and indifference of the wanderer—the lost consciousness that he is lost; the downward, heedless rush to ruin, without one desire to return. And, doubtless, it is so with vast multitudes. They have become so steeped in forgetfulness and insensibility—they have drunk so deeply of the waters of lethargy—that they settle down in these strange pastures in reckless contentment, without one thought of the old paths and the forgotten fold.

But we see also, in the Bible picture of the lost sheep, what is a truer and more faithful delineation of the lost human heart. The strayed sheep feels its loneliness. Those who have at times witnessed the living type in our own mountain glens, may have noted in the plaintive bleatings—the wild restless look—the rushing here and there, in hopeless effort, to regain the lost path—that the animal has the one absorbing feeling of estrangement and abandonment. If you could interpret that language of look and sound, you would find that it was the longing for restoration to the fold.

Men who have lost God, forget it and deny it as at times they may, yet, ever and anon, do feel (they MUST feel) that, by reason of that loss, they are not happy. Nothing will fill the infinite capacities of the soul of man, but the great Being from whom he has departed. You may try to fill that soul with lower and baser substitutes. You may lure it away from the heavenly fold by tempting it with the world's choicest pastures, the golden meadows of riches, and the pleasures of sin. It will tell you by a half-stifled bleat of fretful, restless disquiet, that it is not, and cannot be happy. And why? just because it has lost its true fold, its true home—in the friendship and love of God.

We always pity those who have seen "better days;" who have been reduced from opulence to chill penury; or who, from an ample competency and cheerful provisions, have now to sing their way in rags and wretchedness from door to door in the open street, in order to procure a pittance for themselves and the hungry orphans at their side. We pity the prodigal who had once enjoyed his father's house and hall, now seated at his humiliating fare with the swine of the far country. We pity the bird of the forest that was used to be singing up to heaven's gate, now lying struggling with broken wing in the furrow. There is a feeling

akin to pity, even in regard to mute inanimate things, which have seen "better times." The old ancestral castle, where, in the days of chivalry, kings and nobles once held feast and tournament, whose tapestried walls minstrels sang; now a deserted ruin, where the winds howl at will through silent chambers and broken battlements and blackened hearths—its only tenant the crawling reptile—its only tapestry, festoons of damp and tangled ivy.

So it is with the sinner. We pity him. Made at first after the image of God, he has truly seen better days. His soul, like the glittering patch gleaming under the rags, bears testimony of former dignity and greatness. We pity him; for he too, like that wounded bird, once mounted on soaring pinions. We pity him; for he too, like that ruined castle, has his niches and loopholes and tapestried fragments, peering through the matted weeds and ivy, which still vindicate the grandeur of his original. We pity him; for he too, like that ruined sheep, was once folded in the Divine pastures. That shattered frame, that torn fleece, are not what once they were, when feeding on the Delectable Mountains, reposing under the Shepherd's love. Do any whose eye traces these pages feel that they are still astray—that they are still far from God—that they have no happiness where they are, and can have none in this state of guilty alienation? Oh! better to feel this, than to settle down in callous contentment, on these distant pastures, without God and without hope, and finally to perish there! Better surely to feel your danger and take timorous means to avert it, than to be like the ill-fated voyagers approaching all unaware and unwarned the fatal reef, in the midst of music and dancing. One other moment the crash, and then the wild cry—"We are lost!"

Go, return to the forsaken Shepherd! Return to the fold; and remember, in doing so, you are, in the truest, sense, "going Home." Home! what a gush of thought there is in that word to all of us! What will the man, long exiled—reluctantly domiciled in the far country not give to be at Home! How often do home memories and home countenances flit before him! How do time and distance only increase the longings once more to be back amid these cherished haunts—to be seated by the trees which boyhood climbed, and by the murmuring streams which sang the first and sweetest music in his ear! That is your home, to be folded in the love

and in the heart of God.

We have read somewhere, of the wild but touching raving of a maniac, which expressed itself ever in the one utterance "I am going Home." A thousand questions might be asked, and a thousand expedients employed, to recall dethroned reason from its wild soliloquy. But in vain—the one key-note of the ever-recurring doleful wailing was—"I am going Home." Ah! It is the indefinite inarticulate longing of wandering humanity. It was the cry of the self-abandoned prodigal "when he came to himself"—when he awoke from his madness, "I am going HOME"—"I will arise and go to my father."

I repeat, you cannot be happy in your present state. You are like the troubled sea which cannot rest. These waves of old ocean are a type of your own restless disquietude, seeking rest, but finding none. The ocean's dimpled bosom is ever "seeking rest." These waves that rise and sink, swelling and tossing themselves in a thousand tortuous forms, are only by nice and accurate physical laws trying to rock themselves into a calm. Emblem of the restless soul of man! Its very heavings and agitations and fretful disquietude, what are these, but just its own giant efforts to rock itself to repose on an Infinite God!

Remember, moreover, what aggravates the guilt and folly of your present departure and unrest, is the fact that you are yourself alone responsible for "going astray." You were not driven from the fold—you wandered from it. It was an act of self-exile, self-banishment. That is one of the most touching scenes of Old Testament story, when, in presence of assembled Israel, on a day of high festival, the scape-goat went forth from the camp, "led by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." We can follow in thought the forlorn animal, wandering, with panting sides and bleating cry, through the sandy waste, until it reached the still more desolate shores of the Dead Sea. There it stands, with hot eyeballs and blistered feet; haggard with hunger and travel; faint with thirst; mocked with the waters of the briny lake, which is unsheltered by shrub or rock; the furnace glow of the sands drying up the juices of its body—the hidden springs of life. That famished creature excites our pity. It was no voluntary exile—no spontaneous desertion of the flocks of its companions which brought it there. It was thrust out—it was led resisting from the

camp. While, therefore, typical of a reality more solemn and significant still, the scape-goat is not the type of the lost sinner. We must seek for this rather in some wandering sheep, which, in stupid forgetfulness and wayward folly, has forsaken its pastures—disowned its Shepherd—and rushed on madly and wildly to ruin and death.

The Shepherd is not responsible for your present distance and alienation. He says now regarding each individual truant wanderer, as He said of old, from the brow of Mount Olivet, through His tears, regarding a nation of such, "How often would I have gathered you, and you would not!" But—(although in this we are anticipating the theme of subsequent chapters)—blessed be His name, His mission also was to proclaim, not through His tears but His blood, salvation to the perishing. In the case of the scape-goat of old, there was no possibility of return. It was consigned to a hopeless banishment—a lonely death; the bones of the outcast were left to bleach on the desert sands—its carcass to be food for the fowls of heaven. But, in the case of the most abject and hapless spiritual wanderer, there is hope—yes, to all who will—there is the glorious certainty of return and restoration. The last clause of our motto-verse unfolds to us the wondrous expedient of mingled love and wisdom. The scape-goat stands forth the awful type of the true Substitute. All the sins of the guilty flock are laid upon Him—and by Him are borne away forever into a land of oblivion. "The Lord has laid upon Him" (on the head of a Surety-Savior) "the iniquities of us all." Go! confess over HIM "all your iniquities in all your sins." Hang up, in the gallery of your hearts, the picture of the Scape-goat, bearing the invisible imputed load of sin into the region of forgetfulness; and inscribe under it the New Testament writing and interpretation—(it is a glorious warrant—a gospel contained in a single sentence)—"HE HAS MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US WHO KNEW NO SIN, THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM. "

## **2. THE FLOCK SOUGHT AND FOUND**

Is the Great Shepherd to leave the stray sheep to wander and perish? or is He to pity and reclaim them? Glory can accrue to Him in either way. It is

for Him, in the plenitude of His own sovereignty and omnipotence, to decide the alternative. In the Crimean war of bygone years, there were two ways, very different from each other, in which heroic deed manifested itself. The one was, by our soldiers' indomitable courage in the field, when brave men stood manfully to their guns, and poured the iron hail against fearful odds—when a thin gossamer line, as if it had been a rampart of brass, broke a murderous charge, and turned the fortunes of the day—when, often and again, the apparently retreating wave, gathering up its strength—rallying its fretted thunder—swept with awful retribution over the ranks of the enemy, leaving the trophies of its might still and silent on the plain! That was the one way; the stern glory of carnage and destruction.

The other unfolds a picture in strange and startling contrast with this. At midnight, in stifled hospital wards, amid the light of dim lamps and moans of sufferers, a gentle Form of pity flitted from couch to couch, with words and looks and deeds of mercy—pale lips kissing the shadow on their pillows as it passed. Both, I repeat, were heroic scenes and deeds. On which of the two does the mind love most to dwell? On that field of stern desperate valor; or on these hushed corridors, away from the roar of battle, with the one hero-heart moving like a ministering angel amid the congregated crowd of wounded and dying?

God's way regarding man (with reverence we say it) was the latter. He could, indeed, have glorified Himself, in the vindication of the awful righteousness of His nature and of His law, by the destruction of the world—by leaving the sheep of this distant fold to wander across the desolate mountains, and perish amid the precipices of ruin. BUT "the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." We may imagine the two alternatives presenting themselves before the Divine mind. The "ministration of condemnation;" by the battle of the warrior, with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, to convert earth into a fearful Aceldama to the praise of the glory of His JUSTICE. Or, by a wondrous scheme of love and wisdom and pity, to turn it into one vast Hospital, with the inscription on its walls, "I am the Lord who heals you" a Magnificent Temple to the praise of the glory of His GRACE. Condemn or not condemn; destroy or not destroy; leave the sheep to perish, or



reclaim the wanderer. Leave the revolted orb to travel on in its erratic course, amid the infinite of darkness, or bring it back within the sphere of the divine regards. The resolve is made and proclaimed, "God sent NOT His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world, through Him, might be SAVED."

Let this be our present theme of meditation: that the whole glory of the restoration of the lost sheep belongs to the Shepherd. The whole glory of the sinner's salvation belongs to God. We may look to this truth, first, in its simplest aspect.

The soul as we have already noted, is ever and anon manifesting some undefined longing after its lost portion in God. But it has in itself a hopeless moral inability to return. It cannot retrace its lost way. Alas! often there is rather the plunging deeper and deeper amid the pathless wilds of ruin, until, in addition to inability, there is added disinclination to be restored to the long-lost fold. How often does the sinner become so habituated to these dark mountains of his wandering, as to spurn all thought of return! How sad it is to note the case of the old worldling, who has gone the round of guilty indulgence, who has drunk from every brimming bowl and chalice of earthly happiness! You would expect the dulled appetite and satiated eye willingly to turn to a nobler portion; like the flower long drooping under cloudy, weeping skies, lifting its head lovingly to the inviting gleam of heaven's sunshine. But how often is it the reverse! Anything rather than return to God. The empty chalice must be refilled by some new honeyed earthly potion. The prodigal, rather than dream of restoration to the lost home, must have some new artificial means of stopping the rage of hunger, now that the swine's husks are turned from with aversion. The sheep, rather than return to the Shepherd, will go roaming in search of other pastures—increasing its mournful distance from the fold, and bringing it only into more perilous vicinity to the lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards.

Alas! experience thus only too faithfully confirms and endorses the Bible's revealed doctrine of human depravity. Deny it as man may, and refine on the Scriptures as they may, this lies at the foundation of the sinner's wandering, that he dislikes his Shepherd. He does not "like to retain God in his knowledge." It is the would-be creed of his corrupt heart

(though conscience refutes the heterodoxy—protests against the lying utterance), "there is no God." He lives as if there were none. "You have forsaken ME, the fountain of living waters."

How, then, can the sinner be reclaimed? It is manifest that by no self-originated effort can he return. If saved, it must be by another. Himself he CANNOT—himself he WILL not save. No sheep can effect its own restoration. You may listen to its bleating cry—the utterance of misery and felt dissatisfaction with strange pastures. But back one step, of itself it cannot go. It is as helpless as the ship lying aslant, with shivered keel and gaping planks, on the bare rocks. You may patch up these wrecked timbers—you may replace these broken masts—but nothing, save the lordly ocean sending in his tidal waves, can lift it from its place, and set it once more a living moving thing on the waters. It is easy enough to wreck that noble vessel. A drunken pilot—a deranged compass—a sunken reef—a sudden storm, may each do so; but not so easy to refit and restore it.

It is easy to drive the sheep away from the fold. A base companion—a master lust—indulgence in one guilty passion—some sudden gust of temptation, may account for a lifetime of wandering; but Omnipotence alone can bring it back. It is easy enough to take the tiara of priceless diamonds, or the necklace of gold, and plunge it down in mid-ocean; but it is not so easy to descend through that traversed barrier—that liquid rampart which rolls defiantly between, and get them up again.

The soul, the true casket of lost treasures, by reason of its own sad principle of moral gravitation, sinks easily downward. But it is He alone who "takes up the waters in the hollow of His hand" that can rescue it from the depths of ruin and despair. Here, then, is the gospel's glorious history of the restoration of the wanderer—"God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ: by grace are you saved." "Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out."

It is not Angels. They may afterwards be employed subordinately as ministering spirits, encamping round about the lost one, and bearing him up in all his ways, "sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation." But it is the Almighty Shepherd Himself who has the whole

glory of the seeking and finding. The words of Peter, when he says, "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," are generally misinterpreted. The "return" here spoken of is not used in an active, but passive sense; the return is not the self-originated voluntary return of the wanderer; but it is brought back, or returned, it knows not how, to the fold of the Good Shepherd. "Not unto us, O God, not unto us, but unto Your name we would give glory, for Your mercy and for Your truth's sake!" Marvelous condescension—unspeakable grace! He speaks in one of the verses which precede this chapter, as if it were something wondrous—something well-near incredible: "Behold I, even I."

The spot is still pointed out with pride, amid the rocky wilds of Dauphine, where an eagle bore in its talons the infant which had been left smiling in fearless innocence in its cradle by the cottage door. One stalwart form after another tried to climb that giddy height for the rescue, but had to abandon it in despair. At last, a fleet and nimble foot spurns all difficulties. Up she climbs, from crag to crag, until, reaching the dizzy eminence, she buries the yet living child in her bosom, saying, as a mother's tongue in such an hour alone could say, "This my child was dead, and is alive again—was lost, and is found!" But that was a mother's speechless affection for her offspring. As she brought her "loved and lost" back to her cottage home, and replaced it in the emptied cradle, we would think it strange to hear her saying, "Behold I, even I, have done this." Who could have done it but she?

We could imagine a father's love for a prodigal boy taking him over half the world in the endeavor to seek and find him out. He would forget all the prodigality and sin, in the memories of hallowed "childhood;" when his little one climbed on his knee, or plucked flowers with him in the meadow, or walked by his side, and with playful prattle wiled away hours of care and sorrow!

We can picture the soldier's wife out in the starry night and the pale moonshine, gazing wistfully amid the heaps of unburied slain, searching for the silent heart that can respond to her love no more.

We can understand many a kind footstep going amid homes of

wretchedness on errands of pity and love—entering the beggar's hovel, or penetrating the alley where filth and crime hold perpetual sway. We can understand how such experience a luxury in doing good—in lifting up these miserable outcasts from their dens and lives of misery and guilt; recognizing under these piteous rags the claim of degraded brotherhood; yes, hearts which, under genial influences, would have been as warm, or warmer than their own!

But what does the Infinite Jehovah see in us?—What claim have these sheep on this Shepherd of the universe—these sinners on their God?—None! The natural heart is a den of pollution, a haunt of evil, the nurturing home of rebellion. "I have not rejected you," He seems to say, "but you have rejected Me!" I might have ratified your guilty apostasy. I might have left you to perish. I might have stamped eternity on your wanderings from the fold. This would have been the case at any human tribunal; in the dealings of man with his fellow man. "But my ways are not as your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts." "Behold I, even I, both search my sheep and seek them out."

Not only, however, are we called to note and admire God's grace and condescension; but to admire the SOVEREIGNTY of that grace as shown in the selection of its objects. Mankind were not the only fallen family in the universe. Other sheep, not of the earthly fold, had also strayed from the Shepherd. Might we not have expected, that in resolving on the ransom and recovery of any lost ones, He would have made choice rather of a different race of wanderers! Fallen angels (the aborigines of Heaven), were greater than man. They were swift of wing in fulfilling the divine behests; and the very nobility of their natures, which made them glorious in their state of holiness and purity, would make them in proportion formidable, when they became demons in depravity. For both these reasons—the excelling in strength, whether for good or for evil, would (we might have supposed on human calculations) have made the angelic nature rather than the human—the lost sheep of heaven, rather than the lost sheep of earth—the object of the divine restitution.

Well may we pause and ponder this wondrous manifestation of sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners of the dust! Well may we love to gaze on that picture which the Great Shepherd Himself, in His own parable, holds

up to view—"leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness" (leaving apostate angels and fallen devils to perish), and Himself "going after that which was lost," in this remote corner of His creation. Not the sheep seeking the Shepherd; but the Shepherd seeking the sheep. Not the dove, with weary wing and wailing cry, traversing the wilderness of waters seeking the Ark; but the Ark in search of the dove. Not the vagabond coming to your door hanging in rags, with cheeks gaunt with hunger, and shivering in the wintry blast; but the King going and seeking out the beggar's dwelling, and putting sunshine and joy into his abode of misery.

Truly, indeed, this salvation of man is a story of grace. Turn the moral kaleidoscope as we may, the gleaming words still stand radiant before our eyes, "By the grace of God we are what we are." God needed no sheep, no sinners, no angels, no universes to add to His glory. Kings of the earth have to add kingdom to kingdom; they have to give rein to the lust of conquest and aggression, to gain themselves renown. The glory of the old Roman conquerors, as, charioted in triumph, they rode up, laurel-wreathed to the Capitol, was measured by the uncrowned potentates who walked in chains beside their chariot wheels, or dragged the car of victory up the steps. But if we can compare the shadowy greatness of earth with that of Him by whom kings reign; who "makes the clouds His chariot, and who walks upon the wings of the wind;" worlds on worlds—myriads of blazing stars and systems—could not add one ray to His underived glory. And were these worlds annihilated—blotted out from the map of creation; were these stars of night swept away into nonentity; by Him, the blank would be unfelt. He would be once more Alone. Glorious in the unpeopled solitudes of immensity; infinitely happy in His own underived happiness!

Once more. God's grace and compassion are further manifested in His untiring love and patience in the pursuit of the lost, until restoration and safety be ensured. In other words, we have to admire, not only His free grace and His sovereign grace, but what the old writers call His irresistible grace. "Thus says the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will BOTH search my sheep AND seek them out." He will not only search for them, but He will search until He discover them. Or, as this is more beautifully expressed by the lips of the Great Shepherd Himself in His parable—"He

goes after that which was lost until He finds it." Until! There is a world of pathos and meaning in that word. It gives us a wondrous glimpse of the Savior's love, and forms the turning-point in the touching story. Until! Its very indefiniteness as to time and toil are expressive. It may be days, weeks, months, years, He has been in unwearied pursuit after the wanderer. It may describe a sad history of scornful rejection stubborn waywardness, persistent ingratitude.

The parable pictures to us the Oriental shepherd climbing over jagged precipices, toiling in the burning sun over unsheltered wilds, or braving the perils of pathless forests—the wayward sheep rushing farther on, plunging deeper and deeper into destruction, and lengthening the weary distance he has to carry it back to the fold.

When a shepherd in our own country discovers that a member of his flock is missing, how does he generally reclaim the wanderer? He sends his dogs in pursuit of it. You may watch their track as they bound along the mountainside or up the craggy steep. By and by the panting fugitive, driven before them, enters, trembling, fleece-torn, and weary, the fold from which it had strayed. Not so, however, the Hebrew shepherd. He would leave the restoring of his lost one not even to a hireling or servant. He cannot rest until the truant-sheep be clasped in his own arms. He grudges not the labor of a long journey. On he pursues his often arduous task, and he continues to pursue "until he finds it!"

Touching emblem and parable of the Good Shepherd, and of His persevering love and compassion! Had it been any other than He—had it been, not God, but man—the pursuit would, long ago, have been abandoned in despair; seeing that, heedless of all entreaties, the sheep seemed to love its own death, and, regardless of the Shepherd's voice, rushed onwards to destruction. But, unmoved by all its indifference; with an importunity that never wearies, and a love that never grows cold, He still pursues. The forgetfulness and ingratitude of the wanderer only seem to quicken His desire to have it folded in His arms. It does not say how long His importunity is to last. The Savior's love is bounded by no distance, is cooled by no difficulties, is repulsed by no obstacles.

Many an earthly shepherd goes after his sheep, but he has missed its

track; or, if not, he discovers, alas! as he gazes on the bones which strew the mouth of the den, that a fleetier foot than his has found the prize. Not so the Heavenly Shepherd. He not only searches, but "seeks them out." He goes after it "until He finds it."

One of the noblest records of true heroism in England's annals is of comparatively recent date; when a gallant vessel, manned with gallant hearts, went forth amid the frowning icebergs of the Northern Seas, to search for a band of missing explorers. They sailed there, buoyed with the faint, feeble hope, that the object of their search might still be found, battling bravely with ceaseless winter. Alas! they went after the lost "until they found them;" but they found them with the stiffened snow and ice as their winding-sheet! They brought not back the living, but only some sad mementos and memorials of the dead.

Not so is the journey, not so the pursuit, of the Great Shepherd of the sheep. His omniscient eye follows every wanderer. Those whom He has marked for His own, He will, without fail, bring home. Not one can elude His pursuit, nor evade His loving scrutiny. Cannot many a wandering sheep rehearse, through tears, all this, as a personal story; how God tracked their footsteps through the bleak quagmire of their wandering, repelled by no obduracy, chilled by no ingratitude. Think of these journeys after lost sinners, embracing a period of 6000 years. What an aggregate of human ingratitude! What a gigantic record of divine patience and mercy! Oh! If all these journeys of Shepherd-love could be told! If a volume were to be written with this title—"until He found them," I suppose that all the world could not contain the books that should be written.

### **3. THE FLOCK FOUND, AND ITS RETURN TO THE FOLD**

In the previous chapter, we spoke of God's grace manifested in diverse ways in the seeking of the lost; His unwearied patience in tracking the erring footsteps of the wanderers; not content with seeking for them, but searching "until He finds them." In what strange unwonted places and resorts the Shepherd of Israel often finds the members of His flock! As the traveler witnesses, at times, the blue gentian peeping up through the snow-wreaths in the heights of Alpine passes—a child of summer where winter wears his icy diadem; or, as the antiquary at times discovers some rare bit of carving, or painting, nestling amid the wreck and debris which encircle the old ivy-clad loop-holed ruin—so are God's sheep discovered often where we would have least expected them. Witness Manasseh, that stray wanderer on the hills of Judah. See how God searched him out "amid the thorns," where, we read, he first took refuge; and then in the dungeon vault of Babylon. See how He followed after him, "until He found him;" and the long-lost, but finally captured wanderer, leapt into the Shepherd's arms.

Look at Saul of Tarsus, the leader of a devious and destructive flock; not content to stray himself, but seducing others to follow. See how the Shepherd pursues him over the stony wilds of unbelief, self-righteousness, bigotry, and guilt; crying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Why longer resist the grace that has marked you as its own?' The chief of erring wanderers responded to the call of shepherd-love. With bleating cry he too rushed panting and trembling to the feet and the fold he never deserted again.

Look at Zaccheus hiding amid the thick branches of the sycamore tree, until the Savior passed by. He was the one of all the Jericho flock least likely to be reclaimed. But the Shepherd's eye penetrated his place of concealment. He cried, 'Zaccheus! come down! Today, lost wanderer, you are to abide in my fold.'



Look at the adulterous woman from Samaria! "Simon, do you see this woman?" 'Do you see you this sheep, the brand of infamy on her brow, the stain of lost purity on her fleece?' If others scorn her bleating cries, the Divine Shepherd, who "gave His life" for her, does not.

Look at the dying thief. It was a sheep in the fangs of the wolf; death was already dimming his eye. It was the unlikeliest time to be saved. But the Shepherd rushes to the rescue, saying—"I have called you by your name, you are mine." That day he was with Jesus in the fold of Paradise!

And how many, doubtless, can tell the same tale of wondrous patience, forbearance, and love—that they are miracles of grace—their history this—"The chief of sinners, but I obtained mercy!"

How many and diverse, too, have been God's method of reclaiming the lost sheep! He has followed some with worldly calamity. He spoke to you—He "searched you out,"—by sickness—by making gaps in your household—by sudden and severe bereavements. You would not listen otherwise to your Shepherd's voice. He had sought you by gentler means; by tender compassion—unruffled prosperity—abounding mercies. But you spurned His calls; and He had to bring you back "by terrible things in righteousness!" Ah! If we but knew it, how often are these desolating afflictions only the louder tones of the Shepherd's voice—the wise and needful constraint of the Shepherd's love?

We have heard of the earthly shepherd who failed to induce the sheep to enter the door of the fold. It eluded all his attempts: it persisted in remaining on the outside pastures. After having exhausted every other expedient, his last resort was successful. He took its bleating lamb, and carried it in his arms inside the fold. The mother no longer resisted; obeying the instincts of nature, she followed her offspring. The Shepherd attained His object, and the wicket-gate closed them in against the storms of night. How often does the Great Shepherd take a tender lamb from a parent's side—a loved child—set it inside the gate of the heavenly fold, that He may tempt and constrain the other to follow after it!

But to pursue the more special subject of this chapter. We adverted, in the former, to the Shepherd's going after the sheep until He found it. Let

us now attend to His dealing with it on finding it, and its restoration to the fold. "When He has found it, He lays it on His shoulders rejoicing." If we spoke of His patient, untiring perseverance as wondrous; there is something surely equally touching and beautiful in this next delineation in the Divine picture. If it had been the kindest and tenderest earthly father, meeting his wayward disobedient child, we could not have been surprised had the story depicted him with a frown on his countenance, displeasure in his eye, the rod of chastisement in his hand. He scarce could conceal or disguise how keenly he felt the filial ingratitude.

Kings and despots of the earth, in bestowing their favors and pardons, have done so, too frequently, with every mark of humiliation and disgrace. Edward the Third of England dispensed pardon at the gates of Calais, but it was when the crouching citizens came with halters round their necks—the degrading badges of servitude; and even this act of clemency was extorted by the intercession of his queen. Another sent his pardoned enemy home—but it was with rayless eyes—emptied sockets, the perpetual memorials of ignominious defeat.

How different the ways of God—the dealings of the Great Shepherd of souls towards the reclaimed wanderer from His fold! The history of these wanderers may have been sad indeed. A history of neglect, rebellion, waywardness. We may expect when the Shepherd overtakes, to hear nothing but words of upbraiding; harsh tones of deserved and merited rebuke. But no! the Lord upbraids not. If we were to select the most tenderly affecting part of the New Testament parable, it would be, when, in silent love, He lays the lost sheep on His shoulders rejoicing. The past with all its forgetfulness, and disobedience, and ingratitude, seems to be obliterated. The Shepherd is so immersed in His own joy in the rescue, that He has no leisure to think of its waywardness. Days, and weeks, and years may have been spent in weary pursuit after the erring sinner, but all the distance, and fatigue, and difficulties of the journey seem forgotten in the moment of ecstasy, when the wanderer is clasped in His arms, and when the Shepherd rejoicing, exclaims, "This my sheep was dead, and is alive again; it was lost and is found."

Mysterious, wondrous silence! What! will He say nothing about grace despised, privileges abused, conscience resisted, mercy scorned? Will He

say nothing about those dark memories of sin, that have been ever haunting some, like fearful spectres, driving them onwards and onwards to the black rocks, the hideous precipices of despair? No! we listen in vain for words of harshness; we look in vain for strokes of chastisement. There are none. When He grasps the forlorn, panting fugitive, it is to take it up in His arms. When He does break silence—wilt thou exclaim, "Rejoice with Me, for I have found My Sheep which was lost!"

Let us look at Christ's recorded dealings with some of these. Nor can we do better than take for illustration the very cases to which we have already referred. Let us see, when He finds those sheep, what He says—what He does; for as He dealt with them, so is He willing to deal with every lost one still.

Is it the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house? Who more utterly lost than she? Scorned and hooted by those in whose company she then was—like the maimed or diseased member of the flock we may have seen on our own mountain-sides—persecuted by the others—thrust aside from their pastures, and set upon with cruelty if daring to venture within reach. She had listened, doubtless, somewhere, to the true Shepherd's voice, He who "calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out!" She had heard His gentle sayings. She had probably heard Him drop those gracious balm-words of comfort—(Oh, to one whose bleating cry was ever this, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep," what could have been more soothing to these weary, wandering feet of sin and wretchedness), "Come unto me, and I will give you rest!" She may have heard Him say, "I am the door; by me if any man enters in he shall be saved." Might she not enter? Yes! others may exclude her—scornful brows may frown upon her, and bid her to go away. But she knows that a kinder Shepherd and a better Fold than earth can give her wherein to rest her weary spirit, are at hand. She will throw herself at the wicket-gate, and let her tears plead her suit. The Shepherd sees her; and what does He say? Does He dwell upon her flagrant life of sin? does He mock her anguish by bitter upbraidings? No! with all her foul black stains, He yet lifts her from the dust, throws open the gates of His fold, and tells her to go in and out and find pasture!

Is it Zaccheus? He too was a guilty, aggravated wanderer; his character blackened with extortion and fraud. But the Shepherd calls him to His

presence. When the guilty publican heard the name pronounced by that Infinitely Pure One, "Zaccheus!" the whole unworthy memories of a past life-time may at the moment have rushed before him. He may have expected to hear from these lips of burning holiness nothing but severe reproach and unmeasured invective. The detected lost one would perhaps gladly have plunged back into the bramble thicket, from which (prompted by curiosity) he had incautiously ventured. But he is also taken and laid on the Shepherd's shoulders rejoicing. Christ has not one angry word to utter. He speaks kindly to him. That poor, hardened soul, unaccustomed to one look or word of complacency; scorned—hateful and hated—pointed at by his fellows, with the odious title, "The extortioner of Jericho!" When he hears that gracious Healer saying, 'Zaccheus! I am coming to be a dweller in your house—to share your meal—to tell you of better pastures than your hungry soul has ever fed upon,' he lifts his drooping head, as do the leaves of the flower, to the gleam stealing through the grated dungeon. This trembling sheep leaps into the Shepherd's arms; and if the crowd around wonder, and raise the unkind taunt; if they whisper aloud the old history of his sins; the Redeemer only lifts His eyes from a scorning earth to a sympathizing heaven, as He thus silently addresses the angel spectators, "Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep which was lost."

Is it the Thief on the cross? a sheep bleating in the agonies of death! He sees his Shepherd bleeding by his side—the Good Shepherd, giving that moment His own life for the sheep. When he cries, "Lord, remember me!" is the Shepherd's taunting reply—"Yes, I remember you—I remember all your guilty wanderings—your cursings—your murders—your life-long villainies—perish in righteous retribution for your crimes"? No! In that hour of mysterious anguish, the dying Savior lays the dying thief on His shoulders, and they enter together the golden wicket-gate of the fold of paradise!

Or shall we take, yet once more, a different example? Look at Peter. His, indeed, was but a temporary wandering from the pastures in which he had long reposed, and from the Shepherd he had long loved. Yet, in one sense, this very fact fearfully aggravated the crime of his ingratitude and desertion. But when the risen Savior meets the trembling backslider,

what does He say? Does He rehearse all the miseries of that wretched alienation, since the night he broke loose from the fold, when the Shepherd was smitten and the sheep scattered? Does He recall to him all his pledged, but sadly-broken vows of inviolable fidelity, on lake and mountain, and at quiet communion season? Does He aggravate the pangs of his sorrowing spirit by recounting the oaths, and curses, and presumptuous falsehood in Pilate's judgment-hall? Does He upbraid him for his guilty coward-absence from the foot of the cross, when the bolder hearts of the Marys and the gentle spirit of John confronted that awful scene? Listen; "Simon, son of Jonah! DO YOU LOVE ME?" That broken bosom was not needlessly lacerated by speaking of sins too deeply felt to need being laid bare. The threefold denial draws forth no severer, no more cutting or wounding rebuke, than the threefold challenge of LOVE, 'Simon'—as if He said, 'I forget the past—I bury it in oblivion. Come, stray sheep, into your Shepherd's arms. Give the silent promise of faithful obedience for the future. Go back amid the flocks of your companions—teach them by word, and warning, and example, never to stray! When you are "turned again"—"when you are 'converted,' strengthen your brethren." "Simon son of Jonah! Do you love Me?" "Feed My lambs—feed My sheep!"

Oh! how tender, how winning is the Great Shepherd in all these and such-like dealings! "The love of Christ constrains us." Nothing but love will draw the sinner—melt the heart, and subdue its enmity. The goodness of God leads to repentance. Sinai—the mount of terror—gives forth its stern utterance, "You shall follow the Shepherd:" it threatens its curses on those who fail to follow Him. Calvary gives forth its voice of love; and we love Him and follow Him because He first loved us. Can it be said of us, "You were as sheep going astray, but have now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls?" If so, how happy our condition! How great the contrast between these hours of bitter alienation and wandering, and those attending this joyous restoration! It is the difference between the furious lava-stream, burning up and blighting everything before it, in its fiery path; but whose surface, a few years hence, is carpeted with verdure, on which purple grapes pillow their ripe clusters.

Astray from the fold, away from the Shepherd, you cannot be happy. No! with death and immortality before you, you cannot be satisfied with the poor 'painted joys' of the present, if you have nothing better with which to fill the aching voids of your soul. Too truthful and suggestive is the symbolic truth conveyed by a painter in an allegorical picture of the world—children in a churchyard, sporting with soap-bubbles by the side of an opened grave! The bubbles are beautiful—lustrous with rainbow tints; but, one by one, they burst, some in the air, others as they touch the fringing grass; the vapoury moisture of all, falling into that dark hollow at their feet.

No, no! the true repose of the heart is in God. The true rest of the soul is in the clefts of the Rock! To revert to the figure already employed, you cannot detain the eagle in the forest. You may gather around him a chorus of choicest birds—you may give him a perch on the goodliest pine—you may charge winged messengers to bring him choicest dainties—but he will spurn them all. Spreading his lordly wings, and, with his eye on the Alpine cliff, he will soar away to his own ancestral halls amid the munitions of rocks and the wild music of tempest and waterfall! The soul of man, in its eagle soarings, will rest with nothing short of the Rock of Ages. Its ancestral halls are the halls of Heaven. Its munitions of rocks are the attributes of God. The sweep of its majestic flight is Eternity! "Lord, YOU have been our dwelling-place in all generations!"

Nor let any unworthy doubts, any unbelieving surmises, be harbored as to the Shepherd's willingness to save. If we have been taught anything by the subject of this chapter, it surely is that blessed truth which is too often overlooked and disowned—"The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." Mark, it is Himself in these words who speaks! It is not man. Man has too often only a harsh verdict for the penitent. As was the case with the unfeeling guests in the house of the Pharisee, the cruel whisper is often all that goes round when the trembling sheep is seen crouching at the Shepherd's feet. Too many deal with the outcast and fallen as the watchman in the Song dealt with the weeping bride—tearing off her veil and loading her with reproaches.

But the Chief Shepherd is more tender and loving than His under-shepherds. He has no words but forgiveness—"Behold I, even Incarnate

Purity. I, who on account of sin had to shed My life's blood, and therefore who hate it with a perfect hatred. Yet even I am ready to say to all who seek My mercy—"Your sins, which are many, are forgiven!" Every such drooping, withered flower in His garden He tells to lift up its head. It reminds one of the decayed and decaying leaves of the rose, which the gardener would have cast among the rubbish, or left the autumn winds to strew on the ground; but which loving hands gather in baskets, that they may be stored up for years in some treasured vessel to shed perfume through all the house!

Do not think of God in the light of a gloomy and unscriptural theology, as the Romans thought of their Jupiter as a wrathful Being, with the bolt in his hand, ever delighting to launch the thunder. Think of Him rather as the Seeker of the LOST; "not willing that any should perish;" calling sinners to His feet—not, as we might have dreamt or expected, with the halter round their neck, the brand on their brow, and the chains dangling at their side—but speaking to them as a Father—dealing with them as a Shepherd; saying to them with the authority of a King—"As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies."

Mock no longer the Shepherd's entreaties. His expostulations may even now be addressed to you. He may be pursuing you by the voice of His providence. He may be showing you, as you never saw it before, the desolateness of this wilderness—the awful isolation of the spirit away from Himself! He may be robbing you of your substance, or blighting your earthly hopes—opening graves for your children, or putting an impressive mockery on the vain magnificence of a dead and dying world; one or all of these may be the footsteps of the pursuing Shepherd.

Do you never pause to think, that the farther you stray from His fold, you are increasing His toilsome journey—adding to the travail of His soul, vexing and saddening a loving Savior's heart? On the other hand, think of the joy which your restoration and return would cause to that Divine Shepherd! Here is His own delineation of that joy—"When he comes home he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Encouraging, sustaining thought to those who may be now returning back to the fold. You are thereby causing Jesus to rejoice! The breakings of heart—the penitential

sighings and tears of the closet—have a glorious counterpart in heaven. For every sinner that stands weeping at the Cross, there is a Savior rejoicing on the throne! As He hurries back with you along the wilderness path in the arms of His everlasting love, He says, "I am glorified in them!"

No, more—His own beautiful parable tells us, that it is no common joy which greets the return of the wanderer. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents—more than over ninety-nine just people who need no repentance." This would seem, among other suggestive truths, to announce to us, that the salvation of the sinner is the marvel of marvels—the prodigy of prodigies! The tears of the lowly penitent are matter of loftier rejoicing than the songs and adorations and unfaltering obedience of those angels who have never swerved from their steadfastness. From the ninety-nine orbs tenanted by principalities and powers, there rolls not into the throne of God a tide of glory so wondrous as that from a ransomed world. Hence we read, that when the heavenly inhabitants would find throughout the universe the noblest theme for their praises—the grandest and most majestic display of Jehovah's glory—they look, not upward to the throne, but stoop downwards to the cross. This is the theme of their ascription—"The whole EARTH" (not heaven) "is filled with His glory,"—"Unto principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God."

Finally, you who are now reposing safely within the sacred enclosure, ever give God all the glory of your restoration. It was He who sought you out when your feet were stumbling on the dark mountains. It was by Him alone that you, lost one, were brought home. This may well be your ever-grateful testimony, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would have dwelt in silence; when my foot slipped, your mercy, O Lord, held me up." Blessed Savior, to whom can I go but unto You? The wandering sheep may turn scornfully from its restoring shepherd; the eagle may cling to its ignoble cage and despise its rocky strongholds; the prodigal may mock a parent's entreaties, and recklessly cleave to his alien home and beggar's fare; the parched pilgrim may turn with averted head from the gushing stream; but O, Restorer of this lost and ruined soul! let me never be guilty of the foul ingratitude of forgetting YOU. "Great" (oh, how great!) "is Your mercy toward me; and You have delivered my soul out of



the lowest hell!"

## **4. THE SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK SMITTEN**

In contemplating, in the preceding pages, the successive pictures of the Flock astray, and its return to the fold, we have been led casually to anticipate the great topic of the salvation purchased by the Shepherd for the guilty and the perishing. We shall make, however, themes of such peerless importance subject of more special and peculiar consideration in this and the following chapter, before passing to other Bible delineations regarding the Sheep. In the sublime figurative language of the prophet Zechariah, a mysterious summons is heard in the court of Heaven. The sword of Justice, which had slumbered in its sheath ever since the time when rebel angels had swerved from their allegiance, is again awoken. We listen in thought to the most dreadful words which ever broke the trance of Eternity—"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow, says the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd." The first thing which strikes us in this remarkable, this tremendous utterance is, that it is God the Eternal Father who gives the decree for the smiting of the Shepherd. It is at the bidding of Jehovah that that dreadful sword leaps from its scabbard, "Awake, O sword, says the Lord of Hosts."

Here, however, we must from the outset guard against anything that would tend to derogate from the character of God as a God of Love. We repeat the remark which we have already made: if there is any teaching which requires to be repudiated more than another, as alike repulsive and unscriptural, it is the unguarded language of those who speak of God much in the same way as they would speak of a heathen Moloch—a vindictive Being, an avenging Deity, whose wrath can be appeased and propitiated only by offerings of blood. The love of God is thus falsely

represented as something 'bought,' extorted at the expense of another, the purchase-price being these untold sufferings of His co-eternal Son! Ah! It would be a worthless thing, that. Love is a thing that cannot be bribed. This noblest of emotions can never be degraded to the level of a marketable commodity—a piece of mercenary barter. Besides, God's love needed not thus to be purchased.

That love was the original cause of all blessing to His creatures. It existed before the birth of time. Before ever angel pealed his anthem, or morning star sang responsive to a jubilant sisterhood of worlds—it was that love which, in the Eternity that is past, first devised the amazing scheme of Redemption, and through the Eternity to come, the ascription of the triumphant Church will be, "Thanks be unto GOD for His unspeakable gift."

The manifestation, however, of Love on the part of a great Moral Governor, must be compatible with the exercise of His moral perfections. God's Justice, Holiness, Righteousness, must be upheld inviolate. While mercy and truth go before His face, justice and Judgment must continue the habitation of His throne. Under the specious semblance of exalting the Divine Ruler in the estimation of His loving and adoring creatures, it is easy to talk of His unlimited mercy, His boundless compassion; that by a mere behest of omnipotence, a volition of His sovereignty, He could have pardoned a rebel world, and gathered back the lost sheep to the fold. Such declaimers, however, look only to the Being of God; they do not think of His Character.

Doubtless, as the Omnipotent, He could do anything. He could, in the exercise of uncontrolled Almightyness, replace, this hour, Satan and his legion host on archangel thrones. So far as power is concerned, He could easily have dispensed with any medium of atonement—forbade the awaking of that sword, the wearing of that crown of thorns, and reinstated the fallen simply by the proclamation of a universal amnesty. But what God, as the Omnipotent COULD do, God, as the Holy, Righteous, Just, True, could not do. He could not promulgate laws, and leave the transgressor to mock them with impunity. He could not compromise His character—He could not darken Himself; He could not degrade his legislative enactments into a mere name and nullity. Had he

done so (rather could He have done so), the pillars of His eternal throne would have tottered to their base.

Was there, then, in the case of guilty man, any possible method, compatible with the exercise of his moral attributes, by which the honor of God's name and character and throne could be preserved intact, and yet the transgressor be saved? Reason is silent here. Unassisted reason can shed no light on the great problem. No, rather, had reason been left to frame the reply, there could have been but one, "No hope,"—"A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."

The principle of substitution—the innocent suffering for the guilty—is one undreamed of in earthly philosophy. It is enough for us to accept the glorious revealed truth, that the principle is one recognized and sanctioned in the Divine economy—that here, at least, is one way, and it is the only one, by which the God who has so solemnly averred that He "can by no means clear," can clear the guilty—yes, and who, moreover, in doing so, can pour the luster of a high vindication around every perfection of His nature, and every requirement of His law. For dreadful as would have been the testimony to the Divine Holiness and Justice and Truth, if sinners had been shut up in the fold of destruction, and the cry had been heard, "Awake, O sword, against these sheep"—not so dreadful an attestation would it have been, as when from His own lips proceeded the gripping words, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow!" The Shepherd has been smitten—the Divine honor has been upheld. Mercy and truth have been betrothed before the altar of Calvary; God has joined them together for the salvation of the human race, and that marriage-covenant never can be disannulled. Justice is now equally interested with Love, in the rescue of the fallen. God is the just God, and yet the Savior.

"Oh, righteous Father," exclaimed the Redeemer in His valedictory prayer, "the world has not known You." "They do not understand the infinite depths of Your love. But surely when that sword awakes, its gleam will flash the truth upon their souls. It will reveal what the intensity of that Love must have been glowing in Your heart, which, rather than lose a race of wanderers, a flock given over to slaughter—made You willing to give Your Eternal Son as a peerless ransom!"

Yes; we may go farther, and boldly aver; if the Father's Love had not been infinite, Justice would before now have been bidden to unsheathe her sword—the hands would have been loosed from the head of the Divine Victim—the Sinless One would have gone free, and guilty myriads been left to perish. But Love triumphs. The command is given, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar;" "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd!"

## **5. THE SHEPHERD GIVING HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP**

Will the Shepherd undertake the awful alternative? Will the Man who is Jehovah's Fellow, His co-eternal Son, be willing to give His own life for the sheep, and accept the tremendous responsibilities implied in such a Suretyship? Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the Lamb for a burned-offering? "Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" At that interrogation, we can well imagine there would be silence in Heaven. Each eye would be directed to the sword still slumbering at the foot of the eternal throne, and then upwards to the One glorious Being who could alone undertake the mission, and pay the adequate ransom. The question would pass from rank to rank, "Will He save others, or will He save Himself? Will He delegate some minister of wrath on the errand of retribution to the flock pent up in the

fold, or will He Himself become the Redeemer of a doomed and dying world?" They are not kept in suspense. The silence is broken by a voice from the excellent glory, "Behold, here am I, send Me!"

The Shepherd, as we have seen, is represented in the parable as leaving the ninety-nine—the glorious angelic beings who hymned His praises from all eternity, and "going after that which was lost." There is something tenderly true to nature in this description. The ninety-nine occupy, for the time, little of His thoughts in comparison with the one erring wanderer. Have you ever observed how the mother's tenderest care and love are lavished on her little invalid? The rest of the family, the hardier shrubs, are left to battle with the storm, but this lame one nestles in her bosom, and engrosses all her sympathies. Or have you ever heard her tell the touching story, as to how all her living treasures are nothing to the one that lies in yonder churchyard? She will tell how wrong she feels it to be, with so many blessings still remaining; but yet, in spite of all, how her anguished heart will go after "that which is lost!"

Jesus is like that parent. He loves the lost more than the ninety-nine. He seems for the moment to forget all the fold in His pitying fondness for the wanderer. "He goes after it." Dare we attempt to follow Him in His pilgrimage of incarnate love? What a journey was that, from the heights of glory to the depths of humiliation! Think of the mountains of transgression He had to climb! Think of the valleys of humiliation He had to descend! Think, as He pursues, of the thorns which pierced His bleeding feet! Think of the nights of darkness in which His unpillowed head was denied the rest of the lowliest of His creation! Nothing would daunt Him in His divine heroic purpose.

In this respect, how different the Shepherd from His fickle, irresolute, feeble flock! The utterance of one of the latter was this, "Lord, I will even lay down my life for Your sake." Alas! when the testing time came, how the conduct of the renegade apostle belied the words so bravely (too bravely) spoken! The Good Shepherd had made a similar utterance, "I lay down My life for the sheep." "But He faints not, neither is weary." What as the God-man He spoke, as the God-man He also performed. "He saved others, Himself He would not save."

Oh! there is no more elevating subject of contemplation than the joyful alacrity with which the Great Surety undertook this work, and longed for its completion. "Before the mountains were settled, before there were fountains abounding with water," the Shepherd-Redeemer seemed to take a hallowed delight in coming down to gaze on the fold, the half-formed world which was to become the scene of His redemption. Hear His own expressive words, "Sacrifice and offering" (the poor expiation which man could provide by the blood of slain victims) "You did not desire. But a body have You prepared Me. Lo! I come!"—(at once the High Priest and Sacrifice, that I may offer the prepared body on the altar of My Divine nature—the altar which sanctifies the gift)—"Lo! I come. I delight to do Your will, O My God!"

In another passage He is represented, still as the Shepherd of His people, looking down the vista of ages from these remote eras of a past eternity. He sees the sheep scattered far and wide on the desolate mountains. He sees death and the grave hunting them over the precipices of ruin; and He exclaims, as the bleat of the despairing flock reaches His ear, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague! O grave, I will be your destruction!" As the crisis approaches for the fulfillment of His vast purpose, His desire to give His life for the sheep, and to fulfill His covenant engagement, seems to grow in vehement intensity. Moreover, while the bravest human spirits frequently startle and recoil at the thought of death, see how this Great Victim loves often and again to dwell on His approaching sufferings and sacrifice. "I lay down My life," says He, "for the sheep." "Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

In the scene of His transfiguration-glory, it is the same wondrous theme which forms the topic of conversation between Himself and the heavenly visitants. They talked not of His glory as God. They spoke of Him not as the Shepherd of the Universe, calling His worlds, like the sheep of His flock, "by name, by the greatness of His might"—but they spoke of the Shepherd plunging into the torrent of wrath to effect their rescue—"They spoke of His death which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."

As the hour drew still nearer the same awful anticipation seems to fill more and more His loving eye and loving heart: as if He had room only for one thought and one sight, that of the flock of wanderers being reclaimed and saved by the pouring out of His blood, "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" In His last intercessory prayer, we hear Him exclaiming, as the hour of suffering is close at hand, "Father, the hour is come, glorify your Son." And again, under the very shadow of the Cross, He breaks out into these words of triumph, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him!"

In the case of the sacrifices of Pagan Rome, it was considered an evil omen if the victim struggled. If OUR all-glorious Victim had struggled or staggered in His wondrous work, we must have been lost forever! But He falters not one moment. On He pursues the blood-stained path, until, stretched on the Tree, He can shout the last glorious word of triumph and of consummated victory, "It is finished:" and yielding up the spirit, exclaims, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."

Oh! wondrous, unspeakable condescension! Matchless, unparalleled self-consecration! He who had known no relation but that of co-equality with God; He who is called "My Shepherd," "My Fellow;" He who was Himself seated on the pinnacles of all Being, and superior to all law, yet is made under law; He voluntarily assumed a place of subordination, and "took upon Him the form of a servant." Behold how He loved them! His whole work is indeed a miracle and triumph of love. We can understand the utterance of the skeptic of a former age, as the gospel plan of atoning mercy was unfolded to him—"It is far too great—it is far too good to be true."

Yes, measuring the deed of love by human comparisons or by human antecedents, it is so. Man never so loved his brother man. "But God so loved the world." We read in old classic story of a magnanimous patriot sacrificing his life for another. Pylades laid down his life for Orestes his friend. "But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Well may He be called "the Good Shepherd." He, the true Jacob, can say, "That which was torn of beasts I bare the loss of it. In the day, the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and

my sleep departed from my eyes!"

He, the true Aaron, with the burning coals in his censer of love, has come between the living and the dead, and the plague is stopped! He, the true David, when the lion and the bear were rushing on his defenseless flock, encountered them single-handed and alone, and rescued them from the destroyers! He, the true Jonah, flung Himself into the boiling, surging deep, saying—"Take Me up, and cast Me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; and the sea ceased from her raging!" He, the loving Shepherd and Bishop of souls, comes to every lost one, and pointing to the open gate of the fold, says—"Behold, I have set before you an open door!" Justice has sheathed her sword. The arm of the law is powerless. "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!"

That must have been a wondrous morning when victorious Israel stood on the other side of the Red Sea—making its shores ring with their anthems of triumph. Terrible, too, were these trophies of Divine vengeance that strewed the beach—the bodies of Pharaoh's warriors, with the sword still fastened by their side or clutched with the grasp of death. Or awful must have been that kindred spectacle—the armored legions of Sennacherib—who had, the night before, been gathering up their strength like a proud wave, to dash themselves against the towers of Zion. When the morning dawns, the 180,000 are still there, with sword and spear and helmet and streaming banner; but these banners wave over a silent camp. The trumpet of battle lies beside silent lips—the gleaming sword is clutched by powerless hands. It is a camp of death. Sword and spear are still intact: but the arms that wielded them are powerless. The angel of death has descended at midnight, and converted the tented field into a sepulcher! So it is with that sword of condemnation.

The curses of the law, like the weapons of Pharaoh or Sennacherib, are still there; each demanding satisfaction, and declaring, "The soul that sins it shall die." But the Great Angel has come down at midnight and paralyzed these arms. He has, by His own doing and dying, rendered the law powerless to smite. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us." Yes, and not only are we thereby released from condemnation. It is more than a mere negative salvation which has been secured. An earthly king, by virtue of an act of royal clemency, can



open the dungeon doors and let a prisoner go free. He is a pardoned man—but he is not a justified man—the old brand is still on his brow, though released from the fear of punishment and death.

It is more, however, with the redeemed sinner. Not only is he justified, having the sentence—"Not guilty," pronounced upon him; but he stands also arrayed in the imputed merits of that sinless Savior. The live coal of pardon is taken from the smouldering embers on the altar where the Great Sacrifice is laid. It touches his lips and he goes forth "clean." Child of God, member of the ransomed Flock, which He has purchased with His own blood, "as far as east is distant from the west, so far has He removed your transgressions from you." Wondrous picture! You can take the wings of the morning, and make the sun your chariot—traverse intervening oceans and continents until that sun dips his burning wheels in the western wave; and when you take a retrospective view of that magnificent circuit, think of it as God's own emblem of the distance to which He is willing to remove your transgressions from your sight and His own!

Seek often, devoutly and reverentially, to contemplate this sacrificial work and atonement of your Great Shepherd. Beware of the theology that is now-a-days creeping stealthily in under subtle disguises and ingenious fallacies, which would rob us of that great central truth of Bible teaching, without which all others would be vain—the vicarious sufferings of our blessed Lord; Christ our Substitute—wounded for our transgressions; and though personally sinless, yet, as our Surety-Redeemer, said to be "made sin for us." We do not undervalue the precious truth of Christ our Example—Christ, as we shall immediately come to consider Him, as our guiding Shepherd, "going before His sheep," "leading them out," and marking out for them their pasture. But we would place, in peerless importance, in the foreground of these Shepherd-picturings, the Altar of Sacrifice, the crown of thorns, and the bitter cross; white-robed Justice with her unsheathed weapon; Heaven and Earth listening in hushed suspense—in mysterious silence, to the terrific summons—"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd!"

Let us close these thoughts with a twofold lesson. What an awful thing is sin, which cost the Son of God so much! How vile does it seem when

brought side by side with the holiness of the Immaculate Surety! As the lightning, when it leaps from the midnight cloud, makes the darkness more felt—as discord is most grating to the ear when it rises in the midst of sublime and beautiful harmony—or as those northern battlefields of olden days and terrible memory, were all the more fearful to look upon, from seeing the blood crimsoning the virgin snow—so, when we see the crimson and scarlet guilt of His people tinging the snow-white purity of that Spotless Being, how terrible does sin appear! How fearful must have been His recoil from this the foe of His nature and His universe, during every step of His Divine pilgrimage—more especially at the closing scene, when the powers of darkness were gathered around His cross; and how at that hour must He have longed with holy ardor to rescue from the pit of perdition, the millions under its dominion and curse, otherwise doomed to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire!

See that you trifle not with an offered salvation, purchased at such an expenditure of blood and suffering. Oh, if, on account of sin, God "spared not His own Son," Sinner!—you who are still nurturing in your bosom the adder which planted its fangs in the heart of Infinite Purity—do you think that He will spare you? If God poured out these vials of wrath on the Innocent, what will He do with the guilty? "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done with the dry?"

The other closing lesson is one which runs like a golden thread through the entire theme we have so cursorily treated. Let it be the last on which the eye rests—the Love of God. God—the eternal God smiting His Shepherd-His Fellow for the sake of lost sinners! He, even HE—could give no costlier proof of love than this. Reader! having given you the greater pledge, you may take it as a guarantee for the bestowment of all lesser blessings. When His providential dispensations at times seem baffling and mysterious—when there seems no bright light in the dark cloud, no mercy in His footstep—when you are apt to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us?" revert to that cross—that mysterious smiting! Let it hush every rebellious thought.

Did He wear that crown of thorns for you? Did He pour out His life's blood for you? And will you murmur at anything proceeding from the Great and Good Shepherd's hands?

"Yes! God is love—a thought like this  
May well each faithless doubt remove,  
And turn all tears—all woes to bliss!  
For GOD IS LOVE!"

## **6. THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEP-FOLD**

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the door for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." John 10:7-9

In our rapid survey of these varied Shepherd-picturings of sacred story, we have here reached the truth of all truths—Christ the Door into the sheepfold; Christ the Way of salvation, the Entrance-gate to heaven. What the foundation is to a house, what the heart is to the human body, what the roots are to the tree, what the key-stone is to the arch, what the sun is to the circling planets, so does this great theme stand related to all the other doctrines of the Bible system.

The verse which precedes this chapter, offers, in its successive clauses, three different topics for meditation. The Savior, "I am the door;" Faith laying hold of the Savior, "whoever enters through me will be saved;" and the privileges and blessedness of the saved, "They shall go in and out, and find pasture."

First, we have THE DOOR—"I am the door: by Me." In every age of the world there has been a groping for this wicket-gate, a seeking for the entrance to the true pasturage of life. Men, like the blinded citizens of Sodom of old, have been wearying themselves to find the door; and manifold have been the human systems and human devices that have sought to mimic the call of the true Shepherd.

Paganism has been crying, "I am the door." She has made an approach through hecatombs of human sacrifice—giving the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul.

Morality has been saying, and is still saying, "I am the door." Her creed is: 'Every man is his own door to the fold. Live well, do good, be kind, and amiable, and virtuous, and charitable. With moral principle and unblemished life, you will be independent of all other wicket-gates—you have the means of salvation within yourself.' As you may have seen the green ivy torn from the old crumbling ruin, to deck up and decorate the triumphal arch; so morality tries thus to deck up her archway into the pastures of peace, with rootless flowers, plucked from the ruins of our fallen nature.

Ceremonialism proclaims, "I am the door." She appeared, in our Savior's days, amid the wasted forms of Judaism, pointing to ancestral privileges, the old covenant promises. Ornately-clothed priests, with their scrupulous ritual observances, their legal washings and outward purification; Scribes and Pharisees, tithing mint and dill and cummin, gilding the prophets' sepulchers, and uttering long prayers, stood with broad phylacteries, as sentinels at the entrance, saying, "We have Abraham for our father—none but the children of Abraham, with the seal of circumcision, can pass here!" She has appeared in modern times, making her doorway, at one time through sacramental efficacy; at another, through the shibboleth of party and denominational distinction. At one time making the drops of water in baptism say, 'Through me you shall be saved;' at another, making the minister or priest the custodian of the soul's safety—the gate of admission, an entrance built with untempered mortar!

But "I am the door," says a divine Savior, after the world had in vain, for four thousand years, groped in the dark for the true way. All other ways are spurious, all other doors are false and counterfeit. There are many ways that may seem right, but the end thereof are the ways of death. "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." It is hard, indeed, for the natural man to surrender all his own efforts and labors, his virtues and goodness, and to be indebted, from first to last, to the doing and dying of Another. Hence the universal

striving of the human race to find a door of their own into the fold, going about to establish their own righteousness, and refusing to submit themselves to the righteousness of Christ.

There is something, moreover, pleasing to this nature of ours, in the old condition of "work and win." In other things we commend the principle. It is delightful to see a man, by dint of his own talent or indomitable perseverance, climbing his way to eminence and distinction; or, by bold arm and brave heart, sweeping all but insurmountable difficulties aside. It is delightful to see the working artisan, by means of energy, and brain, and toil, rising from the lowly cottage to the pinnacles of society. It is delightful to see the student—the son of peasant or mechanic—asserting the true nobility of genius, and, from lowly birth and obscure origin, becoming a fountain of wisdom; or, in high places, wielding and influencing a nation's destinies. It is noble to see the soldier, under fearful odds, facing the bristling ramparts, and, amid shot and shell, mounting the breach.

But in the matter of salvation—merit, self-glory, there is none. "Where is boasting?" exclaims the Apostle; "it is excluded." There is no climbing up by any other door in the matter of salvation. There is no other lever by which the soul of fallen humanity can be raised out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. Just as all modern dynamics are puzzled and perplexed to find the lost power by which those colossal stones could have been upheaved in the temples of Memphis, or the Pyramids of Cairo; so all moral dynamics of which man is the inventor are vain to account for the elevation of the polished stones adorning the Heavenly temple—redeemed saints in glory.

It was no inherent power, no effort of human wisdom, no device of human ingenuity, no recompense of human merit, which brought them there. Here is the one only leverage, "CHRIST, the power of God unto salvation unto every one who believes. " "HE has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places." Neither is there salvation in any other, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Let us pass to the second clause of the verse, or FAITH LAYING HOLD

OF THE SAVIOR, "By Me, if any man enter in he shall be saved." Christ, we have seen, is the Door of Salvation. Wide enough too is that door for the admission of all. "If any man," is the superscription on its portals. Whatever be the age, the country, the color of skin; rich or poor, young or old, bond or free—free as that sun in heaven which shines with indiscriminate splendor on molehill and mountain, on cottage and palace, on blade of grass and stately palm or cedar—free as that mountain-stream, singing its way, amid birch and heather, to lake or ocean—free as that stream is to the fish that sports in its pools, or to the wild deer of the forest or to the wayside pilgrim to slake their thirst—free as that ocean is to every vessel and every craft, from the rude fisherman's boat and the plank of the castaway, to the iron fortress, carrying its impenetrable sheathing and its sleeping thunders—so free is that door of entrance into the fold of the Heavenly Shepherd. Around it, rich and poor may congregate together, with this plea, 'The Lord is the Redeemer of us all.'

It is not like the doors opening into the high places of the world. These are patent only to the favored few. These can only be opened by the key of influence, or merit, or intellect, or rank, or money (the golden key which fits all locks); while the multitude—the vast majority—stand outside, excluded. But all are warranted and welcome here. Although, however, this is true, and we glory in the fullness and freeness of the Gospel Salvation, yet its blessings are appropriated by faith. We are not mere passive machines, incapable of moral action, to be dragged in by force into the fold. We must reach out the hand of faith to accept the proffered blessing. We must "enter in" if we would be saved, and enjoy the heavenly pasturage. God gives us Salvation as a beautiful Flower. But He does not give us that flower full blown. He gives it to us in seed. He has prepared the soil for it. He holds in His treasures the sun, and winds, and rains, and dews that are to nurture it. The glory of that flower will be all His, but if we do not plant it, it will not grow!

God gives us Salvation as a Ship. He says, 'There is a vessel. I give you hulk, masts, rigging, helm, sails; water (the element through which it is to cleave its way); winds (to fill its canvas); a safe and commodious haven to receive it at last. But it is for you to avail yourselves of these. If you

misuse them—if you mis-time them—if you neglect them—if you cast anchor out when you should be spreading your sails, and thus forfeit the favoring breeze—if you sleep your opportunities away of clearing the harbor—you never can reach the haven where you would be!

God gives us Salvation as a Home. He points the pilgrim, in the blue distance, to the purchased inheritance. He provides him with staff and provender. He gives him feet to walk, and eyes to see, and strength and muscle, and guidebook for the journey. But if he casts these aside, and waste the live-long day in folly or in slumber, the night will overtake him, and leave him unsheltered in the darkness and gloom!

God gives Salvation as a Fire. He provides the fuel; but He leaves you to kindle it. The means for imparting warmth are all of His own providing. You yourself can neither manufacture wood, nor coal, nor atmospheric air. But the air is given; it is in abundance around you. The faggots are piled up beside the hearth; but if you want to get warm, you must heap them together and kindle them. Neglect this, and you will continue shivering in cold, and perish in the midst of plenty!

The poor cripple at Bethesda, whatever might be the virtues of the troubled pool, had to "step in" if he would be whole of whatever disease he had; and if others were more alert than he, or if he procrastinated and lingered, he forfeited the cure. Paul, though he had a divine assurance during the storm, that there would be the loss of no man's life, but only of the ship, yet worked unremittingly at the pumps, and sails, and rigging, as if the safety of everyone on board depended on his exertions.

Yes, I repeat, Faith, as spoken of by Christ, is a thing of action. He never represents it as a dreamy sentiment. Listen to some of the freest and most glorious of His invitations—"Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Enter in at the strait gate." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "If any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." Away, then, with this dishonoring religion that would degrade man into a mere automaton—deprive him of will, choice, and moral responsibility. The wicket-gate is open—the Savior-Shepherd is addressing in language of importunate invitation. But it is for you to

rise and obey the summons. The ladder of salvation, like Jacob's of old, stretches from earth to heaven. But the ladder must be climbed. You never can enter "within the gate into the city," if you remain, like the patriarch, slumbering at its base!

What is the reason that so many refuse to obey the invitation and enter in? It is because they object to comply with the one only binding condition. They enter; but they would enter and partake of the heavenly pasturage with their sins too. They would take Christ as a Savior, but not as a Sanctifier. They would take Christ as a Priest, but not as a King. There can be no admission on such un-gospel terms. That door, wide enough to admit all, is too narrow to admit any while carrying the load of known and indulged sin.

Think of a man—a drowning man—escaping from the sinking ship. He has enough to do to buffet his way through tempest and surging sea—yet he rushes back to rescue some hoarded gold. He might have reached the rocks girdling the shore, if he had taken nothing to hamper or impede him. But those dead weights have dragged him to his grave in sight of safety. He and his gold perish together! Ah! remember that solemn truth—that Jesus saves you FROM your sins—not IN your sins.

As Paul, in that same threatened shipwreck, counseled that all the vessel's freight and treasures should be cast into the deep; so be it yours to say, with reference to every loved and cherished sin, "Yes, doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

There yet remains to be noticed, the DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE SAVED—their privileges and blessedness; they "shall go in and out, and find pasture." This beautifully describes the Christian, in his relation to the world. He "goes in and out from the fold;" he goes to and from the world, with his Lord ever in view. From Christ and His cross he draws his every motive for duty in the midst of life's labors and occupations. He goes out to the world, through Christ "the door." He returns from the world through the same. He looks to Him as the alone path of safety. In the words of Zechariah, he "walks up and down in His name." Happy for the Church and for the believer, if the sense of Jesus' presence and love



were thus interfused through all work and toil—if out in the world's bleaker pasture-ground—as well as within, in the quiet of the homestead—the eye were ever directed towards that open door.

Jesus is elsewhere personated as Wisdom. He is represented as 'opening His voice in the city'—'crying in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates.' And this is true Religion—true Christianity—to carry a sense of a living Savior—the realized consciousness of our covenant relation and consecration to Him, out amid the world's din and bustle—to the Exchange, the shop, the mart of commerce—as well as to the more consecrated pasture grounds where His people feed.

And the Christian, too, may find pasture in both—in public and in private—in the field and the fold—in the world and in the closet. In public, he can be sustained by lofty principles. In private, by prayer and secret fellowship with his Lord. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Having his eye on that door he can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Thus have we briefly glanced at one of the most precious utterances of the Great Shepherd. How these, and such like gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth, must have told on the wondering multitudes He addressed—those who never heard kind sayings before—who were led to imagine that it was learned scribes, or sanctimonious Pharisees, or austere Sadducees, or stolid priests, who alone had any hope of Salvation! Can we marvel that "the common people heard Him gladly"—when He lifted them up from the dust of degradation; when He proclaimed boldly—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." I came not to call you rich—you learned—you who trust yourselves on your religious formalism and self-righteous austerities—but you broken-hearted penitents, weeping prodigals, despairing Magdalenes—you the most erring wanderers from the fold, who are really and earnestly seeking to return. "If ANY man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "If ANY man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

Reader! Say not, 'This invitation cannot be for me. I cannot enter, just as I am, maimed and fleece-torn, with the memory of countless

transgressions.' Yes! it is just because you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, that we invite you to come. Come, just as you are. God does not require any previous qualification. It is because of your poverty that He so importunately exclaims—"Behold, I have set before you an open door." When in a season of scarcity and poverty, thousands thrown out of employment are forced to avail themselves of bread doled out to stop the ravage of hunger; they are not heard to say—'We must have proper clothing first. We must first cover these children's bleeding, frost-bitten feet, before we can venture to appear before the dispensers of a city's or a nation's bounty.' No; if they did so, it would vitiate their plea; it would send them home again to a cupboard, and hearth, and wardrobe, as empty as they left it. It is because they appear in tattered rags, and because hunger has written its appeal on their emaciated faces, and in the hollow eyes of the hapless children at their side, that the door opens for relief.

Remember, there is but the one door of safety, and no other. There was but one way to the Hebrews of old, for evading the destroying angel—by the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts of their dwellings. There was but one way through the Red Sea from the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. There was but one way for Rahab escaping the general destruction of Jericho—by hanging out from her window the scarlet thread. There was but one way—by washing in the river of Jordan—that the proud Syrian captain could have his leprosy healed. Israel might have built up Egyptian pyramid on pyramid to keep out the messenger of wrath. It would have been of no avail. Or the million army, passing through the Red Sea, might have piled up its coral rocks to make an avenue through the waters. The wild waves would have laughed them to scorn, and made them the plaything of its tide! Naaman might have made a toilsome pilgrimage to every river of Asia—from Abana and Pharpar, to the Euphrates and the Indus—but all would have been to no purpose. Nothing but 'the waters of Israel' would prove efficacious in curing his malady.

Arise, then, make sure of safety; wing your flight to the Rock of Ages. You are only safe when you are found nestling in its crevices. Unmoved by storms, unworn and unsplintered by the destroying hand of time, Jesus, the Living Rock, stands infinite—immutable—all-sufficient—faithful

among the faithless—changeless among the changeable.

Yes! you who are weary, sick at heart of the vain world which has deceived you—bubble after bubble bursting in your hands, feeding on the husks of the swine and the rubbish of the wilderness—your Shepherd, with outstretched arms, is waiting to welcome you back. He is standing, as He did eighteen hundred years ago, by the door of the sheepfold, saying, "I am the Door," "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out!"

## **7. THE SHEPHERD GOING BEFORE THE FLOCK**

"The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:3-4

Beautiful is the feeling of fondness, we had almost said of affection, which from time to time we see displayed by man towards the lower animals. The cottager in the lonely abode has his faithful dog to tend him in his hours of labor, or to share morning and evening his frugal fare and the caresses of his children. Even in the dense city, the poverty-stricken inmate of the upper loft has her hours of solitude cheered by the tiny warbler hung up with dusty plumage in its cage. It is no simulated sorrow on her part when the note falters and the wing droops; and the cage is suspended empty and songless.

The same feeling, on a more remarkable scale still, may be seen in the case of the Hindu with his elephant, or the Arab with his horse; and, most of all, in that of the Oriental shepherd with his fleecy companions. We would require to be among the hills of Judah and Gilead, or amid the vast valleys and forests of Bashan and Hermon, rightly to appreciate and

understand the exquisite beauty of the figure which we are now to consider in the Pastoral parable. In these wide sheep-walks and mountain-ranges the shepherd occupies very much the relation of a parent to his offspring. He has a tender solicitude for each member of his flock. He is not the rough hireling or stern custodian, but the kind protector and provider. He knows every sheep. He has a name for each. By night and by day he is at their side. During the hot months of summer they are taken on the cool mountain heights to a temporary fold, composed of a palisade of intertwined branches of thorn. He sleeps armed in the midst of them. He is ready to give battle to any prowling lord of the forest who (as is sometimes the case) clears at a bound the temporary rampart—"The wolf comes and scatters the sheep."

Instances are on record where he has cheerfully given his life in deadly conflict, either with human plunderers or wild animals, for the protection of his flock. During the continuance of long drought, when the heavens are as brass and the earth as iron—when the herbage is dried and the sheep go bleating and pining over the withered pastures—he climbs the rock to the verdant turf fringing the hidden watercourse, and brings at his own peril a scant handful for the most needy. At other seasons, when the northern forests are alive with flocks gathered underneath the trees, the faithful shepherds mount the branches, and, stripping them of their leaves, cast them down to the companions of their solitude.

Can we wonder that the sheep follow the Shepherd—that they gather round him as their friend—love to hear his voice, and implicitly trust his guidance? Moreover, can we wonder, that to the mind of the Divine Redeemer, this lovely image, so familiar to every Hebrew, should be touchingly suggestive of the trustful love—the hallowed interchange of affection between Himself and His true people? "WHEN HE PUTS FORTH HIS OWN SHEEP HE GOES BEFORE THEM." Let us gather a few comforting reflections veiled under this symbolism.

There is, first of all, the general truth, that all our pastures—our lots our positions and spheres of life—are appointed and meted out for us. That the Gracious Shepherd of Israel precedes us. That He does not put us outside the wicket-gate of the fold, and then leave us to select our own destiny; but that all which concerns us is His righteous ordination and

decree. "The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." As surely as the pillar of cloud and fire preceded Israel in their marches, directing every encampment of the pilgrim army, so have we the Invisible Pillar of covenant faithfulness going before us in all our journey. True, it is with us, as with Moses. On his return to the spot in the Sinai desert where he first saw the bush burning with fire, the bush was probably visible no more. He would look for it in vain. But the sacred flame in which it formerly was enveloped, still lived in the spiral column which rose up before him by night, and in the pillar-cloud by day.

Christ in His human nature—Christ the lowly bush of the desert "the tender plant"—"the root out of the dry ground;" Christ in His humiliation—"manifest in the flesh"—we can see no more. But the Pillar of fire still remains. The Shepherd of the Flock—the invisible Redeemer—is still preceding the camp of His covenant Israel: and we can say with reference to our spiritual journeyings, as it was said of old of the Hebrew Exodus, "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."

Oh! it is well for us that we are not left to choose our own pasture—to thread at will the mazy labyrinths of life! "My Presence", He says, "shall go with you, and I shall give you rest." It is the Shepherd going armed before His sheep—not only pointing out the way, but seeing that it is practicable. It is the Master Husbandman going before with the ploughshare, His servants tracking His steps and inserting the seed in the upturned furrow. It is the General going before his soldiers, himself the first to scale the ladder and enter the opened breach, encouraging his troops to follow after him.

The Great Shepherd asks us to tread no path which has not already been trodden by Himself. Think of the varied incidents in His life of human love and sympathy and suffering on earth—and, connecting these with every possible diversity of circumstance and experience of sorrow among ourselves, remember "HE goes before us!" Is it infancy? He went before us here, in being Himself the Babe of Bethlehem! Is it youth? He 'goes before us' in the nurturing home of Nazareth, sanctifying early toil and filial obedience! Is it hours of weariness and faintness and poverty? He 'goes before us' an exhausted traveler to the well of Jacob, 'weary with His

journey!' Is it temptation we have to struggle with? He 'goes before us' to the wilderness of Judea, and to the awful depths of the olive-groves of Gethsemane, to grapple with the hour and power of darkness! Is it loss of friends? He 'goes before us' to the grave of Bethany to weep there! Is it Death (the last enemy) we dread? He 'goes before us' wrapped in the cerements of the tomb—descending into the region of Hades—uncrowning the King of Terrors—trampling his diadem in the dust! Is it entrance into Heaven? He 'goes before us' there. Having overcome the sharpness of death, He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He shows us the path of life leading into His own blessed presence, where there is fullness of joy, and to His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

But it is the individual, personal solicitude of the Shepherd in the well being of each of His people, which forms one of the loveliest inspired touches in John's parable. "He calls His own sheep by name." As the Oriental Shepherd has a distinguishing name for each separate member of his flock, so Christ has His eye on each individual believer, loves him, leads him, feeds him, "names" him, as if he were the alone object of His care and regard. It is not as with the husbandman, who can call his field of grain by name, but cannot discriminate each separate stalk. It is not as with the astronomer, who, although he can name some stars or groups of stars, leaves myriads unnamed in the wide field of immensity. It is not as with the general, who, though he can name a few of the more illustrious of his soldiers and officers, knows the rest of his brave thousands only in the mass. But as sheep by sheep passes in review before the Good Shepherd—He knows all their cases—their circumstances—their trials—their sorrows—their joys. He calls them "friends," "brethren," "peculiar treasure"—"I have called you by your name: you are mine!"

Yes! let us not lose the unutterable comfort of this, by resolving all into the doctrine of a mere superintending Providence—that God takes a general oversight and supervision of His creatures and their actions, but that of the minute circumstances and accidents of their daily life He takes no cognizance. His is a minute, personal, discriminating love. The individual is not lost in the mass or the aggregate. Believer! He loves you as if you stood alone in His world, and as if He had none other but you on

whom to lavish His solitudes!

This same Great Leader, on another occasion takes yet a smaller member of the lower creation than that spoken of in this parable, to teach the same truth. He points to one of the sparrows of the housetop, lying with fluttering wing in the highway or in the furrow—and He says, "Not one of these fall to the ground without my Father knowing of it. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Most comforting and consoling truth! Jesus—the Shepherd-Savior—the Brother in my nature—"mighty to save" as God, mighty to compassionate as man, ever preceding me—marking out all that befalls me; appointing and controlling the minutest events in my personal history, and loving me with an affection of which earth's tenderest relationships afford the feeblest type.

See the mother seated by the couch of her suffering child! Watch her tender unremitting care—the hours and nights of sleepless vigilance, she bends over the cherub form—smoothing its pillow, and moistening its fevered lips. What a picture! It is earth's most touching symbol of love and sacred affection. God points to that watchful parent and says—"She MAY forget, yet will I not forget you!"

## **8. THE FLOCK FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD**

If British travelers in Palestine are, with singular unanimity, arrested by the novel spectacle of the Shepherd going before the sheep, still more

impressive, to the eye unaccustomed to such scenes at home, seems to be the docility with which the sheep follow the Shepherd. It is a beautiful living picture in the dumb creation of trustful and confiding attachment. One or two truants of the flock may stray into the tempting cornfields, unhedged and unfenced close by; but the vast majority follow closely the footsteps of their guide. An accurate personal observer of pastoral life in the Judean hills has noted, that if the sheep stoop down to take a mouthful of the grass across which their Shepherd leads them, they lift up their heads to see that he is at hand, fearful of losing sight of him, and of finding themselves beyond reach of his voice. They will even plunge into the stream or swollen torrent if he should lead the way.

Is this a feeble figurative description of our docile, trustful following of the Good Shepherd? Can it be said of us in any humble sense, "We have the mind of Christ?" For what is the great lesson shadowed forth under this figurative language, but that our aim, as His people—the flock of His pasture—should be, to have each thought, wish, feeling, desire, coincident with His holy will. "Following Jesus" is just, in other words, doing always those things that are pleasing in His sight. Let us dwell upon this a little more particularly.

To follow Jesus as His spiritual sheep, we must do so FAITHFULLY. We are (or ought to be) divine artists making the character of the Redeemer our study, seeking to transfer, with scrupulous fidelity to our hearts and lives, a copy—imperfect, indeed, at best it must be—of the glorious Original. The four Gospels are the four corridors of a great picture-gallery, opening into one another. Their walls are crowded and frescoed with delineations from the story of His life on earth—scenes illustrative of the divine virtues of the Shepherd of Israel—for our imitation and example. Here is one picture of matchless humility—He is washing His disciples' feet. Another—He is weeping with a group of mourners in a Jewish graveyard. Another—He is bearing unmerited indignities, in meek, uncomplaining silence. Another—He commends, in His dying hour, His sorrowing, bereft parent to the care of a trusted friend. Another—He stretches out the hand of forgiveness to an ungrateful disciple. Another—while the chariot of cloud is waiting to carry Him upwards to His mediatorial Throne, His arms of unselfish love are extended in blessing



the bereaved and orphaned men of Galilee! What sublime pictures are these for our study!

Let our transcript—poor, marred, blemished at the best—be as faithful an approximation as we can. The nearer the artist is placed to the work of the Great Master, the more exact and successful his copy will be.

"Consider," says the apostle (literally "gaze upon") "Jesus Christ." Study the divine portraiture, line by line, feature by feature, until you transfix on the tablet of your own heart some faint resemblance of His spotless character. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

In following the guiding Shepherd, let us do so JOYFULLY. The Oriental sheep does not follow with reluctance. It is not driven with the goad of some cruel hireling, or terrified into tractability by the dog baying at his heels. It is a free, voluntary, joyful obedience. It would be unhappy to hear any other voice, or to follow any other footstep. It obeys the call of the Shepherd, because it delights to be near him. This is the picture of the true believer. He follows his Lord with joy. It is not the cold, hard motive of duty—but rather, duty is transformed into delight. If you ask him why he follows his Shepherd, he will reply, "The love of Christ constrains me!"

The flower does not follow the sun grudgingly and under constraint. It does not hide its blushing tints in the shade, or creep under some crevice to escape the light. On the contrary, it is strange to see the efforts it makes to free itself from its nook of concealment, and get refreshment and revival for its leaves and blossoms. The air feeds its invisible vessels; the dews moisten leaf, and stem, and root; the sun pours upon all its genial warmth; and the grateful and joyous inanimate thing pushes upwards, as if it longed to be ever nearer the great dispenser of light and blessing. Why should we creep like unhealthy plants afraid of the sunshine? "These things," says Christ, "have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "Rejoice," says the noblest of His followers, "in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." Be true sheep to your guiding Shepherd, and you will "go on your way rejoicing."

Endeavor to follow the Great Shepherd HABITUALLY. The sheep does not follow its Shepherd by fits and starts; seeking to be near him only

when the wolf is prowling, or when the dog is on its track—when the night shadows are falling, or the pasture is diminishing. It is generally found close to its protector and guide. It is an undeviating trustful companionship, in sunshine and storm—in fullness and in drought—in summer and winter.

So it is, or ought to be, with the Believer—a constant, consistent, habitual following of his Lord, seeking ever to have a realizing sense of His nearness. Not merely when trouble is near; in the hour of affliction and sad calamity, or of impending death; but in the midst of life's joyous sunshine, when verdure is on the mountainside, when the rills are singing their way down to the lower valley, and the tinkling bells answering from fold to fold, tell of nothing but peace, and safety, and repose.

It is not great, or special, or extraordinary experiences which constitute in the best sense the 'religious character.' It is the uniform daily walk with God; serving Him in little things as well as great things; in the ordinary duties and everyday avocations, as well as in the midst of grave and eventful contingencies. As the most sublime symphony is made up of separate single notes—as the wealth of the cornfield is made up of separate stalks, or rather of separate grains; as the magnificent texture, with its gorgeous combinations of color, its pictures cunningly interweaved by the hand or the shuttle, is made up of individual threads—as the mightiest avalanche that ever came thundering down from its Alpine throne, uprooting villages and forests, is made up of tiny snowflakes; so it is with the spiritual life. That life is itself the grandest illustration of the power of littles.

Character is the product of daily, hourly actions, and words, and thoughts—daily forgiveness, unselfishness, kindnesses, sympathies, charities, sacrifices for the good of others, struggles against temptation, submissiveness under trial. Oh! it is these, like the blending colors in a picture, or the blending notes of music, which constitute "the MAN!" It is when the whole being is in harmony with the Divine will—this—this is the true "Psalm of Life!"

The flower, of which we spoke a little ago, has no set days for following the sun, and drinking in his radiance; neither has it any set days for

exhaling its own perfume. It swings its censer of incense in the still air all summer long. So with the Christian. His heart is a true sun-flower, following the Great Spiritual Luminary from dawn to eventide, drooping its head in sadness when the night shadows fall, and ready to expand the folded blossom again at the summons of the morning. He does not give God the Sabbath merely, and closes his leaves and petals to holy influences all the week. He seeks to begin it, carry it on, and end it under the consciousness of the Divine favor. His morning prayer strikes the keynote of each day. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You that lead Joseph like a flock."

Let us seek, as the flock of Christ, to follow the Shepherd ONLY. No other voice, no other leader ought we to hear. There are other voices to which, in these days, we are apt to listen, rather than that of the Heavenly Shepherd. In these divided modern sheepfolds, we have one saying, 'Paul is my shepherd;' another, 'Apollos is mine;' another, 'Cephas is mine.' We hear the word "toleration" applied among professing Christians more frequently than we should. Sheep tolerating one another—Shepherds tolerating one another; yes, and sometimes not even that. Salvation is made to turn on the question of sectarianism. The Jewish sheep and the Jewish shepherds have no dealing with the Samaritan sheep and the Samaritan shepherds. Sheep are excluded—excommunicated from the fold—because they have not some discriminating symbols of human device, apart from God's symbol of holiness of character. Oh! that we were done with these wretched man-made distinctions!

They are like the marks the earthly shepherd puts on the wool of his sheep to distinguish them, but which are no test whatever of intrinsic value. As we have seen some of the basest truants of the fold, some poor, haggard, pertinacious wanderers, bearing on their fleece forged initials; so it is by no artificial lettering—no church or denominational symbolism—that we are to discriminate the true sheep of Christ. What says Paul, that noble under-shepherd? "Be you," he says "followers of me"—or followers of Apollos—followers of Cephas. How? "As far as we are followers of Christ." No further. 'Follow us only as we follow the Chief Shepherd. Follow us only if you hear in us His voice.'

God's mark is that which He set of old on Caleb—"He wholly followed the

Lord his God." Not that we plead for a condition of the Church which we have no reason either to expect or desire; an amalgamating of all the different sects and sections an absorption of all the different folds into one. We question if this would be the mind of the Chief Shepherd. But as on our own hill slopes and mountain sides at eventide, there comes from the pendant bells of many separate folds a sweet and pleasing harmony of blended sound, so there might be (there ought to be) union if not communion—cooperation if there is not incorporation. "Whereto we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing:" recognizing a brother wherever we see a true follower of Jesus; extending Christian sympathy and fellowship wherever we see the unmistakable marks of the spiritual character and life.

Up! and follow the Lord FULLY. The traveler, overtaken in the snowstorm, knows that the longer he dallies, the greater will be his danger. He grasps his pilgrim-staff, and, facing the cutting wind and blinding drift, he pursues his arduous way. It is a blessed promise, "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." And the nearer we are in conscious fellowship with Christ, the more closely we track His footsteps—the safer and more joyous and more privileged we shall be.

An intelligent observer, in speaking of some sheep who are always nearest the shepherd, says, "These are his special favorites. He is ever distributing to such, choice portions which he gathers for that purpose.' Near Christ now, He will feed us with the finest of the wheat. Near Him now, we shall be privileged to enjoy nearer access to Him hereafter. Our spiritual condition and position now will determine our place in the fold above. It is according as we gravitate on earth near the Great central Spiritual Sun, that our orbit will be fixed in the celestial firmament. While yet, then, still at a distance from the heavenly pastures, be it ours to imbibe the spirit, and to walk in the footsteps of our Shepherd-Redeemer, that when we reach the golden meadows of heaven, when we take our place among the flock of the ransomed, it may still be said of us, in a nobler sense, "THESE ARE THEY WHICH FOLLOW THE LAMB WHEREVER HE GOES."

## 9. THE SONG OF THE FLOCK

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23: 1-4

What a deathless poem the twenty-third Psalm is! It is the psalm of all psalms. Our Bibles would be robbed of their brightest jewel without it; and our memories of a garnered and cherished treasure. What a myriad multitude there would be, could we assemble all who have ever read or sung it! There would be the sufferer on the sick-bed shortening and beguiling his weary vigils by repeating its consolations. There would be the martyr chanting it at his stake as the flames wrapped their red winding-sheet around him. There would be the soldier in his bivouac on the eve of battle, pondering its majestic solaces, by the smouldering embers of his fire—or his Bible found among the heaps of the slain, with its leaf turned down at the song of 'the valley of the shadow of death.' There would be the shepherd, wandering by the green pastures and still waters, warbling the strains of the inspired minstrel of all time, who had thus sanctified his calling. There would be the bereaved mourner stooping over some withered flower—deploring some extinguished light in the earthly dwelling—singing of a house and home where he and his restored loved ones would dwell forever. It has been sung on the hills of prosperity and in the valleys of woe—by the tongue of prattling infancy—by manhood in its prime, and by old age with its tottering step, leaning on the rod and staff of which it touchingly speaks. Little did he who first swept its numbers on his harp, think of the legacy he had thus bequeathed to the Church of the future; when, in some bright moment of his own waning years, he lifted the curtain of life and reposed in thought on the fond images of boyhood, as by day he led his sheep along the mountain sides, and by night folded them in the sheltered hollows; taking these memories of sweet sunshine as hallowed symbols of the Shepherd-

love and faithfulness of God.

The images of this pastoral song may be of earth, but its pedigree is of heaven—it is a heaven-born psalm. Surely, Goodness and Mercy, the two guardian angels—sister spirits—spoken of at its close, must have fetched it on shining wings down from the upper sanctuary. For three thousand years has it gladdened, comforted, solaced the Church in the wilderness. "Its line has gone through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world." And the numbers now singing it in the Church below are nothing to the ransomed tongues in the Church of the firstborn, to whom its undying cadence is still dear. Let us at present gather around the opening sentence—the opening strain. "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD I SHALL NOT WANT."

JEHOVAH, "All-sufficient," the covenant Shepherd of His people—embarked on their side, and pledged for their salvation. The old patriarch Jacob speaks of the "Shepherd of Israel;" Peter speaks of "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls." But David uses a loftier—more endearing epithet. That Almighty All-sufficient omnipotent Being, says he, is mine; He is MY Shepherd; or as he elsewhere sings—"This God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death." It is not the promises of God he leans upon; it is upon God Himself. It is not the streams he drinks of; but, stooping over the Infinite Fountain, he exclaims, 'Behold my covenant portion! God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.'

We know not if he shared the beautiful belief of the Hebrews regarding attendant angels hovering over the human pathway from birth to death. But he seems to say, "Here I have a nobler creed—a mightier Guardian, The Lord of angels is my Shepherd."

Let us consider, a little more particularly, the words of our motto-verse, as expressive of these three things—Thankfulness for the past, Confidence in the present, and Trust for the future; although these must necessarily be suggestive of some similar consoling truths which we have already dwelt upon in a preceding chapter.

Let us view this song of the flock of God as expressive of

THANKFULNESS FOR THE PAST. Jehovah, All-sufficient, HAS BEEN my Shepherd. Many there are who can see no better law or principle regulating the allotments of their daily life, than accident and capricious fortune. They see the shuttles of apparent chance darting here and there in the loom of existence, weaving a web of varied hue—an intricate pattern—black threads and white threads—joy and sorrow, in strange and fitful alternation. No, not so! The shuttle is in the hands of the Great Weaver. Life is not a mere kaleidoscope—its events gliding and shaping themselves into fanciful and wayward combinations. God has a plan, a divine plan, in all. Every mercy is His bestowing; and when mercies are withdrawn, and sorrows take their place, it is equally of His wise, though sometimes mysterious, appointment.

Seek, like the psalmist, to see your Shepherd's guiding hand in all the past, and to retain in the remembrance that best blessing—a thankful heart—thankful for small mercies as well as for great ones. As the magnet attracts to itself the tiniest iron grain as well as the largest—so the redeemed, regenerated soul, magnetized with the love of God, bears away with it the lively remembrance of the smallest tokens of the Divine favor, as well as the 'memories of God's great goodness,' and feels that no mercies are unworthy of remembrance, for all are undeserved.

The proud, worldly, unthankful heart is never satisfied—all it has, it takes as a matter of course; and, notwithstanding all it has, it is ever craving for more. The thankful heart, on the other hand, baptized with the new affections of the gospel, delights to traverse in thought the past, and to connect each bright spot in the retrospect with the great Bestower of all good—saying, in the words of him who wrote this psalm, on another of those occasions of his life which drew forth the acknowledgment of his grateful spirit "What am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me hitherto!"

This song of God's ransomed flock implies CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENT. "Jehovah, All-sufficient, IS my Shepherd." How blessed thus to repose our present in God; and to say, as we lie passive in His hands, "Undertake for me!" He is portioning out for us as He sees fit, having His own infinite reasons for what may appear perplexing to us. We, with an unquestioning and unreasoning faith, fully trusting His Shepherd-power,

tenderness, skill, vigilance, love. He does not consult our short-sighted wisdom in what He does. The clouds do not consult the earth as to when they shall visit its fruits and flowers—its cornfields and forests, with their watery treasures. The pining plant does not dictate to the heavenly reservoirs as to when they shall unseal their hidden stores. These give a kindly and needful supply "in due season," and the earth has never yet, for six thousand years, had to complain of them as niggard almoners of their Creator's bounty.

So it is with the soul—He who makes the clouds His—chariot who opens and shuts at will the windows of heaven—locking and unlocking the fountains of the great deep—says to all His people—"Trust Me; I will give you all needed present blessings—I will come unto you as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth. I do not pledge myself as to how or when the rain shall fall—but I will cause the shower to come down in his season: there shall be showers of blessing. As your day is, so shall your strength be."

O that we could learn this lesson of entire confidence in a present, personal God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being! Behold, the sun of the natural heavens, the great central luminary—a dumb insensate mass of matter—holding its dependent planets in their orbits, controlling their unerring movements; they in calm, silent submission, yielding obedience to the will of this sovereign lord: how much more may we hold on our way in the orbit of undeviating obedience, exulting God's ever-present power and love; so that in the remotest solitude, as well as the densest crowd, we can say, "Alone, yet not alone, for my Father and Shepherd is with me!"

A necessary result of this confidence in the wisdom of God's Shepherd-dealings, will be, contentment with our lot, whatever it is. We cannot say precisely at what time of his eventful life David wrote this psalm—whether it was amid the splendor of royalty, or when a weeping exile amid the glens of Gilead. But he seems in it to rise above all outward experiences—the pomp and circumstance of life. "It matters not," he seems to say, "what my condition may be—crowned or uncrowned—a king or an alien—I have a nobler heritage than earth can give me, or than earth can despoil me of. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing."



A happy, gladsome motto for us all, in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth. Go to that lowly, despised, down-trodden believer. He has lost his worldly substance, his health, his children. Wave on wave of earthly calamity has swept over him; and yet, conscious of some hidden, unexplained "needs be," and of a nobler reversion—he can sing through his tears, "I lack nothing!"

Aim after this contented spirit; not fretfully murmuring at your present allotments, or ambitiously aspiring after other positions in life, as if mere change itself would rid of vexation and augment happiness. Happiness is not dependent on place, or sphere, or locality, but on the state of the heart. Wherever God dwells and holiness exists, there must be contentment and peace. As the Christian poet well says—  
"While place we seek and place we shun,  
The soul finds happiness in none,  
But with a God to guide our way,  
'It is equal joy to go or stay."

And if we thus confide in God, He will confide in us. Beautiful are the words of the prophet "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness; those who remember You in Your ways." Those that remember You and confide in You, "You meet them!" The Lord comes out half-way to meet the confiding heart. The Shepherd comes out half-way to meet the timorous yet confiding sheep. The old father comes out half-way to meet his prodigal; and when He does meet him, He has the first tear and the first word of welcome. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You!"

This song of the flock expresses trust for the FUTURE. "Jehovah, All-sufficient, shall be my Shepherd-I shall not be in want." "That dark future." How many are speaking of it as such! It is in the Shepherd's keeping, and we may well leave it there. How beautiful the impress of God's hand in the works of outer nature. Every blade of grass, every forest leaf, how perfect in symmetry of form, and in tenderness of color. With what exquisite grace He has penciled every flower, delicately poised it on its stalk, or spread a pillow for its head on the tender sod! The God who has "so clothed the grass of the field," will not be unmindful of the

lowliest of His covenant family. But we need not go so far as the silent volume of nature. We may open the volume of our own experience. Just as the husbandman sees in the flush of green in early spring the pledge of a golden harvest, so we may take the crowded memories of His Shepherd-love in the past, as proof, and pledge, and token, that not one thing will fail us of all that the Lord our God has spoken unto the house of Israel. We can exultingly add with the psalmist in subsequent verses, "I WILL fear no evil . . . Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

David seems to love here, as elsewhere, to sit at these windows of covenant faithfulness, looking, at one time, back along the chequered vista behind him, and then casting a glance across the river of death into the shining city. "Goodness and Mercy," the two attendant guardian angels that have tracked his footsteps all the bygone way, he sees still at his side. Other messengers, other attendant ones may have met him on the road. Sorrow, clad in her somber attire—Bereavement, with her tearful eye—Pain, with her languid countenance. But his joyful contented spirit can see none in all the catalog but two—GOODNESS and MERCY!

In the spirit of the great apostle, he does not give thanks only sometimes for some things, but "always for all things." His motto seems to be, "I have set the Lord always before me." Grateful for the past, he still follows the steps of the guiding Shepherd—chanting His pilgrim song, "I shall not be in want!" Let us banish all unholy distrust for the future. "Take no thought" (that is to say, Do not be over-anxious or over-careful) "for tomorrow;" that 'tomorrow' is in the hands of One boundless in His resources, infinite in His love. Do not charge Him with insincerity when He says, "All things work together for good to those who love God." "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." If He leads you along a rough and thorny road, hear His loving voice thus reassuring your faith and lulling your misgivings, 'Your Heavenly Shepherd, your Heavenly Father—knows that you need of all these things.'

Above all, think of that leading Shepherd as the Savior who died for you; who Himself, as we have previously seen, was identified with you as the Man of Sorrows, in every earthly experience of sorrow and woe, and can enter with exquisite sympathizing tenderness into every bleat of His

weary, suffering flock. He foresees and anticipates every emergency that can overtake you. He can avert every danger, and disarm every foe. "All power has been committed to Him in heaven and in earth."

Oh! as you may be now surveying the yet untrodden road, leading 'uphill and downhill to the city of habitation,' remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

How many of us can sing this first note of the song of the Lord's flock which we have now been considering? All can do so, who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior—all who have their feet planted on the Rock of Ages, and who have closed with the terms of offered covenant mercy. Can we say, "He has set MY feet upon a Rock, and put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God?" All are warranted to come to that Rock. There is no lip that may not learn to sing that song. There is no wandering sheep that may not come to partake of these heavenly pastures. God has made provision not for the strong only, but for the weak, the weary, the tempted, the sorrowful, the suffering—all may partake of the Shepherd-love of that God, "All-sufficient." The feeblest lamb of the flock can utter its trembling cry of confiding trust. The same Jehovah-Shepherd and Lord is rich to all that call upon Him. The anointing oil of blessing poured on the head of the true Aaron flows down to the very skirts of His garment, so that the least and lowliest are made partakers of His covenant grace.

Who can give utterance to words akin to those of the psalmist regarding any earthly portion? Who that have made the world and pleasure their chief good, can say, on the retrospect, "I lack nothing?" Rather, have you not to tell of great aching voids in your hearts which nothing on earth can fill? If we were to analyze the fevered souls to whom these covenant blessings are strange, would not this be the confession, perhaps reluctantly wrung, "The Lord not being our Shepherd, we lack everything; yes, everything that is truly worthy to be called a portion? Our outer life though thoroughly furnished with all the world can give it—how empty! These gaudy treasures of a vain earth, what a hollow mockery, dissevered from the true riches of God's love and favor!"

Let it not be ours to barter these glorious realities for things which perish with the using, to return our Shepherd's overtures of kindness with cold indifference, chilling unconcern.

Be it observed that all the blessings spoken of in this song of the old Hebrew minstrel are present blessings. We do not say that the blessings of the future—the blessings in store for us, are not greater still; that the view, across that river Jordan, of the green hills of Canaan, opens up wondrous revelations of bliss and glory of which we can at present form only the feeblest conception. But that divine Shepherd-love, with all its attendant blessings, is ours now, if we have fled to Christ for safety, and can lay hold by faith on God as our covenant God. "We who have believed DO enter into rest." "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Yes, we can sing the Lord's song, even in this strange land. We shall indeed meet (we must expect to meet) with chequered experiences—seasons of depression, sorrow, suffering. But we need never fear with such a Guide. We have an All-sufficient refuge when our hearts are overwhelmed—"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel! You who lead Joseph like a flock." And when angels come down to our pillows, to bear us away from the cloud and the storm, to dwell in the hills of glory, we shall carry the old song of the flock on earth up amid the enduring pastures of the blessed—"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT BE IN WANT!"

## **10. THE GREEN PASTURES AND STILL WATERS WHERE THE FLOCK ARE FED**

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Psalm 23: 1-2

In the preceding chapter we considered the opening verse, what may be

called the key-note of David's beautiful pastoral song. There he had given utterance to the negative, now he proceeds, under the same Shepherd-symbol, to speak of the positive blessings belonging to all God's people. The picture here presented is that which is often witnessed in our own Highland valleys—a flock of sheep, on a summer evening, reposing by the verdant banks of some limpid stream—having around them, in abundance, the two main requirements of the fold, grass and water.

The Eastern or Arabian shepherd is known to wander for days together along the trackless waste, until he find these requisite supplies. The greenest grass would be insufficient without the stream, and the purest water would be unavailing if its course lay through barren moorlands, or among rank weeds and naked rocks. In these two expressive emblems of this psalm, we have brought before us the provision which the Great Shepherd has made for the comfort and nourishment of His flock. In other words, the ample supply of grace afforded to the believer in the new covenant, to meet all his spiritual needs. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures" [margin, in the pastures of tender grass]. "He leads me beside the still waters" [or, "the waters of quietness"]. Taking the words in a more general sense, we may gather from each of the clauses one or two simple thoughts for meditation.

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures." The first idea suggested is that of REST and SECURITY. The flock 'LIE down.' The posture is indicative of perfect repose. So timid often are sheep, that to pass by them in a meadow is the signal for scattering the whole flock. But here every cause or fear of danger seems removed. No bleat is heard in all the valley. They are moored, like vessels in a quiet sheltered haven, around the feet of the shepherd.

The life of man, as we were led more specially to notice in a former chapter, is a constant striving after rest, repose, satisfaction. Many, indeed, are seeking it in base counterfeits; yet even in the counterfeit-search we detect the aspiration after a nobler reality. In the very chasing of the shadow we discern the longing after the substance. The miser seeks it in his gold; the ambitious man seeks it as he climbs his giddy eminences; the pleasure-hunter seeks it in artificial excitements; the student seeks it in the loftier aspirations and achievements of his

intellectual nature. But true rest can be found in God alone. "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing." "When HE gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" "HE gives His beloved sleep" (rest).

It is only when we have secured possession of the Divine Shepherd's favor and love, pardon and reconciliation through the atoning work and merits of Jesus, that we can "lie down." Short of this, there will be a feverish roaming after something other, something apparently better, but a something which, even when attained, does not and cannot satisfy. Having Him for our portion, we need no other. With every longing of our moral natures answered, we can say, "This is my rest forever."

A second idea which the figure of "green pastures" suggests is that of ABUNDANT PROVISION. Observe, it is not one piece of pasture-ground that is here spoken of, but "pastures." There is no scant supply, but, on the contrary, an ample variety, to suit the circumstances of each member of the flock. The sheep may roam from field to field, yet still there is enough and to spare. Moreover, the provision is the best of its kind—not bitter or fading, but young and tender grass, as if eternal spring or summer brooded over these meadows. What diversity there is in God's spiritual provision for His people!

Grace for all times, and every time. Each tender blade has its dew-drop of comfort—each pool in "the still waters" has its reflection of love. Countless multitudes have been nourished by these pastures in every age, and still they are green—evergreen; and the song of the flock is this day what it has been for three thousand years—"The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing."

How specially is this true of the pastures of God's Holy Word! What variety have we here; doctrine, precept, promise, comfort, consolation, yes, "everlasting consolation." At no time are these pastures greener to us than in seasons of sorrow; when the world's pastures are burned up, and its choicest nooks and valleys—those that were used to be carpeted with flowers and bathed in sunshine—can offer no refreshment or repose. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

Let us pass to the second part of the verse—"He leads me beside the still waters!" "Still waters!" These words appear to convey, under another figure and symbol, a description just of the same calm and hallowed repose, secured to the believer, which the psalmist had in his mind in the preceding clause—the soul kept in perfect peace which is stayed on God. The wicked are compared to the "troubled sea." But this is an inland river—a quiet, gentle stream, protected from the boisterous winds which fret the ocean to madness. Strange, indeed, often is the history of the soul before it attains that divine repose; fierce are its struggles before there ensues the calm of victory and rest. Like the patriarch at Jabbok before he secured the change of name and the divine blessing, it has often times been a long night of wrestling before the dawning of the day.

You may have witnessed such a peaceful meadow as that described by the psalmist of Israel, with its quiet, lake-like stream; so still, that not a ripple bedims its surface; every rock, and plant, and spear of grass, which fringe its banks, beautifully mirrored in the surface. Yet follow that same river up these mountain ravines, and you see it fretting and foaming over rugged rocks, hurrying impetuously down to where it now sleeps so calmly in the lower valley! That is a picture of the often long unrest of the soul before it has found the peace which passes understanding; its struggles with inward corruption and outward temptation; the fierce eddying currents and impetuous cataracts of passion and sin, before it secure its glorious repose in God. Not until it reaches these quiet meadows, with their green pastures, which we have been now describing, can it say—"Return unto your rest, O my soul!"

Here, too, as in the former figure, we have the abundance of God's mercies set forth; not only varied pastures but varied waters. The blessings of grace are not like the Nile, one solitary river which receives no tributary all the nine hundred miles it traverses. They are rather like the Jordan, fed by a hundred rills, as it hurries through its rocky gorges. Many streams only flow in winter or spring. When summer comes (the time they are most needed) their channels are dry. But these "still waters" are full even in drought, for they are fed from the everlasting hills. When the world's streams are emptiest, the streams of grace are deepest and most ample. "The Lord," says the prophet, "shall guide you continually,

and satisfy your soul in drought, and make fat your bones; and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not."

We have streams of peace, of purity, of pardon, of sanctification—all exceedingly great and precious. Look at the exuberance of God's mercies in the natural creation. Go to some sequestered nook of tangled loveliness, by brook, or waterfall, or sequestered glade. Study for an hour that one page in the volume of nature, taking the microscope with you to help you in the task. How wondrous the tints! How symmetrical the forms! How lavish the garniture of the tiny worlds of animated being which the lens discloses! It is a feeble type of the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. "Oh! how great is Your goodness which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have wrought for those who trust in You, before the sons of men!"

We may conclude with the reflection suggested by both clauses, that true Religion is happiness. The loveliest emblems in nature, "green pastures" and "still waters," are here combined to symbolize the experiences, and depict the reality, of the believer's life. The world has its pleasures too, and we do not affirm that they are devoid of attractiveness. Had this been the case, they would not be so fondly and eagerly clung to as they are. But this we can affirm, that while they are certain, sooner or later, to perish, they are fitful and capricious even while they last. They are sand-built, not rock-built. They are, at best, but the passing gleam of the meteor; not like the Christian's happiness, the steady luster of the true constellation. The joys of the true believer outlive all others.

True Religion is like a castle on a mountain summit, catching the earliest sunbeam, and gilded by the last evening ray. When low down in the world's valleys, the shadows are falling, and the lights are already in the windows, the radiance still tarries on these lofty peaks of gladness. That castle, moreover, is full of all manner of good things. God has furnished it with every attractive blessing that can invite the weary wanderer in. He has crowded it with love-tokens, with which He may welcome back His long-absent children; just as a mother decks out her room for her absent boy; as every available nook is made gay with flowers and embroidery, crowded with souvenirs of affection, so God has filled that castle with



love-pledges. Its walls are tapestried with proofs and promises of His grace and love in Jesus.

Go, wandering one, enter within these gates! Test for yourself the reality of the divine assurance—"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe." Go, wandering sheep! make proof of the truthfulness as well as beauty of the symbol under which the spiritual existence is here, presented—as a reclining on green pastures, and by still waters. Go take your rest in those meadows of peace.

Not, however, a rest of inglorious sloth. It is rest in God; rest in the blessed assurance of His favor. But it is not rest from the activities of a holy life. It is not rest or respite from a perpetual battle with sin. Christianity, we have previously seen, is no condition of selfish inaction. The believer is a steward, a servant, a worker, a member of that royal priesthood who have each their special ministry of duty and love in the spiritual temple. Reader, let this rest be yours, the pure rest which follows the consciousness of doing good—of discharging some lowly unostentatious offices of love to the Shepherd of souls.

We value most the rest of the body when it is the recompense of hard work and toil. He sleeps most sweetly who has worked through the day most bravely. Have you ever felt the sweets of this rest? The pleasurable experienced after some act of kindness, and compassion, and generous self-sacrifice, by which your fellows have been made the better and the happier, and in the doing of which you have been enabled, in some feeble degree, to imitate the example of Him whose life was a combination of duty and love? If these deeds are performed quietly and unostentatiously, so much more is it in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, and with the spirit of the emblem we have been now considering—the still waters, fringed with green, flowing gently, noiselessly, unobtrusively along, manifesting their presence only by the fertility they spread around them. Beautiful picture of the true Christian! The silent flow of life's everyday current, carrying blessings in its course, fertilizing as it flows; leaving behind, and on either side, the green border of faith and love, kindness and benignity, charity and unselfishness.

Still waters indicate depth. It is the shallow stream that makes the

ostentatious hollow noise, gurgling and fretting along its pebbly channel. True religion is too real to be noisy. Its characteristic is deep principle, not fitful ecstasies. It is in grace as in nature—the gentle dew distills on the tender grass—the gentle rain feeds the mountain streams, and these imperceptibly feed the still waters in the lower meadows. Blessed resort, this sheltered valley of Christ's reposeful love! Hear Him calling you, as He utters the invitation, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

Having found the Shepherd of these green pastures and still waters, dread everything that would lead you away from Him, and forfeit the possession of His favor and regard. It is the short but touching epitaph frequently seen in the catacombs at Rome—"In Christ, in peace." Realize the constant presence of the Shepherd of Peace. "HE makes me to lie down!" "HE leads me!"

Be ever near these waters of quietness. Let the current of your daily walk and business run side by side with the heavenly stream. In the world you may and must be. "In the world," says He, "you shall have tribulation, but in Me you shall have peace." And when you come to die, others may speak of the surges of death, and the swellings of Jordan, but to you it will only be, under the guidance of the great Forerunner, a transit through the border stream, to the better meadows and better Canaan beyond. "When you pass through the waters I will be with you." You will be borne through them in the arms of the Shepherd, to rest evermore in the celestial pastures, and to drink evermore of the rivers of His pleasure.

## **11. THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH THE FLOCK ARE LED**

There is a world of comfort contained in the simple words, "He leads me." As we have already had occasion more than once to note, in adverting to the same pastoral figure, our lives are no fortuitous concurrence of events and circumstances—we are not like weeds thrown in the waters, to be

tossed and whirled in the eddying pools of capricious accident and chance, our future a self-appointed one. There is a Divine hand and purpose in all that befalls us. Every man's existence is a biography, written chapter by chapter, line by line, by God Himself. It is not the mere outline sketched by the Divine Being, which we are left to fill in; but all the minute and delicate shadings are inserted by Him. Looking no farther than our relation to Him as creatures, it is impossible for a moment to entertain the thought of our being beyond the leadings of God, and to speak of a life of self-government and self-dependence.

The complex machinery of the outer world, dumb inanimate nature in all its integral parts, is upheld by Him. "He weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." "He counts the number of the stars." He guides Orion and Arcturus in their magnificent marchings. If one of these orbs were to be jostled from its place—plucked from its silent throne in the heavens, it is well known that the equipoise and perfect balancing of the material system would be fatally disturbed—devastation would reign triumphant. And shall we own Him as the leader of stars and planets, and ignore His sovereignty over the human spirit? Shall we acknowledge that He is Lord in the universe of matter, and not supreme in the empire of thought and human volition? No, "His kingdom rules over ALL." Angel, archangel, cherub, and seraph; man, beast, worm, "these all wait upon You!"

But it is not the doctrine of God's general sovereignty which in the verse selected for meditation we are called to contemplate. It is as the Shepherd-leader of His ransomed flock, and the manner and method of His leading: "He leads me in the path of righteousness." Not only does this proclaim that I am the object of a thought in God's heart, but a loving thought. It is the Shepherd intent on some loving purpose, in every intricate turn of the winding path. Ah! we know, at times, there is nothing more difficult to believe than this. "What!" we say, "God leading me as a Shepherd, and leading me in righteousness! How can I reconcile, with all this, so much that is startling and perplexing alike in my own experience and in the world around me, where I see vice extolled, and virtue trampled under foot?"

There is a man, proud, niggardly, profligate, worthless; an extortioner,

the oppressor of the poor. God is leading him along one of the world's smiling paths; elevating him to positions of influence and distinction; fame sounding her brazen trumpet before him—while yonder is a man of sterling integrity and worth, of high honor and boundless philanthropy—the friend of the friendless—his open hand keeping pace with his generous heart, who can tell of quite a diverse experience. What can it be but unruly capricious fortune that has dandled on its knees him who is thus worthless and mean-souled—and left the other, in some luckless moment, stripped and beggared; disappointing his hopes, cropping the wings of honorable ambition, spoiling him of his goods, dashing his ships on the rocks, baring his cupboards, and leaving his children penniless?"

'Can that' (another will say)—'Can that be the path of righteousness, that path which echoes to the mournful tramp of the funeral crowd, as some loved one is borne to the long home? My innocent babe is snatched away; oh! why take the green and spare the ripe? Might He not rather have taken the old gnarled, decrepit tree, with its hollow trunk scathed with the storms of years? Might He not rather have taken the rose with its spent and withered leaves ready to drop to the ground? Why has He plucked the opening bud; left old age with its crutches, and despoiled the cradle of its smiles?'

Hush these Atheistic thoughts—away with these unworthy surmises. He "leads in righteousness." He has an infinite reason for all He does. It is not for us to attempt to unravel the tangled thread of Providence. God is often, like Jacob of old, blessing the sons of Joseph with crossed hands. We, in our half-blind, short-sighted faith, would presume to dictate to Him, and prejudge the wisdom and rectitude of His methods. We are tempted to say with Joseph, "Not so, my father." But like the old patriarch, "He guides His hands intentionally."

As the sheep of His pasture, He may not be leading you along the bright meadow or sunny slope; He may be lingering amid stunted herbage; He may be turning down some bramble thicket—plunging into gloomy forest glades, while acres of rich sunny pasture are close at hand. But He sees, what you did not see; He sees an adder here; He sees a lion there; He sees pitfalls here; He sees a precipice there. He knows you better, He loves you better, than to set you in slippery places, and cast you down to

destruction. He sees, if that fortune had been unbroken, that dream of ambition realized, that clay-idol undethroned—the alienated heart would have gradually, but terribly, lapsed away from Him.

Trust Him. In the midst of perplexing dealings say, "I know" (you cannot say "I see"), but let faith say, "I know, O God, that Your judgments are right, and that You in faithfulness have afflicted me." It is covenant love that guides you. If you are led up the mountain summits of worldly distinction and honor and prosperity, HE leads you—if along the lowly valleys of obscurity and poverty, humiliation and sorrow, HE leads you. Your life is a plan of the great God; and this is the most important element in the plan, "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers."

Health, sickness—joy, sorrow—successes, reverses—worldly honors, worldly humiliations—receiving, surrendering—suffering, losing—in all these, He has in view your soul-prosperity. Better to have not even a place to lay your head, if the guiding Shepherd be with you—than all the world's broad acres without Him. Better the empty barrel and the handful of meal, with God—than the full cup and gilded ceilings without Him. Better Lazarus with his crumbs, and his hope of glory—than Dives with his purple, and dainty provisions, and no heaven! Better yonder chained prisoner in the dungeon, than Nero in his palace. The one was the world's undisputed master, with his foot on the neck of subject millions; the other was an outcast Jew—a sheep, without fold or pasture on earth which he could call his own—yet to his guiding Shepherd he could say, "I have all and abound!" "All men forsook me, notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

We own it, that these gracious leadings are often not discernible. We cannot understand His judgments, they are a deep, "a great mystery." You may have seen the somber mountains which descend in abrupt shelving masses into some of our peaceful Highland lakes. Their bases are lost in the unsounded depths of that still mirror; we see their trembling reflections, no more. But the mountains themselves are patent to view. So, if we cannot discern or understand God's judgments, let us acknowledge the "righteousness" which directs them. Let us say in

adoring reverence with the psalmist, who seems to have had this beautiful image in his eye—"Your righteousness is as the great mountains, Your judgments are a great mystery."

What a grandeur and dignity, what a safety and security it would give to life, if we sought ever to regard it as a leading of the Shepherd—God shaping our purposes and destinies, that wherever we go, or wherever our friends go, He is with us! Even in earthly journeyings, if our pathway be the great and wide sea—"He gives to the sea His decree"—winds and waves and storms are the Shepherd's voice. If it be speeding along the railway tracks, nothing but that tiny iron thread between us and death, He curbs the wild frenzy of the fiery courser; He puts the bit in his iron mouth; He gives His angels charge over us to bear us up and keep us in all our ways.

If it be our position in the world; He metes out every drop in the cup, He assigns us our niche in His temple, fills or empties our coffers, makes vacant the chairs of our homesteads. But "HE leads us!" He will yet be His own interpreter. We can take no more than the near, the limited, the earthly view of His dealings—let us pause for the infinite disclosures of eternity.

Look at the husbandman laboring in his field. All this deep ploughing is for the insertion of the needful seed. In doing the work, he may appear to act roughly. Ten thousand insects nestling quietly in their homes in the ground are rudely unhoused. All at once, their ceiled dwellings are pulled asunder. Many a happy commonwealth is scattered and overthrown in the upturned furrow—little worlds of life and being demolished by the ruthless, remorseless ploughshare.

In like manner, some of our earthly schemes may be assailed and pillaged—our staff and beautiful rods broken—our worldly treasures scattered by the iron teeth of misfortune. But all is preparatory to a higher good, a harvest of rich blessing crowning the soul, as He does the year with His goodness, and making its paths drop fatness!

Let us, finally, learn the lesson of our entire dependence on our Shepherd Leader, and our need of His grace in prosecuting the path of the spiritual

life. God had just taken some means to revive and quicken that life in the soul of the psalmist, "He restores my soul." Thus restored, he clings with greater ardor than before to the great Restorer. He is more keenly alive to his indebtedness to Him for keeping in healthful energy every spiritual grace. His feeling is not "I am revived, and restored, and quickened, I shall be able now manfully to pursue my own way."

The next note in his song, after telling of God's reviving grace, is to exult in God's sustaining grace—"He leads me in the paths of righteousness." Reader, make it your prayer to this "God of all grace," "Hold up my goings in Your paths, that my footsteps slip not"—"Lead me in the way everlasting!" And He will lead you—He will keep you. "The Lord is your keeper, your stay, and your strength, on your right hand." That path is an onward path of blessedness and peace. It is written, "The righteous shall hold on his way."

Rejoice then, you sheep of God! You shall never perish. All creation may become bankrupt; earth may lock up her furrows, and seasons refuse to revolve; the sun (heaven's great lamp) may be extinguished, and the stars rush from their orbits—but the Lord will never fail to be to His people their "Sun and Shield," giving them "grace and glory." Meanwhile be it yours to follow after that holiness—that "righteousness"—without which no man can see the Lord. Walk day by day, under the guidance and guardianship of your Shepherd; and in the conscious possession of His love, you must be happy. Trials will turn into mercies—sorrows will be transmuted into joys—losses will be resolved into gains. You will sleep, like the little child through the night of storm, when he feels his parent's hand locked in his. In the very darkest of human hours—when the wind is sweeping and sighing through the trackless forest—when the tempest has shrouded moon and stars—and you are getting deeper and deeper amid the intricacies of entangling thickets—with such a Guide, Protector, Friend, you need fear no evil.

In the words of Ezekiel, you can "dwell securely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." And when the morning breaks—the bright morning of heaven—when the earthly path is at end, and you attain the sunlit summit of the everlasting hills, you will be able to retrace, with adoring gratitude, all its windings. The prospect will afford material for a twofold

song—the Song of Providence and the Song of Grace. You will sing "the Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb."



## **12. THE SHEPHERD SEEKING THE FLOCK IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY**

"I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." Ezekiel 34: 11-16

In the closing sentences of the preceding chapter, we indicated the possibility of a change in the experience of the believer—such as that which is now to form the theme for consideration. In the first of the two verses above selected, there is laid, as it were, the scene of this new pastoral picture. Dark clouds are represented brooding over the landscape—the thunder has burst over the valleys—and the sheep are scattered here and there over the gloomy mountains. Some are entangled in the thorns—some are lost in the misty shrouds filling the hollows, some are lying bleeding and wounded, at the foot of the precipices over which they have fallen. But wanderers and panic-stricken as they are, they are not forsaken. Amid wind and storm, the watchful eye of their Shepherd follows them; and, under new symbols, we have a fresh and tender unfolding of His loving dealings. Let us briefly consider, in their order, the fourfold classification here given of the scattered sheep. The lost, and the driven away: the broken, and the sick. Thus separately grouped, we have a figurative description of the two elements of Sin and Sorrow, which, in the experience of the flock of God, still give rise to "the cloudy and dark day."

The first in this enumeration are "THE LOST." It is not necessary that we attach to this term the meaning it has in other passages already considered—as denoting the Shepherd's first finding of "the lost sheep,"—the first rescue of the sinner from his state of condemnation and death. We may rather now cursorily notice it as referring to what will afterwards form the theme of a separate chapter—Christ's dealing with backsliders—truants, who, it may be, have long known the peace and security of the Fold—but who, by their own hapless estrangement, have forfeited, for a time, alike their happiness and safety.

Moreover, we may here regard the figure as descriptive of those who, little by little (by imperceptible degrees), have erred and strayed from the Shepherd's fold and presence—those who, to use a different Scripture figure, once did "run well," but who have been "hindered." Once their landscape was bathed in sunshine; the mountain-tops of God's faithfulness were clear—the summits of the heavenly hills sparkled gloriously—theirs were the green pastures and still waters—the Shepherd's voice to cheer them, and the Shepherd's steps to guide them.

But all is gloomy now—the storm-clouds have gathered in their once serene sky. The sun cannot disperse, as formerly, these floating vapors; they look around for their Shepherd—He is gone; for the fold—it is hidden in mist and fog; farther and yet farther they stray—going on, in the words of Jeremiah, "from mountain to hill;" but the clouds only seem to gather, and the distance and alienation to increase. And yet, to account for their wandering, there may be no very specific cause, no bold presumptuous sin. It may arise from their own sluggish unconcern—a drowsy, sleepy, callous frame—the result of a gradual, but ever-deepening insensibility to divine things—a trifling with their spiritual interests—languor in prayer—conformity with the world—tampering with sins of omission—venturing on forbidden or debatable ground. The issue, at all events, has been a painful, conscious distance from God. Behold them now among the scattered flock, in "the cloudy and dark day!"

The second class described by the prophet are those who are "DRIVEN AWAY." These have more marked and distinctive characteristics. Some overt act has been the cause of their scattering. Look at David as an illustration. One of the choicest of the flock of God, feeding on the richest pasture, he was in one guilty moment thus "driven away," a wanderer on the dark mountains. "Driven away!" His own guilty passion was the lash that drove him from his Shepherd's presence and love. His own iniquities separated between him and his God. He never after was the joyous believer he once was. He was indeed restored, pardoned, loved—but the memory of that sad day followed him to the grave, and mantled his whole moral landscape with clouds, even to the very entrance of the dark valley.

And how many among the true flock of the Shepherd have to tell a similar mournful tale! Some one guilty deed has laid the foundation of weeks and

months—yes, years—of spiritual alienation and distance from the fold. The indulgence of a forbidden sin—a guilty companionship—an ungodly marriage—a resisting or wounding of conscience—a rejection of God's providential leadings. One or any of these may be the beginning of fatal disaster. How many a youth of fair promise—to take one example—has been "driven away" by evil companions! His opening years were bright with spiritual promise. The earliest psalm, it may be, his infant lips had been taught to utter was the psalm of the green pastures and still waters, and death's dark valley illumined with the Shepherd's presence; and his childhood's vow—the echo of a mother's prayers and tears, was, that from that fold he would never wander. But the siren voice, in a hapless moment, stole upon his ear, and smothered his better and nobler resolves. A godless associate smiled at his conscientious scruples, and mocked his superstitious fears. The forbidden path of wandering once entered—the clear sunlight of truth and a quiet conscience obscured—he was soon lost amid the mazy fogs of sin. Driven away by his own guilty forgetfulness of home-teachings and Bible warnings, and of all the fond memories of a childhood and youth of innocence and peace—behold him now, a wreck on a stormy ocean, a shattered, wounded, fleece-torn sheep, in the "cloudy and dark day!" Thus much for 'the scattered' in the cloudy and dark day of sin.

We come now to speak of the dark and cloudy day of sorrow. The first of the latter class here described, are "THE BROKEN." How numerous are these! Many of us in the midst of our bright enjoyments—our green and verdant pastures—our full cup—our uninvaded circles—are apt to ignore altogether the existence of breaking and broken hearts. We see the sunny hill-side, covered with sheep, feeding in reposeful security under the Shepherd's care—morning by morning, listening to the dulcet tones of the mountain-pipe—at evening quietly penned—protected from summer's draught and winter's cold.

But we are apt to forget that the world is not all sunshine—that there are members of the fold scattered by the wild winds of misfortune—lying wounded and broken—having no joy, no pasture, no rest. Some are "broken" by calamity—penury scattering them in its cloudy and dark day. Some are "broken" by bitter disappointment; an aching heart-wound, too

sacred to be revealed, has left them bleeding and desolate, refusing to be comforted. Some are "broken" by bereavement. The mother has the bleating lamb plucked from her bosom—or the lamb goes bleating after the mother she cannot find—all the wealth of the living fold is nothing to either, because of those "who are not."

We have still another class in the cloudy day of suffering and sorrow. They are the "SICK". We might take this in a figurative sense; as descriptive of those who are sick at heart—sad and disconsolate with the trials, and sins, and sorrows of earth, and with the corruption of their own natures. But why not regard it literally, as applied to those laid on beds of sickness? Many among us, who inadequately appreciate the blessing of health, are apt also to forget and overlook this large section in God's world—the "poor afflicted ones," the maimed members of the flock—who, with drooping heads and wan countenance, loathe the richest pastures, and can get no rest or ease in the choicest fold—whose inward wail is heard in the long hours of wakeful darkness—"Would God it were evening; and in the evening, Would God it were morning"—pining flowers, around whom the sun shines, and the rain descends, and the birds sing in vain—the languid body exercising a like depressing influence on the mind—the gloomy sameness and silence of the sick-chamber tinging the whole life with inveterate sadness.

To one and all of these cases—to one and all of these "scattered ones"—the Great Shepherd comes. Yes! In the cloudy and dark day—the day He is most needed—"lo! He comes, leaping upon the mountains." He has a special word of comfort for each separate case. "Lost!" He "seeks" you. Though you have forgotten Him, He has not forgotten you. "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel—for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings!"

You who have been "driven away," He will "bring you again." You who, like the Psalmist of Israel, have unwarily left the pastures of grace and security, and entangled yourselves in the midnight forest of danger and sin—the lion may have you in his fangs, but the grace of Him who first brought you to the fold is able to bring you back again, and restore to you

the joys of His salvation. Hear His own words by the mouth of His prophet, veiled under the favorite Shepherd-symbol, and in which He mingles judgment with mercy in the restoration of the erring—"I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me. So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart. O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help."

Broken ones! You who are crushed and mutilated by the thousand ills of suffering and sorrow: rejoice! That Shepherd came to "bind up" breaking hearts; His name is "The Healer of the brokenhearted." His life was a grand living commentary on this the first text and opening sermon of His ministry. Weeping eyes and woe-worn spirits were ever following the wake of this mighty Vessel of mercy. The stranded, hapless barks on the world's shores He loved to set floating on the ever-flowing tide of His compassion. This was the motto of His life—it is the description of His ever-living love at this hour—"He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds."

"Sick!" You pining sufferers in earth's great hospital! You bleating sheep, lying languid and helpless in the fold—He, the Great Shepherd, comes to "strengthen you." A sick-bed—where the noisy world is shut out—where its cares, and anxieties, and aspirations, and ambitions are no longer present to hamper and harass—what a blessed season for converse with the Infinite! Then does the Shepherd of Israel specially love to come to the weak and weary with better than the balm of Gilead—fulfilling in the case of many "sick ones whom He loves," His own promise—"The Lord will strengthen him on the bed of languishing."

And in all this, let us mark the gracious adaptation of Christ's dealings to the different needs, and trials, and necessities of His people. He "seeks" the lost; and on finding them, a look of love suffices to bring the conscience-stricken wanderers back. He "brings again" the driven away. Those cowering in terror at their own willful blindness and apostasy, their deep ingratitude and heinous guilt, need help, encouragement, guidance—they need being carried in the Shepherd's arms. Peter dreads

to meet the Lord he has so injured; but He "brings him back again," first with a gentle message, and then with a gentle word. He "binds up" the broken; He stanches the bleeding wound with the application of tender restoratives—the balm-words of His own exceeding great and precious promises. He, the Brother born for adversity, teaches the wounded spirit, as He alone can, how to "bear" in this "dark and cloudy day;" He turns the shadow of death into the morning. He "strengthens" the sick—those who for years on years have been laid on couches of languishing—secluded from the gladsome light of day, on whose ear the tones of the Sabbath—bell fall only to tell of forfeited privileges.

They can best bear attestation, how a mysterious, sustaining strength, not their own, is imparted to them, which makes them wonders to themselves. Indeed, were we to go in search of the most touching proof of the Shepherd-Redeemer's upholding grace, it would be to the chamber of that wan and sickly sufferer. See him bowed down with paroxysms of excruciating pain—the iron ploughshare leaving deep furrows on his cheek, and banishing sleep from his pillow—yet all the time, while the cold drops are standing on his brow, and every nerve has become a chord of agony—no murmur escapes his lips. See how patience has her perfect work. Hear how the prayer trembles on his lips—"Father, may Your will be done!"

And say, can this be his own strength? No; it is the Shepherd coming with healing balm to the prostrate sheep of His fold. It is supporting grace given for the day of suffering. It is the Lord coming to the couch of languishing, and, in the expressive words of Scripture, "making all his bed in his sickness." There is no more beautiful study either in Holy Scripture or in the Scripture of experience, than this diversity of dealing on the part of God towards His people—His wise and discriminating treatment of each case, according to what He sees they require.

It is said of some Oriental kings, that they never appear in the same garment to those who seek an audience. Moreover, that whatever be the garment in which they are attired themselves, their attendants have a duplicate gift ready to present to the stranger or supplicant. It is even so with the Shepherd-King of Israel! He ever comes to His needy people, arrayed in the garb of some new promise or specially adapted blessing.

He comes with the robe of righteousness to the spiritually naked. He comes with a garment of healing for the bruised and broken. He comes with the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.

For every sorrowing thought of the heart He has a counterpart and corresponding comfort—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me," says the Psalmist, "Your comforts delight my soul." It is not one fountain only, but "springs" of water, the Shepherd has for his flock—according to the beautiful description of the Prophet Isaiah—"They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that has mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them."

Let us close with two practical reflections. The first is a CONSOLING one—the All-sufficiency of the Shepherd's power and love. There is no case He cannot meet. Lost ones, driven ones, broken ones, sick ones. It seems to exhaust the circle of human needs and necessities. He seems to anticipate every supposable case, so that none dare say "that Shepherd-love does not include me." It reminds us of that wondrous expression of the Great Apostle—that verse with its grand redundancy of words—its significant and touching tautology—"Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think." See how the gradation rises. See how he mounts to his magnificent climax. What a golden ladder is this verse! Christ is "able to do"—Christ is "able to do abundantly"—Christ is "able to do abundantly, above all that we ask or think." And then, as if he had not unburdened his soul of the full truth, the "goodly matter" his heart was inditing, he adds another stone to the pyramid—"Exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think."

Rejoice in such a full Savior as this, sufficient for all temporal and all spiritual necessities: who can bind up the broken body; who can bind up the broken soul; ease the aching head, and quiet the aching spirit; who can reclaim the wandering and save the lost. What earthly friend can help us so? Who else, save He, can fill with His presence and love the gap in the sorrow-stricken heart? But He can; He does! Lover and friend may be put far from us; all we once cherished and doted on may be smitten with inevitable change; the roof where childhood reveled may be a heap of

ruins, or habited by strangers; the trees, under whose shadow we reposed, may have long been felled to the ground; the parents' arms that clasped us as we lisped our infant prayer, or which smoothed our pillows in sickness, may be mouldering in the dust; voices that cheered us on the pilgrimage may be hushed in awful silence. But here is One who is Father, Brother, Physician, Friend, Shepherd, Home, ALL!

No one can fell the Tree of Life! No storm can overturn that Home of unblighted love! No envious whisper can estrange that true Friend! No King of terrors can paralyze the Everlasting Arms! "The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Oh! blessed it is for the broken, blighted, downcast, bereft, in that moment of their sorest agony, when returning from the grave to the silent house of bereavement—entering the lessened fold, and marking the blank in the flock—blessed it is to feel the Abiding Friend filling the empty place and the aching heart. The sheep has gone, but the SHEPHERD remains!

Our concluding practical reflection is one of WARNING. This precious passage, so full of tenderness and love to the erring, the backsliding, the suffering, ends with a brief but most solemn utterance of 'judgment' on the impenitent, the self-righteous, and unbelieving. "He that has rest for disquieted saints," says Matthew Henry in his comment on this verse, "has terror to speak to presumptuous sinners." That Shepherd of Israel adds (it is a thrilling postscript), "But I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."

This seems to refer to those who are living in guilty independence of God; disowning His hand—resisting His grace—self-satisfied and self-contented—fancying themselves rich and increased with goods, and having need of nothing; no tear of penitence in their eye—no consciousness of distance from the fold—no longings for return. How many such there are! And strange it is those often who are the most abundant recipients of the Shepherd's love—on whom worldly prosperity has most richly descended—"the fat and the strong," are frequently most apt to live this life of guilty atheism, saying in their hearts, "Who is the Lord that we should obey Him."

"Jeshurun," we read, "waxed fat and kicked." Like a bullock



unaccustomed to the yoke, fed and pampered in the stalls of earthly prosperity, that prosperity has often proved a curse. It has nurtured a rebel, restless, ungovernable spirit. The gifts which should have drawn upwards to the Giver, have, alas! drawn downwards to perdition. "I will destroy" such, says God. Judgment, indeed, does not often descend now, under a present economy. These obdurate are allowed to live on "feeding"—"nourishing their hearts for the day of slaughter." But that day of retribution will come; and the Great Being, whose love they have slighted, and whose pleadings they have scorned, will be true to His own solemn declaration—"He that, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!"

"Turn, turn, why will you die?" God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Presume not, however, on His forbearance and mercy. You lost ones!—wandering up and down the desert of the world seeking rest and finding none—see that you refuse not Him that speaks. The Shepherd may now be abroad seeking you in some cloudy and dark day; but remember, these "seeking" seasons dare not be lightly tampered with. They are the days of His "merciful visitation." If they be allowed to pass by unimproved, the echoes of His voice may be heard no more. The clouds may only gather more deeply and lour more gloomily, and you may be hopelessly lost amid the dark mountains of your wandering. David's men, when they heard "the sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees," rushed on to battle, and routed the host of the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim. If they had neglected the signal—if they had delayed until that wild music had died away—the victory would have been forfeited—the sun would have set on their vanquished and panic-stricken ranks—the opportunity would have been lost.

Oh! how many neglect the voice of God "in the mulberry trees!" How many miss and forfeit the sanctified use of affliction! The Spirit of God is moving amid the rustling foliage—to advance would be to conquer; resolute deed would end in spiritual advantage. But the day of grace, the hour of solemn pleading, is allowed to pass. They have become weak as other men, who out of weakness might have been made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

While that gracious Shepherd of the flock is now abroad, seeking to

gather in the weary, the wandering, the perishing—while judgment still lingers, let us not be among the number of those who continue to wander deeper and yet deeper amid the cloud-lands of sin—to whom, at last, will be reserved the mist of darkness forever; and on whose forlorn graves will be inscribed the mournful epitaph—(words which the Great Shepherd Himself uttered, through His tears, over the doomed fold of Israel), "You knew not the time of your visitation."

### **13. THE SHEPHERD'S GENTLE DEALINGS WITH THE BURDENED OF THE FLOCK**

"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."  
Isaiah 40:11

One of the leading ideas in these beautiful words is, the strong supporting the weak—Omnipotence stooping to sustain feebleness—the mighty God—the Shepherd of Israel—feeding the helpless and dependent, bearing the lambs in His arms, and gently leading the weary and burdened. In nature we have often examples of the strong being thus the prop of the fragile and tottering. The old castle, that has sustained the fierce assaults of armies, holds out its massive arm to the feeble, clinging ivy. The ocean, able to sweep down navies in its gloomy caverns, supports on its dimpled bosom the tiny skiff, or the branch washed from the shore. These, and suchlike, are dumb parables in the outer world, shadowing forth a nobler verity—"For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It is different with man. The great ones of the earth generally associate only with the great. They are like the eagle, which holds little converse with the low, misty valley, when it can get up amid the blue skies and

granite peaks. It is the powerful—the rich—the strong—the titled, who are the deified and worshiped. The weak, and poor, and powerless get but a small fraction of regard. These are too often left unpitied and uncared for; to endure the rough struggle of existence as best they may.

And the world has accordingly shaped its divinities after this its own ideal. We see the embodiment of that ideal chiseled in the old slabs of Assyrian marble, where the winged bull or lion is depicted trampling its enemies in the dust; the strong trampling on the weak. The early Christians had also their truer and nobler symbol, which, as previously noted, they have left in rude device in the catacombs at Rome—the often recurring representation of a Shepherd—the Great Shepherd of the sheep—the Mighty God—carrying on His shoulder a feeble lamb.

It is the perfect Humanity of Christ which forms the bond of union between omnipotence and weakness; He being alike the Everlasting God and the Babe of Bethlehem. In this respect, indeed, the emblem of the Prophet, impressive as it is, is partial and incomplete. There is lacking perfect identity of nature between the earthly sheep and their shepherd to ensure complete sympathy. For however closely the keeper of the fold, in olden times, on these wild Syrian hills or plains, may have associated with his flock—sharing their companionship by night and day—still, a vast interval in the scale of being separated the two. "How much," says our Lord, "is a man better than a sheep!"

But different is the bond of sympathy which unites the Great Shepherd with His spiritual flock. He became one of the flock Himself. Inhabiting eternity, He nevertheless pitched His tent among earthly tabernacles: He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. There being thus identity of nature, there is identity of feeling and experience. "In all things He was made like unto His brethren." While, however, in this point of view the accuracy of the Shepherd-symbol fails, we must not omit to mark how beautifully it illustrates the leading truth with which we started, that is, the love of a higher nature to inferior natures.

The Palestine shepherd in a sense loves his sheep. As we have often before noted, he protects them—defends them—risks his life for them—enters into their very circumstances, and joys in their joy. It is an

expressive picture of the love of the Creator to His creatures; or rather of a covenant God to His believing people. The mightiest of Beings stooping to be the Protector, Defender, yes, Friend of redeemed man. "HE shall feed His flock like a Shepherd!" Who is this? It is that God whose throne is immutability—whose power is boundless—whose dominion is immensity—whose life-time is eternity. Yet He, with a shepherd's love and tenderness, attends to the needs of the humblest and weakest of His enormous family—feeding all His flock, and marking the peculiarities of all.

There is no subject of contemplation, indeed, more marvelous, than the unceasing attention and care lavished by Deity on small as well as on great; that the vast provinces of His giant empire do not withdraw His thoughts and care from the feeble and insignificant; that He who wheels the planets in their courses, and lights up the blazing suns of the firmament, can watch also the sparrow's fall and feed the young ravens when they cry! Just as the mountain supports the tiny blade of grass and the modest floweret, as well as the giant pine or cedar—just as that ocean bears up in safety the seabird seated on its crested waves, as well as the gigantic vessel—so while the Great Keeper of Israel can listen to the archangel's song and the seraph's burning devotions, He can carry in His bosom the feeblest lamb of the fold, and lead gently the most sorrowing spirit.

The Psalmist delights to celebrate these two thoughts in conjunction—God in the vastness of His omnipotence, and God in the condescending tenderness of lowly love to the feeble and fallen. "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, Your dominion endures throughout all generations"—"The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down!" "He tells the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names"—"He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." Let us at present advert to a few of the cares and weaknesses and burdens of the flock, whom Jesus, the Great and Good Shepherd, so tenderly gathers, and so gently leads.

The first burden we may refer to is the burden of SIN. Blessed are they—those weary ones—who feel this burden, and long to get rid of it. Blessed are they to whose spiritual eye the Holy Spirit unfolds the existence and

reality of this burden—and permits them to get no rest, until, like the load of Bunyan's Christian, it falls from their back at the foot of the cross. We have previously seen how gently the Savior of old dealt with burdened sinners. Never once did He spurn penitence and anguished tears from His feet. Never once did He say, "Go, child of the devil—your sins have placed you beyond the pale of mercy, your case is hopeless, your burdens cannot be removed—weary Me no longer with your pleadings!"

On the contrary, His whole ministry and teaching were a significant comment on the prophetic utterance—"A bruised reed He will not break." Simple, but expressive emblem! The most fragile thing in nature is the shivering reed by the river-side. The Eastern shepherd tending his flock by the streams where these reeds grow, appears to have used them for his rustic pipe. When one of them was bruised or broken, he never made the attempt to mend it. By inserting it among the others he would make his instrument discordant, and accordingly he threw it aside as worthless. Not so the Great Shepherd. When a human soul is bruised and mutilated by sin, He casts it not away. That bruised reed "He will not break." He repairs it for its place in the heavenly instrument, and makes it once more to show forth His praise.

Go, burdened one, to this Shepherd of Souls! Go, weak and weary lamb of the flock—and as you lie in His bosom, hear His word of comfort and consolation—"I will remove your shoulder from the burden"—"O Ephraim, you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your Help"—"Jehovah Rophi, I am the Lord that heals you"—"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more!"

Another burden of the flock of God is the burden of DOUBTS. Blessed are they who bring these burdens, too, to Christ. They are heavy burdens. We must not deal harshly and unkindly with those who bear them. Happy, indeed, are the receptive spirits who can apprehend the truth as little children—who can open their hearts like the sunflower to the sun—and drink in, all at once, from his radiance. Others, however, from constitutional and mental temperament, are cautious—slow of heart. They must have a reason for all they hear, and all they believe. They arrive at the truth by slow processes. The sun's beams have to force their way through the closed calyx. They remain with shut, imprisoned

blossoms long after their floral peers have been basking in his light, displaying their beauty and dispensing their fragrance.

Now those who doubt for the sake of doubting—who encourage and feed the carpings of a speculative mind—can expect no gentle leadings or dealings from the Shepherd. He will release no such burdened ones—their Unbelief is not their misfortune, but their sin—they incur a heavy risk and penalty by fostering and encouraging doubts, as they would encourage spiders, to cover with their webs the windows of the soul, and hide out the spiritual landscape. Doubt will, by and by, in such cases, pass into 'free-thinking', and free-thinking into cheerless infidelity.

But those whose doubts are the trembling misgivings of anxious inquirers—those who are really in earnest in seeking the truth; feeling their way cautiously but surely, step by step up the ladder—seeking to "do God's will," at the same time that they seek to "know of the doctrine"—these the Shepherd is ever willing to receive and lead, and to make good in their experience His own promise, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Nicodemus was one who had such a burden. He stole by night, when the streets of Jerusalem were hushed in silence, to the abode of the Great Teacher, to unburden his burdened heart, and to be instructed in the things of the kingdom. Many of the new doctrines were startling and repugnant to this cautious man of the Pharisees. He honestly avowed that they crossed his preconceived opinions. "How can these things be?" The Great Shepherd kindly received and kindly instructed him; and, at the close of their conversation, gave a significant hint as to the reason why, in contrast with such honest seekers as he, many brooding doubts, in the case of others, settle into unbelief and skepticism—"Light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that does truth comes to the light."

What was the result of this "doer" of the truth bringing his darkness to the light, and his burdens to the Shepherd of souls? It was this—that from a state of anxious doubt, he became strong in faith, giving glory to God. For when the Shepherd was smitten, and the other sheep scattered, that once trembling spirit gloried in the public avowal of his faith in Jesus,

and in the broad light of day came and boldly demanded of Pilate the body of his Lord!

Thomas was another still more heavily oppressed with this burden. When the other apostles willingly credited the fact of a risen Savior, attested by trustworthy witnesses—he would not believe unless he had ocular proof—unless he saw and handled the spear-wounds of the mangled body. How did the Lord treat this doubting apostle? He knew his peculiar temperament—He had tested before the sturdy heroic faith of the man, who had, at a recent crisis-hour, boldly proposed to his fellow-apostles to perish with their Master—"Let us also go that we may die with Him." He will not spurn him now. No! even though his doubt is unreasonable and indefensible—yet He will make due allowances for a naturally hard, severe, rationalistic, speculative nature—a man slow and guarded to a fault in the reception of evidence—yet firm as a rock when once the truth has got hold of his mind. "Reach here your finger," said He, "and behold my hands; and reach here your hand and thrust it into my side: and do not be faithless, but believing."

The Good Shepherd, who thus gently led that burdened one out of his doubts into strong faith, had no harsher reproof than this—"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." The apostle never, to his dying day, forgot being thus carried in these gentle arms. A future life of zeal and hard labor atoned for the passing hour of hesitancy, and showed that the "My Lord, and my God," uttered by adoring lips, was no formal ejaculation—no empty, hollow protestation of love and devotedness.

Yes! it is a cheering consolation, that He who suggested the merciful excuse for the sleepers in Gethsemane—"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," He will "gently lead" the Little-faiths and Ready-to-halts—as well as the Samsons and Asahels of His flock. Often does He come in the night-seasons of their darkest doubt, and lights the dim candle of faith and hope and loving confidence. Just as a mother, when her child awakes at midnight, frightened and scared with visions, strikes a light and illuminates the chamber, smoothing the ruffled brow, and kissing every fear away—so does the Lord remove the gloomy misgivings of His children—"You," says the Psalmist, "will light my candle, the Lord

my God will enlighten my darkness."

Another burden of the Lord's flock is the burden of SORROW. How many are weak and weary, and weighed down with this! Few comparatively may have the burden of doubt, but many are the children of affliction—many more than the world knows of. For the saddest sorrows are secret ones, with which a stranger does not intermeddle. God gently leads such. He takes them in His arms. He will not conduct them over a rougher road than they are able to bear. He adapts His consolations to them. As the Refiner of Silver, He is seated by the furnace of His own lighting, regulating the fury of the flames. "I will correct you," says He, "in measure." All will be meted out. "He will stay His rough wind in the day of His east-wind."

That Great Shepherd, who has "shorn the lamb," has "the winds in His fists," and He will temper them accordingly. He will give the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness. Oh! You who are burdened with life's manifold afflictions, think of the strong Arm that bears you! We have heard of the seaman grasping the infant from the sinking ship in one hand—and cleaving the roaring breakers with the other—bringing it safe to shore. That is a picture of your God. Omnipotence sustaining weakness. "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Through all the billows of this mortal life, He will bring you to the desired haven. "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yes, than the mighty waves of the sea!"

Let us suggest, in conclusion, one or two brief thoughts from this description of the Savior's dealing with His weary and burdened flock; gathering the lambs with His arm, carrying them in His bosom, and gently leading those that are with young. This language speaks of SAFETY. Where is a lamb so safe as in its shepherd's arms? The wolf may be prowling close by—the flooded stream may be threatening to sweep away the rest of the fold; but that weak and helpless creature is secure. Before you can injure or destroy it, you must destroy the shepherd. The feeblest member of the flock of God is safe in the arms of Covenant love and faithfulness. His throne must first be shaken before the interests of the humblest believer can suffer. The life of Jesus is the pledge and



guarantee for the life of His people. "Because I live, you shall live also!"

The words speak of AFFECTION. An Eastern traveler tells us that the Syrian shepherd is often seen surrounded by some favorite lambs which do not mix with the rest of the flock—but are to be seen at one time borne in his arms, or frisking and fondling at his heels. Or, shall we look again at that higher symbol of earthly affection—the child nestling in its mother's arms—confiding in that mother's tenderness—whispering its little tale of sorrow or joy in its mother's ear, and she, in return, singing over its couch her lullaby of love? Both are feeble pictures of the affectionate intercommunion between Christ and His chosen. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." Yes, and there is this difference; the shepherd may forsake—the mother may forget "yet," says the Good Shepherd, "yet will I not forget you!"

This beautiful saying of the Prophet speaks still further of SYMPATHY—gathered in His arms—borne in His bosom—it tells how near we are to Christ—how closely we are brought into endearing union with Himself, and especially in our burdened seasons—our times of trial and sorrow. There is no more precious truth upon which the mind can repose, than this infinitely pure and exalted sympathy of the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He Himself—the Prince of Sufferers—having borne our griefs and carried our sorrows—as He bears us in His arms through the wilderness, can tenderly enter into every pang which rends our hearts.

It has been observed, with regard to the Eastern shepherd and his flock, that there is a mysterious sympathy which grows up between them, on account of their sharing common dangers. This has a deeper and truer meaning in the relation of the Chief Shepherd to His people. In every thorny thicket of their wilderness He has been—every midnight of storm and tempest that has environed the sheep has environed Him—the loneliness and desolation of the loneliest of His flock has been shared in a far intenser severity by Him. "In all points He was tempted like as we are." "In that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to support those who are tempted."

Let us finally learn THE BLESSEDNESS OF REPOSING IN CHRIST—

trusting Him implicitly in all the vicissitudes and exigencies of life. We ourselves cannot calculate on the future. We cannot predict one turn in the highway of existence. The morrow is a blank and enigma—we cannot point our finger to one of its hours and say, 'So and so it shall be with us.' We know in our libraries where to find a book—we know in our gardens where to find a flower—we know in the mountain we have often ascended where to pause for the view, and to look in the distance for the blue smoke of some loved hamlet—we know where to look in the heavens for a favorite star—or where to direct the telescope to view a brilliant planet. We can with confidence predict the march of the seasons—when spring will tread on the heels of winter, and flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds may come.

But we cannot predict or foresee the manifold changes of this manifold existence. The flowers in life's garden may wither in a moment. We may look up in vain on life's firmament in search of an extinguished star. Ours is at best an April day—showers and sunshine. We never can tell when the shadows will sweep across the landscape—when the clouds may gather and the birds cease to sing, and the sun of happiness be swept from the meridian. But it is our comfort to be assured that He who feeds His flock like a Shepherd—who marshals the sun and planets—knows every flower of life's garden, counts every tree of its forest, and every leaf of every tree! All that concerns us and ours is in His hands.

"Father, I know that all my life  
Is portioned out to me;  
And the changes that are sure to come,  
I do not fear to see."

And it is not His sovereignty merely we have to exult in—(that is the lesser, or least comforting, portion of the great truth)—but it is His Paternal or Shepherd-love—His covenant-interest in us. "He shall feed His flock"—not like a sovereign, who often rules his people with a rod of iron, but "like a shepherd," who gently leads them with rod and staff of love. In all the periods and stages, too, of life, "He is faithful who promised." Youth has few burdens. Middle-age—the glory of manhood—although associated with "the burden and heat of the day," has, generally speaking, at all events, strong shoulder and agile limb to bear its burdens.

But some whose eyes trace these pages may, with fragile step, be tottering under the burden of old age—the burden of declining years. The keepers of the house may be trembling, and the strong men bowing themselves; fears may be in the way, and the grasshopper may be a burden. To such the Great Shepherd draws near, and says, "Fear not! I will gently lead you. Even to old age I am He, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you." When the decrepit, enfeebled body is fast failing—when the outer casement is fast crumbling to decay—how beautiful is it often to see the inner shrine of the soul lustrous as ever, as if the very splits in the house of the earthly tabernacle were only opening a way for the transmission of the rays of the coming heavenly glory!

Yes, and often, too, when memory is hazy and clouded for every other theme, there is one Name which cleaves imperishably to its tablets—the name of Jesus!—the music of that name refreshing and cheering at the hour of departure, as if the aged Christian really felt himself upborne in the Shepherd's arms, as he passed through the floods of Jordan. Would those who may be feeling that the vigor of manhood is past that their sun is fast setting—that, having long ago reached the top of the hill, they are now descending the shady side into the valley—would they know in time how to be eased of their burdens, and to sing in old age as in the days of their youth? It is by walking at their Shepherd's side, and breathing the prayer for conscious nearness—"Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

Go, then, burdened one, whatever be the diversity in your age and experience, lean on your Shepherd's bosom. "His gentleness will make you great." Earthly friends—earthly shepherds—may deceive you; they may prove summer shepherds—summer friends: at your side when all is sunshine; but when the winter's blast comes, and the trees are stripped, and the brooks fail, and their protection is most needed, they may leave you unsheltered to the sweep of the storm.

But He will not. Omnipotence loves to stoop to weakness. The Royal Shepherd of Bethlehem, who laid in the dust the giant of Philistia, could also weep tears of love and tenderness over a tiny, pining flower in his own palace. So is it with the true David. He combines the might and

majesty of Godhead with the tenderness of weeping humanity. The same hand that upholds the world could take, and can take, the little child into His arms and bless it. He may lead you along the wilderness by a way that you know not, and by paths that you have not known. But trust Him: He will feed and lead His flock "like a shepherd;" supporting the faint, carrying the weary, sustaining the burdened.

This description of the people He led of old out of Egypt will be the history of every member of His flock still, when safe gathered within the heavenly fold—"He found him also in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings—so the Lord alone did lead him." In the quaint words of an old writer, "He will lead you in—He will lead you up—He will lead you through—He will lead you HOME!"

## **14. THE FLOCK IN THE WORLD**

"The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it." John 10:12

The figure employed by the Good Shepherd, which is to form the theme of consideration in this chapter, is one that would be familiar to all His hearers. "The sheep in the midst of wolves"—The wolf coming and "scattering the sheep," were pertinent symbols of the fierce temptations with which His disciples then, and His people in every age, might expect to be assailed. Who can attempt to describe these wolf-like temptations? Apart from those more peculiar to the world around us—the countless absorbing influences and interests of sense and time—a man's worst foes

are too

often those in his own bosom. We have wolves in our own hearts, lurking insidiously—fettered vices, longing to burst their bands, and go forth on missions of death and ruin. There are the wolves of temper—envy—jealousy—hatred—malice—each hidden in his den—crouching in his lair—ready to make the spring when temptation offers.

Covetousness—the wolf with the golden fleece—how it has strewed earth's highway with the bones of men! Even our daily business and avocations may become to us a dangerous foe. Our very prosperity may turn into a ravaging wolf. But we cannot attempt to particularize. Wherever we look, the world is bristling with temptations. Wolves lurk on every side—"The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," each the leader of a hungry pack waiting for their prey.

When we think of the earth as in the hands of Satan—as one of the old writers expresses it, "the hunting-ground of the god of this world"—these wolves ready at his bidding to pursue and devour—do not the words of our motto verse seem strange and startling? Do we not rather expect to hear the Shepherd giving directions as to surrounding His fold with lofty walls or secure enclosures, to prevent the possibility of the sheep falling a prey to the Destroyer? Would it not have been better—we are apt at first sight to think—had He either made provision for keeping His flock safely within the fold of earth, or for at once translating them to the fold of heaven—sanctifying and glorifying them at the moment of their justification?

Would it not be in every respect preferable for the believer—would it not conduce to a saintlier, more heavenly life—if away from the world's perilous snares—'the loud stunning tide of human care and crime'—shut up in peaceful and secluded retirement—holding converse with pure nature—like Elijah at his Cherith, lulled asleep by brook, and waterfall, and song of bird—gazing on golden skies and everlasting mountains—would not all this, it might be thought, be safer and better for the Christian, than having his spirit soiled with the degrading contacts of a debased and debasing world—confronting temptation in its thousand forms—open profligacy—mean-souled selfishness—pitiful jealousies—superficial follies—frivolous excitements—debasement pleasures?

Such, we know, was the theory of the early Church; such was the development of Christian life in those successive ages, when the deserts of Palestine and Syria, and many parts of Europe, not excepting our own country, were crowded by hermits' cells and monastic establishments. Mistaken visionaries! We do all honor to the purer motives of these earlier devotees. They were the victims of a devout delusion. Theirs, however, was not the ideal of the saintly life, as prescribed and portrayed by their Lord and Master. Christ's description of His Church—the Shepherd's description of His flock is this—"These are in the world"—"I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one"—"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves."

We see the same truth illustrated and embodied in one of the 'acted' parables—if we may so designate one of the many incidents which occurred in the course of His life and ministry, and which veiled, under the outward drapery, some great moral or practical lesson—He specially commanded His disciples to launch forth on the tempestuous sea of Galilee. We might suppose at first that they would have been exempted from the "toiling in rowing"—the contrary wind—the midnight storm. They might have gone with their Lord to the quiet adjoining mountain-top, or accompanied the multitude, peacefully and without peril, along the shore to Capernaum. No! "Jesus constrained them to get into the ship." It was a miniature picture of the Christian life—the spiritual Voyager reaching the distant haven, through wind and storm and buffeting waves; the sheep reaching the fold of heaven through a desert haunted by beasts of prey.

We may profitably inquire for a little into the reason and wisdom of such an appointment. Why is the Christian thus called on to mingle with the world, and grapple with its fierce temptations? Why, instead of granting to the flock immunity from all assaults of evil, why has Jesus "sent forth His sheep into the midst of wolves?" Many reasons might be assigned. At present we shall confine ourselves to one. Jesus sends forth His people into the world FOR THE NURTURING OF THEIR CHRISTIAN GRACES. The plant or shrub is hardened, not by being secluded from outer influences—shut up in the hothouse—but by being left to wrestle with

wind, and rain, and storm. The soldier is hardened, not by being pillowed in luxurious ease in the camp or barracks, but by the stern discipline of trench and night-watch.

So it is with the Christian. He reaches the crown by the way of the cross. He enters heaven, not like Elijah, borne up in his fiery chariot, but rather battling his way, inch by inch, step by step, up the typical ladder of an older saint. When the man out of whom Christ had cast the legion of devils came and threw himself at the feet of his Deliverer, with the importunate request to be permitted to follow Him, the reply was a decided negative. He wished at once to be housed in the fold; but the Good Shepherd sent him back to the wilderness of temptation—to the old (and likely adverse) contacts of his own home. When Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the ecstasy of his joy, would have had three permanent tents erected for his Lord and the two Heavenly Envoys, the proposal was immediately rejected. It was seeking the crown before the cross. It was seeking to reach the haven by overleaping the intervening billows. Earth had its duties still to be performed. The morning light found Master and disciple once more descending the hill; and the crowd at the foot of the mountain too plainly told them they were back again amid the old world of misery, and sin, and sorrow—the appointed training-ground for a sinless, sorrowless heaven.

Take one other Scripture illustration. Many would have condemned the saints in Nero's household, as being out of their places and sphere while remaining in that godless palace. 'Wrong and perilous,' many would have said, 'for these sheep to continue in the midst of wolves—these Christians to be under the roof of a heathen master, whose golden crown and scepter cannot gild or mask his villainy and crime. Let them come out forthwith, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing.' Not so thought Paul. He sends his "chief" greetings to these very saints. Noble was it in subsequent years, to hear the bands of devoted believers, shut up in the Roman catacombs, singing hymns of faith and hope in subterranean dungeons.

But equally noble and saintly is the spectacle of these early Christians, retaining their unflinching fidelity to a higher Power while resident within the palace of Nero; who, despite the unscrupulous persecutors—

the ravening wolves around them—could keep faithful to their Great Shepherd, rendering to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, while they rendered to God the things that were God's. Paul was not the man to send honied words, unmeaning and unmeant salutations. His bold and honest tongue would have been the first to denounce to these courtiers or servants of the Roman palace their adherence to place and pay, if this was inconsistent or incompatible with the profession and practice of the religion of Jesus. But from the very warmth and specialty of his greetings, he would seem to assure them, that if faithful to their great principles, theirs was Christianity in its loftiest type and form.

"IN the world, and yet not of it." Caesar's servants, but the uncompromising haters of Caesar's sins! In his great general discourse on this subject, which he gives in one of the Corinthian epistles—"Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God." And this is religion's loftiest manifestation—its most difficult triumph—to maintain, it may be, in the midst of an ungodly circle of worthless and wolf-like associates—a holy, pure, upright heavenly life—for the Christian merchant to remain the merchant still, and yet to infuse a gospel spirit into daily business transactions. The shopkeeper to remain behind his counter still, but to show the power of gospel motives in determined hate of underhand dealings equivocal ways, immoral bargains, illicit trade, knavish practices. The soldier to remain the soldier still—earth's noblest specimen of generous self-sacrifice for the good and safety of others—but to show, by purity of conduct, loftiness of principle, kindness and forgivingness, that he is a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

All professions may thus be hallowed and consecrated. Whatever our worldly callings may be, let us not be guilty of uttering the vain and futile wish, 'If my lot had been cast otherwise, I would have better served my God.' Serve Him where you are. Show how your Christian graces and principles can grow and flourish, despite of all difficulties and temptations. It is a remarkable saying of Moses in his farewell address to the tribes—"Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents." Zebulun was the maritime tribe. Their possessions lay along the shores of the Mediterranean. They had their commercial port—their sailors—their traders. "They went to sea in ships, and did business in



great waters." Moses does not say to them, 'I cannot bid you God-speed until you abandon that sailor life—that seafaring existence.' No. He says, 'God bless you in your pathway through the deep! God speed your sails! God waft your vessels to the ports of the Great Sea! May you see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep, and may He bring you to a quiet haven! Go—stretch your canvas to the gale.' "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out!"

Issachar was at one time in Hebrew history a tribe of farmers, at another a tribe of warriors. What says he to them? Is it 'You vine-dressers and ploughmen, if you would serve God, you must cast the pruning-hook and sickle away! You warriors, if you would get to heaven at last, these battle plains must be abandoned—sword, and shield, and spear must be thrown aside; religion is compatible only with the arts of peace.' No! "Rejoice," he says, "Issachar, in your tents." Let the husbandman and the vine-dresser cultivate his vineyard, but let him glorify all the while the Great Husbandman, "whose vineyard is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant." Let the ploughman cleave the furrows, and sow the seed, and reap his harvests, and think all the while of Time as the seed ground of Eternity. Let the warrior of Issachar come forth, like his brave ancestors, by the great river—the river Kishon. Let the chariot-wheels roll over the plain as in the heroic chivalrous age of Barak and Deborah. But let him "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life."

Let not Zebulun covet Issachar's tents, as if he could serve God better in them than in his ships. Let not Issachar covet Zebulun's commerce and active life—as if he could serve God better there than under the vine and fig-tree. Let each rejoice in their God-appointed calling and lot. Reader, whatever be your trade, profession, worldly circumstances, take them as His appointments; use them so; and hear His voice bidding you speed, and saying, "Rejoice!" Zebulun, rejoice in your going out! If yours be like Zebulun, an active life, consecrate that activity to God's glory. If your business takes you from home and country to traverse foreign shores, and live in distant climates—rejoice! God's own way is said to be in the sea, and His path in the deep waters. He will be with you; and if temptations assail you, the Shepherd of Israel will be with His own sheep in the midst

of wolves.

"Issachar, rejoice in your tents!" If yours be a sedentary life, if you tarry at home to divide the spoil—saved from the perils, and temptations, and hardships of distant lands—rejoice in your quiet tents, your peaceful home-habitations and pursuits. There will be temptations everywhere; and the grand thing is to carry the fear of God and an eye to the glory of God along with you in the midst of these temptations. When you hear the howling of the ravening wolves, keep close by the guiding footsteps of the Shepherd.

It is the great aim of apostolic teaching, and it ought to be the main aim of what is called Christian training, to inculcate principles—to store the youthful mind especially with lofty motives of action, the fear of God and the love of God—and the identity of holiness and purity with happiness. So that, even though the gate of access be left open to the forbidden haunt, he may be deterred from entering, by having been taught the grand heroic lesson of self-restraint, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!"

Let Christians try to be Christians despite of the world's allurements. "In the world you shall have tribulation." "If any man will come after Me, he must deny himself." The lily raises its head among thorns. The sheep goes onwards to the heavenly pastures in the midst of wolves. No ship-owner would ever dream of keeping his vessel locked up in harbor in case of storms. It would lie there as a worthless, useless thing. What does he do? He equips it well. Before leaving dock he sees that every timber and bolt and rivet is in its place. He provides it with helm and compass, strong masts, sails, and rigging; and, more than all, an experienced pilot. Forth it goes on its mission, to grapple with storm and tempest and wild tornado!

So it is in the Christian life. No spiritual vessel would ever reach heaven by lying inert—sleeping on its shadows in the earthly harbor. The Heavenly Pilot sends it out in the midst of these moral hurricanes, saying, as He does so, "Fear not, it is I; do not be afraid!" "Behold, I send you forth;" and it is well worth noting that the "I" of this verse is specially expressed in the original Greek—as if He would have His disciples then,

and His people still, to extract comfort and encouragement from the fact that He sends them on the warfare, and that they go not that warfare on their own charges.

Yes, trembling sheep of the fold of God, that Shepherd will not forsake you. He will not allow any temptation to go too far, but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. He will not allow the wolf to devour. He holds every such wolf, as it were, in a chain. They can approach no farther than He permits. "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not!" "I will be a wall of fire around," says He, speaking of His flock. As the shepherds in Eastern countries, by night, encircle their folds with fires to scare off the wild beasts, 'I,' says Christ the Great Shepherd, 'will be like that fire!'

Believer, privileged member of His fold, if He is faithful to you, you be faithful to Him. Make no compromises to appease the world, abjuring your lofty principles, submitting to a temporizing policy, rushing headlong into temptation. How many seem to love walking, as near as they can, to the wolf-thickets! How many venture to wander in strange pastures, where the dews of heaven rarely if ever fall! Remember it is said, "Whoever is a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Let these wolf-temptations rather drive you closer to the Shepherd.

"Come with Me," says Christ, in the Song, "Come with Me from Lebanon, look from the top of Amana; from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." Lebanon was the border mountain. It formed part of the border-land between Palestine and Syria, between Israel and heathendom. It was there the haunts of the wild beasts were—the roaring lion and the treacherous leopard. And it is the "border-country," of which it becomes Christians specially still to beware—neutral territory—the border-country of Satan—the confines between the kingdoms of light and darkness. "Come with Me from Lebanon;" He repeats it, "with Me from Lebanon." He is the true "Refuge of the Flock." There would be no hope for us but for His promised strength and guidance. The sheep has no chance in the unequal conflict with a wolf, nor the dove with the vulture. But He that is for us is greater than he that is in the world. The Intercessory Prayer of Christ was a

prayer to His Father to 'keep' His sheep in the midst of wolves. The whole burden of the prayer is this—"They have no strength of their own. Father, keep them! Keep, through Your own Name, those whom You have given Me!"

And, in the midst of these fiery trials and conflicts, think of the consolatory truth we spoke of in last chapter, of the Great and Good Shepherd Himself being exposed to these ravaging wolves—think of these same temptations assaulting the soul of that spotless Savior—and let this nerve you in passing through kindred experiences of trial. Follow the print of His suffering footsteps—"Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds." Feel honored in thus having, in any feeble degree, fellowship with Him in His sufferings. Hear Him pointing you away from the haunts of wild beasts to the unassailable security of the Heavenly fold. How will the rest and peace of these celestial pastures be enhanced and augmented, by contrast with the dangers and temptations of the earthly wilderness—the corruption of the world, which will then be entirely escaped!

"Jesus, blessed Mediator!  
You the trial-path have trod,  
You the Judge, the Consummator,  
Shepherd of the fold of God.  
"Blessed fold! No foe can enter,  
And no friend departs from thence;  
Jesus is their sun, their center,  
And their shield Omnipotence!"

## **15. THE SHEPHERD'S GIFT TO THE FLOCK**

In unfolding some of the more vivid Bible delineations of the Shepherd of Israel and the Flock of His pasture, we have hitherto spoken mainly, if not exclusively, of their present relationship to Him—reclaimed from their wanderings; entering the Door of the Fold; following His footsteps; He preceding them; leading them by the green pastures; marking out for them paths of righteousness; seeking them in the cloudy and dark day; tenderly bearing in His arms the weak and the burdened.

In this chapter, we are on the threshold of grander truths. The green pastures and the still waters of earth are but the pledge of more enduring realities. Here we have the Good Shepherd Himself announcing the bestowment on His people of a limitless future of being and bliss—"I give unto them Eternal Life!" Retaining, for a subsequent occasion, the consideration of the nature and elements of this peerless gift, we may meanwhile meditate briefly on the three thoughts which, in connection with it, the words of the Shepherd suggest.

It is a FREE gift. "I give." Believers have themselves no share in the purchase. Man, in bestowing his gifts, has generally reference to some loving or lovable qualities in the objects of his beneficence. But it was from no attractiveness on their part—no foreseen good works or virtues, that the Good Shepherd was induced to procure and bequeath the priceless heritage. It is a munificent bestowment of sovereign grace and redeeming love. "I give"—it is theirs in unqualified, inalienable possession—a glorious freehold. The Ransomed Flock reposing in the heavenly paradise are spoken of as having "a right to the tree of life." It is the right of the slave who has had his freedom purchased. It is the right of the son who has been given his patrimonial inheritance. It is the right of the conqueror dividing among his soldiers the honors and trophies of victory which his own valor has won.

And as it was His free sovereign love which led Him to pay the ransom-price, so it is the sovereign, irresistible grace of the Shepherd which keeps His flock every hour from destruction, and will present each member of it at last faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Let us not lapse into a loose and indefinite theology, by speaking of the "inherent power of the new nature." That is nothing. It is a shadow—a name—apart from the grace of Christ and the indwelling, upholding

energy of the Spirit of God. Why was Paul enabled to stand firm when the messenger from Satan was sent to buffet him? Why did not the thorn in the flesh get the better of his nobler self? It was because that free grace which had "predestined" and "called" and "justified," was, in the hour of trial and temptation, made sufficient for him—God's strength "perfected in weakness," yes, overcoming weakness. Let us ever admire, with adoring wonder, this unmerited, undeserved, sovereign freeness, from first to last, of the great salvation.

Christ is the true Zerubbabel, who has laid the foundation, and who also will finish it. Seek to trace His hand in each part of the spiritual building—beginning, carrying on, completing—the Alpha, the Omega—the Justifier, the Sanctifier, the Glorifier. "Thanks be to God," says the apostle, "who always causes us to triumph in Christ." As the pearl would remain forever in the depths of the ocean unless the diver descended for it, so, unless He who purchased us as gems and jewels for His crown had taken us from the depths, there we would have remained forever. And as He rescues the pearl, so He keeps it, polishes it, and finally inserts it in His mediatorial diadem!

As His is the glory of the commencing work and the sustaining work, so His is the glory of the crowning and consummating work. The branch cannot live severed from the vine. The limb cannot live severed from the body. The Christian lives only by virtue of "Christ his life." It is not our repentance or our prayers, or our habits of grace, or our long standing in grace, which keeps us—but the sustaining arm of an omnipotent Savior. "The Lord is your Keeper." "He who keeps Israel does not slumber." Take, then, the gift of eternal life, but take it as Christ gives it—a "present"—a gift—a free heritage of sovereign love—its charter and title-deeds written in His own blood. "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is a PRESENT gift—a gift, not only reserved for the future, but in present possession. Not, "I shall give," but "I give." It is the life of grace now, preparatory to the life of glory hereafter. Scripture, in manifold passages, attests the same truth. "He who believes on the Son of God HAS everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but HAS passed from death unto life." "Who HAS raised us up together, and made us sit

together in heavenly places in Christ." "Our lives ARE hid with Christ in God." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who HAS blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Think of this!—this eternal life—the purchase of sovereign love—is begun here and now. The feeble rill commences here, which expands at last into the river that makes glad the city of God. The first notes of the new song are hymned in the Church militant, though the full chorus is reserved for the Church triumphant. The bird, though still within its mortal cage, is gifted with the wings of a nobler being—it only waits the opening of the door to soar away to the heights of its bliss. The prisoner has obtained his reprieve: life—dear life—is once more his; he only needs the unlocking of the prison-gate fully to realize the blessing—the conscious possession of which has already kindled the fading luster of his eye. The paralyzed cripple has felt fresh energies creeping into his frame: he only waits until the swathing bands are unloosed and he is freed from his couch, that he may enter the porches of the new Jerusalem-temple—walking and leaping and praising God!

Our natural life indeed is still the life of sense. We move in the scenery of the lower world. We mingle in its bustle—we pursue its avocations, and grapple with its groveling, carking anxieties and cares. But let us seek that all this lower life be blended with the higher. Let the life of time be interwoven and interpenetrated with the life of eternity. "This is life eternal, to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." The vision and fruition of God—that is heaven. By seeking to have the knowledge of God now, we lisp the alphabet of Heaven. Delighting in God now—walking in His ways, doing His will, spending life in His service, is the spring of a glorious autumn. He who is enabled in some feeble measure to make the averment, "I live for God—"that man's higher being—his eternal existence and eternal happiness are already begun. His feet are on earth—but his citizenship is in heaven!

It is a GREAT gift. It is "Eternal life." Eternity!—Who can fathom that word? What mortal thought or figure can compass its meaning? An old writer has thus illustrated it—"Suppose this globe of ours to be composed of sand. Suppose at the close of every million of years one grain were to drop from the enormous mass. Yet when the round orb of sand has

exhausted its countless grains and its countless millions of years, that measureless lapse of ages will (compared to Eternity) be only as one swing of the pendulum!" What a heritage is this—these years of deathless bliss!

We are in a perishable world. The proud monarchs of the past—where are they? The scepters waved over prostrate kingdoms, and the hands which grasped them, where are they? Cities with the murmur of a swarming population—temple and tower rising to heaven—where are they?—Relics of perished magnificence—the owl and the satyr hooting desolation to the passer-by! Every form and object around us, animate and inanimate, has the wrinkle on its brow. The most colossal works of nature are hastening to decay and dissolution. The day is coming when the sun itself shall grow dim with age—when the moon's silver lamp shall cease to burn—when the stars in the great temple of night shall quench their altar-fires—when the ocean shall be swept from its channel—when the forests shall be charred into blackness—the mountains crumble into dust, and the hills become as chaff. And after these present material heavens shall have passed away, there may be new suns and systems—new forms and conditions of matter, to take their place. There may be new volumes in the history of God's universe, whose pages are eras, and their chapters millenniums.

But there will be no break, no gap in the believer's limitless life—no canceling of the irreversible word, "They shall never perish." They shall reign forever and ever! Eternity! Yes, believers, this is the measure of your happiness—the duration of your bliss—a duration, in comparison with which all time, all history, all past cycles and ages, from the song of the morning stars until now, is but as a dream when one awakens! Existence concurrent with that of the Infinite Jehovah!—the life-time of the Almighty—the years of God!

He who thus purchased, with His own precious blood, this magnificent inheritance, turns to each one of us and says—"He who believes in me, though he were dead yet shall he live—and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Let each direct that question to himself, "Do you believe this?" Seek to make it matter of personal concernment. Think of the dread alternative—Eternal life or Eternal death!—a heritage of joy or a heritage of wrath! For while it is said, "He



that has the Son has life," it is added, "He that has not the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Abides! Yes, "abides!"

As life—eternal life—in the case of the believer, is now begun—as we have even in this world, the first installment of that life which is never to die; so, if we have not the Son of God—if we have no saving interest in Christ—what is our position—what our inheritance? Is it a fearful looking for of prospective future judgment and fiery indignation? No, it is more than this; it is worse than this. It is a present retribution! It is the first installment of everlasting death—the first gnawings of the worm—the first kindling of the everlasting fire! "The wrath of God abides." It is not the brimstone-cloud hanging over us—but that cloud already burst—the wrath of God already "revealed from heaven!"

Seek without delay a saving interest in Him who came that "we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." Flee—oh! flee from the wrath to come! And here is a blessed—a glorious Shelter from that wrath—they are words uttered by the lips of the great Life-giver Himself—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"

## **16. THE SECURITY OF THE FLOCK**

Is this gift of Eternal Life—the great gift of the Divine Shepherd of the sheep, which we have considered in the preceding chapter—placed beyond the possibility of risk or forfeiture? Passing unscathed through all perilous contacts, will His people reach with certainty the heavenly fold at last? That existence of endless bliss, so dearly purchased, is inalienably and irrevocably secured. Once within the Shepherd's fold, they are in the fold forever—in the possession of a life as deathless and imperishable as His own!

Jacob, in his touching appeal to exacting Laban, tells of sheep that had been stolen by night and day, and torn by wild beasts. How striking the

contrast with the Great Shepherd, when He makes the protestation, "Of those who You gave Me, I have lost none!" He hushes every fear and misgiving as He utters the glorious guarantee—"I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

This negative form of statement repeats, by implication under a new figure, the truth we have incidentally alluded to in a previous chapter, that there is in the world an opposing Power, or Powers, whose aim is to accomplish, if possible, the ruin and destruction of the Elect—that there is an Enemy lurking in the vicinity of the fold, and watching his opportunity to pluck the sheep out of the hands of the Shepherd. Satan is that great counter-worker. "We are of God," says John, speaking as the representative of Christ's people; "and the whole world lies in the wicked one." In combination with his legion emissaries, he is ever engaged in storming a citadel. That citadel is the heart of man—the heart of the believer. A citadel, not like many of the forts or citadels we see in our own country, where the engines and implements of war are allowed for years on years to remain unused and undisturbed—the cannon waking their sleeping thunders only on days of commemorative joy—sentinels pacing their rounds, but only keeping mock vigils—for no enemy is at the gates, and the flag of peace hangs quietly on the battlements.

But that heart is in a state of perpetual siege. By storm, and secret stratagem, the giant adversary is plotting its overthrow. And it is not the Little-hearts and Feeble-minded only, against whom he directs his missiles. It is against the Valiant and the Great-hearts too. He knows that the more prominent and illustrious will be his triumph if he can succeed in capturing some veteran in the field, or in demolishing some fortress of renown. Hear one of such veterans telling his experience (what a representation it gives us of the reality of this spiritual warfare)—"We wrestle" (WRESTLE! It is a personal struggle—foot to foot—hand to hand)—"We wrestle—not against flesh and blood—but against principalities and powers—against the rulers of the darkness of this world—against spiritual wickedness in high places."

What a picture have we here of the believer in the heat of conflict! Christ giving him the noble gift of life—Satan trying with every accursed wile

and weapon to rob him of the priceless jewel. Christ leading him to heaven, step by step up the ladder of salvation—Satan watching the moment when he may find him off his guard to hurl him down. It is darkness seeking to extinguish light. It is death seeking to trample out life. It is the two antagonist forces of the material universe at work in spiritual things—the one drawing towards the central sun—the other drawing away into devious orbits.

But He who is the great center of divine life and light and being, countervails, in the case of all His own people, the might of "the prince of the power of the air." 'You cannot pluck my ransomed Church,' He seems to say, 'from its orbit of light and love, and draw it away into the regions of hopeless darkness and blank despair.' "My sheep shall never perish." "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Hall, in his "Breathings of the Devout Soul" says—What shall I do, Lord? I strive and tug what I may with the spiritual wickedness in high places, which set upon my soul; but sometimes I am foiled, and go halting out to the field. It is Your mercy that I live, being so fiercely assaulted by those principalities and powers—it were more than wonder that I should escape such hands without a wound. Even that holy servant of Yours, who strove with Your angel for a blessing, went limping away, though he prevailed. What a marvel is it that so weak a wretch as I, striving with many evil angels for the avoidance of a curse, come off with a maim or scar? But, blessed be Your name, the wounds that I receive are not mortal; and when I fall, it is but to my knees, where I rise with new courage and hopes of victory. You who are the God of all power, and keep the keys of hell and death, have said, Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Lord, I do and will, by Your merciful aid, still and ever resist: O make my faith as stead fast as my will resolute. Oh! still teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight; arm my soul with strength; and at last, according to Your gracious promise, crown it with victory.

What are the grounds of this inviolable security of the believer's bliss? GOD, the eternal Father, sets His seal to the words, "They shall never

perish." The attributes of His nature—His Power, Love, Faithfulness, Immutability, all render the destruction of one member of the ransomed fold impossible. "My Father who gave them Me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." "You," says Christ, addressing the Father with reference to Himself, "You have given Me power over all flesh, that I should give eternal life to as many as You have given Me." "Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost." "That by two immutable things" (His oath and promise), in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

CHRIST, the adorable Son, sets His seal to the words, "They shall never perish." He has a personal interest and responsibility in the salvation of each member of His chosen flock. They are made over to Him of the Father. He can say as Jacob, on that same occasion to which we have just referred, said of his flock to Laban, "That which is torn of beasts—I bear the loss of it; of my hand do you require it."

God, the HOLY SPIRIT, sets His seal to the words, "They shall never perish." "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed unto the day of redemption." "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

In addition to these immutable guarantees of each of the Three Persons in the adorable Trinity, we have a more special ground of security arising out of that sublime and ennobling truth so frequently dwelt upon, directly and indirectly, in the inspired epistles, the believer's spiritual union with his Lord. Incorporated into the mystical body of which He is the Head, to perish is impossible. We are accounted one with Him. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. "If we perish," says Luther, "Christ perishes with us." Identifying Himself with His people, He may be supposed to say, as David said to Abiathar, "Abide with me, for he that seeks your life seeks my life, but with me you shall be in safeguard." And what is this safeguard? It is the Deity of the Redeemer. He who gives me life, and who promises that life is imperishable—He is "the Mighty God." My hope of

eternal life, promised before the world began, stands on the Rock of Ages. Divinity gives it strength. He who is able to keep me from falling, is the "only wise GOD our Savior."

But, it may be asked, does fact or experience warrant all these strong assertions? Are the sheep of Christ never plucked from the hand and bosom of the Shepherd? Do we never see them lamentably stumbling and falling, and in some cases, so far as we can judge, perishing, and perishing irrecoverably? No, not so with one true member of the Savior's fold. Such apostates may have seemed to be of the flock—but it was only in semblance, not in reality. They may have seemed to be true coin, from the divine mint—but they were counterfeit metal—gilded alloy—they lacked the true ring of the currency of heaven. And if such apparently have perished—if such sheep have apparently been plucked from the Shepherd's hands—here is the Shepherd's own explanation, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

It is true, indeed, the life of the most devoted believer has its ebbs and flows—his safety, by reason of his own backslidings, corruption, and unwatchfulness, may seem at times to be endangered. The sheep of Christ, as we shall note in the succeeding chapter, may, in some moment of temptation, be found, and are found, wandering along the dark glen, entangled in brier thickets, or carried down the swollen stream. But as the shepherd among ourselves puts a mark on the various members of his flock that he may know his own; so the sheep of Christ bear upon them, what the old writers call "the blood-mark of the covenant"—and of these the Great Shepherd says (when they may be themselves uttering the cry of despair)—"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Their life and safety may apparently be endangered, but it is only as the flow of the majestic river is apparently impeded by the mass of opposing rock in its channel. It is fretted for the moment; but after clearing the temporary barrier, it dashes onwards, with grander impetuosity, in its way to the ocean. So with the believer. The rocks of temptation may obstruct and arrest the smooth current of his spiritual and eternal life;

but it is only for the moment—He that has begun a good work—He that has begun a new life—will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus. You may as soon dream of stemming a river—damming up the mountain torrent as it plunges over rock and cataract in its way to the shoreless sea—as arrest the flow of that God-given life.

Remember the apostle's golden chain—"Whom He did predestinate them He also called, and whom He called them He also justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified!" We may lose sight of the links of the chain, but it never can be broken. We love this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. We cannot believe in the possibility of a man being regenerated today, and unregenerated tomorrow. As Christ's blood has purchased—so will His grace sanctify and His power save. "Having loved His own who are in the world, He loves them to the end." If we are ever tempted to doubt or despond—if ever led to fear that as wandering sheep we may be fatally swept down the mountain-torrent, or fall a prey to the evening wolves—let us think of a living, life-giving, life-sustaining Intercessor on the throne of Heaven—the Shepherd's eye watching us from the mountains of myrrh and the hills of frankincense!

Israel could never have coped with the war-disciplined chieftains of Amalek, but for the uplifted hands of their interceding head on the mount at Rephidim. They would have been scattered as chaff—and their bones left to bleach in the wilderness. Joshua with all his fiery courage, as column after column swept along the valley beneath, would have been nothing, had not Moses been pleading on the hill. Blessed be God, we have One on the heavenly mount, whose arms never faint—whose hands never grow weary. His words have a perpetual meaning—a perpetual music—"I have prayed for you—I am praying for you—that your faith does not fail."

You who are the sheep of Christ's pasture, see the secret of your preservation—your perseverance—see the secret of this marvelous triumph of your weakness over Satan's strength—the "worm Jacob" in the strength of his Savior-God "thrashing the mountains, and beating them small, and making the hills like chaff"—the spiritual David, with a few brook-pebbles laying low the giants of sin and unbelief and temptation! Yes, indeed, it is a mighty marvel, the security and final safety of every

member of the fold. This poor plant—beaten with wind and hail, rain and tempest, outliving all, and destined to flourish in eternal luxuriance and beauty! This fragile vessel—the sport of ten thousand adverse influences—buffeted by the waves of temptation—left for nights on the starless ocean—grazing with its keel the sunken rocks—yet outriding the storm, and entering peacefully the desired haven!

This vile heart with its legion-foes confederate with Satan—Pleasure in its Proteus-shapes—Worldliness with its legion-headed power—the archers of Mammon with their golden arrows—our own sins—each individual sin we commit, a foul attempt on our part to pluck ourselves out of the Savior's hand—yet the battle is certain to end in victory!

In earthly battles, victory trembles in the scale often for long hours of bloodstained fight; neither side can predict the results. By some apparent accident—some trifle—the fortunes of the day may be decided, the destiny of a country altered, the liberty of a people lost or won. But no such uncertainty hovers over this spiritual conflict—triumph is sure—no trophy will be lost—no straggler will be left to perish—as with Israel in leaving Egypt, "not a hoof will be left behind." You will not only be conquerors, but "more than conquerors through Him that loved you!" "I give unto you," says He, "eternal life." Your names are imperishably engraved on this Heart of love— and on His priestly Breastplate, and they never can be erased!

Let us conclude with a word of explanation, of encouragement, and of warning. A word of EXPLANATION. Let not any misinterpret the truth, by imagining from what has been advanced that we reduce believers to irresponsible machines—like yonder engine careering on the iron highway, or ploughing the waters—a dumb, sluggish, inert, soulless piece of mechanism, which is reined in, or which plunges on, in obedience to the intelligence which guides it, but which has no will, or purpose, or choice of its own. Let none say that they are the mere passive subjects of a predestinated purpose—an irresistible destiny which renders their salvation a certainty; and who are, therefore, relieved from the necessity of all individual exertion in the work of their high calling—that being saved by an irreversible decree, they may live as they desire—that final perdition being impossible, they may face and encounter whatever

temptations they may desire—they can even hold parley with sin, or allow it at times to gain the mastery—it matters not—they will be saved at last—none is able to pluck them out of the Shepherd's hands!

No, God deals with His elect as rational, free, responsible agents. They are "kept," it is true—so the apostle Peter beautifully expresses it—"kept" (as in a citadel or garrison)—"by the power of God." But how, says he, are they kept? "By the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." "Through faith." As it has been well said, the eye of faith and the ear of faith, and the feet of faith, are all on the watch against the incursions of the enemy. This active, living, influential principle of faith is ever on the alert; working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world.

Does Peter regard the purchased safety and absolute security of the believer as an argument for unwatchfulness?—That having in possession the gift of eternal life, the Christian may cast aside the spiritual armor, and fight and wrestle no more? Hear his own words, in the first chapter of his second epistle—he speaks to those who "have obtained like precious faith, through the righteousness of God"—who have become "partakers of the divine nature." How does he address such? "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Never let any say, that these distinguishing doctrines of sovereign grace lead to unguardedness, unwatchfulness; or, what is worse, to a license to sin—that we may continue in sin because this electing and saving grace abounds. Holy living, and holy walking, are the test and proof of election—unholy living, and unholy walking are Satan's (no, they are our own) brand of reprobation. The law and the gospel enunciate the same great principle—"To those who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality," (He will render) "eternal life." But to those who are disobedient, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness," (He will render) "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."

We may draw a lesson of ENCOURAGEMENT. What a glorious prize is this set before us!—what a glorious incentive for our immortal energies!



Life! the only thing worth calling life—the life of God in the soul—a life whose infancy is on earth, and its perfected manhood in heaven. What is there worthy of aspiration in comparison with this? What though other earthly blessings are lacking, if you have this everlasting possession? What though outward things may elude your grasp, and perish in the very using, if you have "the better part" which is indestructible? What would the sculptor care though his packing-case is broken, if the priceless marble statue which it contains escape uninjured? What would the mother care though her cradle got burned in the flaming house, if her loving child, her loving treasure, be spared? What though the thief have escaped with the casket, if the jewel remain? "Let the perishable things go," says a good man—"the inheritance is ours!"

Be indifferent to what the world gives or withholds. Learn that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. Life is not, as the world estimates it, composed of wealth, riches, honors, possessions; these are but the incidentals of life—the outer shell—the perishable and corroding gilding. But it is the inner wealth of peace with God—the assurance of His love—a pure heart, a peaceful conscience, the humble hope of eternal fellowship and communion with Him above. "Our cause," says Luther, "is in the very hands of Him who can say with unspeakable dignity, 'No one shall pluck it out of my hands.' I would not have it in our hands—and it would not be desirable that it were so. I have had many things in my hands, and I have lost them All—but whatever I have been able to place in God's hands I still possess." "The world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever!"

Finally, let us hear a word of WARNING. This eternal life hangs on the small thread of the present. As we are now, so shall we be forever. Eternal life is a synonym for character. "The child," it is said, "is the father of the man." This has a more solemn and awful—a more significant and truthful meaning with regard to a world to come. The childhood of time will determine the manhood of eternity. The passing moments of the present will color the infinite future. Life in this world is the cartoon—the dim shadowy outline—which will be filled up and embodied in the life hereafter. What an untold value all this gives to the present! And what!

Have we been letting its consecrated moments filter like sand through our fingers? Have we been "seeking our portion in this life?" Toiling up the hill after a fancied something, which turns out to be an airy nothing!—Seeking to gain the world, and to pay that awful price for it—the losing of our own souls? Have its pleasures—its riches—its ambitions—its vanities—been dimming to our souls their nobler destinies? Have the things that are temporal and seen, been supplanting and superseding the things that are eternal and not seen?

And if the eye of any who know not God—who are yet strangers to the fold and to peace, should fall on these pages, let them not twist the words of this scripture unto their own destruction. Mark, He who utters them does not say regarding you and your sad condition—"I give unto them eternal death!" No, no. God gives—God apportions to no one so terrible a destiny. This is what He gives. He gives you vessel—oars—sails—chart—compass—rudder—He points you to the distant harbor—He warns you of the environing and approaching storms. But He tells you, if you sail by His chart you will outride them all, and cast anchor in the heavenly harbor.

What is the conduct of many, in the face of all these provisions, to ensure safety and peace? They fling their ballast into the depths of the sea. They hoist their sails, but they are passion. They are guided by a compass, but that is the world's opinion. They steer by a helm, but that is base expediency. God has given them His Bible as their lighthouse, but they are lured by the balefires of sin. Unhappy castaway! Had you yielded to heavenly influences, your sails would have been filled with propitious breezes, which would have wafted you safely to the haven. But can you wonder—can you upbraid God with your ruin, if you are now found rudderless; with tattered sail and leaking hulk and splintered masts—drifting, drifting onwards, amid the howling winds and wintry sea of a dark and cheerless eternity? Therefore, while we congratulate Christ's true people on their noble heritage of eternal life, see that all this may not be to you the forecasting and foreshadowing of eternal darkness—of sin, and shame, and everlasting contempt! See that you are not yourselves responsible for being among the hapless ones, who are shut out and excluded forever from the heavenly fold! "Many," we read, on the great

day, "shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

The entrance to the sheepfold is open this hour. It is open to all who seek it. "By me," says Christ, "if any man enters in he shall be saved." But once that final day is come, and you are found standing outside the fold, Omnipotence itself cannot unlock its closed gate! The door is shut—the invitation is withdrawn—mercy can plead no more. "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us!"

## **17. THE CRY OF A WANDERER**

"Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?"

"If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds." Song 1:7-8

We have just been considering, in the preceding pages, that elevating subject, the imperishable life of the believer—the inviolable safety and security of the flock of the Great Shepherd. But, as it has been well remarked, there is often only a step between the third heavens and the thorn in the flesh. The child of God, triumphing at times in the indestructible privileges and blessings of the covenant—saying with the Psalmist, "The Lord is my life and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"—may, like that same Psalmist, by reason of the seductions of temptation from without, or from remaining corruption within, be brought to wail through anguished tears—"My soul cleaves unto the dust"—"Iniquities, I must confess, do prevail against me!"

Sad fitfulness and waywardness of the vacillating, even though regenerate heart! The sheep that has been rescued from the pit of destruction—carried back in the arms of the Good Shepherd, caressed and fondled by its Divine Deliverer; with every conceivable motive to follow His steps and "abide in His love;" yet, once more a truant from the fold! This is our only comfort amid human changefulness—the ebbing and flowing in the tide of the spiritual life—that we can repose in the faithfulness, veracity, and immutability of Him "with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning." The vessel may, for a while, drift from its moorings, but the Rock is immovable. "Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand." "The Lord lives, and blessed be my ROCK, and let the God of my salvation be exalted."

In the two portions of Scripture which head this chapter, we have the record and utterance of such an experience—the bleat of a wanderer who has strayed from the fold—the cry of a child who has strayed from the paternal home. Mournful is the theme, to trace the history of such aberration—to go down with a torch into the dark chambers of the soul, and discover the guilty secret of this quenching of its light. The humbling thing about spiritual declension, as we previously incidentally noted, is the often apparent triviality of its cause. Just as a child's breath on the window is sufficient to dull and obscure the loveliest landscape—or as that same child's breath puts out the candle as effectually as would the sweeping storm; so, little sins obscure the windows of the soul—they dim the spiritual and heavenly landscape—they put out the lights of faith and love, and leave the whole moral being in gloomy darkness.

How many can trace a long and dreary period of alienation to one unhappy incident—one omitted duty—one outburst of temper—one tampering with conscience. Any of these may, like the little jutting stone in the path, turn the sheep aside from the footsteps of the flock, and from the voice and leading of the Shepherd. Slowly, imperceptibly, the retrograde movement proceeds—slowly, the lethargy steals over the spirit. The backslider says, like Samson, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself; and he know not that the Lord had departed from him."

Yes, in the case of not a few, that decay of spiritual health and energy, by

means of many counterfeits of spiritual life, hides its own sad reality from the subject of it. It is like that specious and fatally common complaint, which simulates so many of the outward symptoms of health—the bright glow in the cheek, and the luster in the eye—while all the time the strength is being undermined, and disease is sapping the foundations of the natural life. So it is with this consumption of the soul. There is often the appearance of spiritual health; and many are content with this name to live, while they are dying or dead—deceiving others, and deceiving themselves.

The rustic figure of the Prophet Hosea is true to the letter—"Gray hairs are here and there on Ephraim, and he knew it not." With others, however, the fatal truth cannot be hidden or dissembled. The misery of this spiritual declension and apostasy cannot be concealed. The soul is only too conscious of the self-forfeiture of all its former spiritual blessings. From being once well fed—sitting under the Beloved's shadow, and catching the falling fruit from the laden branches; now it is forced to cry with no fake anguish—"My leanness, my leanness!"

Once it was like those flowers which open their petals to drink in the dews of heaven; but now, blighted and drooping, the cup closes, and the dew trickles down and falls unblest on the earth—or like those plants, once covered with leaves and blossoms, but which have been imprisoned in the dark cellar—shut out from air and sunlight, now stretching their sickly tendrils towards every chink in the wall—gasping and sighing for the genial, loving influences from which they are excluded.

Among other fruitful causes, how often does **WORLDLY PROSPERITY** tend to this lapsing of the soul from God! How often do our very outward mercies and blessings super-induce this spiritual languor and decay! It is with believers individually as with the Church collectively—they are never in a condition less favorable to spiritual health and advancement than when they have no trial or cross to brace their energies and invigorate their graces. The soldier gets tired and listless after battle. History tells us how the bravest veterans of the great Carthaginian general got demoralized and degenerate, when (victory over) they sat down to rejoicing and revelry—they never were the same heroes again.

On the other hand, TRIAL is often made the means of rousing the lethargic soul. Affliction, in its many forms, is often instrumental in prompting the cry and the confession—"I went astray like a lost sheep." Then are we brought to see secret sins before undetected—pride, vanity, rebellion against God—unowned and unacknowledged mercies, of which we have been the daily recipients. We can imagine that it was in the cold, bleak night of the far country—when the sun had gone down—in the deep silence of some dreary solitude, that the prodigal first began to ponder his wretchedness. In that murky background, the gleaming memories of happier days were contrasted with the husks of the swine, and the garbage of the wilderness—there it was, that awaking suddenly to the consciousness of his misery, he rose from his stony pillow with the cry, "I am perishing with hunger!"

And so it is in the dark night of sorrow—in the solitude of the death-chamber and the stricken-heart, that many a man awakes to the first feeling of the wretchedness of his alienation from God, and that the blessed resolve is formed, "I will arise, and go to my Father." "Before I was afflicted I went astray." "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me." The mount of "revival" is reached, not by walking along the flowery meadow, but the steep thorny path of "trouble!"

But let us pass from the wanderer and the wandering to consider more particularly THE WANDERER'S CRY. Cast down, he is not destroyed. The child is still conscious of the yearnings of home-love. The prodigal has not buried the remembrances of home-affection. The sheep, as it roams over the mountains, has not forgotten its Shepherd's voice and fold—"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed—where You make Your flock to rest at noon!"

Backslider! In the midst of your guilty departures, can you make this averment—"O you whom my soul loves"? "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you." "Seek," not a stranger, but "seek your servant. I have longed for many things in my seasons of estrangement, but none, O Savior God, have ever satisfied me but You. I have gathered pearls from many oceans, but none have been like the Pearl of Great Price. I have culled sweets from many flowers, but no perfume is like that of the Rose of Sharon. I have fled to many shelters! many bowers of earthly pleasure

have spread over me their canopy, but none can compare to the True Refuge from the storm and covert from the tempest!"

Are there any perusing these pages who feel such to be their experience—who are sensible of the misery of their departure from God—who, in the retrospect of their spiritual life, have the sunny memories of other and brighter days—the springtime of love, when the garden of the heart was green with promise—while now all seems stunted, blanched, blighted, barren; like the significant description given by the Psalmist, "Like grass on the roof, which withers before it can grow; with it the reaper cannot fill his hands, nor the one who gathers fill his arms"? Melancholy, indeed, is your history. Dare I attempt to sketch it?

Once you soared on eagle pinions of faith; but these have collapsed—they have become leaden wings—and you have fallen powerless to the earth. Once you loved communion with God—the unspeakable privilege of fellowship with your Heavenly Father. That is now cold and dead—a piece of lifeless formalism. Once you loved prayer; you delighted to touch the golden scepter, to lay hold of the angel and wrestle; but now the soul's sinew is shrunk—your wrestling power is gone—the scepter is still there, but you are impotent to reach it. Once you loved the Word—the Scriptures read in the closet and in the sanctuary—the simplest of sermons in which Christ was preached were prized by you. Now the Bible gathers dust on your shelves—the sanctuary is attended more to criticize than to profit—to indulge the itching ear, rather than to benefit the needy soul.

Once you spent blessed hours of hallowed contemplation at the foot of the cross, or walked in Emmaus' journeys with your Lord—your heart burning within you, while, conscious of His invisible presence and love, He talked to you by the way, and opened to you the Scriptures. Now the world has hidden the cross—its din and bustle have drowned and overcome the Savior's voice. You call God still your Father; but you have no longer the filial, loving, childlike spirit which you once had. The tenderness of conscience is impaired; genuine spirituality is gone. The creature has vaulted on the throne of the Creator. Harsh thoughts of God have taken the place of loving ones. Unkind misconstructions of His ways and dealings have taken the place of reverend acquiescence in His

sovereign will. The scroll of your life of faith, once all illumined with red and gold, is now covered with black lettering, "O Lucifer, son of the morning, how are you fallen!"

But do not despond. See, in both motto verses, the secret of such a wanderer's return. We have spoken of the sad case; let us look to THE CURE. The means of restoration is Prayer. It is by seeking anew the long-deserted and unfrequented mercy-seat. "Seek Your servant." "Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed." In the language of Hosea, addressed to backsliding Israel, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously."

At that crisis-hour of his history, when David was the most abject of wanderers, it was prayer which brought him back. His beautiful fifty-first Psalm is the liturgy of a penitent backslider, the loud and agonizing cry of a wandering sheep. And the Shepherd heard it! God restored his soul; and made good in his experience, as in the experience of all wanderers, His own promise, "Re turn unto Me, and I will return unto you." Do not keep back. Do not repress these penitential emotions, because of the sadness of your declension, and the extent of your divergence from the footsteps of the flock. Mountains of transgression may seem to separate you from the Shepherd. It matters not. If David had been influenced by a consideration of the enormity of his sin, before coming in broken-hearted penitence and conviction, to confess it, he might well have seen in it a wall of separation—an unbridged chasm, proclaiming eternal severance from the fold.

Listen to his plea. Listen to the backslider's entreaty. It is a strange and remarkable one, "Pardon my iniquity, FOR IT IS GREAT." Most transgressors would deem the greatness of their iniquity the very reason for God's withholding pardon. We might have expected to hear this presumptuous transgressor wailing out, through tears of despair, 'Lord, if my sin had been less heinous and aggravated, then I might have dreamt of forgiveness. If I had been untaught from my youth—untutored and undisciplined in Your ways, there might have been excuse or palliation for my offences, and room to hope on Your part for compassion and pardon. But I, guilty abuser of privileges, quencher of heavenly light, faithless requiter of abounding mercies, cannot expect, cannot ask You, to



forgive these crimson iniquities. I must be content to be an outcast from Your fold forever.' No! He makes the very greatness of his sin his plea for the extension of God's mercy!

With man it would have been different. The turpitude of the crime would have closed the door of human sympathy and human hope. But God's ways are not man's ways, nor God's thoughts man's thoughts. "Let me fall into the hands of GOD, for great are His mercies, but let me not fall into the hands of man." "After Your loving kindness have mercy upon me. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." "GOD, be merciful to me, a sinner." "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, FOR it is great!"

Reader, are you conscious that your iniquities have thus separated between you and your heavenly Shepherd? Are you conscious that you are not now as once you were? that you enjoy no longer, as once you did, sensible nearness to the mercy-seat? that you are restraining prayer before God? that the fine edge of conscience is blunted? that, in one word, you have lost ground in the Christian life? Arise, confess your sin, mourn your backsliding, and cry for mercy! Making a full and unreserved confession, the Great Shepherd will not spurn you away. He is waiting to be gracious. In the words of the woman of Tekoah, "But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him."

The Shepherd devises means for the reclamation of His erring sheep. He pities the backslider; just as the general on the field of battle pities the wounded who are carried bleeding by their comrades to the rear. "Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, O backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever."

May it be yours to experience the blessedness of this true repentance! Yes. Strange as the expression may seem, the "blessedness of repentance." You have seen, when the rain and the storm had spent their fury on some landscape; when the thunder-cloud had passed, and blue vistas had again opened in the sky, and the sun had shone forth, silvering the dripping branches, how the woodland grove rang with the song of

birds—all the sweeter and more gladsome seemed the notes of music, succeeding the gloom which had so long repressed them. Such is the image of the happiness and joy of the soul, in the hour of its restoration. Let this be your "new song," on being brought up from the miry clay, and your feet again set on the Rock of Ages, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise!"—"Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasture-lands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago."

We close with a sentence of solemn admonition. Write "Beware" on every page of your future spiritual history. Wanderers once, see to it that you may not be wanderers again. "Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." If threatened with shipwreck once, before again putting to sea, "strengthen your mast,"—if decoyed once within the grim bars of Doubting Castle, be on your guard against the tempters with which Giant Despair has in these days studded the pilgrim's way. Hear the voice of God saying, as to the Church of Ephesus, "Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

Beware of forfeiting, even for a time, God's affection and love. In the case of human affections, after the sacredness of a friendship has once been broken, it is hard to reunite that broken link. It is hard to forget the treachery of a trusted friend, or to repose confidence where confidence has been misplaced and cruelly abused or wronged—it is easier to form a new affection than to patch up an old one. The same is true with regard to our relationship to God. It is hard for us to feel the tenderness of a first love again, if that love, on our part, have undergone coolness or lukewarmness. The bitter personal remembrance of having wounded the Highest, Truest, and Best of Friends, can never be obliterated. Peter (fully forgiven, and loving all the more because forgiven) could never cancel from his own memory the story of his denial—the deep wound he had inflicted on his loving Master; and he would carry that scar on his heart of hearts until the hour of his death!

Beware, too, of tampering with anything which may have periled your peace or dulled and deadened the life of God in your soul. Beware of

walking on the edge of the precipice. You may escape falling; but the wiser plan is not to attempt it. Beware of walking too near the fire. You may escape the flames—but better not to run the peril of contact. Beware of navigating too near the rocks. You may carry your vessel through unscathed—but better not run the risk of making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Beware of worldly associates—those whose principles and fellowship are apt to act as drags on the wheels of the spiritual life, and to retard the soul's advancement Godwards and heavenward. Cultivate the friendship of Christ's true people.

What was the reply to this wail of the wanderer in the Song, when, in pursuit of her lost Shepherd and Lord, she exclaims, "Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?" It was this—"Go your way by the footsteps of the flock, and feed your young goats beside the shepherds' tents." And while distrusting yourself, be it yours, with the Psalmist, to look away from your own weakness and wandering, to the Shepherd of Israel, as alike your Restorer and Keeper. How precious the double name—the double assurance! He is the RESTORER. "Seek Your servant," says the penitent suppliant. Well did he know that if the lost one is to be found—if the wandering sheep is to be brought to the fold again, the arms of the Good Shepherd can alone effect the restoration—"He restores my soul."

But He is more than this. "Seek Your servant;" and after seeking, keep Your servant! The Lord is Your KEEPER! "He who keeps Israel shall not slumber!" What can we desire more than this? All-sufficiency to restore, and All-sufficiency to keep; mercy to pardon, and grace to help. "Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved!"

Backslider! a gracious Savior thus gently chides you, "Will you go away also?" "You did run well, who hindered you?" No longer hazard your safety, or endanger your peace. "There are some sheep," says a traveler familiar with every phase of modern Palestine life, "incurably reckless, who stray far away, and are often utterly lost. I have repeatedly seen a silly goat or sheep, running here and there, and bleating piteously after

the lost flock—only to call forth, from their dens, the beasts of prey, or to bring up the lurking thief, who quickly quiets its cries in death."

Although we cannot think of any true believer, however sad his wanderings, as perishing finally—consigned to hopeless and irremediable ruin; the earthly picture and symbol may well suggest solemn thought to all who are "ready to die," and who, by their own reckless waywardness and backsliding, are madly braving the perils of distance and alienation from the fold of God. Return, without delay, to the seeking Shepherd—rekindle the smouldering fires on the forsaken altar. If it has been for a time winter—spiritual winter, with your soul—all apparently lifeless and dead—every living grace drooping under the conscious absence of the true Sun—anticipate the spring-time of reviving energy. Cease not until you can respond to the gladdening notes of the revival hymn of the olden Church, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land"

## **18. THE TREMBLING FLOCK COMFORTED**

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32

Here is another of the many precious "voices of the Shepherd." It may be regarded as an answer to the cry of the wanderer, which formed the subject of last chapter. A little flock; a fearful flock—such is Christ's own description of "His people and the sheep of His pasture." But He lulls their trembling apprehensions, by pointing them away from the sorrowing present, and the chequered future of earth, to the bright,

unsinching, unsorrowing, glorious future of Heaven—"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

There is something striking and significant in the mixed metaphor which is here employed. Though our Lord in these solacing words to His disciples, and to His Church in all ages, addresses them as His "Flock," He does not add, "It is your Shepherd's," but "It is your Father's good pleasure." The two favorite emblems of Old and New Testament are thus brought in conjunction. The well-known pastoral symbol of the one is coupled with the paternal symbol, which belongs preeminently, we may almost say exclusively, to the other.

"Give ear, O SHEPHERD of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock," was the form of adoration familiar to the saints and patriarchs of the former economy; and while, as we have abundantly seen, that Shepherd-emblem is not superseded in the Gospel, but rather retained, and lovingly enshrined in the utterances alike of inspired apostles and their Lord; there is yet super-added this new formula of invocation for "the children of the kingdom," "Our FATHER who is in heaven." "It is your Father's good pleasure!" Had that kingdom of future bliss been the bestowment of God as a munificent Sovereign, we could not have failed to prize the honor. But how is its value enhanced, when it comes to us as the gift and pledge of a Father's love—when the feelings which the Almighty Donor wishes those whom He has served, heirs to its riches to cherish regarding Him, are not those of awe towards an majestic Potentate, but of love and affection towards a tender Parent. "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

We shall not reiterate, what has been fully dwelt upon in former chapters, the various kinds and occasions of misgiving and "fear" which tend to discourage and terrify the little flock in "the way of the wilderness." Many of these form a necessary portion of their probation discipline. As shadows and half-tints are needed to give boldness and strength to the brighter parts of a painting, so in the spiritual life-picture—these are the shadings required to give expression and depth to the whole. We shall only advert, at present, to one additional cause of apprehension which not infrequently exercises a depressing influence on the minds of God's people, in the prospect of their Father's kingdom—that is, the sense of

their utter unfitness and unworthiness to enter it—the discrepancy between the holiness which befits that kingdom, and the unholiness—the remnant corruption and vileness of their imperfectly sanctified hearts.

This is oftentimes their inward musing—the soliloquy of no shammed humility—'How can we, with all our wretched frailties and shortcomings, dream of admission into a heaven of unsullied purity, undimmed and undefiled by the intrusion of one unhallowed thought! The great Shepherd-Father may admit other sheep into His Eternal Fold, other children to His Eternal Home; but we stand debarred forever from entering its gates, or expatiating in its bliss.'

No, "fear not;" for, First, amid all your conscious unworthiness, remember, **YOU ARE HIS CHILDREN**. The soiled garments of earth which you may carry to the very portals of glory, cannot alter a Father's feelings towards you, or lead Him to refute or forego His promises. If there is joy in heaven (and that joy deepest in the Father's heart) over the sinner in the hour of his repentance; what will be that joy in the hour of his glorification, when, stripped of his travel-worn, sin-stained clothing, all his truant-wanderings and estrangements, and backslidings at an end, he enters the threshold of the paternal and eternal Home!

We have read somewhere a story in real life, regarding a long missing child, the heir to vast estates. The tale described how this innocent little one had been decoyed from the parental roof, and was last seen when a tribe of gypsies had been prowling about the neighborhood of his princely home. Golden bribes had a hundred times been offered for his restoration; but the cruel mystery remained hopelessly unsolved, all efforts were in vain to recover the valued life. The anguished parents, seeing the pride and hope of their household wrenched from their grasp, abandoned themselves to inconsolable grief. One day, years later, as the family carriage was, with these two saddened hearts, traveling along the highway, a gang of the wandering gypsies were passing by. In their midst, with a heavy burden on his shoulders, and attired in tatters, an eye and a countenance met theirs which could not be mistaken. A shriek of mingled terror and delight was heard—the mother, leaping in frantic joy from her seat, had, in a moment, that aggregate of rags and squalor in her arms—her son, who had been long dead, was alive again—long lost, he was again

found. What did these years of degradation signify to her? It was her beloved boy, by whose cradle she had, in days gone by, sung her lullaby, and weaved visions of fond hope; and though the golden ringlets of his hair were now matted with filth—the tiny hands hardened and begrimed with boyish drudgery—and the face browned and weather-beaten by exposure to the hot sun by day, and the cold, dewy, houseless night; yet there he was, her own, her only one. Yonder castle, looking forth on the wide estate, kept high festal holiday that evening. Servants were gathered, and menial servants were feasted, and the firesides of the poor were made brighter and happier by the recovery of the wanderer!

So shall it be with the children of the heavenly kingdom, in entering the heavenly Home. What though, to the last, by these rags and tatters of nature—these souls begrimed with the remains of sin, we belie our lofty birthright, and render ourselves all unworthy of so glorious an inheritance—"Surely you are still our FATHER! Even if Abraham and Jacob would disown us, Lord, you would still be our Father. You are our Redeemer from ages past." That hallowed word is beautifully represented by the Prophet Jeremiah as forming the passport to the little flock at the gate of heaven—its utterance, in the case of those destitute of all personal claims to admission, unlocking the golden portals, and conferring right of entrance. "I thought to myself, 'I would love to treat you as my own children!' I wanted nothing more than to give you this beautiful land—the finest inheritance in the world. I looked forward to your calling me 'FATHER.'" Jeremiah 3:19

But more, "Fear not, little flock," for your Shepherd-Father will prepare you for the KINGDOM. A glorious change will pass on your now partially renovated spirit at death. "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him." These, at present, drooping, lagging, groveling souls, will, by a transforming process which we cannot now venture to imagine or comprehend, be made fit for the holy Heaven of a holy God.

Go to the garden, from which winter has just been removing its icy mantle—and over which the first breath of genial spring has been passing. Watch on the gravel-walk or nestling on the rockery, that hideous, repulsive insect (a caterpillar)—you half wonder how God, the infinite

Architect, in the plenitude of His skill, could not have devised something more beautiful than that little mass of inert life. But bend your steps to that same sunny nook when the balmy zephyrs of a July morning are wafted by. What do you see now? That black lethargic shell has unlocked its secret—that little prison-house has sent forth a joyous captive, radiant with beauty. See it with spangled body and golden wings, reveling amid the luscious sweets and the play of sunshine—each flower opening its cup and making it welcome to its daintiest treasures. What a feeble image of the transformed, metamorphosed spirit, in that hour when, life's winter-storms all past, it bursts its prison-bars—"leaves its encumbering clay;" and, gifted with angel wings, soars aloft to "summer high," in the bliss of the beatific presence!

Meanwhile, fear not. "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" "God will perfect that which concerns you." In that last solemn moment—"in the twinkling of an eye"—He will fit you, by "the working of His mighty power," for taking your place among the spirits of the just made perfect, and for being one of the rejoicing multitude who are "without fault before the throne." The gifted author of the "Pilgrim's Progress" represents Mr. Feeble-mind and Mr. Ready-to-halt, after all their timorous thoughts, as safe at last. He describes the post as sounding his horn at their chamber doors. "I am come to you," says the postman, addressing the latter—"I am come to you from Christ, whom you have followed on crutches. He expects you at His table to sup with Him in His kingdom;" and then he pictures him, on reaching the brink of the river, as throwing away his crutches.

So will it be with many of God's true people, who are indulging needless apprehensions, because of the oppression of the enemy. If fearful now, the day is coming when, like the pilgrim Hebrews of old, you will stand triumphant on the further shore, exulting in the truth of your heavenly Father's assurance, which you may at present be so slow to credit—"Your enemies whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever." You may now be wailing, in notes of sadness—your weakness and feebleness. Like some captive bird, you may imagine—that your wings are disabled—your energies cramped and paralyzed—your song silenced. But not so! In God's own time the cage will be opened, and on



new-born wings of faith and love, you will go singing up to the gate of Paradise!

Finally—Believers, rejoice in the assurance, not only of certainty that you shall enter the heavenly fold, but that once entered, "you shall no more go out." The Father who "gives" you the kingdom will "keep" you in it. Not one member of the little flock will ever stray from the celestial pastures—not one member of the glorified family will ever be missed from the household—none will ever go forth weeping as from the gates of the first Eden.

How different our Father's house on high from the father's home on earth! As years roll on, how sad and mournful the family blanks! The empty arm-chair, where the venerable parent used to sit, tells of one vacancy—the closed bookcase, with the dust-covered school volumes, tells of another—the unused toy—(most touching of all)—tells of another—that portrait on the wall, on which ever and again a tearful glance is cast, tells of another. The once joyous catalogue in the old family Bible is blotted and saddened with many a mournful entry—or rather, these are transferred to the marble memorials of buried affection, crowding the silent land of forgetfulness.

But not so in that blessed kingdom! There, there will be no blanks—no missing names—no harrowing separations—no memories of buried love. No citizen of the New Jerusalem will ever be called to surrender his charter-rights. The road to the city, and the streets of the city, are paved with golden promises of the God who cannot lie—golden tower on golden tower of immutability and truth render inviolable the safety of its glorified inhabitants. Not only will an abundant entrance at last be given, but once allocated, it will be forever secured. The saying of the Good Shepherd regarding the flock on earth will be equally applicable to the flock of heaven—"Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish!"

One word in closing. Though this kingdom—this heritage of the little flock, as we have seen, is a covenant-gift—sealed and secured by the eternal love and promise of God the Father, we repeat the caution and qualification stated in a recent chapter—its privileges and immunities can

be enjoyed only by those who "strive to enter in." "The kingdom of heaven," says the Divine Purchaser, "has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." The processes in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature, are developed and matured by the diligent use of appointed means. Indeed, the commonest occurrences and transactions of every-day life remind us that we are under an economy of means, and that by foregoing or rejecting the employment of these, we are sure to forfeit the end.

A rope will save a drowning man—but he must stretch out his hand to grasp it—otherwise he is lost. The fire-escape will save a man enveloped in the flames—the iron ladder is shot up by the side of the burning building—and the sleeper, roused by the crackling fires, is told to rush to the provided means of safety. But saved he cannot be, if he folds his arms in indifference, and resigns himself to his fate. The man basking on the sea-beach on a summer day, when the tide is out, is warned that if he continues where he is and falls asleep, the rising waters will inevitably overtake him. Were he so foolish as to laugh to scorn the warning, we know that nothing could prevent the relentless, remorseless waves sweeping him away.

God puts us, like Jacob, at the ladder's base, and says—"There is the ladder of salvation; but if you would reach heaven, you must climb it." In providing a Zoar for Lot, He could easily have commissioned the angels to bear him miraculously through the air, and deposit him in safety on the adjoining hill. But He tells him to arise; and, staff in hand, to climb to the refuge—"Hasten! flee for your life!" Reader, be up and doing; while the gift of the kingdom is God's, yet, in one sense, it rests with ourselves whether we are to be crowned or beggared. The throne of that kingdom God promises only "to him that overcomes." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

## **19. THE FLOCK PASSING THROUGH THE**

## VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Psalm 23:4

There is perhaps no verse in Scripture with which we are more familiar than that which heads this chapter—no Bible figure which has made a more lasting and indelible impression. The picture of life, with a dark valley at the end of it, was hung up long ago, in the halls of memory, when infancy first learned to repeat or sing the Shepherd-psalm. Other mental scenes and pictures have come and gone—other Bible symbols may have made a transient impression—but this remains. And as Luther ever associated the appearance and scenery of the figurative Death-valley with that of his own valley of Augsburg, so each Bible reader has doubtless had his own mental picture suggested by some scene of his youth—perhaps some dark, lonesome Highland glen, with mist and rain-clouds muffling the mountain-tops, and a sluggish stream, amid the deepening shades of eventide, wending below.

We need not stop to inquire or conjecture what spot or locality suggested to David this world-wide emblem—what his prototype was of that Valley which, through his inspired lips, has now found an enduring place in all Christian teaching and symbolism. His thoughts may possibly have reverted to some scene memorable in the days of his boyhood, when he fed his father's flocks in the valleys around Bethlehem—some deep gorge among the mountains of Judah, through which, amid gloom and storm, he had himself conducted his fleecy charge.

Or if, as some are disposed rather to conjecture, the psalm were written in his declining years, during the rebellion of Absalom, when he took refuge beyond Jordan—he may have thought of some glen amid the rocky crags of Gilead, through which he had seen a shepherd conducting his flock out to the pastures of the wilderness. Or in the same spot of his exile, where the border river frets its way along a tortuous valley overhung with precipices, he may have seen the patient shepherd with the sheep slung on his shoulder, and with rod and staff in hand, fording

the impetuous stream. One or all of these familiar incidents may have presented to his mind the picture of Death—as a dark valley through which the flock of God have to pass, on their way to the heavenly fold.

But be this as it may, the image, at all events, has passed into all languages and all hearts. How many tears has this one verse dried! How many eyes, when dimmed by the haze of death to other familiar scenes—when the faces of loved relatives were eclipsed in the gathering darkness—how many eyes have gazed on this valley, made radiant with a presence and companionship better than all earthly friends! How often has the ear drunk in the heavenly music of this sublime soliloquy, or the faltering tongue lisped it, until the note of the earthly psalm blended with the songs of the seraphim!

Come and let us gaze on the picture! Let us stand by the mouth of this Valley, under the solemn conviction that we must one day tread it. Shall it be with or without the Heavenly Guide? The other expressions of the psalm may not come home to us. We may, alas! know nothing of "the Lord our Shepherd." We may be strangers to "the green pastures and still waters;"—the restoring of the backslider; and the leading in the paths of righteousness and peace. But "the Valley of death-shade" all must tread. We imagine it, with reference to ourselves (and so it is), a solitary valley; but in reality it is ever densely thronged, filled with a continuous stream of human beings. It is computed, that every hour upwards of three thousand of our fellow-creatures cross its entrance. Three thousand pallid pilgrims are hourly crowding and hurrying along its silent gorges! Let us visit the place, and ponder whether we are ready to join that band of silent travelers. The verse suggests three topics for consideration: The Valley, the Presence, and the Twofold Prop.

THE VALLEY—"The valley of the shadow of death." Death is a gloomy experience—even to the believer. They are false to the deepest and truest emotions and sensibilities of humanity, who would venture to aver otherwise. We must not attempt, even in the case of those who have "gotten the victory over death," falsely to gild the tomb, and to strew flowers around the sepulcher. Death, as the wages of sin, even to the Christian, is an enemy. All have a natural dread of death—a natural shrinking from dissolution. You may get at times some bold, defiant

spirits—some hardened desperadoes in guilt—who, with seared consciences, can meet their end without a shudder. Such wicked people "have no bands in their death, their strength is firm." But these exceptional cases do not affect the great law of common humanity—"Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give for his life."

It must be, it is a solemn thing, when that which we have often spoken of, thought of, tried to realize, has really overtaken us. When we feel the dimming of the eye—the dreamy insensibility—the gathering darkness—the prospect of severance from all that has long bound us to life; and going on the long voyage to that strange land, from which no voyager that ever set sail has returned. It is not poetry, but nature, which dictates the words—"It is a dreadful and awful thing to die." But, while the believer, as a member of our common humanity—a child of our common nature—instinctively recoils from death—as a child of God, a child of grace, he can say, "I will fear no evil."

Observe how beautifully and significantly the Psalmist speaks of death while looking to his Covenant-Shepherd. He calls it not "the Valley of death," but the "Valley of the SHADOW of death." The substance of death is taken away, and the shadow only remains. To the believer, the 'King of Terrors' is a vanquished enemy. The iron crown has been plucked from his brow and rolled in the dust. We know not if he who sang this Shepherd-song knew by prophetic teaching all the wondrous secret of that conquest, but we, at least, in taking his words into our lips, can weave into them a gospel meaning. We can go to the sepulcher of Jesus and see the grim foe chained as a trophy to the chariot-wheel of the conquering Savior.

Blessed truth! Christ, by dying, has taken the sting from death and cast it into the flames of His sacrifice! He is sublimely represented, in his ages of a past eternity, as looking down the long vista of the future—His eye settles on a world loaded in chains, and its millions doomed to everlasting destruction. In holy ecstasy He exclaims, as longing, if possible, to annihilate intervening ages, in order that He might complete the conquest—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague! O grave, I will be your destruction!" By His vicarious sacrifice and sufferings as a Surety-Savior,

He has flooded the Valley with light. The dark rolling mists have resolved themselves into golden clouds.

The Apostle, in speaking of the wages of sin, takes no account of temporal death—the death of the body—the crumbling of the outward, perishable, corruptible framework. That is a mere transient incident in the believer's existence—what the best of the old commentators calls "a parenthesis in his being." With eternal death and death's Conqueror in his eye, he exclaims, "Jesus Christ, who has ABOLISHED death!" Can we say, in the prospect of that solemn hour, "I will fear no evil?" It is seated at the foot of the cross of Calvary, and entering the Savior's vacant tomb, that we can echo the same Apostle's challenge, "I am persuaded that . . . death shall not separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our next topic is the SHEPHERD'S PRESENCE—"YOU are with me." Here is another element of support in passing through the Valley—not merely the blessed persuasion that the curse of death, as one of the penal consequences of the Fall, has been removed and canceled, but there is the promised assurance of a real companionship in that closing scene. The Shepherd, who has gone before the flock in the wilderness, will not forsake them in the swellings of Jordan. And this is no mystical figure—no mere poetical or sentimental illusion. It is a wondrous fact! Thousands who have passed through the Valley can bear witness to it, the felt nearness of the Savior! No one who has had any experience of death-beds but can testify that there is often the sublime consciousness of a PRESENCE there—as if the dying pilgrim rested on a living Arm, and that Valley became a Peniel, where, like the Patriarch, the wrestling soul saw God face to face!

How can we with sure warrant look forward to a similar experience? It is by having God as our Shepherd now, if we would have Him as our Shepherd then. What was it that gave David this confidence in the prospect of treading the Valley of Death? It was the conscious nearness—the realized presence of that Shepherd in his present life. He was even then rejoicing in this companionship and love. See how near he felt Him to be! Observe the phraseology of the verse—the form of utterance of this

sheep of the ancient Hebrew fold. It is not, "I will fear no evil, for You are to be with me," nor is it "for GOD is with me," but "You are with me." He seems to look up with confiding faith to Him who was even then at his side.

He speaks not of a remote Being, who would meet him at the valley-gates—a mere guide through the gloom of that strange gorge at the end of life, but who at other times is unknown and distant. It is the Friend he has known and confided in so long. It is the Shepherd of whom, in the opening strain of the song, he said, that Shepherd is mine—"The Lord is my Shepherd." It is He whose guiding hand had led him by the green pastures and the still waters, and the paths of righteousness. Let us not delude ourselves with the thought that a God unknown and unsought now, will be found at a dying hour—that we can insult our Shepherd by refusing His guidance and companionship until we reach the very confines of the Valley, and then give to Him the dregs of a worn-out life—the remnants of a withered love! If we would have peace and comfort in the thought of that last day's journey, let us test ourselves with the question—"Can I, even now, look up to the face of the Lord my Shepherd and say, 'You ARE with me?'"

And WHO is this who is specially the Shepherd and Companion and Guide of His flock in their journey through the valley-gloom? It is He of whom we have found it elsewhere said, "He goes before them." Cheering thought to the dying believer—there is ONE with him who has known that Valley, by having Himself trodden it—One who has experienced far more dreadful shadows than ever can fall upon His people. When He trod it—He trod the wine-press—He trod the Valley—"alone." No star glimmered on His path—no rainbow gleamed through the misty storm-clouds. The words awoke only their own lonely echoes—"My God! my God! why have You forsaken me?" Christ has sanctified that Valley; He has left in it the print of His footsteps; He has been there, as elsewhere, a Brother-man. He stoops from His throne in Heaven, and whispers in the ear of every pilgrim of mortality, "Fear not! I am He that lives, and was dead!"

"Come down to the river. There is something going on worth seeing. Yon shepherd is about to lead his flock across the river. Some enter the stream

boldly and come straight across. These are the loved ones of the flock, who keep hard by the footsteps of the shepherd. And now others enter, but in doubt and alarm. Far from their guide, they miss the ford and are carried down the river—some more, some less, and yet one by one they all struggle over and make good their landing. The weak one yonder will be swept quite away. But no; the shepherd himself leaps into the stream, lifts it into his bosom, and carries it tremblingly to the shore. Can you watch such a scene, and not think of that Shepherd who leads Joseph like a flock, and of another river which all His sheep must cross? He, too, goes before; and, as in the case of this flock, they who keep near Him fear no evil. They hear His sweet voice saying, 'When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the floods, they shall not overflow you.' With eye fastened on Him, they scarcely see the stream or feel its cold, threatening waves."—The Land and the Book.

Let us pass to the remaining topic—THE TWO-FOLD SUPPORT. "Your ROD and Your STAFF they comfort me." Oriental writers tell us that the shepherds of the East have generally two staffs—one for counting the sheep, the other, with a crook at the end of it, to assist in rescuing them from any perilous position, if they fall over the precipice or are swept down the stream. These two props may be taken symbolically to denote the "rod of Faith" and the "staff of the Promises". As Moses smote the waters of the Red Sea with his rod, and these divided, so that the people went through dry-shod, so when the believer comes to the typical Jordan in the Dark Valley, Faith smites with its All-conquering rod the threatening waves, and he passes through.

"Let Faith exalt her joyful voice,  
And thus begin to sing,  
O Grave, where is your triumph now,  
And where, O Death, your sting?"

And what is this FAITH which thus waves her triumphal rod, and sings her triumphal song, but just that elevating principle elsewhere spoken of as, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"—which enables the believer to penetrate the future, and to regard death and its accompaniments only as a narrow river lying between him and the true land of Promise.



But besides the Rod of Faith, there is be Staff of the PROMISES. Without something to guide us in crossing the muddy, swollen stream, we may cut our feet on the rugged rocks, or slip on the rounded stones, or sink in the deceptive hollows. The staff enables us to find sure footing, and in safety to reach the opposite bank. So it is with the Christian in the turgid river of death. Without his staff he might be engulfed by the raging waters. But this staff of God's promises ensures his safety. He feels step by step for the solid rock. "The Lord upholds him with His right hand!" And here, again, let us observe, it was the present leaning on the rod and staff which gave David the sure guarantee of comfort at the last. He does not say, "They shall comfort me"—as if this rod and staff were something unknown in the wilderness, which the Angel of Death gave to help him through the closing scene of all. No. "They comfort me." "They are mine now. I am leaning on them every step of my heavenward way; and the props I so value now will not fail me then.'

And was the Psalmist deceived? Did this song of life prove a delusion when the hour of death came? Could he sing it so long as his journey was carpeted with flowers, and radiant with sunshine? But did his faith forsake him, and his rod and staff give way, and his song melt into a wail of terror, when the shadows fell around? We have his last words recorded. We have the very hymn which this Hebrew minstrel sang, when the valley-gloom was beginning to darken his path, and the sound of the waters of death fell on his ear—"He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. This is all my salvation, and all my desire."

And God is still faithful who promised, "As your days, so shall your strength be." There is no part of that promise more faithfully fulfilled than in His giving dying grace for a dying day. Often have we seen those who, during life, shrank at the thought of the Dark Valley—who trembled as they grasped the staff in the prospect of dissolution—through fear of death, all their life-time subjected to bondage—yet, when the Valley is reached, the clouds seen in the distance are glorified with heavenly light; their terrors are at an end; the storm is changed into a calm; they "fall asleep."

The fruit drops when it is ripe. As we have seen it somewhere finely said, God gives a parable in nature for those who have an unnecessary dread of death. Try to wrench the foliage off a tree—strip it of its verdant leaves where summer is "not yet." They resist your efforts; or, if they are removed, you leave a gash and wound where the immature, unripe leaf has been forced away. But allow these same leaves to grow, until autumn has covered them with golden glory and they have fulfilled their uses, and see how gently they fall! No rude blast is needed to sweep among the branches of the forest—at the touch of evening's gentle zephyr they strew the ground.

So it is with believers ripe for heaven, who have finished and fulfilled their earthly destiny. In life's autumn, evening death comes, but he comes like a gentle zephyr. The golden leaves drop without effort from the earthly bough. How gentle that dismissal of the spirit in the silent chamber of dissolution! "Our friend Lazarus is asleep." "He was not, for God took him."

We close with two practical thoughts.

1. PONDER OUR PERSONAL INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT. Let each think, "That Dark Valley must be trodden by me! I may not have another inch or acre in this world I can call my own; but that common heritage shall at last be mine, "the house appointed for all living." Yes, and not only so; but, in a solemn sense, we have all already entered that Valley. Life is but a highway leading to death. Sin has made us heirs to these gloomy mansions! That infant's wailing cry is the first projected shadow of the Valley. That playful child's tottering steps are on the way to the Valley. That youth in the pride of early life, if he had eyes to see it, could observe the Valley in the blue hazy distance, and, as he proceeds on the journey, it will get nearer and nearer. The path of honor—riches—ambition—glory—leads but to the grave!

And you who have passed life's midday, how befitting especially that you should often and solemnly meditate on the gradual approach of that night of darkness! How important now really to ascertain whether you have in truth found your Shepherd-Guide! How important to cleave more closely to Him as the evening shadows are beginning to fall! The sheep, in broad day and in the open common, imagines itself independent of the

shepherd. But when the sun has set, and the howl of the wolf is heard, and night dulls the landscape, how needful to keep near his side!

So be it with you. As the shadows of life's closing day are beginning to fall, seek to cling more closely to your never-failing Protector and Guide. Have the staff of promises ever near at hand; that, when, like aged Jacob, you come to a dying hour, you may lean on that staff, recounting the Divine faithfulness—glorying in the Divine presence—saying, "I have waited for Your salvation, O God."

2. CONNECT THE VALLEY WITH THE HEAVEN TO WHICH IT LEADS. That Valley of the Shadow of Death is like the Valley of Achor, spoken of in Hosea—It is "a door of hope." Achor was one of the entrance-ravines from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Death is the valley leading to the true Canaan—or, to employ a rustic illustration, it is like emerging from some long tunnel, after miles of gloomy darkness, into the bright sunshine of some festive city, whose bells are ringing their merry peals, and in whose streets gay groups are gathered. It is the great festive day of heaven—"the city which has foundations."

A moment before, in closing our eyes on the earthly scene, our ears listened to stifled sobs; now, we hear the bells of glory ringing the joyous chime—"there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away!" Let us ever view death as the entrance into life—the exodus of the soul from its bondage to the true Canaan. Let us not mis-name death by calling it "dissolution;" and the grave, "the long home." Our loved and lost ones, if they have died in Christ, have only then in truth begun their real life. Death is to them the birthday of their everlasting joys! A dying chamber is generally full of tears. To them it is rather full of angels.

We do not call that dying, when we see the beautiful virgin blossom of early spring, fall from the fruit tree. That fruit is not destroyed. It has not perished. No, the dropping of these delicate blossoms indicates only a step in its further development—a step onward in its progress to perfection. So, when loved ones drop their blossoms in the grave, it is only that they may expand in fuller and nobler proportions in a heavenly world. The blossoms of the earthly spring-time are gone. They lie

withering in the ground. But the immortal fruit remains, and that is imperishable!

Reader, again let me ask—Are you prepared for that solemn hour, which must sooner or later come, when life, with all its opportunities and responsibilities, is at an end—when we shall feel that our moments are numbered—that the hour-glass has reached its last grain—that the die is about to be cast, and cast forever? You may not, as yet, have had any startling warnings on the subject of mortality. Death may have been going his rounds elsewhere, and your circle is unbroken. Disease has blanched other cheeks—the arrow from the last enemy has paralyzed other arms—and you are still strong. Others have been hovering for years at the entrance to the Valley—but life to you is still blooming with flowers. "Death's dark valley" is in the far horizon.

But come it will, come it must. It may be suddenly—it will be unexpectedly. Do not imagine that, as you get older, you will be more disposed to think of your preparation for your great change. Alas! If that preparation is neglected now, we fear with most, as life advances, there will be a growing disinclination to believe death to be nearer. They are like men walking backwards to the grave that they may not see it—that the unwelcome thought may not disturb the dream of the present. Oh! terrible it will be to tread that Valley with the curse alike of temporal and eternal death brooding over it. To have alike the shadow of death and the reality of death. Death, disrobed of his sting, is still formidable. What must it be to confront the last enemy with the sting unplucked—both DEATH and what is AFTER DEATH!

Speaking of the wicked, the Psalmist says, "Death shall feed upon them;" [or, as that has been more literally rendered, "Death shall lead them into his pastures."] Death, which conducts the believer through the Dark Valley to the pastures of the blessed; drives the ungodly into his own pastures—the bleak and dreary wastes of an immortality undone! That Achor, that Valley—which to the believer is 'the door of hope,' is to the unbeliever the gloomy portal of despair! It decides his fate. An infinite future is from that moment sealed. It is literally "the Valley of Decision." He that is unjust will remain "unjust still," and he that is filthy will remain "filthy still."

Be it ours now to flee to Him who has vanquished death. Let us be able personally to appropriate the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, "Yes, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil." "The Valley of the Shadow of Death?" It is the portico of our Father's house! As we stand under the porch, the archway over our heads projects a shadow. We are for a moment out of life's sunshine. But the next! the door opens; and better than the blaze of earthly sun is ours. The darkness is past, and the true light shines!

O change—O wondrous change!  
Burst are the prison bars!  
This moment there, so low  
In mortal prayer, and now,  
Beyond the stars.

O change—stupendous change!  
Here lies the senseless clod;  
The soul from bondage breaks,  
The new immortal wakes,  
Awakes with God!

## **20. THE FINAL GATHERING OF THE FLOCK**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right,

'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' Matthew 25:31-34

We have just had our thoughts directed to the beautiful inspired picture of the Shepherd conducting his flock through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The next delineation of Christ's pastoral relation to His Church and people is a pre-eminently sublime one. The Shepherd-love and leadings of the wilderness are at an end. Earth's diverse experiences—its green pastures and still waters, its rough and rugged paths—its places of temptation—its lairs of wild beasts—its cloudy and dark days—and the Valley of Death-shade terminating—all these are over and past. The flock is now seen on the Great Day of Judgment, as depicted in the magnificent imagery of the passage which heads this chapter—a passage which stands almost unrivaled in Sacred Scripture for its pathos and grandeur.

Viewing Christ as the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, the time and circumstances in which He uttered the words are remarkable. It was but a few days previous to the fulfillment of the awful prophetic announcement, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd!" when the Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep to be scattered. He was now seated, with His disciples, on the brow of the Mount of Olives, over against the Temple, mingling predictions of the doom of Jerusalem with delineations of the end of the world and the great judgment day. Possibly on some of the slopes of that mountain, or down in one of the ravines at their feet, His eye may have fallen on one of the many flocks of sheep and goats that were used to browse on its pastures. The scene is suggestive. It affords a relevant symbol to illustrate those themes on which He had just been discoursing.

That flock of mingled sheep and goats, with their Shepherd seated on one of the grassy knolls or rocky eminences nearby, forms an impressive parable and picture of the hour when the Almighty Shepherd, so soon to be smitten by the sword of Justice, and to give His own life for the sheep, should appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to dispense the awards of unerring equity to the countless multitudes "gathered before Him." A volume would be needed to exhaust the topics embraced in this stupendous description of the Shepherd-judge. We can

do no more than sketch a feeble outline.

But as we do so, let it be under the impressive conviction, that it is a scene in which each one of us has an individual and solemn interest. It contains the story of our future. This chapter will be to each one of us yet matter of personal history. Oh! how do all other events dwindle into insignificance when brought side by side with "that Day!" How do all other facts seem tame and unimportant compared with this—"So then, every one of us must give account of himself to God!"

In taking, then, a cursory glance of the passage, let us note THE SHEPHERD'S NAME. It is twofold. He is called "The Son of man"—"when the Son of man shall come in His glory." In that scene of unutterable majesty, when the heavens and earth are fleeing away, and there is no place found for them; when the trumpet of the archangel is sounding, and the cry of ten thousand times ten thousand is heard, "He comes! He comes! to judge the earth." When the eye, in trembling emotion, is lifted to see who this majestic Being can be, whose approach is thus heralded—Lo! It is the Son of man!

The glorified humanity of the Christ of Nazareth stands, as it were, in bold relief in the foreground of the picture. If we could imagine the myriad ranks breaking the silence of the scene with a burst of praise, it would be in the old prophetic words—"a MAN is a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!" How often is this encouraging truth, not only of Jesus being our Judge, but our Judge as the Son of man, unfolded to us in Scripture, both by our blessed Lord Himself, and by His inspired apostles! "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." "The Father has committed all judgment unto the Son." "He has given Him power to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man." "He has appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained."

Precious assurance! that when startled from the long sleep of ages by the final trumpet, the first object that shall arrest the gaze of the rising dead will be "the living Kinsman"—the Brother in our nature—the once helpless One of Bethlehem—the wearied One of Sychar—the tempted One of Gethsemane—the weeping One of Bethany—the suffering One of

Calvary! The Savior of the Throne of Judgment will be the very Savior we formerly loved and trusted on the Throne of Grace! How shall every jewel of the crown about to be bestowed on us be augmented in value by the thought—'It is given by JESUS!' The whisper will circulate through the throng of the ransomed, as they gaze on their Judge—"He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

But there is yet another title given here to the Shepherd. It is a royal one—"Then shall the KING say unto them"—and as a King, He is to come in His glory—and to "sit on the throne of His glory." It is the only passage in His Gospels where He assumes the name and title of King. The 'Shepherd and the Fold' for the moment melt from the view, and we see a 'Monarch seated on His tribunal or judgment-seat'. The 'rod and the staff' have dropped from His hand—and the 'scepter of justice' takes their place. He is about to pronounce a regal sentence—the insignia of royalty are around Him—He has "prepared His throne for judgment."

He is about, not only for Himself, to enter on His final mediatorial reign and kingdom, but also to grant to His ransomed Church investiture with their royal rights and prerogatives. "The children of Zion are joyful in their KING." On His vesture and on His thigh is seen written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." What that glory here spoken of is to be, it is not for us to conjecture or attempt to depict. We may believe it will far transcend our present feeble comprehension. The universe will accumulate its rarest treasures to enhance the magnificence of that advent, and to swell the shout of jubilant welcome. If creation hid her face in darkness at the hour of the crucifixion—if the reeling earth was convulsed in paroxysms of anguish, and the sun put sackcloth on his disc, at the spectacle of that shameful death—shall not that creation, which thus mourned His humiliation and suffering, array herself in holiday attire to grace His triumph?—Putting off her sackcloth, shall she not be girded with gladness, to the end that her glory may sing praise to her Redeeming Lord, and not be silent?

What a contrast!—that once buffeted and forsaken Man, whose infant dwelling was canopied by the rude rafters of a Judean stable—whose unpillowed head was often denied the basest shelter afforded to beast or bird—whose scepter was the rod of mockery, and His only throne the



bitter cross—What contrast with THE KING, on whose head shall be "many crowns," and whose hand shall grasp the rod and scepter of universal empire! The lofty summons of the Psalmist will then receive its full response—"Make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King! For He comes to judge the earth; with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the people with equity." "Your THRONE, O God, is forever and ever!"

We have next to note HIS RETINUE—"All the HOLY ANGELS with Him." These blessed beings are represented as profoundly interested in the gradual unfolding of the plan of Redemption. When the amazing scheme was first broached in the counsels of Heaven, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." During the progress and development of the mediatorial kingdom on earth, either singly or in groups and companies, they came down to visit the theater of the coming Savior's sufferings.

A vast throng congregated at the law-giving on Sinai—"The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary." We read of "a multitude of the heavenly host" praising God in the plains of Bethlehem. In these and similar instances, however, we have only (so to speak) delegates and representatives from the great celestial army. But, on this Great Day, "ALL His holy angels" are to be with Him. Dominions, principalities, powers, are for the time to vacate their thrones to crowd the heaven of judgment. He is to "call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people."

With what delight will these blessed Beings respond to the invitation, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." If they came, with joyful alacrity, to sustain the adorable Sufferer on the mount of temptation—to wipe the blood-drops from His brow in Gethsemane—to guard His vacant sepulcher, and pronounce the victory of Redemption achieved—with what gladness will they go forth on His great Coronation-day, with the sound of their trumpets, to gather in His elect from the four winds of Heaven! Angels constitute the brilliant retinue of the Great Judge—His assessors on the final Day of reckoning.

Our attention is next called to THE THRONG ranged in front of His tribunal—"Before Him shall be gathered ALL NATIONS." What a convocation! not one person missing of the countless millions. All that have ever lived—from Adam to the last of the human family, are there. We have read in history, both sacred and profane, of vast assemblages of human beings. The hosts of Israel as they mustered on the night of the Exodus—the mighty convergence of the Hebrew nation, as Solomon dedicated his temple—this same Mount of Olives, where Christ delivered the words we are now considering, densely thronged to its summit with the awe-struck worshipers. We have read of the hosts of Xerxes and Alexander, of the invading hordes—the figurative locust—multitudes of Attila.

But what are these, and many others? insignificant nothings, in comparison with the ranks of this multitudinous army who have in a moment burst from their graves, their pulses beating with immortality! The sea shall give up its dead—the thousands who filled its caverns in the days of the flood—the millions who, since that time, have in every age been gathered into its rapacious holds by storm and tempest—the proud hosts, which, like Pharaoh's, perished in the waves—the crews of stranded navies—and the lonely wasted invalid, who has been let down, in slow, solemn burial over the ship's side—the rippling waters chiming his requiem!

The earth shall give up its dead—the tenants of the unknown, and unnoted heaps of the village churchyard—those whose winding-sheet has been the snows of the mountain, or who lie uncoffined in the mounds of the battlefield—kings and princes from their pyramids and cenotaphs. Earth and sea shall seem like two gigantic mausoleums; the buried dust of all ages and all climates, so long in their custody, shall be gathered, molded, readjusted—disembodied spirits hastening to re-inhabit their new resurrection-tabernacles.

"All nations!" Egypt with her crouching slaves—the children of Edom and the children of Abraham—the conquered millions of Babylon and Assyria—military Rome with a vassal world at her feet—Greece waking up from the dreams of her false philosophy—rude savages of the Arctic regions bursting their ice-bound tombs—insubstantial Pagan tribes from the

climates of the sun—hordes of cannibals from the Isles of the Pacific—roving tribes from the forests and prairies of the Far West—Britain with her million-peopled cities, and the children of her gigantic colonies—and thus, all at once and together—"the dead, small and great, shall stand before God."

Yes, and more solemn than All—as has already been observed, the eyes which now trace these pages shall gaze on the unutterable majesty of the descending Judge! These ears shall listen to that trumpet peal! These feet swell the tread of these deathless thousands!

Observe, next in order, THE SEPARATION—"He shall SEPARATE them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." To understand this figure aright, we must bear in remembrance that in Palestine the long hairy wool of the sheep makes the animal so similar in appearance to the goat, that an unpracticed eye, in looking at the flock browsing on the same meadow, would be at a loss to distinguish between them. But the discriminating shepherd has no such difficulty; he can tell at a glance "the one from the other;" and before folding them for the night, can easily effect their separation.

So it is with the Great Shepherd of souls. At present—in this our earthly condition—the sheep and goats—believers and unbelievers—righteous and wicked—good and bad—are so intermingled, that often the most discriminating human eye cannot detect the difference. The tare, or spurious wheat, mingles with the true grain. The hypocrite and formalist, under the mask of religious profession, passes for the true Christian—separation is often impossible. But on that Day—the final separation shall take place. The possibility of pretense and appearance will be at an end. The shibboleth of party will be heard no more.

Here, while on this earth, we have the Church of Christ split up and severed into endless divisions—those of "Paul, and those of Apollos, and those of Cephas." We have society, too, with its conventional grades and distinctions; rich and poor, master and servant, learned and unlearned. There will then be two, and only two classes—the sheep and the goats—the wheat and the chaff—the vessels unto honor, and the vessels unto dishonor—those who are Christ's people, and those who are not—those

who love Baal, and those who love God. "He shall set the sheep upon His right hand, and the goats upon the left. " Each shall stand in his own lot at the end of the days. There will be no middle ground—no place of compromise. Between the two separated multitudes "there is a great gulf fixed!"

We have next, THE SHEPHERD'S ADDRESS TO THE SHEEP—the King's welcome to His Church— "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" "COME!" What music in that word! It is the old, blessed, gospel utterance to which they first listened in the depths of ruin and despair, when sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened—"Come unto Me, all you who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As that word was His first invitation of love in the day of espousals, so it is His last invitation and welcome in this the day of final triumph. He spoke it from the cross; He now speaks it from the throne! It is taken up by the concentric ranks of surrounding angels. All Heaven echoes and bids the ransomed welcome. "Come!" It contains the essence of their Heaven—for it tells them that they are to be the sharers and companions of His own glory.

What if He had slightly altered the formula? What, if, instead of "You blessed ones, Come," He had said rather, "You blessed ones, Go, to a kingdom I have provided for you. Angels! conduct from My presence this ransomed people I have redeemed. Furnish them with crowns and thrones in that distant celestial city; and since I am to be no longer with them, you be to them a holy brotherhood, make them partakers of your joys!" How would every face droop in sadness! Heaven would have a blight passed over it. Its ransomed worshipers would exclaim—"Our thrones are divested of their glory—our crowns of their luster, O Savior, without You!" But it is not so. His very opening declaration dispels their dread. "Come!" Wherever your heaven is, it is to be a heaven with ME—we are to share our crowns and thrones together. "Him that overcomes will I grant to sit with ME on My throne." "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

And in connection with this invitation, observe further, the HERITAGE BESTOWED—"Inherit the Kingdom." He is seated on that throne as a

Shepherd-King, and it is a Kingdom that is His gift. We have spoken elsewhere of heaven as the many mansions of His Father's house. But now it is a joint-kingly inheritance with Himself, the elder Brother. By virtue of their adoption into the covenant family, they are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Nor is the investiture with these mighty and amazing privileges any sudden and capricious mark of the divine favor. It is a kingdom which had been "prepared for them from the foundation of the world." God had destined them, from all eternity, for surpassing honors. He is only now fulfilling the purposes of His own infinite, everlasting love. As the fond mother, in the prospect of welcoming her absent son from a distant land, has his chamber bedecked and furnished with every memorial and souvenir which love and affection can devise—so has God, the Infinite Father of His people, been providing for the reception of His long absent children. He has been "preparing" a kingdom fitted to meet and satisfy the amplest longings and aspirations of their immortal natures. "I saw," says John, "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband!"

We shall not enter on the dreadful antithetical portion of this passage, when the Judge of mankind turns to the left hand to pronounce sentence on the wicked. "DEPART," He says. And in that one word lies the fearful element of their condemnation. They are banished from His glorious presence. The "Come" of the righteous, stands in marked contrast with this exile of the unrighteous. "Depart, you cursed ones!" What a saying to issue from the lips of supreme Benignity, Kindness, and Love! It is the first and the last curse of Christ. It is the first and last invective uttered by Him, whose mission was "not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

And their doom is everlasting—"everlasting fire." Men may twist that expression as they may, to extract a limited and modified meaning. They may try to reason themselves into a less gloomy theology. But the Word of God in too many unmistakable passages closes their lips. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "He who is filthy, let him be filthy still." "Their worm dies not, and their fire is not quenched." "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire—who shall dwell with everlasting burning?"

And yet once more—Observe THE GREAT JUDICIAL PRINCIPLE in the awards of the Shepherd-Judge. It is the works of those at His tribunal. The test enunciated is—"Inasmuch as you did it," or, "inasmuch as you did it not." Justified by faith, they are to be sifted, proved, and judged by deeds. It is those who, in the first instance, have found pardon and peace in the efficacious merits and sacrifice of the Divine Redeemer—who have sat under the shadow of His cross, and exulted in the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin—to whom He will address the invitation—'Come, inherit the blood-bought kingdom!'

But He thinks also of the cup of cold water—the clothing of the poor—the sheltering of the orphan—as being evidences of love to Himself—or He thinks of the evading of all these works of mercy by the selfish professor, as the too truthful test of the lack of that love. 'I,' says He, 'am the sick One—the homeless One—the naked One—the captive One—you did it—or you did it not—to ME!'

Let us remember this; it is "charity" in the true sense of the word, love to God, generating all those loving virtues, of which love is the parent, which will decide our final state of blessing or woe. Religion, if true, can never be quenched in an unloving, selfish life. The criterion on "that day" will not be what we have well said, or well thought, or well intended, but what we have "well done!" Mere semblances will be nothing then—party distinctions will be nothing then—'appearing to be a Christian' will be nothing then; flaming orthodoxy, the most evangelical creed in Christendom, apart from a loving nature, will be nothing then. It will be doers alone who will be justified.

The demand will be, "Show me your faith by your works." Not that these works will unlock the gate of heaven. God forbid! In themselves, and as pleas of merit, they will be but as "wood, and hay, and stubble." It is evident in this passage, and well worth noting, that from the righteous ones expressing their astonishment at the Judge's commendation—they at least deemed these works and charities utterly valueless as a ground of justification and acquittal. "We your sheep," they seem to say to their Shepherd, "what have we done?" But Christ does see and does accept, what has been by them done to His people, as if it had been done to

Himself. He commends not the works as such, but the love which prompted them.

And when He turns to those on His left hand, who are destitute of all such evidences of life and love, it is as if He said, 'You have been selfish, and niggardly, and unfeeling, and avaricious—you cannot have kept the first table of the law, and loved your God, seeing you have broken the second to your brother.' "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

The theme of this chapter, of which we have given the feeblest outline, is a most solemn one. The oldest recorded preacher, in the oldest recorded sermon, takes this very subject for his text and discourse. "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'"

Every fresh age should give augmented emphasis to these words of thrilling warning. Each day we live, the shadow of that Throne is deepening on our path—the noise of the approaching chariot-wheels becomes more audible. "Yet a little while" (and that 'little while' is becoming less every day), "and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

Are we ready to meet Him? Are we ready for the "Come" of welcome? Could we say, in looking upwards to His advent-throne, "Lo! This is our God, we have waited for Him?" Would He be to us the true Melchizedek, King of Salem (Peace), coming to bless? Or, terrible alternative! Have we no portion in that advent-scene but the Curse and the Depart! Despise that first "Come" of, pardon and love—and the second "Come" of welcome cannot be ours. Reject the Savior on the Throne of grace, and when the Throne of judgment is set, and the books are opened, there can be no more blessings. The reign of mercy is over. The priestly intercession is at an end. The prayer for the cumbering fig-tree, "spare it"—is no longer heard—the pleading voice is silenced—the door is shut. The Shepherd can no longer gather—the Shepherd's crook can no longer rescue—these

terrible words alone linger on the Shepherd's lips—"You are not of My sheep!" Great God, avert from us such a doom! Gather us to Your fold of grace, before we be overtaken by the hour of eternal separations! "The Lord grant unto us, that we may find mercy of the Lord on that day!"



## **21. THE ETERNAL FOLDING OF THE FLOCK**

"They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat. For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears." Rev. 7:16-17

In the preceding chapter, we contemplated that majestic scene—the Shepherd-King seated on the throne of His glory, at the great final gathering of His flock—separating the sheep from the goats; and apportioning to each their several recompenses. One, and only one additional theme remains. But it is that towards which all the others point and converge. It is the assembling of the flock within the Fold of Heaven.

The world's long day is now over—Time's curfew-bell is tolling, proclaiming that evening has come—that earth's fires are to be put out, and the flocks to be eternally housed. Or rather, the long spring-time of everlasting bliss and glory has begun. The bleak herbage of the wilderness—the brookless channels—the falling snows—the angry tempests—the roar of the ravening wolves—are known no more. It is a glorious picture of unbroken sunshine—gleaming pastures—clear waters—living fountains! The passage selected for these concluding meditations, suggests some thoughts, alike regarding the SHEPHERD and the SHEEP.

I. The SHEPHERD. It is evidently the vision of a rustic scene which is now in the eye of the Apostle of Patmos. We have all the accessories of such a scene. First, in the words of contrast—where the picture of a flock is brought before us—bleating amid arid pastures—panting defenseless under the fierce rays of a burning sun—and turning often their languid eyes towards waterless courses—"They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat."

And then observe his positive description of the bliss of the ransomed. It

is a flock feeding on the meadows of Heaven, and reclining by its perennial streams. They are 'fed' on these abiding pastures, and "led" to the living fountains of waters." We look for the completion of the picture. We see the rejoicing sheep browsing on the everlasting hills. But we gaze in vain for the great central Figure. We expect to see the glorified Shepherd seated on some sunny eminence overlooking "the multitude which no man can number," and which He has purchased with His own blood. Jesus is there; we see Him.

But, strange mixture of metaphor, it is not as a SHEPHERD, but as a LAMB. He precedes the flock—feeding them and leading them. It is one of those singular, dream-like transitions common in prophetic symbol—but which, when we come to examine them, are so significant and full of meaning. We have in a previous apocalyptic vision, a similar startling and remarkable figuration; startling from the same powerful (we had almost said violent) change of metaphor. The apostle had been speaking of Christ as the "LION of the tribe of Judah," breaking the seals of the prophetic roll, and unfolding the destinies of the Church and the world. In most magnificent language, he further describes all Heaven, redeemed and unredeemed—"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"—gathered in to do homage to this Majestic Being who had "prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."

When we gaze, amid the stupendous throng, for the object of this adoration—lo! we are arrested by the sight, not of a Lion, but of a LAMB! It is the same in this beautiful rustic vision. We lose sight, for the moment, of the Shepherd—or, if in reality He still remains, the beloved Evangelist at all events describes Him under a different symbol and epithet. It is the name which he himself knew so well—that by which the Great Shepherd was first pointed out to him—He loves it still—"Behold the Lamb of God!" But there must have been some greater truth hidden under this change of simile than the mere association of the writer. Let us briefly inquire what that truth is—in other words, what we may deduce from this apparently singular metaphor, of THE LAMB leading the flock to their pastures of blessedness.

The description implies, that there will be a continual remembrance on the part of the ransomed, of the death and sufferings of their Shepherd.

In that same remarkable passage to which we have just adverted, it is not only a Lamb that is represented as receiving the homage of countless worshipers, but it is specially noted and delineated, "a Lamb as if it had been slain"—a Lamb with the blood-marks upon it—wounded and smitten. A Lamb slain! Strange symbol, in the place where suffering never enters, and death is unknown! What is this, but in the most expressive figurative language to tell us, that Christ's sacrificial death will ever be present to the thoughts of the Redeemed—that Calvary's Cross and Calvary's Sufferer—the sword awaking from its scabbard and smiting the Shepherd, will continue the theme of eternity.

Yes, though all remembrance of death and suffering will otherwise be banished from Heaven—no pang known—no pain capable of being either felt or feared—it would appear there shall, through all coming ages, be one exception; one memory of ignominy and superhuman anguish. The once smitten Shepherd will be there, with wounds in His hands. "And one shall say unto Him, what are these wounds in Your hands? Then He shall answer, those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends!" He wears the sign and memorial of suffering on His glorified body; and as the Redeemed flock gaze on the significant emblem, they will cry to one another—"Behold the great love with which He loved us!" "The Good Shepherd gave His own life for the sheep!"

A second truth we may gather from this figure of the Lamb leading the ransomed in the heavenly world is, **THE PERPETUITY OF CHRIST'S EXALTED HUMAN NATURE**. It is not as a kingly Shepherd He leads, but as one of the flock Himself—wearing their nature. In an earlier portion of this volume, we dwelt at some length on the holy humanity of the Son of God—how when He came down to tabernacle on earth, He set up His own tent among human tents. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt" (literally, tented or tabernacled) "among us." "In all things He was made like unto His brethren." He was Brother in our nature—"bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh!" What of His Divine Person, now that He is exalted? How in this respect will He stand related to His ransomed flock and fold to all eternity? He is, and ever will be, "that same Jesus," unchanged and unchangeable.

John, when he first saw Him in His Resurrection glories in Patmos, "fell

at His feet as one dead." On many antecedent occasions, it had been otherwise with that favored disciple. He had often times enjoyed with Him confiding, endearing fellowship. He had pillowed his head on His bosom at the Last Supper. He had received the last injunction and benediction of love from His lips on the cross. Now, however, when He beheld the luster of His ascended majesty—His feet like burning brass—His eyes like a flame of fire—His voice like the noise of many waters—the bright blaze of unearthly glory projected on His path—he fell prone to the ground, awe-struck and speechless. But a gentle Hand is laid upon him—a gentle Voice restores his confidence. It is the Lamb of God still!—the Brother with His changeless human tenderness! "He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I AM He that lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

And in the vision we are now considering, he sees the Lamb—the glorified Redeemer—still retaining the identical nature in which He suffered, "leading" His people in the realms of everlasting day! Christ's mediatorial kingdom, with regard to His saints, shall continue forever. With respect to His enemies—after their final trial and doom, that reign shall cease. It is said, "Then shall He deliver up the kingdom"—(that portion of His sovereignty which has reference to the wicked)—"to God, even the Father"—(into the hands of God absolute).

But it is different with His reign over His ransomed and triumphant Church—"of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." God has given Him "length of days forever and ever." The Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world," is still, in the glories of exalted Humanity, to lead His Redeemed to the living fountains of waters. In name, and nature, and love, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever!"

Let us pass now from the glorified Leader to THE GLORIFIED FLOCK. Let us gather a few thoughts, from what is here said, regarding the Redeemed in glory. The Lamb feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes. The first thought these words suggest is—that all the joys of the ransomed Flock will be associated with the love and companionship of their Shepherd. He feeds—He leads—He wipes away all tears from their eyes—

and in a previous verse, under a different figure, it is said, "He who sits on the throne shall dwell among them."

Heaven would be no heaven without Jesus! Take Him away!—It would be to blot out the sun from the celestial firmament—every star would hide its face—the angel would disrobe him of his shining attire, and stand in sackcloth before the vacant throne! Take Him away!—let the Shepherd leave His Redeemed Church—and you might give the flock heaven's choicest pastures—you might sentinel the heavenly fold with archangels—it would be no compensation for the loss. The long-forgotten cry would ascend piteously amid the fairest landscapes of Paradise Regained—"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where YOU feed, where YOU make Your flock to rest at noon!"

But He, the Shepherd-King, whose invitation on the throne of judgment was—"Come, you who are blessed,"—will be true to His word. As He was with them in all places where they were scattered in the cloudy and dark day—so, in the bright and cloudless day of glory—in all places He will be with them. We may take the words of a beautiful parallel passage of Old Testament, and give them a heavenly meaning—"They will be my sheep, grazing in green pastures and on hills that were previously bare. They will neither hunger nor thirst. The searing sun and scorching desert winds will not reach them anymore. For the Lord in his mercy will lead them beside cool waters." "Leading" them, "feeding" them—wiping the very tear-drops from their eyes. What figurative language could express nearer, closer, more intimate fellowship and communion!

The fellowship of the believer and his Savior on earth—alas! how fitful, intermittent, transient! He is too often "like a stranger in the land, and like a wayfaring man, that turns aside to tarry for a night." But in Heaven, in the full vision and fruition of a Savior-God—the song lisped here, often with trembling lips and stammering tongue, will rise triumphant from an ever-present experience of its bliss—"Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" "You will show me the path of life. In YOUR PRESENCE there is fullness of joy!"

Oh! What a motive for holiness of life and character does this thought supply! Heaven—an eternity with Jesus! Heaven—everlasting

companionship with infinite purity, tenderness, love. To enjoy Him, I must be like Him. Earthly friendships are formed and cemented by identity and similarity of tastes, pursuits, and enjoyments. What should be my life-long aspiration now, in the prospect of living forever in the presence and fellowship of the Holy One? "Let every man that has this hope in him purify himself, even as He is pure!"

This description would seem to denote AN INFINITE PROGRESSION IN THE JOYS AND FELICITIES OF THE RANSOMED FLOCK. The Shepherd is seen leading them from pasture to pasture, from fountain to fountain, from eminence to eminence—higher and yet higher up the hills of God. On earth, the pilgrim company are represented as going "from strength to strength." It will be so, in a nobler sense, in Heaven. As the loftier we ascend a mountain, the wider is the landscape that is spread before us—so the higher the heavenly pilgrim mounts in his ever-upward ascent—the wider will be the horizon and circumference of his joys. His song will be the true "Song of degrees." He will be attaining ever new views of God—new unfoldings, and revelations of the Divine purposes—new motives for the ceaseless activities of his holy being.

Heaven will thus, in the language of the old divines, be "a rest without a rest." "They rest." "They rest not." Such is the beautiful delineation here given in the vision of the Seer of Patmos. The Lamb is represented first as "feeding" His flock. They lie down at His side, in restful repose, by the green pastures of His love—basking under the sunshine of His smile.

Next, the Lamb is represented as "leading" them. The rest is for the time over. He leads them deeper and yet deeper, through these sunlit meadows, along these glorified valleys, to new living fountains of water—ever advancing, yet never reaching the plenitude of bliss—satisfied to the full, and yet ever new satisfaction—pastures ever greener—waters ever clearer—the sun of their joy ever climbing the sky and never reaching the meridian. The plummet-line let down, and yet the cry ever the same, ascending from the unsounded infinity of love—"Oh, the depth!"

The figurative language of the Evangelist further indicates, that there will be an unfolding of the Shepherd's wisdom and faithfulness in His earthly dispensations. Not only is the Lamb to feed them with gracious views of

the Divine dealings, and to lead them from fountain to fountain of wisdom, and goodness, and grace—but, by a beautiful and most expressive symbol, God is represented as wiping away all tears from their eyes. As if, when they entered glory, some lingering tears were still there. As if the eye had not recovered from the night of earthly weeping. But, before long, no remaining vestige of sorrow will be found. As in a forest, after a drenching thunder-shower, every bough, and blade, and leaf is dripping with rain; for a considerable time after the sun has shone out, and the sky is blue, and the birds of the grove are singing—the lingering drops gem the branches, and sprinkle the sward. But the sun is up—and his genial rays are drinking up the moisture—nature's tear-drops. One by one they evaporate—slowly, gradually; and the refreshed forest rejoices, and basks in the sun's radiance.

So with the great Sun of Deity in heaven. One by one, earth's remaining tears vanish before the radiance of that Sun of Wisdom and Love. Weeping can be no more—the fountain of weeping, the memory of weeping, are gone forever! Beautiful as are the preceding representations of the Lamb leading, and feeding—we love to dwell on this finishing touch in the inspired picture—"God wiping away all tears from the eyes." Do you wonder, Reader, at your Shepherd's dealings? Are you apt, with misgiving heart, to ask—why that desolation of the earthly fold? why that angry hurricane—that harsh night-wind—that pelting rain, which destroyed the choicest pasture, and maddened into foaming torrent the calm still water—sweeping loved ones down the resistless flood?

Yes! and you may carry these tearful eyes with you as you enter heaven. But there is a gracious Hand waiting there to wipe each one of them away! These lingering drops will be crystal lenses, through which, as you enter glory, you will see in vivid manifestation the loving-kindness and faithfulness of your Heavenly Father.

Are you wondering now why that wolf of the forest was allowed to prowl upon your path? You will see, then, that it was to lead you nearer, and keep you nearer the Great Shepherd. Do you wonder why these springs and rills of earthly happiness were withdrawn, or dried in their channels?—why a blight was allowed to pass over your earthly pasture? It was to lead you to feel and to exclaim—'O God, all my happiness—all my springs,

are in You?'

Do you wonder now why that 'lamb of the flock' was early taken? You will see then, that it was in order to lead yourself through the wicket-gate. He emptied your home, and your heart, and your fold on earth—that He might lead you and your to the better fold above. Following the steps of the Heavenly Shepherd, as one by one in the fold of the ransomed—these "loved and lost ones"—will be revealed to your sight, one here, one there, reposing in the celestial pastures—when you see to what a blessed land you had early sent your children—how will the once tear-bedimmed eye have its every tear wiped away—and at the contemplation of God's wisdom and love, in what appeared at the time the dark providence of earth—the ever-deepening song will ascend—"So we Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever!"

Yet once more, this description would seem to indicate, that **THERE WILL BE A VARIETY AND DIVERSITY IN THE JOYS OF HEAVEN**, suited to the various capacities and tastes of the redeemed. It is not to one fountain to which the Lamb is said to lead them; they are "living fountains of waters." Like the four-branched river in the first earthly Eden, there will be, from the one great river of Deity, streams which make glad the city of God. There will be some **STREAMS** of calm, clear, peaceful meditation—some that leap from rock to rock, singing their way onward, bearing in their course refreshment and joy.

The **PASTURES** will be different. Some will delight to feed on the pastures of knowledge—some to repose on the pastures of love—some to climb the mountain in the ceaseless activities of holy ardor—their truest rest will be worship—their highest joy, holy work and labor. We delight to think of the Flock of Heaven—each member of it perfect in the full measure of its own bliss—but each under the Shepherd's eye, thus following the pasture, or climbing the mountain-steep, or browsing by the streamlet, it most loves.

And yet, all the Fold, in these separate and distinctive ways, combining to glorify their Shepherd-King. Flock of the ransomed! while yet out in the lower valley, not infrequently, it may be, overtaken by the cloud and the storm—cleave more and more closely to your Divine Shepherd. He has



promised to give you "grace and glory"—admission to the fold on earth, and an everlasting entrance into the better fold above.

Some who read these pages may possibly be scattered far and wide, feeding on different pastures, penned in different earthly folds, and tended by different under-shepherds. May we meet at last, an undivided flock, under the ONE Shepherd, amid more enduring pastures! Make sure now of your personal and saving interest in His Shepherd-love. Enter by the one door into the sheepfold. Follow with unwavering eye His footsteps—repose on Him your burdens—confide to Him your misgivings and fears. Let life be a happy, peaceful reclining by the green-pastures and still waters of His love. Let Death's anticipated valley-gloom be dispelled by a present and habitual leaning on the rod and staff of His immutable promises—"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away!"

"Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise." Psalm 79:13

# MEMORIES OF GENNESARET

## Our Lord's Ministry in Gennesaret (also called Galilee or Tiberias)

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## **THE HOME**

"Few are the tones of love He hears,  
Unpillowed oft His weary head;  
By day He wrought, by night He prayed,  
His way was paved with love and tears."

"Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake." Matthew 4:13

That is always a momentous era in the history of every individual, when the period of youth is over, and manhood goes forth to grapple with the stern realities of life. Existence has new responsibilities—new cares—new hopes—new motives—new trials—new joys. If the character was plastic before, and only molding or developing, now it fast consolidates. "The Man" takes a new position. He selects his own associates—discovers his own resources—manifests his own tastes and congenialities. The magnetic needle, trembling and oscillating before, fixes itself now to its pole; and there, with little variation, remains till he goes to the last and longest home of all.

We have in these words the first glimpse which the Bible gives us of the Home of Jesus. Around that name, the earthly Home of the Lord of Glory, how many hallowed and sacred thoughts gather! Other spots already, indeed, claimed the honor. Egypt was for a time His home. There, in the morning of that mysterious infancy, He fled with His parents, till a message from Heaven assured of a safe return. Nazareth was His home. There, an impenetrable silence broods over thirty years of wondrous interest to all time. We dare not lift the veil of secrecy. But we can well picture the lovingness of that holy Childhood and Youth, unruffled by one frown or passion or taint of selfishness—a Holy Light in a dwelling of peaceful obscurity, His hands toiling, as we have reason to believe they did, in the workshop of His reputed father, thus voluntarily subjecting Himself to the full heritage of the curse of toil. We can picture the wanderings of that mysterious boyhood amid the olive groves and wooded eminences which enclosed the Village. We can listen in thought to the earliest prayers lisped in the quiet homestead or on the silent hills. Rising even then with elastic step "a great while before day," while the lower valley was still sleeping amid the shadows of early dawn, the "Holy Child" was invoking the ear of His Father in Heaven.

But CAPERNAUM is invested with a deeper interest still. Youth, obscurity, privacy, are left. He is now the public Person—the Teacher sent from God—the MAN. Nazareth was the home of His parents. There He was "subject to them." The period of subjection is over. He has completed His beauteous example—He has read His holy lesson to boyhood and youth. Now He has to bear a more advanced and dignified testimony. Manhood in its prime is invited to come to the shores of Gennesaret, or to enter one of the lowly porticos in the town of Capernaum, and gather solemn instruction by a visit to the Home of JESUS!

"Master, where do You live?" said two of His disciple-followers on one occasion. "Come and see," was His answer. He invites us to come also. We can, indeed, speak nothing regarding that lowly dwelling; we can mark no stone of the outer building; we cannot tell whether the blue waves of the Lake murmured under its lattice; or whether it looked out to the Vines climbing the slopes which hemmed in the plain. But the mere locality is nothing. It is the wondrous Life that stamped its impress on

that home, and that reads many a lesson still as to what the home and the life together should be. Come, then, let us gather with all reverence around this model "Home," where the ideal of MAN, the root and flower of perfect Humanity, mysteriously unfolded itself.

Let us look to the life of Jesus in its twofold aspect—social and public; individual and private.

I. SOCIALLY—The character of the Redeemer partook of no asceticism. The Home of Jesus was in the center of Galilean and (Jerusalem excepted) the center of Palestine life. He was, in this respect, unlike His great forerunner, John the Baptist. Rigid, austere, separating himself from the amenities of existence, the wilderness and solitudes of Judea were John's abode. He shunned society. He came and delivered his message to teeming multitudes by day, and then, as the night shadows gathered around the Jordan, he plunged back into the untrodden wilds, with no eye to look kindly on him but that of One, whose presence to him was more than all human tenderness could be! There was much to love, at least to revere, about the Forerunner of the Messiah. He was bold, honest, courageous, sincere. He had forsaken all for the sake of his message. He could afford no time to fritter away in a worthless world. It took him the livelong night to get his spirit braced up for the solemn ministry of the morrow. With the prayer still lingering on his lips, he went forth with the old burning message of persuasion and terror—"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

But the Home of Jesus was not the wilderness! No secluded nook was His selected dwelling—no quiet Palestine hamlet where He could dwell in mystic loneliness, refusing to mingle in the common business and duties of life. He pitched His own tent in the midst of human tabernacles, amid the noise and bustle of a town—the hum of busy industry ever around Him—coming in contact with every description of character—rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, noblemen, centurions, publicans at the receipt of custom, sailors and bargemen on the Lake, crude Galilean mountaineers and shepherds, caravans crossing with motley crowds from Syria and Persia to lower Palestine and Egypt. He met them all in free, unrestrained communion. At one time, reading to the Jews in their synagogue. At another, gathering the multitude at their spare hours by

the sea-side, with suggestive nature before Him—His pulpit a fisherman's boat—proclaiming the great salvation. At another, seating a similar crowd on the grass at the head of the Lake, He would miraculously feed them with the bread which perishes, and unfold spiritual things from the earthly type.

Nor do we find Him in any way spurning the duties and delights of social fellowship. At one time, He consecrates with His presence a marriage-feast at the neighboring Cana. At another, He is a guest in a Pharisee's house, eating with publicans and sinners. At another, as the Jewish Sabbath sun sinks behind Mount Tabor, look! the shores and highways are lined with eager hundreds. The sick and palsied, the blind and lame, come to receive the magic touch, and listen to the Omnipotent word! Wherever He goes, His steps are tracked with mercy; misery, in every form, crouches at His feet; and gratitude bathes the wondrous Healer with its tears.

II. Thus much for His outward, public, social life—the stirring scenes of ministry and miracle. But is the portraiture complete? Does the revelation of the ideal of Human perfection end here? We now turn to its other phase, the remaining complement in that wondrous character; the PRIVATE Life of Jesus. He had, as each of His people have, a secret, inner being, in conjunction with the outer and social: the one a reflex of the other. That busy world on the one side of the Sea of Tiberias, witnessed His mighty deeds, heard His weighty words, and glowed under the sunshine of holy smiles and joyous friendships. But amid these boats flitting up and down the lake, one may now and then be seen (as the twilight shadows are falling) gently traversing its bosom; and when moored on the other side, a Figure, companionless and alone, is ascending the rugged steeps of the mountain, until the veil of night shuts Him out from view.

When the lights of luxury are gleaming on the opposite shores, and the fishermen's oars are heard pursuing their nightly task, the Son of Man and Lord of Glory is seeking refreshment and repose for His soul in divine communion. With the deep solitudes of nature for His oratory, He "continues all night in prayer to God." He is left "alone," and yet! He is "not alone," for His "God and Father are with Him!" Most beautiful union

of the active and the contemplative: public duty and private devotion; ceaseless exertion, and needful spiritual cessation and repose; the outer life all given to God and man; the private inner life diligently cared for and nurtured; night by night, and morning by morning, the sinless and spotless One fetching down heavenly supplies, as if in every respect He were "tempted as we are," requiring equal strength for duty and preparation for trial. How it links us in sympathy to this adorable Redeemer, to think that He had bodily as well as mental affinities with ourselves; that He participated with us (sin only excepted) in ALL our infirmities!

Do we, like Him, combine the two great elements of human character? Are our public duties—the cares, and business, and engrossments of the world, finely tempered and hallowed by a secret walk with God? Is our outer life distinguished like His by earnest diligence in our varied callings—love to God and kindness and goodwill to man throwing a softened halo around our path; beneficence, generosity, sterling honor, charity, unselfishness characterizing all we do?

Is our inner life a feeble transcript of His? If the world were to follow us from its busy thoroughfares, would it trace us to our family altars and our closet devotions? Would it discover in our secret histories, "Sabbaths of the soul," when wearied with the toil and struggle of earth, we ascend in thought the mount of Prayer, and in these holy mental solitudes seek an audience of our Father in Heaven? Action and meditation, I repeat, are the two great components of Christian life, and the perfection of the religious character is to find the two in unison and harmony.

Not like Martha of old, all bustle, energy, impulse, and finding little time for higher interests. Nor like Mary, on the other hand, wrapped in devout meditation, indifferent to the duties and shrinking from the struggles of life, but the happy intermingling of both. In one word, come and visit the Home of Jesus—see that noblest of combinations, consuming zeal and childlike teachableness—untiring devotion to His fellows, hallowed converse with His God. Oh, that each dwelling, that each life, might be like that! Would that, in order to make a "model home," we were often led to cross and re-cross in thought Gennesaret's lake. Then would our hearths and households more frequently be like Edens, blooming in a

desert world—miniatures of the great Heavenly Home, where still there will be the beautiful combination of untiring energy in God's service, and of peaceful rest and repose in God's love.

Let us only add, as one out of many practical lessons this subject suggests, a word of encouragement for the guiltiest. Where did this Blessed Lord of Glory establish His home? What portion of the wide world, or of the sacred land, did He select during the three most eventful years of earth's history for His most frequent residence? It was "the land of darkness;" it was "the region of the shadow of death." It was among a people who, in the most impressive and significant of Bible figures, are represented as "sitting" in that darkness; content to remain in guilty apathy and unconcern, heeding not the gloom around them, and the appalling shadows gathering overhead. Yet, He spurned them not. No; He, "The Light," entered this thick and gloomy darkness. Incarnate truth came into the midst of error. Incarnate wisdom settled in the midst of ignorance. Life came and settled in the abodes of death!

What does this teach? but that none need despair. Those who till this hour have been "sitting in darkness"—the darkness of guilt, and sin, and miserable estrangement from God—may listen to the voice of Jesus saying—"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life."

And not only do we here learn that Jesus comes to the very worst, and is willing to enlighten them, but that He can change the very worst—that He does enlighten them. The Sun of Righteousness has not only arose on Galilee, but He rose "with healing in His beams." "Its common people heard Him gladly." His best converts, his truest and most trustworthy friends were from the ports, and fishing boats, and villages around Gennesaret. Oh, if He effected such a change on them, there is no room for despondency! "That is the true light which enlightens every one that comes into the world." He is willing to take up His home in every soul—though that soul be as the valley of the shadow of death. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is willing to shine into that heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Whatever your darkness may be, Christ can relieve it; Christ can dispel it! If your heart be as a Gennesaret swept with storms,



He will come and whisper in your ears, as He did of old, His calming words—"Peace, be still."

The Home of Jesus, His outer home, at Capernaum, is but a memory of the past; not one stone has been left upon another that has not been thrown down. But He has a more enduring home, which human hands cannot annihilate, and time cannot destroy. "Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, I dwell in the high and in the holy place; with him also that is humble and of a contrite spirit!"

## **THE FISHERMEN**

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Luke 5:1-5

The first Memory of Gennesaret is appropriately connected with a fishing scene in its inland sea. It must have been now about the end of November or beginning of December, when the sultry heat of summer had disappeared; when the trees were either bared of their leaves, or seared with autumnal tints, and the voice of the turtle-dove was silent. Our Blessed Lord had recently returned to His native Galilee, after a summer absence in Judea; and several eventful months were now to be spent on

the shores of the lake, before the next Passover, in March or April, summoned Him again to the capital.

As He was now walking alone along the white sand that fringed the beach, we may suppose it to have been at that morning hour when nature was waking up again to life and energy; the usual traffic had been resumed in the little seaport of Capernaum, and the fishermen, who had been out the livelong night, were returning to the nearest landing-point with their spoil. Four of these seafarers, Andrew, Peter, John, and James, had reached the shore. They had been unsuccessful in their labors; weary and jaded, they were in the act of washing their nets before retiring to their hamlets for refreshment and rest.

But One who, as we shall presently see, was no stranger to them, had been noting their unrecompensed toil. There was a deep meaning and reason, which they knew not at the time, for the dispiriting results of their midnight industry, but which was, before long, to be made manifest. Meanwhile, however, Simon is approached by a voice whose music he was often in future to hear. His Lord "as one that serves" begs from the lowly fisherman the accommodation of his boat, that He might make it a platform from which to address His first Gennesaret auditory—a throng of ardent followers who had gathered on the sea-beach, eager to listen to His teachings.

We may realize the scene. The Lake, so often fretted with storms, exposed to sudden gusts coming sweeping down the ravines of the mountains, was now hushed into a dead calm. Tree and rock, fishing-hamlet and villa, were mirrored in its quiet waters. Hushed, too, was the dense mixed multitude that crowded on the shore; while the great object of their eager curiosity—Jesus of Nazareth—sat in meek majesty in Peter's fishing-boat, about to speak the words of eternal life!

Dare we picture to ourselves the expression of that godlike countenance? Accustomed as we are to think of Him as the ideal of human excellence, and in outward form as well as inward loveliness, "fairer than the children of men," we may venture to realize some feeble image of that portraiture, while yet the happy memories of peaceful Nazareth were hovering around Him, and before a woe-worn path had furrowed the

brow of the Man of Sorrows with the lineaments of predicted sadness.

It was the sunny morning of a dark and troubled life-day. The Sun of Righteousness, as He arose on this valley and shadow of death, had no spot, no murky cloud foreboding the darkness that was to shroud His setting. He was "as a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber, and rejoicing like a strong man to run his race." With grace poured into His lips, this "Chief among ten thousand"—this "altogether Lovely one"—proceeds to unfold the great revelation for which, during four thousand years, the world had waited in anxious expectation. It was a momentous day in the history of the Church. It was the inauguration of the first noble band of missionaries—an ordination scene and ordination sermon—the setting apart of under-shepherds by the Great Shepherd, to "feed the flock of God" which He was about to "purchase with His own blood."

We cannot pronounce when and where the first introduction took place between Jesus and these future teachers of the world. May He not possibly, in the days of His youth, when living in mysterious seclusion in the not far-distant Nazareth, have stood on the shores of Gennesaret, and, as the young fishermen of Bethsaida were helping their fathers to adjust their nets, may they not have unconsciously beheld in the stranger, their future Master and Lord? We can form, with greater certainty, such a conjecture at a later period; we have in one passage an indirect intimation that Capernaum formed a rendezvous for the caravan in north Galilee, in going up to Jerusalem to observe the paschal feast (John 2:12). If so, might not these youths, who were afterwards to be linked in so holy a relation, love to group and pitch their tents together in that sacred pilgrimage? Might they not travel onwards singing their psalms, under the clear light of moon and stars, in their nightly journey—the Galilean fishermen little dreaming that some of those very songs they chanted were to the praise of the wondrous Being who, in human form, walked at their side?

But be this as it may, we know, at all events, that not many months before the events here recorded, they had met Him on the banks of the Jordan, probably after the celebration of the Passover, when, on returning to their native lake, they paused to listen to the Baptist's stirring words. The Great Messiah, of whom he bore witness, was then pointed out to them.

They hailed Jesus of Nazareth as their Lord and Master, and cast in their lot with Him as disciples. Whether they met during the brief intervening period we cannot tell. But we may surely well believe that often would these four fishermen spend their lonely midnight hours on the lake, by discoursing of Him whom His great Forerunner had so recently pointed out to them as "the Lamb of God."

Could Peter forget the penetrating omniscience which had even then scanned his own character, and anticipated the lights and shadows in his ardent temperament (John 1:42)? Could Andrew and John forget the hallowed evening converse, when, at His own gracious invitation, He welcomed them to His temporary abode, and from four o'clock till the night shadows closed around them, caused their hearts to burn within them? Moreover, if they had never personally met since, their confidence in His power and in the divinity of His mission must have been strengthened and confirmed by the miracle recently performed on the nobleman's son at Capernaum, all the more impressive that it was by the power of a distant word at Cana, that the dying youth had been raised to life. It must have been, at all events, now with a joyful surprise, while washing their nets, that His longed-for voice was heard. How would the lost labor of that midnight be forgotten, and the thought of fatigue banished, when they beheld Him once more standing on the shore ready to unfold to them and to the multitudes the mysteries of His kingdom! With what delight would they gather around to listen to the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth!

Let us pause at this point in the sacred story, and gather a few PRACTICAL LESSONS.

I. Observe here, how God honors worldly industry, and hallows His own appointed heritage of toil.

These fishermen, though enrolled among the disciples of Jesus, did not on that account forsake their honest callings, as if discipleship and daily work were incongruous. No; with all the hallowed recollections of that day at Bethany and the Jordan, no sooner did they reach Bethsaida, than, clothed in their rough cloaks, they were out night after night on the sea, patiently waiting subsequent communications of their Lord's will. And

now, when He meets them again, when that loving Voice is once more heard, how are they engaged? Still at their work—their hands ministering to their necessities—standing knee-deep in the water, in the shadow of their fishing-boats, "washing their nets." What does all this tell us, but that Christ honors and consecrates daily industry. He would here, as elsewhere, proclaim the beautiful harmony between the most laborious ardor in our several earthly employments, and religious earnestness; that the world's dullest tasks and most drudging toil can be baptized and hallowed with the new-born spiritual element; and that while men may be "not slothful in business, they may be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

II. We learn that Jesus gradually prepares His people for service and trial.

As in mental training, so in spiritual, there is an education—a gradual progressive discipline. They are brought to their exalted attainments in grace—the consecrated heights of His kingdom—not by some sudden or miraculous elevation, but step by step. It is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." The fishermen of Bethsaida may have received, as we have already conjectured, the first hallowed impressions from casual meetings with the young Nazareth Pilgrim in their journeys to the city of solemnities; or the earliest seed of the kingdom might have been more recently planted by the teachings of the Baptist. This had been still further nurtured by a solemn personal interview with their Lord. Months had elapsed, to allow all these to take root. They had been left to themselves during this intervening period to a secret work of faith and prayer. And now, when love has been deepened, and faith strengthened, He demands loftier services; imposes heavier responsibilities. The Disciples are to become Apostles. The nets and boats of Galilee are to be left for the mightiest ministry ever entrusted to human hands.

There may be exceptions, and there are exceptions to this great rule. A persecutor may be struck down, and in a moment transformed into an apostle. A felon may be arrested by grace amid the agonies of crucifixion, and in the twinkling of an eye be translated from a criminal's death to a believer's crown. But God's processes in the spiritual economy are, generally speaking, gradual and progressive. The temple rises stone by stone. Nicodemus-like, we have to grope our way to higher spiritual

manifestations, to higher faith, higher duties, higher grace. Were it otherwise, it would contradict the Divine method of working. It would unteach the oft-recorded lesson in that mighty volume of parables, where growth is never sudden; but slow, silent, almost imperceptible: the sapling hardening into the oak before it can wrestle with the storm; the child creeping before it can walk, spelling its way upwards through successive stages of mental progress.

God Himself more than once, indeed, employs this very same image regarding His people. He acts a parent's part in guiding the tottering steps of feeble spiritual infancy, "dandling them on His knees," comforting them as one whom his mother comforts," "bearing them on His shoulders, as a man bears his own son that serves him," "leading them about, instructing them, keeping them as the apple of His eye;" until at length, strong in the manhood of vigorous faith, they "mount upon eagle's wings."

III. Learn in our seasons of trial and despondency never to despair.

Peter had been toiling all night, and nothing had been caught. But his Lord gives the word, "Launch forth into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch." Peter replies by telling of their lack of success—that "all night" (the best and most likely time for catching fish) they had labored in vain; but, addressing Jesus as "Master" (evidently showing the relation in which he already stood to Him), he adds in simple faith and submission to a will he had been taught to love, "Nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net." The result was the enclosure of such "a multitude of fishes that the net broke."

Ah! when was the soul ever disappointed which followed the Lord fully? How often, in our night-seasons of despondency and trial, are we prone, in our short-sighted folly, to exclaim, "All these things are against me?" How often do we feel, in spiritual experience, as if all effort in Christian attainment were worse than hopeless? The heavens have become as brass, and the earth as iron; our prayers are unavailing; ordinances are unblest; sanctuary wells are without water; our sun is wading amid clouds; the net of faith is let down amid the promises of God; but unable to appropriate them, we are ready to say amid this long night of spiritual

toil, "Surely my Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me." "No! no! pray on—labor on—trust on—" "They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!"

Resolve, with Peter, "Nevertheless, at Your word, Blessed Savior! I will launch forth once more. I will let down my net into this dark, deep, unfathomable sea. Though You slay me yet will I trust in You. In ourselves, Lord, we are helpless, hopeless, weak, perishing; but at Your word we proceed; Lord, what would You have us to do? Our wills we would resolve into Yours—Your will is always the best. We shall not arraign the appointments of Your unerring rectitude. Even though at times we are led to adopt the words of the prophet—'I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;' with him can we add, 'Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.' Even if carrying a cross be required, fresh launching forth into the deeps and midnights of trial, we shall let down our nets, assured in the end of a glorious recompense."

For have we not His own recorded promise?—"Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." Hosea 6:3. Let us seek to value more and more that precious promise.

The multitudes on Gennesaret's shore, and the disciple in the boat, who with fond eagerness listened, and with joyful alacrity obeyed, read to us solemn lessons. Of the one it is said, "They pressed on Him to hear the word of God;" of the other, that, triumphing over carnal doubts and reasonings, he exclaimed, "Nevertheless, at Your word."

Oh, what a blessed formula for us! "This path of mine is dark, mysterious, perplexing; nevertheless, at Your word I will go forward. This trial of mine is cutting, painful for flesh and blood to bear. It is hard to breathe through a broken heart—" "may Your will be done." But, nevertheless, at Your word I will say, "Even so, Father!" This besetting habit or infirmity, or sin of mine, is difficult to crucify. It has become part of myself—a second nature; to be severed from it would be like the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye. Nevertheless, at Your word,

I will lay aside every weight; this idol I will utterly abolish! This righteousness of mine, it is hard to renounce; all these virtues, and amiabilities, and natural graces, it is hard to believe that they cannot in any way be mixed up in the matter of my salvation; and that I am to receive all from first to last, as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord. "Nevertheless, at Your word, I will count all but loss for the excellency of His knowledge."

Reader! let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly! Let it be your counselor; the ultimate court of appeal in every perplexity. If your own proud reason, or self-will, or corrupted nature and blinded conscience, should dictate an opposing line of procedure, let this lofty determination settle and silence all doubt, "Nevertheless, at Your word." Sit as a meek disciple under this infallible Teacher. Silence the temptations of the great Adversary as your Lord silenced them before you, by the rebuke, "Get behind Me, Satan—It is written." And when the Sabbath comes around, be it yours, like the crowd on Gennesaret's shores, to go to the sanctuary eagerly thirsting for the Word of eternal life—not the words of frail mortals, worms of the dust; but, despising all the excellency of man's wisdom, seeking only to have declared to you the whole counsel of God. Be earnest in prayer, that He may send forth His light and His truth to lead you and guide you. Then shall a Savior God be invisibly present by His Spirit, to bless and lighten, to gladden and refresh your souls; and the Beatitude, intended for all time and for every age of the Church, will be made good in your experience: "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance!"

## **THE CALL AND CONSECRATION**

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow Thee;



Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shall be;  
Perish every fond ambition,  
All I've sought, or hoped, or known,  
Yet how rich is my condition,  
God and heaven are still my own!"

"Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him." Luke 5:10, 11; Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17-21

The Sermon to the multitudes we have spoken of in the preceding chapter being finished, the "Consecration service," the all-absorbing event of that memorable hour, begins. How is it conducted? What is the Savior's mode of illustrating solemn truths which are to have their bearings on the remotest ages of the world? In that great Temple of Nature—the everlasting mountains its pillars—the arching sky its roof—the Lord alike of nature and of grace discourses to His disciples and to the Church of the future by means of an acted parable. He who, at a later period of His ministry, cursed a fruitless fig-tree on the way to Bethphage, in order that it might be to all time a standing memorial of the guilt of hypocritical profession, now makes the humble callings of the fishermen of Galilee the means of conveying to their own minds, lessons of faith, and confidence, and hope. He takes the nets they were washing, as exponents of these great truths, and prepares to make them "Fishers of men."

At the bidding of their Master, after their night of unsuccessful toil, they had once more launched forth into the deep. The nets had been lowered—the unrewarded efforts of the long midnight hours were more than recompensed. So wondrous was the capture, that they had to beckon to Andrew and John to come to their assistance from the adjoining pier. The net was discharged of its contents, and both vessels were filled to the point of sinking with the unprecedented spoil. It is the sequel of the narrative which is now to engage us, in which three points invite our attention.

I. SIMON PETER'S EXCLAMATION—"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O

Lord."

The feelings of Peter form the natural workings of every soul which, conscious of its sinfulness, has been brought into visible contact with its God. He had known of Jesus before as the Holy Youth—the Teacher sent from God—the Prophet of whom the Baptist testified that He was "mightier than he." But here he felt the consciousness of a more majestic Presence still. He sees standing before him the Lord of creation, the owner of "the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the sea." His feelings are those of trembling Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." The finite felt himself in contact with the Infinite. Faith, love, adoring reverence, and intermingled with all, a profound abasing sense of worthlessness and guilt, makes this impulsive apostle humble himself in the dust. In tremulous dread, he is ready to say with Pilgrim Israel, as they cowered under the blazing peaks of Sinai, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Very different was his subsequent conduct, when he had learned, by "perfect love," to "cast out fear." Called to gaze into profounder depths of his Redeemer's glory—though subsequent nearer and dearer fellowship tended in no degree to diminish his sense of that gulf, which must ever be untraversed between the Creator and the creature—the sinner and the divinely exalted Holy One—nay, though quickened spiritual sensibilities would tend rather to augment and intensify the sense of unworthiness and imperfection—yet the terror of this first surprise never again returns. When we next see him at his Savior's feet, owning Him as God, there is no trembling accent on his lip as he makes the joyous avowal, "Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life; we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who was to come into the world."

As years roll over his head, increased familiarity with his Divine Master only deepens this loving, trustful confidingness; and even after the Lord had withdrawn from him His visible presence—after the heavenly veil had shut out His glorified person from the eyes of His apostle—that fervent soul loved to penetrate the invisible; realizing an absent Savior, he thus comforted his own heart and the hearts of those to whom he wrote, "Whom having not seen you love, and in whom, though now you see Him

not, yet believing you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Why, and how this wondrous change in his feelings? It is the history of every believer still, when he comes for the first time into solemn, heart-searching contact with God—when the eyes of his understanding are enlightened, and the dreadful consciousness passes over the stricken spirit—"I am a poor, miserable, guilty, condemned being, responsible to One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." Ah! when life's long-slumbering atheist-dream has been thus dispelled; when the soul, naked, unsheltered, guilty, unforgiven, feels itself all in a moment in the presence of the God with whom, emphatically, "it has to do;" when an inexorable law flashes conviction and condemnation on a misspent past, speaking trumpet-tongued of the righteousness of the lawgiver; when a future of limitless being rises up before him in ghastly reality; impressive and solemn ciphers, unheeded before, now standing in front of the solitary "unit of earthly existence;" when the miserable shreds and patches of earthly goodness and virtue are disclosed in their utter worthlessness—conventional moralities seen to be but "splendid sins"—sparks of fire of their own kindling, quenched one after another, and revealing only a darkness more felt; the awakened sinner, stricken down, helpless, terrified, before this first revelation of Jehovah, exclaims, with Job, "My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes!" He gazes on the great God of Heaven—the Holy One—the Just One—the Righteous One—but it is out of Christ, and He is a "consuming fire." "Depart from me," he exclaims in a paroxysm of fear. It is the feeling of our fallen Parents of old, when, under the fresh consciousness of their guilt, they fled frightened from their Maker. The voice which had so lately all music, has now become nothing but terror and wrath; the flaming cherubim guard the way. Where is the spot in the wide universe to which that burdened soul would not rush to screen itself from revealed truth, holiness, omniscience?

But, look! the flaming sword guarding the way to the Tree of Life is seen quenched with blood. The unbridged gulf of separation has been spanned; a glorious sunshine bringing peace and rest and consolation, bursts from that dark and lowering sky. The brief history of that joyful

transformation is thus told—"God is in Christ, reconciling a lost world to Himself." Yes! that trembling one ventures to lift up his eyes in these moments of waking agony. He sees One standing by him in mingled majesty and tenderness, who has magnified that law and made it honorable, and who, by His doing and dying, has opened up a way of forgiveness to the guiltiest. The gates of torment are shut; the gates of glory are opened. It is no longer a "fearful" but a blessed thing "to fall into the hands of the living God." In trembling transport he exclaims—(not as in the first anguish of awaking convictions, "Depart from me," but,) "Lord, to whom can I go but to You?" "Entreat me not to leave You, nor to return from following after You. Where You go, I will go; where You dwell, I will dwell. Through life I will pass cheered by Your love; in death I shall be supported by Your everlasting arms; through all eternity I shall in Your unveiled presence, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Oh, happy consummation! if, while we are smitten down by a sense of our unworthiness, we are directed to adoring Gospel views of Christ, in His person, and offices, and work. Believer! turn your eye with arrested gaze on this divine Savior. The more you gaze, the more will terror give way to wonder, love, confidence, and joy! The more you study His divine character, the more you will understand the divine secret of repose—"Acquaint yourself now with God and be at peace."

II. We have THE SAVIOR'S ASSURANCE—How gently He speaks! "Jesus said to Simon, FEAR NOT." It is the same calming word which, as we shall find in later times, soothed and lulled disquieting misgivings—dropping like oil on the surging sea—"Fear not, it is I, do not be afraid." When John found himself gazing on the lustrous countenance of his Redeemer in Patmos, he fell awe-struck at His feet, "as one dead." But the whisper of a well-known voice was enough to restore confidence and joy. It was the same gracious watchword—"Fear not, I am He who lives, and was dead."

What a sublime antidote to our misgivings! What a balm to our troubled spirits, these accents of undying and unchanging solace, stealing like celestial chimes from the upper sanctuary—"FEAR NOT!" Fear not, poor sinner trembling under a sense of your sin, your great unworthiness, your black ingratitude. "I have come to seek and to save those who are lost."

Fear not, faint and weary one, appalled at your own deep corruptions and guilty estrangements. The temptations and snares of a seductive world, and that great antagonist, unbelief, ever tempting you to stray from the living God; "I will make my grace sufficient for you."

Fear not, tempted and tried one, beaten down with a great fight of afflictions; your garnered earthly blessings swept from you like chaff in the summer's threshing floor, your household plundered of its nearest and dearest, and the gaping fissures in your bleeding heart refusing to be healed or comforted. Fear not, I am better than son or daughter, or any earthly relative. Heart and flesh may faint and fail, but God is the strength of your heart, and your portion forever.

Fear not, you who "all your lives were held in slavery by your fear of death." I once was dead. I have sanctified the grave before you. I have fought and conquered death in his own territories, and dragged him in triumph at my chariot wheels. This last enemy may at times, be to you like a cold ghastly shade moving on the midnight lake. But trust Me, when it comes, you shall hear amid the storm, a loud Voice mightier than the noise of many waters; yes, than the mighty waves of the sea—"Fear not, it is I, don't be afraid."

The Savior, having relieved his servant's fears, proceeds to unfold the nature and duties, the responsibilities and encouragements, of the great apostolic work.

How startled must that fisherman of Galilee have been by the announcement which now fell upon his ears—"From now on you shall catch men!" Jesus made the mute tenants of the lake that lay in dead and dying heaps in the net, a living parable and pledge of far vaster successes. He was to retain his net, but souls were to be the nobler prey. He was to buffet waves still, but they were to be the waves of human passion, and ignorance, and crime. He was to hoist his sail still on a more treacherous sea, but, with a mightier arm than his own guiding the helm, he would reach the heavenly shore with the unbroken net, and lay at his Redeemer's feet joyous multitudes rescued from the depths of ruin and despair.

Commentators have often marked, in the original Greek, the power and beauty of the word here used by Jesus, and whose full meaning is so inadequately expressed by the term "catch" in our translation. It means to catch, not in order to kill and destroy, but to "catch alive," to catch in order to preserve and perpetuate life, or to raise it to a higher state of development.

Ah! wondrous encouragement to Peter, and to all who like Peter are entrusted with the net of the gospel! Ministers of Christ! here is your high prerogative, to raise the myriads which at the Savior's word you capture—to raise them from the lower element, "the earth, earthy," to the higher and nobler and purer element of undying endless LIFE. If the analogy fails in the case of the humble spoil which then lay on the earthly shore, it is only that Christ, by the beauty of contrast, may bring out more vividly the true grandeur of the great commission. It was as if He had said, "Peter, that net of yours has dragged its multitudes out of their briny depths, but they struggle and die in this new and hostile element. As they are cast on the beach, their tiny existence, the ephemeral life I gave them, terminates forever. But different, far different, is your embassy. At my command you are to let down your net. Myriads on myriads in the ocean depths of despair are to be the fruits of your faithful toil and that of others; and no sooner do they leave their old element of guilt and depravity, than they begin to breathe a new and nobler life, immortal as My own."

Would that those of us who are "Fishers of men," Ambassadors of Christ, could realize this vast, this incomparable work, with all its tremendous responsibilities and tremendous results! Death and life are here confided to us! Our aim is here represented to be, not a mere external varnishing over with new habits, new tastes, new virtues; but to effect a change of being. The faithful preaching of the gospel ought to have for its object a bringing up and out from the deep, dead sea of nature; elevating to a new heaven-born atmosphere. Oh, LIFE is a solemn thing!—a solemn word! It is a solemn hour—every parent knows it—when a child is born into the world—when the first infant cry breaks upon the ear, and tells that a little inhabitant has been added to the domain of life—a new heir of an endless imperishable being!

And shall not that be a solemn and momentous event, when, at the second spiritual birth, the cry of the new creature is heard, "Lord, save me, or I perish"—when the immortal spirit begins to breathe a new atmosphere, to share in the very Life of the Almighty who made him, and in the Resurrection-life of the Savior who redeemed him? You are captured in the Gospel net, but it is to have life infused, the only thing worth calling life in a dead and dying world. I repeat it, the Gospel raises to a higher platform—it raises from the groveling element of fallen sinful nature to the higher element of grace and glory.

The little seed is in its element when, beneath the clod, it slumbers in darkness in its clay or mossy bed; but nobler is its new element, when it springs exultant from its prison house, and, arrayed in living green, bathes its newborn tints in the glorious sunlight. The caterpillar is in its native element when, embedded in its chrysalis state, it lies a torpid and forbidding groveler in its winter shell; but nobler is its destiny, when on wings of purple and gold it spurns its tiny sepulcher, and in resurrection attire it speeds from flower to flower. The earth is one mass of teeming life, living and moving, and turning on its axis, even when night wraps it in its curtain, and deep sleep pervades its silent tenantry; but nobler surely is that life, when the sun lights up with living glory temple and tree, and rock and mountain, transforming lake and ocean into burnished gold, and man, its high priest, "goes forth to his work and his labor until the evening."

But what are these compared to the higher Life and Glory with which the immortal soul is invested, when the Great Spirit, brooding over its chaos, gives the summons, "Let there be light," "Let there be Life." Oh, that this might ever be the aim—the end—the glory of all preaching (perish all other)—to "catch men," not by human power or human eloquence—the wisdom of words—exalting ourselves at the expense of our Master—making the cross of Christ of no effect; but in faith and love and joyful hope, letting down the simple net—it may be with crude untutored hands, but doing so at the word of Christ, and with longing desire to bring immortal spirits safely to the heavenly shore, living trophies to cast at the Great Master's feet!

The ministers of Christ, in handling the gospel net, are apt at times to be

discouraged. They have to mourn like Peter over hours of unavailing effort—Sabbaths when the net was (as they thought) in faith let down; but no result of their labors—no owning of their work. Yet we will not despair. "Nevertheless at Your word we will still let down the net."

Others may resort to other expedients for the improvement of man, solving the great problem of fretful, careworn, restless, suffering humanity apart from the gospel. The philosopher may dream of visionary earthly antidotes; the statesman may see in some cold, frigid, intellectual training a panacea for human wrongs; the moralist may discourse on human virtue, and the self-rectifying power of human goodness; the Socialist may dare to propound his damning theories as the pioneers of the halcyon reign of unbounded liberty. But "nevertheless we will let down the net." We have boldness and confidence that Christ, and Him crucified, and the new life which this Lord of life has to impart, are the true and only secrets of peace on earth and good will to men.

See what that gospel has done already! mark its power and progress ever since that hour when on Tiberias shore Christ spoke this authoritative word to these humble fishermen! How weak their efforts! how humble their instrumentality! What! a handful of uneducated men from the darkest of all the Palestine provinces, and one other converted Jew of Tarsus; who ever dreamed of these hurling superstition from her throne—silencing her oracles—demolishing the temples and shrines of ages—bringing the whole Roman empire, as by a magic touch, to own a crucified Savior as its God and King?

What can't grace do? Their first motto has been the motto of every faithful successor in the glorious company of apostles—"Nevertheless at Your word we will let down the net." The ancestral splendors of our own ancient ritual is against us; the pomp and pride of imperial Rome is against us; the learning and philosophy of polished Greece is against us; the idolatries of Paganism, with their lust and revelry, and blood, are against us; the heart of corrupted, degraded humanity is against us—"Nevertheless at Your word we will let down the net."

Rome has conquered by her sword; Greece has rendered herself immortal by her triumphs of intellect. The Jew, arrogant and fanatical, boasts of a



descent from the world's aristocracy, and proudly clings to an abrogated ritual. But we, with the humblest instrumentality—an instrumentality of which the net of lowly fishermen is the befitting type—we will go forth on our accredited mission, feeling that herein lies the secret of all success—"Not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord God of Hosts." "It has pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe!"

More than this, looking closely at this prophetic parable, we find that Christ, in calling human agents to be Fishers of men, not only divinely appoints to the office, and divinely qualifies for the office, but there is an exquisite significance in the accompanying act of the catch of fishes. It is a prophetic promise that men shall be enclosed; that His word shall not return to Him void; that the net of the kingdom shall not be let down in vain. It is the Lord Himself giving the pledge, and symbol, and guarantee of success; and we shall find Him repeating the same with still greater significance, at the close of all—at His last visit to Gennesaret, before He ascended to glory.

Oh, yes! the letting down of that net, the filling it, the drawing; it is the Lord's work and not man's. "Neither is he who plants anything, neither he who waters, but God who gives the increase, that our faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." The great and glorious history of apostolic preaching and ministerial success for the last 1800 years, may be given in the lofty words of the Psalmist; they are words that would seem more especially to take their date from the very hour of which we now speak, when Jesus stood on Gennesaret's shore—when His omnipotent mandate moved the first wave—this impelling another, and another, and another still—until the glad gospel waters are now fast sweeping over the sands of time—"The Lord announced the word—great was the company of those that proclaimed it. Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder. Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold."

III. Let us observe the DISCIPLES' RESOLUTION—"So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus." Or as the same incident is recorded in the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel—"At once

they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw other two brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him."

It is a solemn lesson of self-denial we are called on here to come and learn at the feet of Galilean fishermen. It was, it must have been for them, a trying hour. At a moment's warning their worldly all was to be left. The hallowed scenes of youth were around them. Every rock and ravine—every sheltered nook and bay in that lovely inland sea—they knew it well. The Bethsaida hamlet, from which childhood was used to rush in its sunny morning to welcome the father, as his boat scraped the shallows, after his night of toil in the lake, was full in view. Nay, we are expressly told, that father's ear listened to the strange summons that implied separation from him and his home, probably forever. They just had, moreover, their boats filled to overflowing. Elated with success, which they might have been perverse enough to attribute to ordinary causes, they never before had so strong inducement to cleave to their nets and carry on their calling.

And for what were they to exchange their all? It was to carry a heavy cross! It was to attach themselves to the person and fortunes of the reputed Son of a carpenter, who was often unable to tell of so secure a shelter as had the fox of the mountain or the bird of the forest! Yet they ("immediately") without deliberating—without conferring with flesh and blood—without reasoning on maxims of expediency—willingly surrendered that all, and cast in their lot with the despised and rejected One! "Follow me!" said their Lord; and with cheerful willingness their boats, homes, friends, were left. "From now on they are fishers of men!"

Did they regret this noble commitment? Were they sufferers by their self-sacrificing devotion? "Look!" says Peter, on an after occasion, "we have left all and followed You!" Jesus said in reply, "I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age—and in the age to come, eternal life!"

Ah! who ever suffered by casting in his lot with a suffering Savior, and with joyful resolution following Jesus? "Would to God," said another great follower (unabashed by the regal purple before him in making his bold avowal)—"would to God," said he, even though the clank of the chain on his own arm reminded of earthly bonds—"would to God you were not only almost but altogether such as I am!"

Reader! have you followed—are you following Jesus as did these His first apostles? You are not called on, thank God, like them to follow Him in the confiscation of your earthly goods, or in the relinquishment of your earthly homes. To be a follower of Christ does not require huge sacrifices—brilliant displays of heroic suffering. I believe that meek Savior is most honored by those who bear most meekly what I might call little crosses, who, not in the great battlefield of the world, but in the quiet of their own homesteads, exhibit the lowly, submissive, patient spirit of cross-bearing disciples.

Look back on your past life—look even back on a single year, and can you point to any one action in the course of it, in which you are conscious of having made some little denial of self, because you thought that denial would be pleasing to Jesus? Can you tell of some passion you subdued—some lust you mortified—some kindly deed you performed, because you believed your Savior would be honored, and you were thereby doing His will? Can you tell of some sore affliction to which you bowed in meek and lowly submission, manifesting in your trial patience, and faith, and un murmuring resignation, because you thought of an un murmuring Savior, and that your own cross was but as dust in the balance compared with His?

Say, isn't that following of your Lord self-rewarding and self-recompensing? "If any man serves me," says He, "let him follow Me, and where I am there shall also My servant be; if any man serves Me, him will My Father honor!" Even if it be suffering and trial you are called to endure, what a privilege in this to "follow Jesus." Yes! put the emphasis on these little words—"Follow Me." "They followed HIM!" Suffering believer! is it no comfort in the midst of trial to think that you are following in the very footsteps of a suffering Savior—that you, a poor, guilty, worthless sinner, are faring no worse than your Lord and Master

did—the stainless, spotless, sinless, and uncomplaining Lamb of God?

Follow Him fully—cast off every impediment—every lingering sin that would hamper you in His service. Go and show that you follow Him by your deeds. It was not by tarrying at their nets, or lingering on the shores, that the disciples manifested their resolve to cast in their lot with the homeless Christ of Galilee! They did it. Ah! religion is not contemplation, but action. Religion is not a thing of mopish sentimentalism, or self-effacing looks, or trite phrases. It is launching forth into the deep of our own and the world's great necessities. It is letting down the net for a catch, and then, in conjunction with this earnest work, rising up and following the example, the footsteps, the word, the will of Jesus.

Arise, then, let us be going! We may, like the disciples in that first hour of their calling, be all in ignorance of a veiled and shadowed future; but, if like them, in the company of the Lord, we may fearlessly leave our fondest earthly treasures behind us, making but one conditional prayer, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Following Him in His cross we shall at last be sharers with Him in His glorious crown, and reap the blessing which He elsewhere promises to His Apostolic band, and through them to all who inherit a disciple-spirit. "I assure you that when I, the Son of Man, sit upon my glorious throne in the Kingdom, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matthew 19:28

## **THE INCURABLE CURED**

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15)

## I. THE SCENE

Recent and trustworthy travelers have identified a mountain on the west side of the Gennesaret lake, with the "Mount of Beatitudes," from whose two-horned top the Savior delivered His memorable sermon. This mountain is visible from all parts of the lake, its double or "bifurcated cone" mingling in every view of the diversified landscape. A deep ravine, known as "The Valley of Doves"—connects this mountain, with the plain of Gennesaret and the shores of the inland sea. As this retired yet elevated spot was easily accessible, we may imagine the Divine Redeemer often ascending it through the narrow mountain gorge. From the flowers that carpeted the ravine, and the doves that built their nests on the branches overhead, He may have derived the imagery He employs in His sermon; when He speaks of the lilies as clothed, and the fowls of the air as ministered to by an unseen but gracious Provider.

He was in the act of returning in company with the vast multitude back towards Capernaum, when a strange and startling sight disclosed itself. What though flowers were clothing the earth, and birds singing among the branches? What though azure skies over-canopied them, and a lake which was the image of peace was sleeping in quiet loveliness at their feet? One sight and wail of human misery now borne to their ears and confronting their eyes, too sadly reminded them that sin had made this world a world of suffering—full, like the prophet's pronouncement, of "lamentation, and mourning, and woe."

A miserable being, afflicted with the most loathsome and ignominious of diseases, had been brooding in silent thought (possibly for days—possibly for weeks) as to whether he might dare venture to cast himself at the feet of the wondrous Restorer. Vain to this lonely and desolate spirit was all the beauty of that outer nature in the midst of which his existence had been spent. The curse of God was resting upon him. His brother man looked strange and alien upon him. From that ghastly countenance, rich and poor, young and old, fled frightened. What to him were the thickly-studded towns and villages which fringed that scene of busy life—he dared not so much as set foot in one of them; though born a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a child of Abraham; a sad curse severed him from the privileges of the enfranchised nation. What though he saw and heard,

spring after spring, at the Passover season, joyful groups with songs on their lips going up to Jerusalem, the city of solemnities; There was no place for him among the multitude that kept holiday. Ceremonially unclean, he was by a terrible edict cut off from the congregation of the Lord. While others took sweet counsel together, and went to the house of God in company, he could only in the bitterest of captivities "weep when he remembered Zion!"

His lonesome home was either some secluded hut amid these Galilee mountains, or if he were permitted to associate with his fellows at all, it was a wretched confederacy with other lepers like himself, who, in their exile communities, only recounted to each other the dismal story of their sufferings, and gazed on faces and frames more ghastly and mutilated than their own.

But what dreams can't Hope indulge in, in life's dreariest exigencies? In such a case as the present, indeed, every vestige of such hope might well seem to have expired; not only was the disease itself inveterate, but this leper's was one of the worst types of it. Luke speaks of him as "full of leprosy." Year after year he may have watched with the horror of despair the slow, silent, insidious progress of the deteriorating disease, like an unseen vulture preying on his flesh—devouring limb by limb, member by member. He had become a loathsome and distorted shadow of what once he was. Life itself was a curse. It would have been to him a blessing to die.

But in that desolate bosom still lay some lingering sparks of hope—the last emotion of the human soul that expires. These were fanned into a faint glow by hearing of the wonders wrought by the Prophet of Galilee. A few weeks before, when the Sabbath's sun had sunk behind the western hills of the Lake; the lame, the sick, the diseased, the dying, had been borne to the Capernaum home of this greater than human Physician. The result was, that that sun rose the next morning on a healed city—disease had fled. Many an aching pillow and anguished heart had been exchanged for songs of deliverance!

Was the suggestion a strange or unnatural one which gathered strength in the bosom of this outcast Leper—"Can't this same Savior heal me? Can I alone not feel His healing touch? Can that omnipotent word not reach

this horrible plague—dash the lifelong tear from this eye, and pallor from this cheek—wrench away these torn clothes which (by a severe necessity) I am doomed to wear—open these portals and thresholds I am forbidden to enter—and send me forth a free man, to set my feet within Your gates, O Jerusalem?"

All that he had seen and heard that day may have tended to strengthen his hopes and embolden his resolves. He may have been hovering with eager expectancy outside the crowd on the Mount of Beatitudes—screening himself behind the ledge of a rock or undulation of the hill—the calm silent air wafting to his ear some of the wondrous words of the Preacher! Did he listen to these opening sentences? Did they not appear as if meant for him?

"What!" he would inwardly say—"blessings and benedictions poured on the 'meek,' the 'poor,' the 'persecuted,' the 'despised!' Did not Jesus of Nazareth speak, too, in His closing sentences, as if Omnipotence slumbered in His arm? Why should I set limits to combined power and mercy? I feel assured He is able. Is He willing? I shall try it—I shall test it! Crouching at the feet of this Prophet of Mercy, if I be spurned away, it is only what the past has often taught me to endure. Yes! I, the most wretched of the wretched, will go and claim His pitying love, and throw this suffering body and suffering spirit imploringly at His feet." Thus did a ray of anxious hope dawn on the saddest bosom in all Galilee!

The time has arrived! The tramp of the multitude is heard. They are wending their way down one of the bypaths to the lakeside. In an instant the halting cripple, with head bare and clothes torn, and covering on his lip, bounds from his lurking-place. Shouting the terrible watchword, "Unclean! unclean!" to warn the crowd from his presence, he is prostrate in the dust, his face touching the garment-hem of the One only Being in the wide world from whom he has hope of cure.

It was a wondrous meeting! The two opposites of being—the extremes of humanity—met at that moment in that Gennesaret road. It was a meeting of Mercy with Despair; Omnipotence with Weakness; Sympathy with Suffering; Purity with Pollution; Life with Death! Not more striking was the contrast in nature between the bleak, sterile, torn desert hills on the

east of the lake and the fertile garden-slopes on its west, than between that torn and dislocated body and soul—that terrible monument of shattered humanity—and the calm Godlike Being who gazed lovingly down on the wretch who clutched the dust with his deteriorated fingers, uttering the wild lament of hereditary despair—yet mingling this with nobler accents, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean!"

Moment of thrilling suspense! The multitude and the disciples are panic-struck, and may probably have recoiled from the forbidden contact; they may possibly have urged the intruder to leave. ONE was there who had no such unkind or unmerciful thought. Well did JESUS know all that dreadful history! the touching story of years written in that ashen countenance! He put forth His finger—He touched the body which no unleprous hand had ever before dared to approach! The Omnipotent "I will!" sounded forth, bearing on its wings words of healing. The scales dropped from his face—the flush of health mounted to his cheek—pain fled from his aching limbs. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles!"

And now we may imagine the multitude, with the restored Leper in their midst, entering the gates of Capernaum, telling to fresh crowds thronging around them of the new sermon and miracle they had just heard and witnessed. The words so full of tenderness and love—of comfort to the lowly and poor and meek; the miracle a display of power unparalleled since the days of Elisha and Naaman. What other evidence was needed that a great Prophet, indeed, had arisen in Israel? It was a twofold marvel even in that old land of miracle and prodigy—"the Lepers are cleansed, the gospel is preached to the poor!"

II. Let us now pass from the Scene, to its GREAT LESSON—the Terribleness of Sin!

We have frequent examples in the Old Testament dispensation, as well as in the course of the Savior's teaching, of outward and visible objects being taken as expositions, or types, of moral and spiritual truths. Of all these emblems, whether in the animate or inanimate world, none was more terribly impressive and significant than the disease of LEPROSY. It is not only that we discern therein some striking resemblances to SIN—the



great spiritual malady—and employ the one as illustrative of the other. These resemblances or analogies were no mere accidents.

Leprosy was singled out by God Himself from the vast catalogue of human diseases and sufferings, to keep before the eyes of His people of old a perpetual memorial of the vileness and awfulness of moral evil. The outer body was made by Him a mirror of the far deeper and darker taint in the soul. It was a silent preacher in the midst of the theocratic nation and to the end of time, testifying to the virulence of a more inveterate malady—that "from the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." Although it by no means invariably followed that the lepers of Israel were afflicted with their dire plague in consequence of personal sin, yet we know also this to have been the case in several recorded instances, such as those of Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah. At all events the disease was regarded by the Jews as a mark of the Divine displeasure. They spoke of it as "the finger of God." It was considered an outward and visible sign of inward disorganization, guilt, and impurity.

But more than this—it was the sign of "DEATH." The prayer of Aaron, in behalf of Miriam, was, "Let her not be as one 'dead,' of whom the flesh is half consumed." By the express injunctions contained in the Levitical law, the Leper was obligated to attire himself in the garments of death. He had to wear torn clothes, the garb which mourners were in the habit of putting on for the dead. His head was to be bare, his upper lip covered—tokens also of grief for the dead. He was to reckon himself thus a dead man. He wore these funereal trappings, as if bewailing his own dissolution—a walking sepulcher—a living corpse in a world of living men. His befitting exclamation might be, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

A learned writer, who has described this subject in all its aspects, informs us that this idea of leprosy as an emblem of Death, not only lingered in the Middle Ages among the Jews, but was transplanted, during the Crusades, along with the disease itself, into Europe and Christendom, where "it was usual to clothe the leper in a shroud, and to say for him the masses for the dead."

The same parabolic meaning and intention may be still further traced in the rites employed on the occasion of cleansing a leper. These were precisely what were appointed for cleansing one who had been defiled by contact with a dead body—"the hyssop, the cedar-wood, and scarlet," thus not only identifying leprosy with Death, but making restoration from it an image of life from the dead—a visible sign of what is thus translated into gospel language, "He has quickened you who were dead in trespasses and in sins."

And to complete this terrible picture of the figurative and symbolic meaning of leprosy, the Leper was solemnly forbidden to enter the camp or city of God. This living impersonation of vileness and death was not allowed to stand in the temple courts, or mingle in the solemn festivals of Israel—nor was there any exemption; Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Uzziah, with his kingly crown, had both to bow calmly to the stern statute. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." He thus solemnly declared, by banning the ceremonially unclean from His holy camp and His holy City, that "evil cannot dwell with Him—that fools cannot stand in His presence"—that He cannot "look upon sin but with abhorrence;" not only that, by exclusion from the earthly Jerusalem courts, He would dimly shadow forth the dreadful truth, that into the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem nothing shall be admitted that "is impure, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful."

Solemn, indeed, was that journey which the Hebrew of old undertook, when, on the first appearance of the suspicious taint-spot (the possible precursor of a life of misery and shame), he hurried to God's appointed priest to submit to the testing scrutiny! If, after careful examination, the worst fears were realized—how agonizing the moment when, in exchange for his usual clothing, the torn attire of death was fastened upon him, his head shaved, his lip covered, and the mournful lament put into his mouth, with which he was, in all time to come, to warn every human footstep away, "Unclean! unclean!"

Even if there had been the dim possibility of some subsequent cure, the bitterness of that hour would have been mitigated; but, over and above all the other terrible features in the malady, was its inveteratecy. The door of hope (so far as human remedies were concerned) was closed on the

hapless victim; he was left to weep tears of disconsolate despair! Unless by some special intervention of Divine power, he was a Leper to the day of his death. The grave alone would close and terminate his sufferings. The disease was incurable—ineradicable!

Have any, who read these pages, the leprosy of unforgiven and uncanceled guilt still cleaving to their souls? Mark this terrible picture of Sin—this Parable of death! You are living a life of death, "dead while you live." Mourners are going about the streets lamenting their dead. "Weep not for them, but weep for yourselves." Let the dead bury their dead! Their funeral hour, the burial rites, are soon over. But if you continue in your present state, what is Life to you, but a long funeral procession? You are bearing within you a dead soul, confined in a dying body! Your throbbing heart, like a muffled drum, beating "funeral marches to the grave!"

Think of this, you who are content to live on in your natural condition, unwashed, unjustified, unsanctified. LIFE—the only thing worth calling life—the life of God in the soul—extinct! "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death." Saddest of all, you stand, like the Leper, self-excluded and self-exiled from fellowship with God—an isolated being, excluded from sympathy and association with all that is holy and happy in the universe. It is bad enough when a man is avoided by his fellows—when, like another Cain, a brand is set upon his brow, and he has to flee society, to shrink in cowering shame from its glance. But what is that, compared to the fearful position of being exiled and outcast from God and angels—from heaven and holiness—from peace and love—to be unbefriended by that Great Being, whose smile is happiness, whose glance of unutterable wrath is worse than death!

Oh, when I wish a picture of the terribleness of sin—when I seek in old Palestine—that land of type and parable—for some dreadful symbol or memento of God's abhorrence of guilt—I may see it in the fig-tree on the road to Bethphage, scarred and blighted, with its coiled leaves and blasted stem; I may see it in the terrible desolation reigning on the Dead Sea shores (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah); I may hear it in the roll of its briny waves, as they fret and murmur on the cheerless beach, telling the endless story of submerged cities and of retributive vengeance.

But, more terrible and impressive still, when I stand on one of the byways of Galilee, and listen to a parable spoken by that wretched outcast, with his squalid tatters and uncovered head, shut out from the cheerful light of other homes, doomed to listen to no music but the sad wail of tortured bodies and broken spirits like his own—standing afar off from the camp of God, friends and relatives shrinking back at his approach, the trappings and memorials of death, indicating that the King of Terrors has already set his foot upon him, and claimed him as his prey! Terrible emblem surely, of that chasm of separation which yawns, unbridged, between God and the sinner! Infinite Purity hiding His face from infinite guilt!—disowning the very being He made once after His own image, because he has disowned Him—leaving him to the tyranny of his own sins, consigning him, because he has consigned himself, to the terrors of the first and second death in one!

And add to all, that this sin of yours is incurable by human hand or human skill, as the leprosy of old laughed to scorn the power and skill and art of man. God alone, by a special act of mercy, could arrest the malady! When Naaman came to the king of Israel to demand a cure, the reply of the monarch indicated who alone had power to grant his request, "Am I God, to kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?" It is the same with sin—it is incurable by earthly agency. An ocean of tears cannot cleanse it; human virtues and merits and penances cannot eradicate its deep, dark blot. Man or angel, beast of the earth, creeping thing or flying fowl, "the cattle on a thousand hills, and ten thousand rivers of oil"—all would be of no avail to purchase freedom from the polluting taint. No hand but One can be stretched forth to save; no voice but One can bid the terrible scourge away! "Lord, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."

Ah, if the leprosy-spot of sin be washed from our souls, the sentence of death recorded within us be obliterated, the new life, the Life of God, begun in our hearts, this shall be our befitting confession—"YOU have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." "The living, even the living, he shall praise YOU, as I do this day!"

Before we leave this memory of Tiberias, let us ponder, for our own spiritual profit and encouragement, two features here specially noticeable in the conduct of the poor outcast who cast himself at his Lord's feet.

I. Mark his PRAYER—"Lord!" Prayer arrests the ear of God. The lisplings of this castaway are heard by the Helper of all the helpless. Though wearied and exhausted with uttering a lengthy sermon, and though eager multitudes are thronging around Him, one voice, and that of the most wretched of Galileans, stops the footsteps of Jesus, draws a tear to His eye, and words of mercy from His lips!

Reader, learn the Power of Prayer. Christ's hand is never shortened, His ear is never heavy. He is no longer, indeed, personally near, as He was at Gennesaret; we cannot, as the Leper did, gaze on His countenance and bathe His feet with our tears; but faith can make the Mount of Beatitudes and the mount of Heaven equally near. Science is in these our days completing her vastest prodigy, by bringing the Old and the New World within whispering distance, defying three thousand miles of ocean to arrest the secret in its transit. But mightier far is the agency spoken of here. Prayer, swift as the electric current or volleyed lightning, enters the ear of the God of Sabaoth. The message sent to Heaven is heard while we are yet speaking, and comes back loaded with blessings of peace and love and mercy.

Love prayer—love to frequent the Mount of Beatitudes, the Mount of Blessings. Make the most, too, of the opportunities for prayer while you have the means. If the Leper had allowed Jesus to now pass by, unapproached and unsolicited, he might never again have found Him traveling that way. If the cry of prayer had not now been uttered, he might have been doomed to return to his wretched home, to languish out the dregs of existence in hopeless despair. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

The time of Sickness is such a pathway where Jesus may be met; the hour of Bereavement is such a meeting-place with Jesus; the House of prayer is one of the pathways the Savior loves to frequent. Sabbath after Sabbath Jesus comes down from his Mount of Beatitudes, scattering blessings as He passes. Remember each Sabbath may be His last—His concluding

journey—the last time you can cast yourself at His feet and implore His mercy. He loved the mount of Prayer Himself. He often wandered up that very ravine, to alone make the "mountain" His oratory. Be it so with you; delight often to follow His steps, ascending the hill of the Lord, saying, "I will get to the mountain of myrrh, and the hill of frankincense!"

II. Mark the Leper's FAITH, "If You will, You can!" He believed (and it is all the sinner needs to feel in casting at his Savior's feet), Jesus' ability to effect Cure—"You Can!" He was convinced that the omnipotent Prophet of Galilee had only to utter the word, and the pangs of a dreary and dismal life would cease forever!

"Human power," he seems to say, "and human skill are of no help to me; I have tried every variety of human cure, I have applied every balsam; I have sought, like Naaman, the waters of Israel, I have plunged again and again in Jordan's healing streams, but all in vain; still 'the whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint.' Jesus of Nazareth! I come to You, believing that Your word is mightier than all the waters of Syria or Israel. There is a Physician before me who is better than the balm of Gilead. Oh, You who can bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives, give me 'beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning!' Lord, save me! else I perish!"

It is enough—"Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, saying, I will, be clean, and immediately his leprosy departed from him."

One point remains still to be noticed. Jesus enjoined him to "go immediately and show himself to the priest, offering the gift that Moses commanded." What meant this closing injunction?

We find, on reference to the Jewish law, that after the restored leper had satisfied the priest of an effectual cure having been wrought, this minister of God was appointed to take two birds. The one was to be killed, and its blood poured into an earthen vessel filled with running water; the other, tied with a scarlet thread and bunch of hyssop to a stick of cedar, was to be dipped into the earthen pitcher containing the mingled blood and water. With this the leper was sprinkled seven times, and then the living bird was set free to join its mates—a significant emblem or symbol that

the leper was now at liberty to resume that interaction with his fellows, which, on account of his disease, had been long suspended.

Who can fail, in all this, to see a far deeper and more touching significance? That bleeding bird, slain by the officiating priest, was a striking type and emblem of a nobler Sacrifice—blood of a nobler Victim, shed to wash out a moral taint, of which the leprosy (terrible as it was) was but a feeble shadow. Who can fail to have suggested (in the mingled contents of that earthen vessel) the recollection of the spear of old which pierced the side of the Innocent One, and from which flowed out a running stream of "blood and water?"

But what of the other bird, bound with its mysterious hyssop-bunch, and tied with red scarlet thread, and which was immersed in the crimson flood? We cannot mistake it. Here, surely, is the type of the SINNER wearing the bonds and fastenings of the everlasting covenant, plunged in the Fountain of blood—that fountain "opened for sin and for uncleanness." Lo! he is free. That bird of old, fluttering and struggling in terror, flew away from the scene of death! With joyous wing it soared with its fellows up in the blue heavens, or perched with them on its native branches in the nearest thicket!

Beautiful emblem of the Sinner! "The Son has made him free, and he is free indeed." The blood and water have effected "the double cure:" the one justifies, the other sanctifies—the one delivers him from the guilt, the other from the pollution of sin. And now behold that once terrified spirit, with wings soiled and plumage ruffled, soaring upwards and onwards on the pinions of faith, and hope, and gospel freedom, singing up to heaven's gate its untiring song, 'Unto Him who loved me and washed me from my sins in His own blood, to Him be glory and praise forever and ever!"

Yes; "to Him that washed me." There was the special tune in that wondrous type: the bird—the live bird—dipped in the blood of his fellow! It was not a bird dipped in the blood of lamb or goat, but in the blood of one of its own mates—one that had been nurtured, it may be, in the nest, or that had perched and sung with it on the same bough!

Precious truth—Jesus our Fellow-Man! The blood in which our souls are

washed is the blood not of incarnate Archangel or incarnate Seraph, but blood that flowed from a human side and human veins—from the Brother and the Friend of the race, the MAN Christ Jesus.

The fellows of the Leper of old, his very friends and acquaintances, fled from him. Not so our Fellow-Man, our Brother on the Throne. He "commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners (lepers) He died for us." Are we ushered into this glorious liberty with which Christ makes His people free? Sprinkled with the twofold emblem of blood and water, are we spreading our wings, the wings of faith and prayer, heavenwards, singing the new song, "We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God?" Beware of defiling yourselves with the leprous taint of Sin. It is contaminating—infectious. Its tendency is to spread; it will eat into the vital principle. If permitted, it will destroy the life of God in the soul.

Keep near the atoning Fountain; be ever traveling to your "Fellow's blood." The scarlet thread, the mark and badge of covenant mercy, has been put upon you; "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made you free."

If there be one Reader of these pages who feels that, by reason of sin (it may be some recent plague-spot), he is a spiritual Leper—some deep, dark blot defiling the conscience, the sense of pardon obscured, the Divine face hidden—standing thereby excluded from the camp of God; go immediately to the running stream—the perennial Fountain with its crimson tide—adopt as your own, the prayer of a sin-stricken penitent, who had the leper and his cure in view when he uttered it—"Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; yes, wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."



## THE SOLDIER AND HIS SLAVE

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, 'my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.'" Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

"The Sun of Righteousness" had arisen on "Galilee of the Gentiles," the region and shadow of death, with "healing in His wings." From the summit of the Mount of Beatitudes, "to the poor" the Gospel had been preached. On the plain and its base, or by the shores of the Lake, a Leper had been cleansed. And now, no sooner had the Divine Philanthropist entered "His own city," (Capernaum) than a new suitor is at His feet. A Roman officer, whose servant was stretched on a bed of pain and death, comes to receive fresh proof of the Divine benediction, so recently uttered—"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Let us look, first, to THE SUPPLIANT'S PREVIOUS HISTORY.

He was "a Centurion," or captain in the army of Herod, stationed with a hundred men under his command in the barracks at Capernaum. We know nothing as to how long he had been resident in this town of Galilee. While there, however, he had become a Gentile proselyte to Judaism. In his communion with the Jewish mind, he had been led to a knowledge of the true God. The bewildering Polytheism, the ancestral Religion of his own land, into which he had been initiated in youth, with its "lords many and gods many"—the heartless vices and growing profligacy of Roman manners—contrasted unfavorably with the sublime simplicity of the worship of Israel's one Jehovah, and the lofty morality inculcated by the Mosaic law. Had religion been with him merely a stepping-stone in professional advancement—life a struggle for pay and place—to stand well at the government Palace of Caesarea and Tiberias, he had only to become the flatterer of Herod, to swear by the gods of Olympus and the Capitol, and plunge into the vices of these libertine courts.

But in that vast Roman empire, God was preparing many minds for a kingdom whose glory and vastness the Caesar had never dreamed of. One

of these "hidden ones" was this Capernaum soldier. He looked beyond the glitter and pageantry of earthly pomp and power to more enduring realities, and sought to have the yawning chasm of his heart's deep necessities filled with the great, the good, and the true. The simple yet sublime revelations of the Hebrew theology had thrown a flood of light on his path, and resolved many perplexities and doubts, whose solution he had vainly sought in his own mythological systems. An alien by birthright, he became by faith a child of Abraham; a stranger and foreigner, he had become a fellow-citizen with the household of God; and, better still, he lived under the influential power of that religion which he had espoused as his creed.

We are called upon here to observe, very notably in his case, how true Piety ennobles and elevates the character. Moralities—native virtues and amiabilities, indeed, may exist independent of religion, but these are purified and sanctified by grace. Religion dignifies the whole man. A landscape beautiful in itself, is glorified by sunlight. Natural virtues may, in themselves, be lovely and of good report; but when the soul in its actions and motives is pervaded and renovated by grace, it is like that same landscape bathed in sunshine, sparkling with a glory and beauty never possessed before. Thus did the fear of God operate in the case of this centurion. It made him a better Man, a better Friend, a better Master, and perhaps a better Soldier too.

Let us look to two of these attributes as illustrated in the narrative we are now considering.

(1.) He was A GOOD NEIGHBOR. "He loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue;" or, literally, "He has built the synagogue for us." Rooted out, was the hatred and scorn with which pagan nations regarded the nation of Israel. But this man had been taught, for its own and "the Fathers' sakes," to love it; and he gave the most substantial proof of the reality of this affection, for in the center of Capernaum, or close by the shores of the lake, rose conspicuous the one Synagogue of the town—a strange and untypical memorial for a Gentile Roman to raise at his own expense.

See here how religion makes the soul unselfish! Many a man, if he is personally faring well, is indifferent how his neighbor or the world fares.

Perhaps unloved and uncared for himself, he thinks there is the less claim upon him, to love or care for others. He is in the midst of those who have no great claims upon him. He is too glad for the excuse or apology for steering clear of what would touch his means, or invade his time, or burden him with new cares and responsibilities. It is the old plea, "Am I my brother's keeper?" "No! I will live for myself—I will clutch my gold the faster, and die amid hoards of plenty. I am a Gentile—the blood of old Romulus is in my veins—the memory of a proud line of heroes is my heirloom. What do I care for these dogs, the Jews, these bigot Hebrews? I shall do Caesar's work, and pocket Caesar's pay. I shall build my villa on this lake, and have my yacht on its waters. I shall put to shame Herod's attendants in the luxuries of my table, and the splendors of my retinue. What concern have I with these barbarians of Galilee? I am sent to curb their turbulent spirit. I will render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. What have I to do with rendering to their God the things that are God's?"

So speak many now; but this great and good Centurion did neither think nor act this way. He had riches, and he would use these riches, not for self or sin, but for the glory of that great Being he had been led to revere. After consecrating his own soul as a living temple of faith, and love, and grateful obedience, he had raised up a sanctuary where his poorer fellow citizens might serve the God of their fathers, and where they might read and hear that law which had made him wiser and better than all his heathen teachers. The Roman soldier was sent to repress and subjugate by the sword; but the sword was sheathed, and he conquered by the weapon of kindness. He loved the nation he had been taught from his infancy to hate, and the God he served was now about to make good in his experience the old promise, "Those who bless Israel, I will bless."

Himself and his servant being both heathens by birth, he felt as if he dared not personally approach the great Jewish Teacher. But he asks and willingly obtains the intervention of the elders of the city. He had proved to them a kind neighbor and generous benefactor. They are glad now for an opportunity to reciprocate his offices of regard. Though his presence in their town as an officer of the Roman army was a badge of their political servitude and degradation, yet the law of gratitude and love triumphs over all party jealousies and national animosities. They joyfully

undertake the task of mediators, and hurry with his errand to the Savior's feet. The words of Jesus that morning on the Mount of Beatitudes had scarcely died away, when they received, in the case of the Centurion, a touching fulfillment—"Love your enemies, do good to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High."

(2.) He was A KIND MASTER. The Synagogue-building might have been a piece of Roman ostentation—the monument which a vain man had erected in a foreign land to perpetuate his name, and secure for himself a brief remembrance. It might have been even worse: it might have been erected by the old Roman on the principle of later Romanists—as the price of a monster "indulgence," a sop with which to quiet conscience and hush suspicion, in the midst of vice, extortion, and profligacy. But far different was it in his case. The external deeds of generosity and munificence had their counterpart in goodness of heart and a holy life.

We follow him within the sacred threshold of his own homestead. It is all that we could have expected—in happy conformity with his public character. The love whose field was the Jewish nation, had its center and focus in the domestic hearth. It is, indeed, a beautiful and touching picture which is here presented to us: an Officer seated by the bedside of his suffering servant, who was racked with torturing pain, "grievously tormented"—"ready to die."

Death at all times is a solemn thing. Who better able to brave it than was the iron soldier of old Rome, familiar with it as he was, under its most fearful forms? But it is one thing to face it in the hour of battle—boldly to die a hero's death—and another to watch the slow and stealthy footstep of the grim Destroyer, as he creeps into our loved circles, and threatens to drag endeared residents down to the abode of everlasting silence. That ghastly enemy confronts him now face to face, and threatens to sweep away "one dear to him" (or, as the word means, "highly valued"). Though that valued one was but a slave, occupying a different relation to his Roman master from what the British servant does to a British master, we may well come and sit at the feet of this "Good Centurion," and learn lessons of kindness and affection to our inferiors and dependents.

Is there not a solemn reproof and reprimand to many a master and mistress, in the tear that stood in that Centurian's eye, and the heaving emotions that struggled for utterance in his bosom, as he sat, night by night, at the couch of his slave, and sought by word and deed to alleviate his sufferings? Pure and undefiled religion before God, led him to stoop to these offices of lowly love. That blessed Redeemer, at whose feet he was about to cast himself, illustrated, at a subsequent period of His ministry, by a significant act, this duty of condescension and kindness—He washed His disciples' feet. He told them to "go and do likewise;" and His whole gospel breathes the precept, "Condescend to men of low estate."

Let Christian masters come to this house in Capernaum, and study the living picture there presented for imitation. The Roman officer felt that a solemn tie which neither God nor nature, nor the memories of years, would allow him to treat lightly, bound him to that dying slave. He might, as thousands of old did, and as many do still, profit by the toil of their dependents during the best period of their lives, and then, in sinking health or failing strength, turn them adrift on a cold and cheerless world, stripping them of comforts at the very time these are most needed. We fear that in our own day such cases are to be found; that not a few are verily guilty in this respect concerning their lowly brother or sister. If, amid the pitiless storms and biting cold of winter, we left our own home comforts, and visited many black and smoldering firesides in our vicinities, is it uncharitable to ask, Would no master or mistress stand rebuked at the bar of conscience and of God, by the disregarded prayer trembling on quivering lips—"Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone"? Past fidelity is not thus to be harshly recompensed.

But it was not so with the Centurion of Capernaum and his trusty dependent. He cherishes the remembrance of years on years of faithful, unremitting service; and now he will change places for a time with the helpless sufferer; he will be himself as one that serves, bending over that anguished pillow in offices of affection and solicitude.

Happy would it be for social life did Religion, more than it does, thus sanctify and hallow the bond uniting servant and master!—the Servant

working under the lofty Christian motive, "I serve the Lord Christ;" the Master, knowing and remembering that he has a "Master also in heaven"—the spirit at least remaining of Boaz' salutation to his servants as they reaped his fields at Bethlehem: He meeting them with the benediction, "The Lord bless you!" and they responding, "The Lord bless you!"

Such, then, is a glimpse into the character—the public and private life—of the man who now sent the urgent message to the Savior in behalf of his servant, and who follows up the mission of the elders of the city by leaving the sickbed he was tending, and prostrating himself at the Lord's feet. We wait with anxiety to learn the particulars of this interview.

Let us look, first, to the Centurion's address to the Savior. Two things are very observable in his conduct and words.

I. Observe his HUMILITY—"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof." What words for a proud Roman to address to a poor Jew! The elders had just a little before, reached Jesus with the centurion's message, enforcing it with the plea, that he was worthy for whom He should do this. But different is the humble Officer's own estimate: he felt that he was a "sinner of the Gentiles"—an alien from the commonwealth of Israel—having no heritage in the covenant promises and the temporal blessings therein included.

But he felt more than this. The deep things of God's law had been revealed to his inquiring spirit. He was convinced of the deficiency and defilement of his best obedience and holiest deeds, and with no disguised, or false, or counterfeit humility, he bends in lowliest abasement before "THE Holy One." A higher wall of separation than the old conventional one between Jew and Gentile, separated between him and Infinite purity. He had, doubtless, become familiar with the person and character of the Savior from His teachings and miracles in and around Capernaum. It may be, in the sumptuous synagogue which his own generosity had reared, he had himself been spectator of the cure of the Demoniac. He must, doubtless, have heard of the miraculous catch of fish. He must have witnessed the results, at least, of that wondrous Sabbath evening, when disease, which in the morning had flapped its gloomy wings over many a

household, at sunset fled by His mighty mandate away. It is more than likely, in his rank and position, that he knew the nobleman whose son in the same city had recently experienced the might of Christ's omnipotent word. Would not the same Power that raised a son, raise a Roman bond-slave? Was he not approaching One who knew no distinction between Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free?

It is, indeed, a lovely impersonation of Humility, to see this offspring of proud Rome—a captain in her armies—one of those accustomed to wear contempt on his lip whenever the name of "Jew" was mentioned—laying aside the pride of name and rank and nation; forgetting that he had stood among the martial legions in Rome, or sat a guest at Herod's table; accustomed ever to command, seldom to obey; rushing now, in the extremity of his unselfish sorrow, to the feet of the homeless Savior—the carpenter's Son—the Companion of fishermen!

But while "God resists the proud," He "gives grace to the humble." "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." That half-heathen worshiper and suppliant has his brow at this hour wreathed with laurel, which survives in imperishable glory; while the garlands of Roman triumphs and victors have faded into decay, and left no trace behind. He has a monument in the hearts of all loving Masters, and faithful Servants, and humble-hearted Christians. For "wherever the gospel is preached in all the world," there shall this, that this Roman officer has done, be told as a memorial of him.

II. The second feature notable (most notable) in the Centurion's conduct, is his FAITH. Whenever there is Humility, there is the companion grace of Faith; as a tree sends its branches upwards in proportion as it strikes its roots downwards; so in proportion as a man is deep in humility, is he "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

The remarkable feature in this grace of the Centurion, and which drew such a tribute regarding it from the lips of Omniscience, was that for the effecting of his servant's cure, he solicited from Jesus, nothing but a word. Unlike the nobleman who journeyed to Cana, and begged Jesus to "come down" to Capernaum and heal his son (imagining that the personal presence of the Healer by the sick-bed was indispensable), this

Centurion requested no more than the mere utterance of the will of Omnipotence. He who of old said, amid brooding chaos, "Let there be light," had now but to give forth the mandate, Let there be Life, and returning health would mantle the cheeks, and the palsied hands be clasped in grateful thanksgiving.

Observe, too, as an interesting feature in the Centurion's Faith, it took its color and character from his Soldier-life—"FOR," he adds, "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me." "I am myself a subordinate—I am used to obeying the Tribune to my superior officer; and the soldiers of my company, in a similar way, give prompt obedience to my orders. I say to this man go, and he goes; to another come, and he comes; and to my servant do this, and he does it."

The application of the appeal is evident: "If I, in this my worldly calling, have only in the name of Caesar to speak and it is done—I believe, Lord, it is much more so with You. Sickness and Disease are Your appointed messengers; they are Servants executing Your dictates; they come and go at Your command; this palsy now chaining my servant down to his bed—bid it flee away: trouble not Yourself to come and touch—but even here, in this open street, utter the healing word, and I know the result—my servant shall be healed."

We may well cease to wonder at Christ calling this great faith. Faith deals with the distant, the unseen, the palpable, the intangible. It has been well defined, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Men are ever craving for the evidence of sense and sight; the word of Thomas is one natural to these earthly hearts of ours, "Except I SEE. . . I shall not believe." But "Blessed," said the Lord, "are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." We, in this age of the Church, are in the position of that sick Servant at Capernaum. To the eye of sense we are separated from the Savior. We see Him not—we can touch Him not—the hand cannot slip amid the crowd to catch His garment hem—we cannot hear His loved footsteps as of old on our thresholds; but Faith penetrates the invisible; the messenger, Prayer, meets Him in the streets of the New Jerusalem; and Faith and Prayer together, the twin delegates from His Church below, He has never yet sent empty away.



Reader, go in the spirit of that Faith to Him; believe in what He has done and what He is still willing to do. Go, and like the Centurion, beseech Him "immediately." Make the most of fleeting opportunities. Beware of abused responsibilities. Do not wait and linger until you effect some preliminary preparation. "Just as you are," with no posture but that of humility, and no prayer but the prayer of faith, cast yourself at His feet, saying, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" And the greater the measure of your faith, the larger and more munificent will be the recompense. Jesus tells the Centurion-suppliant that the answer given will be commensurate with the degree of his faith—"As you have believed, SO be it done to you."

Having considered the feelings manifested by the Roman Centurion in addressing Jesus in behalf of his sick servant, turn we now to the Savior's comment on the conduct of this noble-minded Centurion, and to those practical lessons with which the subject is replete.

He announces, in connection with this remarkable display of faith, The bringing in of the Gentile nations, "Truly I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say to you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

This Roman soldier was the first-sheaf of a mighty harvest yet to be reaped from heathen lands—the first-fruits of that vast quarter of the globe where Christianity was after-ages to set up its banners and gather its noblest trophies. In the case of the miraculous cure on the Leper, Jesus, it will be remembered, "touched" him. That leper was a Jew—a Hebrew by birth; the "touching" him, may be seen as emblematic of the Savior's coming into personal contact with those of His own nation—"He came to His own," though "His own received Him not." In the case of the present miracle, however, there was no immediate or personal contact with the subject of it. The Savior spoke the distant word and the Roman slave was cured. May not this have been designed as emblematic of those far off Gentiles and Gentile nations, millions on millions, who were never permitted, like Israel, to gaze on the Incarnate God, but who were, in after-ages, to experience the power and potency of His miraculous word and will?

"Many shall come and shall sit down with Abraham!" This is surely a startling utterance to these Galileans; only surpassed by this Jewish Prophet and Teacher turning round and commending openly to the crowd, the faith of a Gentile as surpassing that even of the "peculiar people." He prefaces it with the word that marks something strange and unaccustomed, "truly I say to you." Strange, indeed, to Jewish ears it was! That leper, miserable spectacle though he was, was descended from Abraham. He had the accents of the Hebrew tongue hanging on his lips—he might be able to point, as most Jews were, in the absence of any other heritage, to the sepulcher where lay the ashes of his fathers: but here was a ROMAN—the synonym of Enmity, Oppression, Profligacy—for, along with their conquering standards they had imported to the shores of that quiet Lake the crimes and vices of the capital.

Could it be that such wild olive-branches were to be grafted into the native olive branch? that these Gentile wanderers are to be gathered by the Good Shepherd into one fold? these peoples so diverse, and for so long considered so antagonistic, to be fused into one mass, and that out of this mass there is to arise the Church of the future? Yes! and this Roman officer and his slave are selected as the first of these "children of God scattered abroad" who are to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the new kingdom—the children of Abraham's faith, partakers in Abraham's promise, and finally to be sharers in Abraham's glorious reward.

There are many important reflections suggested by this memorable incident—we can only refer to two of these.

First, we are again taught the often repeated Scripture lesson, that in every profession and occupation of life, a man may serve God. How often are people apt to plead their professions and worldly engagements as an apology for ungodliness! "I might have been a Christian," say many, "but for this adverse position in which I am placed in business. I might have been following a mother's teachings, and reaping the blessings of a mother's prayers; but, cast where I am, it is vain to think of a holy walk. I am, by a sad necessity, denied the happiness of a religious life."

How different it was with this Roman Centurion! Not only, soldier as he was, did he fear God; but, it is very observable, he fed and nurtured his faith from his military habits and experience. The old discipline and training of a Camp-life read to him a high spiritual lesson in approaching Christ. "For I am a man set under authority."

Ah, it is beautiful when a man thus makes his trade or profession, whatever it be, suggestive of spiritual incentives and motives of action! David, in the most imperishable of poems, made his Shepherd-life beautifully to shadow forth his covenant relation to God, beholding in "the green pastures" and "still waters" to which he led his flock, a peaceful image of spiritual safety and repose. Listen to the apostle Paul, "the tentmaker," toiling with his own hands at the goats' hair canvass that he "might be chargeable to no man"—as he suspends his manual labor to write an epistle to the Church at Corinth, he borrows from his rustic occupation encouragement for their hearts and his own, with regard to more enduring "tents"—"For we know that when this house of our earthly tent is taken down, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Or, at a later period, "I am an ambassador in bonds," said he, as he wrote with the heavy iron fettering his hand; but the chain suggests the glorious contrast, "the word of God is not bound." And thus, every profession may become suggestive of such and similar spiritual truths.

Is it the Husbandman? He can read in the golden Harvest undying type and pledge of spiritual blessings as the result of faith and earnest diligence in the heavenly husbandry, that "in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Is it the Sailor? Every wave that wafts him nearer the harbor may remind him of the vaster Voyage on which he is embarked, and warn him of the treacherous storms, and tell of the glorious security of the heavenly Port.

Is it the Physician? He is reminded, amid complicated troubles which perplex his experience and baffle his skill, of a Physician who, in a more inveterate trouble, can heal "all diseases."

Is it the Merchant? He is reminded by the very vicissitudes of trade—the

ebbings and flowings in the tide of prosperity—of the need of securing an interest in a better possession, and more enduring riches than earth can give.

Is it the Soldier? He hears mightier bugle-notes sounding to arms, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed!" He is reminded of a more gigantic battle-plain than the world's conflicting hosts ever occupied—and the need there is of taking to himself "the whole armor of God; and fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life."

It is striking to note that the first Gentile convert welcomed to the new spiritual kingdom—the first Gentile whose prayer was heard and whose slave was healed—was a European Officer—the first of a noble army who have, in after-ages, joined the ranks of the faithful.

It is interesting, moreover, to know that he was not the only officer in the service of Caesar, who, at this era of the world, and in Palestine, was brought to fear God. We have another of similar rank—the centurion spoken of at the dreadful terminating scene of Gospel story, who, gazing up on the meek countenance of the Crucified, exclaimed, "Truly this is the Son of God!" We read in a subsequent period of "Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band," quartered with his men at the seat of government at Caesarea, that he was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always."

We know how the apostle Paul, in his final imprisonment in Rome, melted the iron hearts of Nero's Imperial Guard. The very soldiers between whom the chained prisoner slept were touched, by his sublime patience, his fervid prayers, his unflinching courage, his glorious hopes.

Thanks be to God, the army has never been without its number of "the good soldiers of Jesus Christ," from the time of this Roman centurion on the Lake of Galilee, down to the hour when Hedley Vicars was consigned to his grave in the Crimean Sea, and Henry Lawrence to his Indian grave. Brave hearts, unflinching in the hour of duty and death, have loved to cast their swords and shields at the foot of the Cross, and to glory, far

above earthly triumphs, in that of the Roman, "This is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith."

We have thought of that Roman Centurion in connection with his Faith and Kindness and Humility on earth. We may think of him at this moment—the battle of life long ago ended—the sword long ago slumbering in its scabbard—the watch-fires of the nightly encampment quenched forever—the trumpet of battle hung mute in the heavenly halls—seated as a fellow-guest with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and the noble army of prophets and patriarchs, apostles and martyrs, in the kingdom of glory—clothed in white robes, with the palms of a better and nobler VICTORY in their hands!

We may learn, as a second lesson, that Great Faith is fostered in the midst of difficulties. It would only be to rehearse what we have already said, to show that this pre-eminent Faith of the Centurion was so reared and nurtured.

The fact of being a Roman by birth; a Pagan in religion; a Soldier by profession—formed a threefold impediment in the path of his spiritual life. But he manfully counted the cost, and, not only was victory obtained, but when he laid the spoils at his Lord's feet, that Savior declared that Israel had need to blush for their faith, when placed side by side with that of the Gentile stranger.

It is of the very nature of Faith to grow in the midst of trials and obstacles! The greatest spiritual heroes of the past—those whose faith culminated highest—are those who "subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire." Plunge them into the deep, like the fabled hydra they seem to rise with renovated energy.

Noah's faith, how wondrous! battling against the taunts and ridicule of a scoffing world, and standing alone to buffet the storm for 120 years.

Abraham's faith was strongest in his most trying hour, when the son of his prayers—the child of promise—was doomed to perish by his own hand.

The faith of the eleven Disciples was never more remarkable than when returning orphaned and bereaved from the Mount of Ascension—Him whom they most loved, vanished from their sight—left to battle an alien world alone! Yet, we read, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy!"

Paul's faith never was stronger or more glorious than when the aged man was fettered in his dungeon, with almost certain death impending.

"Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

And every martyr at the stake, and every missionary in his gigantic task, has to bear the same testimony, that it was when the tempest was highest, and the battle loudest, they were "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

The Oak is rooted firmest and fastest, that has been nurtured, not amid quiet climates and in the sheltering valley, but high on the mountainside where it has had to wrestle with the storm. That is not vigorous training for the rower, when resting on his oar, his boat is borne down the descending stream. But his is the hardened sinew and brawny arm whose bark has to face the fiercest current, and struggle with contending wind and tide.

The great man and master-mind was once the boy at school, who bravely encountered difficulty and disadvantage; who wept hot tears over the baffling task, and dried them not until he conquered impediments, gaining mental and moral courage every step in his ascending way. So it is in the higher spiritual struggle. Bunyan's Christian, who scrambled and ran up the "Hill Difficulty," was found asleep on the Enchanted ground."

Do not be downcast, then, if difficulties and trials surround you in your heavenly life. They may be purposely placed there by God, to train and discipline you for higher developments of faith. If He calls you to "toiling in rowing," it may be to make you the hardier seaman—to lead you to lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees, and, above all, to drive you to a holier trust in Him who has the vessel and its destinies in His hand, and who, amid gathering clouds and darkened horizon, and crested billows, is ever uttering the mild rebuke to our misgivings—"Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

## THREE PORTRAITS

"Pilgrim! burdened with your sin,  
Come the way to Zion's gate;  
There, till mercy shut you in,  
Knock, and weep, and watch, and wait.  
Knock—He knows the sinner's cry;  
Weep—He loves the mourner's tears;  
Watch—for saving grace is nigh;  
Wait—till heavenly light appears.  
Hark! it is the Bridegroom's voice.  
Welcome, pilgrim! to your rest;  
Now within the gate rejoice,  
Safe, and sealed, and bought, and blest."

"Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them." Luke 7:36-38

In our last scene of busy life on the Shores of Gennesaret, we visited in thought the house of a Gentile officer in Capernaum, and were there taught the hallowed relation which ought ever to subsist between master and servant, rich and poor.

We have now a change of incident within the walls of the same city; where Hebrew synagogues and Hebrew dwellings mingled with the villas and mansions of Roman courtiers, and the palaces of Herodian princes.

In one of these Jewish houses the scene of our present narrative is laid. It is a Parable in real life. New phases of humanity here meet us, with which Jesus dealt; and in dealing with which, He has left behind important lessons for our guidance and instruction.

Of the many graphic scenes, indeed, in Sacred story, we know not one more striking than that which is at present to engage our attention. It is a Picture amid Gospel Pictures. One ceases to wonder that the great Painters of the middle ages clung to it as a favorite subject for delineation. We have in the group itself—its lights and shadows—the individuality of its unique and contrasted characters—all that contributes to make a striking and powerful composition. Proceeding rapidly, as we are doing, through this portion of the gospel Picture-gallery, we dare not pass it by in silence. Other minor figures crowd the background, but there are Three which stand out from the inspired canvass in significant prominence—three impersonations of vastly diverse character.

In the foreground of all, and arresting first our attention, is the impersonation of lowly Penitence and Humility. Close by, in bold contrast and antagonism, is the type of haughty supercilious Pride and Religious Formalism. And, thirdly, to complete the triad, and in still greater contrast, there is the Godlike Impersonation and essence of ineffable Tenderness, Compassion, Love.

The Weeping sinner, the Self-righteous Pharisee, the Great and Gracious Redeemer. Let us for a little, with God's blessing, dwell on each of the three in their order.

(I.) The first figure which meets our eye in the picture is that of THE LOWLY PENITENT (The Weeping sinner)

Her history is a brief one—soon told: "A woman in the city, who was a sinner." "THE sinner" was her infamous epithet! The guilt of a life of immorality and shame was branded on her brow. She was probably a Gentile—one of those unhappy outcasts from virtue and peace that had been imported to the Jewish lake by the loathsome corruption of Roman leaders.



All at once, however, her life has become changed. How she may have been prepared to undergo so vast a revolution in her history, we cannot tell. For years, it may be, her soul may have been struggling in vain to get free. Her heart may have been torn and tortured with the memories of a blighted past, and a miserable and abandoned present; and yet she might know no faithful ear, perhaps, to which she might reveal the reality of her wretchedness. The sunny recollections of joyous and innocent childhood, and a happy home, may have mingled sadly with the thought of the agonized and broken hearts there left, from which she had torn herself forever. A future of terrible and untold desolation rose before her. No Gadarene demoniac, more truly than she, went about "seeking rest and finding none."

But Rest she has found. Her base betrayers have crushed that bleeding heart under their feet—they mock her tears and scorn her self-reproaches. But One voice she has heard which has spoken peace to her troubled soul!

Where she first saw Jesus, we cannot tell. Where she first listened to those gracious balm-words which stanchd her bleeding wounds, we know not. Could she have been in the crowd that day by the Lakeside, when the Lord of nature and grace spoke so tenderly from the fisher's boat? Could she have lingered, on that more recent occasion, in the skirts of the multitude as, from the Mount of Beatitudes, wondrous words of power, and wrath, and mercy, fell on her ears? Might she not have heard the stern utterance there pronounced in connection with such sins as hers, "The whole body shall be cast into hell?" Might not she also have listened there to the blessing in reserve for the "poor in spirit," the "persecuted," the "mourner?" Might she not have heard that Great Restorer who had healed lepers and sick, rich and poor, noble and despised, say without reserve or condition—"Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened?"

Or, is it not more probable still, that she may have listened in Capernaum to that briefest but loveliest of all the Savior's utterances spoken shortly before, and which has for eighteen hundred years calmed the tempests in many storm-swept bosoms, "Come to Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest? Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me:

for I am meek and lowly of heart: and you shall find rest for your souls? For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light?" "Are not these words, these golden words," she might say, "just for ME? They are all I require—all I have been seeking for! I am a 'WEARY one;' none but God in Heaven knows how weary! This heart of mine for years has been torn and broken. The burden of crimson sin has been weighing me down. Did I not hear Him say, 'Come to Me, I will give you rest? you shall find rest to your souls?'"

Might there not thus have been one echo at least to these soul-soothing words in that crowd? One ear listening which drank them in? One bosom sighing for that to which it had been ever before a stranger—a yoke which was easy, and a burden which was light?

But whatever were the occasion—wherever the scene, and the place, and the manner of her awaking from her sleep of death—she had been arrested, convicted, humbled, comforted; her conscience had been struck, her life of profligacy was loathed and abandoned forever. Now, all her thoughts are about coming into a personal encounter with that Great Being who had brought her up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set her feet upon a Rock, and established her goings!

Who can picture all the reality of that season of deep conviction—the tears she wept in secret over her life of infamy?—and if she now cherishes the humble hope that that terrible past is wondrously forgiven, how full is she still of trembling apprehensions! The scene in the text discloses to us the turning-point in her history. It is the struggle between life and death. In the anguish of her newly-awakened and deeply-stricken heart, she has long been making the patriarch's prayer her own—"Oh! that I knew where I might find HIM, that I might come even to His seat!"

Her cherished wish is now to be gratified. Such an opportunity for seeing the Savior does now occur. She had heard that He was guest that afternoon in a rich Pharisee's house. The doors of the dining-hall (according to Eastern custom) were open. Could she not creep unbidden behind where He was, and weep at His feet the tale of her sorrows? Yet many, and diverse too, are the struggles before she dare venture there. Two impediments, especially, must have powerfully deterred her.

There was, first, that which many a penitent transgressor still feels—the fear of others. The dread of cruel censure, contempt, and scorn. She seems to have had the curse of an unenviable notoriety resting upon her. May she not be spurned away? May not that drooping heart, opening to the gladsome sunlight, be trodden under foot by merciless man?

Then add to this the torturing thought—how can she face the infinitely PURE ONE? She seems to say, "Can I, dare I, venture into the presence of Incarnate holiness? Can He endure my defiling touch? Will He condescend to receive me; to cast on me one look of pity—to utter one word of compassion? May I not only aggravate the tortures of this heart by listening to merited upbraidings, by hearing that 'Rest' there is for the 'weary,' for every weary head, but mine, and such as mine!"

But what will a soul in earnest not do? What barriers can restrain it? Frown who may, she resolves to repair to that "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" and to tell her story by those tears which had been "her food, day and night," since she first listened to her Savior's words.

She enters the house. Silently she steals behind the couch where the Lord reclined. If the other guests have been observing her—if the whisper and comment of indignation is passing round from lip to lip—it matters not to her. She hears it not, and cares not though she hears. JESUS IS THERE! She thinks of no one in the assembly but the Refuge of the weary, the Help of the helpless, the Friend of the friendless. Her eye rests on Him alone. She has found "Him whom her soul loves." "He is all her salvation, and all her desire."

See her now, in her lowly lurking-place. Not a word is spoken. Her burning tear-drops (what Augustine calls "the blood of her heart") are left to speak for her. They fall on her Savior's unsandalled feet. On these feet she imprints her kisses, and dries them with the disheveled hair of her head. An act, it is worthy of observation, which was performed only by the lowliest female slaves in Rome to their masters. In this poor sinner's case, therefore, it was significant. Branded with ridicule by man, she fled to the God-Man. That trembling Penitent casting herself at her heavenly Master's feet, seems rejoicingly to say, "O Lord, truly I am Your slave, I am Your slave; You have loosened my bonds."

And as if this were not all, a box of fragrant perfume, which she had procured, probably to lavish on her own person in the days of her shame, she now breaks, and pours on the feet she had moistened with weeping. As we behold the loosened tresses (what Paul speaks of as "the glory of woman"), now spurning all adornment, and the fragments of the alabaster-box scattered around, this weeper of Holy Writ seems to have anticipated the same apostle's injunction to other similar penitents, and to be acting upon it—"As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

Oh, beautiful type! Marvelous picture of broken-hearted sorrow! A poor outcast of wretchedness lying low at the cross! her footpath there saturated with dewy tears. A miserable wreck of humanity who had broken loose from her moorings, drifting helpless, hopeless, ruined, lost, to the bleak winds and howling sea of eternity, now fastened to the Great Living Rock. There was joy in Heaven that day, among the angels of God, over that one sinner that repented!

We now pass on to the second Portrait in this Gospel picture—the type of haughty supercilious Pride and Religious Formalism—the Self-righteous Pharisee. Can there be conceived a greater contrast and transition? From one low in the dust of self-abasement, confessing herself the chief of sinners, to one who is the type and portraiture of haughty self-righteous formalism! The host at this entertainment was a PHARISEE.

Little or nothing is said of him in the narrative, to throw any distinctive light on his history. We have no reason to believe that he was, by any means, a disreputable specimen of his class. Had he been so, our blessed Lord would have been more unqualified in His condemnation. He was no Skeptic. Neither profanity nor immorality probably could be laid to his charge. Multitudes of such were round about that Lake; profligate Gentiles, scoffing Romans, rationalistic Sadducees. But he was very different. He was, for all we know, a good Moral man. He was a Synagogue attender. The very fact of having Jesus as his guest intimated a respect for religious Teaching. He was punctilious in Synagogue services and Ceremonial rites. The only incidental glimpse, indeed, the narrative gives of his character, indicates this much—he marveled that if

Christ were truly a prophet, gifted with the discernment of spirits, He did not shrink from the unclean touch of the sinner at His feet. He spoke within himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is, that touches him." He speaks of the Magdalene not as the woman who "weeps," or "kisses," or "anoints," or "loves," but as the woman that "touches."

He was then, externally to a Jew, all that could be wished. He "thanked God that he was not as others." He tithed all he possessed with scrupulous nicety. He could boast, it may be, of the broadest phylactery in Capernaum. He was a pupil of Hillels, or, perhaps, made it matter of thankfulness that it was not Hillel, but Shammai, at whose feet he had sat, and whose spirit he had imbibed. He made it his boast that he never had any dealings with the Samaritans; that far off as Mount Zion was, he had ever shunned, as defiled, their temple on Gerizim; and in going up to the annual feasts, rather than run the risk of contamination, he would take the circuit of the Jordan route to avoid it. No, no; other Jews might show a latitudinarian spirit and have dealings with Samaritans; never would he! Others might believe in the sincerity of a Publican smiting on his breast and confessing himself a sinner, and God hearing that prayer; never could he! And as for condescending so much as to touch this Gentile Sinner, this wretched offscouring of Roman profligacy, it would defile and contaminate him—it would be a blot on his pedigree as the child of Abraham. He had conscientious objections to take the Jewish children's bread and cast it to Gentile dogs!

Jesus saw what was passing in the narrow, shriveled soul of this turbaned Religionist; indeed, but for a brief and sententious parable, which the merciful Philanthropist interposed, the Pharisee-host might have bid away the poor suppliant from his home and table. "O Simon!" says a learned commentator, "if you were not a poor sinner, Jesus would not have come to your table; had not this woman been a penitent sinner, she would not have sought Him in your house. Oh, that you knew what a Savior He is—how He knows you and her: her repentance—your pride!"

Is not this Jewish Pharisee a "Representative man"—a type still of his Class? In him we have one of those cold, heartless spirits who have an outward respect for conventional Religious Forms, but have no

corresponding realization of the exceeding breadth of God's law, and the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts. They see sin in others, but they are all as they should be; they can pull out the speck in their brother's eye, but they have no thought of a beam in their own. Champions for sect and party; orthodox, as they firmly believe in their own creed—all the world are wrong, or may be wrong, but they are sure they are right. Their Church is the pure one. They can trace their pedigree to apostles. Others have altered their rubrics; they never have. Others seem to live on enthusiasm; they can take Religion easy, and get into Heaven notwithstanding. There are poor at their doors, why not let the Law or Police look after them? If a miserable transgressor comes in their path, they hold it would not be respectable to have dealings with him; if a brother, overtaken in a fault, comes with the hot tears of grief pleading for forgiveness, they think it best to have nothing to say to him. It may do for a good Samaritan to pick up that wounded man; but, being Jews, they would contract defilement by touching him. They are sorry for him; but, shaking their heads and sighing, they leave him to the tender mercies of others, and "pass by on the other side!"

Let us beware of this cold, selfish, proud spirit. If there is anything more obnoxious to God, more withering to all that is noble in the human soul, it is this—the gilding of the outside of the cup and platter—the whitewash of the moral sepulcher—the Religion which begins and centers and terminates in self, and whose culminating glory is the complacent thought, "I am better than others. Stand back, I am holier than you!"

The Omniscient Savior sent the arrow of conviction to this Pharisee's conscience. Like another Nathan, self-judged and self-condemned, he brought home the verdict, "you are the man." He would do the same to every one of us, who in the shadings of this picture may see any dim reflection of himself. He who knew all the deep labyrinths of the human heart thus gives in another place His estimate of self-righteous, Pharisaic formalism, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven."

But let us pass on to the third and last principal figure in our Picture. In the center of the group (between the two we have described), is the Living

and All-glorious type of human Tenderness, Compassion and Love—an exalted SAVIOR-GOD, the Great and Gracious Redeemer.

We wait anxiously to mark how He receives the trembling Transgressor. Are her fears well founded? Are her sobs to die away in empty echoes within these walls? Ah! if it had been man—selfish, haughty, unfeeling man—away, spurned and broken-hearted, she would have been sent; but "My ways are not as your ways, nor My thoughts as your thoughts, says the Lord!"

At first He speaks not—He leaves her in silence to exhaust her tribute of sorrow and love. The streams of her heart being just opened, He lets the flood of tears rush on unchecked. But He does break His silence—He can bear and brook no longer the cruel frowns and taunting looks of those around. With what feelings must the broken-hearted one have listened to the tones of ever-living love, as thus He (yes, HE the Lord of glory) spoke in behalf of the vilest of sinners. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "All right, Teacher," Simon replied, "go ahead." Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

He turns then round in meek majesty to the Penitent, and applies the simple but expressive rebuke. "Do you see," he continued to Simon, "this woman? I entered, a weary Stranger, into your house. In accordance with usual custom—the rites of ancient hospitality—you or your servants should have afforded Me water for My feet: this was denied Me: but your neglect or inconsideration was more than supplied by her. From the welling fountains of her grief she has bathed My feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss—this usual courtesy to a Jewish Rabbi you have, from motives of calculating prudence, withheld from Me; but she, ever since she crept behind this table, has not ceased to kiss My feet. My head even with common olive oil you did not anoint; but this woman has anointed not My head, but My very feet, and that, too, with costliest spikenard. Therefore I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom

little is forgiven, the same loves little."

And now follows the gracious, longed-for word to the listening Penitent. Now comes her own assurance of comfort and Joy—"Your Sins Are Forgiven." "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Her Lord has received her, looked upon her, defended her, assured her, forgiven her, and now He sends her away with the coveted benediction. She came weary to Him, and He has not belied His own sure word, for she has received "rest" for her burdened soul.

Most lovely picture, we again say, this of the Savior of the world, with that despised, down-trodden, forlorn female at His feet! We have here a living type and embodiment of what Christianity has done to wipe the tears from degraded womanhood, and raise her from the dust to which paganism had doomed her. What is the boasted Chivalry of the middle ages, but the legitimate effect of the elevating spirit of Christianity? Wherever Christianity is not, there is woman found with the curse of bondage and degradation resting upon her—the drudge and menial slave, instead of the helpmeet and companion of man. The first words that our Lord uttered when He rose from the grave were addressed to a whole world in tears—"Woman! why are you weeping?" And He could point to that vacant sepulcher He had just left as the certain pledge, amid higher blessings, that before long these tears would be dried. O Jesus! Woman (personated by that poor Penitent in the text) may well come and lie adoring at Your feet. Your religion has been the breaker of her chains and the balm of her sorrows! We cease now to wonder that she was last at Your cross and first at Your tomb!

Let us pass on to several Practical Lessons which this narrative suggests. We may take three which have reference to Great Sinners.

I. We learn that for Great Sinners there is a Great Savior. Here is THE Lesson of all lessons. We have been studying this Picture figure by figure, but like the ancient Painters we must be jealous of detracting from what, after all, is the central glory of it. All the other parts must be subordinated to One—all other figures must only be brought in as helps to tell the story of His exceeding love.



Yes! Jesus is the Chief Speaker here; and, "chief of sinners," He speaks to you! He tells you in words and deeds of unutterable tenderness, that you never need despair of His mercy!—that for "scarlet sins" and "crimson sins" there is an ever opened fountain. "This man receives sinners," was the ironical taunt of proud and haughty Pharisees. "This man receives sinners," is the Savior's own motto—the glorious peculiarity of His great salvation! Hear it, you who are bowed down with an overwhelming sense of some heinous sins! there may be one such whose eye is falling on these pages; some troubled miserable being—shivering on the verge of despair—an awful past frowning upon you—specters of guilt haunting you by night, and the scorpion sting of conscience goading you by day; hiding your fears from those nearest and dearest to you; your heart alone knowing its own bitterness—the dreadful unrest of unforgiven and unmortified sin!

I am commissioned this day to lead you to this Picture in the great gallery of Truth—to point to that wicked Profligate with the blood of souls on her head, and to tell you she trembled and wept, and believed and rejoiced! Hers was the worst supposable case. No sheep in all the Galilee fold more outcast, worthless, self-condemned than she; and yet—see the kind Shepherd! He had followed after her (it may be for years on years), tracking her guilty steps as she rushed farther and farther from the fold, but He ceased not "until He found her;" and when He had found her, He laid her on His shoulders rejoicing, saying "Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which was lost!"

The Pharisees' axiom (and still the creed and verdict of many) is—"God can have no dealing with such vile sinners." He can—He does! Remember, it is not the Sinner He hates, but Sin. He loves the sinner. He gave His Son to die for the sinner, to show how He loves him! What other proof of this do we need when we have the Cross of Calvary? "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Him and live." If you are saying now, as you contemplate that picture of anguished Penitence and Redeeming Love, "Would it were the same with me!" I answer unhesitatingly, "It may be the same; with God's grace it shall be the same! Come! you whose sins are of the deepest dye—the memories of the past, memories of guilt and loathing and self-reproach—your hearts

restless and anguished as you stoop over the dark abyss; put this picture before your mental eye—keep it there—hang it upon your heart-walls—ponder it in your hours of conviction and your hours of despair—suspend it above your death-pillows, and write under it as its name and inscription—'Where sin abounded GRACE did much more abound!'"

Learn that toward Great Sinners there ought to be shown great tenderness. It is often not so with man. There is often a mean pleasure in spurning the transgressor from our presence—recalling the memory of sin—loading with cutting rebuke and upbraidings—when a kind word and kind act might reclaim from the paths of vice and soothe a shattered and a broken heart!

Yes, I fearlessly say it, there is often a harsh unwillingness to make allowance for circumstances—for the power of temptation and the seductions of a guilty world. How often is this the case with the wretched outcasts of whom the woman in the text is the type! Society frowns on them (that we dare not blame); but is there to be left no room for repentance and for tears? If another such weeping Magdalene, as in the text, is to implore a kind look, after years of anguished penitence, are these tears to be cruelly mocked, and is she to turn her head to the grave as the only rest and resting-place for her woe? Is a brother to turn an erring sister from his gates? Can a parent read this story of redeeming mercy, and let the iron enter deeper into the heart of his penitent and exiled child?

Yet how often is it so, and this all the while (oh! the cruel and base injustice of public morality)—while the man—the base seducer—who murdered the peace of innocent households, and brought a father and mothers' gray hairs in sorrow to the grave—while he is permitted to strut unbranded on the world's highway! The world's doors are open to him—the lounges of fashion he can frequent—he can clasp still the young hand of virtue, and whirl with it in the giddy dance; the victims of his sin meanwhile left to pine in brokenhearted misery—unwept for—unsolaced! One's heart burns with indignation at the hollow baseness of this too truthful picture of what is called "fashionable life." I ask you whether should that deserted woman, shivering in the ragged tatters of poverty in her wretched garret, or her destroyer, moving amid the lights and halls of

luxury—whether is that poor, broken-down, battered flower, with its soiled and withered leaves, or he who has crushed its young tendrils under foot, and left it to rot and consume in the delirium of despair—which of these two is most hated in the sight of God—which of these two ought to be most branded in the eye of man?

You may remember another similar Victim of guilt and shame hurried into the presence of Christ. Her cruel-hearted accusers were all loud in her condemnation; until Jesus, by a personal appeal to their consciences silenced their clamor, and pronounced the milder verdict—"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Let us come to this Parable-picture, and learn a lesson of tenderness to the erring. Learn it from Him who is our great Example. "He will not break the bruised reed—He will not quench the smoking flax." We have often truly reason to say "Let me not fall into the hands of man." But we have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. To every weeping, broken-hearted Penitent, lying low at His cross and casting the burden of sin there, He says, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more!"

III. Learn that from Great Sinners God expects great gratitude and love.

This Woman's sins, which were many, were "all forgiven," and, as a consequence, "she loved much." We must not, from all I have said, be tempted to infer that Christ in any degree winks at sin. The stupendous journey He undertook from the heights of glory to the depths of humiliation refutes at once the thought! If sin, great or small, were a trivial thing in the eye of God, do you think that He would have exacted a penalty of such untold anguish from the Son of His love? Equally abhorrent must be the thought of continuing in sin because such grace abounds. Would not this be to represent a holy God as the great Patron of iniquity? Would it not be to make the entire Incarnation work one gigantic effort to relax the penalties of the law, and let the transgressor violate it with impunity? We repel the thought, as Paul repelled it, with an indignant "God forbid!"

Let those who have been thus graciously forgiven, and "forgiven much"—who by the free grace and tender mercy of God have had such a full, free,

everlasting remission extended to them—let such show by holy living and holy acting—by contrition and humility, by kindness and gentleness and unselfishness, by love to God and love to man—the depth of their gratitude to Him who has dealt with them as the tenderest earthly father never dealt with his dearest and fondest child. This lowly Penitent in the text, as she crouches tremblingly and lovingly at the feet of Jesus, with the mingled remembrance of great guilt and great forgiveness, lavishes upon Him her best! She may have had nothing else to offer. The sole treasure of a wretched home, she plucked from her bosom and poured its fragrant contents on the feet of her pilgrim Redeemer!

She seems to speak to every crimson and scarlet Transgressor, who, heart-sick with sin—stricken down by the terrors of the law—the truths of the second death—the dreadful other world—has rushed to the only Ark of safety, the sheltering Covert for the weary and heavy laden! She seems to say, "Give Him—oh! give Him not the crumbs and dregs, not the sweepings and remnants of 'a worn and withered love,' but let your tribute offering be, to the full measure of your ability, commensurate with the magnitude of that forgiving mercy which has borne the mighty load away into a land of oblivion!"

Reader! Is the sweet music of that word now falling on your ear—"Sinner! your sins are forgiven?" Grace has called you!—Love has redeemed you! Blood has washed you! Peace is bequeathed to you! Heaven is before you! Be it yours to reply, "Lord! I am Yours! My love to You—that cold callous thing which we call love—is but as a drop in the ocean of Your tenderness. But here I am! Take me, use me for Your glory! This body, long a dark, desecrated shrine, full of loathsome pollution, sanctify it as a Temple to Your praise. This soul, that has been long groveling in the dust, wallowing in the mire of its earthliness and sin, bring back to it the lost image and lineaments of Your great Self! This life, this existence reclaimed by you from the blank chaos of death and despair—oh! let it be one never-ending thank-offering of gratitude to Him who has 'loved me with an everlasting love.'

And Death!—when that solemn moment draws near, which I once shuddered to name—'MY death!'—let it be the sweet triumph-hour of a spirit at peace with its God! As I confront the once dreaded water-floods,

let me hear the old word which on earth I loved so well. Let me hear it  
come floating across the dark billows, glorious with the new impress and  
meaning of Heaven; yet still spoken by Him who died, that to me and for  
me He might utter it, as He stands beckoning on the heavenly Shore,  
"Come to me, weary one, and I will give you rest!"

## **THE SOWER AND THE SEED (part 1)**

"Oft as Your word, O God, is cast,  
Like seed into the ground,  
Let the rich dews of heaven descend,  
And righteous fruits abound.  
Let not the ever-watchful foe  
This holy seed remove,  
But give it root in every heart  
To bring forth fruits of love.  
Let not the world's deceitful cares  
The living Word destroy,  
But let it yield a hundredfold  
Of peace and faith and joy."

"Behold, a farmer went out to sow his seed." Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8

We have until now been engaged mainly in witnessing our Lord's miracles of power, or in listening to His utterances of mercy and compassion on the shores of the Galilean Sea. We have, in the present chapter, a remarkable specimen of a favorite method, which often and again on subsequent occasions He adopted, in unfolding the mysteries of His kingdom—that is, teaching BY PARABLE.

The Treasure-house of Creation is taken to interpret the doctrines of Grace—Pictures hung in the outer world, and on which the eye of Jew and Gentile had gazed a thousand times, unconscious of their containing any spiritual suggestions, are transferred by Him to the walls of the Gospel Temple, and there pointed to by the Lord of both kingdoms as illustrators of Divine truths. The hills and fields, the corn and trees, the flowers and waters, are employed as exponents of heavenly verities. The ordinary lessons of His kingdom, indeed, and especially warnings to the obdurate and impenitent, are still to be conveyed in the old familiar vehicle of plain unvarnished language. He arrays the startling judgment truths of the preceding chapter, in Matthew, in no mystic drapery. He attempts no proverb when exposing the guilt of hypocrites and announcing their

doom. But when He would unfold the "secrets" of His kingdom, He puts "apples of gold in pictures of silver." He adopts a cycle of parabolic emblems to instruct His Church until the end of time.

The first Four were spoken from a fishing-boat to a vast throng assembled by the seaside. The remaining three were uttered immediately afterwards to the disciples in a private house in Capernaum. Beautiful is the unity, and most natural the sequence, of these seven vivid similitudes, in that parable-chapter—beginning with the incipient act of the Kingdom, the "Sower sowing the Seed," and ending with the emptying of the Draw-net—fetching the Redeemed multitudes, at the time of consummation, home to the heavenly shore.

It is the opening one of the series, the Parable of the Sower, which alone we shall consider, as a specimen of the others. "Is there anything on the spot to suggest the image thus conveyed?" "So," says a recent traveler, "I asked, as I rode along the track under the hillside by which the Plain of Gennesaret is approached. So I asked at the moment, seeing nothing but the steep sides of the hill alternately of rock and grass. And when I thought of the Parable of the Sower, I answered that here, at least, was nothing on which the Divine teaching could fasten; it must have been the distant corn-fields of Samaria or Esdraelon on which Christ's mind was dwelling. The thought had hardly occurred to me when a slight recess in the hillside, close upon the plain, disclosed at once in detail, and with a conjunction which I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the Great Parable. There was the undulating corn-field descending to the water's edge! There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or edge to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side of it, or upon it; itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet. There was the good rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain, and its neighborhood, from the bare hills elsewhere descending into the lake, and which, where there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the corn-fields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were the large bushes of thorn—that kind of which tradition says the Crown of Thorns was woven—springing up, like the fruit trees of the more inland parts, in the very

midst of the waving wheat."

As we have good reason to infer that, in the closing parable of the series, the figure of a draw-net was suggested by the sight of some Gennesaret fishermen discharging their cargo at the moment on the shore, so the Parable we are now to consider was probably suggested by what the eye of our blessed Redeemer beheld as He then gazed from the fishing boat along the fertile plain.

We can realize the spectacle—(at that season and spot so natural)—a Sower in early spring scattering his handfuls of grain in the upturned furrow. Birds from sea and mountain are screaming around his head, tracking his steps and picking up the stray grains which the harrow had missed, or which had been tossed on the hardened foot-road. It was a fertile text for His opening similitude—"behold, a farmer went out to sow his seed!"

Before proceeding to the parable itself, let us advert for a moment to the Sower and the Seed. We cannot for an instant hesitate in determining that the Sower was, in the first instance, Christ Himself, and the Seed those great gospel truths which He came from heaven to implant in the hearts of man. Moreover, from the diverse soils, spoken of in the Parable, on which the seed was cast, it is evident that one of the fundamental lessons intended to be therein set forth is—that God sows everywhere—that He wills that "all should come to the knowledge of the truth." As in that wondrous and beautiful Panorama of natural scenery stretching before the Savior's eye in the land of Gennesaret, there was every variety of soil, from the mountain sward and the thin rocky layer to the loam of the valley, so, in the world of human hearts and homes, was there every variety of condition and rank, disposition and character.

But the Sower was to "sow beside all waters"—He, the glorious Sun, was to shine alike on palace and cottage—on rich and poor—on learned and despised. The gospel was to be preached to every creature! No waste so barren as to forbid the Spiritual Husbandman's labor—no rocky heart so hard as to be passed despairingly and unheeded by. If the scattered seed, thus so extravagantly cast, bore no produce, the fault was not God's—the shortcoming rested not with the Sower but with the ungracious soil of the



human heart. He would have none to perish unwarned; His gospel is preached "as a witness to all nations;" mighty to save, in the case of those who meekly and lovingly receive it, but through the perversity of those who reject it, mighty also to condemn.

While Jesus, however, is the Great Sower, He has confided the scattering of the seed—the preaching of His holy word—to human instrumentality. "It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe."

This parable forms a picture of every congregation of Christ's people, gathered on His own Day, throughout the world. The living and breathing souls gathered within the walls of the sanctuary, constitute the four diverse soils in the human Landscape—the Hardened footpath; the Rocky covering; the Thorny ground; the Honest soil. The Servant of God—the spiritual Husbandman—in His name scatters the seed, all in ignorance where it falls, how it is received, what is rooted, what is lost, what is rejected, what is germinating! He cannot tell what is the result. But another there is who CAN—who does!

Yes! it is a solemn view to take of this great reality—that as we are assembled in the house of prayer, Christ Himself is gazing upon us! He, the Great Sower and Master Husbandman (no longer in His garb of humiliation on the shores of an earthly lake, but from His throne in glory), is gazing down on the multitudes of immortal beings gathered Sabbath after Sabbath in His house of prayer. We may think little of the solemnity of such meetings; we may view with indifference the scattering of this Sabbath seed. He does NOT! As the Sabbath-bell tolls, He hushes the songs of ministering seraphim; echoing his old Gennesaret text in their hearing—as if souls lost or souls saved were the result of every sanctuary convocation, "behold, a farmer goes out to sow!"

Let us, attend, then, in their order, to the FOUR different classes of hearers specified by our Blessed Lord in this parable. We shall speak of the first two in the present chapter, and reserve the consideration of the two latter for a subsequent one. Observe, in all the four, it is the same Sower, the same Seed, the same Season. The effects alone are different, arising from the diverse soil and condition of the human heart.

I. There are the WAYSIDE HEARERS. "As he was scattering the seed, some fell by the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up."

Some corn seeds are here represented as falling on the hard beaten path in the center of the field used by foot-passengers, or where the wagons of traffic or the carts of the husbandmen were in the habit of going. It was crushed under the feet of the one, or bruised under the wheels of the other.

Significant picture this, of the hearts of many hearers! The seed of the Word is scattered by the preacher's hand, but it falls on hearts hard as the beaten pavement. Around, furrows may be opening and inviting its entrance, but no crevice is there, in these adamant souls! The proclamation of the law in its terrors, or the gospel with its blessings, is like the winter winds or the summer sun, beating on the graves of the churchyard: the dead hear not the one and feel not the other. This first class of Hearers come, indeed, to the House of God. They hear the Word; they are church-goers if they are nothing else. They must have a religion of some kind. To be churchless, would compromise them in society; it would brand them in the world of fashionable profession. They must come, because others come. The trumpet-peal of custom is their Sabbath-bell. They could not enjoy their sins and follies but for this miserable blinder to the world, this wretched opiate to their consciences. But, as to all that is spoken or heard (if heard at all), they are utterly callous. They do not perceive the yawning chasm of their souls' deep necessities. They have no depressing consciousness of their lost condition, or of the magnitude of unseen eternal realities. As they sit in their pews, their thoughts are all in the world; they fold their arms and lapse into one of its dreamy reveries. Imagination becomes the hard-beaten footway of the text.

Up comes the wagon of Pleasure, filled with the withered, faded garlands of last week's follies and gaieties, its lusts and sins, and the anticipations of fresh ones!

This wagon past, another presents itself: it is that of Business, lumbering along with its noisy, deafening wheels. The past week's gains and losses,

its happy hits, its vexatious blunders, its clever tricks and successful advantage-takings; perhaps, conjoined with these, the daring ventures and wild schemes of a desperate future—on it comes, these dizzy wheels of traffic crushing underneath them all thoughts of the soul, of holiness, of death, of judgment, of eternity!

This wagon past, in some adjoining pew a fevered brain sees yet another toiling up the hardened road, heavier laden still than the others! It is Mammon with his smoking team, pushing on with his bags of gold, fearful of every rut in the way lest it may jolt his treasure, and leave some glittering coin rolling in the dust. And yet, though a wagon-load heaped high, all his thoughts are on filling it higher still, though this only increases the chances of jolting and loss! Yet on it comes; the precious seed is scattered, but the iron wheels grind it to powder, pulverizing into dust that which is of value infinitely greater than thousands of such gold and silver!

These wheels, observe, every time they pass, are making harder still the way, lessening the chance of the seed germinating, giving to the heart more of the consistency of the rock and granite than before. Oh! how many hearts thus become, in the very sanctuary, a beaten thoroughfare for worldly schemes, and pleasures, and pursuits, and interests, and devices. They have no serious views about God or religion. They do not feel that they stand in any relation to the seed sown. If the truth were spoken plainly out, it is an intrusion, all this preaching, and praying, and church-going. If it were not for 'appearance sake', they would be done with it.

Their Religion at best is a mere piece of formality, a grand illusion. If you speak to them of holiness, they will say, "It is all a pretense." If you speak to them of conversion, they will call it an enthusiast's or fanatic's dream. If you speak to them of death and hell, they will turn uneasy on their seats, and say, "We don't want to hear of such things just now." In one word, they have no personal interest or concern in all that is spoken—"As a deaf adder, they hear not;" and amid a thousand other things that may be flitting to and fro in the chambers of their memory, God is really and truly "not in all their thoughts."

At times, indeed, in spite of themselves, the barbed arrow will strike them; conscience will speak and their spirits tremble, and who knows but that despised seed, lying forgotten on the surface of their adamant heart, might in due time grapple with the ungenial soil and spring up.

But, another Foe is at hand. If the foot of business or the wheels of worldliness fail to mutilate and crush, there is a great "counter-worker" of the Sower, who in the parable is represented as casting his dark shadow over the moral landscape. "Then comes the Wicked One, and catches away that which was sown in his heart." Satan the arch-robber—Apollyon "the Destroyer," is keeping his watchful eye on the scattered seed. If the wagon passes it unscathed, he has other means at hand for preventing its growth.

As our Lord, in looking towards the sower in Gennesaret, probably saw a flock of motley birds circling around him, and darting down to secure every stray grain which lay exposed on the road; so Satan, the "Prince of the power of the air," lets loose on the soul, birds of prey that pick up every spiritual seed. Some grains may have fallen into the ruts of memory, others into the sacred crevices of conscience; but a horde of winged thoughts, evil desires, corrupt passions, idle trifles, come sweeping down suddenly, and leave the heart bared and forsaken!

The corn grains of impression may be lying on the heart of the hearer when the parting blessing is pronounced, and he rises from his seat to retire from the House of God. But crossing the threshold, the old familiar world is there again, with its blue, or hazy, or wintry sky, as the case may be. There has been enough of serious talk in church. In five minutes or less, he is back again to the old starting-point—the absorbing topics of the day. These seem now invested with all-engrossing reality. If some stray grain be still left, it is not allowed long to linger; any startling thought, any rousing or solemn impression is erased like the rippled sand-marks by the first rising tide.

Ah, how great are the devices—the "depths of Satan!" He has been studying that heart of man, with its beaten footways, for 6000 years! Every year he is profiting by past experience. How terrible to think that he makes the very House of God his whispering-gallery; that into its

sacred precincts—the very Holy of holies—or into the secret chamber of devotion—sweep his accursed legions to rob the soul of the Salvation so dearly purchased and so freely offered!

Do not be ignorant of his devices! He employs thoughts; wandering, flighty, winged fancies, as his Birds of prey—in themselves apparently harmless, but potent enough to pillage the heart of its best treasures. It matters not to him what the instrumentality is, if he only succeeds in abstracting the mind from grander realities—if the thoughts of Eternal realities be only kept in abeyance.

Beware of a wandering heart in the Sanctuary, leaving the seed to fall neglected and uncared for! If Israel of old left the manna ungathered when it fell, it melted away; it was shriveled in the sun's rays; the day's supply was forfeited, and nothing could compensate for the loss. Seek to remember, Sabbath after Sabbath, as you take your places in the courts of the Lord, that you cannot leave as you entered; that the seed then sown must have a bearing on your eternity; that the gospel then preached must be either the "savor of life unto life," or "of death unto death!" "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." "This, then, is he who received seed by the wayside."

II. We turn now to the second class spoken of in the parable: The STONY-GROUND HEARERS. "And some fell," says Luke, "upon rocky soil, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture." The parallel passage in Matthew is, "Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The plants sprang up quickly, but they soon wilted beneath the hot sun and died because the roots had no nourishment in the shallow soil."

By what is here called "stony places," we are not to understand fragments of loose rock or stone, into the crevices or interstices of which the seed fell; for if so, it might have found its way to the soil below, and in spite of the impediments and darkness that obstructed and dwarfed its growth, it might have struggled upwards to the air and sunlight, and gathered

strength by the very difficulties it had to encounter. By "stony places," our Lord intends rather one of those manifold rocks abutting into the plain of Gennesaret and fringing its rich corn-fields, on which there was a thin layer or deposit of soil, sufficient to conceal the naked stone, but not sufficient to afford nutriment to bring the seed to perfection. The present, however, is unlike the previous description of the Wayside-seed. There, the grain was either trampled under foot, or carried away by marauding birds. But here, it springs up; and moreover, it does so "quickly," "with joy." There is a marvelously rapid growth. While in the rich soil around, the germinating seed has not burst its clod, and no flush of green is visible, the grain on the rocky knoll is shooting upwards with premature vigor, and giving promise of speedy perfection.

But, the discerning eye of the Husbandman knows better! It is an unhealthy vitality; it cannot strike its fibers downwards into the adamant stone: "It has no depth of soil"—no root, no moisture. The underlying rock, by the heat which it retains, may warm the superincumbent soil, and thus act as a rapid stimulant to the seed. But, soonest green, it is soonest decayed; it is stalk-growth, nothing more. The, blazing sun sends down its fiery rays, the mushroom plant droops, and withers, and dies!

This is a truthful picture of a new, and, at first sight, a more promising set of Hearers. "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word and immediately with joy receives it: yet has he no root in himself, but endures for a while, for when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, by and by he is offended." "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places," says Luke, "is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."

They represent that class of hearers in our churches who are susceptible to strong and lively emotions. Not like the preceding class, who are careless and apathetic, they enjoy a preached Gospel. They are easily stirred under its urgent messages. As the ambassador of Christ scatters his seed, and discourses of man's responsibility—the certainty of judgment—the awfulness of the second death—their spirits thrill under the startling averments; resolutions of new obedience are formed—they

leave the church with a tear in their eye and the iron in their soul. But then, it is all surface work—superficial, shallow impression. It has sprung up under the stimulating heat of excitement, and expends itself in emotional feeling. The underlying proud rocky heart, apparently more influenced and impressed, is really harder than the beaten footpath representing the former class. The roots have taken no vital grasp—they are spreading—and straggling along the upper layer of profession—they have no hold on the inner deeps of the man's being—the heart remains unconverted as before.

They are the class spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel, "So they come pretending to be sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them. They express love with their mouths, but their hearts seek only after money. You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't do it!" In one word, theirs is a religion of smiles and sunbeam—a summer walk, all prosperous so long as no dreary cloud sweeps across their landscape. But when trial comes—when they are brought to know the great truth, "no cross, no crown"—that the Religious life is no sailing down the current, but a breasting of the waters—a denial of self—a struggle with corruption—a parting with loved sins; when brought face to face with some strong temptation, the grappling with some vile temper, the resistance of some viler lust—ah! whenever this Sun of trial and tribulation rises, the precocious promise turns out to be a mockery. Their soul shrivels into the old lifeless thing it always was. Their Religion is based on no solid principle: it is like the fretful treacherous ocean—the ruffle is only on the surface, underneath is the deep calm of death!

Of this class we have many Scripture examples. Take one. Demas had been a faithful disciple of Paul; he had loved his noble master; he had enjoyed his faithful preaching; he had accompanied him in his journeys, and taken a share in the proclamation of his gospel. But in later times, Persecution arrests the apostle in his labors. Old and infirm, he is cast into the prison in the Roman capital. If ever he needed the hand and voice of earthly friendship, it was now—to smooth his pillow of straw and speak peace to his downcast spirit! But Demas (faithful in prosperity)

turns traitor and coward in adversity. The sun of trial and fierce tribulation arises "for the word's sake."—The leaves of a lifetime fail. Scorched and withered and blighted, his lonely master has to utter through sorrowing tears, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world!"

Beware of this superficial Religion—this Religion of frames and feelings and strong impulses. Nothing that is superficial lasts. The superficial house will soon totter to its foundations: the superficial book will fret its little hour before its author and itself are consigned to oblivion: the superficial student may acquire a surface-talk on everything, and be full of youthful promise; but when launched into the world, he will soon find that nothing will stand but the deep, the solid, the real. So it is with the religious Life. No evanescent emotions dare come in place of real heart-change. Do not allow mere impressions to evaporate before they issue in saving conversion. The impressions made by a rousing sermon are no more real Religion, than the hearing of a salvo of artillery on a review-day might be called fighting.

That is real religion which can be carried with you into your families—your business—the coarse contacts and toiling drudgeries of life—that can stand unscathed in the whirlwind of temptation, trial only leading you nearer God—like the flower long imprisoned in the dark dungeon, but whose roots are watered by some hidden kindly spring, and which, when the iron doors are opened, turns its leaves joyously and lovingly to the sunlight.

This our age has in it, we fear, much affinity with the second class spoken of in the Parable. Surface-work—in all things, is its distinguishing characteristic. Frivolous gaieties are too often the layer on which its very religion grows. Souls—selfish souls covered over with the wreck and debris of worldliness—come and sit in our churches to get their share of the Sabbath-seed. Saturday evening has closed over scenes of giddy pleasures. Weary and jaded, they come to a new scene of mental excitement, to indulge in a new class of feverish emotions in the house of God. The reaction is not displeasing. Heart-sick, it may be, with the week's frivolities, wearied in body and mind—they sit with complacency to hear of their sins; they heave some sighs over their follies; they feel



that they have been mocked in their pursuit of pleasure, and as they listen to the sublime lessons—the hopes—the promises—the joys of the Gospel—a tear starts in their eye, and a pang visits their souls. The Seed of promise seems for the moment to have taken root and sprung. But soon Monday treads on the heels of Sabbath-hours and Sabbath-resolutions. From the ballroom to the church, from the church to the ballroom. The world's sun is up again in the horizon. The giddy soul rushes afresh, headlong into temptation. Amid the smiles and frowns of that withering world the sickly leaves pine and die!

Seek to avoid anything and everything that tends to foster this life of cold indurating selfishness—the life of Pleasure which is a life of death. This life of mere Sabbath religion and weekly godlessness is one of dreadful peril. It deceives the soul. It makes you believe there is a merit in coming to church, and in sowing the seed on the rock of weekly selfishness, though it withers before evening has gathered around you its shadows.

Better, you may say, a withered stalk than none at all. Better these few Sabbath sighs and tears and pious excitement than treading the seed under foot, and denying it all entrance into the memory or heart. Oh! has it come to this, that a few pitiful sighs and tears and emotions on Sunday, are to purchase absolution for a week's frivolity and sin—as if, by wearing this garment of Sabbath sackcloth, you could, with greater impunity, during the week, wear "the garment spotted by the flesh?" You are thereby only throwing a sop to an accusing conscience. You are ruining the Good Seed, which might have been cast with advantage on other and kindlier soil. You are resting satisfied with the husk and shell of Religion, despising its kernel. You are blinding your own eyes to the fact which the great Harvest-time of the world will force on you, that you are contenting yourself with "a name to live while you are spiritually dead."

It is a terrible thing thus to be sowing to the wind and reaping the whirlwind—to be forfeiting and abusing opportunities, and causing the very Ordinances of God to aggravate alike your guilt and condemnation. Even your very afflictions will be unsanctified. If the Seed had sunk into a good soil, when the sun of trial pours down its rays, its heat would nourish and foster it. But that seed, falling on "a rock-bed of selfishness"—on the thin layer of soil besprinkling a godless heart—look!

when affliction arises, the heat only scorches and burns, embittering the pangs of the evil day. Like fabled Icarus soaring aloft on his waxen wings—borne upwards for a time on the breezes of prosperity—when you come to face the fiery Sun—the wings melt, and you fall powerless to the earth.

Reader! while the hypocrite's hope shall perish, seek to be so rooted in the faith—grounded in the love of Christ, that when the great trial-hour shall come—when the branch shall be stripped of its verdure—"the beautiful rod" broken and, as in the vision of the Apocalypse, "all the green grass burnt up"—it may be yours exulting, in the precious seed that has fallen deep into your hearts, to say, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

## **THE SOWER AND THE SEED (part 2)**

"Sow in the morn your seed,  
At eve hold not your hand,  
To doubt and fear give no heed,  
Broadcast it o'er the land.  
You cannot toil in vain—  
Cold, heat, and moist, and dry,  
Shall foster and mature the grain  
For garners in the sky.  
And duly shall appear  
In beauty, verdure, strength,  
The tender blade, the stalk, the ear,  
And the full corn at length."

"Listen to what the parable of the sower means." Matt. 13:18; Mark 4; Luke 8.

In the preceding chapter, our attention was directed to two classes in the Parable of the Sower—the Wayside and Stony-ground hearers. We shall

proceed to consider the two remaining soils our Lord here describes—the Thorny and the Good ground.

The third class He speaks of are the THORNY-GROUND HEARERS. "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants." "The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

The Seed, you observe here, takes root—it penetrates more deeply than in either of the preceding cases. The soil was no longer the superficial layer on the top of the rock; if justice had been done to it, the result must have been an ample produce. But the good seed was "strangled" by rival occupants. Thorns were there—not thorns already grown and covering the surface, but old uneradicated roots, which, at the insertion of the seed, may have shown no vestige above ground, but which, before long, began to push upwards in their former strength. Being the stronger of the two, indigenous to the soil—old possessors—they soon proved more than a match for the tiny stalks of grain, strangling them with their prickly branches; (literally, "they went in between the wheat, and choked it.")

The evil was twofold: the thorns drew that nutriment from the soil which otherwise the germinating seed would have appropriated. There was room for one, but not for both. The sap that would have sent its vivifying juices up the stalk of corn, expended itself mainly on the stronger rival. The corn plant grew up, therefore, a dwarfed and sickly thing from the exhausted and impoverished soil.

But there was another evil entailed by these thorny occupants of the ground—they hid the sunlight. Their thick bristling boughs (thicker than the thorns in our country) interrupted and intercepted the two great supports of vegetable life—air and sunshine. Thus, though some of the corn stalks shot up, struggling into existence in spite of these impediments, what did it matter? The ear was hollow—the fruit worthless. The reaper's sickle passed them by untouched. They were but mockeries of his toil; they would only encumber his barn; or, if mixed with other grain, injure and detract from its quality.

Here is the third picture of the hearers of the word. The Seed of immortal truth finds deep lodgment in their memories and hearts. The great requirements of the soul—the great questions of eternity are, for a while at least, no superficial matters. They feel the momentous interests at stake. They sit in breathless and arrested solemnity under the proclamation of the gospel. They like faithful preaching. They are not as the former class, who would take offence at bold statements; who warn their ministers to lower their standard lest they leave their church; who try to cajole their spiritual teachers into that greatest snare—preaching smooth things.

They relish the full and gracious unfolding of the plan of Redemption. Christ crucified they are willing to take as the sole "power of God unto salvation." But soon a great and crying evil develops itself at the very root of their spiritual being. Unmortified habits and tastes and propensities, for a while muffled and concealed, begin to manifest their presence and power in the soil of the heart. Religion springs up—but, look! it is a dwarfed and mangled thing; for side by side with it there are old and vicious principles and practices. These, like the Thorns, are of spontaneous growth—natural to the heart; while the Word, like the corn-seed, is an exotic. The newborn principle has no chance with the old veteran owners of the soil; spiritual things have to wage an unequal conflict with those of the earth, earthy; and what is the result?—the life of godliness is eaten out and consumed—the soul "brings forth no fruit to perfection"—Satan's devices within the heart are more mischievous and more fatal than his troop of birds from outside—and "the last state of this man is worse than the first."

Our Blessed Lord leaves us in no doubt as to what is meant by these thorns. He tells us they are "the worries of this life, and the deceitfulness of wealth." These monster impediments have been rightly regarded as the two great, though diverse causes, of spiritual declension and decay—and both in equal antagonism to the soul's progress.

"The Cares of the world"—the poor man's birthright of poverty—the weekly and daily struggle with oppression and scarcity—living, as he often does, from hand to mouth—an unprovided morrow forecasting its dark shadows upon him, and blinding his soul to its nobler destinies—

with so many things to be anxious and troubled about in this world, that the one thing needful is kept in abeyance and thrust into a corner. His family—his house-rent—his trade—his merchandise—his daily toil—these are the bristling thorns that are overmastering better thoughts, and better times, and better resolutions. When he started on his journey—fresh from a mother's prayers—the precious seed seemed to have taken thorough root; but life, with its feverish anxieties and cankering cares, has eaten out the memory of a parent's sacred words and admonitions. The footpath to the place of prayer is choked with entangling weeds. It was once a well-beaten path, but the thorn and the nettle, in wild luxuriance, tell the too truthful story of a knee unbent—prayer neglected—God forgotten!

The other and opposite cause of strangling the seed is the "Deceitfulness of wealth." The Poor man's spiritual life is choked with needless cares—poverty staring him in the face with its real or imagined evils. The Rich man is endangered and imperiled by the Deceitfulness of wealth.

But mistake us not—there is no necessary deceitfulness in Riches themselves. It would be a harsh thing if God poured affluence into a man's lap, and all the while was pouring a curse! It is not the mere fact of a man being a millionaire—having bags of gold in his possession—that brings him under the category of a Thorny-ground Hearer. When Christ says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God," He means those who trust in riches—who make riches their idol—and clutch their gold as if it were the gate of heaven. The poor, lowly, miserable beggar, who has his hoarded pence sewed up in the rags he wears, or the rags he sleeps on, is destroying his soul as much with these "choking thorns" as the lordly Miser with his coveted thousands. The Wagon we have already spoken of, as crushing under its grinding wheels the seed scattered on the wayside, is as much a mammon-load whether a poor man sits hugging his bags of copper, or a wealthy king sits trembling amid his chests of gold.

"The Greek word for riches is not riches absolutely as possessed, but riches desired." Avarice is a quality of mind—a base principle of earth-born souls common to rich and poor—to the Dives and the Lazarus—in the extremes of society—to the man eating his crust of bread, and the man wearing his purple and fine linen. But however this love of gold may

develop itself, (whether in hurrying to be rich, or in the cursed ambition that, like a raging fever, has seized all men to pretend to be people of style and greatness beyond their rank—amassing only for personal aggrandizement and selfish extravagance)—when a man whose soul has been once fired with better things—who was once feelingly alive to his spiritual necessities, and once drank in greedily the truths of the gospel—when that man surrenders himself to the tyranny of these lusts, allowing them to twist their roots round the very nerves and sinews of his being, either for the wretched pleasure of living miserly, or living and dying a prodigal spendthrift—what more appropriate description could be given of the ruinous deceitfulness of these riches than this, that the good seed "fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked it?"

What a living protest have we in these "Thorny ground hearers"—this third class in the parable, against the great crying sin of our day—the rock on which vessels freighted with immortality are weekly wrecked and foundering! Men of promise and high aspirations—men even of religious training and religious profession—become seized with the accursed thirst for gold—bartering health, morals, principle, social ties, life itself, in this demon-scramble. The cold-blooded murders, and villain plunderings of the street and the highway, perpetrated by the dregs of society, are not one whit more heinous in the sight of God, than are the polished counterparts of social and individual baseness, where the betrayal of high trust, or the delirium of wild speculation, has embittered the widow's tears, defrauded the orphan of his bread, and left happy firesides stripped and desolate. Well did He who knew the human heart denounce "covetousness" as "idolatry."

Depend upon it, God will visit our land and our time with judgment, if this usurping Dagon is not hurled from its throne. It is this mammon-spirit which, in the case of all ancient nations, formed the first symptom of decadence and decrepitude—the first impelling wave which rose to a wild deluge of ruin. God keep us from the verge of this engulfing whirlpool, and tune our lips more to the music and spirit of the prayer of honest, contented, unostentatious frugality—"Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with food necessary for me!"

And as the Deceitfulness of wealth is common alike to poor and rich, so

would I add, that "the Worries of this life" must by no means be considered as spiritual hindrances peculiar to the poor. Alas! in every rank, in every station, these distracting, disquieting solitudes are a injurious enemy of the soul's welfare. It is no light thing thus to allow the heart to be unduly engrossed with these earthly cares. Christ Himself includes them in a catalogue of great sins. Were you never struck with these words? "Be careful," says He, "or your hearts will be weighed down with careless ease and drunkenness." And what follows? is it the mention of some other low and groveling lust? Hear what He says, "careless ease and drunkenness, and filled with the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware."

"The worries of this life" everyone must have. It would be an idle mockery to say, "Bury your cares! Cares and religion are incompatible. Let your family shift for themselves. Take no thought of tomorrow." This would be presumption; not faith. It would be fatalism, not trust. It would be the argument for the selfish isolation of the hermit's cell—the sinful ignoring of life's duties—the denial of the common debt due to the vast brotherhood of man. But be on your guard against excess of care, or unlawful care. It is the attribute of the worldly—the unregenerate—that they "mind earthly things." They are grovelers. Their souls "cleave to the dust," instead of soaring heavenwards. They are content with the prodigal's portion in the far country, when they might have been guests at their Father's ample table and joyous home.

You will carefully observe that the great evil of the Thorny ground Hearers was, that they were content to let the seed fall in an unprepared heart. By a blunder in spiritual husbandry, they had neglected to root out latent principles of evil, which afterwards rose with giant growth, and crushed and mangled every stalk of spiritual promise. The contending thorns and seed illustrate, by parabolic figure, a former saying of Christ, "No man can serve two masters;" "You cannot serve God and mammon." I repeat what I have already said—no soil has sufficient sap to mature both thorns and grain—the presence and growth of the one must inevitably alienate the vital juices and nutriment that would otherwise have contributed to the strength and growth of the other. It can bear wheat, or it can bear thorns, but it has not the productive power to bear

the two. So it is in the spiritual field. You cannot have your crop of sin and your fruits of righteousness. You cannot live both for time and eternity. By seeking to retain both worlds, you lose both.

See that every root of bitterness likely hereafter to spring up and trouble you be eradicated; all idle frivolities—all guilty pleasures—all occupations of doubtful propriety likely to dislodge God from the heart. By indulging in these, you are willfully stripping yourselves of gospel blessings. You are shackling yourselves so as to be unable to stoop to the joyous fountain gushing at your feet, and to partake of its living stream.

When you go to prayer, the key has gathered over it the rust of worldliness. It can no longer fit the lock. You kneel in your closets; but, the wheels of devotion, like those of Pharaoh's chariots, are taken off, or drag heavily. And then, what is the inevitable result? "A divided will, a half service, ever ends in the prevalence of evil over good." The half-hearted believer—the border Christian—the loiterer between the kingdoms of light and darkness—spoken of in this third class, cannot linger long where he is; darkness gets the better of light—conscience gets more and more drugged and stupified—the upspringing seed goes from weakness to weakness—the latent thorny corruptions from strength to strength!

Now, in all these three classes of soils in the parable we have hitherto considered, there is a seeming and apparent progress to something better—a nearer approach to the character of a true believer. But it is in semblance, not in reality. The guilt of the three may rather and more truthfully be taken in an inverse ratio from the order stated here—the deep-rooted corruption of the heart manifesting itself with greater intensity at each advancing step. The beaten road—then the rocky ground—then, in spite of great promise and great privilege, the choking thorns. "The climax is apparently from bad to better. The first understand not. The second understand and feel. The third understand, feel, and practice. But in real order it is from bad to worse. Less dreadful is the state of those who understand not the word, and lose it immediately, than that of those who feel it, receive it with joy, and in time of trial fall away. Less dreadful, again, this last, than that of those who understand, feel, and practice, but are fruitless and impure." (Alford)



We pass on now to the fourth and last class of Hearers.

"Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." We may take the explanation of this as given by Luke: "The seed on the good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

We are arrested here by the question, What is the good heart? Is there anything in the natural soil of the human spirit entitled to be called honest or good? Is there any natural aptitude in the soul of man for receiving the seed of the kingdom?

We answer, unhesitatingly, None, independent of the grace of God, and the vivifying, transforming, regenerating power of His Spirit. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." The preparation of the heart is from the Lord. "The soil is made receptive by a granted receptive power." It is His rain which softens the hardened path. It is His hammer which splinters the rock in pieces. It is His ploughshare which uproots the strangling thorns, and converts the wilderness into a well-watered garden.

Moreover, the term "good" we are to take in a comparative and qualified sense. Alas! even after the Spirit of God has been at work, and the heart has been renewed, how much of the old man still remains! How much of nature still mingles with better purposes! "What will you see in the Shulamite? The company of two armies." The two opposing antagonist forces of grace and corruption—the thorn still struggling to its old mastery, and the power of God alone keeping it down.

There are two special characteristics here given of this good heart—  
I. It is HONEST. The man is serious, when he seats himself in his pew and listens to the words of eternal life. It is no mere pleasant song he hears to beguile the passing hour. It is the great question of questions—the theme which overshadows his whole eternity, and, makes all things here—his business, his trade, his wealth his family—look little indeed,

poor trifles, in comparison with these peerless eternal realities!

Let us seek to be serious. Earnestness is the great secret of success in worldly things. A man with no great natural gifts—not above mediocrity in intellect—if his soul be set upon some object or attainment, evincing earnestness, a fixedness of purpose, unity of action, and concentration of thought—will secure the golden prize. From the boy mastering his task, to the hero taking a city, or the astronomer finding his planet, a dogged earnestness of purpose will eventually lead to triumphant results. So with spiritual things. "This ONE thing I do," is the great motto and maxim of the conquering Christian. Honestly yield yourselves up to this heavenly seed. "Keep it," as it is here said: do not allow the soiling contacts of the world to stifle its growth, but seek to "go on to perfection."

2. A second characteristic of the "good heart" here mentioned is, that "by persevering it produces a crop."

It is not sentimental emotion—lively frames, excitable feelings—but it is living action, abiding permanent principle. It is one thing to feel—another to act. A touching story in a newspaper-column—a historical incident a thousand years old—a spectacle of misery or poverty, seen in walking along the streets—any or all of these may make me feel; but it is another thing to relieve need, to prove the good Samaritan, to bind up the wounds of the sufferer, and fill the mouths of the perishing. Unless feeling be thus expanded and developed into action, it is a useless thing. A man can weep over a romance novel, who never gave a farthing to an orphan, or who would see his fellow drowning and refuse to help him. So in spiritual things, a man may feel the truths of God's Word—the story of Redeeming love may fill his eye—he may listen with a glowing heart to denunciations of selfishness, to pictures of the beauties of holiness, and the happiness of doing good—and yet it may all evaporate in mere sentiment, and he may go out of church the icicle he entered it, thawed for the moment into tears, but these congealed and frozen again, when he passes from the region of idealism into the realities of life.

Let it not be so with you. Let others "think" religion, or theorize on religion, or talk about religion, be it yours to live religion. It is not creeds, or party, or churchmanship that will save you. All the dogmatic theology

of Christendom and its schools, will not save you. A dry, orthodox creed, or confession of faith, could as little insure the salvation of a soul, as a rule in Algebra, or a problem in Mathematics. Bring forth fruit! Be holy—love God! Open the drooping leaves of your renewed natures to the gladsome sunlight. In one word—"Do those things which are pleasing in His sight."

This is the need—the crying demand of our age—a living Christianity—Epistles of Christ that may be "known and read of all men."

Presumptuous scoffers are there, who would dare to allege that the Bible is an antiquated book—that its age is past and gone—that it was well enough for the world or the Church in its infancy—but the refinements of the present era demand something higher and better. Vain dreamers! Christians, if you who value your Bibles and prize their priceless worth, know that something better, something nobler, cannot be given; remember too, there is one volume (not a substitute, but an all important supplement), which you can produce to silence the gainsayer—the volume of your Life—a volume read by worldly and scoffing eyes, that scorn to read the Word of God. They can despise God's blessed Revelation as an impotent and antiquated story, but they cannot resist the mighty eloquence of a pure, holy, Christ-like, heavenly walk!

Scorning the base compliances of the world; at war with its selfishness; diffusing a kindly glow of love, and charity, and peace, and amiability all around: Yes, here is Christianity! No pulpit figment—no barren theory—no worn-out dream of an age long gone by; but an active, living, influential principle; a life hid with Christ in God; the glorious, imperishable, indestructible seed, taking root in heaven-born natures, and bringing forth fruit "in some thirty, sixty, or a hundred times what was sown."

From the entire Parable let us gather a lesson to Ministers and People—to the Sowers and the Soil.

The SOWERS—How vast their responsibility! God's accredited Servants, going forth Sabbath after Sabbath, bearing the precious seed—seeking with all fidelity to keep back nothing of the Truth of God—to lay bare all heart deceptions—to denounce every spurious soil which mocks the good

seed and imperils eternity. If desirous to be true to our great mission, woe be to us if we rest satisfied with any man-made religion; any wretched compromise of hollow profession; anything short of aiming at the salvation of souls. One soul really saved, is worth ten thousand merely MORALIZED!

The ambassadors of Christ, indeed, may not scorn, but exult in the title of the upholders of Virtue—the stern and uncompromising denunciators of national and individual immorality. But at the same time, would we repudiate the idea that we are but Conservators of the public peace, commissioned to watch the floodgates of crime, to repress, whether in its more polished or debasing forms, hydra-headed vice, and to enforce the claims and extol the happiness of virtue. This would be a poor petty installment of the great debt we are commissioned by our Heavenly Master to discharge. No! Our work is the sowing of Gospel seed—the free proclamation of a free Salvation, through the Blood of Jesus; regeneration and sanctification through the Spirit of Jesus. All else will be inadequate to renew a man's nature and raise his soul from the ruins of the fall.

We might preach to the drunkard forever on his drunkenness, or to the thief on his pilfering, or to the covetous on the baseness and peril of fostering a mammon-spirit. We might possibly make them reformed people, but we would not make them saved men. Moreover, being a mere change of habit, not of principle, we could have no security for its permanency; it would be but the lopping down of the thorns, only to spring again, to shoot aloft their stems in wilder luxuriance and strength than ever. It is not single fruits we ask to be manifested, or single thorns we wish extirpated; for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He has new motives, new aims, new principles of action.

Seek for the promised aids of the Holy Spirit to effect a radical change in your hearts; that by what Chalmers happily called "the expulsive power of a new affection," "all old things may pass away, and all things become new." Thus will your minds, Sabbath after Sabbath, be prepared and made receptive for the good seed of the word. That word is "quick and powerful," and can convert into a fruitful soil for the visits of Jesus, what was once as a hardened footpath, trodden by Satan and swept by his

legion emissaries.

Yes! this is our comfort and consolation, that the word we preach is not the word of Man, but the word of God. It is altogether independent of man. However weak and unworthy the instrument, it is God's appointed ordinance. Often, when in conscious weakness and feebleness, we utter its wondrous truths—when at times, as every minister of the gospel must feel, we are pressed down by lack of faith and lack of zeal, our work dimmed and clouded by human sin and human frailty and infirmity; or, what is equally felt, often when inculcating solemn lessons which we have most urgent need ourselves to learn, demanding tears of contrition which we need ourselves first to weep—oh, what a comfort to fall back on the assurance that "the word of God is not bound!" That it is not of him who preaches or him who speaks, or of him who hears, but "of God who shows mercy."

Often it is a coward heart that sounds the trumpet in battle—stirring the courage and nerving the arm of thousands. The Sun in yonder heavens, that dispenses light to its circling planets, is said itself to be a cold and frigid mass. The Sower scattering the grains from his side may be enfeebled by age and disease, need and poverty—but yet the seed thus scattered by a decrepit hand takes root in the thankful and well-cultured soil, and produces food for hundreds.

So, thanks be to God, the Church of Christ is independent of the mere Instrument. The sound of salvation—the light of truth—the seed of the gospel—is independent of US! "The excellency and the power are altogether of God." There may be no Paul to plant, no Apollos to water, but He is able from stammering lips and feeble tongues to "give the increase."

And if there be a word to the Sower there is also a word to the SOIL. O that we would bear in mind that each successive sowing increases our responsibility! We are invested, so to speak, each Sabbath with a new responsibility. On account of each Sermon we hear, we have incurred new obligations—we have heard fresh warnings; and listened to fresh entreaties. Oh! in the great diary of Heaven, while the fact of our meeting is thus inserted, "Behold a sower went forth to sow"—the appended entry

in the book of God, regarding every heart, will either be "This day salvation," or, "This day condemnation, has come to this house!"

Break up your fallow ground! God does not in the text irremediably give up and surrender the three worthless soils. The very utterance of the parable seems to imply that the most hardened ground might yet become soft, and the most obdurate reclaimed!

But see, oh, see to it, that you are not self-deceived. The startling fact in this parable, that out of four diverse soils ONE only was sound and good, ought surely to lead us to deep heart-searchings, to scrutinize our motives and character, and ascertain what, on the Great Day of reckoning, would be our standing-place before God.

Do not go to the sanctuary merely to listen and not to practice—to hear what is preached, to criticize it, or laud it, or condemn it—to give the ear and the lip during the brief Sabbath hour to God; and the soul during the week, to the world. A few passing resolutions, and then to lapse again into sin—the victim of a deeper ruin than before. Ah! my brother, it may seem a small matter to you now, this scorning of offered mercy—this cold indifference to the perils and prospects of eternity. You may afford now to smile at these pleadings as idle tales; to let the seed lie rejected on the hardened footpath—the footpath once softened, it may be, by a father's prayers and watered by a mother's tears. But wait until you come to stand on the verge of the dreadful precipice—about, in an unexpected moment, to take the final leap into a neglected eternity—and say, at what value will you estimate your neglected Sabbaths THEN?

## **THE STORM ON THE LAKE**

"Night sinks on the wave,  
Hollow gusts are sighing,  
Sea birds to their cave

Through the gloom are flying,  
Oh! should storms come sweeping,  
You in heaven unsleeping,  
O'er Your children vigil keeping,  
Hear and save!

Stars look o'er the sea,  
Few and sad and shrouded;  
Faith our light must be  
When all else is clouded.  
You whose voice came thrilling,  
Wind and billow stilling,  
Speak once more our prayer falling—  
Power dwells with Thee!"

"Then He got into the boat and His disciples followed Him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

This is the first of the "Memories of GENNESARET" which have their scenery and illustration not on the shores, but on the Lake itself. Lessons from the lips of the Great Teacher are now read to us amid winds and waters.

We have already, indeed, found our Blessed Redeemer discoursing from the deck of a vessel to the listening multitudes, and, in the miraculous Catch, claiming as the Lord of Nature, dominion over the Fish of the sea. But He is now to manifest His dominion over the Sea itself. As He has already asserted Lordship over its tenants, He is about to claim sovereignty also over their unstable watery realm itself.

Who can estimate the priceless worth of that handful of voyagers, who, in the dusky evening twilight, push off from the Western Shore? That humble fishing-boat contains the Infant Church. It is freighted with the world's Salvation! These winds and waves are charged with sublime moral and spiritual lessons to the end of time. As we hear uttered the

mandate which chained the tempests of Galilee, and laid to sleep its waters, we can take up the words of the Psalmist and say, with a nobler than their primary meaning, "O Lord God Almighty, who like you? You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, You still them!"

Let us seek to gather from this interesting incident some of those lofty lessons it is fitted and designed to teach us. It speaks emphatically "concerning Christ and his Church," and let these two points successively engage our thoughts.

The Storm on the Lake speaks CONCERNING CHRIST.

(1.) His HUMANITY is here strikingly brought before us. That same afternoon Jesus had spoken the Parable of the Sower—a parable, as we have remarked, probably suggested by seeing, near to where He stood, a farmer, in early spring, casting his seed into the upturned furrow. Evening had now come. That sower had retired to his home. Already may he have been stretched on his bed of sleep, recruiting his weary frame after the toils of the day. So also had the Heavenly Sower! None more needing repose than He after a day of such unremitting labor!

But where is His home? where His bed? Out amid the chill damps of the evening, a boat is seen gliding along the lake, manned by a few fishermen. They speak with suppressed breath, for a weary, jaded passenger, wrapped for warmth in a coarse fisherman's coat, lies snatching what rest he can find in the back part of the vessel. Let no harsh voice break His rest. He has, during that long day, been scattering the seed of a nobler than any earthly harvest. How deep, how profound are His slumbers! The splash of the oars—the scream of the birds overhead—disturb Him not. Yet crude is His couch—hard His pillow. They took Him into the boat, (in the quaint but expressive words of Mark,) "Even as He was."—all unrefreshed and unprepared for a voyage. The evening meal probably untasted. The garments needed for crossing the Lake unprovided. His head, as the word in the original seems to imply, rests uneasily on the rough wooden rail at the stern of the boat.

It is a touching incident in the life of the great Apostle, when, "as Paul the Aged," he sent a message to Timothy to bring with him "the cloak he left



at Troas" to protect his shivering frame from the cold of a Roman dungeon. But what was this in striking poignancy, compared to the scene we have here? Paul's Master and Lord—the Being of all Beings—GOD Manifest in the flesh—that Adorable human form within which Deity dwelt—laid on the rough planks of a fishing-vessel—exhausted nature demanding refreshment and rest!

We have read of hunted and outlawed monarchs seeking refuge and repose in forest huts. Tales linger in our own land of royal adventurers sleeping soundly and gratefully in the chill mountain cave, or on the clay floor of Highland hovels. But what are these?—poor insignificant nothings in comparison with the scene before us. The Lord of Glory—Immanuel, God with us—out on the bleak sea—the dusk of approaching night for His curtains, the sky for His canopy—stretched like a helpless babe in the arms of sleep—lulled to rest by the music of oars and the ripple of waters!

The scene deepens in interest as the voyage proceeds. When they left the shore, the sun had apparently set peacefully over the Western mountains—the sky was unfretted with a cloud—the sea unruffled with waves. But suddenly one of those squalls or gusts so often experienced in inland lakes came sweeping down the opposite mountain gorge. The gathering clouds answer to the wail of the hurricane. The waves beneath lift their crested forms, and the rain rushes from the blackened heavens. So violent, indeed, does the tempest soon become, that, from the wetting spray dashing over the boat, and the torrents from above, she is fast filling with water—"The waves beat into the ship so that it was now full." It could, indeed, be no mimic storm, no ordinary danger, that would lead the fishermen-disciples, who knew the sea so well from youth, to cower in terror for their safety and abandon themselves to despair.

And what now of that majestic Sleeper? Weary Humanity still asserts its need of repose. The wind is sighing and sweeping around. The rain is pouring on that unprotected pillow. Yet still He slumbers! The wild howling war of the elements awakes Him not! And unless His disciples with rough hand had come and roused Him, these weary eyes would have slept through the storm. Even that last lurch of the vessel which had led the faithless mariners to cry, in an extremity of tremor and agitation,

"Master, Master!"—even this had not disturbed that Sleeping Man!

Oh, wondrous, beautiful testimony to the perfect Humanity of Jesus. I say perfect Humanity; for many there are, who, while they speak of Him as Man, think of Him at the same time as something far beyond their sympathies and feelings, their weaknesses and infirmities—a sort of half-Man, half-Angel, incapable of any identity of experience with them—His life a mysterious drama, which they may gaze upon with wonder, but which to them is invested with no personal interest. Look at this picture on the Lake of Tiberias. One only of all that little crew was prostrated with bodily exhaustion, and that one was Jesus!

It is the same Pilgrim Savior who, after traversing the dusty roads of Samaria, with its hot summer sun blazing overhead, flung Himself, weak and way-worn, as best He could, on a well by the wayside, and asked from a Samaritan woman a cup of cold water. It is the same lowly Sufferer who, exhausted with weariness and watchings—stripes and buffetings—fell powerless under the cross which cruelty compelled Him to bear; or who, as He was transfixed on it, in anguish exclaimed, "I thirst." It is the same Divine Sympathizer whose breaking heart gave vent to its pangs, in audible sobs, at the Graveyard of Bethany. The "Temple of His body" was mysterious indeed—a holy, sinless, unpolluted shrine. But though separate from sinners, it was not separated from human infirmities. Hunger, thirst, weakness, weariness, suffering, pain, had their lodgment there. The motto and superscription on its portico ever was, "Behold the Man!"

Most touchingly do we read this truth in the narrative before us. Ah! when I wish to feel certified of the glorious, upholding, gladdening assurance, that Jesus was indeed "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh;" that He knows my frame; that He remembers I am dust; that He had the blood of the human race in His veins, and the sinless infirmities of the human race in His nature; that He knows the very lassitude and languor of this frail body, which so often crushes and enfeebles its companion spirit—I go not to hear Angels chanting His advent in the lowly Manger, nor to the Magi hastening, under their guiding star, to present offerings at the feet of that Infant of Bethlehem. I go not even to the home of earthly friendship, to see Him ally Himself with human

hearts. I rather go out amid the bleak and howling winds of an earthly Lake. I see there the Savior who died for me, sunk in slumber on the deck of a vessel—glad for rest, as the humblest son of earthly toil—the prostration of an overwrought frame refusing to be roused by nature's loudest accents, and requiring the hands and voice of His own Disciples to unseal His weary eyelids!

Again—while a perfect Humanity, observe, further, it was a pure, spotless HUMANITY, which belonged to Jesus.

That peaceful Slumberer on lake Gennesaret is the type of Innocence. If Jonah out-slept his storm, it was because his conscience was lulled and deadened. He had defied his God; and his God for the moment had so left the Atheist Prophet, that the tempest's rage fell disregarded on his soul. But a Greater, a Holier than Jonah, is here! No moral storm ever swept over that pure, calm, sinless spirit. No unquiet, disturbing vision of guilt, now flits across the Sleeper's bosom.

On the other side of the lake where He was going, a demon-crowd of Devils haunted the gorges of Gadara. According to some writers (as having in their power the destructive agencies of nature by reason of the sin of man), they may have been riding now on the wings of this storm, doing their best to avert their own approaching adversary. Think of their bosoms tortured by the memory of a guilty past, maddened to despair by the prospect of a hopeless future; the sport of tempests, of which Gennesaret's surface was then a feeble type. These wicked were like that "troubled sea which cannot rest." But see the Spotless Lamb of God!—in the absence of all human comforts, yet with the calm treasure of a peaceful conscience, He sleeps tranquilly, as the cradled infant which a mother's gentle lullaby has sung to rest!

But (2.) The scene we are now considering also speaks concerning the Savior's DEITY.

It is remarkable, that in all the more memorable incidents of our Lord's life, whenever His lowliness and humiliation are signally manifested, there is generally, in conjunction with this, some majestic exhibition of His Godhead. His Humanity was proclaimed in the lowly stable of His

birth; but in that same hour Angels over Bethlehem sung of His glory. His Humiliation was touchingly proclaimed in receiving baptism (a sinner's rite) at a sinner's hand; but the Heavens were opened, and a sublime voice from "the Excellent Glory" attested His Divinity. Bethany's teardrops spoke of the tenderness of His Human heart. Bethany's word of omnipotence, which summoned the putrefying dead man from the tomb, proclaimed the majesty of His Godhead. Calvary's Cross shows us a dying man—the crown of thorns—the gash of the spear—the criminal's torture—the malefactor associates—all speak of the depths of Humiliation. But a blackened sun; riven rocks; the earth trembling to support its Creator's cross—were nature's glorious testimonies that He who hung in ignominy on that tree was "The Mighty God."

We have the same contrast of lowliness and greatness in this scene on the Lake of Galilee. "As the Son of Man," says a writer, "He slept; but as the Son of God in Man, He awakes and speaks. For Himself, exhausted; for others, Almighty." He opens His eyes on that scene of nature's wildest uproar, and sitting undisturbed in the midst of it, counsels and comforts. First, as a great Master reproving His disciples' fears, and then as the great God uttering His "Peace, be still." As the Lord alike over the atmosphere above, and the waters beneath, He addresses each separately. Looking upward, first to the storm raging on high, He rebukes the wind, saying 'Peace!' Then turning to the waves below, the angry surging of the sea, He adds, 'Be still.' A new element in nature thus casts a trophy at His feet, and owns Him her Lord!

We have already witnessed, on the shores of the Lake, His power over bodily diseases. We have seen the leper cleansed by His touch. The centurion's servant healed by a distant message. Now would He show that "dragons, and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind," are equally ready to "fulfill His word." "He spoke, and it was done!" There are no labored means required. The intervention of no rod, as in the case of Moses, to stretch over the deep. From the fishing-vessel, as His throne, He issued His behest. Every wave rocked itself to rest. The winds returned to their chambers. The lights on the shore were once more reflected in the waveless sea—"Immediately there was a great calm." Well might the disciples, as they beheld the power of that marvelous mandate,

exclaim, in the words of their Psalmist King, as they crouched adoring at their Master's feet, "The sea is His, and He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Oh, come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!"

While we exult in the Humanity, let us evermore exult in the Deity of Christ. Had Deity not inhabited the bosom of that sleeping Man, the disciples must have had a yawning sepulcher in these depths. We would have had to tell this day of nothing except ruined souls and a sinking world. It was His Deity which impressed an untold value on all His doings and dying. Take away the great keystone of Christianity—that Godhead dwelt in the bosom of Messiah—and our hopes for eternity lie buried with His unrisen body in the grave at Jerusalem! But "His name is Immanuel, GOD with us." While we look up to heaven and see a MAN upon the throne, we can at the same time exclaim, "Your Throne, O GOD, is forever and ever!" The combination of the two in the one person of the Ever-living Redeemer, makes Him to be all we need, and all that we can desire.

It is, indeed, in His glorified Humanity He now lives and reigns. He needs no longer, as at this eventide scene on Gennesaret, earthly rest. His period of weakness, His struggle with human infirmity, is over. We need not, like the disciples, now go to awake Him; for in yonder glorious Heaven "He faints not, neither is weary." "He that keeps Israel" now "neither slumbers nor sleeps." But His heart of love knows no change. He is "that same Jesus," our God yet our Brother, our Brother yet our God!

There may be comfort to some here in the thought (more especially brought before us in this passage in connection with Christ's deity) that He rules over winds and waves. "What kind of man," exclaimed the disciples, "is this, for even the winds and the sea obey Him." No storm that sweeps the ocean can defy His power, or resist His control. These boisterous elements are His ministers and messengers. Not one storm-cloud can gather—not one crested wave rise—not one board can loosen—without His permission, who "holds the winds in His fists." All power is committed to Him in Heaven and on Earth.

The Satanic Prince of the power of the air, if some mysterious dominion is assigned to him, has a mightier One to control His demon rage; and

whether it be the atmosphere that comes loaded with plague and fever, pestilence and cholera—or the hurricane that uproots a forest and overturns a house, burying a beloved child in the ruins—or the tornado that strews the bosom of the ocean with the pride of navies, or sends wailing and widowhood into the fisherman's lonely Dwelling—"The Lord sits upon the floods; yes! the Lord sits as King forever." "The floods, O Lord, have lifted up, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. But the Lord on High is mightier than the noise of many waters; yes, than the mighty waves of the sea!"

But, II. The text speaks, not only "concerning Christ," but "concerning HIS CHURCH." This both in its collective and in its individual capacity.

In previously considering the miraculous catch, we found the fish enclosed in the net were designed to form an instructive pledge and symbol to the "Fishers of Men" of the success of their labors. If the Fish were thus typical of immortal souls; the element in which they lived, the heaving, changing, restless water, with its fitful alternations of calm and tempest, was surely an appropriate picture of human life, swept with storms and strewn with wrecks. And if, as we believe, each portion of this sacred incident is filled with symbolic instruction, we may warrantably look also for some figurative truth in that tossed vessel with its frightened crew. Nor is there much difficulty in finding its true place in the Sacred Allegory. If the Ark of Noah, in the old patriarchal deluge, was not only a befitting type of the Church, but was really the Church of God, tossed on that raging flood; have we not in this Gennesaret vessel the Gospel type and symbol of the same—the Church in the world, and yet not of the world—subject to the storms of persecution, often hurried into guilty fears and faithless distrust and misgiving—yet her Lord, not (as in the extremity of her unbelief she sometimes supposes), like Baal, slumbering and sleeping, but seated invisible at her helm, guiding her through the roaring surge, and enabling her to ride out the tempest!

At no period has the Church been exempt from such hurricanes. Even in these our days (though, thank God, the outer storm is hushed, and she is holding on her way in these favored lands through calm and tranquil seas), there are discerning spirits who can catch up distant indistinct mutterings—presages of a coming tempest, more fearful than any she has

yet buffeted—"the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear." If, before the Millennial morning breaks, there is thus a deeper and darker night of trial in reserve for the Church of Christ—Satan and his demon-throng, riding on the wings of persecution, putting forth their last giant effort for her destruction—be it ours to exult in the thought that there is a Sleepless PILOT at her helm, who can say, like His great Apostle in the Adrian storm, "I exhort you to take courage!" "GOD is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved: THE LORD shall help her, and that right early."

(2.) This passage speaks concerning the Church in her individual capacity.

It speaks of Disciple life and Disciple experience. It is easy for us to speak and theorize about Faith, but God often casts us into the crucible to test and purify our gold, and separate it from the dross and alloy. He brings us into the vortex of the storm to see whether we shall wring our hands in faithless despair, or rush to our Master. The disciples in Gennesaret had acted unfaithfully; untrustingly. They might have known that, though the wail and death-shriek of perishing crews had been heard all around, one boat at least would have defied the rush of waters and roar of winds. With Jesus in their midst, they need have feared no evil.

The simple fact of His presence ought to have been pledge and guarantee enough that their safety was secured. If some more cowardly spirit than the rest had urged His being awakened—some impetuous Peter, in his eager impulsive haste, had hurried to the stern to utter his unbelieving fears—we would have expected some one of the others of calmer mold and stronger faith, some John or James, to have arrested the intruder, saying, "Do not disturb Him!" Sooner shall these mountains that gird the lake be removed, than He allow "one of His little ones to perish." Let us gaze in calm serenity on the face of the Almighty Sleeper. Let us "be still and know that He is GOD!"

But, alas! for the moment they seem all to have been involved in the same unworthy anxiety, "Master, Master! Don't You care that we are going to drown?"

We cannot, we dare not, to a certain extent, wonder at their fear. So far it was natural. There was much to awaken apprehension. Their ship reeling on the waves, and their Lord appearing unconscious of their danger "asleep on a pillow." It was the excess of their terror which drew forth the rebuke. Each Evangelist in recording it gives a slight variation. One says, "You have little faith;" another, "Where is your faith?" a third, "You have no faith." But in all the three cases it is the lack of FAITH which is blamed; the lack of that principle which "casts out fear." We may wonder, perhaps, at the severity of the condemnation. Was Faith on their part really so utterly lacking? Did not rather their very rushing to their sleeping Lord seem to indicate the intensity of their trust in that perilous crisis-hour? They felt that if they are to be rescued at all from a dreadful grave, it can be by Him alone. Yet, observe, He rebukes them, as if their Faith were poor, trifling, unworthy of the name!

How is this?—It is plain that His condemnation of it is relative. It is judged by a standard of its own. Had some of the multitude (not the disciples) manned this vessel, and rushed thus imploringly in the tempest to awake Him, probably, as in the case of the Gentile Centurion, Jesus would have commended their faith as great. But these anxious disciples were those who should have known better than to distrust for one moment His ability and willingness to save. Had they witnessed to so little purpose His recent miracles? Had they heard with so little profit His recent Discourse of heavenly wisdom? Unkind and cruel, in the case of trusted friends, was the cry with which they roused Him, "Don't You CARE that we are going to drown?" Anything to that beneficent Being would have been less cutting and wounding than this—"Don't You CARE!" It was doubting not His power but His Love, that love to which every hour since they knew Him had borne testimony.

How kindly, gently, considerately, yet faithfully, He deals with them! He utters no reproach for that crude awaking, robbing Him of the slumber He so greatly needed, and which His untiring energy elsewhere denied Him. But, gazing with earnestness upon them, He puts the penetrating question, which must have gone like an arrow to their hearts, "Why are you so fearful?" He speaks as a faithful Master to His faithless disciples before He turns to speak to the elements. The winds and waves He allows



to revel at will before He has delivered in the hearing of the Voyagers the word of needed reproof. He has no ear for the warring elements, until, in mingled severity and kindness, He has poured oil on the troubled sea of these vexed hearts.

Are any of us thus fearful? Jesus turns to us and says "Won't you trust Me? Look at Calvary's Cross! Is that not a pledge and guarantee that I will never leave you nor forsake you? For, a small moment I may appear to have forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you—with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon you!"

Let this be with us, as with the disciples, the result of all these storms of Trial—to drive us nearer our Heavenly Master, and endear Him to our souls. They wondered at the moment, doubtless, what could be the cause of such a storm. Why not have arrested it or kept it chained in its mountain hold, until that boat with its valued crew got safe to land?

Thus they may have reasoned while the tempest was overhead, and their hearts failed them for fear. But what was their verdict when they were planting their anchor in the white sands on the Gadara shore? They said one to another, "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Their Lord rose higher than ever in their estimation. In the future manifold sacred memories of that wondrous ministry, how the combined remembrance of the weary MAN and the Almighty GOD would brace them for their great fight of afflictions! That "peace, be still," has been a motto and watchword which these howling winds of Gennesaret have wafted from age to age and from climate to climate, sustaining faith in sinking hearts, and producing in many a storm-swept bosom a "great calm!"

Oh, happy for us if all the hurricanes that ruffle life's unquiet sea have the effect of making Jesus more precious. If God has to employ stormy trials, severe afflictions, for this end, let us not quarrel with His wise ordination. Better the storm with Christ than the smooth water without Him.

"Far more the treach'rous calm I dread

Than tempests bursting overhead."

It is the experience, not of the luxurious hotel, but of the harsh battle-field, the trench and night-watch, which makes the better and hardier soldier. It is not the exotic plant nursed in the glass hothouse and artificial heat which is the type of strength; but the plant struggling for existence on bleak cliffs, or the pine battling with Alpine gusts, or shivering amid Alpine snows. If there be a sight in the spiritual world more glorious than another, it is when one sees (as may often be seen,) a Believer growing in strength and trust in God, by reason of his very trials—battered down by storm and hail, a great fight of afflictions—enduring loss of substance—loss of health—loss of friends—yet, standing by emptied coffers and full graves, and with an aching but resigned heart, enabled to say "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!"

Never let us take our trials as an indication that God is angry with us; saying, like Martha, in our blind unbelief, "Lord, if You had been here, this never would have happened. The Savior cannot have been at my side, or else this desolating storm would never have swept over me." No, He was with the disciples—sleeping in their very boat—when the Gennesaret hurricane descended. "Behold," says the Evangelist (as if arresting our attention to the fact), "Behold" (when He is voyaging with His own apostles) "there arose a great tempest." And often is it so still. He selects the blackest cloud, and causes His people to pass through it, that He may span it with His Rainbow of mercy, and show in blended colors, His power, and faithfulness and, love!

And what remains, but to urge you to flee to that same adorable almighty Savior, and to cast all your cares on Him who has shown you, at such a cost, how He cares for you. You who are in perplexity, temptation, trial—enviored with storms of unbelief and doubt and inward corruption—go to your Lord as the disciples did. They give you a new testimony to the power of Prayer. It was Prayer that roused their Divine Master. He continued asleep until His disciples awoke Him. And the great principle in the gospel dispensation still is, "Ask, and you shall receive." How beautifully is here brought out His willingness to hear the cries of His perishing people! All the roar of the hurricane—the voice of wind, and rain, and mountain waves—awakes Him not; but the cries and entreaties

of His people, at once reach His ear!

Let us, then, arise and call upon our God. The great lesson taught both to the Disciples and to us in this storm, is that, in nearness to Jesus lies all our safety. Weak faith, and Little faith, as well as Great faith, are encouraged to rush to this Great Deliverer! The world is at best a treacherous sea. Its Painted Boats may hold on for a while their uncertain course, spreading their white wings before summer gales and favoring breezes. But a sudden hurricane comes; the waters are strewn with their wrecks, and "the place which once knew them knows them no more!" But, safe in the Ark of God, steered by the Heavenly Pilot, we are as secure as combined omnipotence and love can make us. And when earthly storms are all over, every crested wave of a chequered past will only endear to us more the Haven of rest, where the tempest's voice will be never more either felt or feared!

## **THE SPOILER SPOILED**

"They went across the lake to the region of the Gadarenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet Him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain." Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

We now follow our Lord's footsteps, for the first time, to the eastern shores of Gennesaret. Striking must have been the contrast between their sterile aspect and the cultivated beauty with which we have hitherto been familiar around Capernaum. Hills, with a few patches of cultivation, rose slanting from the water's edge, unrefreshed by those rills and water-courses which formed nature's contribution to the life of the western side. If we add to an uncongenial climate and the absence of soil, exposure, as at this day, to the incursion of the adjoining desert hordes, we find an

additional reason for the comparatively scanty inhabitants—the near and strange proximity of intense activity to desolation and barrenness. It was a border land "of darkness and the shadow of death," abandoned to a mixed population of Jew and Gentile; animals clean and unclean—the sheep of the Hebrews, the swine of the Gentiles—browsing on adjacent pastures. No rich plain or undulating slopes fringed, as on the opposite shore, the margin of the lake, on which "the sower" could "go forth to sow." If that memorable parable were suggested by an incident seen in the fields of the one side, the parable of the lost sheep—roaming through a trackless waste, had its appropriate scenery on the other. These Eastern wilds formed "the desert place," to which Christ, on other occasions, invited the disciples to "go and rest a while." The very solitude of this wilderness was a pleasing refuge to Him from unceasing labor. There, amid nature's rugged temples and oratories, her Great Maker and Lord "ofttimes resorted," for purposes of meditation and prayer.

Such is the befitting frame for that terrible picture which we are now to contemplate; a theme uninviting in itself, and encompassed with not a few difficulties—but which, occurring, as it does, in the order of the narrative, we dare not pass in silence.

The description of the Gadarene Demoniac is given by the first three Evangelists. We shall avail ourselves of the notices peculiar to each, taking as the groundwork that of Mark, which is distinguished (as most of his other narrations are) for minuteness and fidelity in all its parts. His is evidently the narrative of an eye-witness; and, connected in some way, as we have good reason to believe the writing of his Gospel was, with Peter—the Evangelist and the Apostle-spectator, in compiling their inspired narratives, have retained, with graphic power, each feature of the thrilling incident.

Let us look first to THE PICTURE itself, and then examine its DETAILS. In other words, let us describe the general SCENE, and afterwards, from its several parts, deduce some general LESSONS.

1. THE SCENE. Recent travelers inform us that opposite the town of Tiberias, on the eastern shore, a recess is formed in the mountains, where there are still the remains of a Jewish burying ground. Caves, either

natural or artificial, are hollowed out of the rock, while the ruins of a city crown the heights at the top of the valley. There is a strong presumption in favor of this being the locality of the scene presented to us in the passage we are now considering.

In our last chapter, we found the Lord and His Apostles suddenly overtaken by a storm in the midst of the Lake—no ordinary storm, as the narrative infers—but one which led the disciple fishermen, who knew these waters so well, to cower in terror at their Master's feet.

But what is this to the moral hurricane which sweeps down upon them the moment their anchor is planted on the eastern beach? Out of one of these rocky tombs or sepulchers, a being in human shape, rushes with fleet foot down the intervening slope, with wild gestures and cries. Mournful was his history! He is no madman or maniac bereft of reason, the victim of a disordered fancy or bewildered imagination—a deeper and darker woe broods over him.

One of the spirits from "the abyss"—an infernal demon, or rather a whole legion of them—had taken possession of that wretched body, and set it on fire of hell! It is altogether a misconception to give to this passage a mere figurative rendering—to resolve this Demoniac's case into a mere affliction of insanity, a disorganization of the brain. Some would do so to evade the difficulties of the question. But by thus rejecting the express declaration of Scripture, they only escape one perplexity to involve themselves in another. If Demoniacal possession had been a mere crude fancy of the Jews—a popular delusion—can we for a moment entertain the idea, that He who came on earth to bear witness to truth would have fostered among his disciples or their countrymen belief in a superstitious lie?—that He would have misnamed mere aberration of the intellect, by calling it the possession of a devil? No, we only do honor alike to Christ and to His Sacred Word when we accept, in the fullest sense, its literal averments, though they may do violence at times to our feelings, and cross our carnal reason.

We know that often and again, in the course of His ministry, the Savior makes special reference to the personality and presence of Evil Spirits. In exorcizing these, He addresses personal agents. He speaks to an

individual, not to a disease, "Hold Your peace and come out of him!"

At the period of the advent of the Prince of Light, there seems to have been an especial putting-forth of the might of the Prince of Darkness. The "Strong man armed" was invaded in his territory by the "Stronger than he." Until now his subordinate ministers sat unchallenged on their vice-regal thrones; the blinded nations bowed before them in abject allegiance. But his kingdom is doomed. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Will his empire be resigned without a struggle? No! His confederate legions are gathered especially in and around the land of Judea. Every shaft is taken from his armory, to avert, if possible, the signal, impending ruin.

In that very Storm on the Sea, there may (as we surmised) have been demon-spirits giving strength to the hurricane, mustering in diabolic rage the destructive forces of nature, under some mad delusion that they might possibly effect the ruin of the Voyagers, and thus prevent the doom they seem to have known too well was at hand.

Terrible seems to have been the subjection of the miserable Being now before us, who was led captive by their will! They had driven him into "solitary places." Perhaps, under the bitter consciousness of the demon power within him, he had himself sought the deepest solitudes of nature, to be screened there from his more favored fellows. Moreover, as if solitude intense enough could not be found amid these desert hills, the demoniac had made his home "amid the tombs," places which, from his happier infancy, he had been taught to regard as "unclean," and to rush from their unhallowed contact.

There he is!—"the living among the dead"—half envying the ghastly repose of the crumbling bones and skeletons that strewed the caves where he dwelt! A supernatural muscular strength had been imparted to him. Again and again had the neighboring Gadarenes, for their own protection and safety, attempted to curb his fury, binding him with iron chains and "fetters;" but these he had broken like thread. In frantic delirium he roamed the adjoining mountains, while, in his wilder attacks,

he was "driven by the evil spirit into the wilderness"—the bleak, flat desert which stretched far away from the hills that girdled the Lake.

Under perhaps a consciousness of deep guilt as the cause of his misery, the narrative further describes him as the Victim of self-torture—"crying and cutting himself with stones." They had attempted to clothe him, but in his demon rage every rag of clothing had been torn from his bleeding, lacerated body. A highway seems to have led from the town to the shore, but "no one now could pass that way." Travelers avoided the haunted approach. He was the terror of the neighborhood; not by day only but at night too, when all around was silent and still, the piteous wailings of the demoniac awoke the echoes of the mountains and startled the fishermen in their lonely night-watch on the sea!

And yet, by carefully attending to the narrative, you will observe that there is in that tempest-tossed spirit a strange mysterious blending of human consciousness and fiendish hate—an interweaving of truth and error—a confounding of his own personality with that of the devils. His own nature is crushed to the dust by some savage tormentor lording it over him; yet the overmastered soul (the nobler being of the man) seems now and then to rise to the surface, and to utter longings for emancipation. It was thus not an entire wreck of the inner life. There are chinks and openings that appear every now and then in that deep, dark, dungeon-spirit—rays and flashes of nobler thought and aspiration that are ever revealing themselves, although only to bring into sadder and more fearful contrast the prevailing gloom. I repeat it, however, this very misery of his tells us he was not an utterly abandoned and hopeless castaway. Had he been so, conscience would have crouched a submissive slave at the feet of these demon powers. No cry for deliverance would have rung through these solitudes; the man, assimilated to the fiends within him, would have rather rushed frightened from contact with infinite Purity, Power, and Goodness.

But, so far from this, there is evidently a struggle (though a seemingly hopeless one) in that tortured frame. He would spurn, if he could, this alien tyrant-power that was detaining him in unwilling bondage, and throw open the temple gates of his soul to a nobler Owner. As he roams from rock to rock, and from tomb to tomb, a cry for emancipation seems

to mingle with the wild wailings which ring through the vaults of the dead—"Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

Is there no response to that wild appeal? ONE, and One only, in the wide world can hush the tempest of that storm-swept soul, and say, "Peace, be still!" That ONE is near! The Demoniac, from the increased distress and tumult of his spirit, may have had some information given him that the Deliverer was now approaching. It is possible that, in his moments of lucid consciousness, he may have heard of a Great Prophet who, in the synagogue on the opposite side of the lake, had expelled demons from bosoms like his. Hoping against hope, that he, too, might not be beyond reach of the omnipotent word, he may have been watching with eager longing each boat that dropped its sails as it neared that solitary strand. At all events, no sooner does the fishing vessel with the Lord and his disciples, touch the Gadara shore, than we see him hastening down the slope, and the next moment he is a suppliant at the Redeemer's feet!

In this act we recognize the man himself—his own nobler nature. The demon, for the instant, has lost the ascendancy, and degraded humanity asserts its right to be heard.

"Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" exclaims the voice of Him who must have beheld with touching emotion the human soul made "a habitation of devils"—ruined, dishonored, enslaved!

But the lucid moment has already passed into the demon mood. The spirit within him stifles the struggles of his better self. Seizing hold of the man's speech and utterance, he thus breaks silence, disowning Christ's interference, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I adjure you by God that You torment me not." The Demoniac, upon this, reeled back at the sight of his Deliverer, and fell anew into a convulsive fit.

It may seem, at first, strange, that obedience to Jesus' omnipotent command could be for a moment delayed. Doubtless He could have enforced an immediate compliance; and He must have had wise reasons for permitting the demon to retain for an instant longer, his infuriate mastery, after He had uttered the mandate of expulsion. It has been



supposed, that in putting the question to the Demoniac, "What is your name?" He wished, before his last and most fearful convulsion, to restore him to personal consciousness—to the remembrance of his earlier history and better times. But here, again, either the indwelling demon anticipates the reply—once more seizing on his organs of speech as if the question had been addressed to him; or, it may be, the wretched man, confusing again his own personality with that of the devils, answered, saying, "My name is Legion, for we are many." LEGION! (a Phalanx—a compact squadron of Imperial Rome in battle array), is his own description of the invading spirits of darkness that had run riot within him! His whole inner being had been wildly torn and dislocated by a host of infernal fiends—"rulers of the darkness of this world—spiritual wickednesses in high places."

But what are all these before the might of Incarnate Omnipotence? Too well did they know the power of Him they owned and recognized as the "Son of God most High." With the same remarkable interchange of personality, either the Demoniac himself, or the possessing devils, importune the Savior not to send them to "the deep" (or the abyss), the dreadful abode of Apostate Spirits—the place of final doom and condemnation.

In the parallel passage in Matthew, they are represented as crying out as they addressed Jesus, "Have You come here to torment us BEFORE THE TIME?" What time? It was the hour which they knew too well was numbered, when, with their Great Leader, they should be cast into the bottomless pit, "prepared for the devil and his angels."

Their further request, "not to be sent out of the country," was equivalent to the other. It seemed a current belief among the Jews, that each region or district was under the sway of Good Angels and Wicked Demons. If the demons, in the present instance, had been expelled their allotted region at Gadara, it would have been tantamount to anticipating their certain doom—sending them beforehand to the dreadful "abyss" which was to form their future and everlasting dwelling.

We need not linger on the sequel of the narrative, nor on the needless and unprofitable questions to which it has given rise. Two thousand swine

were feeding on one of the adjoining mountains. Our Lord, in His sovereignty, grants the startling request of the demons, that, instead of being driven out of the country, they might be permitted to enter into the animals. As a subordinate reason, this permission may have been given as a righteous retribution for the owners keeping, in a Hebrew territory, what was in direct violation of the Jewish law, (swine being reckoned unclean). Be this as it may, the herd, being entered by the fiends, rush headlong in frantic rage to the slopes overhanging the lake. One after another, each following its blind leader, they leap over the precipices, and are engulfed in the waters below. Those tending the swine fly in consternation to the adjoining city. The inhabitants hurry out to verify with their own eyes the strange rumors which had reached them. Not only do they find the herd perishing in the waters, but, stranger than all, the scourge and terror of the region is sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind!

Oh! wondrous triumph over hellish confederacy! Mighty as was that Voice which, an hour before, had chained the tempests and bridled the storm; more wondrous still was that which could put a curb on the untamable spirit of a hapless wreck of humanity! "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles!"

II. THE LESSONS. Let us now look, as we proposed, at this Picture in its various parts or DETAILS—at its lights and shadows—the dark side and the bright side. In doing so, we have, in the dark side, the Possessor and the Possessed; in the bright side, the Restorer and the Restored.

### 1. THE POSSESSOR.

How dreadful the truth that is here brought before us—the sway which Satan had, and still has, in our earth! Thanks be to God it was the culmination of his power at that great crisis-time in the world's history—emphatically "the Hour and Power of Darkness." How terrible that power must have been, when the first Apostle who died—"Satan entering into him"—died a suicide and a traitor; and the first two disciples of the Christian apostles—"Satan filling their hearts"—died liars and hypocrites.

Christ, in vision, saw him "fall as lightning from heaven." On the cross,

He bruised his head, plucked the jewels from his crown, rescued from him the usurped dominion of Life, and, as the Moral Conqueror, ascending up on high, He dragged him and "captive multitudes captive," at the wheels of His triumphant chariot. Yet still does the Arch-deceiver "rule among the children of disobedience." "Let not any one think," says Luther, "the devil is now dead; for as He that keeps Israel, so he that hates Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps." Cases, indeed, of "possession" of the human body, are either now at an end, or are comparatively rare. It would be presumption to speak with confidence on a subject in which we have such limited data to guide us. One thing, at all events, is plain, that if such cases do occur, they are not so palpable as then. Satan seeks now to conceal his dominion. His name is the "Prince of darkness," and he delights to work in the dark. Jesus, on the shores of Gennesaret, forced him to speak out. He dragged to light the demon-horde that had converted a living man into a raving fiend. The raging lion was driven from his lair. He was exposed, in the very act of "seeking whom he might devour."

Now, he continues to lie concealed in the thicket—he succeeds once more in silently and stealthily seizing his victim, binding not the body with iron chains, but the soul with moral and spiritual fetters, and degrading it into a "habitation of dragons." "He so conceals his agency," says an able writer, "that while we fancy we are sailing before the impulse, and floating down the stream of our own free volitions, his hand is on the helm; thus flattering our pride, scoffing at our weakness, and steering our destiny at the same time" (Harris).

We dare not ignore this truth of the existence and personality of Satan with his subordinate evil angels—his "dominions, principalities, and powers"—an organized consolidated agency of evil. Vast must be their multitude!—the air around us, for all we know, is thronged with their myriad ranks!—their assaults only deflected by the counter-working agency of Good Angels—those whom God gives charge to "encamp round about His people, and bear them up in all their ways."

Let us not be guilty of rushing to a false inference from this doctrine, that it is incompatible with the freedom of a moral agent—that it diminishes our moral responsibility—that we may plead, as an excuse for our sins,

that we have become the helpless victims of a power without us—that, (by a harsh fate which we cannot control) we are "delivered over unto Satan."

While the Bible does everywhere admit the existence of that extraneous power, and traces to it the authorship of evil—"Satan has filled your heart"—"Satan entered into Judas"—"Get behind me, Satan"—yet the Satan without, has his echo in the evil heart within; the temptation is Satan's; the crime and guilt is our own. "They sell themselves," says God, "to work iniquity. If we are set on fire of hell, the fuel is our own collecting. Every yielding to sin on our part, allows the deeper insertion of the wedge on Satan's—an opening wider of the heart's doorway to let the invader in. The same Bible which tells of the dread influence of the arch-apostate and his legions, commands us to "RESIST the devil, and he will flee from us."

Beware of his first encroachments. If, like the inhabitants of Jerusalem of old, you give him of the gold of the Temple to propitiate him, this will only lead him to make bolder demands until the Temple is laid in ruins. Your safety consists in living near to God—soaring above the wiles of the Great Adversary on the wings of faith and prayer. "Surely in vain," we read in a striking verse in Proverbs, "the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (or as that is rendered in the margin of our Bibles, "in the sight of him that moves on the wing"). In vain will Satan spread his traps, and snares, and nets, in the sight of the Believer, who, on the soaring pinions of his renewed, regenerated nature, rises above the fascinations of the world—the toils of sin—singing, as he soars to heaven's gate—"I desire a better country, that is, an heavenly!"

2. We now turn from the Possessor to the POSSESSED.

What a terrible spectacle! a human body, God's own Temple—become a desecrated shrine, the haunt and residence of the sworn enemy of His throne and His universe! The man lapsed into the fiend. A Hell in embryo! How had he, we are led to inquire, become the subject of so terrible a destiny? Was it a mere capricious exercise of demon-rage that selected an innocent victim, and made him the sport of unmerited wrong, so embittering life as to cause death to be a happy release—a welcome termination to ignominious torture?

We have no clue, indeed, in the narrative that would lead us to connect the man's present sufferings with his previous history. But there is at least a strong presumption that his own guilty excesses had invited the terrible assault. This legion company may have been roaming the district in search of a victim. Look! the gates of a corrupt and corrupting soul were found open for their entrance—a body debilitated by gross passions, wallowing in sensuality, the whole nervous system, shattered and unstrung, bid welcome to the wandering horde. Conscience—the conscience of innocent days, when a pure mind dwelt in an unpolluted frame—now and then awoke up to a sense of present guilt and forfeited innocence. But the demon-throng were ever watching to crush the aspirations of nobler life, and hurry him at last as their companion to the abyss!

This gives an dreadful reality to the Picture before us, and invests it with utterances of pathetic warning. Ah, is it not to be feared that it is the actual picture of many who, in the words of Scripture, "give themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness," paying for their excesses the terrible penalty of a shattered body, a ruined soul, and a maniac's end?

Would that youth, in the hot fever of its passions, if unrestrained by loftier Bible motives, would come with us to Gadara, and gaze on the picture of its inevitable fate—this awful Bible picture of SENSUAL EXCESS! Would that those who have surrendered themselves to tyrant lusts—pandering to base appetite, destroying and enervating their bodily frames—would mark here the terrible destiny awaiting them. Our own asylums can, at this hour, furnish many a counterpart. See yonder wretch—half man, half fiend—coiled up, shuddering with terror, in one of the midnight tombs of Galilee, clutching the ground in the wildness of despair—the chains dangling by his side, and the blood streaming from suicidal wounds—his body turned into a living grave! Slaves of Abandoned Lust!—"Oh that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your Latter End."

3. We pass to a more pleasing theme—the, bright side of the Picture—to the RESTORER and the RESTORED. Here (as in all the other Gospel scenes we have hitherto contemplated) stands out, in bright and beautiful

contrast, the Divine Savior—the Restorer of the lost, the Comforter of the downcast.

If ever there was a case, which, we might have thought, would have repelled Infinite Goodness and Infinite Purity, it is that which we are now considering. No Leper-house more loathsome or polluted than this. Joined to his filthy idols—the trail of the serpent in every chamber of imagery—Christ might well have said, "Let him alone!"

But who can "limit" the Holy One of Israel? He will leave behind in that wild region, if He should never visit it again, ONE ever enduring memorial of His grace and power. He would tell His church and people in every age, that if Satan is mighty, there is a mightier still—that over this legion-dominion "all power is committed" to the "Stronger" than the "strong man." He has only to utter the word, and the demons surrender their prey, and crouch submissive at His feet!

Moreover, adverting to a still further exhibition of the Savior's power in the sequel of the narrative, observe the Devils would not and dared not enter into the herd of swine, until they had received His permissive word "Go." Blessed assurance! Satan's power is bounded! Satan's Lord says now, as then, "This far shall you go, and no further, and here shall your proud waves stop!"

Both from the case of this Gadarene Demoniac and the one in the Synagogue of Capernaum, we learn, that, great as was the sway of Satan over the bodies and souls of men, it was not such as to prevent them taking themselves to Jesus, and seeking His mercy. If this were so at a time when the influence of the great Adversary was at its height, we may take comfort in the assurance that no power of Satan can now deter us fleeing to the "Power of God;" that if our Faith and Hope is built upon that Rock, "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

And further, in connection with the Restorer of this Demoniac, we have the assurance that there is a period of triumph at hand—a time coming when Satan's kingdom shall be destroyed, when Jesus shall put him and all other enemies "under His feet."

That Satanic Empire got its greatest and final blow on the cross of Calvary. "Now," said Jesus, when that cross was projecting its shadow on His path, "shall the Prince of this world be cast out!" It was even so. "As He bowed His head, and cried, 'It is finished!' he dragged the pillars of the Usurper's Empire to the dust." And if we see not yet "all things put under Him," we know on infallible authority that victory does await the Prince of life. The chain is already forged which is to bind the destroyer. Ever since the day when his serried legions were routed at Calvary, the loyal subjects of his Divine Conqueror have been following up the triumph of their Lord, gathering spoils and trophies from the nations so long enthralled—the Great Captain of Salvation "from henceforth expecting, until His enemies be made His footstool."

You who are feeling at times downcast by reason of "the depths of Satan," mourning over his power alike in your own hearts, in the church of God, and in the world; remember his doom is sealed! Jesus can say of each one of His people as of Gad of old, "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." We can anticipate with confidence the predicted period when the tyranny of six thousand years shall end—Satan and all his vanquished legions be strewn, like the hosts of Egypt, on the shores of Time—and, in the words of God to His true Israel, "The enemies you have seen today, you shall see no more forever."

#### 4. Finally, let us contemplate THE RESTORED.

How beautiful this calm sunset after a storm-wreathed sky! His fellow citizens come out in numbers to witness the prodigy—the once infuriated man sitting, like a child, at the feet of his deliverer, "clothed, and in his right mind." A vaster than mere deliverance from a bodily thralldom would seem to have been his—it was a translation all at once "out of darkness into marvelous light." No captive hurried from the world's darkest and most pestilential dungeon to breathe the pure light of day, ever experienced the gladsome sensations of this Restored Demoniak.

Can we wonder at his fervent wish, as his Lord and the disciples are once more about to depart and cross the Lake, that he might be allowed to accompany them? What, he might naturally think, may be the consequence when my deliverer is gone? A new invasion, either of the old

legion or of a fresh raid from the Hosts of Darkness, may be made on this trembling frame, and my last state may be "worse than the first." How natural that he should cling in grateful love to that mighty Being, who had "brought him out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set his feet upon a Rock, and established his goings, and put a new song into his mouth, even praise unto our God." "HOWEVER Jesus did not allow him, but said to him, Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and has had compassion on you."

We cannot pronounce what may have been the special object Jesus had in giving this man such express injunctions to publish his cure, while the same publicity, as you will remember, he strictly forbade in the case of the Leper. It has been surmised that a previous profligate life had involved his acquaintances and friends in his guilt and ruin, and he may have been sent specially to warn them, lest theirs might be the same terrible doom without the same hope of deliverance. Christ's refusal to allow him to accompany Him may, moreover, have been intended as a great lesson for all—that true rest and repose in a Savior's presence is reserved for heaven; that life has great duties and great responsibilities; that religion is not a thing to be thrust into a corner, the joys of which are to be selfishly appropriated, without one effort to impart them to others; but home, friends, country, humankind, are the successive spheres for the operation of our Christian influence. Shining first and brightest in our own dwellings, the light of truth must radiate to the earth's circumference.

While from this man's history there is a voice of terrible warning, there is a voice surely also of encouragement and mercy. Are there any whose eyes may fall on these pages conscious of a lifetime of sin? trembling on the brink of despair, fearful lest all be lost? ONE has come to the shores of a desolate world; He has encountered tempests of wrath, that He might reach your homes and hearts of wretchedness with the word of pardon and peace! Oh, flee to Him without delay. Your spiritual adversaries may be many—"their name is legion"—but One is on your side, alone, but omnipotent. "God is for you, who can be against you?"

Yes, there is no room to despair. Blessed be His name, there are none debarred and excluded from mercy, and to whom we may not utter the



free message, "Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope."

With these demons of the text the case was different. With them hope was extinguished. Their probation time had come and gone; their mighty game for Eternity had been staked and lost; their die was cast, and cast forever! "What have WE to do with YOU?" was their too truthful theology. The door of mercy on them was irrevocably shut. They had "gone to their own place!"

But it is with you as with the demoniac! A Savior's voice can still reach you—a Savior's blood can still wash you! You may up to this hour have been "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked," but His grace can bring you submissive to His feet—seat you there "clothed, and in your right mind," clad in the spotless clothing of His imputed righteousness!

"Behold the goodness and severity of God—on those who fell severity, but on us goodness if we continue in His goodness!"

See that that goodness be not spurned. Flee to that Savior's feet while yet He tarries on the earthly side of the Lake. Soon He may depart—soon He may re-cross the waters—the opportunity of meeting Him may be past! This was probably the one solitary visit He ever made to the Gadarenes. It may be the same to us. See that our conduct be not a copy of theirs, bidding Him begone, "praying Him to depart out of our coasts." He may never return. He may take us at our word. He may prove in this, by stern reality "a prayer-answering God."

Might He not have so dealt with us before now? How often, already, have we rejected Him? Oh! if He had done to us, as he did to the Gadarenes—granted our request—where should we have been at this hour? But still He lingers! The anchor of Hope still clings to the sands of Time. Still is He "waiting to be gracious." "If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever!"

## THE ONLY DAUGHTER

"Fondly I prized that lovely mind  
Where all was gentle, sweet, and mild;  
A thousand blooming flowers entwined  
The earth-bower of my sainted child!  
Forth sped the doom—'Return to dust!'  
In the cold grave my treasure lies;  
I was a traitor to my trust,  
I got it not to idolize!  
Hush! breaking heart, that pines and weeps,  
Laughing the holy word to scorn,  
'The maiden is not dead but sleeps;'  
You'll meet her on the Heavenly morn!"

"Then a man names Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying." Luke 8:41, 42; Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43.

The two last incidents we considered, were the Storm on the Lake, and the more terrible picture on its eastern shore, of the Gadarene Demonic. "The Man Christ Jesus," oppressed with fatigue of body and exhaustion of spirit, lay stretched, fast asleep, in the hinder part of a fishing vessel, until roused by His disciples from His needed repose, to allay the tempest. On landing, we found Him encountering a victim of Satanic rage—a bosom more troubled than earth's most unquiet sea! But to the moral storm, as to the natural, He had said, "Peace, be still!" Then, as a strange sequel to this miracle, the Gadarenes "pled with Jesus to leave their region." In obedience to their ungrateful wish, He has taken ship, once more, to the western side, where the people are already lining the beach, eager to welcome Him.

And what is the first recorded incident in connection with the Lord and His disciples, as they again tread the streets of Capernaum? They had left behind them a fearful monument of Sin. They are called now to behold Sin's terrible consequences!

Ah! Death!—O unsparing Foe!—terrible Invader!—Severer of the firmest of earthly bonds—causing, from the hour of the fall, one loud wail of suffering to arise from the households you have swept—converting the world itself into one vast sepulcher—its teeming millions a long burial procession to the one long home!—every heart beating its own "funeral march to the grave!" But the Prince and Lord of Life now draws near. You are about to be stormed in your own citadel—compelled to relinquish your prey; and to every bosom in all time which you are cruelly to rifle, there are consolatory words and lessons to be gathered from this scene we are now to consider.

Let us first rehearse the narrative; and then endeavor to gather up some of the more solemn and comforting truths which that narrative enforces.

We have no further light thrown in Gospel story, on the principal personage in this scene. He was Ruler of the synagogue of Capernaum; supposed to be one of those "elders of the Jews" we previously found coming in a body or deputation, to intercede with Jesus in behalf of the Centurion's servant, saying, that "he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loves our nation, and he has built us a synagogue."

This pious Israelite had urged his suit successfully for another—the slave of a Gentile soldier who had been stretched on a couch of sickness, "ready to die." The Divine philanthropist had listened to the pleadings of faith and gratitude, and immediately accompanied him in the direction of that soldier's abode. But a far tenderer case now engrosses this Ruler's thoughts—a far tenderer sorrow weighs down his own heart. The Grim Messenger is now standing at his own portal!

An only daughter, like the one Ewe lamb of the prophet's parable, gladdened his home. She had arrived, too, just at that age when a father's heartstrings are bound fastest and firmest around his child's soul, and before the world had time to taint or stain her with its corruptions. With that child had been doubtless interwoven every thought of the future; she was the pride of the family, the prop of the present, the promised solace of her parents' old age. Often perhaps, in the midst of other trials, they would glance at the loving spirit at their side, and say, "This child shall comfort us." But health and strength, youth and intelligence, are unable

to exclude the sleepless foe of human happiness. The shadows of death are falling around that dwelling; and it is the one they least dreamed of, that is marked out to fall!

We have not detailed to us, as in the case of Lazarus, the circumstances of that hour of anxiety and sorrow; whether disease had crept imperceptibly upon her; the King of terrors coming with noiseless step—velvet footfall; the candle of decaying life burning down slowly until it reached its socket; or whether, with appalling suddenness, the arrow had sped—the sun, which perhaps that morning rose on a cheerful home, setting over the valley of death, amid weeping clouds. All the entry we have in the inspired Record is, "She was dying." She had reached that terrible crisis-hour when hope's last glimmerings were being extinguished—the last tides of life were slowly ebbing—that sun was "going down while it was yet day!"

Can nothing be done to arrest the death-arrow in its course—to stop that sun from so premature a setting? The anguished father thinks of ONE, and ONE alone, who can say, "Sun, stand still!" "Can that same Jesus" (he might think to himself), "who cured a humble slave, who gave back to a fond Master the life of a faithful servant"—can He not (will He not) pity "one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel?" Will He, can He, if I rush to Him in this hour of my sorrow, deny me His pitying love, and the exercise of His wondrous power?"

There is no time for delay. With fleet footstep he rushes to the feet of the Prophet of Galilee, and in an agony of prayer beseeches Him to follow him to his dwelling. The Savior obeys; accompanied by a mixed crowd, among whom deeper and holier feelings and sympathies mingle with vain curiosity. As He hurries in the direction of this home of death, we may mark, in passing, the individualizing tenderness of the Redeemer's sympathy in all the three recorded cases of His raising from the dead—at Capernaum, at Nain, at Bethany; an only Daughter, an only Son, an only Brother!

An incident, meanwhile, takes place by the way, which for a time impedes His progress. A woman, "who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years," slips unobserved through the thronging crowd, touches the blue

fringe of the Lord's garment, and receives an instantaneous cure. But instead of passing, as we might expect, with all haste to the more urgent case, Jesus pauses and dwells on this intermediate one. He summons into His presence the subject of His healing power, in order that He may manifest to others the victory of faith, and utter in her own ear, words of encouragement and peace.

Hard, untimely interruption, we are apt to think! Each moment was precious to that trembling parent. The sand-glass of that loved one's life was hurrying to its last grain. He might have reached her in time, had it not been for this. But the likelihood is that the golden opportunity is past and gone; these few minutes' delay have cost the father his child—locked her fast in a sleep too deep to be disturbed!

And yet, we may well believe, there were gracious purposes in this, as there ever are in much which our blindness is apt to regard as adverse and unfavorable. The smaller miracle—the intermediate cure—would prepare the crowd for receiving the greater one. Above all, it would strengthen and confirm the faith of the witnessing parent—lead him to hope against hope, and, in the extremity of his anguish, make him "strong in faith, giving glory to God." We hear from his lips no fretful and impatient utterances—no insinuations against his Lord, or against the other suppliant, regarding the delay. Meekly he waits the Redeemer's time and will; and before long he shall have the promise fulfilled in his experience: "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks Him." "It is good for a man that he both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God."

But just at the moment when faith has got its pledge of Divine power—when the procession is again in motion, and joyous visions of the past are beginning to fill the future, messengers from his homestead are the bearers of heavy tidings: "Your daughter is dead, do not trouble the master!" "Fatigue not (as the word means), that weary, toil-worn Savior—add not to his journey or exhaustion. Let Him have the rest He so much requires; His presence could be of no avail now, for death has put his impressive, irrevocable seal on these lips."

Ah! bitter news! Just when hope was rising—when the future was

beginning again to have its rainbow hues spanning a dark sky—these tints melt and merge into a deeper darkness than before. The torch is quenched. The great dreaded blight of existence has passed over the parent's heart!

Now is the time for Jesus' utterances of comfort; for now was the moment when doubt and misgiving were most likely to rise and eclipse the hitherto triumphant actings of faith. Now was the time for those harsh thoughts of rebellious nature, we have already hinted at, which so often, at such seasons, overmaster our nobler feelings. "If it had been but a few moments sooner, my child might have been spared! If the Lord had only postponed the performance of that other act of love until He had left my threshold, I might still have had my precious gourd blossoming around me! It was these moments of delay that bereft me of my household treasure. By stopping to give peace to one sufferer, He has done so at the sacrifice of all that most fondly bound me to earth!"

If these, and thoughts like these, were about to arise, Christ in mercy interposes. We read, "Jesus answered," (not that Jairus spoke aloud his own feelings, but He who reads the secret heart answered to what was passing in the heaving depths of that soul)—"Hush! hush!" He seems to say, "do not allow these thoughts to arise in your heart; dismiss all such unworthy doubts." "Do not be afraid, only believe."

And now He has reached the house. The trappings and outward pageantry of death too truthfully verify the tidings of the messengers. In accordance with oriental custom, hired mourners and hired minstrels were already filling that silent chamber with dirges; while with these mingled the deeper and truer wailings of the smitten hearts.

"Go away!" said Christ, as in a tone of authority He rebuked these vehement demonstrations of mimic sorrow—"Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but ASLEEP." An enigmatic expression to the tumultuous mob around, but to the father, it was the renewal and repetition under a lovely figure of the former pacifying utterance, "Do not be afraid, only believe." The word "dead"—the utterance of the human messengers, too well calculated to annihilate the last spark of hope—is replaced by the rekindling word, "she sleeps." Man

has put the terrible extinguisher on that lamp. But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." What is that message of death, when I, the Lord of life, have been summoned by you? You have seen my power on a suffering woman—"only believe, and I will show you greater things than these."

The irreverent thronging crowd are kept outside. The mimic mourners are all excluded. His three favored disciples (afterwards the witnesses of His transfiguration on the Mount, and of His agony in the garden), are alone allowed to enter the chamber sacred to sorrow. In dumb emotion the two parents are bending over their withered flower. But so also is He who gave it—who planted it—who plucked it and who is to give it back again. In the might of His own omnipotence—in His own name (without invoking, like His prophets or apostles under similar circumstances, any higher power), death is summoned to yield his victim. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" The sleeper awoke! The prostrate lily raises its drooping head, and sheds once more its fragrance in that joyous home. That happy Israelite might well take up the words of his great ancestor, which he had so often read in the synagogue service, but perhaps without being ever before touched by them: "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever!"

Let us now seek to ponder one or two of those practical lessons with which this scene and passage are replete.

I. The first lesson we may gather from the text is, that all are exposed to domestic bereavement.

It may seem unkind to break the trance of earthly bliss by referring to the possibility, far less the certainty, of trial. And yet it is needful, now and then, solemnly to repeat the warning that you and yours "will not always live."

If God has up to now put upon your household the exempting mark—if the destroying angel has passed by your door unscathed—if you have no vacant chair at your home-hearth, no yawning chasm in your heart of

hearts—you are the exception, not the rule. God knows we have no gloomy pleasure in being prophets of evil. It is a poor gospel to dwell on harrowing thoughts of death—the shroud—the grave! But I would take these as preachers, to enforce the lesson daily taught us, "You also be ready." Yes, sooner or later, each one of us, parents and children, shall be brought to learn the solemn truth, "I am about to die." And if there be one who peruses these pages, who, like the minstrels of whom we have been speaking, is ready to have a smile on his lips, and to "laugh to scorn" a trite commonplace which everyone knows and many care not to hear—if youth in its strength, or manhood in its prime, is saying inwardly, "No fear for me," "My mountain is standing strong"—we would say to him with deep solemnity, "You fool, this night your soul may be required of you!"

Parents may well listen to a special word of solemn admonition. The death spoken of in the text was that of a child "twelve years of age." While this tells that your children may, at any age or at any time, be taken from you, it ought to urge upon you fidelity to your immortal trust. If you would wish the richest of all solaces when you are bereft of them, deal faithfully with their souls now. Do not allow any false shame to prevent you in all seriousness speaking to them of the things which belong to their everlasting peace. If you should ever come to mourn over an early grave, to you it will be the sweetest of all consolations if you can think that that "buried treasure of yearning hearts" was the subject of a mother's prayers and a father's counsels—that under that grassy sod there sleeps the child who from earliest years you had "lent to the Lord." On the other hand, it will be the bitterest of reflections (the iron truly will enter into your soul), if you have to weep burning tears of anguish over parental unfaithfulness and neglect. Bereft of that hope, "My child is in glory," you will be bereft indeed!

II. We learn from this passage that we need trials to bring us near to God.

It was his child's sickness that drove Jairus to the feet of Jesus. But for that home-trial his faith would never have been exercised, nor his love and gratitude evoked. While in health and prosperity, we are apt to take God's gifts as matters of course. It is not until the storm rises, that, with these atheist hearts of ours, (like the heathen sailors in Jonah's vessel),



we fall upon our knees and feel that our only safety is in Him "who rules the raging of the seas." Yes! when God makes breaches in our households—when He brings home to us the truth that our existence, and the existence of our children, is a perpetual miracle—when we discover that those little lives, pillars in our households, which we have vainly thought were pillars of iron, turn out to be pillars of dust—when the solid ivory discovers itself to be the melting snow wreath—then are we driven to discover what is the sole imperishable Portion!

If God is visiting any one of you with the deep experience of trial, it is that He may speak home to you. Never does He speak so gently, so wisely, so loudly, so solemnly, as when He asserts His right to take away what He originally gave. See, in the text, the unbelieving, laughing, mocking crowd, are disqualified to hear Jesus. They have "passed at a bound" from their mimic sorrow to heartless mirth; simulators—actors—they are thrust out of that Holy Presence. But the stricken Parents are taken into the favored circle. They gaze upwards from the face of the dead on Him who is "fairer than the children of men." In such a Presence unbelief is hushed, and faith is ready to hear "what God the Lord has to say to their souls." How many can tell, "But for the death of that Parent, that Brother, that Sister, that Child, I would have been to this hour without God and with out hope!"

III. Let us learn, from the incident of the text, the comfort of Prayer in the hour of sickness and death.

This Ruler, we read, came and fell down before him, pleading with him to heal his little daughter. "She is about to die," he said in desperation. "Please come and place your hands on her; heal her so she can live." Trial drove Jairus in his hour of dreaded bereavement to prayer, and "the effectual fervent prayer of this righteous man availed much."

The same blessed refuge is open for us in times of sickness. When our friends or our children are stretched on beds of suffering and death, we can take their cases to God, and plead with Him in their behalf at the Mercy Seat. We must not indeed dream that our prayers (as they were in the case of the Jewish ruler) must necessarily be answered, and that at our earthly bidding a miracle should follow. This would be presumption,

not faith; this would be to usurp the Sovereignty of God—to substitute our own wisdom for His—it would be to make our will and not His paramount. If we had only to speak and it was accomplished, it would make man God, and degrade God to the level of man. It would be to dishonor the Almighty, making Him the servant of the creature—not the creature waiting on in loving trustfulness as the servant of the Creator. Far, far better is it for the lowly suppliant to endorse every petition with the words, "Father, not my will but Yours be done."

And yet, let us remember for our comfort, that prayers at a deathbed (apparently unheard and unanswered) are not in vain. They may smooth the death-pillow. They may remove from it its thorns, and put the promises of Christ in their stead. They may lead sorrowing survivors to lowly resignation, and disarm earthly reflections of their poignant sting. Yes! do not forget this, when seasons of family trial overtake you—when the best of earthly means and instrumentality prove ineffective, and those near and dear to you are hovering on the confines of the grave. Do not sit down wringing your hands in despair, as if Jehovah were like Baal, asleep or on a journey, and His ear deaf, when you most need His intervention. Arise, call upon Your God! Plead the assurance that if in accordance with that better will and wisdom "the prayer of faith SHALL save the sick."

The Patriarch David of old, is a rebuke in this respect to the lack of faith in many a Christian parent now. For seven whole days was he stretched on the bare earth importunate for his infant's life. "Who can tell," said he, "whether God may be gracious to me that my child may live?" Not until the little spark had fled, and the sad accents fell on his ear, "Your child is dead," did the prayer melt into the bright hope full of immortality—" I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me!"

#### IV. Learn the nature of real sorrow.

He who wept at the grave of Lazarus does not forbid Tears. They are holy things, consecrated by Incarnate tenderness. Let the world, if they may, condemn it as unmanly to grieve—or worse, let them seek oblivion for their trials in the giddy round of its pleasures and follies, and make the grave of their dead as soon as they can, be "the land of forgetfulness." He encourages no such cold and stern stoicism. But, on the other hand,

neither does He countenance excessive sorrow. True Christian grief is calm, tranquil, chastened. The noisy, wailing, mimic crowd are spurned from the scene. If they had been the tears of a Martha or Mary, He would have held them as sacred; but being the hollow echoes of unfeeling hearts, He says, "Why all this commotion and wailing?"

Jesus, on every occasion in His public ministry, stamps with His abhorrence all pretense. He dislikes unreality, what is made to appear gold which is tinsel—whether it be simulated joy, or simulated piety, or simulated tears. That is a poor sorrow which expends itself in funeral trappings—which is measured by doleful looks, and passionate words, and mourning clothes. True grief is not like the stream which murmurs and frets because it passes over a shallow bed—that which is deepest makes least noise. Inconsolable sorrow is inappropriate the Christian. To abandon one's self to sullen gloom, moping melancholy and discontent, is sadly to miss and mistake the great design of trial. God sends it to wake us up to a sense of life's realities—not to fold our hands, but to be more in earnest than ever in our work and warfare.

Oh! when He sees fit to enter our households, and, as the Great Proprietor of life, to resume His own, be it ours to thank Him for the precious loan, to acknowledge His right and prerogative to recall the grant. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver." Although it was in a trial, of which, God forbid, either you or I should ever know the bitterness, I know not in all Scripture a more touching picture of this silent acquiescence in God's sovereign will than we have in the case of a parent who had seen his two worthless children smitten down before his eyes, and yet of whom we only read that "Aaron held his peace."

V. Finally, let us learn from this passage that Christ is the Great Vanquisher of DEATH.

Previously we have traced His footsteps of mercy and power as the Healer of diseases—the Savior of the body—the Lord of nature—the Ruler of the spirit. We have seen Pain crouching importunate at His feet; Penitence creeping meekly at His side bedewing Him with tears; Sickness at His summons taking wings and fleeing away.

But now he has reached a new era in His life of marvels. He has broken the bands of Death. He has gathered in the first sheaf of that mighty Harvest of life, of which the angels are to be the Reapers in the Resurrection morning.

He gives us here a comforting assurance; first, regarding the Dying, and second, regarding the Dead.

(1.) He tells us regarding every death-bed—that the thread of existence is in His hands—that He quickens and restores whom He will—that to Him as "God the Lord, belong the issues of life and death."

"Your daughter is dead;" (said bold human unbelief) "trouble not the Master." But the message is premature. He has inverted the sand glass. He has made the shadow as in Hezekiah's dial to go back!

Oh, glorious assurance! Our lives and the lives of all near and dear to us are in His keeping. It is He who sends the death-messenger. It is He who marks every tree in the forest—plucks every flower in the garden. My health and sickness, my joys and sorrows, my friends, my children, are in the hands of the Christ of Calvary! We, in our blind unbelief, may regard Death as some arbitrary tyrant lording it, with iron scepter, over hapless victims. But the Gospel teaches a nobler philosophy. It tells of One in heaven who has in His hands "the keys of the grave and of death," and who, at the time He sees best, but not one moment sooner, "turns man to destruction, and says, Return, you children of men!"

(2.) He gives us a comforting word regarding the DEAD. Christian, He says of your dead (the dead in Christ), "Do not be afraid, only believe." "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleeps." Yes, weep not! she is not dead, but LIVES! Death is but a quiet sleep. Soon the morning hour shall strike—the waking time of immortality arrive, and the voice of Jesus will be heard saying—"I go that I may awake them out of sleep."

It has been often noted that there is a beautiful and striking progression in our Lord's three miraculous raisings from the dead. This instance, we have been considering, was the first in point of time. The daughter of Jairus was raised immediately after death had taken place, when the body

was still laid on its death-couch. Her soul had but taken its flight to the spirit-world, when the angels that bore it away were summoned to restore it. The second, in order of time, was the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. Death had in this case achieved a longer triumph. The usual time for lamentation had intervened—he was being borne to his last home when the voice of Deity sounded over his casket. The third and last of this class of miracles, was the raising of Lazarus of Bethany. In his case, death had attained a still more signal mastery. The funeral ceremonies were over—the sepulchral grotto held in its embrace the loved and lost; four days had these lips been sealed before the life-giving and life-restoring word was uttered. There is one other gigantic step in this progression. "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth."

In the first case we have cited, the time elapsing between the dismissal of the spirit and its recall, was measured by moments, the second by hours, the third by days; the fourth is measured by ages—centuries—A millennium! But what of that? What though we speak of the tomb as the "long home," and death as the long sleep? By Him (with whom a thousand years is as one day) that precious, because redeemed dust, shall be gathered together, particle by particle. "I will ransom them," He says, as he looks forward through the vista of ages to this glorious consummation—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be Your plague! O grave, I will be Your destruction."

Blessed, thrice blessed time! As in the case of Jairus, it was his own loved daughter who, in form and feature, was again restored: as the widow of Nain gazed on the unaltered countenance of her own cherished boy: as the sisters of Lazarus saw in him who came forth from the grave, no alien form strangely altered, but the Brother of their hearts—so, we believe, on that wondrous Morning of immortality, shall the beloved on earth wear their old familiar smiles and loving looks. They shall retain their personal identity.

And further, as in the case of the daughter in the text, her Parents received her once more into their arms—as in the case of the widow's son, it is expressly said, "they delivered him to his mother"—as in Bethany, we

are allowed to look into the home circle again reunited, Jesus once more loving "Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus," and they loving one another—so may we believe that, on the Resurrection day, the affections which hallowed homes on earth, shall not be dulled, quenched, annihilated, but rather ennobled and purified. Brothers, sisters, parents, children, shall be linked once more in the fond ties and memories of earth, gathering in loving groups around the living fountains of waters, and singing together the twofold anthem of Providence and Grace—"the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb!"

If we descend for a moment from these lofty contemplations, it is to utter a brief word, in conclusion, to those who know nothing of such glorious hopes—who are locked in the slumbers of a far sadder Death. Yes! there is a more dreadful sleep—a more dreadful death—than that of the Grave! They are rather to be envied who have "fallen asleep" (or as the word means) who have been "laid asleep by Jesus." Faith, in her noblest musings, would not weep them back from their crowns, and deprive them of their bliss! But they are to be pitied who are still slumbering on in the deep sepulchral stillness of spiritual death—that death from which there can only be a waking up in anguish! With deep solemnity would I say, "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life!"

When we are called, as at times we are, to hear of deathbeds in every phase of life—in every stage of the chequered journey—manhood in the sere and yellow leaf—youth in its prime—childhood in its innocence—infancy in its tenderest bud; or when these truths come home to us as arrows feathered from our own bosoms—solemn thoughts welling up from the very deeps of our being; I know not what will make a man serious if such impressive lessons fail to do so! Reader! If God were to meet you tonight, could you meet Him? Would you be ready for the Opened Books and the Great Judgement? Nothing—nothing will be of any avail at that hour, but the life of faith in the Son of God; not the wretched possibility of a deathbed repentance, but an honest, loving, cordial closing NOW, with that great Salvation.

It is but a slender thread that binds us to existence; every moment, "Truly there is but a step between us and death." Oh, that we may so live, that

that step may be regarded as a step between us and Glory; and that, when the final summons comes, it may be to us—what weeping friends cannot see—the Chariots of Salvation and the Horses of fire, waiting to bear us to Paradise!

## THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE

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

"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. 'Follow Me', Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him." Luke 5:27, 28; Matthew 9:9, 10; Mark 2:14

We cannot be sure what precise chronological place among the Memories of Gennesaret the calling of Matthew should occupy. But we cannot be far wrong in considering it as having occurred in immediate connection with the incidents on which we have been recently dwelling.

Of the previous personal history of the future Evangelist we know nothing. But a flood of light is thrown upon his character, and the position he occupied in Capernaum, by the worldly profession from which he was taken to be a Follower and Apostle of Jesus.

If any one name or class was more hated than another among the Jews, it was that of the Publicans. These, as is well known, were the collectors of the tax laid on the Jewish nation by the foreign power by which they were subjugated. The impatience of the Hebrews under the Roman yoke rendered taxation in any shape peculiarly offensive. The odium of the public burdens themselves, came to be shared by the officers who exacted them, so much so, that it was only the more degraded among their countrymen who could be found willing to accept pay and place, reckoned at once servile and degrading. It was written in their law (Deut. 17:15), "You may not set a stranger over you who is not your brother." The



Hebrew that would stoop to collect these revenues (badges of national dishonor), was considered guilty of an infraction of their sacred code—denounced as having done homage to an alien and heathen master.

There are never lacking, however, in any community, mean-souled, covetous men—men of iron will by nature, and that indurated by practice, who will venture, at any risk, to brave public opinion, and stoop to have their mammon-spirit gratified. The office of Publican was an easy road to wealth; and a man destitute of self respect, who was heedless about losing his character, or rather who had no character to lose, would not be scrupulous in accepting this lucrative office under Caesar. The collecting of these taxes, moreover, afforded the publicans additional opportunities for indulging in tyrannical exaction and fraud. Any appeal from their overcharges was carried to a Roman tribunal, where the case was often pre-judged, and the chance of reimbursement rendered nearly hopeless. The civil rulers never deemed it diplomatic to encourage resistance to their subordinate officers. Thus, Might too often triumphed over Right; while the petitioners, in anticipation of an adverse decision, could readily disarm the hostility of the tax-gatherer by means of a secret bribe.

The code of morality among the Publicans, you can thus see at once, was that of the lowest description. We cease to wonder at the disgust in which they were held by the rest of the population. The severest thing a proud Pharisee could say was, "God, I thank you I am not as this Publican!" The daughters of Israel scorned alliance with them in marriage. Their testimony was not received at Jewish tribunals. It was a common saying among the Jews, "that vows made to thieves, murderers, and publicans, might be broken," and when our Lord himself spoke of an incorrigible offender, one who, from persistence in wrongdoing, was to be excommunicated from the Church, He says, "Let him be to you as an heathen man and a publican."

There may have been exceptions, indeed, among the class we are speaking of—individuals of nobler parts, who were not so unscrupulous and dishonest as others. We have nothing, however, to entitle us to consider Levi (or Matthew) in any more favorable light than as an average specimen of his calling. His post for "receipt of custom" seems to have been at the port of Capernaum. There he was seated when Jesus met him,

receiving dues. The question is one of no great importance whether the calling and conversion of the first Evangelist was sudden, or whether it had been preceded by processes of anxious thought—severe mental and spiritual struggles.

Most probably the latter. Though we never dare limit the omnipotence and sovereignty of Divine grace, it seems more in accordance with God's usual dealings, and the analogy in His other works, to connect the great moral change known as conversion, with certain means and instrumentality; not making it the offspring of blind, unreasoning impulse. Who can tell, that, though unknown to his fellow tax-gatherers or to the thronging crowds which crudely jostled and wrangled around his place of business, there had been for a long time, a silent, secret, unnoticed spiritual work going on in that man's soul! For days—for weeks—conscience may have been speaking; the thought of a debased moral nature, grasping avarice, illicit gains, may have been disturbing his peace by day, and his dreams by night.

He may, long before this, have been an hearer of the discourses of the Great Prophet, and a witness of His miracles. He may have listened to some of those Divine lessons in which a lofty morality had been inculcated, to which he, alas! had long been a stranger. How terribly would his whole life stand rebuked by the utterance of these golden words—they may have gone like a barbed arrow into his soul—"Do to others as you would that they should do unto you." "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again, and you shall be the children of the Highest." As another Publican, at a later date, swung himself on the branch of a sycamore tree to attract the notice of the Holy Teacher, so may this officer of Capernaum have followed the crowd of stragglers to the Mount of Beatitudes, or heard, amid the pauses of traffic, some gracious words which sank into his soul, and stirred the depths of his being.

Who can picture the conflict that may have ensued between nature and grace, principle and conscience, mammon and God? He may have long felt the heavenly impulse before he dared to publicly avow it—a desire to renounce his sinful and fraudulent ways; but the old arguments, "My subsistence, my gains, my family," crushed and smothered better

thoughts. He may have been for long what the old writers call "a Borderer," wavering and hovering on the confines of light and darkness; the pendulum vibrating between two worlds! But Incarnate Truth confronts him, and the whole lie of his former being melts before the rays of that Glorious Sun. Jesus comes, sees him, and by an omnipotent word and look, conquers! Joined to the Son of God and Savior of the world by this outward act and inward principle of life and love, he has become "a new creature"—"All old things have passed away, and all things have become new."

The same great change must take place with regard to all of us before we can enter the kingdom of God. There must be a leaving behind us of all that is of the earth earthy, and a cleaving with full purpose of heart to the Lord who died for us. Let us not deceive ourselves with the thought that some external profession—acting up to some conventional standard of religion recognized by the community in which we dwell—Sabbath forms of devotion, and weekly worldliness—will save us, instead of saving conversion. Much less, that some fond dreams of future amendment will exempt us from the need of present repentance and crucifixion of sin in the heart and life. Let us remember the words of Him who never made one hard exaction, or imposed one unnecessary burden—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." If any are disposed to feel that such denial is unreasonable, if not impossible, come with us to the Port of Capernaum and as we gaze on that scene of worldly business, and hear a voice in the midst of it, saying, "Follow Me," let us endeavor to weigh well all that is comprehended in the willing response—when Matthew "left all, rose up, and followed Jesus."

We might examine the conduct of Matthew from many points of view, but we shall illustrate it, at present, under one aspect, (an aspect which the Church in modern times may do well to ponder), that is, as a life of sacrifice.

#### I. The conversion of Matthew involved A SACRIFICE OF THE WORLD.

A financial sacrifice is all the greater if the man who makes it is naturally avaricious and covetous. We can quite well imagine an individual who is

happily exempt from the passion of money-making, counting it no great hardship to take some step involving a reduction in earthly gain. But it is no small struggle with him who has, from youth up been a cringing worshiper of mammon, to cast the hoarded treasure from his grasp, and throw himself penniless into the world.

Such was the case with Matthew. If he had not been naturally a covetous man, the chances are all against his being ever found seated at the custom-house of Capernaum. Moreover, that this particular "receipt of custom" was a lucrative one, is further evinced by the fact that he was able on quitting it forever, to make a sumptuous feast for his friends and former associates. It was different with him in this respect from the other apostles. Fishermen on the lake—their sole riches consisted in a joint fishing vessel with its tackle, and the precarious gains of their daily toil. What a test of his sincerity—that he was swayed by some mighty principle superior to nature—that in one moment he was able to surrender at his Lord's bidding his golden prize, and cast in his lot with the despised and homeless Savior of Galilee.

Yes; the world might not have wondered that he thus left his original calling had there been some carnal and lucrative equivalent held out in the other. But it was all the reverse. That Savior had taken care to undeceive every adherent who clung to hopes of worldly advancement—"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head." Yet, with this prospect of poverty, disgrace, and contempt—the Publican willingly renounced his earthly all. At the very moment his coffers are filling, behind the pressing crowd around his tribute table, he sees a Divine countenance, and listens to a Divine call. The glittering coin—the idol of his life—was in a moment forsaken; that loving look, that convincing word, are more to him than "thousands of gold and silver," and waiting not to count the cost, or debate the expediency, he threw in his lot with the Prophet of Nazareth.

What an example for us! Are we willing to make similar sacrifices for the glory of God's name? Ah! rather, how poor, and feeble, and inadequate are our most self-denying efforts when compared with those of this Hebrew tax-gatherer. He left his all—he gave God his best, and kept the remnants to himself. We give God our remnants, and keep our best to

ourselves. He left his worldly gain at Christ's bidding—what have we left? what have we sacrificed? What 'pennies' have we thrown into His treasury! Often only the crumbs and sweepings of guilty extravagance! O that every believer—every member of the Christian priesthood—would come to consider his possessions, his houses and lands, his wealth, his money, not as a mere property to be selfishly used, but as a talent to be employed for the good of man and the glory of God—a trust committed to his charge by God and for God, and in respect of which his stewardship will at last be rigidly scrutinized.

It may seem to the carnal, worldly-mind a hard saying—who can bear it? —to leave ALL and follow the Savior. But who that has pondered the story of Redeeming love, can call anything unreasonable that Lord requires? Glance upwards to Him who thus demands the surrender, and remember how willingly and cheerfully He left His all for us! The noblest instance of renunciation on the part of His people is but a mere shadow—dust in the balance—in comparison with that self-sacrificing love which exchanged a Throne for a manger—a Crown for a cross. How does that noble appeal of the Great Apostle make all the sacrifices of man pale into nothingness like the rushlight before the sun—"you know the grace of our Lord Jesus, who, though He were rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be made rich."

II. We have just now spoken of Matthew's sacrifice of the WORLD; there was another still greater sacrifice he proved by his deeds he was willing to make—THE SACRIFICE OF SELF.

The unpretentious, unboastful, unostentatious spirit of this Israelite is beautifully exemplified by one or two almost unnoticed touches in the inspired records. As if covered with shame and confusion at the remembrance of the past, he seems anxious to utter no word which would go to magnify himself, or exalt his own character and doings.

While other Evangelists speak of a "Great Feast" he made, and to which he invited Jesus, he says nothing as to its greatness in his own Gospel—all the reference he makes to it is, "Jesus was having dinner in the house." While Luke speaks of it as his own house, Matthew leaves the particular house indefinite.

Again, in speaking of forsaking his calling at the bidding of his Savior, while Luke speaks of him as leaving "all" and following, he himself omits the words "Left ALL." But for the fidelity of his brother Evangelist the amount of his self-sacrifice would have been left unrecorded. He is content with the more modest entry, "He rose and followed."

The other Evangelists, in classifying the Apostles, two by two, give him the precedence of Thomas; he reverses the order, Thomas first, himself last.

While the others put a enhancing veil over his former life by inserting his other name (Levi), he has no such scruple, but adopts the old title with the unenviable notoriety it had on the shores of Gennesaret. And more, if you consult his list of the apostleship, and compare it with the others, he would seem desirous to hide from view all in himself that was praiseworthy, and to magnify the grace of God in his conversion, by bringing into prominence all that was blameworthy. In the list of Apostles given by his fellow Evangelists there is no account given of their respective worldly callings, but he makes in his own case and name a strange exception—he styles and subscribes himself, "Matthew, the Publican."

Oh, how unlike self and self-love is all this! When a man has committed some great fault in his past life—when there is some scar in his history, how careful is he to hide it from the world, or if this he cannot do, to palliate and extenuate his conduct as best he can. A bankrupt cares not to speak of his insolvency. Whether it be his misfortune or his crime, it is an inhibited, and shunned, and forbidden theme. But Matthew, as a converted man, would have others to know what the grace of God had done in his behalf. As the lights of a picture have a value and strength given to them by the disposition of shadow, he brings into prominence the shades in his past spiritual life to give power to that light which had "shined into his heart," even "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

In writing his Gospel—that sacred record which was to be read by millions on millions—what an opportunity, had self been paramount, of displaying his own character to the best advantage. But the whole

narrative of his conversion is there merely incidental. It is hidden among a crowd of other sacred facts. What of all he recorded could have made such an indelible impression on his own mind—what memory half so hallowed or momentous, as when his Lord, in ineffable love, stood confronting his custom-house, and gave that never-to-be-forgotten word, whose echoes to his last hour were ringing in his ears—the "Follow me"—which was henceforth to be his motto for all time?

Yet where would we discover, in reading the account in Matthew, that the narrator of the event was the veritable Publican at the Port of Gennesaret? He gives it no undue prominence. His passing reference to it is to exalt not himself, but Him who is "the chief among ten thousand." The selfish man, in rearing this monument to be read by future ages, would have done his utmost to magnify his own deeds, exalt his own sacrifices, and hide the dark blemishes in his previous life. But, when that inspired monument is reared—on the four sides of which each Evangelist inscribes the record of our Lord's ministry—see how the three others carefully obliterate all memory of their brother's former life, and seek to give due prominence to his generosity and self-sacrifice—while he himself, in giving his version of the great Gospel story, puts all his own goodness in the shade; and, as we seek the sculptor's name amid the letters he has chiseled, we find it thus entered amid the glorious company of Apostles—"Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the Publican!"

III. We have still another instance of sacrifice in the case of Matthew—the sacrifice of a class of feelings that had a more special reference to HIS RELATION TO OTHERS.

When one who has previously led a godless life comes under serious spiritual impressions—when the great Gospel change operates on his conscience, and he becomes a converted man—not the smallest part often of the struggle through which he passes, is the ridicule to which he has exposed himself at the hand of his former companions. "I would willingly," is the musing of many, "become religious—live a life of piety and prayer. But what would my associates think of me?—my companions in daily life—my brothers—my kinsmen—my neighbors in the counting-

room—my assistants at the receipt of custom? I could bear anything, and put up with anything but these scoffing sneers. I would boldly make the avowal which conscience prompts; but I dare not breast that sweeping current of ridicule which I know too well must necessarily be encountered."

Or, to avoid this, how often do we see the newly awakened and regenerated soul adopting another alternative—(it was the unhappy expedient of Christians of the earlier ages)—rushing from the world into solitude—escaping cold, repulsive, unsympathizing looks and words from those with whom they formerly associated, by an unhealthy abandonment of life's duties and responsibilities. Now, at first sight, there may be something to admire in the apparent boldness and unworldliness of such resolves. An air of saintliness gathers around these hermit-spirits. They seem to have surrendered much for God and heaven. A spurious sentimental piety would speak of them as living and moving in another atmosphere than ours, and forbid us lightly to violate the sanctity of their religious seclusion.

"Those hermits blest and holy maids,  
The nearest heaven on earth  
Who talk with God in shadowy glades,  
Free from crude care and mirth;  
To whom some viewless teacher brings  
The secret love of rural things,  
The moral of each fleeting cloud and gale,  
The whispers from above that haunt the twilight vale."

But, say as we will, this is the romance of religious life—not its reality. Far nobler—far more self-sacrificing—is the conduct of the man, who, like Matthew, after forming his resolution to leave all and follow a despised Master, will gather together at a great Feast his old companions—his fellows in trade—his former confederates in fraud—and disclosing to them boldly his own change of principles, seek to make them partakers of the same liberty with which he himself has been made free. We believe if Matthew had now acted as his own natural feelings would have dictated, he would have shut himself up in his dwelling, shunned his former associates, and waited anxiously for the next Passover, that he might



follow his Lord to Jerusalem, and leave Galilee and Capernaum forever! But, with conduct worthy of a hero, he will not leave his post—he will not leave his city, until he takes a graceful method of bidding his acquaintances farewell, and of giving them an opportunity of hearing from the lips of his Lord those words which had spoken peace and joy to his own soul!

Yes, there was sacrifice here—the bold sacrifice of a man fearless of all possible misconceptions. If he had been the slave of the dread of these, he might have thought to himself—"Will not this fatally damage me in the eyes of my future companions?—will not Christ and his disciples, if they see me in such company, denounce me as worldly and inconsistent? Will they not say, That man pretends to be one of us—pretends to have made great sacrifices and renunciations, but his soul is clinging to the dust as before? He seemed to have forsaken all—but his house and halls are open, as ever they were, to the unworthy and depraved."

He heeded not such possible insinuations. He felt, before he left the city of his birth or his sojourn, that he owed a great duty to those who had been for years his friends and intimates. He was in future to be honored as an Apostle in carrying the Gospel message to distant tribes; but, in the true spirit of Christianity, he will first begin at home. All unkind and uncongenial though they now be in sentiment and feeling, he will impact and influence his old associates at Capernaum, before he goes forth, either by pen or voice, to evangelize the world. He was acting up to the injunction our Blessed Lord gave subsequently to another Apostle—"When you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

Are there any of us who, like Matthew, have been brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel? Have we still some old companions at our "receipt of custom," those with whom we have been long brought into contact, but who are still without God?—perhaps associates in our former guilt, ruined by our former example. We owe them a heavy debt of Christian love! It becomes us to strive to do what best we can, while we have opportunity, for their souls' salvation. It may be a hard matter; it may need a bold heart to do it; but what might not many a young man, many a youthful soldier of the cross, effect, with the glory of God as the great aim of his life; how much might he not effect at

his place of business—on those seated with him at the same desk, or standing behind the same counter, or plying the same worldly calling—teaching them to sanctify and hallow their worldly work with great religious motives, and to interweave diligence in business with fervency of spirit, "serving the Lord!"

IV. The last illustration of the spirit of sacrifice on the part of Matthew (though not, of course, specified in any of the passages which head this chapter) was THE SACRIFICE OF LIFE.

We know little of the future of this Apostle, but what we do know, is all in accordance with the antecedents on which we have now been commenting. After spending eight years in Judea, during which time his memorable Gospel was written, he went (according to the statements of early ecclesiastical writers) on his apostolic mission and labors to Africa. Through him Ethiopia first "stretched out her hands unto God." But on that virgin soil too, the blood of this faithful Galilean was spilt—by a violent death for his blessed Master's sake, he set the most impressive of seals to his sincerity. The World, Self, Friends, Home, Country, and now Life itself, were freely surrendered at the bidding of his great Lord.

From first to last, indeed, his was a noble specimen of an entire and unqualified sacrifice. The other disciples seem, after entering on the apostleship, still to have retained their boats and nets. We still meet Peter and John, Andrew and James, as Fishermen on the Sea of Tiberias; but Matthew we never find again at his former calling. If we visit in thought the port of Capernaum, a new Collector is seated at the Tax Booth—a new tenant occupies the scene of the strange farewell feast. The Fishermen could go back with safety and impunity to their daily occupation, for it was a lawful one—rid of all temptation to fraud and unworthy dealing. But it was different with the Publican. Return to the old resort might have been perilous. The old fires of covetousness might have been rekindled; drawn within the perilous vortex he might have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, and proved another Demas loving the present world and forsaking Christ. He seems purposely to shun Galilee; and even when the other disciples return to it for a season, he cleaves to his adopted home in Judea.

After the Savior's resurrection we have the names of the apostolic band enumerated only twice; on the first occasion, when Jesus met them on the shores of Gennesaret—the name of Matthew is NOT there; on the second, when they are gathered in "the upper room" in Jerusalem—Matthew IS mentioned! His voice is heard with the rest, engaged in earnest prayer for the coming of the Paraclete—"following" his Lord in thought to the glory to which He had ascended, and waiting for the promised baptism of fire. That Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Savior's word, is poured abundantly on Matthew, to qualify him alike to be an inspired Historian and a faithful Missionary.

As the Historian—He "guides him into all the truth," "brings all things to his remembrance," "shows him things to come." As the Missionary—He imbues him with supernatural gifts, in accordance with his Lord's parting declaration—"you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth!" Forth he went, on his great errand; ending A LIFE OF SACRIFICE on a martyr's cross, and inheriting, we doubt not, a martyr's crown.

In conclusion, Christ would speak to each of us in the words he addressed to this Publican—"FOLLOW ME!" Believers! He asks you to honor Him in your daily callings—in your everyday words and works. If, like the other fishermen-disciples, you are engaged in lawful occupations, leave them not, but ennoble and sanctify them with high Christian motives; and, as you reap in worldly gains, do not forget the God who is the Proprietor of your wealth, and looks to you to be the almoners of His bounty.

If, like the Publican at the Roman toll, yours is debatable ground—where principle is at stake—some desperate game at which conscience holds the dice with trembling hand—like Matthew forsake it. Leave it, and leave it forever; and take as your motto (with the Divine favor and blessing) —"The little that a just man has, is better than the riches of many wicked."

Oh! plead not your worldly duties, your business, your engagements, as an apology for living without God; as if the voice of Christ cannot find you there, and His grace cannot triumph over all obstacles. Remember it was

amid the coarse jostlings of that crowd at the port of Capernaum—amid the shouts of bargemen—the ringing of hammers—the roll of wagons—that Matthew first heard (yes, and listened to) the call, "Follow me!"

One other thought still suggests itself. We have spoken of Matthew's life as a lowly yet splendid instance of Self-sacrifice; and yet, I would beg you to mark that, in the very midst of that Sacrifice there is an element of CHEERFULNESS. It is a striking thing to note, at the very moment when he has made renunciation of his worldly ALL—when his old associates and acquaintances are doubtless, speaking of him as a ruined man, the old publican makes a Feast—a joyous Banquet! He is cheerful, at the very moment when he must have been conscious that the world, by a voluntary act, was receding from his grasp, and that his, henceforth, is to be a simpler meal, a humbler abode, a more despised Master than the Roman Caesar!

But this is a true Picture of Christianity, and of the power of true Christianity on every heart. Religion is a Feast—Religion is gladness. Let others paint it, if they will, draped in sackcloth, with melancholy on the brow and a bunch of funereal cypress in the hand. That is a spurious religion; not the Religion of this Savior-God who sat with Matthew at his feast—honored him with His presence at this social gathering! Never did the soul of Matthew find true joy until now. He had it not before, in his bags of gold—his lordly bribes—his cursed robberies. But he had it now in "the peace of God which passes all understanding" "keeping his heart;" and even when he left that table, and bade farewell forever to a luxurious home, he could look up to the face of his Great Master and say, "You have put gladness into my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

If God is calling upon us to follow Him, and if that following demands the surrender of much that our hearts may fondly cling to, whether it be the world or self, or friends, or children, or home, or substance—at His bidding let us do it willingly—"The Lord loves a cheerful giver." The very surrendering, if it be for His glory, will have an accompanying blessedness. Oh! I repeat, what can we surrender for Him to be compared for a moment with what He surrendered for Us?—"God Spared Not His Own Son!" What sacrifice can we count great, or unreasonable, or

grievous, after this! Thus, being willing to honor Him as the Taker as well as the Giver, let us remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive manifold more in this present time; and in the world to come life everlasting.

## **THE MIRACULOUS FEAST**

"And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."

Matthew 14:19, 20; Mark 6:39-43; Luke 9:14-17; John 6:10-13

The miracle, which is to form the subject of this chapter, seems to have had an important influence on the Jewish mind, in substantiating the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God and the Messiah promised to the Fathers. We cannot wonder, therefore, that it occupies a prominent place in Gospel story. It is worthy of note that the miracle itself—the feeding of the five thousand—is described by all the four Evangelists. Even John, who seldom travels in his inspired narrative beyond the events transacted in Judea, on the present occasion inserts this remarkable Galilean incident, in connection with the sublime discourse to which it gave rise on the Bread of life.

Before referring to the locality of the miracle, it may be well to advert to the two causes which seem to have induced our blessed Lord and His disciples to suspend, for a time, their labors on the busy western shore of Gennesaret, and seek the seclusion and repose of the opposite side.

The first appears, from Mark, to have been the untimely death of John the Baptist, whose imprisonment in the castle of Macherus on the Dead Sea, had just been terminated by an act of capricious and cold-blooded cruelty and murder on the part of Herod. A sorrowing group of his bereaved disciples seem to have hastened, when the deed was consummated, (or rather after the interment of their master's mangled remains,) to inform a mightier than John of the mournful tragedy. He who afterwards wept tears of anguish over the grave of Lazarus, was not likely to be unmoved when the tidings reached Him of His greatest prophet—a true "Master in Israel"—having fallen.

We have here a glimpse of the tenderness of the soul of Jesus. Sorrow at the death of a valued friend and follower, whose holy life had shone with undimmed luster to its close, stirred the depths of His loving heart. Grief likes to be alone. The great world, with its din and bustle, is strange, grating, and uncongenial at such an hour. Jesus, feeling as a man, would seek to leave the crowd for a little while—to commune with His own heart and be still. Related alike by kindred and affection to the Messenger of the Covenant, He summons His disciples to take ship from Capernaum and make for the farther shore, that there they might mingle their tears and lamentations over the hero-heart that had so suddenly ceased to beat.

John was the Forerunner of his Lord. "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light"—the morning star heralding the dawn of Gospel day! When that Star was quenched in the firmament, the Great Sun of all Being mourned the sudden extinction of His brightest satellite, and for the moment waded through clouds of sorrow. As the "Friend of the Bridegroom," the Baptist had "rejoiced greatly at the sound of the Bridegroom's voice;" now the Bridegroom in His turn mourns when the voice of His faithful, earnest, self-denying friend is forever hushed and silenced.

But a second cause may be added for this retirement to the solitudes of Naphtali. We find, in the preceding context, that the twelve Apostles had just returned from their first missionary tour in the towns and villages of Galilee—the first-fruits and pledge of vaster enterprises throughout Judea and the world. Weak and exhausted with their incessant ministrations,

their Lord provides for them this season of needful rest. "Come you also," says He, "apart into a desert place, and rest a little." It was a befitting opportunity, too, for communicating in private to their Divine Master the results of their preaching. "The apostles," we read, "gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had DONE and what they had TAUGHT!"

Solemn and touching picture! Ah! it is what every minister of the Gospel has yet to do—when his work is done—when his mission is over—and he crosses to meet his Lord in the deep solitudes of eternity. What an incentive this for every Steward of the mysteries of grace to be earnest, faithful, self-denying, instant in season and out of season—"warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." How terrible to confront his Judge at last, and to be branded by his own deeds and his own teachings as a traitor to his trust; listening, in the silence of self-condemnation, to the twofold question which will be put at the threshold of immortality—"What have you DONE? What have you TAUGHT?"

The place to which the Redeemer and His disciples now retired was in the neighborhood of Bethsaida, on the northeastern shore of Gennesaret, under the green mountains of Golan, where the Jordan hurries its waters into the Lake.

We are not to understand by "a desert place" a region of dry barren sand; on the contrary, it was a spot fertile in itself, but it had not, like the opposite land of Gennesaret, been brought under the cultivation of the husbandman. It remained in a state of nature. Cattle browsed on its slopes, or on the rich pastures at the mouth of the Jordan. It was now the most delightful season of the Palestine year. The first flush of spring was carpeting both plain and mountain with living green. John specially notes the season: "The Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near;" and, again, as confirmatory of the time, Mark (who is ever the most graphic and pictorial of the Evangelists, always seizing, if I might so say, with a painter's eye, some striking natural feature in the scene he delineates), afterwards represents the multitudes, in his description of the miracle, as seated on the "green grass."

The Lord and His disciples had crossed alone in their fishing vessel, but the many eager hearers they had left behind—still thirsting for the word of the kingdom—set out on foot, walking round by the northern shore of the lake, in hopes of meeting Jesus as He landed, and of again enjoying His instructions. The fame of the Prophet of Galilee had now rapidly spread. As these anxious groups passed through the towns and hamlets that lined the shore, they added to their numbers—villagers, farmers, and fishermen swelled their company. Moreover, the time of the Passover approaching, it is more than probable they would meet some of the northern caravans of pilgrims coming to the holy feast. The report of the miracles performed in the towns bordering on Tiberias, had reached the adjacent region—Tyre and Sidon—the secluded hamlets of Lebanon and the cities of Syria; and many, hearing that the wonder-working Teacher was so near, would doubtless willingly suspend their journey, and join the groups who were hastening to meet Him.

The crowd which had left, a few hours before, the streets of Capernaum, has now increased with these varied recruits to the number of five thousand. Might it not be taken as the first pledge of a vaster fulfillment of old Jacob's prophecy regarding the coming of the Shiloh—"Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be?"

From one of these green slopes, already indicated, Jesus sees the multitudes. The flocks browsing on the pastoral scenes around Him are carefully tended; but the Great and Good Shepherd is "moved with compassion" towards the human crowd below, because "they were as sheep without a shepherd!" He prepares, therefore, to lead them to green pastures and still waters, and to give them food to eat which the world knows not of.

Let us here note, the ever unselfish, untiring, unwearying ardor of the Savior in His great mission of mercy. Could we have wondered, if, in the present instance, He had declined to leave repose so needed?—all the more needed, as He knew that, with the Passover drawing near, there would be fresh claims on His own teaching, and on that of his disciples. How hard, it seems, to break that rest, (that well-earned recompense), after weeks of unremitting toil, and days in which they had scarce leisure or opportunity to taste food! Could we have thought it strange if Jesus



had rebuked this crude disturbance—this unkind intrusion on sorrow and repose—and left the motley throng to return, as best they might, to their places of sojourn? But never in any one instance do we find Him sacrificing the comforts of others to minister to His own. "Christ pleased not Himself." It was the motto of His whole earthly existence. The deeps of His being are stirred by the sight of these unshepherded, unfolded sheep; and He hurries down the mountain slope to minister alike to their spiritual and temporal necessities. In a few moments that same majestic voice is heard in the deep stillness of this mountain solitude, with the roll of Jordan at their side, and the blue heavens for their canopy, proclaiming words which cause many in that "wilderness and solitary place" to be "made glad."

Before performing His work of omnipotence, Jesus seemed desirous of testing the faith of His own disciples, and especially of one, from whom, after many weeks of close fellowship and communion, we might well have expected a more prompt recognition of the power of his Master. "When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He said to PHILIP, Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

Philip, of all the Apostles, seems to have been "slow of heart." He gave promise, at an earlier period, of better things—when, with a soul apparently full of zeal and confidence, he sped to Nathaniel with the good news that Messiah had at last been found; and when he would not leave the honest Israelite until, from under the shade of his fig tree, he had "brought him to Jesus." The mingled gentleness and severity of the Savior's rebuke, addressed to Philip, on an after occasion, might have been administered now—"Have I been with you so long and yet have you not known me, Philip?"

Jesus had put the present question, "Where shall we buy bread?" to see whether or not he would leap at once to the conclusion, warranted by all which, during the preceding weeks, his eyes had seen and his ears had heard of the Word of life. He had witnessed the tempest stilled—devils cast out—the possessed sitting calm at their Deliverer's feet; he had seen

Sickness, at the same mandate, taking wings and fleeing away—and, above all, Death itself compelled to yield its prey; and yet, in dull, stupid unbelief, he begins to make the poor calculation about the eight months wages of bread it would cost to feed them!

Others, less privileged, might have conveyed to him a silent reprimand. Had the Leper of Capernaum—or the friends of the Paralytic—or Jairus—or the Gentile centurion—had one or other of these listened to the Savior's question, the likelihood is, that from each and all there would have been the reply—"You who changed the storm into a calm—You who have the elements of nature and the events of providence in Your hand—You who have the key of heaven's garner at Your belt—You have only to speak the word, and manna will distill, as before, from the clouds, or the fowls of the air will fetch, as they did to Elijah of old, a mysterious supply. What is this fainting crowd in this remote corner to You, who opens Your hand and satisfies the desire of EVERY living thing?"

Let us beware of dishonoring God by our unbelief, descending to earthly shifts and earthly calculations instead of honoring Him by a full and implicit reliance in His mingled power and mercy, His ability and willingness to help, feed, sustain, and comfort. "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" was the challenge which unbelief once uttered. The reply was, a forty years experience of unvarying and unfailing faithfulness and love. "Man's extremity" is often "God's opportunity"—He allows our circumstances to be at the lowest, that He may render more signal His interposing mercy and grace. Remember, "those things that are impossible with men are possible with God." Not only that, "all things are possible to him who believes." "Cast then your burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain you!" "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and truly, you shall be fed."

One of the disciples is apparently either more unselfish than the rest, or possibly he may be spokesman for the others—Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?" This, from the narrative of the other Evangelists, seems to have formed their own supply of provisions—the little stock which they had provided before crossing the lake—for their own evening meal. After the previous days of

exhaustion and labor, to which we have already referred, this simple food could hardly have been spared; and had Andrew or his brother Apostles been men of selfish natures, they would have taken care not to make known the existence of their tiny store. But, as we found in the case of Matthew, it is the Gospel's great triumph to displace SELF, and on its ruins upraise the two great master principles of love to God and love to man.

Let us learn the lesson here, of a kindly interest in others—a willingness to deny ourselves, if we can confer a benefit on our fellows. He is unworthy of the name of Christian, whose every thought begins, centers, and terminates in self—a cold, frigid icicle, chilling all who come within his reach; when he gives, giving grudgingly; and what he gives, costing him no sacrifice. Sacrifice of some sort, either of substance, or time, or personal effort, is necessarily involved in every deed of true beneficence. It was not the gifts of costly munificence, thrown with supercilious air into the Treasury, which the Savior valued; but the widow's two mites, the little earnings which a grateful, giving heart doled out of her poverty, and which made her evening's meal simpler and scantier than otherwise it would have been.

Let us go back in thought to that rural scene on the Jordan, and as we behold the disciples hastening to their Lord with their handful of barley loaves and fishes, at His feet, for distribution to the fainting multitude—let us learn anew, the lesson of self-sacrifice. That scene is a miniature picture of the world, with its thousands (no, its millions!) of starving outcasts; famishing, body and soul, in temporal and spiritual destitution. Have we, like the disciples, abridged our own comforts to minister to theirs; or rather, is it not the duty of each to ask, before God, What can I spare? Is there no needless expenditure—no lavish waste—no foolish luxuriance; nothing that could be spared in my house or my table, in my social feasts, that, instead of going to feed and pamper that love of extravagance which is running wild in all modern society, would tend to dry the widow's tears, clothe the nakedness and feed the mouths of the orphan and destitute?

Not that the elegancies and refinements of life are to be condemned and denounced. Far from it! As "creatures of God" they are good, and if kept

in due subordination, not to be refused, but rather "received with thanksgiving." But they are to be condemned, if they are either abused, or if their very lavish profusion only hardens into a deeper and more intense selfishness, and a more guilty ignoring of the needs and claims of others. We shall find immediately a command given, with regard to the fragments of the feast, that they were to be carefully gathered, so as to allow of no wastefulness.

Ah! might not the crumbs, often despised among us, go to gladden the lot of some lowly Lazarus at our gate? might not the delicacies at many a table be spared, or lessened, to swell the widow's barrel of meal? might not some lights of luxury go far to feed her cruse of oil? Remember the Apostle's words, "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God dwell in him?" Remember the words of a Greater than the Apostle, that adorable Savior, who on the Great Day will reckon what is done to the least and poorest of His brethren, as if done to Himself—"I was hungry, and you gave Me food ; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink." In doing it to that shivering outcast, that ragged beggar, that old man groping in his blindness, that widow with her homeless orphans, that idolater abroad, that heathen at home—"Truly I say to you, you did it to ME."

But, to return to the miracle. It is supposed when Jesus first put the question we have already considered to Philip, it had been towards the afternoon. But as the day wears fast away, and twilight approaches, His disciples come to Him in great concern, urging the necessity of dismissing the crowd to the adjoining villages, that they might procure needed food and lodging for the night. The Lord proceeds without delay, to manifest His power by the prodigy which follows: "He directed them," says Mark, "to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass; so they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties."

We may imagine the scene—Groups of people gathered in regular order; their long-drawn shadows at that sunset hour projected on "the green grass," or creeping up the gentle slopes. In front, facing these haggard countenances, with the traces of grief and exhaustion on His own, stands the Son of God! He is about to fulfill the truth of a saying uttered from a mountain platform then in full view, "Seek first the kingdom of God and

His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." These fainting thousands (many of them at least), had sought the Kingdom of God, and now they were to have the promised addition of temporal blessings.

The feast proceeds—the food increases and multiplies in the hand of Christ—still more, in that of the Apostles, as they deal it out to the crowds—and more still, as the separate groups receive their allotted portion. At last, when all are satisfied, the disciples receive the closing command, "Gather up the fragments that are left over. Let nothing be wasted. So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten them." The leftovers of the feast was greater than the amount of the original provisions.

Oh! beautiful type of true benevolence, and its invariable results. The Apostles had given their little all with an ungrudging spirit—but they were no losers. The loaves expanded in the hands of Giver and receiver; and when the donors came to count their loss, look! it was a mysterious gain! "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

But there were weightier spiritual truths intended to be conveyed in this miraculous feast. The Miracle for a moment lapses into the Parable. Great and glorious truths in an acted Parable-form are impressed by their Master on the apostolic band. These, as we have seen, had just returned from their first mission. He tells them still, in His name, and on His authority, to proceed on their Godlike work. That crowd was symbolic of a world, fainting, wearying, hungering, for the Bread of life—and the command to the disciples is, "You give them something to eat."

Nor were the left-over overflowing baskets without their significance—did they not point to the inexhaustible affluence and fullness of the Divine riches?—that thousands on thousands have been ministered to, and yet still the table in the wilderness is as full as ever? Millions of hungry souls have been fed, and still the promise is as ample as ever, "He satisfies the longing soul with good things;" "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Still the command is to His

servants, "Give them to eat"—Proclaim, "You who have no money, come, buy and eat; come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Yes, there is more than this implied—in these overflowing baskets of fragments, God seems to say to his servants, "I will multiply my blessing, the more the bread is given, the more the word is proclaimed. There will not only be "bread enough," but "to spare." I will give "more exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think."

While all this is encouraging to ministers, who are the distributors of the bread; those who receive it at their hands may read in this Parabolic miracle the willingness of Christ to supply the needs of all His people in this desert world. They never can come out of place, or out of season, to Him. As we see the Savior coming forth from His needed solitude and rest, to minister to these wearied multitudes, does He not proclaim to all time, to fainting myriads, who, in future ages would have far deeper cause of weariness and unrest, "whoever comes to Me, I will never drive away."

And now, let us "gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted"—or rather let us, from the Savior's own discourse the day following, carry away the ONE great Fragment—His own sublime spiritual lesson supplied by the miracle—it is the keynote of that wondrous Sermon—"Do not labor for the bread that perishes, but for that which endures to everlasting life."

**LABOR NOT FOR THE PERISHABLE!**—What lesson more needed, when with multitudes the perishable seems all they live for—all they care for? Yes, indeed. Sad it is, when we come in sober seriousness to pause and think of it, that so many thousands should be frittering away this great period of preparation for eternity in this unprofitable labor of earth—Unprofitable! for what in a few brief years will all this worldly toil come to? All that the world can give, apart from Christ, never can, never will, satisfy. You may as well, by a few grains of sand, or a few spadefuls of dust, expect to fill up a yawning chasm, as fill the gaping crevices of man's soul—reach the depths of his being with the poor nothings of earth. He was born for nobler things, and with less noble things you cannot satisfy him.

Besides all this, how transient, uncertain, precarious, all that wealth can

hoard, and labor realize! Like Sisyphus of old, the stone, after a lifetime's labor, has been heaved to the mountain-summit; but in one unwary moment, it slips from the hand, down it hurries, with hopeless bound, to the depths of the valley; the golden heap which took a lifetime to amass, one solitary wave of calamity comes and washes away!

BUT, "he that believes on ME shall NEVER hunger." His inordinate appetite for earthly things shall be so subdued and vanquished by the nobler portion he has in Myself, that he will neither too ardently covet earthly blessings, nor fret and mourn too heavily when they are taken away.

Let us listen to the voice of Him who is even now saying to us, "I Am the Bread of Life!" Let the voice of that same yearning Shepherd, who was moved with compassion towards the wandering multitude—let the voice of Jesus be heard telling every weary "laborer" of that rest He has procured. Let the word of admonition follow us out into this busy world; let its accents fall in the place of business, in the crowded mart, in the workshop, by the counter, in the classroom, in the study—let it follow us up the ladder of ambition, and track our steps in the race for riches —"labor not for the food which perishes, but for that which endures to everlasting life!"

## **The Night Rescue**

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on

the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Matthew 14:22-27

It is night on the Sea of Galilee! a night of tempest—the Lord of the sea and the storm walks majestically on the waves. "He made darkness his secret place—his pavilion round about him are dark waters and thick clouds of the sky." We know of no subject in the inspired picture-gallery which exceeds this in sublimity and grandeur. If there be poetry in any part of the Gospel story, it is here. It forms an episode in a Life which itself was the grandest and most sublime of Epics. Let us approach the scene with sanctified imaginations; and as we contemplate the Creator of all worlds—His head wreathed with tempests—the restless surge his pathway, approaching the laboring vessel of the Apostle-fishermen, and revealing himself as their God and guide—be it ours with triumphant faith to exclaim, "This GOD is our God forever and ever, He will be OUR guide even unto death."

The miraculous feast to the crowd of five thousand being over, Jesus dispersed the multitudes to their several abodes. As the night-shadows were falling, they might be seen in straggling groups winding their way round the northern shore to their various hamlet-homes. We can think of the Passover pilgrims, too, accompanying them—their voices attuned to some of those psalms and sacred songs they were in the habit of singing by night on the occasion of this solemn anniversary! Would not the melody be all the sweeter on account of the gracious words they had heard proceeding a few hours before, from the lips of the wonder-working Prophet, whom the entire crowd, John tells us, had He permitted, were ready to hail at that moment as their Messiah-King "the hope of Israel and the Savior thereof?" Before dismissing the multitude, however, He gives directions to His disciples to enter their vessel and re-cross the lake to Bethsaida. He gives no indication as to how or where He may rejoin them—whether He will follow next morning in the steps of the crowd, and meet them in the streets, or at the port of Capernaum—or whether He will avail himself of some other vessel crossing the lake at early dawn. On all this He maintains a mysterious silence.



From the words "He constrained them to get into the ship," (Matt. 14:22) we may almost gather that it was with fond reluctance the disciples assented to this separation. They may have attempted even a gentle remonstrance, pleading either that He would still accompany them, or else permit them again to drop anchor, and suspend their voyage until He was prepared to go. The sky may have already been wearing a threatening aspect; the hollow moanings familiar to the fishermen's ears may have been premonitory of a coming storm; lowering clouds may have been wreathing the brow of the Gadara heights and the headlands of Tiberias.

On a former occasion when the disciples encountered another storm on the lake, they felt that all was safe when their Master had said, "Let us pass over". Their adorable Lord—the Heavenly Pilot—was with them in the vessel. Now it was different. They had before them night on a tempestuous sea; and he, whose voice alone could hush its fury, was leaving them to brave it alone!

But His word and will were paramount. That great Lord, whose power and tenderness were so recently manifested to the fainting multitudes, commands them to depart. It is enough; they ask no more. Though the storm may have been already beating high-like brave soldiers, who, at the bidding of their Captain, rush on to the assault, determined to conquer or perish—they are in a moment launched on the deep, encountering the crested waves and the gathering darkness.

It was twilight (about six o'clock) when they set out. A fair breeze would soon have run them to the western side; but when midnight came, it found them little more than half way on their voyage. Owing to a furious head-wind, their sail was useless; and though for nine hours they toiled manfully at the oars, three o'clock (the fourth watch of the night) found them still pitching in the midst of that roaring sea the fitful lights (their only compass) glimmering distant as ever on the longed-for opposite shore. The former cry of faithless unbelief may now have been often on their lips as they thought of last evening's mysterious parting, "Master, master, care You not that we perish?" "If He had been with us," we may picture them saying to each other, "If He had been with us, asleep as He

was before, in the hinder part of our ship, then we could have rushed to His side, invoked His aid, and, in a moment would the storm have been changed into a calm. But where He is now, we cannot tell; our cries are inaudible, our prayers are vain; they are drowned in the rage of that tempest." "Surely our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over from our God!"

Let us pause here and learn a twofold lesson.

Viewing this scene as a picture of human life, learn, first, How sudden are the transitions in human experience, from sunshine to storm, and from storm to sunshine. A few hours before, the disciples had been dealing out the miraculous stores to the joyous groups on the green grass, partaking along with them of this mountain Feast—the Great Shepherd of Israel Himself tending them with loving interest. Never did sun seem to go down more happily, or promise a more auspicious rising. But now the sky is clouded— night has drawn its curtains gloomily around them—and, worse than all, the Lord of the Feast is gone. The Shepherd has left, and the sheep are scattered like broken reeds on the trough of the sea. Let us not calculate too fondly or confidently on the permanency of any earthly good. Let us be "glad" for our gourds, but not "exceeding glad." When we may be saying, "Peace, peace, sudden destruction may come." Today God may be spreading for us a table in the wilderness; prodigal nature may be pouring her richest gifts into our lap—at evening; the sun of our earthly joys may go down in thick darkness, and the memory of our best blessings be all that remains.

Learn, as a second lesson, that God often sends trials to His own people, from which the world are exempt.

Who are these we here behold, tossed on that sea? Jesus had sent the multitudes quietly and peacefully away; no storm burst on them; no danger threatened them; no fear disquieted them. Of all the thousands who had a few hours before listened to His voice, His own beloved followers alone were called to contend with the tempest. And it is often so still, with Christ's people; often do storms visit them, from which the world are free; oftimes, when the world is in sunshine; they are in

darkness. The bands of ransomed voyagers, now lining the heavenly shore, give their united testimony—"We are they who have come out of great tribulation."

But God has always some wise end in view in sending His people into such a sea of troubles. In the case of the disciples, it was evidently to discipline their faith, and to prepare them for sterner moral storms, yet in reserve for them. That night at Tiberias would imprint on their inmost souls truths and lessons which never would be effaced in all their future apostleship, and serve to brace their spirits for many an hour of perplexity and danger.

It is worthy of note, too, the progression in these trials of faith. The severity of the test is increased as the spiritual life advances. Just as a child is by degrees, step by step, taught to walk, so are these disciples tutored in the higher walk of faith. The previous storm had doubtless the same end in view (the testing and strengthening of this great principle), but there was on that occasion a gracious tempering of the wind by the Good Shepherd to His little flock—His shorn lambs. When the tempest then burst around them, He was at their side, though fast asleep on a pillow; yet the very fact of His presence must have calmed fears that might otherwise have overmastered them. But they are to graduate still higher in the school of faith. A severer test, therefore, now comes. On the former occasion, Jesus was like the mother seated by her infant's cradle, rocking it asleep with the tones of her well-known voice, or dispelling its fears by imprinting, with her own lips, kisses on its brow. Now, with the increase of spiritual and apostolic experience, He would subject them to a severer ordeal—a further step in His gradual process of discipline. And how does He do so? It is in the very way that same mother disciplines her babe, at a more advanced period of its infancy, when teaching it to walk. She places it by itself on the opposite side of the room, to let it feel that it is alone. The little learner, conscious that it is left to its own resources, and that even at the peril of a fall it must risk the tiny adventure, with outstretched hands makes its way across the floor to bury its head in that bosom of safety, and clings there more closely and tenderly than ever! It is not the tender vine, supported by its trellis work, which is the type of strength, but the oak of a hundred years, standing alone on the mountain

height, wrestling with the storm the very buffetings of the blast only making it moor its roots firmer and deeper in its ancestral soil.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice." "If need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." But to return to the narrative. As the disciples' dangers increase, so also do their fears. Sadder and stranger than ever seems their Master's absence. "Where is now our God?" mingles in thought, often and again, with the wild accents of the storm. It is unlike His kind heart thus to have deserted us, and consigned us to the mercy of this pitiless tempest.

But where in reality was their beloved Savior in the hour they most needed His presence, and most ardently longed for it? He seemed to have hid His face from them, but it was in appearance only, not in reality. Upon the heights of one of these mountains that girdled the north-east corner of the lake, the Redeemer of the world, in the silence of midnight, is alone with His God! That mountain summit is converted into an altar of Prayer. His eye is at one moment on the distant sea, at another uplifted to heaven; the breathings of His soul are ascending in behalf of His disciples; He is watching every billow that breaks on their tempest-tossed bark, every fear which disturbs their fainting hearts. The darkness cannot hide them from Him; their troubled thoughts "He knew afar off." Though not praying with them, He is praying FOR them, that "their faith fail not."

Oftimes are the people of God tempted, with repining Zion, to say, "My Lord has forsaken, and my God has forgotten me." But what says Zion's God, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" Isaiah 49:15. Storms and tumults may be raging without—temptations may be assailing within; besetting sins may now be disturbing the serenity of our spiritual joys; seasons of holy refreshment and peace may be gone; God may seem to be hiding His face, and we are troubled. But behind these temporary clouds there sits a Savior of unchanging

faithfulness, who, though we may have forgotten Him, has not forgotten us. Yes! precious assurance! at the very moment when we may be thinking all to be lost— the vessel which bears in it our eternal destinies about to be foundered—when faith is beginning to fail, and hope to sink—all dark without, all trouble within—and worse than all, when our heavenly Pilot seems to have deserted us—there is above A PRAYING SAVIOR! He who watched the disciples' agitated vessel, from Galilee's mountain, and converted its lonely summit into a place of prayer, is now seated a great Intercessor on Mount Zion above, directing the roll of every billow that threatens His people's peace, and, though to them unseen, "praying that their faith fail not!"

And as it was with the disciples of old, He will not always deny His people the sensible comforts of His grace and presence. Generally in the darkest hour of their trial, when they least look for Him, and least expect Him, He reveals Himself. Coming, too, in the very pathway of their troubles; going "through the flood on foot," and causing them "THERE" in the very place and experience of tumultuous sorrow)—causing them there to "rejoice in Him!"

BUT, alas! in the narrative before us, we have a mournful testimony, how sad often is the contrast between the faithfulness of a Savior God, and the faithlessness and unbelief of man.

Jesus comes! walking majestically with His radiant form across the troubled waves. He is so near His disciples that they can hold converse with Him. Dark as was the night, they might well have guessed that it was their Lord's form as well as voice that was upon the waters. The joyous utterance might well have passed "from tongue to tongue"—"The Master has come!" We expect to hear every moment, as He nears the vessel's side, the word of joyous recognition, "My Lord and my God."

But strange! His appearance seems to trouble and agitate them more than that vexed and agitated sea. With those superstitious feelings so proverbially common among sailors and fishermen, they think they observe in the hazy darkness only some unwelcome messenger from the spirit-world—they imagine, possibly, in their dread, either that one of the

spirits of darkness, roaming so lately the gorges of Gadara, is now evoked from the depths of the lake where it had plunged with the mountain herd; or else that the hour of their own death and destruction has arrived, and a premonitory herald from the regions of Hades—some terrible shape such as the Jewish fancy was wont to picture—has come from the world of the dead to give them warning, that that yawning sea is preparing their sepulcher, and these moaning night winds chanting their requiem! Faith is for a moment eclipsed by vain superstition. "They were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear."

How great the contrast; the heaving waters, the perturbed disciples, and the calm majestic tranquillity of the Great Lord!

And is not the experience here described often that of God's people still? When Jesus comes to them on some billowy night of trial—He comes radiant with beauty—His heart full of love—His hands full of blessing. But they can see nothing in the looming mist but a phantom spirit. Their eyes see of are dimmed with unbelief—the windows of the soul are darkened—they remember God, and are troubled. Or sometimes, it is even a sadder experience, when in the extremity of their unbelief all their former pledges of His faithfulness and loving-kindness seem to vanish, when for the moment the rush of despair comes over them. Religion is a lie; its comforts delusions—its fears tales of credulity and terror—its joys but phantoms—and the whole pillars of their belief seem to rock and tremble to their base. With others again, even when He is recognized, His dealings seem strange. As with the disciples in the text, He comes to their ship, but He makes "as if He would have passed them by." He walks, but it is towards the bow of the vessel. There is a strange delay in His intervention. He hears their cries, but He seems as if He heard them not. The sun is in the heavens, but there is no light in the sky—no break in the clouds.

Be assured there is some wise reason for such postponement—such apparent "passing by." You remember, how strange seemed His delay to the family of Bethany, when He lingered among the mountain glens of distant Gilead, instead of at once responding to their message and hastening to their relief. But in the end it was all "for the glory of God,

that the Son of God might be glorified thereby", issuing in a glorious proof, that "the Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." You remember in that memorable walk with the two disciples at Emmaus, when he reached the village, "He made" apparently, "as though He would have gone farther." Why? It was, as on the occasion before us, to draw forth the fervid invitation of burning hearts, "Abide with us. . . and they constrained Him." How often does He thus delay His succouring mercy—postpone deliverance—just in order to draw forth the music of importunate prayer?

Yes! not the least memorable lessons in this scene on the midnight sea, are those of PRAYER. We see our blessed Lord Himself, as the Man Christ Jesus, occupied in prayer. He Himself comes forth from the mount of Prayer to tread the waters. As the great ideal of Humanity—the Exemplar of His people, He would teach them, that if they would overcome the greatest difficulties, if they would tread triumphant on waves of trial and persecution, they must come from their bended knees. In walking thus majestically from His mountain oratory across the raging sea, He seems to speak this parable unto them and unto us, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." The cry of the disciples, on the other hand, arresting as it did the ear of their Master, and evoking the word of support and love, tells us in the depths of our extremity never to despair. Each of these voyagers on GENNESARET was a witness to the truth of words which their great ancestor uttered in olden times, not far from the scene of their present terror "I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life." Psalm 42:7-8.

The earthquake, and the whirlwind, and the fire, being now past, there comes "the still small voice." Loud above the riot of the storm sounds the well-known, gentle, soothing, familiar tones, "Be of good cheer, It is I, be not afraid." Their Master's form they had mistaken in the lowering darkness, but the voice was well known to them. Just as the sailor, when owing to the dense fog, he is unable to find the beacon in the light-house; hears the sound of the bell, swung on its top, by the force of the tempest. That brief but beautiful word of comfort is fenced on either side with "Be

of good cheer," "Do not be afraid." But the ground of consolation is in the middle clause. That fear-dispelling, comfort-giving, "IT IS I," must have fallen on their ears like a strain of celestial music. "It is I." I your Lord and Master. I who have oftentimes before spoken peace in your hours of trouble. I who have bidden the weary and the heavy laden come to have rest. I whose word has given light to the blind, and health to the diseased, and comfort to the mourner, and life to the dead. I who but a few brief hours ago had compassion on the multitudes, "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." Do you think I will not much rather have compassion on you, My own sheep, who "follow me, and know My voice?" "Be of good cheer, It is I"—Fear not.

It is the same brief utterance with which He has calmed the storm-tossed in every age. When Paul, in an after year, was in imminent peril of his life, shut up in the Roman barracks in Jerusalem, in the Castle of Antonio, that same Lord, at the same midnight hour, stood by the bedside of His desponding servant, and repeated the same peace-giving word—"Be of good cheer, Paul." Again, at a subsequent period, one of those very disciples now in this vessel had a sublime vision vouchsafed to him of his Lord! It was so overpowering and glorious as to lead him to "fall at His feet as one dead." But the same right hand was extended, the same gentle voice was heard, saying, "Fear not."

And who has not felt in the storm-night of the soul the soothing power of that voice, and that presence, and that word? "IT IS I." Jesus lives. O! It is the felt presence, and power, and love of a Savior God which is the secret of the Christian's strength—not Jesus, a distant abstraction—Jesus, some mythical Being of superhuman might, soaring far beyond human conception and human sympathy—but Jesus, the personal Savior—the Living One—the Acting One—the Controlling One—(ay, and to as many as He loves,) the Rebuking One and the Chastening One! The hand of Jesus, and the will of Jesus, and the love of Jesus, is to him seen in everything. "It is I," is to him penciled on every flower, murmured in every breeze, waving on every forest branch. It is the superscription in every event in Providence. It gleams in gilded letters in prosperity. It stands brightly out in the dark and cloudy day. It is written on every sick pillow—on every death chamber—on every vacant chair, and vacant heart. Yes! that little



word which rose from the bosom of Tiberias has gone forth to the end of the world, circling in undying echoes wherever there is a soul to comfort and a tear to dry. It gave peace to the chained Apostle in his Roman dungeon. "All men forsook me," says he, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, and delivered me out of the mouth of the lion." And that same Divine Attraction that tuned the lips of those lonely tempest-tossed fishermen to songs in the night, is able still to allay every anxious fear—every trembling misgiving. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "The floods have lifted up their voice, the floods have lifted up their waves; but the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea."

Let us learn from this entire passage, that we are always safe when following the will and directions of our Lord and Master.

Notwithstanding the momentary terror and lack of faith on the part of the disciples, it was, as we have seen, in obedience to the express command of Jesus, they had left the shore and braved the storm. "He CONSTRAINED them to get into the ship." With such a warrant as this, they had no cause for fear. Come darkness—come tempest—come shipwreck—come death—come what may, they launched into the deep, "for the Lord had bidden them!" If they had left the shore unbidden by Him, they might have had good cause for alarm. The first breathings of the tempest would have disquieted them, but with this gracious encouragement, even though we are told that "the wind was contrary" they heeded it not. Their own doubting hearts might have prompted them to relinquish the voyage, and, since "all these things were against them," to return to shore. But the Lord had given the word! They pursued undaunted their onward course, and this was the helm by which they steered through the adverse waters" The Lord has bidden us."

If we, too, when seasons of trial overtake us, thus hold on amid all difficulties, cleaving faithfully to Christ, he will at last cause light to shine out of darkness, and bring us unto a quiet haven.

There is a very striking contrast between the case of the disciples in the

narrative, and that of Jonah—the former obeying the directions of their Lord, the latter fleeing from His presence. How did it fare with each? For a time God seemed to prosper the journey of the disobedient prophet. Everything at first seemed to concur in his favor, and promised him a speedy and propitious voyage. He accomplished his land journey in safety, he found a vessel just ready to embark at the very time he needed it, and, with a serene sky and unruffled sea, he holds on his way. Look, again, to the disciples. They scarce have left the shores of Galilee, when the shadows of night begin to fall—a storm arises—opposing winds, and an adverse tide defy their seamanship, and seem to tell that obedience to their Lord's command is impossible. But how did the respective voyages terminate? The faithful disciples, struggling fearlessly on through winds and waves and buffeting elements, at last found, what we shall also find, an ample recompense for every storm we encounter, amid every trial we endure—they found the Lord. The other, in his guilty flight, was at first borne on by a propitious breeze, but speedily the calm was changed into a storm; and, engulfed in the raging elements he had madly braved, he was led to feel, in his sad experience, what "an evil thing it is to depart away from the living God."

Or, take another still older example: Look at Lot, at the bidding, not of his God, but of his own worldly ease and selfish ends, seeking the rich inheritance, while his more self-denying kinsman and uncle is content with the poorer portion. At first, all seems prosperous with him; the man of pleasure revels amid his well-watered plains and his luscious vintages; his cattle browse on richest pastures; the sun of heaven shines not on a fairer climate, on statelier dwellings—or nobler flocks. But, mark the end! Abraham, the unselfish, God-fearing, falls asleep full of years and faith. The noblest of epitaphs is to this day read by millions on the old cave of Machpelah—"The Father of the Faithful, THE FRIEND OF GOD!" But go to yonder height at Zoar, and note the contrast. See the proud home of Lot. The place that once knew it knows it no more! A canopy of fire is its winding-sheet; the depths of a bituminous lake its sepulcher—a calcified pillar, with a terrible history, stands overlooking the scene of perpetual desolation; and sadder far than that calcified pillar in front— and blacker far than the blackened ashes beneath—the Temple of his own Soul has been blasted and withered with infamy and shame! He who ("a righteous

man") might have stood forth in these early ages as a glorious monument of primitive faith and virtue—a bright beacon-light to guide—became a glaring balefire, in the light of which the most distant ages may read the awful warning—"Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

Once more, THE CHURCH COLLECTIVELY, as well as believers individually, may find comfort and consolation in the narrative we have now been considering.

The two occasions of the stilling of the tempest, have been justly considered as typical of two great epochs in the Lord's administration of His Church on earth. The first (when He was with His disciples) symbolizing the period of His personal ministry—when, as God "manifest in the flesh," He was visibly among them, cheering them with His companionship. The second, when after His ascension, He no longer gladdened the Church with His personal presence; when He left it, apparently to battle its own way amid the storms of persecution; but yet, all the while continuing to watch it, as he does now, from the Heavenly Hill, controlling every billow which threatens its peace. As He appeared of old, at the fourth watch of the night, just the hour preceding day-dawn, and not only cheered the disciples with the joyful—"It is I"—but came up amid the toiling rowers, hushed the storm, and conducted them safe to shore;—so it will be, at the deepest hour of the world's midnight—the hour preceding the millennial-morn! He himself has forewarned us (as if He took the very symbol He employs from that night at Gennesaret), that when "the sea and the waves are roaring, and men's hearts are failing them for fear," then the sign of the Son of Man shall be seen,— "His way in the sea, and His path in the deep waters,"—and the trembling Church, cowering amid the darkness, will lift up its night-Song—"Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof . . . before the Lord, for He comes! He comes! to judge the earth."

Ah! we are apt in the midst of these environing {surrounding} storms, which threaten, and shall yet still more threaten, the existence of the Church of God—we are apt at times to wonder if its Great Head has forgotten His word, and forgotten His promise. There are ever craven hearts ready to echo the desponding cry— "Where is the promise of His

coming?" but, fear not! Jesus has not left the foundering vessel to reel and plunge amid these moral tempests that are to close the great drama of time! No!—"in the fourth watch of the night"—when the darkness is thickest and the billows highest—"He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." Just as the new creation is about to put on its full robe of morning light, He will hush every billow; and mooring His vessel on the heavenly shore, take His storm-tossed Church to be FOREVER WITH ITS LORD.

Let us seek to be in the position of men waiting for the dawn—standing on the deck with the cry on our lips—"Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And when we observe His presence on the waves, let it not be ours to exclaim in terror—He comes! but there is no pardon in His voice!—He comes! but there is no mercy in His footstep! Rather may we know the music of these words, which, to all that hear them, will be as the gate of heaven "IT IS I—IT IS I—DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

## **THE SINKING DISCIPLE**

"Lord, if it's You," Peter replied, "tell me to come to You on the water." "Come," He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Matt. 14:28-32

In the preceding chapter, we considered that memorable scene on the Lake of Galilee, when in the midst of the tempest, "toiling in rowing," the disciples were gladdened by the joyous advent of their Lord. At first, terror-stricken as they saw the mysterious form on the midnight sea, but calmed and quieted on hearing the familiar voice and the reassuring word.

In following out the sequel to this scene, let us direct our thoughts—

I. To the DISCIPLE around whom the main interest of the present incident gathers.

II. To the SCENE itself; and

III. To some of its LESSONS.

I. The DISCIPLE who forms the central figure in this gospel narrative, is one who has impressed on him a peculiar and powerful individuality. There are in his character, certain strong and well defined traits—marked lights and shadows familiar to the most unobservant reader. Had no name indeed been mentioned in this passage, we would at once have been led to figure on Peter as the apostle who went, in impetuous haste, down from the vessel's side, braved the stormy sea—walked upon it—sank in terror, and rose again in faith! Peter's is that composite character which one often meets with in the world, formed by a union of opposites. Bold, hasty, forward, ardent—a soul full of deep emotion and sudden impulse, who in the fever of the moment would do a brave and hazardous thing from which, in a calmer mood, he would be deterred. Thought with him was action. To determine was to attain. In such a mind as his, to doubt would have been a grave impropriety. He is the David of the New Testament—soaring at one moment with buoyant pinion to the skies, singing as he soars, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom shall I fear?" The next, struggling as a wounded bird on the ground—with the plaintive note, "My soul cleaves to the dust!"

Or, perhaps, we may more appropriately liken him to some of David's mighty men, capable of a bold and dashing exploit—killing, at one time, a lion in a winter snow-pit—at another, plunging through the slumbering Philistines, and filling their helmets with "the water of the well of Bethlehem"—bringing the longed-for drink to their hero leader. If Peter had been, like these—a soldier by profession—he would have been suited for the brilliant attack—the sudden raid—the impetuous assault (some daring feat of arms)—not for the slow, wasting decimating siege and trench work. His enthusiasm and ardor (honest and sincere at the time) were apt to be damped in the moment of trial and danger. For emergencies to which he fancied himself equal, the event proved he was not. A child of Ephraim boldly "carrying his bow," he turned faint in the day of battle! An Asahel, swift of foot, he becomes, in his trial-hour, a

"Ready-to-halt." Facing the sullen visages of frowning Pharisees and armored Romans, his countenance falls—his knees tremble. Foolish—faint-hearted—he sinks into the renegade and coward!

Thus, doubtless, was Peter a defective character. He had great faults—but these, too, were softened and redeemed by many noble compensating qualities. Better all that striking energy of soul—that warm, outspoken, hearty enthusiasm—even although it proved often mistimed, often rash, sometimes culpable—better this, than that cold, repelling, apathetic, pulseless spirit, which never kindles into one earnest or loving emotion.

There were other types of character in that very fishing vessel, perhaps more beautiful and perfect. Take John, as the ideal of the Christian man—meek, calm, adoring. His befitting place—the bosom of Jesus in his life, and the cross of Jesus at his death. His the holiest legacy ever bequeathed by filial love—"Son, behold your mother!" His gentle heart is like some quiet river, unrippled by one wave, mirroring the rich garniture of loveliness fringing its banks, and murmuring, as it glides by, the tranquil music of love. Better this, than the maddening torrent, tearing over rock and precipice, as it hurries to its ocean home.

But rather give me that boisterous river, with its foam and thunder, its cataracts and wild music, than the fetid, stagnant pool, which sleeps on in dull torpid inaction. Better the fervent, enthusiastic Christian, than the men of Meroz—those who "do nothing"—the cold, timid calculators—men of dull drowsy routine in the religious life, in whose sight fervor and fanaticism are the same things; ever jealous of going too far, never suspecting whether they may not be going far enough; who, knowing that it is an apostolic caution, "it is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good," adopt the prudent way of avoiding blunders by not being zealously affected at all.

Peter's faults were the infirmities of a noble mind; and before he received his crown, he became a living testimony as to what the grace of God could do in modifying natural temperament. Peter, "speaking in his Epistles," is another man from the impetuous Fisherman, on the shores or on the bosom of his native lake. Tradition represents him as having, at his own request, been crucified with his head downwards, in token of humility.

We may accept the legend, at all events, as has been remarked, as a significant emblem of the "inversion of his character." At the close of his existence, his old age is like the peaceful subdued sunset which often terminates a troubled day; or like the mountain which, close at hand, is torn and splintered—ploughed up with unsightly scars by spring floods and winter storms. But as we recede, and the soft autumn evening tints fall upon it—the jagged outline is lost; we see only a mass of mellowed glory!—Such was the evening of Peter's life.

II. Let us consider the description here given of one of these sudden impulses of this impulsive apostle, harmonizing as it does so entirely with the rest of his history and character. Judging from this peculiar temperament, perhaps when the mysterious phantom form was first seen on the waters, Peter may have been the most faint-hearted of all. While the calm John, or the cool, cautious Thomas, may have looked their danger sternly in the face, he may have seen, in the shadowy figure, nothing but the spirit of the Tempest, or the wings of the Angel of Death, and fled, cowering in terror, to the hold of the vessel. But no sooner does he listen to the comforting, "It Is I," than shame and sorrow overwhelm him that he had been so "slow of heart," and in the very rebound from faithlessness to newly awakened joy, he resolves by an heroic act to atone for these moments of unworthy cowardice. "Lord!" says he, "if it is You, tell me to come to You on the water."

Even yet, however, his voice trembles as he speaks. Neither his faith nor his motives will bear rigid scrutiny. The very word with which he begins his bold and presumptuous request implies a secret doubt—"IF it is You."

Ah! how often does that guilty word mingle still in our deep midnights of trial—questioning God's voice, God's way, God's will, God's loving wisdom. How apt are we to indulge in unkind, unrighteous surmises; saying, like Martha of Bethany (the "Peter of her sex"), when the Master came to her in the midst of a still darker tempest, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died?" Let us "be still and know that He is God." There is no room for an "if" or a "why" in all His providential dealings. Shall we own the voice of God, as we stand in the natural world in the loaded air of summer noontide, when from the heavy clouds there issues bolt after bolt of living thunder? and in the moral world shall we

refuse to acknowledge and adore the same? No; when out, buffeting the wintry sea of trial, "neither sun nor star appearing, and a very great tempest lying upon us;" while others may only hear the rougher accents of the storm, be it ours to recognize the soft undertones of covenant love, and to exclaim with one who had likewise Nature, Providence, and Grace in his eye when he penned his words—"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thunders. The Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty . . . The Lord sits upon the flood, yes, the Lord sits king forever. The Lord will give strength to His people. The Lord will bless His people with peace."

But to return to the narrative—While there was doubt and misgiving on the part of Peter, in illustration of that strange union of opposites to which I have referred, there was in conjunction with these, boldness and presumption.

His own thought, doubtless, was to make an avowal of his faith, but what he did display was not faith, but a base counterfeit. It was a degenerate semblance and figure of the true. Rightly named, it was forwardness, fool-hardihood—the haughty spirit, which is inevitably succeeded by a fall.

Let us always be careful to give things their proper designation. Let us be specially on our guard against looking at vice and virtue through a distorted medium, giving the name of gold to what may, after all, be base alloy; confounding great heavenly principles with hollow semblances; calling evil good and good evil; putting darkness for light and light for darkness. How often do we hear revenge misnamed honor; passion, spirit; extravagance, generosity; free thinking, liberality; blasphemy, wit; and presumption, faith.

In the case before us, we may be apt, at first sight, to confuse and confound two feelings and emotions, in themselves widely different. Peter in appearance is very magnanimous nor do we deny (his Lord Himself owns it) that there was in his bold deed a certain amount of faith and confidence in Christ's ability and power. So far his conduct was commendable; but there was more of the reverse—more of pride, ambition, rashness.



His faith in his Divine Master would have been tempered with a wiser discretion, and a kindlier regard for the feelings of others, had he simply joined with his fellow apostles in inviting Jesus into their ship. But he lorded it over them. There was an implied assumption of superiority in the personal request, "Tell ME." We could not even have quarreled with his conditional "If," had he put it in the form, "If it be Your will, Lord." But with a rashness similar to that which drew down a later rebuke, when unbidden he cut off the ear of Malchus, he utters, on his own authority, and more in the tone of a mandate than a proposal, "TELL me to come." There is a struggle for pre-eminence, a craving to win the highest praise from his Master. He would wish to make himself out the boldest and bravest of the apostle-crew. It is the saying and the failing of a future occasion put in another form and other words—"Though all be offended, yet I shall not."

Doubtless, had an injunction to leave the vessel emanated from the lips of Christ, it would have been alike his duty and his joy to obey; there would then have been no sinking, no faltering. If the Lord had "given the word" He would have made Peter's "feet like hinds' feet," and set him upon these "high places." But this frail worm himself takes the initiative. He makes his own will and wish antecedent to the will of his Lord, and he must pay the penalty of his presumptuous daring.

Let us beware of such a spirit—this love of pre-eminence—this exalting our own reputation or good name at the expense of others. "Do not be high-minded, but fear." "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Self-denial is one of the most beautiful offshoots of humility; and Humility, remember, is the loveliest plant in the heavenly garden. The Lord of the garden delights to tend it and nurture it. The man on the white horse in Zechariah's vision, rode among the myrtle trees, which were in the bottom of the valley, not amid the oaks of Bashan or the cedars of Lebanon. The sweetest note of the lark, though she loves to carol in the sky, is said to be when she alights in her nest in the furrow. Let us seek the shade—not being wise in our own conceits; but "in humility consider others better than yourselves."

How kindly and considerately does Jesus deal with this bold and rash, yet ardent and devoted man. "Lord, tell me to come." He forbids him not.

Had he done so, there would have been lost to Peter the most valuable lesson his Master ever taught him. Jesus uses the present opportunity to discipline him by his failure to become, as he afterwards did become, a spiritual giant and hero; out of his very weakness He made him strong!

Our Lord, as Man, had His own likings and partialities for individual character; and though that of John was probably cast in the human mold most resembling His own, yet His personal attachment to Peter is undoubted. He seemed to take a pleasure in training him, just as a faithful teacher takes special pleasure and pains in the training of an eager, ardent, impetuous child, or a faithful farmer in cleansing a fruitful, grateful soil of redundant and noxious weeds.

Peter makes his request. A single word is all he gets in reply. The same voice which, a few moments before, gently quieted by a threefold assurance the fears of all the affrighted crew, says, in answer to the bold outspoken one—"come!" He does not refuse, but neither does He give any warrant or promise of upholding power. Peter had said "Tell me;" Christ does not say "I tell." Peter had said "on the water." Jesus speaks of no footway there. Peter had said "unto You;" Jesus gives no such invitation. He utters only the one indefinite word, "come!" "Come," He seems to say, "bold one, make trial of your strength; come if you can; but it is on your own risk and responsibility; I give no pledge or warrant of success to your carnal presumption."

He does come! He descends the side of the lurching vessel—the next moment his feet are on the unstable waves. His faith is for the moment strong, and fixing his countenance on his great Redeemer, he travels in safety along that strangest of pathways. But a wandering eye is the first symptom of a mournful reverse. He turns his face from Christ; he transfers his glance to the rolling waves at his feet, and the storm sighing overhead. "When he saw the wind boisterous he was afraid." It was no new tempest that had sprung up; the sea was not opening its mouth wider than before; the sky was no blacker; the hurricane no louder; the waves were beating as high when he first sallied forth. But with his eye and his heart on the Lord of the storm, he had no room then for a thought of danger. Now it was different. Gazing on the tempestuous elements, he trembled at his own courage. He took his eye off the secret of his support,

and down he sank like lead in that raging sea.

Ah! Peter is here a living impersonation of UNBELIEF, which is nothing else but a diversion of the Soul's Eye from God—a looking to the creature—to the world—to sight—to self—to sense—and ignoring the great Creator, the Blessed Redeemer, and the things Unseen! The disciple, while he retained his faith, saw no waves and heard no winds. The disciple, faithless, with his eye turned from his Lord, was awakened to the reality of the maddening elements around him; and then the Lord left him to taste the fruits of his rash over-boldness. Like Samson, he is shorn of his strength. Like that champion of Israel, he says, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself." But unbelief has caused his "strength to go from him, so that he has become weak as another man."

But pass we now to a more favorable turn in Peter's case. It has been said that he is the most gifted general—not who achieves most victories, but who is able to retrieve his errors; and effect triumphs out of untoward misfortunes and mistakes. Peter had presumed—faltered—was fast sinking. Is he to let the opportunity go without seeking, by some strong effort, to retrieve his honor, and convert that midnight sea into a moral battlefield where a great fall and loss is to be converted into a great victory? Is the bird taken in the net spread by itself not to make a bold attempt to penetrate the meshes and soar to his native sky?

Yes! as unbelief sank him, so faith is to raise him again. How is he raised? He honors Christ throughout in this memorable crisis. He might have dreamed at that moment of other ways of extricating himself from his peril. Was there no rope in the hold of the boat? Could he not have asked one of the Apostle rowers to stretch him one of those oars with which, a few minutes before, they had been toiling in vain to make head against the storm? Or, where was his natural or acquired skill in swimming, of which we read afterwards, when near the beach of that same lake on a later occasion, he plunged headlong into the water and swam manfully ashore! But he resorts to none of these expedients. Having dishonored Jesus by distrusting Him, he will honor him once more by fresh confidence in His power and love. "None but Christ" is His motto. His cry, "Lord, save me, else I perish!" Not all the props you can employ can raise up the battered downtrodden flower so well as the congenial

sunshine. So this drooping flower turns his leaves to the Great Sun of Righteousness. The Apostle is sinking—but even as he sinks, he sinks "looking unto Jesus."

And as the Servant honored his Master—as the Disciple honored his Lord—so does the Lord and Master honor him and deal tenderly with him in return.

He might have righteously left him for a while in his anguish and trepidation, to feel the consequences of his rashness. With the horrors of death taking hold on him, He might have addressed him in words of cutting rebuke and upbraiding. But He will first restore His confidence. "Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him." The Lord's hand was not shortened that it could not save. Peter's experience was that of the Psalmist—"When my foot slipped, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up!"

And now comes the gentle rebuke. It would not have been well for Peter—it would not have been well for the Church of the future, which was to read and ponder this scene—had the salutary needed reproof been allowed to pass. Gentle, however, it was! He does not address him as the presumptuous unbeliever—neither does He reprimand him for making the attempt to come. This might have had the effect of damping his energies for bolder deeds yet in reserve for him. Thus is he addressed by Him who "breaks not the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax"—"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

That sensitive heart required no harsh or severe word to enforce the appeal. A look, you will remember—a glance of impressive silence, yet of deep significance—afterwards covered his face with bitter tears. So now, that one brief question would bring before him the memory of a hundred former acts of love and power, all of which would aggravate the unkindness of distrusting that Gracious Savior. It was equivalent to saying, "Peter! after all that I have done for you in the past, why have you now dishonored Me?—why refuse reliance now on my all-powerful arm? I still acknowledge that you have faith—but in this critical emergency it has shown itself to be small. Why have you wounded Me so by this unworthy doubting?"

The accused is silent. He attempts no reply. Perhaps his tears forbid it. Doubtless he returned to the vessel a humbled man. It was a night which to his dying hour would be much remembered. Yet could it fail to rivet his affections more strongly than ever around that Savior? If we put a "Song of the Night" into his lips, may it not be appropriately that of the Great Prophet—"Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song. He also has become my salvation."

Let us now ponder one or two of the PRACTICAL LESSONS suggested by this subject, though these indeed have already been so far anticipated.

I. We learn that Faith and fear may be found existing together in the minds of God's children, and that we must not make the existence of doubts and misgivings an evidence that we have no faith.

That Peter had faith, notwithstanding his distrust and fear, is obvious. It was faith, though mingled with other lower motives, which led him to venture on the water. It was faith which, as he was sinking, prompted the prayer, "Lord, save me." And in his rebuke Christ recognizes the existence of faith, though he speaks of it as small, "O you of little faith."

From this, the desponding child of God may draw a lesson of consolation and encouragement. You whose souls are harassed with fears—who are mourning over the coldness of your love, the weakness of your graces, the languor of your spiritual frame, learn here not to argue from the existence of doubt, that faith must be lacking or cannot be real. True it is, the further you advance in the Divine life the greater your faith will be, and the fewer will be your doubts. But Christ here does not refuse to stretch out an arm of mercy to one of little faith. If you have faith only as a grain of mustard seed, it tells what spirit you are of. For this is no plant of earthly growth that will blossom spontaneously in the soil of the unregenerate heart, it is "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The Bible speaks of various degrees of Faith. And there are different figures employed to denote the operation of this great principle. Its first and simplest act is represented as a "Looking to Christ," then a "coming to Christ," a "receiving Christ," a "laying hold of Christ," a "cleaving" to Christ, a "trusting" in Christ.

But the lowest in this scale, provided it be a real faith, gives a sinner an interest in Jesus and his salvation, as well as the highest. The faith of the "weak" as well as of the "strong" rests on the same one Foundation. But mistake us not! We do not mean to say that because the smallest degree or measure of faith is an index of spiritual life, that therefore there is no need of further degrees of it. If, there is true faith, it must, like every other Christian principle, be progressive. This must be the prayer of every heart in which that grace is real, "Lord, increase my faith." While with holy humble gratitude we can say, "Lord, we believe," we must ever be adding, "Help our unbelief."

II. We are taught here the great cause of all the doubts and misgivings of God's people. It is, as in the case of Peter, a lack of dependence on Christ. We have seen when that ardent Disciple first ventured on the watery element his footing was firm, because his faith in his Lord's power was firm; but as soon as his eye was turned from his heavenly Master on the boisterous elements around, then faith failed, and he began to sink!

What was the secret of Paul's boldness amid his great fight of afflictions? It was keeping the undeviating eye of Faith fixed on that same glorious Redeemer. With a martyr's stake casting its shadow on his path, or with the rage of Nero's lions in his ear, he could exclaim, "None of these things move me."

Is it not even so with us? Why is it that we who once, it may be, were confident in the Lord's faithfulness, and who stood firm, like a rock in the waters, against the temptations that were assailing us, may now be unable to resist their force? Is it not because we have turned away the eye of faith from a reigning Savior, and fixed it on the troubles and tumults and dangers around; reasoned about the strength of our temptations and the severity of our trials, the greatness of our difficulties, and the imminency of our dangers—forgetful of that blessed truth that Christ is able to save to the uttermost? We have doubted His ability and distrusted His faithfulness, and He has now left us to feel "how frail we are."

III. We learn from this narrative—What is the source of relief to the sinking soul, in its times of troubles and fear. It is Christ Himself—a renewed application to Him as a Savior.

You remember the well-known incident in old Roman story, when, in crossing a strait in the hour of maddening storm, coward hearts were tortured with terror, as they listened to creaking planks in their tiny vessel. The sea was lashing over them; their eyes were dimmed with the blinding spray—Death seemed to sit on every crested wave. A voice from one of noble bearing, sitting wrapped in a military cloak by the stern, blended with the accents of the storm—"The Bark cannot sink which carries Caesar and his fortunes!" It was enough. The revelation of the imperial presence and the imperial word was like oil cast on the fretful sea. Their courage rose—with undaunted souls they buffeted its waves, and were before long on the wished-for shore.

Reader, in the midst of your earthly troubles, turn in self-oblivion to the Heavenly Pilot. A nobler than Caesar is at your side! He tells you that there is nothing to fear—that there shall be no loss of any man's life—no, not even of the ship—but that you shall all get "safe to land." If duty has called you out to the troubled waters, let Faith—that divine principle—believing—trusting, honoring Jesus—bear you up amid every difficulty and every danger. Say with this same Apostle on another memorable occasion, "Lord, to whom can I go, but to You? You have the words of eternal life;" or with another sinking castaway, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? and why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."

IV. Let us here note the means by which this application is made and final deliverance obtained. It is PRAYER—"Lord, save me, I perish."

How delightful to think that amid all the troubles of the world without, and all the tumults of the heart within, a Savior's ear is ever open—the gates to a throne of grace are never shut! Yes, though we may be conscious that much of our doubt, and darkness, and despondency can be traced to nothing but our own faithlessness—though we may be conscious that we have ourselves roused the storm which now and again may be desolating our hearts—there is yet room for calling upon Him who can say to the storms within as to the storms without, Peace—be still; and no tempest-tossed spirit in its sinking moments ever applied to Him for help, and applied in vain.

Are there any reading these pages thus tossed with tempest and refusing to be comforted—whose faith is weak—whose hearts are desponding—whose love is cold—who are mourning over the departure of seasons of spiritual light, and liberty, and joy? Let your hour of doubt and trembling be turned into an hour of prayer. You may have changed in your love to your Redeemer—forgotten and forsaken Him—rejected His grace, and distrusted His faithfulness—but He is unchanged in His love towards you! The storm may have hidden His face, but He is as near you as He was to Peter of old. For you there is still open, what there was to the sinking disciple—a Throne of grace! Go with the cry, "Lord, save me, I perish"—and you will find that the hour of supplication will be turned, as with him, into an hour of deliverance. For "immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him."

O wondrous power of Prayer! What miracles, what triumphs does it accomplish! It has turned the volleyed lightning in its path. It has scared away the brooding pestilence. It has unlocked the bronze gates of the sky, and brought down floods on the thirsty soil. It has smoothed the pillow of sickness. It has dried the widow's tears, and filled the mouths of her orphans. It has brought back the wandering prodigal to his Father's hearth and home. It has wrestled with an angel, and prevailed. It has arrested the ear and moved the arm of Omnipotence.

The telescope has with giant bound scaled the stars and traversed Immensity. The electric spark can now conduct its winged messages from sea to sea, and from continent to continent. It can stay armies on their march, and silence the thunders of battle, and give the momentous word and will on which depends the fate of thrones and the destinies of nations. But what is that to a power which transmits messages from the lips of the finite creature to the presence-chamber of the Infinite God?—finding its way where the eye has never roamed, the telescope never reached, science with its lightning-pinions never soared—penetrating the gates, unlocking the garner of Heaven!

Do we know this Power of Prayer? Feeling that we are perishing, have we sent up a cry for help to that God who is a refuge to His people in every time of trouble? If so, He will send help out of His holy hill of Zion. Why is it that our prayers seem so frequently to go unanswered—that, despite



of them all, we feel that we are sinking still? Is it not because they are not the cries of those who feel their great and impacting need of Christ, and are really desirous that His hand be stretched out for their rescue? Let us go with the publican's lowly spirit, and with the sinking disciple's importunate entreaty, "Lord, save me, I perish! Lord, I look to You for safety. There is no safety in myself. I feel that I am a lost undone sinner, and unless plucked from the billows of sin, I shall perish everlastingly. But, Lord, from the depths I cry to You; help me, O helper of the helpless! Show me that man's extremity is God's opportunity," and then, as surely as in the case of Peter, Jesus will stretch forth His hand. It may not be, as with him, "immediately." But "the Lord is good to those who wait for Him, unto the soul that seeks Him." "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he WILL strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."

V. We learn, from the narrative before us, that distrust in Christ's faithfulness is displeasing to Him—Jesus REBUKED him, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" That question, we have seen, carried an arrow of deep conviction to Peter's heart. He dared not answer it. His silence told how deeply it was felt! And does not that same question ring reproachfully in many of our ears; if we are now surrounded with trial or temptation—disposed to question or distrust the Redeemer's faithfulness. "Why," He seems to say, "Oh, why, unbelieving one, do you doubt? Look back on your past history; don't you remember the hours when you tasted My faithfulness and mercy; when My candle shined upon your head, and my peace lit up your soul with a joy infinite as heaven? Look back, and is not your pilgrimage journey crowded with Ebenezers, telling that the Lord has helped you? Don't you remember the hour of trouble when I wiped your tears; the hour of temptation when I dispelled your foes; the night of affliction when I soothed your sorrows, and whispered peace when all around was death; the hour of prayer and the season of communion, when I made the House of God as the very gate of heaven? And if darkness and tempest have now succeeded—if the calm has been changed into a storm, and I seem to have hid My face, Oh, why do you doubt? Shouldn't My faithfulness in the past be an encouragement for the future—a pledge and assurance that I will never fail you nor forsake you?"

VI. We learn again, from the deliverance given to the sinking disciple,

that there is no situation in which Christ is not willing and able to help us.

When did He come to Peter and to his fellow voyagers? It was "about the fourth watch of the night," while morning had scarcely begun to dawn, and all nature was sunk in slumber! And who, after the toils of the preceding day, would have felt these slumbers more sweet, or nature's rest more refreshing, than the weary Man of Sorrows? But He who had gone to the lonely mountaintop, to seek a bed of rest, when elsewhere He had none, willingly forsook even this, to come to the help of His beloved disciples! What does this tell us, but that we can never go out of season to Christ; that there is not the hour in which He is inaccessible to our needs, or will refuse to give us help; that there is no danger from which He cannot extricate us; nor the trial which He will not overrule for the strengthening of our faith. He is able to save—He is willing to save. None are beyond the reach of His abounding grace and mercy.

As the ocean supports a navy as easily as the bubble on the breaker, or the sea bird sitting on its crested foam; as the earth supports the everlasting hills as easily as the tiny grass which clothes its sides, or the cattle which browse on them; so Jesus can save great and small; He is the spiritual Atlas carrying a ruined world. In the season of our deepest extremity, even when, like the apostle, we may seem on the brink of perishing—the waves of destruction about to close over us—with such a Savior there is no room to despair.

VII. Finally, we have here a lesson of rebuke and warning: Christ calls Peter's "a little faith." And yet, weak and faithless as he was, when we read this narrative, how are we overwhelmed and abased when we think of the poverty and meagerness of our faith, when compared even with that of the sinking disciple? We behold him in that hour of tempest, stepping down from the vessel and committing himself to the raging waters. He hears his Lord's voice, and, fearless of danger, travels along the unstable element to throw himself at His feet. We see, in the same moment, courage, ardor, prayer, love, devotedness; and yet the Savior reproves him, and his silence tells that he felt the rebuke was no more than was due. Surely if this could only be called a "little faith," what must He who so denominated it, think of ours?—when many of us can tell of lives that present one sad history of doubt, and distrust, and faithlessness

—prayerless, careless, godless seasons, when the least vanities are cleaved to in preference to Christ, and we rush to every 'savior' but the one who died for us.

Do not let us harshly and censoriously deal with Peter until we have "considered ourselves." Let us look at his frailties side by side with our own. Our judgment on the apostle may well be tempered with mercy—our judgment on ourselves may well be mingled with shame. Let us be equally noble, as he was, in our avowal of attachment to our Great Lord. Let us be equally ready, when we stumble and fall, for his baptism of bitter tears. Let us be equally resolute in spirit for his martyr-death. If God sends us midnights of trial, let these be hallowed and consecrated to us, as they were to him, by a more loving trust in that loving Savior—leading us the more fondly to welcome the Lord's voice upon the waters, and to take as our motto and watchword for all the contingencies of an unknown future, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You!"

## THE DOOMED CITY

"Ungrateful sinner! on your future rests  
A sadder heritage of guilt and shame,  
Who with abounding gospel mercies blest  
Dare spurn the Savior's grace and scorn His Name;  
Forget not, though His patience now endures,  
The heathen's hell will be a heaven to yours!"

"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."—  
Matthew 11:23, 24.

While following, in the preceding chapters, the Savior's footsteps on Gennesaret, with no name or spot, in all the favored region, have we been more familiar than with Capernaum. His ever memorable sojourn within its walls, is now, however, speedily to terminate. Along with other Hebrew Pilgrims, He is about to proceed to the City of solemnities (Jerusalem), in order to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.

But before He leaves its gates, He must utter in its hearing a solemn warning—a dreadful denunciation, over unrequited love and guilty impenitence. He looks down the vista of ages to that solemn day when cities and their inhabitants shall throng the area of the Great Tribunal, and when He who holds the balances in His hand will deal out, with unerring equity, to each and all, their respective sentences.

It is not often that Jesus—the meek, and gentle, and tender Savior—speaks in accents of stern wrath and upbraiding; we may well believe He never uttered one needlessly harsh word. When we behold Him, therefore, as the Minister of Justice, standing with the flaming sword in His hand, proclaiming "terrible things in righteousness"—"he that has an ear to hear, let him hear!"

We have these three points brought before us for consideration in this solemn address of our Lord—

I. Capernaum's Privileges.

II. Capernaum's Neglect.

III. Capernaum's Doom.

I. Capernaum's PRIVILEGES

"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies?" We reject the interpretation put upon this clause by some of the older writers, that it has reference to the worldly prosperity of the city as the great seaport of Gennesaret; still more, another, that the allusion is to its elevated natural site. It is, undoubtedly, in a spiritual sense Christ speaks. His reference is to Capernaum's exaltation in unprecedented and unparalleled religious privilege.

Of all the cities in Palestine, none was in this respect more exalted (nay, so exalted) as this town of Galilee. Bethlehem was "exalted" as the scene of the Manger, and of the Seraphim who sang the advent-hymn of the Prince of Peace. Nazareth was "exalted" as the home of His youth: imagination loves to watch in this little city, nestling amid its picturesque hills, the unfoldings of that wondrous Humanity—to follow Him as He climbed in mysterious boyhood these sunny slopes, or toiled in the lowly workshop of His reputed father. Jerusalem was "exalted" as the scene of more thrilling and majestic events. It witnessed the awful termination of the drama of love and suffering—the Agony; the Cross; the Grave; the Resurrection.

But if we would select the most instructive chapter in the Great Biography—that which contains the most thorough manifestation of the life of Jesus, we must seek it in Capernaum—we must linger in its streets, or frequent the mountain slopes, which looked down on its busy waters. It is spoken of emphatically, with reference to Jesus, as "His own city," the place where He dwelt. For the three most eventful years of His life He made it His home. Either within or outside its gates, miracle followed miracle in rapid succession. Bodily disease; sickness; blindness; palsy;

death itself—fled frightened at the presence of the Lord of life; while the very waves which washed its port had been made a pathway for a new display of Power, and murmured their tribute to His Divinity.

Nor was it the WORKS of Jesus alone which this favored city had witnessed. Hundreds on hundreds would echo the later verdict of the soldiers and officers, "Never man SPOKE like this man." The noblest of all His recorded discourses was uttered with Capernaum in view. The rocks, and ravines, and mountain summits around, had listened to Beatitudes of love and mercy for which the world had strained its listening ear for 4000 years. That noble series of Parables, explanatory of the nature of His kingdom, was spoken as He was moored in a fishing boat by its beach. If we cannot even now, read these truthful lessons and words of wisdom without profound emotion, what must it have been to have listened to them, in the living tones of that living voice, and to have gazed on the countenance of the Divine Speaker, "fairer than the children of men?"

And even mightier still than word or deed, sermon or miracle, was, (as we have just noted,) the holy LIFE of this adorable Philanthropist. What a matchless combination of power and gentleness—of majesty and humility! How unlike all human greatness—how unlike all human selfishness! a zeal that never flagged—a love that never faltered—a pity and compassion which sheltered the wretched, the worthless, the abandoned, and those "who had no helper." When His public work was done in the city, He was seen betaking Himself, amid falling twilight shadows, to some neighboring "mountain apart to pray;" or if bodily fatigue demanded rest, no sooner was the cry for support heard, than He was seen hurrying back from His solitude and mountain pillow to afford the needed help.

O favored Capernaum! honored for three long years as the abode of "God manifest in the flesh." How surpassing your privileges! What were the boasted glories of earth's proudest capitals, at that moment, in comparison with this town by the solitary lake of Northern Palestine? What was Rome, with her imperial eagles, looking down from her seven hills, exulting in the sovereignty of the world? What was Athens, or Alexandria, with their schools and systems—their sages and philosophers

—looking down from their haughty pinnacles of intellectual triumph on the subject world of Mind? What were these in comparison with the honor enjoyed by that city, within whose honored walls dwelt the Prince of the Kings of the earth—"Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God?"

In its streets, or on its hill slopes, or amid the chimes of its waves, words of mighty import were first heard, which were destined yet to be borne where the Eagles of Rome had never penetrated. There a mighty balsam was distilled for the wounds of bleeding humanity, which the doctrines of Aristotle and Plato had failed, and ever should fail, to stanch: No wonder, then, that over this His adopted home, His heart should yearn with deepest emotion. His eye wanders first to the further towns, lining these same shores, and which were not unfamiliar with His voice and presence. As He gazes on them with tearful eye, thus He weaves His plaintive lament: "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." But He has a deeper and sterner plaint reserved for another city—a more solemn and emphatic exclamation: "and you, Capernaum" (I turn now to you, the spot most favored of all, during my earthly pilgrimage), "and you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven!"

Is it a far-fetched comparison, if we see, in the privileges enjoyed by this city of Gennesaret, a reflection of our own? What the region around it proverbially once was among the Hebrews ("a region and shadow of death"), Britain was to the old world; a land of savage barbarism and debasing superstition. But to us, as to them, who once "sat in darkness," light has "sprung up." Cast your eye over the map of the habitable earth, and what the spot, what the nation in its two hemispheres so favored as ours? I speak not of our worldly prosperity—our national glory. I speak not of our enterprise—our science—our arts—our commerce—our institutions. Regarding all these in their place, we have reason for honest pride. But I speak of our spiritual privileges, which may well be prized as a Briton's noblest birthright—the security and conservator of all the rest.

Look to other countries, on which the Sun of heaven smiles more brightly and favorably than on our own, yet cursed and demoralized with horrid

rites of impurity and blood—millions bowing to insensate blocks—yearning souls, feeling the void and worthlessness of their own barren systems, longing for some nobler panacea than superstition can give—ten thousand Ethiopians stretching out their unsupported hands to some better God than their idols of silver and gold.

Look at empires nearer home. The saddest of all sad features in many of the nations of Europe is, that God's own truth is not free—that a poor perishing sinner is not permitted to read with his own eyes that precious Word which was intended to be patent as the air of heaven!

Oh, is it no blessing to turn from this sickening tale of a benighted world and a benighted Christendom, and see our own land, with every fetter struck from the limb of thought and action, shining like a spiritual lighthouse—in the midst of the darkening waves? Is it no blessing that we can tell of peaceful Sabbaths, and holy ordinances, and unbound and unforbidden Bibles?—that free as the streams that leap from our mountain ravines are these precious waters of salvation?—that while myriads of heathens are passing into a dark eternity, or pining unsolaced in the bitterness of broken hearts; we can sit by the bedside of the sick, the forlorn, the bereft, the aged, the dying, and from the leaves of this Holy Book, light up the faded countenance with the smile of a foretasted Heaven?

May not He who uttered these words of profound solemnity in the hearing of Capernaum, well look down on this our favored country, and with solemn and significant emphasis echo the exclamation: "And YOU who are exalted to heaven!"

II. Consider Capernaum's NEGLECT. He "upbraided" this city, along with the others, "because it did not repent."

Now it is worthy of note that there is no special or atrocious sin laid to the charge of this lake-city. During all the period of our Savior's residence there, we read of no personal insult its inhabitants offered Him. Nazareth, the town of His childhood and youth, has covered, in this respect, its otherwise hallowed name and memories with everlasting reproach. The furious assault its citizens made on the guiltless and



innocent Savior is stated as the reason for His leaving it and coming to dwell in Capernaum. But in His new home we have the record of no such ignominious persecution—no such outburst of personal animosity. On the contrary, He seems there to have been honored and respected. His influence was great; and the most blinded and obdurate could not shut their eyes to the fact that a Great Prophet had arisen in the midst of them. Representatives from all its diverse ranks and offices did him homage; Publicans from their Custom-house; Fishermen from their nets; Leaders of the Jewish synagogue; Officers in Caesar's ranks and drawing Caesar's pay—while the common people heard him gladly.

But what of all this? While there were some (we may hope many) happy exceptions, with the vast multitude there was continued indifference, cold and cheerless neglect; with many more, daring irreligion, and the indulgence of those unblushing vices which, imported from the Roman capital, had been propagated by an abandoned Court. They heard His words, but they practiced them not. They owned him as a Heaven-sent Teacher, but they refused to regulate their lives by His lofty instructions.

In the neighboring city of Tiberias, that imperial Court of Herod was located. This unhappy sovereign was himself the type of hundreds whom the Redeemer had doubtless now in His eye. Herod vaunted no infidelity. On the contrary, he had been the personal friend of John the Baptist. He admired the great preacher's unworldly spirit—his deep and singular earnestness—the novelty and impressiveness of his themes! He invited him to his palace. He listened to his faithful, soul-stirring words—and yet all the while that palace was the scene of shameless profligacy. Herod—this sermon-lover, this Religionist, who could hear the holiest of mere men preach the doctrine of Repentance—was reveling in guilty defiance of the laws of God and man. Patiently he heard John so long as he kept on the great general theme—so long as he allowed him to remain undisturbed in his own wickedness. But when he became a 'Nathan' to him—when the faithful, fearless Forerunner hurled the bolt of rebuke at the soul of his imperial master, and dragged to light his secret lusts, he could tolerate him no longer. Herodias is retained, and John is sent to exile.

So it was with many in Capernaum. They could follow Jesus to the

heights of the Mount, and listen to His beatitudes. They could stand for hours on the white sands of the lake as He spoke to them from Simon's vessel all the words of the kingdom; but when He urged the necessity of a daily self-denial—a daily bearing of the cross—they were immediately offended. "This is a hard saying," they said, "who can bear it?" "From that hour they walked no more with Him." This was their condemnation that light (the great Light of Life) came to their city, but they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Has Capernaum in this respect no parallel and counterpart in modern times? Alas! alas! Is it not to be feared that now, as then, men are content with having "a name to live," who are spiritually dead. There are thousands who come to our churches, who hear the preacher, who assent to the message, but go back from listening to the tremendous themes of Death, Judgment, and Eternity, to plunge deep as ever into engrossing worldliness and sin. The preacher may be heard—his words may fall like lulling music on the ear, but the gates of the soul are firmly locked and barred against admission—the Baptist may thunder his rebukes, but some Herodias, some heart-sin and life-sin, will, in spite of them, be retained and caressed.

Are there none now reading these words, whom the Savior would begin (as He did with Capernaum) to "upbraid," because they have repented not? When His scrutinizing eye looks down, Sabbath after Sabbath, upon listening audiences throughout our land, all apparently solemn, sincere, outwardly devout, does He not discern, lurking underneath this fair external guise, the signs and symptoms of loathsomeness and decay; like the pure virgin snow covering the charred and blackened ruin, or the emerald sod muffling the volcano. Ah! sermons will not save us—church-going will not save us—orthodoxy in creed and party will not save us. Repent! Repent! is the sharp, shrill call of the Gospel-trumpet. There must be a change of heart—a change of life—a crucifixion of sin—and with full purpose of heart, a cleaving unto the Lord who died for us.

Like Capernaum in our privileges, let us see to it that we be not like Capernaum in our guilt. Better that we had been born among a Pagan-horde—better that we had been kneeling before shapeless idols, votaries of dumb clay, or worshipers of the Great Spirit of the fire or the

mountain, than knowing a Savior, and yet rejecting Him—the freeborn citizens of a Christian land, and yet the enslaved possessors of Heathen hearts!

III. We are called to ponder Capernaum's DOOM. "And you, Capernaum, shall be brought down to hell."

That this refers to no mere temporal judgment, is plain from what is immediately added—"It shall be more tolerable," says our Lord, "for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." Sodom was already destroyed. It was the future judgment of both, therefore, at the great day, to which the reference is made.

No doubt this future and final retribution has had its significant foreshadowing in a temporal overthrow; for nothing in all Palestine (no, not the dilapidated walls of Jerusalem itself) is more striking, than the contrast between Gennesaret as it was, so busy a scene of traffic and life, with what it is now, a spectacle of loneliness and desolation. The very site of the ruins of Capernaum, and its sister towns, is matter of dispute. Jordan, as he rolls past, hurrying his waters to the Asphalt Lake (the Dead Sea), carries the tidings to its submerged cities, that that once "Sea of Life," has become a "Sea of Death," like itself.

But as we have said, we must seek for the full meaning of our Lord's words, not in the grey moldering heaps which strew the shores of that now silent lake, but in a more terrible scene, when from beneath these crumbling stones, buried thousands shall rise at the last summons! It is a solemn and dreadful picture here brought before us. The Angels of Judgment are commissioned to announce them with their trumpets, and to gather in before the tribunal, not solitary individuals, but congregated masses; City is brought to confront City; Capital to confront Capital!

Capernaum is seen to rise from its shroud of ruins! It is the old earthly home of Jesus that is now conducted to the bar of judgement. Let the Witnesses be summoned! Three solemn years, like three venerable forms, come forth from the ancient past. They testify how its streets had been trodden by the footsteps, its shores had echoed to the voice, its arraigned thousands had gazed on the mighty works of Him, who, once the Savior,

is now the Judge!

Nor are there lacking individual witnesses to substantiate this testimony. Hear their evidence. One has to aver: 'I was stretched on a couch of sickness "ready to die." He came, and by a word healed me.'

Another—'The foulest of diseases (leprosy) had, from infancy, tortured my frame, banished me from my fellows. He gave the mandate. Returning health thrilled through my veins, and those that had before fled frightened from my presence, beheld in me also a new trophy of His divinity.'

Another has to tell—'My son was trembling on the verge of the grave—a look and a word restored him.' Another—'My only daughter was hushed in that sleep from which human power can effect no awaking. The King of Terrors had torn her from our side. But the Lord of Life entered our dwelling, rolled back the gates of death, and gave us back our loved and lost!'

Material Nature can even be summoned to add weighty testimony. The mountains whose verdant slopes so often listened to His voice—the midnight solitudes which heard His prayers for the impenitent—the grassy meadows where He fed the hungry and compassionated the fainting multitude—the white sands that bore His footsteps—the very waves that rocked themselves asleep at His omnipotent "peace, be still." There is a tongue in every one of them to attest the privileges of the ungrateful city.

And now appears a stranger and more impressive Witness. It is a witness called from the depths of a tremendous sepulcher. Calcified rocks with their riven fronts have borne for ages the significant epitaph of an unexampled overthrow; temple and tower emerge from these abysmal deeps—the hum of a vast City breaks on the ear! It is SODOM, the doomed capital of the Patriarchal age—The "City of the PLAIN" confronts the City of the northern SEA! "Exceedingly wicked sinners against the Lord," what have you to plead?

'Had we enjoyed,' is the reply, 'the privileges of Capernaum, we would

have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes. Had that voice of majesty and love sounded in our streets as it did in theirs, we "would have remained until this day"—the brimstone cloud would have dissolved—the bolts of living fire would have been undischarged—smiling plains and vineyards would have been where for ages sullen death-waters have rolled—we might have lifted up our faces unabashed in this hour of judgment. Lord! Great Judge! to us much was not given—forbid that from us much should be required!

What does the Righteous Lord say? 'SODOM! Justice demands retribution for your crimes—your guilt was not without its aggravations—you were not left unsupported and unwarned; the voice and the prayers of the Father of the Faithful ascended for you—a Righteous man testified in your midst from day to day against your unlawful deeds—yet you would not listen; the doom of Earth must be confirmed now! City, you were filthy, be filthy still!'

But YOU, Capernaum! the same Justice demands that far different be YOUR doom! The guilt of Sodom was guilt contracted in the thick darkness of the old world—a few broken beams only struggled through the mists of early day!

But YOU, Capernaum! what city of earth so favored? Your hills were the first gilded by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness—your waters were the first to sparkle under His radiance. It was no earthly prophet or messenger that came and tarried within your walls, summoning you to repentance! Oh, mightier than all preceding Witnesses, your JUDGE Himself must now take the place of deposition, and testify against you! I warned you!—I counseled you!—I lifted up my voice in your streets! Never did I break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax!—I sought to bring forth judgment to victory. But my pleadings of love fell powerless on impenitent souls. You knew Your Lord's will, and did not do it! You were exalted to heaven with privileges—be thrust down to hell for the misimprovement of them! 'Truly I say to you, It is more tolerable for the land of Sodom in this the day of judgment than for you!'

It is the same principle which will regulate the procedure in the Final Day with reference to US. The same great law of unerring equity will be rigidly

adhered to—"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded."

Is there one among us who has trampled on unnumbered privileges—the lessons of early piety—followed by a manhood of daring ungodliness, or with whom solemn providential warnings have been guiltily neglected and scorned? What shall the Great Judge say on that Day of just retribution? 'Guilty one! Your doom admits of no mitigation! There is everything to aggravate and nothing to extenuate. I made for years your soul a very Capernaum. I lingered in it, with My footsteps of mercy plying you with every motive and every argument to induce you to hear My voice, and turn at My reproof. I spoke to you in prosperity—by the full cup; but you drank it unacknowledged. I spoke to you in adversity—by desolate hearts and swept chambers; but you received the chastisement in sullen fretfulness, and rushed only deeper into worldliness and sin. See that Outcast by your side! If the mighty works had been done in his case that were done in yours, it might have been far otherwise with him. If he had had your mother's prayers—your paternal counsels—your pastor's warnings—your solemn afflictions, he might have been clothed before now in the sackcloth of repentance. But no penitential tear stole down your cheek—My grace has been resisted—My spirit grieved—My love mocked and scorned. Truly I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for miserable thousands throughout eternity than for you!'

We are obviously taught by all this, that there are to be gradations in future punishment—aggravations of guilt and degrees of suffering. Of what these are to consist, we cannot tell; doubtless among them will be the gnawing rebukes and accusations of memory and conscience, over abused privileges—the bewailing of opportunities and mercies madly thrown away by us.

In that impressive parable of our blessed Lord, describing the condition and experience of the lost, one of the saddest elements in the woe of Dives is unfolded in the reply of Father Abraham—a reply whose echoes will circulate gloomily through the domains of despair—"Son, REMEMBER!" Capernaum, remember! you were the honored home of a Savior you guiltily rejected. Sinner, remember! how that Savior stood and knocked day by day, week by week, at the gates of your soul—remember!

How you grieved and scorned Him—remember! that parental prayer, that funeral, that sermon, that lifetime of privilege!

Even on earth, how often do we see how memory and conscience together can light up a hell in embryo! Not far indeed from Capernaum, there was an illustration of this in the case of the imperial tyrant, to whom we have previously alluded. Herod had guiltily connived at the murder of the most innocent of men, and most devoted of ministers. The base deed is consummated. But no sooner is it so, than conscience is roused to its work of retributive vengeance; the image of the slaughtered prophet haunts his thoughts by day, and scares him in dreams by night—Herod the king, soon heard about Jesus, because people everywhere were talking about him. Some were saying, "This must be John the Baptist come back to life again. That is why he can do such miracles." Others thought Jesus was the ancient prophet Elijah. Still others thought he was a prophet like the other great prophets of the past. When Herod heard about Jesus, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has come back from the dead!"

It is John reanimated to inflict merited retribution on his old destroyer! the stern preacher has come from Sheol! he has been sent from the spirit-world as a minister of vengeance! Conscience sees the grim spectral shadow flit ominously before him, like the fabled ghosts of the murdered—all his power cannot bribe it—all his courage cannot charm it away!

Yes; this is but a foreshadowing of what will terribly aggravate the sufferings and upbraidings of the lost; some foul deed that murdered (worse than the body) the soul of a fellow-creature, will fasten upon the transgressor like the sting of the scorpion, and give him no rest day nor night. The terrible imagery will track his footsteps, and traverse, with terrifying form, his path.

I was a traitor to my child, will be the harrowing thought of one; he might have been in glory but for me! I laid snares for the innocent, will be the self-reproach of another. I sowed the seeds of vice in virtuous hearts; they are now piteously upbraiding me as the author of all their misery! I was the Pastor of a Flock, is the torturing anguish of a third; but I deceived them with a name to live, I neglected to tell them of their danger, and

urge them to accept the great remedy, and the voice of my people's blood is crying out against me! We had that Savior in our offer, will be the wild cry of thousands more, but we rejected His love and spurned His grace.

Ah, it is this last which was the crime of the Capernaum sinner, (misimproved privileges), and we fear no guilt will be more general, no reflections more harrowing, than those arising from its consciousness. Yes; be assured nothing will be half so terrible as to be confronted with the charge of abused responsibilities. If he be without sail and rudder, the castaway on the raft could not be blamed for inability to buffet the storm, reach the haven, and save his owner's cargo; but a heavy responsibility would rest on the pilot, who, with fully equipped vessel, a bright sky above, a favoring breeze, and a safe navigation, permitted her to run aground, or be dashed on the rocks.

Not only, in the case of abused privileges, is the responsibility greater, but the ruin is swifter and surer! The very possession of privileges, if these are unimproved, will only lead to a greater hardness and impenitency of heart. The sun, and dews, and rains of heaven, which warm and moisten, and fructify the living blade, or plant, or tree, accelerate the decay and rottenness of the dead one. As by familiarity with sin, its native odiousness is worn away—the first shudder of tender conscience is followed by a duller sense of its turpitude, then the swift downward descent to perdition. So by familiarity with the gospel, the urgency and impressiveness of its messages are diminished; just as the Alpine shepherd can, through habit, sleep undisturbed at the base of the roaring cataract, or the soldier can hear without wincing the thunder of the cannon.

God keep us from the sin and danger of being preachers and hearers, and not doers—having the head enlightened and the soul unsaved—our privileges only forging the heavier fetter, and feeding and fanning the hotter flame!

Awake, my Brother, before it is too late, from your sleep of indifference. God calls on all men, everywhere, to repent. Yours may, until now, have been the guilt of Capernaum; yours its heavy responsibilities; but the Savior has not yet stood at the gates of your heart to utter the last



malediction; announcing that you are, through impenitence, finally given over to judicial blindness! While Capernaum still enjoyed the Lord's presence, for the vilest sinner within its walls there was mercy! We entreat you, by the great Day of Judgment—that Day in which Sodom and Capernaum and we shall together meet—to remain no longer as you are.

Do not go down to the grave, with your souls unsaved! Jesus is still lingering on your thresholds. It was the wondrous record of three years of miraculous works and cures in the Galilean city—"He healed them ALL;" and He is still the Physician who heals ALL diseases! Soon it will be too late to rush to His feet; He will have bidden an eternal farewell to the souls that have rejected Him, or death may have put his impressive seal on their hopes of pardon. A few more faint "pulses of quivering light," and your earthly sun will have set forever! The past may be a sad one—you cannot recall it—you cannot revoke or cancel it—it has winged its flight before you to meet you at the Judgment. But the future is yours, and God helping you, the dark and cloudy day may yet have its golden sunset! Up, and with the earnestness of men resolve to flee sin and cleave to the Lord, that that dreadful hour may never arrive, in which your own knell shall thus be rung—"If you, even YOU had known in this your day, the things that belong to your peace, but now they are forever hidden from your eyes."

Can I close these solemn thoughts without a word of incentive and encouragement to God's own people? The text tells us that there are to be different degrees of punishment in a state of woe; but there are other passages in abundance, which teach us the cheering corresponding truth, that there are to be different degrees of bliss in a future heaven. One star is to differ from another star in glory. There are to be rulers over five, and rulers over ten cities—those who are to be in the outskirts of glory, and those basking in the sunlight of the Eternal Throne!—Is this no call on us to be up and doing?—not to be content with the circumference, but to seek nearness to the glorious center—not only to have crowns shining as the brightness of the firmament, but to have a tiara of stars in that crown? It is the degree of holiness now that will decide the degree of happiness then—the transactions of time will regulate the awards of eternity.

And as we have seen that memory will increase and aggravate the wretchedness of the lost, so will the same purified ennobled power intensify the bliss of the saved. Ah! with what joy will they re-traverse life, mark every successfully resisted temptation—every triumph over base passion and sordid self—every sacrifice made for the glory of God and the good of man—every affliction they have meekly borne—every cross they have submissively carried—every kindly unostentatious deed, done from motives of love and gratitude to the Savior. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. The Christian life is action; it is not theory—it is not dreamy thought—sickly sentimentalism. The formula of the great Judge's sentence on the last day to the Righteous is (not "well thought," or "well purposed," but)—"well DONE;" to the Wicked—"Inasmuch as you DID it not."

Fellow sinners, washed by the same blood—fellow pilgrims, traveling to the same eternity—fellow prisoners, who are so soon to stand at the same Great Judgement—are we ready to meet the summons which may sooner than we think startle us in the midst of our neglected privileges?—"Go! Give an account of your stewardship!"

## HEROISM

"Then rest, poor soul,  
He bids you rest,  
Nor tremble at the dread tomorrow;  
Lean on Your Savior's willing breast,  
And you shall know no care nor sorrow  
No longer trust your tottering limb,  
But cast your burdens all on Him  
Who set His face to tread the blood-stained path,  
And without murmur drained His Father's cup of wrath."

"As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Luke 9:51

There must always be a feeling of sadness in bidding farewell to a place where we have long sojourned, and with which is interweaved many hallowed associations—the scenes of sunny childhood—the hills on which we gazed—the stream which murmured tranquilly by the parental home—the kind looks, and kind hearts, and kind words which throw a halo more sacred still around the dwelling of our early youth.

Jesus, being Man, participating in all the tenderest sensibilities of our nature, could not be altogether a stranger to similar emotions. He is now about to bid farewell to scenes and localities with which for thirty-three years of a mysterious life He had been familiar. The last three of these, though saddened, as we have seen in the former Chapter, by unbelief and impenitence, were yet linked with loving and momentous memories. His words and deeds were embalmed in grateful remembrance in many a town and fishing hamlet of Gennesaret. The dying, the dead, the sick, the blind, the halt, the lame, had learned to revere Him as a Great Prophet, a generous Philanthropist, a faithful Friend. The very children loved to follow Him—to listen to His simple teachings, and to lisp His sacred name. If He refused the offer of a crown, He was king in ten thousand hearts; and heavily would the tidings have fallen on many, had they known the truth, that this Great and Gracious Redeemer was about to depart from Galilee, never again, except for the briefest of interviews, to return!

If it is sad, even with bright prospects before us, to bid adieu to a home such as I have described, how are these feelings of sadness augmented when that departure is accompanied with gloomy forebodings, too truthful presentiments of evil and sorrow?—the knowledge that there is but a step between the hallowed home-hearth and the chilling blasts of a wintry unbefriending world? When the hand of death has entered a household, and the widow and her orphans are forced adrift amid bleak scenes and stinted comforts, who (save those who have felt it) can describe the fond lingering look turned to the old dwelling, listening for the last time to the murmur of its brook, the sunlight glancing amid the quivering leaves, under whose shadow childhood has often loved to

repose! The youth leaves a father's roof under any circumstances with a drooping spirit. But how are his regrets embittered when he knows that he is entering on a rough and rugged path, about to exchange gentle looks and kind smiles—for frowns, reproach, cold neglect, and insolent scorn!

What—if we dare compare human feelings with those of Jesus—what must have been His emotions in leaving now the home-scenes of Galilee and Gennesaret under the tremendous consciousness of the trial-hour awaiting Him? What must have been His thoughts, as for the last time He stands near some spot where the Jordan, issuing from the lake, resumes its impetuous course, and, taking His farewell glimpse of the scenes of His ministry and miracles, He hastens onwards to the climax of His life of woe? But He trembles not—flinches not—falters not! His resolution is taken! With a HEROISM unparalleled in the world's history, He seems, in words He afterwards uttered, to be longing for the hour of conflict and victory—"There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished!" In this Festival Journey, how diverse the thoughts and experiences of the multitudes—the Disciples—their Lord!

The multitudes could participate in no such saddening farewells. These feast-days periodically recurring, formed to them the most joyous events of the year—holiday times, all whose associations were mirth and gladness; happy occasions for friends meeting friends at the distant capital, and uniting together in the worship of their fathers' God and their own! On ordinary occasions these feelings would have been also shared by the disciples. It was different, however, now. They had recently been receiving mysterious and significant intimation from their Beloved Master of a terrible crisis impending—how He "must go up to Jerusalem" to suffer, to be rejected, and crucified. Their feelings are thus powerfully and graphically described by Mark—

They were now on the way to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with dread and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him in Jerusalem. "When we get to Jerusalem," he told them, "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans.

They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again." Mark 10:32-34

How strange, that notwithstanding such an announcement as this, the bearing of Him who uttered it should be so calm, so magnanimous!—that instead of shrinking at these dreadful shadows that were now projected on His path, He should commence from Galilee that "Dolorous way," terminated by the crown of thorns and the bitter tree, with tearless eye and unhesitating step; and that the Evangelist has to give, as the closing record of this portion of His Gennesaret life—"As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, He resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

Let us endeavor to ponder one or two reasons which among others must have served to strengthen and sustain the Savior in setting out on this momentous journey—in other words, the causes of a resolution and magnanimity so remarkable, with a crisis so appalling at hand.

I. He was cheered by the consciousness that in now going to Jerusalem He was fulfilling the will of His Father.

This great idea, this elevated motive, was ever paramount with Him—the impelling power in every thought, word, and deed—"My food is to do the will of Him that sent me." There was an hour appointed by the Father for the consummating of His work on earth. That hour, no bribe, no threat, could tempt Him either to anticipate or evade. A short while before, some worldly, time-serving "kinsmen" urged Him to proceed without delay to Jerusalem, seizing the opportunity of unbounded popularity to claim the Throne of David, and assert His claims to the Messiahship, "Leave here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You do. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." His answer was meek and gentle, yet tempered with righteous severity, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready." "There is no restriction laid upon your time, and even if there were, you would not be willing to attend to it, if worldly prudence or advancement dictated otherwise. But it is otherwise with ME. A great WILL above regulates my every movement; I cannot and shall not by one hair's-breadth deviate from the path that WILL has prescribed."

But the moment had at length arrived which the Father had appointed for the Great Sacrifice. Daniel's "seventy weeks" of years were on the eve of "accomplishment;" and, in obedience to that Higher WILL, He prepares to depart. The hour strikes which had been waited for by all time, "and He sets his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem!"

Here is the secret of moral strength in encountering our seasons of trial and difficulty—the conviction that our times are in the hands of God; thus leading to complete and entire subordination of our wills to His. How it would disarm affliction and bereavement of their bitterest stings if we were enabled to give as the history of our darkest dispensations, "This is my heavenly Father's will!" The hour has come—the hour appointed by loving Wisdom. "The world's time is anytime;" their trials are called "misfortune;" "untoward accident;" "wayward calamity." But the Christian, like his Lord, is able to view every occurrence as emanating from a Hand of infinite love, a Mind of infinite foreknowledge, and a Will of infinite faithfulness. Every phase in his history—every step in his pilgrimage—its most trifling incidents and circumstances—are Divinely appointed. Feeling that he is under this kind and gracious guardianship, he resolves his own will into the will of The Supreme! All that concerns him and his are parts of a vast harmonious plan. The future (mazy, dark, mysterious,) is fully known to One who sees the end from the beginning—educing good out of seeming evil—order out of apparent confusion. Even when a cross (a shadow of his Lord's) looms gloomily on his path, he breathes with un murmuring lips, "Even so, Father!" and sets his face steadfastly to endure his baptism of suffering and blood!

II. Another reflection which would, doubtless, sustain Jesus in this farewell hour, would be the thought of past fidelity and devotedness in His great work.

How faithful, how devoted, the great Redeemer was during these brief but eventful years of residence within and around Capernaum, we have often had occasion to note; from His first utterance in its Synagogue, as the anointed Preacher of glad tidings, down to the hour here spoken of, when He took His last view of Galilee, and proclaimed to its cities, and to the world, those healing words on which His own death was now to impress an untold significancy and value—"The Son of Man is come to

save that which was LOST!"

We found, in a former chapter, how His weary human nature often sank under physical exhaustion, gladly snatching a few hours of sleep, as best He could, on the planks of a rough fishing-vessel, or on the brow of the midnight mountain. His was the ceaseless activity of holy work; curing physical maladies; expounding heavenly truths; pointing the weak and weary—the burdened and backsliding—the neglectful and the lost—to that wondrous salvation He was sent from heaven to purchase and proclaim. "Never a man spoke"—never a man toiled and labored, wept and prayed like this Man! Yes, the consciousness that He had been enabled to fulfill His God-like work with such unwearied devotedness, could not fail mightily to uphold His spirit when about to confront more terrible experiences—"the hour and power of darkness."

Let us ask, How is it with us? In the prospect of the time when we too are to be "received up"—that moment which sooner or later awaits us all—when our spirits shall wing their flight from an irreparable past into a changeless future—can we anticipate or meet it with the joyous humble hope, "I have not lived in vain—my work is done—I have served my God—I have been for long reposing on the merits of that blessed Redeemer—I have sought to spend existence under the sovereignty of the lofty motive to please Jesus!" Or, alas! is it with us, as with many; Christians in name, but whose lives are a mournful blank? If they have love to God; it is a fruitless love; if they have faith in Christ, it is a faith without works"—withered, sapless, unproductive, dead!

Reader, if you would seek, when the last Messenger comes, to receive his summons with calm composure and tranquil joy—live now to God! Study, as your model, that lovely Life we have been tracing in its three most momentous years—that "Rose of Sharon," as it bloomed and blossomed on the shores of Tiberias. Let its tints and fragrance follow you to your homes, your closets, your places of business, your scenes of enjoyment. Let all your daily thoughts, words, actions, be molded and regulated by the inquiry, "How would Jesus have acted here?" As activity, in His Father's work, was the great law of His being, make it also yours. "Lo, I come, I delight to do Your will, O my God," was His utterance when, (pillowed in that bosom of everlasting love), the Redemption plan was

first proposed to Him. Sacredly did He fulfill His high resolve, from the moment He entered our world as the Babe of Bethlehem, until, with the voice of a Conqueror, He could proclaim—"I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You gave me to do."

Like Him, too, "work while it is called today." His appointed period for active energy on earth was short—three brief years included it all. Your probation time may not be longer; it may not be so long. Ah! "the night is coming when no man can work." Think, before it is too late, how terrible to be confronted by Death, all unfit and unprepared to die—the oil not bought—the lamps flickering—hours wasted—opportunities neglected—an unprovided-for eternity lying at your door!

If tonight the angel-messenger were to deliver his command—"The time has come for you to be received up;" could you, with the joyful alacrity of your Lord, set your face steadfastly to meet the great struggle-hour of nature? could you adopt the words uttered from the noblest of deathbeds—"As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return." 2 Tim. 4:6-8

III. Jesus willingly "set His face to go to Jerusalem" and accomplish His decease, when He thought of the glory that was to follow.

If His last utterance, at this time, in sight of Gennesaret was, that His mission as the Son of Man was "to save the lost," what a theme was this with which to nerve His soul in the prospect of that dreadful baptism!—"THE LOST," who by these sufferings would be reclaimed—the countless myriads whose robes, through that blood-shedding, should through eternity be made white!

At that eventful moment His omniscient eye must have had mapped out before it all terrible realities of Gethsemane's Garden and Calvary's Cross—every thorn of the crown—every mark of the nails—every gash of the spear. But if such was the dark foreground in the earthly picture, there was a bright and glorious background—the perspective of a palm-bearing



multitude of triumphant victors. For the joy that was thus set before Him He "endured." He beheld, in this transporting vista-view, myriads who must otherwise have become monuments of inexorable Justice in the dark prison-house of despair, made everlasting pillars in the temple of God, saved by His bleeding love and mercy. Oh, when He thought of that goodly harvest which was to be reaped—a harvest of which His blood was the costly seed; when He estimated that revenue of glory which, by means of His cross and passion, should, through everlasting ages, roll in to the triune God, He willingly turned His back on the peaceful homes and hamlets of Galilee, fearlessly to confront the hour of His own tragic sufferings.

Is ours the same joy? does this cheer us under all the trials to which we may now be subject—does it nerve and sustain us in the thought of death itself—that soon the night-songs are to melt into the praises of eternity—the night-shadows to merge in the glories of unending day? Amid the light afflictions of the present, are we keeping in view the bliss which is hereafter to be revealed; forgetting the tossings of the intervening ocean, in the prospect of the quiet haven and the everlasting rest?

The earthly father, going to a foreign land to provide for his dependent family, is cheered amid all the difficulties and privations which may beset him, with the thought of again rejoining them—that after a brief struggle in an uncongenial region, he will be back again amid cheerful faces and joyous welcomes. Shall we not willingly submit to any loss, any cross our gracious God sees fit to appoint us, if we can exult in the well-founded hope of a blissful future—a glorious immortality, where these very losses and crosses will be found to turn into eternal gain? Let the sweet chimes, coming floating on our ears from the towers of the New Jerusalem, cheer our spirits and quicken our languid footsteps. Let us set our faces towards there; and though we may have our Kedron-brooks and Gethsemanes of bitter sorrow now, let us think of the sinless, sorrowless, tearless heaven beyond, where these shall never more be known or dreaded!

And now, in conclusion, let us ask, Are we ready for Death?—do the words of this passage fall on our ears as a truthful, a beautiful description of the "inevitable hour," the time when we are to be "received up?" How many are there to whom every thought of dissolution is strangely

different—to whom death is the most harrowing of prospects—a dark portico at whose shadow they tremble—a Grim Monarch, whose very name carries with it terror and dismay? No wonder that it is so, if you are content to live in guilty unreadiness for its advent—if your peace is to this hour not made with God—if you are squandering existence without one thought of Hell or Heaven.

But if it is otherwise—if you have fled to Jesus, the Sinner's Savior and the Sinner's Friend—if you have personally appropriated all the benefits of His purchase, and are living by faith on the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you, then is the King of Terrors disarmed of his might—he is an unsceptered and crownless monarch—and when you anticipate that solemn hour when he is to make inquisition at the house of your earthly tabernacle, you need no longer think of it with dread—you may rather associate it with descending angels and ministering saints smoothing your pillow, and waiting as a celestial convoy to "receive you up."

Yes, I again say, Beautiful figure! It speaks of death as an hour of emancipation and triumph. Up to that moment you are, like the fettered eagle, chained down in the earthly cage; but a Messenger comes from the Spirit-world, snaps the encumbering bond, that you may soar a free-born citizen to your true home in the skies!

That time must before long arrive when you shall be called to die. Are you so living, that you could bid a joyful farewell to your pilgrim warfare and joyfully enter on your pilgrim rest? If you cannot yet contemplate unappalled that final hour—if you are still living at a conscious distance from God, eternity unprepared for, your soul unsaved—delay no longer repairing to Him who alone can give you peace; and, as you hear Jesus proclaiming the grand focus truth of His Gospel—the Son of Man has come to save the lost—as one of the lost accompany Him in this His final journey to Jerusalem—go with Him to His cross! gaze on His bleeding wounds! His dying agonies!—see what He did to save you and such as you! As you listen to His expiring cry, "It is finished!"—remember its comforting accents were meant to reach your souls.

Do not think that Jerusalem towards which He calls you to set your face

is a prize beyond your reach! He has flung open its portals for you. Having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Ah! were the procuring of that Heaven dependent on yourself, then you might well despond and despair. But He is "the Way, the Truth, the Life"—"By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved!" It is because His face was set to the Earthly Jerusalem that the Heavenly has unbarred its gates to you! He Himself, by His doing and dying, has let down the patriarch's typical ladder; by it, you are invited to enter within the gates into the city. Relying on Him who has thus "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light," you can, like your Lord, set out on the final Journey, saying, with the cross beside you and the crown above you, "Into Your hand I commend my spirit; for You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

## **MARY MAGDALENE**

"Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for His needs. Among them were MARY MAGDALENE." —Matthew 27:55, 56, and 28:1-11; Luke 8:1-4; John 20:1-18

The history of Mary Magdalene forms an appropriate link, connecting the earlier with the later "memories of Gennesaret." Her holy and honored ministry of love interweaves, like a golden thread, the tissues of that Greater Life from which her own derives all its interest and sacredness.

It is strange how a name worthy of deepest reverence should, by a popular misapprehension, which has no ground whatever to support it, been confounded with that of the penitent—"the Magdalene" of the Pharisee's house—whose striking history we have already considered. Of MARY's previous life we know nothing further, than that she had become

a miracle and monument of the Savior's power and mercy. Her case in the Western Magdala, was the counterpart to that of the demoniac on the Eastern Gadara shore, and the exorcism of seven devils, sufficiently indicates the malignant character of the possession. From her name being afterwards mentioned along with "Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna," and it being related of her, that along with these, "she ministered to the Lord of her substance;" we may possibly infer that her position in society was not the poorest. It may have been one rather of competence, if not of wealth and luxury. But what was the world with its pomp—what the glitter of Herod's court—what the loveliness of hill, and shore, and sparkling water, that met her eyes all around, when a malady worse far than withering paralysis, or leper's taint, held her in the chains of Satan? Jesus (we know not where) had found her. His word of power had scattered the demon-throng; and never did gratitude so track a deliverer's footsteps, with dutiful love and tears. From that hour she became a devoted follower of her Great Lord—a model Christian, worthy the imitation of all believers, and more especially those of her own sex.

Our first introduction to her in sacred story, is in a reference the Evangelist makes to a missionary tour of Jesus and His apostles, through the towns and villages of Galilee. It is on that occasion we find her associating with the other honored females we have already mentioned, in providing for the needs of the homeless Savior. She had probably, a considerable while before this, been attached to His person and cause; but with beautiful modesty she has kept in the shade—shunned publicity. It is only when acts of womanly devotion and kindness are required, that this quiet star is seen noiselessly and unobtrusively shining in her appropriate sphere. In gentle consideration she ministers to the indigence of her pilgrim Lord, as she afterwards embalmed His corpse, watched by His shroud, and wept at His grave.

No Apostle truly, of all the company, loved the Redeemer more than she. It must have been pure unselfish affection for Him, which alone prompted her to undertake that long journey, we spoke of in last chapter, to the ever memorable Passover which witnessed His crucifixion. The males from all Palestine, it is well known, usually assembled at the public festivals in Jerusalem, while the females "tarried at home." MARY,

however, had heard from His own lips unusual and mysterious intimations of approaching ignominy, suffering, and death. She cannot brook the thought of separation in the prospect of an hour like this. She feels she can do but little in the way of active service—feeble would be her interposition when the hour of danger came—impotent her arm to ward off those legion foes; but if she can do no more, may she not contrive, by word or look, to solace these seasons of mysterious anguish? If death is indeed to stamp its ghastly lineaments on that holy Visage, can she not be hovering near at hand, to assist in performing the last sad tribute of affection? may not her hands serve, in some unknown way, to soothe and smooth that dying pillow, and close those lips which uttered the first words of mercy her soul ever heard? Her resolve is taken; and among "the women which followed him from Galilee," when "He set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem," was Mary of Magdala.

Our next meeting with her is at the most solemn spot of earth—the most solemn moment of all time—lingering near the cross on which her adorable Redeemer hung, in company with "the mother of Jesus, and His mother's sister, and Mary the wife of Cleophas." How acute and poignant must have been the anguish of that hour—the rude taunts of ruffian soldiery sounding in her ears—the cry of "Crucify Him," ascending from the infuriated crowd—along with other base indignities offered to the unmurmuring Sufferer. How willingly would her own tender feelings have induced her to rush from the scene of ignominy and shame, and bury her griefs, as the disciples were unmanfully burying theirs, in some secluded chamber in Jerusalem. A concern even for her own personal safety, might have dictated withdrawal from that arena of wild bloodshed and terror; but while others (His trusted friends) had grown cruelly faithless, "perfect love," in her case, had "cast out fear"—her love was "strong as death;" and when in that hour, around the cross of the Eternal Son, "deep was calling to deep"—all God's waves and billows rolling over Him—she gave proof of the saying, that "many waters cannot quench love, nor many floods drown it."

Pre-eminent indeed was the claim which that Savior had on the devoted gratitude and love of this woman. In addition to dispossessing her body of fiendish tyranny, enthroning reason on its abdicated seat, He had

evidently lighted up her soul with gospel peace, and cheered her future with gospel hopes. The feeling uppermost in her heart doubtless was, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Like the devoted crew in the sinking vessel, who will rather go down with their faithful Captain than leave Him in the hour of extremity—she, her sister-heroes, and the Beloved Disciple, are willing to brave every indignity and danger—yes, death itself—rather than desert their gracious Lord. Doubtless, the eye which from the cross recognized His own mother and named her, would not fail to note, in the devotion of the kindred spirit at her side, a lovely sequel to previous constancy and devotion. How He would be cheered and sustained, by this loving sympathy, in that hour of all others when He most needed it! On the other hand, how fondly would they receive His last look! How would these accents linger in their ears, as they wended their sorrowful way back to the city—"Woman, behold Your Son! Son, behold Your mother!"

But the ministry of love is not ended. Joseph of Arimathea had "asked for the body of Jesus," and, wrapping it in a linen shroud, "laid it in a new tomb." Nicodemus, too, had provided a mixture of myrrh and aloes—a hundred pounds weight—and embalmed the corpse. This, in ordinary circumstances, might have relieved from the need of additional expenditure on costly spices, or making further provision for the burial. But theirs was no common, no ordinary attachment; although, even in this beautiful tribute of affection, we have proof that while love was strong, faith was weak. Amid the humiliations of that dreadful hour, when they beheld the King of Terrors effecting so signal a triumph, all their fond hopes regarding the "Messiahship" and "the kingdom" seem buried in their Lord's sepulcher. He had told them plainly that He was to be killed, laid in the grave, and in three days rise again. But the insignia of death had been so terribly imprinted on their memories as to exclude every nobler thoughts. The preparation we find them making for embalming the body, too truly reveals the irresistible conviction which had seized their minds, that His flesh was to share the common doom of mortality, and to be laid in its long home.

The spices and perfumes were duly purchased on the Friday evening; and after the hours of the paschal Sabbath (the most sacred of all the year)

had elapsed, Mary Magdalene is seen, in the early dawn of the first day of the week, hastening to the spot where all she most loved lay silent in the domain of death. As she and the other Galilee women enter the garden gate, their first thought is as to how they shall be able to remove the incumbent stone. They are nearing the spot. Look! the stone is already rolled aside from the mouth of the sepulcher. Mary, in a moment of panic, leaves her companions and rushes into the city to carry to the disciples the tidings of the deserted grave. The thought of crude hands pillaging the sepulcher, and taking the beloved inhabitant away, alone seems to have occupied her. She has never entertained the possibility of her Lord having risen. She had expected to have seen his cherished form again, to have bathed his pale countenance with her tears, and laid the embalmed corpse in its rocky bed. Blinded to grander realities by her overpowering grief, in an agony of sorrow she pours out her painful tale to the disciples, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him."

Meanwhile, the other women who have lingered behind, see a young man seated in the vacant tomb, clad in long white clothing—the emblem of gladness. He announces the startling tidings that the Lord they loved had risen, that He was to go before them into Galilee, that Gennesaret and its shores were again to hear the familiar music of His voice. "He goes before you into Galilee, there shall you see Him, as He told you."

Peter and John, on hearing the strange account from the lips of Mary, had hurried to the sepulcher. They had entered it—beheld with their own eyes the napkin and linen clothes lying by themselves, (the undoubted trophies of victory,) and yet, with mingled doubt, and wonder, and terror, they "went away again to their own home!" Mary, unable to run so quickly as they, had followed their steps to the tomb, where (in the most touching portion of the wondrous story) we find her alone, alone with her tears. "Mary stood outside the sepulcher weeping!" Still is the idea of a risen Savior by her undreamed of. She is filled with sorrow at the loss of a beloved friend—indignant, poignant anguish at the thought of crude hands and iron hearts stealing His remains away. The death stillness in that silent place seemed to echo the dismal taunt, "Where is now your God?"

For the first time she ventures a closer inspection of the grave. Stooping down into the deserted vault—look, two angel forms have taken their places, "the one at the head, the other at the feet where the body of the Lord had lain." The celestial messengers are the first to break silence. In affectionate sympathy with her fast-falling tears, they put the question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" We might have expected at that lonely hour and lonely spot, with two mysterious visitants from the spirit world, that she would have been agitated and frightened; but her grief was too acute, her mind too much riveted on one absorbing topic. She repeats her sorrowful answer, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

There is often, at a time of trial and bereavement, some peculiar phrase or turn of expression which we come almost mechanically to use, and which seems at last naturally to well forth from the depths of the smitten heart. We find, in the case of Martha and Mary of Bethany, that the settled utterance in their season of bereavement was, "If the Lord had been here, our brother would not have died." In MARY's case she seems to have attuned her lips to the plaintive lament, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." She reminds us of the picture given in the Song of Solomon, of the spouse roaming the streets of the city with disheveled tresses and tearful eye, in search of her Beloved, saying, "I sought him, but I found him not; I called upon him, but he gave me no answer."

But "the Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him." She hears a footfall, and in turning about sees by her side a Solitary Figure. The angel's question is repeated. The Stranger asks the cause of these hot tears. She supposes Him to be the gardener, and in importunate urgency demands—"Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him." Love will brave anything; it feels as if it could cope with impossibilities, even though it should be a female arm bearing away a dead body by its own unaided strength. One word from the Stranger's lips dissipates every shadow of darkness—dries every tear—"Jesus said to her, MARY!" It was one of the first words His risen tongue had spoken. MARY! He needed no other utterance. It is "the voice of the Beloved!" "His sheep know His voice." He calls His own sheep by



name, and leads her out! "She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni! (which means Master!)"

Wondrous meeting between the great moral Conqueror and a weeping woman! between the Great and Good Shepherd and this bleating sheep of His smitten and scattered flock. The Shepherd had been "smitten"—the sheep had been "scattered"—but He is now fulfilling the accompanying promise, "I will turn My hand upon the little ones." And how gently that hand is turned! He appeared to her in no overpowering splendor, no dazzling glory. She mistakes Him for the gardener. Though surrounded with the evidences of victory, He is still the lowly Man, the Brother, the Friend. He rose with the same heart of unaltered and unalterable love with which he died, "That same Jesus!" The experience of the Psalmist was fulfilled in that of this honored disciple—"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." Weeping had endured during the two preceding nights, but joy came in the morning. She rushes into the city with her heart bursting with the wondrous tidings—"I have seen the Lord!" Words long familiar to her, had now a new and nobler meaning impressed on them as they glowed under the sunbeams of a first Christian Sabbath—"This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad of it!"

Ah, how God honors waiting faith! The Disciples, in their doubt and selfish sorrow, had stood aloof from the scene of ignominy and death—they forfeited the first glorious surprise, the first coveted benediction. But Mary had continued at her ministry of watchful love and in her case a new testimony was added to the faithfulness of God to His own recorded promise—a promise equally applicable to his waiting, watchful, prayerful people in every age—"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

Let us learn, from the experience of Mary, the true and only source of comfort to the dejected, downcast, sorrowing spirit. Angels were there. They had spoken to her kind and soothing words, but they could not dry one tear. They found her in floods of grief, and in grief they left her. It was not until the Lord of Angels drew near and spoke, that her sorrow was turned into joy!

Observe, moreover, that it was not the Form of Christ—His bodily

appearance—that dispelled her doubt and lighted up her soul with peace. It was His VOICE! that mighty Voice which had first bid away the demon-throng that ruled her wretched body! The Person of Jesus is now withdrawn from the eyes of His church. His glorified body is hidden from our view within the curtained splendors of the Holiest of all. But His Voice is still heard. The echoes of His tender soul are still preserved fresh to us as they sounded to Mary, in His own Blessed Word. We can still write over every precious promise it contains, "Thus says the Lord;" "Truly, truly, I say to you."

And now, we might imagine Mary's joy complete. Jesus is once more by her side. The "little time" He spoke of, "You shall not see me," is now past. She has entered on the "while" that "You shall see me!" There seems now to lie before her, a happy future of perpetual interaction, that is to know no interruption until her own dissolution summons her away! But different are His purposes towards His Church and people. "Touch me not," He says, "for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." His work is incomplete if He does not ascend to His Mediatorial Throne. Though dear to them would have been His living, loving, personal Presence, yet there are purposes of mercy still unfulfilled which demand His departure—the Intercessory work—the comforting Mission of the Paraclete. He is to leave them, and yet not to leave them. Tossed on Gennesaret, He is still up on the Heavenly Hill bending on their agitated boat His watchful eye, and coming invisibly to their aid in an hour of extremity.

"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended!" But, did not these words indicate to that lowly disciple that there was a time coming (though not now) when she should touch Him? Yes, on the Last and Great Day, when He was to come again and receive His people to Himself, and to utter in their hearing the joyous word of welcome, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" This Resurrection Morning at Golgotha was in one sense a "coming again," but not the GREAT coming! He is now a Pilgrim Lord, in haste to be gone to finish in glory His vast undertaking. But soon these clouds shall be torn, and soon the Conqueror of Calvary, seated on His

throne, will greet the no longer weeping Magdalene with the old name of affection—in unutterable love He will say to her, MARY! She was not ashamed of Him and His word, while other disciples were; and He will then "confess her name before His Father and before the holy angels." Great was Mary's honor and privilege in seeing a dying and a risen Jesus—in being last at His cross and first at His sepulcher.

But if we be of Mary's faith, and partake of her lowly self-denying love, we shall be sharers too in her joy on that glorious Easter-morn of Creation, when our Lord shall come forth, not from the swaddling bands of death, but with His head encircled "with many crowns." She "ministered to Him of her substance," and waited on Him with unwearied devotedness. Though in this respect we cannot imitate her, we can do what is in His sight equivalent—we can bestow our time, our substance, our personal exertions, in lowly offices of love and mercy to His people—"You did it unto THEM." "You did it unto ME!"

We know nothing further of Mary's earthly history beyond what is here told us regarding the interview at the sepulcher. It is more than probable—more, we believe certain—that she met Him again on His return to Galilee, and followed His footsteps on her beloved native shore. The last words recorded as having been uttered by her are these—"I have seen the Lord!" They are true of her at this hour! She is now "seeing" Him without a tear, and that forever and ever!

May Mary's gladsome exclamation be ours, when we are waking from our sepulchers! In turning around at the Archangel's summons in the darksome cell of the grave, may it be to see Jesus standing with looks and tones of ineffable kindness, ready to pronounce our name as one written in His own Book of Life! Happy for us if we can say, even now, in joyful hope, "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!"

Meanwhile let us exult in Him as an unchanged and unchanging Savior—a Brother born for adversity. The message which Mary bore to the disciples was a message to the Church in every age—"Go, tell my brethren." Comforting thought! The risen, exalted, crowned Jesus is "not ashamed to call us Brethren!" Even when He stood on the field of His

triumph—Death a dethroned monarch under His feet!—yes, even then, when the glories of Heaven were fully in view, the crown, the throne, the universal homage—when He saw the gates of Heaven lifting up their heads, that He, the King of Glory, might enter in—He speaks of the redeemed sinners he came to save as Brethren! And when He refers to His own entrance into the beatific presence—the glorified Son returning to the bosom of the Eternal Father—mark His words—"MY Father and YOUR Father, MY God and YOUR God!"

Arise, then, and let us go on our way rejoicing. We have glorious anticipations!—we have a glorious Predecessor! "Look!" said the angel, "He goes before you into Galilee!" Joyous must have been the thought to Mary and the other women, in returning the long road to their distant home, the certainty of their again meeting their Lord! If they had left Judea under the impression that they had bid Him farewell forever—that before they reached the shores of Tiberias the chariot-cloud would have borne Him away—with heavy and disconsolate hearts would they have set out on their pilgrimage! But the angel's implicit word—"There shall you see Him," must have put gladness into their hearts, and caused them with buoyant footstep to undertake the journey!

Pilgrim believers! yours is the same strong consolation! You shall meet Him again on a better than any Gennesaret shore, to enjoy blessed interchanges of love, an everlasting Sabbath-feast in a Sabbath world! "He goes before you." It is a blessed watchword for every Zionward Traveler. You need not dread the way to the "long home"—"He goes before you, look! He Himself told you!" Have your eye ever fixed on these Heavenly shores, these everlasting hills; for "There you shall see Him!"

## **THE FEAST ON THE SHORE**

"Sun of my soul! O Savior dear,  
It is not night if You are near;  
Oh! may no earthborn cloud arise  
To hide You from Your servant's eyes.  
Abide with me from morn to eve,  
For without You I cannot live;  
Abide with me when night is nigh,  
For without You I dare not die.  
O Frammer of the light and dark,  
Steer through the tempest Your own ark;  
Amid the howling wintry sea,  
We are in port if we have Thee.  
Come near and bless us when we wake,  
Ere through the world our way we take,  
Till in the ocean of Your love  
We lose ourselves in heaven above."

"Afterward Jesus appeared again to His disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias.  
It happened this way . . ." John 21:1-14

We are once more summoned in thought, in this beautiful closing chapter of John's Gospel, to the Lake of Gennesaret. Since we last followed the footsteps of Jesus there, the great event had been accomplished. That Adorable Being, whose miracles of love and power had hallowed its shores, had expired in anguish on the cross, and risen in triumph from the tomb. The mighty debt of ransomed myriads had been paid; glory had been secured to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good-will had been granted to men!

We do not wonder to find that the Disciples have returned again to their native sea, when we recall the announcement referred to in the preceding chapter, made first by the angels and repeated by the Lord Himself, that He was "to go before them into Galilee," and that there they were to see Him.

We naturally love those localities which have been specially consecrated to us by early and hallowed associations. No spot is so dear to a hero, on his return from the scene of his triumphs, as the village where he was

born, or the banks of the stream where childhood, in its young morning of joy and hope, delighted to wander. More cherished still is the place associated with spiritual blessings—the room sanctified by a father's counsels and a mother's prayers—the dwelling where we held endeared communion and fellowship with Christian and congenial hearts—the House of God where we first listened to the joyous word which brought life and peace to our souls.

Might not Jesus, as MAN, participate to some degree in such feelings, when we find Him now seeking out once more His beloved and honored haunts on Tiberias before He ascended to glory? Every creek and bay, every hamlet and mountain slope, had some memorial of mingled majesty and love. There poverty, disease, demon fury, death itself, had surrendered and succumbed at His word. The very sea and storm had conceded to His might, and crouched submissive at His omnipotent mandate.

And if these scenes were sacred and hallowed to the Master, equally sacred would they be to the Disciples. There they had listened to His utterances of matchless wisdom—there they had been summoned by Him to undertake their Great Embassy. Busy as they were now once more at their old occupation on the Lake, wherever they turned their eye, its undulating shores must have been fragrant with His name and presence. Capernaum rose before them with its crowded memories of power and mercy. Yonder were the bifurcated peaks of the Mount, where the most wondrous of discourses was uttered—yonder was the plain, flushed now with the loveliness of spring, where the Sower had sowed—yonder, in the far north, was the green tableland where the barley loaves were dealt out as emblems of mightier spiritual blessings—yonder, hiding itself amid sterner nature, was the scene of demoniacal conquest—there, yet again, the bleak mountain oratory, where the Lord of all this wondrous Panorama poured out His soul in the ear of His Father. And when night fell, and the stars looked down, at one moment, from their silent thrones, and the next were swept from the heavens by the sudden storm, the Apostle fishermen would remember the majestic form of Him who walked before on these very waters, and the Voice that mingled with the moanings of the tempest, saying, "Peace, be still"—"Fear not, it is I, do

not be afraid."

Can we doubt that these solemn and manifold remembrances would now often tune their lips on their lonely night watch—that day after day they would be thus interrogating one another, "Where shall we see Him?" "When shall we again hear His longed-for voice? He is faithful who promised that He would meet us here again. Even so; come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Seven of them—James and John, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and probably Andrew and Philip—have been out on the Lake all night long; but their toil, as on a former occasion, is unrecompensed. Morning begins to streak the mountains of Naphtali—distant Hermon is unveiling his diadem of snow. As they approach within a few cubits of the shore, in the grey dawn of that morning light, a solitary figure attracts their eye—"they did not know that it was Jesus!" The first word He uttered might have told them all!—"Children!" Yet still they recognize Him not! He appears but as a passing wayfarer whom curiosity has drawn to watch the mooring of the boat on the shingle. He inquires if they have any fish captured that might serve for a morning meal? They answer despondingly that they had none!

The mysterious Stranger bids them "cast out on the right side of the ship." The result was so vast an enclosure of fish that they were unable to draw it to land. The quick-sightedness of love discerns the divine Presence—the similarity of the present with a former occasion has led the Beloved John to scrutinize more closely the person of the Speaker. Catching up the sweet music of that well-known voice, he is the first to reveal the joyous secret, whispering it first with half-trembling lips into the ear of his chief associate—"It is the Lord!" Peter, with characteristic impetuosity and fervor, wraps around him his coarse fisherman's tunic, springs into the sea and swims a hundred yards to shore, in order that he may cast himself soonest at the feet of his Great and Good Master. The other disciples follow behind, dragging with them the net with its encumbering load!

Who can describe the profound emotion of that meeting at that calm hour when all nature was hushed and still? It is simply and artlessly told in the

Gospel narrative. No strong or exaggerated effects are inserted by the Apostle to mutilate the simple grandeur of the picture. Not a tear, not a word, not a question is recorded. No, in significant silence they confront the Holy One—"None of the disciples dared ask him, Who are You? knowing that it was the Lord!" But there was an unusual—it may be a miraculous—provision ready for them at that landing place—"a fire of coals, fish laid thereon, and bread." The feast had been prepared by their adorable Lord. Before inviting to partake of it, however, He bade them drag their nets to land. Peter in a moment complied with the request, and it is specially noted that, as full as the net was, and that too of "large fish," it was brought on shore unbroken.

"Come and dine" was the brief invitation given and accepted. The Master and his seven disciples surround that lowly table. "Jesus came, and took the bread, and gave it to them, and fish likewise."

Strange and mysterious transaction! We are at once led to inquire as to its signification and meaning. A feast of the kind did not seem in itself necessary at that spot or hour. The fishermen disciples were near their own Bethsaida dwellings, and the risen body of the great Redeemer, we have reason to believe, was not dependent, as it was before the Resurrection, on the "bread which perishes" to sustain it. We have already found that many of our Lord's actions around these shores were symbolic of some great spiritual truths. We cannot for a moment doubt that the present is to be classified with these, and that that morning hour and morning meal were fraught with momentous lessons to the disciple-guests, and to the Church in every age. Let us seek, with God's blessing, to gather from this detailed narration some of that SOLEMN INSTRUCTION it was designed to impart, specially to the disciples and in the main also to ourselves.

I. Before speaking of the Feast, let us, for a moment, advert to the same general lesson, which a previous similar incident furnished, that God honors and consecrates daily toil.

The disciples met their Lord while they were engaged with their nets and boats, prosecuting their former calling. A risen Jesus would thus teach us, that instead of worldly industry proving a hindrance and impediment to



the religious life, it may rather, if not perverted and abused, become the very channel through which God delights to meet His people.

It is a healthful and encouraging lesson in this everyday working world of ours—to the merchant at his desk and the apprentice at his counter, the artisan at his hammer, the ploughman at his field, and the cottager at her wheel. It tells that that tear and wear—that "loud stunning tide" of human care and incessant toil so far from being incompatible with the service of God, may be made by Him the very medium for higher and more exalted revelations of Himself.

There are times, indeed, when worldly work—the grinding wheels of business—must be hushed, and we are alone with God. There are solemn seasons when the din of earth dare not intrude; Closet hours—Sabbath hours—Sanctuary hours, without which the spiritual life would languish and die. Jesus had met the Disciples lately, in "an upper chamber in Jerusalem." It was their solemn convocation on the first day of the week—Gennesaret, with its nets and fishing vessels, was forgotten then—it was the Day and the Place of prayer and communion. Jesus met them as He delights to meet His people still in their Sabbath assembly, and "breathed upon them, and said, Peace be unto you, receive the Holy Spirit!" But having shown us these, His own disciples, in their Sabbath attire, he would seek to show us them also in the rough attire of everyday life.

He had left them for a while with the indefinite assurance—"I go before you into Galilee, there shall you see Me." How, meanwhile, are they to employ themselves? are they to remain in listless inactivity at their native village? are their boats to be anchored on the beach, and their old means of honest industry abandoned? No; if there be no immediate apostolic work ready for them, like their "beloved brother Paul," at a future day, when, side by side with the tentmakers of Corinth, he plied his busy task, they will teach a great lesson, to the world and the Church, of how God loves honest earnestness in our lawful worldly callings; and how, moreover, diligence in business may be combined with fervency in spirit serving the Lord! Jesus tells us He is to meet us again; but we are not, meanwhile, with hermit spirits, to abandon life's great duties. We are to carry out these with unabated ardor. Let us never forget that it was while the disciples were out formerly with their fishing craft, toiling all night,

and returning faint and weary in the morning light, that Jesus met them and put honor on their laborious efforts by bidding them, "let down once more for a catch"—and filling their empty net with a multitude of fishes!

II. The disciples were reminded, by this renewed miraculous capture, of their former call and consecration as FISHERS OF MEN.

Their Lord had put signal honor upon them; constituting them His companions, and apportioning for them a work of unparalleled magnitude, responsibility, and honor. But during an interval of time fraught with momentous consequences to the world, they had proved unworthy of their distinguished trust—they had become traitors to their Master—cowards in adversity. Might He not transfer the apostolate to others? How could He still confide to the trembling band that had cowered in terror when the Shepherd was smitten (one of their number basely denying Him!)—how could He still confide to them a vast commission which, in the first hour when their heroism had been tested, they had basely trampled under foot?

No! they had fainted and grown weary of Him—might He not justly have grown weary of them? But "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary. He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might He increases strength." The gospel-net is still to be entrusted to their hands. At His word myriads of immortal souls should, through their instrumentality, be enclosed in it. He would, moreover, comfort them with the assurance of His continual presence and blessing—that, in the darkest night of their worldly or spiritual toil, they might think of a Great and Wise Provider—a wakeful eye of Heavenly love that would never allow them to toil unowned and unrecompensed. While, on the one hand, He would seek them to feel their utter impotency without His presence and blessing, He would also assure them of the triumphant success which should follow, and must ever follow, His omnipotent word and prompt obedience to it—that, being "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," their labor in the Lord should not be in vain!

III. Another truth this Gennesaret scene was designed to teach, is the victorious and safe ingathering of the Church of God at the Resurrection

morning.

On the occasion of the former Miraculous Catch, the nets had been broken. These nets, on that previous occasion, have been supposed by commentators, from the days of Augustine downwards, figuratively, to represent the Church of God in its present condition. The boats, you will remember, when our Lord then spoke to Peter, were still out on the deep, they were "ready to sink"—the weight and struggles of the fish broke the meshes of the net, and many of the enclosed escaped into their old element. Fit type of the visible Church in its militant state—still on the stormy sea, often threatening to sink, the net rent with unholy and unhappy divisions, enclosing indiscriminately both "bad and good"—believers and professors—saints and hypocrites—those having the form without the power of godliness, who are arrested for a season only to return once more to their sinful element.

But in this second miraculous enclosure all is different—the net is not hauled in, while the boats are still on the sea—the fishermen are now done with the sea of life, its storms and toils, and night-watchings; they have planted their own footsteps on the Heavenly shore, and brought their net along with them.

It is a lovely picture of the Resurrection Morn, when all divisions and separations among Churches and Christians shall be at an end—when every fish in the sea of immortal being, "all the children of God scattered abroad," shall be gathered in. Notwithstanding the vast aggregate, not one shall be missing. Over the unbroken net the glorified Redeemer will be able to repeat the declaration of His last intercessory prayer—"Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost."

IV. Another object Christ had in view, in this morning feast and meeting, was to demonstrate His own real and undoubted Humanity.

He wished to convince the disciples that it was no shadowy apparition which, at that morning hour, saluted them and then vanished away. It was the Man Christ Jesus—the same Adorable Being who had been known to them often before on these same shores in "the breaking of bread."

True it is, indeed, we are fully warranted in believing that His bodily form had undergone some mysterious change since the Resurrection. The term here employed is significant—"He showed Himself." "His body, after the Resurrection, was only visible by a distinct act of His will." It is possible, too, there may have been some alteration in feature; perhaps the weary, toil-worn, wasted countenance of the Man of Sorrows, those furrowed lines of deep woe, which had imprinted themselves on the disciples' last memories in the Garden—these may have been exchanged for an aspect of calm elevated joy, befitting the Risen Conqueror.

But one thing they could not mistake—His heart of hearts was unchanged! They would not wound Him by questioning His personal identity. This seems to be the meaning of the Evangelist's singular statement—"None of the disciples dared ask him, Who are You? Knowing Him to be the Lord." They saw, perhaps, some external alteration (they must have done so, else why so slow to recognize Him as they were); but they knew Him from His words, His looks, His loving soul—they knew Him to be the Lord.

He Himself, by the most significant act, confirms the joyful assurance. He reveals Himself as an unchanged Savior. Though risen and exalted, and with untold honors in prospect, He still condescends to lowly offices of love and mercy. He meets His fishermen-apostles in the chill damps of a spring morning on the Lakeshore. He who, before His decease, washed their feet, and "wiped them with the towel with which he was girded," has risen from the grave with the same loving heart which He ever had! He meets them at the frugal meal—He prepares that meal with His own hands—He partakes with them—He calls the lowly guests His "Children!" He would proclaim, as His name and memorial to all generations—"Jesus in His life of humiliation—Jesus in His state of exaltation—Jesus risen—Jesus glorified—Jesus crucified—Jesus crowned—is the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

V. In this Feast, Jesus would seem to speak, by anticipation, of a nobler and better festival He was then on His way to prepare for His Church in glory.

After the night of toil, and the miraculous catch, came the joyous

Banquet. Glad must have been the surprise to these weary jaded men, after their discouraging labors, to find their Greatest and best Friend ready to welcome them on shore, with provided pledges of temporal and spiritual blessings. It told a joyous story of the future—it forewarned, in the first instance, of a possible (no more, a certain) night of discouragement—baffled labors—work impeded—souls uncaptured and unsaved. But all at once, in the hour of utter hopelessness, the Lord gives the word—the nets are lowered and filled—the elect are gathered in—the great gospel net with its priceless enclosures is brought safely to the Heavenly shore!

Better than all, Jesus Is There!—the world's long night-season is over—the eternal morning dawns and the first sight which catches the eye of the triumphant and glorified Church is—her Glorified Lord. Faithful to His own promise, He has come again to receive them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also. They who have faithfully and manfully toiled through the night of earthly disaster and discouragement, shall then "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob," in His Father's kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the prospect of this glorious meeting—May we be among the number of those who "love His appearing!" Some of you may be out now amid the darkness of the earthly sea—the lights in your earthly firmament may be dimmed—one star after another, that cheered you over the waves, may be mysteriously extinguished. But soon shall daybreak appear; and, standing on the Heavenly shores, in His own peerless ineffable love, Jesus will be waiting to greet you with the welcome—"Enter into the Joy of your Lord."

And finally, we must regard this whole scene as an encouragement to devoted work in the Lord's service.

That Feast was the reward of labor. Had there been no night of toil, no mutual invitations to "go fishing," that Holy Stranger would not have met them at day-dawn with so gracious a meal and so rich a blessing. "God is not unmindful of your work of faith, and your labor of love;" your services to His people and His cause shall not go unrecompensed by Him on the Great Day, when "He will give to every man according as his work has

been." Each, remember, has His net of influence and responsibility; forbid that we should confront our Lord, at last, on the shores of eternity, with the woeful confession—"My time is done, and my work is not done!"

But while there is a word of exhortation and encouragement to all, there seems to be a special one for Christ's special Servants—Ministers of the gospel—for the Apostles of Gennesaret, and the true "Successors of the Apostles"—successors in their faith and zeal, their self-sacrifice and devotion, who are "wise to win souls"—faithfully letting down the gospel net for the catch.

Their work is concluded. Their Lord himself is standing waiting to receive them at the everlasting Feast of His own presence and love. The banquet is prepared—shall He issue the invitation, "Come, all things are ready?" No, something still is needed! the Almighty Provider has yet some element of bliss to add, before the feast is complete. "Bring," He says, "of the fish that YOU have caught!"

Oh, wondrous thought! the faithful Servants of Christ—the "Fishers of men"—are told by their Lord, on that joyous morn, to bring with them the immortal souls they have captured! Assembled at the heavenly feast—with the Savior before them, and the white-robed band of immortals saved through their instrumentality, seated by His side—they shall be enabled, in Paul's burning words of triumph, to exclaim, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not YOU in the presence of the Lord Jesus?"

## **THE TESTIMONY OF LOVE**

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Feed My lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love You.' Jesus said, 'Take care of My sheep.' The third time He said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked Him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' He said, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." John 21:15-17

The Feast we considered in the preceding chapter is followed by a solemn and touching interview between the Lord and one of the Apostle-guests.

We can almost surmise, before the name is mentioned, which of the apostles it was. They had all been guilty of unkind desertion, when their sympathy would have been greatly valued; but one, who had been pre-eminent in professions of ardor, zeal, and devotedness, had proved, in the hour of trial, the first to fail. Peter's downfall had, indeed, been humiliating. We would not have wondered, if, covered with confusion at the thought of his recent treachery, and refusing ever again to meet the glance of his injured Master's eye, he had fled back in terror to Galilee, and hid himself, for very shame, in one of its most secluded hamlets.

But what will not the consciousness of devoted love brave and overcome? Never more convinced than now of attachment to that Lord he had deeply wounded, he is the first of all the seven to throw himself at His feet and implore His forgiveness. It would have been strange, too, had it been otherwise. A special message had been sent to him by Mary Magdalene, which might well have brought burning tears to the eyes of one of sterner mold than he. "Go," said the angel-guardian at the sepulcher, "go your way, tell his disciples, AND PETER."

We may imagine the interview between this messenger of reconciliation and the trembling Apostle on the Resurrection morning. When Mary rehearsed to him the angel's words, would he not, at first, listen to them as idle tales—as a message too good to be true? 'What!' may he not have said to her, 'have you not mistaken the name? John or Andrew, James or Matthew, it may have been, but I am the last, surely, who would have been singled out with this special remembrance of a love I so basely

required.' Yet it was all true. A new testimony that God's "thoughts are not as man's thoughts, and God's ways are not as man's ways!"

"AND PETER!" How these two little words would linger like undying music in his soul. How they would follow him every step in his way back to his native Galilee, haunt his sleeping and waking hours, and prove like a bright gleam in his lonely watches on the midnight sea!—And now, when He who dictated them is standing before him in peerless majesty in the morning light, can we wonder that, unable to repress the outburst of his grateful feelings, he is seen plunging into the water, cleaving the waves with his brawny arms that he might be the first to reach the shore! The Feast, we found, was partaken of in solemn silence—but when concluded, the Risen Lord is the first to speak, and Peter's name is the first on His lips.

We have already explained the significant symbolism of the miraculous Catch of fish, and of the Banquet which followed—how the Fishermen-apostles were addressed figuratively through the trade with which from youth they had been familiar—their nets being taken as typical of the Gospel Church, and the fish enclosed, of the living souls they were to capture. Our Lord now, however, changes the metaphor. He passes to one with which these Villagers of Bethsaida, amid the abounding green slopes and pasture-lands which bordered their lake, must have been equally familiar. Perhaps where they now were, a flock of sheep might have been seen browsing on one of the adjoining mountains: they may, at the moment, have attracted the eye of the true "Shepherd of Israel," as they emerged at that early hour from their nightly fold.

Be this as it may, the old figure which David loved so, well, when he sang of the Shepherd-love of God, is now taken by the Good Shepherd to instruct His own Disciple. The figure of the net spoke emphatically of the magnitude of the ministerial work—the vast and glorious ingathering of the family of God, which was to take place previous to the Heavenly Feast. Now He proceeds to unfold the principle or motive by which that work could alone be successfully prosecuted, and the method of attaining the great final recompense.

How does our Lord address the erring, but penitent, Apostle—"Simon,



Son of John." Simon! He had surnamed him after his noble confession at the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, Peter, "the Rock." But the Rock that should have manfully braved the storm had become the brittle reed, shattered by the first blast of temptation. His conduct had belied his loud protestations, and forfeited the nobler title. His Lord, therefore, goes back to the simple name of his old fisherman life—that which He employed on another occasion when the same disciple was tottering to a fall, "Simon! Simon! Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat." Or again, when he was found slumbering at his post, instead of being, as he should, the wakeful attendant and guardian of the Great Sufferer—"SIMON, why are YOU sleeping?"

And while there is a thrice-repeated name, there is also a thrice-repeated question, "Do you love Me?"

There can be no doubt as to the Lord's intention in the thrice-repeated question. He wished, by reminding of the threefold denial, to convey to His servant a gentle threefold rebuke. He could not have done so more impressively; while in the addition He makes to the first query, "Do you love Me more than these?" there is an equally manifest reference to that occasion when, in a self-sufficient boastful comparison of his own moral heroism with that of his fellow-disciples, Peter had said, "Though all should be offended because of You this night, yet will not I."

Simon heard the first two questions unmoved; but when for the third time it was uttered—implying, as it did, a secret mistrust as to his sincerity, and reminding with such marked significance of his threefold sin—the questioned apostle "was grieved." He began to suspect there must be some good reason for these implied doubts. He knew that the loving heart which so interrogated would not unnecessarily wound him; that his gracious Lord would not utter a needlessly unkind word or question. Could it be that He, who knew all things, might see foreshadowed some future denial, which led Him to receive these ardent protests with such significant caution? Could it be that his heart, which had so deceived him in the past, was to prove a traitor-heart again, and that he would have to renew his bitter weeping over the humiliations of a still sadder fall?

It was, however, the very grief his Lord desired. He wished to humble him, to annihilate his self-confidence and self-sufficiency. He would teach him that the very love he was tempted to boast of was not an innate, self-generated principle, but, like all his other gifts, divinely imparted and nurtured. He would lead him in future to be ever drawing supplies, not from his own frames and feelings, which were fitful as the changing sand, or apt to fail as the summer brook, but from the exhaustless fountainhead, God Himself!

That our Lord's reiterated appeal had the intended effect we cannot doubt. It read a lesson the Apostle never forgot until his dying hour. We may regard this interview, indeed, as a crisis in Peter's history—the date of a new development in his inner life. The proud self-sufficient Disciple becomes from this day onwards a little child. He comes forth from the furnace into which his Lord had cast him, purified as gold—humbled, but really exalted. We see in his very reply to the present threefold question the germ of this new grace of future poverty of spirit. His answer in former times would probably have been, "I know that I love You." But Jesus has taught him a different estimate of himself. He appeals from his own truant, untrustworthy heart, to that of the great Heart-searcher, "Lord, You know all things; you know that I love You."

His Lord had asked him as to the relative intensity of his love, whether it was now according to his former boasting estimate of it—"more than these." The humbled Apostle takes no note of the comparison. His silence is its own interpreter. There was once a time when he would have been arrogant enough to say, "Yes, Lord; none can love you as I do." But the memories of the past, and the rebukes of the present, have seated him in the dust. He can only make the confident appeal to Him who knew the heart, as to the sincerity of present resolutions, and the depth of present attachment. "I am done," he seems to say, "judging others—I have done judging myself. I once imagined I was bold enough to walk with undaunted step the raging water; but faith failed, and I began to sink. I once drew my sword, with what I thought a hero-heart, against an armed band; the next hour I was a coward trembling with guilty fear. I once said I was ready to go to prison and to death, and that though all should deny and grow faithless, I would never be one of them. Yet, I was the first to be

ashamed of that Lord to whom I had sworn unswerving allegiance, and my sin was blackened with aggravations I shudder to recall. Now, I dare boast no more. I can say nothing as to the dependence to be placed on my devotedness. Fitful in the past, it may be fitful still, but at present, Lord, it is with no false lips that I declare, with Your scrutinizing glance upon me, YOU know that I love You."

Jesus forthwith proceeds to reinstate him in the Apostolic office, which, by his unworthy conduct, he had for the time forfeited. Anew he affixes the seal on his previous high commission, "Feed My lambs"—"Feed my sheep."

His Lord had listened to his protestations of love. He accepts them; and in token of acceptance He tells His disciple to go and act a Shepherd's role to His purchased flock. His words are equivalent to saying, "Simon, if you indeed love Me, make proof of the reality of your love, not by your words but by your acts. Prove by newly baptized zeal and unremitting labor that I have not unworthily confided in your resolute assertions."

And in this, Jesus would proclaim to His Church in every future age, that the grand qualification for the feeding of the Sheep is the love of the Great Shepherd in the heart of the under Shepherds. Nothing can be done acceptably but what proceeds from this paramount Christian motive—LOVE TO CHRIST. Peter could not fail, surely, at this moment peculiarly to feel its constraining influence. He was standing within the shadow of the Cross and the Tomb—that blended memory of love and anguish was fresh on his soul—the hand that had just broken the bread still bore upon it the print of the nails. Formerly he loved his Lord as a Heavenly Friend—now he loves Him as a gracious Savior. Formerly he could say with Paul, "Who LOVED me"—now he can add, "Who GAVE HIMSELF for me!"

It is the same paramount gospel claim which is, or ought to be, all-powerful, as an incentive for duty and action with ourselves. We have all the old claims of God's love remaining in undiminished and unaltered power—God our Creator; God our Preserver; God our Bountiful Benefactor; but to these is superadded the culminating claim of all—God our REDEEMER! If you wish to learn the secret of obedience—of active

service or passive suffering—come and seat yourselves at Calvary's Cross—listen to the thrilling words—the pathetic appeal coming from these dying lips: "All this I have done for YOU—What do you do for ME?" Or, as this has been translated by one who knew well the sovereign power of that love—"you are not your own, you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are His." Depend upon it, nothing will nerve the soul for high, and holy, and pure, and self-sacrificing deeds, but this great principle—"The love of Christ constrains me!" Sinai, with its thunders, says, "You SHALL love God." But Calvary says, "We love Him, because He first loved us!"

How does OUR LOVE stand to that Great and Gracious Redeemer? Were He to prompt the question at this hour, "Do you love Me?"—could we reply in honest earnestness, "Yes, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Perhaps some who read these pages may be Backsliders. Like Peter, you may have forsaken your first love. You may have become as bruised reeds and smoking flax. You may think that return is hopeless to that Savior, whose grace you have despised, and whose loving heart you have so grievously wounded. Look for your encouragement to Peter's gracious reception by his Lord on these shores of Tiberias. Had he obeyed, perhaps, his own first impulses, he would have fled frightened from that Presence, and fearing a withering glance he felt he dared not face. Ah! if ever there was one who might have been spurned away, it was that poor despicable waverer in Pilate's judgment hall, who, with oaths and curses, denied the Lord who bought him. But Jesus sent a special message of love to him, as He does to us. And what was the Penitent's resolve? It was to cast himself imploringly at his Master's feet, and seek that loving mercy he had never yet sought in vain! As the loving child cannot close his eyes in sleep, until he has received his father's forgiveness; so this erring Apostle feels that joy must be a stranger in his heart, until he receives from his Lord's own lips the cheering assurance that the past is all pardoned—that his crimson and scarlet sins are buried in the depths of forgetfulness!

And Jesus not only receives him, but even in rebuking him, what tenderness, what unutterable gentleness is mingled with that rebuke! We

quite expect, after so black a catalogue of guilt, a reprimand of corresponding severity. When the words are first uttered "Simon, son of John"—we expect to hear the enumeration of his former sins—his arrogance—his presumption—the oaths and curses and cowardly desertion. But we see "the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." He knew well that that wounded spirit did not require to be needlessly lacerated. There is no direct reference, therefore, to the past—no catalogue of former sins dragged afresh to the light of day. Like the Shepherd in the parable of the lost wanderer, in silent love "He lays him on His shoulders rejoicing," saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which was lost!"

Reader! are you overwhelmed at the thought of some past sins—some deep dark blots disturbing your peace, and darkening your spiritual prospects—detering you from the mercy-seat—leading you to restrain prayer before God? Delay no longer! Flee to that same unchanging Lord of love. He is waiting now to be as gracious as He was to the penitent Apostle at Gennesaret. He is as willing now as then to say, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more."

And learn once more from this subject, that it is by GRACE you stand. Why was Peter not a Judas? Why do we not find him, like his brother apostle, a vessel (once freighted with noble resolves) lying a wreck on the desert shore? It was grace which made all the difference. Grace called him—grace restrained him—grace rescued him. He was a commentary on the words, "kept by the power of God." Jesus Himself tells, that at one time there was truly but a step between Peter and death. There was but one link that prevented the chain of his spiritual life from snapping, but it was the golden link of His own ever-living intercession—"Satan has desired to have you, BUT I have prayed for you that your faith fail not!"

It is the same with us. We can boast of no grace that we have. We are dependent every hour on the upholding arm of a gracious Savior. That arm removed, and we sink like lead in the waters. Distrust yourselves. Feel that your own strength is utter weakness. Let your cry be, "More grace! more grace!"—ever traveling between your own emptiness and Christ's infinite fullness.

And with His grace sustaining you, seek to have His love constraining you. Seek to have more and more a realizing sense of the paramount claims of that amazing mercy! Seat yourselves often under Calvary, and gaze on Him who spared not His own life's blood, that He might rescue you from the waves of destruction, and spread for you a Feast on the Heavenly shore. Oh! with such a miracle of stupendous condescension in view, can we wonder that He should ask, regarding all else that may be competing with His paramount claims—wealth, friends, home, children—"Do you love Me MORE THAN THESE?" Give Him henceforth the throne of your best affections, and be able to say in the spirit of the old martyr, "If I had a thousand hearts, I could love Him with them all. If I had a thousand lives, I would lay them down for His sake!"

## THE FAREWELL

"Lord! no guardian to defend me  
In the world I have like Thee;  
None so willing to befriend me:  
You are all in all to me!  
What is life! a scene of troubles  
Following swiftly one by one;  
Phantom visions—airy bubbles,  
Which appear, and then are gone.  
What at best the world's vain fashion!  
Quickly it must pass away;  
Vexing care and whirlwind passion,  
Surging like the angry spray.  
One brief moment, Lord, may sever

All that earth can 'friendship' call;  
But Your friendship is for ever—  
It outlives the wreck of all."

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'  
Matthew 28:16-20

We have now reached the last of Gennesaret's Sacred Memories. The time has come when the Savior is to take a final farewell of its shores. In the two previous chapters, we found Him by the Lake side, holding, in a quiet morning hour, a private and confidential meeting with His Apostles. A more numerous gathering is now appointed, that He may publicly bid adieu to the many devoted disciples scattered throughout Galilee, among whom He had longest lived and labored.

The place of assemblage was "a mountain," most probably the Mount of Beatitudes—the spot hallowed by former burning words of warning and mercy, and which more than any other overlooked the scenes of His ministry and miracle. We have every reason, moreover, to believe that this was the same memorable Convocation to which Paul refers when he speaks of Christ having been "seen by five hundred brethren at once"—the greater part of whom were still alive when he wrote, though a few had "fallen asleep."

As Jesus afterwards, on the summit of Olivet, took farewell of the scenes of His ministry in Judea, so now, in presence of a larger throng, he closes His ministry in Galilee, and upon the shores of its honored Sea.

The Roman hero of old, at the close of his victorious campaign, used to address his soldiers before being conducted to the Capitol to be crowned. The Prince of the Kings of the Earth, before ascending the Hill of God, to receive the reward of His triumphs, assembles together His faithful

followers, to convey to them words of encouragement and directions for duty, when His own visible presence would be withdrawn. As the Great High Priest of His Church, He had recently entered within the veil with the offering of His own blood. Now, the curtain being torn, He, the true Aaron, comes forth to pour His benediction on the waiting people; or, like a fond father, who, before he sets forth to a distant land, gathers his family around him, to breathe upon them farewell accents of comfort and peace.

The Evangelists give us no particulars regarding the interesting transaction here referred to. It is but the dim outline of a picture which we long to have filled in. May we not, however, so far venture to realize it? With the local Scene we are already familiar. Few hamlets would there be on the Lake that would not probably send a believing delegate to the solemn assembly. Conspicuous among the band of five hundred, would there not be the Centurion of Capernaum, with his restored servant—The Leper, now purged of his uncleanness, no longer an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, but a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God—The Widow of Nain, with the tear of gratitude in her eye, as she first gazed on a restored son at her side, and then upon the face of the Great Restorer—The Paralytic, standing upright, with vigorous limb and gleaming eye—The Maniac of Gadara, now the calm and loving believer—Jairus, also, with the living trophy of redeeming power leaning gently on his arm—Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Susanna, no longer ashamed to mingle in the same group with another (once outcast) sister, who had testified, at their common Master's feet, by tears of anguish, the depth and intensity of her sorrow and love?

If we could have wished an ampler description of the Scene and its Convocation, still more could we have desired that the memorable farewell address of the Great Redeemer had been fully given to us. It has, however, for wise reasons been withheld. All that is recorded is the briefest of outlines; but that outline is, nevertheless, precious and significant. It embraces three statements, to each of which we would now invite attention.

Conscious that for the last time they were standing in the presence of their Divine Master, the multitude would doubtless listen in breathless



silence as they heard the farewell tones of the Voice they loved so well. Let it be with something of the same feelings that, in this closing chapter, we gather in thought around the feet of Jesus, and hear the parting word He has to say to our souls!

The three recorded assertions of our Lord consist of

I. A PARTING ASSURANCE.

II. A PARTING COMMISSION.

III. A PARTING PROMISE.

I. There is A PARTING ASSURANCE—"All power has been given to Me in heaven and in earth."

What more precious farewell truth, what more blessed Keepsake, could the Savior have confided to these waiting hundreds, than this—that to Him has been committed the Scepter of universal Empire! Many there had witnessed His poverty, His humiliation, His cruel buffetings, His bitter death. But now these were all past. His head was about to be "crowned with many crowns." As King and Head of His Church, "All things had been delivered to him by his Father." He knew that "the Father had given all things into His hands." He would impart the comfort of this ennobling truth to the orphaned Church He was to leave behind Him—when the chariots of God had borne Him away from their sight, they could still think of the Christ of Galilee as boundless in His resources; that He who so often had spoken to them "in righteousness," was still "mighty to save"—"The Prince who had power with God," and must "prevail"—"the Wonderful, the Counselor, the MIGHTY GOD."

This "prophecy" was of no "private interpretation," intended merely for the ears of this mountain auditory. These five hundred formed the representatives of the Church of Christ in every age—whatever truths were soothing and consolatory to them, may be equally so to us. And who will not exult in the glorious assurance, that to these very hands, that were pierced on Calvary's Cross, has been confided the Sovereignty of the Universe!

John, sixty years later, beheld in striking vision, in Patmos, a book or roll "sealed with seven seals." Tears came to the aged eyes of the Evangelist,

because no one in heaven or in earth was found "worthy to take the book" and unloose its mysteries. All at once, one of the redeemed from the earth conveys to him the joyous assurance, that he need no longer "weep," for the "Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed to open the book" and unloose its mystic seals. What was this, but the announcement in significant figure of the Savior's own last utterance, that He has had committed to His keeping the roll of Providence—that roll in which is inscribed not only the fate of kingdoms, the destinies of nations—but all that concerns the humblest and lowliest member of His Church on earth—with Him rests the unfolding of the roll—the breaking of the seals—the pouring out of the vials—the bursting of the thunders. Need we wonder that in taking the book into His hands, the ransomed myriads in the Apocalyptic vision should be seen falling down at the feet of the LAMB, with their harps and golden vials full of incense; and, exulting in the thought that the Great Ruler of all was a Brother of the human race, they should attune their lips to the lofty ascription, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, FOR You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!"

Yes, I repeat, who will not exult in the thought, that this vast world of ours is committed to the rule of Jesus—that it was "created by Him," that it was created "for Him," that "by Him all things are held together?" I look up to the spangled dome of Heaven with its myriad constellations. I am told these lamps, hung in the sky, are burning incense-fires to His glory—that they march at His word, and their eternal music is an anthem to His praise. I look to the landscape beneath—all that vast furniture in the Palace of Nature is His providing. It is He who covers it in its robe of light, who wreathes the brow of Spring in living green, and decks the valleys in Summer glory. Not a breeze murmurs through the forest, nor a dewdrop sparkles on its leaves, the sun shoots not one golden arrow through its glades, but by His permission. It is He who pencils the flower, and intones the thunder with its loud peals, and gives voice to the tempest, and wings to the lightning.

But these manifestations of His power in nature are subordinate to a nobler sovereignty with which He is invested in the moral and spiritual

world. There, too, nothing can happen but by His direction; nothing can befall us but what is the dictate and result of His loving wisdom. Often, indeed, that wisdom and love are veiled behind gigantic clouds of permitted evil. "Truly, You are a God who hides Yourself"—"Your judgments are a great deep"—is often all the explanation which our finite minds can offer. But when we remember the pledge, in His own life's blood, which He has Himself given of His love to His people, dare we impugn the rectitude of His dealings, or arraign the wisdom of His ways? No! This Savior-God reigns, "let the earth be glad." From the heart stripped of its beloved gourd by the gentle hand of death, to the more terrible cry of perishing thousands in a revolted empire or beleaguered capital—what truth more sublime, what syllables fall with more soothing music on the soul than these—"HE" (the Savior who died for me, who now lives for me) "does according to His will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth!"

Conscious that the Lord has set Him as "King on His holy hill of Zion," we may well take up that triumphant Psalm, which to hundreds of bleeding hearts will ever have a memorable significance—that Psalm which speaks pre-eminently of the ascension glories of a reigning Redeemer. In one of the world's very darkest hours, when the last vestige of the footsteps of a God of Love seemed obliterated—when, man-forsaken and God-forsaken, the hapless innocents were about to go down into darkness, tempted to cry out in frantic unbelief, "Is there a God on the earth?" the glorious truth of the text was made to fringe the edges of the threatening cloud—a blood-stained leaf floating on the crimson deluge pointed to the all-power of Jesus as the alone sheet-anchor in the maddening storm. "The Lord has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to our God, sing praises: sing praises to our King, sing praises. God reigns over the heathen; God sits on the throne of his holiness. The shields of the earth belong unto our God: He is greatly exalted."

II. We have here A PARTING COMMISSION. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Appropriate seemed the spot where Jesus now stood to issue this great

commission. It was on the frontier land of Judea—"Galilee of the Gentiles"—almost within sight of Heathendom.

At an earlier period of His public ministry the command had been very different—"Do NOT go into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans do not enter; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." A new dispensation, however, with the rending of the old temple veil, had now dawned on the world—the brotherhood of the human family was boldly announced; the leaves of the tree of life were no longer to be for the healing of Judea, but for "the healing of the nations."

The announcement of Christ's investiture with "all power" is beautifully connected with this missionary injunction—"All power," says He, "is given to Me," THEREFORE, "go and make disciples of all nations"—as if the first use He would make of this Mediatorial rule and sovereignty was to break down the barriers that had so long separated race from race, and make the waters of salvation roll round the globe, and, like its own oceans, touch every shore. Seated as King in the citadel of Zion, He had examined its armory, inspected its treasures, and the first use He makes of these is to armor His Disciples, and send them forth as the conquerors of the world.

What a startling commission! what a gigantic undertaking! Had the wise of this world been of the listening throng on that Galilee mountain, how would they have laughed it to scorn! What! that handful of Galilean barbarians and fishermen to go forth on the conquest of the human race?—men devoid of learning, polish, worldly tact, worldly wisdom, to proclaim a lowly Jew, who lived a lowly life and died an ignominious death, Lord of all? To undertake, moreover, to wage war with lust, and passion, and self in every shape—to proclaim that there was sin against high Heaven, not in the word and deed only, but in the secret thought of revenge, the rising passion, the unclean look—to hurl the venerated religious systems of ages from their thrones—to dethrone Jupiter from the Capitol, Minerva from the Acropolis, and erect in their place the pure, self-denying doctrines of the Cross, and the worship of an Invisible God! It seemed the ravings of childish enthusiasm, the boldness of ignorant and infatuated dreamers.

And what were to be their weapons? The battle of the world's warriors is "with confused noise and garments rolled in blood." The secret of Mohammedan triumph was the power of the sword. But the commission is not "go and subdue," "go and conquer"—but go and teach, go "make disciples." It was to be a moral victory over Mind, Conscience, Will, a debased Nature, groveling Passions. It was by a few scrolls written by Hebrew prophets, and Jewish fishermen and publicans, that the world was to be "turned upside down!" The unlettered listeners, with nothing but the simple sling of faith and the smooth pebbles from the brook of eternal Truth, were to go forth on their apparently hopeless undertaking!

If those localities are sacred in the world which are associated with the first plannings and conception of a great enterprise, where originated some grand thought or purpose which has had a powerful influence for good on mankind—if that spot is memorable where Columbus first dreamed of his unknown western world—or where Newton sat under his garden-bough and grasped the law which molds the raindrop and gives the planet its pathway—or the library where Luther found the dusty volume which gave birth to the Reformation, and emancipated the human mind from the despotism of ages—how illustrious and hallowed surely must ever be that mountain scene in Galilee where the simple Jew listened with startled ears to the strange command, that "Repentance and remission of sins" were now to be preached, in the name of Jesus, "to all nations"—that henceforth there was to be "neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free"—that the Angel of the Jewish Church had now folded his wings, and that "another Angel" was about to "fly in the midst of Heaven, having the Everlasting Gospel, to preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

What a sacred trust was here confided to us! Woe to that Church which neglects so hallowed a commission and selfishly appropriates its spiritual blessings without one effort to convey them to others.

If farewell words are ever solemn and binding ones, let the Church of Christ come to this Mountain of Galilee, and listen to the parting command and injunction of her Great Lord. Striking surely, and significant it was, that, before He ascended, one of His last farewell looks should have been turned towards the nations yet sitting in darkness; that

His last utterances were burdened with a solemn charge to the Church of the future to "go far hence unto the Gentiles." The wailing cry of unhappy Heathendom was doubtless, at that moment, borne to His ear from all coming ages. The wild shriek that has risen in our own age may have mingled in the terrible appeal. Well He knew that nothing would tame savage hearts but the regenerating power of His own blessed Gospel; and, therefore, before He bids the world farewell, and allows the chariot-cloud to descend, He utters, with heathen mountain-peaks in view, and half heathen villages at His feet, the ever memorable command, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

III. We have finally, the PARTING PROMISE.

The Savior's discourse is drawing to a close; a few more utterances and He will vanish from sight never again to be seen by His Church on earth, until the Great Day of His appearing.

Sorrow was doubtless filling their hearts at the thought of His departure, when the most sacred and joyous of friendships seemed about to be dissolved for ever. But by one glorious promise He turns their sorrow into joy—"I go," He seems to say, "and yet I will never leave you. These heavens are about to receive Me, but though My personal presence be withdrawn—though this Risen Body is soon to be screened from view behind the veiled glories of the Holiest of all, do not think that in reality My Presence is gone, for Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

There is a beautiful connection and contrast between the first and the last assertions of this farewell discourse. The assertion of His unlimited sovereign Dominion was a cheering and gladdening one. It was the announcement that the garnered riches of the Universe were in His possession, and that all these would be used in behalf of His people. He seems in it to take the telescope and sweep the boundless skies of His power, proclaiming His kingdom to be an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion enduring throughout all generations.

But now is the telescope laid aside and the microscope is turned to every

atom of redeemed dust! He leaves the symbols of His might in the Heavens above—His regal sway over "thrones, dominions, principalities, powers"—and turning to every single individual member of His Church on earth, the feeblest, the poorest, the lowliest, the most desolate—He says, Lo! I am with You always, even to the end of the world! The splendors of His mediatorial throne were at that moment in view. The harps of Heaven were sounding in His ear. But He assures them, when standing on the very threshold of all this glory, that His heart of love would still continue with the Pilgrim Church He was to leave in a Pilgrim World. "All power is given to Me in Heaven;" YET, "Lo! I am with you!"

That farewell saying has lost none of its comfort. "You"—that little word embraced every one of His redeemed people! YOU—Jesus looked down the vista of eighteen centuries, His eye, perhaps was on some lone spirit now reading these pages who thinks he has been left to the mercy of the storm, and still He says, "O you of little faith, why are you downcast? Dispel your tears, dispel Your misgivings, 'Lo! I am with YOU!'"

Yes, Blessed assurance amid much that is changing here! Heart and flesh faint and fail! Often our cisterns are scarcely filled when they break in pieces—our suns have scarcely climbed the meridian when they set in weeping clouds—our fondest schemes are blown upon—our most cherished gourds withered. We seat ourselves in our homes, but there are blanks there—vacant seats tell the too truthful tale of severed links, and blighted hopes, and early graves. As old-age creeps on, we look around us, but the companions of our pilgrimage are gone—noble forest trees, one by one, have bowed to the axe; "the place that once knew them, knows them no more." BUT there is ONE surviving the wreck and ruin of all sublunary joys, changeless among the changeable—"Lo! I am with you"—and "the wilderness and the solitary place" are by that presence made glad!

Amid sacred musings over departed friends—when visions of "the loved and lost" come flitting before us like shadows on the wall, how often do we indulge the pleasing imagination of their still mingling with us in mysterious communion; their wings of light and smiles of love hovering over us; delighting to frequent with us hallowed haunts, and reparticipate with our spirits in hallowed joys. This may perchance be but a fond

delusion regarding others—but it is sublimely true regarding JESUS!

When the gates of the morning are opened, swifter than the arrowy light His footstep of love is at our threshold, and His voice is heard saying, "Lo! I am with you!" When the glow of health has left our cheek, and the dim nightlight casts its flickering gleam on our pillow, His unslumbering eye is watching us, and His lips gently whisper, "Lo! I am with you!"

When the King of Terrors has entered our dwellings—when we are seated amid the dreadful stillness of the death chamber, gazing on the shroud which covers the hope of our hearts and the pride of our lives; oh! amid that prostration of earthly hopes—when unable to glance one thought on a dark future—when the stricken spirit, like a wounded bird, lies struggling in the dust with broken wing and wailing cry—longing only for pinions to flee away from a weary world to the quiet rest of the grave—in that hour of earthly desolation, He who has the Keys of death at His belt—more, who has tasted death Himself, and, better still, who has conquered it—draws near in touching tenderness, saying, "Lo! I am with you!" I will come in the place of your beloved ones. I am with you to cheer you, to comfort you, to support and sustain you. I, who once wept at a grave, am here to weep with you—I will be at your side in all that trying future—I will make My grace sufficient for you, and My promises precious to you, and My love better than all earthly affection. All others are changeable, I am unchangeable! Others must perish; I am the strength of your heart and your portion forever!

Mark the word in this parting Promise, "Lo! I am with you ALWAYS." In the original it is more expressive; it means All THE days"—(all the appointed days). Our times are in the hands of Jesus—He counts not our years, but our DAYS—and He promises to be with us every day to the last day of all; and when that last day comes, He does not withdraw His Presence, but changes the Scene of it, and says, "TODAY you shall be with Me in PARADISE."

Reader! cling to this glorious farewell promise. Rejoice in Christ's fidelity to it. The natural world never belies her promises; we can calculate with unflinching accuracy on her unvarying sequences. The sun that sets today behind the western hills, will rise tomorrow. The trees which in the



waning year are bared of their foliage, will be clothed with verdure in returning spring. The farmer, casting his seed in the prepared furrow, sees afar off Autumn with her joyous sickle coming to bear the harvest treasure home.

And if the natural world be thus scrupulously truthful and unerring—"He is faithful who promised, I will never leave you, nor forsake you." True, we may not, and do not, witness, in visible manifestation, the Savior's power or presence. But as the mightiest agencies in the natural world—gravitation, heat, electricity—are hidden and impalpable, yet constant in their influence, and stupendous in their effects; so it is with this ever-present Savior.

We see Him not—we hear not His voice—we cannot touch, like the believing suppliant of old, the hem of His outer garment. But it is the mission of Faith to rise above the impalpable and intangible, and to hold converse with the UNSEEN. The Believer, planting his footsteps on the Rock of Ages, can say, with triumphant joy, "the Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Mounting with Paul on soaring pinions, he can challenge the Heavens above and the Earth beneath, legions of Angels and hosts of devils, ever to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord!

# MEMORIES OF OLIVET

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## **The Royal Flight Across the Mount**

2 Sam. 15:13, 14, 17, 18, 23, 30

A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword."

So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away. All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king.

The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert.

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.

2 Sam. 16:5, 6, 11, 12, 14

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left.

David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

(See also 2 Sam. 15:1-31 and 2 Sam. 16:5-15)

The most sacred and impressive memorials of Mount Olivet are to be found in the evangelical narrative, and associated with the words and work of the Divine Redeemer. In the truest sense of the term, the Memories of Olivet are the Memories of Jesus. Its rocks, its footpaths, its little dells and ravines and olive groves, are, above all, fragrant with "the name which is above every name." Its green slopes are a sacred scroll--an illuminated book--glowing with the records of His presence and power--His pleadings and His tears. The Old Testament, however, is far from being either silent or devoid of interest regarding a locality, which was to receive its loftiest and truest consecration at a later and brighter day--and the passages indicated at the head of this chapter, form alike the earliest and the most remarkable of these "Memories" which preceded the Gospel Era.

Few single incidents indeed in Old Testament story, are so vividly photographed in all their minute details as that which we are now to consider. Touching must have been the scene here unfolded. The uncrowned and unsandalled King, with head covered and eyes dim with tears, pursuing his way along the precipitous road "by the ascent of the Olives" to the country of exile whence he might never return--the wailing

crowd, like a long funeral procession, their heads similarly muffled, (for "the whole land wept"), tracking his steps.

"Put not your trust in Princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." "Cease you from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of." To all outward appearance, the Minstrel King of Judah had been securely seated on his Throne. Though a man of war from his youth, his sword was sheathed, his empire consolidated, his capital strengthened and beautified--peace seemed to be within its walls and prosperity within its palaces. But a storm was gathering, and the noblest vessel on that surging sea is driven on the rocks! Sundry political causes, on which we need not now enter, may have tended to foster and stimulate the national disaffection. Chiefly among these, may be noted, the impolitic appointment of mercenaries for the Royal Body-guard--"Cherethites, Perethites, and Gittites, six hundred men, which came after him from Gath," (2 Sam. 15:18.)

It is not difficult, indeed, to seek David's personal reasons for this enlistment of foreign soldiers and counselors. There is no doubt that at this period of the monarchy his popularity was on the wane. Since the commission of the great crime of his life, his whole character as a ruler seems to have deteriorated. That crime had recoiled terribly on its perpetrator. He secluded himself more from his subjects. He was deeply conscious that he had justly forfeited, at least the former enthusiastic ardor of their love and loyalty. He was no longer either physically or morally the hero he once was. Losing his own self-respect and self-confidence, he lost confidence in the attachment of his old and trusted advisers, and with a short-sighted policy availed himself of extraneous aid. Add to this--some have inferred, from references in several of the Psalms, that at this period he had become the victim of bodily ailment; an ailment so severe, as to prevent him, for the time, discharging indispensable public duties; more especially that, which has ever possessed peculiar charm in the eyes of Orientals, seating himself day by day by the City Gate--the arbiter in disputes and the redressor of wrongs.

The unscrupulous Absalom avails himself of the tempting opportunity--the favoring conjunction of circumstances--to ingratiate himself with the populace and gratify his unnatural ambition. His gaudily-caparisoned

horses and chariot; his noble demeanor and kingly countenance; his indefatigable attendance at early morn to hear causes of debate and controversy; His deceitful reflections and insinuations regarding the King's absence and neglect to appoint a deputy; at the same time with bold effrontery asserting his own pretensions, "Oh that I were made a Judge in the land, that every man which has any suit or cause might come unto me and I would do him justice"--all this king-craft or prince-craft was only too successful with a people fond of outward glitter and show, and possessing the frequent national characteristic of fickleness and love of change. The Royal conspirator "stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

The course was only too successfully laid, and all that had to be done was to apply the torch. It must have been, need we say, to the aged Father, the trial of all trials, that the arrow which pierced him was one feathered from his own bosom--that it was the child of his affections, his favorite son--around whose future his too fond heart had weaved visions of bright hope, whose gallant demeanor had won a nation's love--it was he who was the fomentor of the rebellion, and the plotter of his parent's ruin--who had put forth his hand to embitter his old age, and bring down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave!

Let those who know what it is to mourn the early death of loved ones--who have gathered around the grave of household treasures and wept over lives of usefulness and promise and love prematurely nipped in the bud--let such come and learn from the Old King of Judah, to thank God that, by these early removals, He may have spared tears and anguish far more bitter, for they may have been "taken from the evil to come." How willingly would that smitten monarch have exchanged places with you--taken your aching heart, with its hallowed memories and sublime solaces, to be freed from woes and sorrows too deep for utterance or for tears.

He, also, had once lost a child; and deep and intense was his grief, when the wavelets of that fragile life were ebbing--when for seven whole days and nights he lay prostrate on the ground, importunate that it might be spared. But what was this? What this sudden and early drying up of a little well-spring of joy within his Palace? dust in the balance compared to the woe of woes that was now crushing him to the earth. Truly we may say, in the well-known words of an old writer, "Better David's dead child,

than his living Absalom."

But to return to the narrative. What resolution in the present emergency must the King adopt? His life as well as his throne is in peril--the insurrection is spreading--the disorganization is complete--the artifices of Absalom have triumphed. Not a moment is to be lost. The usurper is mustering his renegade army at Hebron; another day will find him marching on the Capital. David, from his Palace windows, looks out on his loved city, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." What will he not do to save it from pillage and mutilation? If he remains and attempts a defense, as his old indomitable courage would perhaps have dictated, a fierce struggle must ensue that may deluge its streets with blood. He must leave it instantly. "Arise," he says, "let us flee."

It must have been yet early morning, the sun had just risen over the somber hills of Moab, and Olivet was casting its shadows athwart the Valley of the Kedron, when he gathered his faithful adherents around him. Himself barefoot, (another token of grief)--the center figure of a vast concourse--he prepares to cross "the brook," and to wend along the same bridle-path which a Greater than he often traversed in a future age. The first halt is by a solitary Olive-tree which marked the commencement of the toilsome road leading across the Mount by the way of the wilderness. At this spot all the household troops, including the Philistine body-guard and the six hundred retainers, defiled before the King.

The flight was in one sense abrupt, but yet, in keeping with David's old martial habits, an order of march was formed and preserved. Humbling and mournful--no, rather we should say, noble and impressive procession! Never is David more worthy of admiration than in his hour of adversity--never truly greater is this Cedar of God than when wrestling with the storm. His keenness of temperament might have roused far other emotions. If he had been naturally reserved, stolid, unemotional, we would not have wondered to see him mount the steeps of Olivet in sullen silence, submitting passively to his fate. But with these his feelings so finely set--cut to the quick with the imputation of unmerited wrong (for "reproach," he tells us, had "broken his heart," Ps. 69:20) could we have wondered if, stung to madness--chafed like a lioness robbed of her whelps--we had witnessed, in this season of sudden reverse,

uncontrollable irritation--some outburst of vehement rage--some vow of fierce revenge.

How different! In tearful emotion, indeed, but with no repining on his lips, he turns his back on his capital, and pursues his way. Even when Shimei comes forth at Bahurim, on the descent of the Mount, scrambling along the top of the cliff with his storm of curses, and hurling his stones and dirt--the expression of the long-suppressed hatred of the fallen family of Saul; and when Abishai--a representative of the spirit of the world--would at once stop the villain's mouth with his sword, "let me go over and cut off his head," David says, No! "My own son is trying to kill me. Shouldn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it." Nothing will sting me after this--no wave can buffet me after this.

"I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because You did it!" (Ps. 39:1-9.) Let none say, David was a veteran in trial--that his finer and more sensitive feelings were now blunted, that he made a virtue of necessity, and submitted with cold stoical endurance to the stern fortunes of war. No, we see the saint of God, the resigned believer, his soul even as a weaned child--"Persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed," remaining calm and unmoved, like a rock in the midst of the surge--cherishing the spirit of an older and kindred sufferer, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to Him," (1 Sam. 3:18.)

At the commencement of his retreat just as he has crossed the Kedron, and is beginning the ascent of Olivet--there are two incidents which we are called to note. The first illustrates the tender considerateness and unselfishness of David's character. Amid the body-guard of Philistines, his eye falls on Ittai of Gath. David knew well, at a crisis like this, the incalculable value of the experience and valor of such a soldier--what a loss his shattered cause would sustain by the departure of this chief and his six hundred veterans. But why should this brave man share the disasters of a kingdom in which he was a stranger and foreigner? The fallen monarch importunes him to march with his Gittite band back to his own frontiers, and not to imperil his life and theirs with a desperate



cause.

Ittai, however, (compared as he has been to the Peter of a future age, along with a nobler guard who surrounded their Master near the same spot,) testifies the strength of his attachment by refusing to leave the royal presence, and chivalrously avowing his resolution to follow him to prison and to death!

Again, we have to mark a sudden stop. The procession pauses. In the motley crowd of soldiers and citizens, we see a group attired in holy vestments. In the panic of the hour, Zadok and Abiathar, with the officiating Levites--faithful to their King, and, as they imagined, to their God--had rescued the sacred symbol from the tabernacle in Zion, and borne it on their shoulders to the place where they knew the Royal fugitive was. Happy accompaniment! we are naturally led to say. The ark of God is with the exiles--the symbol of their nation, the sacred pledge of ultimate deliverance and victory. They may well cheer their hearts and dry their tears--Jehovah will bless the house of David, as He did that of Obed-edom, "for the ark's sake." The furious anarchists who have sided with Absalom, when they march into Jerusalem and discover the removal, will pronounce that the glory of the city has, with it, departed. Its presence with David will rally all waverers. He has only to hasten across Jordan and make known that the symbol of ancestral glory is there, and thousands will give their adhesion to his cause--its name and prestige, more than sword or shield or shields of mighty men, will win back the hearts of his disaffected subjects. Wherever the first great feast--be it Passover, or Pentecost, or Tabernacles, is held--there will "the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel to give thanks to the name of the Lord."

No more, as he hastens to Jordan by way of Jericho, may he not bear in memory the marvels associated, at both, with that consecrated shrine? and now, as its custodian, may he not ask, "Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save?" In one word, will it not prove to him and his, like the Pillar of Fire of old--reflecting brightness on their cause, and spreading darkness and gloom over the camp of the adversary?

Different altogether is David's feeling and determination and royal

command--"The king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city!"

The noblest, purest, most unselfish motives, doubtless, dictated this decision. He cherished no superstitious idea that the retention of the Ark would in any way act as a magical charm. He may perhaps reverently have thought that it would be unbecoming and unseemly to risk this holy treasure in the hour of precipitate retreat; But the will of Jehovah, here, as at other times, doubtless decided him. "In Judah is God known. In Jerusalem also is his tabernacle." David will not attempt to purchase peace and restoration by an unrighteous expedient, or by following divisive courses. God (the God who dwelt between the Cherubim) had said of Jerusalem, "This is my rest." Neither priest nor king has a right to propose a transference without divine authority and sanction, and to pillage the Holy City of that which gave it, by distinctive pre-eminence, the name of "The Mountain of Holiness."

If David had been a time-server--guided by worldly artifice, policy, base expediency--if he had made his religion a mere cloak to cover and expedite his schemes of aggrandizement--he would joyfully have hailed the presence of the sacred chest. He would have said, 'By all means keep it. Abandon what else you may. Let my Palace treasures go; the accumulated silver and gold for my projected Temple. Let my best soldiers, if they please, desert my ranks. Let the counsel of Ahithophel, my most sagacious adviser, be given to the enemy. But, at all hazards, retain the Theocratic symbol. Its moral influence is worth half an army, half a kingdom. If my usurped Throne can be re-purchased on no other terms, the Ark of God will do it--I shall hold it out as the price of unconditional surrender!' David, however, was above all such unrighteous diplomacy. His command was imperative; and before he advances another step, he sends Zadok and Abiathar on their way back, with the hallowed ark, to the tabernacle on Zion.

Besides, the veteran saint took a far higher view of the whole matter. If this expulsion from his throne and kingdom had been man's doing--the result of uncontrolled human passion or wayward caprice, he might have altered his tactics--he might have stooped to unworthy compliances, and willingly assented to the expedient worldly wisdom suggested. But it was

very different. Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him." 2 Samuel 15:25-26

Ah, doubtless at that moment (unknown to those around) there was a silent voice, more terrible than Shimei's taunts and imprecations, speaking to the sorrowing exile. Nathan's solemn words must have been ringing their echoes of judgment in his ear. The blood of the murdered Uriah, and the foul guilt which followed, must have hung like a cloud of vengeance over his head. Even the name and place of the human agents in the plot, were not without their retributive significance.

"The sword" that was "never to depart from his house" was now unsheathed; and it was the hand of his own child that was the first to draw it from its scabbard. The defection of Ahithophel--the wisest and wiliest of the political leaders--and his confederacy with Absalom, had its explanation in the family disgrace involved in the crime of his granddaughter Bathsheba; while the very 'stones' hurled by Shimei, would remind the great wrong-doer of the peculiar death, which, by the laws of his country his crimson guilt entailed, and which doubtless his regal position had alone averted. Conscience was writing bitter things against him.

Others, his still confiding subjects, may have wondered at this sudden reverse of fortune; but David himself wondered not. He had often perhaps had a gloomy premonition of the present hour. He had rather reason to marvel why his God had so long delayed the merited retribution. The Being he had offended was only showing him, "by terrible things in righteousness," that He was "not a man that He should lie." As the aged monarch sped him up these slopes--when he looked on his own sackcloth attire, and listened to the loud wail of his people wailing every echo of the mountain--when he looked behind him on the city and palace that had been the scene of his aggravated crime, the dreadful admonishment must, like a funeral bell, have rung in his ears--"be sure your sin will find you out!"

'Talk not,' he seems to say, 'of retaining the Ark. Restore it to its own holy rest. If the God who is now judging righteous judgment, has resolved to bring me back, He will do it independently of any such outward instrumentality. I am in His hands. I will not stoop to a dishonorable strategy, or the arts of base expediency. I may see my beloved Jerusalem once more. Often has He restored me in times past, and led me in the paths of righteousness; and He can do so still; He may yet turn my mourning into dancing--take off my sackcloth and gird me with gladness--I may yet praise Him on the loud cymbal and psaltery.'

'On the other hand, if He has forgotten me; if He has resolved to leave me to perish in exile--I deserve it all, and will submit to it all. If I am to cross that Jordan to my grave--if I am left as a desolate panting deer amid the mountains of Gilead, sighing in vain for the brooks of Zion, I shall not, I dare not murmur. My punishment may be greater than I can bear, but it is not greater than I deserve. He who "stills the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people," may in His own time utter the mandate, "Peace, be still." "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my cause and executes judgment for me!"'

Onward the mournful cavalcade sweeps, from the top of the hill, down the undulating slopes, and across the wild, jagged limestone rocks, with the hills of Moab and Gilead demarcating the horizon. Jerusalem, with all its hallowed memories and princely splendors, is exchanged for "a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

In gathering a few PRACTICAL LESSONS from this 'Olivet Memory,' let us learn--

1. The unsatisfactory nature of all earthly things. This, we find, is the topic of David's special musing in that Psalm, (39.) which was evidently penned along with others, on a retrospect of the mournful incidents of his flight, "Surely every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man walks in a vain show--Surely they are disturbed in vain--he heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them." Here was the result of all this great man's wars and campaigns, all his diplomacy and statesmanship, all his efforts for the consolidation of his empire, the

beautifying of his capital, the prosperity of his people.

"All was vanity." In one brief hour the dream had vanished. It was a pantomime--"a vain show." He had been "heaping up riches," accumulating costly materials in his palace--they were to be "gathered" by an ungrateful son, and to fall into the hands of base unscrupulous partisans. What a requital for his toil! What a mockery of the pageantry of the past, and of the bright hopes he had indulged for the future! He could adopt the epitaph, over this mimicry of true life, written in a later age--"The fashion" (or as that word means, 'the shifting drama') "of this world passes away."

And was David's case a singular or exceptional one? Alas! no. Every day makes additional disclosures of the "vain show;" and writes the old "sum of the whole matter"--"This also is vanity." A man "heaping up riches"--but it is a golden pyramid, erected over his own dead and ruined hopes.

One man has toiled a whole lifetime. The coveted riches have come at last--houses and lands and equipage and luxury--all is realized. But, it is "a vain show." Disease unexpectedly supervenes--he has no health, no heart to enjoy them--the riches are there, but the zest is gone! Another has toiled with equal success. He had a beloved child, all worthy of inheriting his wealth; but, at the hour he least dreamt of, the footfall of the dread messenger was heard at the door, and the object of his fondest anticipations is borne away to the last home! What to him now are the long, toiling, fretting years of the past? His gold is poor base alloy; that amassed fortune passes to some unknown or distant relative in whom he feels no interest. It is again "the vain show"--the "castle of fairy frost-work" which rises in a night and perishes with the morning sun--"he heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them," (Ps. 39:6.) Yes! there are many broken and sad hearts that will be ready to subscribe this experience as their own--who, in the memory of frustrated hopes, disappointed schemes, forfeited friendships, sorrowful bereavements, will tell that the world is not the gay and gladsome and happy thing many take it for. Would that, in the midst of this constant experience of its vanity and unsatisfactoriness; we might adopt David's words in that same Psalm as our habitual motto--they would temper the joys of prosperity, they would reconcile to the bitterness of adversity, by keeping us mindful

that this changeful, deceitful earth is not our home--"I am a stranger with you and a sojourner, as all my fathers were!"

2. Let us learn next, from the example of the royal fugitive, the lesson of RESIGNATION under affliction, patience under injuries, and of humble, child-like reliance on God. In the midst of dark providences, let us seek to have no wish or will of our own; no reproaches or slanders on the Divine faithfulness. Some may be disposed to think, that, even in the eyes of David there might have been room for such repinings, and that the sincerity of his repentance, years before, might have exempted him from present judgment. He might have thought so himself. 'It is hard for me,' might have been his inward reflection, if not the utterance of his lips, 'to encounter this sweeping blast in my old age. After a life of devotion to the God of Israel; after seeking to discharge, as faithfully as I could, my duties as His anointed servant, the king of His covenant people, and the minstrel of His Church--hard it is to have the harp snatched from my hand, or left hanging tuneless and mute in my Cedar-palace, and to be driven an exile and wanderer on alien soil!'

But no such reasoning escapes his lips. Of all the Psalms he ever sung, this 'living-psalm' was one of the grandest--when he climbs Mount Olivet, weeping and barefoot, yet so humble, unselfish, generous, submissive, resigned--"not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing."

Would that we had ever such a heart in us in the midst of afflictions, unmerited taunts, unkind insinuations! When God in a moment overturns our cherished schemes, and sends us forth, barefoot and weeping, across the mount of trial; or when some unkind and cruel human persecutor--some slanderer like Shimei--comes forth with malicious and railing accusations, launching missiles "more cruel than spears and arrows, their tongue a sharp sword"--be it ours to feel that all is ordered--even the wrath of man, the tongue of calumny--"Let him curse on, for the Lord has bidden him." 'I will look high above all 'human' instruments--"The wicked who are your sword, the men of the world who are your hand." O God! here am I, do to me as seems good to You--take me, use me for Your glory. I wish not to evade any cross or suffering. The lot may be a bitter one, cast into the lap, "but whole disposing thereof is

of the Lord."

3. And if the example of David teach us Resignation for the present, let it teach us also Trust for the future.

Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

He felt the future was not in his own hands, but in the hands of Him who had gathered these storm-clouds round his head. The same One who gathered them, could, by a word, disperse them. "It may be, that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." He trusted to better times. He seemed to say, in the words of a royal descendant, when placed in similar circumstances of peril, with an host encamping against him, "We have no might against this great multitude, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon You!"

One recorded incident in this sudden flight is enough of itself, touchingly and beautifully to unfold to us the hidden inner life of this man of God. How calm that religious trust must have been, which, in the midst of his hurried retreat, prompts him at noon, when every moment was valuable, to pause at the altar on the top of the Mount and engage in worship. Ah! it is easy enough in prosperity, when our circles are unbroken and our worldly hopes unblighted, to own God's hand--to erect our altar and kindle our sacrifice, and raise our thankful song. But it is not so easy, when the hearth is swept and the home desolate, and the mount of trial, the "hill difficulty" has to be climbed--it is not so easy then, amid the peltings of the storm, to kneel and utter words of faith and trust, and to say, as David did, in the spirit, if not in the language of the Psalm of his exile--

"I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life.

"O God my rock," I cry, "Why have you forsaken me? Why must I wander in darkness, oppressed by my enemies?"

Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!" Psalm 42:7-9, 11

And the God he thus trusted, did not fail nor forsake him. A few weeks afterwards, that same Mount of Olives is crowded with a different throng. Its echoes are awake with joyful songs of victory, as the old King is conducted back to his throne and palace, amid the hosannas of his people, who had come down to the Jordan to welcome him.

God's dealings have always some great end in view, and when the end is accomplished "He gives his beloved rest." Great surely is the comfort for us to know, with David, that the Lord "looks upon our afflictions;" that the troubles He sends are needed troubles; that He graciously and wisely metes them out and apportions them--as "a refiner of silver," watching until the process of purification be complete; and though He does and will cause us to pass (when He sees we require it) through the flames, He will not "make a full end" of us. God's furnace is to purify and refine, not to destroy and consume.

"If they break my statutes," says He, "and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail," (Ps. 89:31-33) As He raised up unlooked-for comforts to the aged king in his hour of bitter adversity--temporal refreshment, (2 Sam. 16:14) and the better solace of generous and faithful friendships, destined long to survive the season of exile--crowning all, with a safe return from beyond Jordan, and a triumphant entrance within the walls of his beloved Zion--so in the case of His tried people.

For them, also, does He spread a table in the wilderness. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them." "I will open" "rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys--I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Thus does He cause them to sing of mercy in the midst of judgment; imparting when



they most need it, new and undreamed of consolations--strength in the hour of weakness, support in the hour of danger, friends in the hour of loneliness, sympathy, human and Divine, in the hour of sorrow. Above all, whatever be their desert experiences and desert trials, bringing them at last, in safety, across the dark border-river into the Heavenly Zion--the new Jerusalem--where the wail of sadness, the dirge of crushed hopes and blighted or buried affections, shall never more be heard.

Oh! trust in this faithful covenant-keeping God. Trust Him in exigencies . Take the words of this Royal sufferer in another of his Psalms, for your motto, in all time of your tribulation--"Whenever I am afraid I will trust in You!" Trust Him--even when, like David, you may have the sackcloth on your loins and the tear in your eye. "Commit your way unto the Lord--trust also in Him, He will bring it to pass. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." "The Lord is good--a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who trust in Him."

## **Solomon's High Places on the Mount**

"In Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart to worship their gods instead of trusting only in the Lord his God, as his father, David, had done. Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. Thus, Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely, as his father, David, had done. On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, he even built a shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods. The Lord was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. He had warned Solomon specifically about worshiping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the Lord's command." 1 Kings 11:4-10

"The king (Josiah) also desecrated the pagan shrines east of Jerusalem

and south of the Mount of Corruption, where King Solomon of Israel had built shrines for Ashtoreth, the detestable goddess of the Sidonians; and for Chemosh, the detestable god of the Moabites; and for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles. Then he desecrated these places by scattering human bones over them." 2 Kings 23:13-14

In the days of King Josiah, a pile of imposing buildings of Tyrian architecture, crowned the southern eminence of the Mount of Olives. Gigantic idols--some, unshapely blocks of wood, others of stone, all strange to look upon in that site--peered above the groves of myrtle, olive, and terebinth which encircled them. In one swift hour of retribution, this pious King and youthful Reformer swept the abominations away. The images of Ashtoreth and Chemosh and Molech were broken in fragments, and rolled down to the channel of the Kedron; and the shrines they guarded were left a mass of ruin.

How came these idolatrous sanctuaries, on the opposite side of the Jehoshaphat ravine, thus impiously to confront the Temple of God? What is their history, and what the lessons to be deduced from them?

Their builder was Solomon--Solomon, the most complex character in Holy Writ--a strange intermixture of intellectual greatness and moral degradation. Never did vessel leave the harbor with expectation of a brighter destiny--never was there a more humiliating wreck. Like his own beauteous Temple on Mount Moriah, he stands before us, in early youth, pure and noble; his name "Jedidiah," "the beloved of God;" the pride and hope of his father, "tender and only-beloved in the sight of his mother," (Prov. 4:3.) But the clouds gather in the midst of that fair sunshine--the lightning leaps forth--the fair alabaster pillars are scathed and blackened--"O Lucifer! son of the morning, how are you fallen?" Unlike the customary progression in the virtues of the good and the true, his life--and that, also, not only after a morning, but a manhood, of promise--was a history of deterioration. Not "from strength to strength" did he go, but rather from weakness to weakness. Surrounded with all the gifts of fortune and genius, raised to the pinnacles of unexampled and unparalleled earthly grandeur, he became the victim of degraded passions and dark, gloomy, atheistic thoughts. The golden-dowered

prince degenerated into the most miserable of men—

"Melancholy marked him for her own."

It is a mournful "Memory of Olivet" this; but, as we stand in thought on the slopes of Moriah or Zion, gazing across the Kedron valley on these ruined pagan shrines, let us gather from the contemplation the lessons they are so well fitted to convey, viewed in connection with the character and history of their builder. Let us confine ourselves to two of these.

1. Learn the sad but righteous result and recompense of sin. Solomon had acted in direct violation of God's will and purpose in singling out Israel from the surrounding nations as the depository of the true faith. A wise barrier had been erected between them and the rest of the world; and their safety consisted in conserving the ancient landmarks and remaining a standing witness to the unity of the divine Being. He had, in the pride of empire--the lust of political power and aggrandizement--cultivated and encouraged political alliances with adjoining Pagan kingdoms, specially with Egypt and Phoenicia. The extension of commercial trade by means of the navies which floated on the Mediterranean in the west, and the Red Sea in the east, was dearly purchased by contamination with the principles and the creeds of the heathen. The silver of Tarshish and the gold of Ophir were procured at the expense of tarnishing nobler traditions and betraying more sacred trusts. "Evil company" corrupted "good character."

One false and fatal step led on to another; political alliances were followed by social and domestic ones. In violation of a still more sacred and more rigid moral enactment, the Polygamy of these other oriental kingdoms, with which he had been brought into commercial relation, was in an evil hour imported to Palestine. Not Egypt and Phoenicia alone, but the border nations of Edom and Moab and Ammon, whose religious worship was idolatry of the darkest type, consisting in cruel and licentious rites, contributed wives to his Palace.

Soloman's character, originally bold and independent, became enervated and effeminate--the tool and slave of others. His fine sensibilities were blunted--his conscience seared. The lauded justice and magnanimity of

his early reign was changed into tyranny. Once the idol of his people--by profligate expenditure on self and sin, he became the despot. His extravagance was maintained at the expense of a grinding taxation. Poor fail human nature! "He who had prayed for his people at the dedication of the Temple, 'Let your hearts be undividedly given unto the Lord,' (1 Kings 8:61,) now himself began to divide his heart." The life which was once like the delicate tracery of one of the marble pillars of that Temple, became scarred and mutilated. The mind that could dictate the everlasting truths of his own Book of Proverbs, had lapsed, by all these evil influences, into moral imbecility, mistaking wild licence for liberality and toleration. He attempted (what was impossible) to fuse all religions into one. He tried to incorporate light with darkness, Christ with Belial, purity with impurity, good with evil. The inevitable result and penalty soon developed itself. He became indifferent to all religion. Providence was an insolvable problem, life itself a profound enigma.

What do we learn from this mournful travesty of genius and wealth and renown? Is it not, to beware of anything that would mar and endanger the simplicity of our faith and spiritual character. If God has given us prosperity--whatever that outward prosperity be, wealth, position, intellect--let us beware of prostituting the gifts of the Great Giver to our spiritual ruin. If these, as in Solomon's case, lead us to tamper with the divine safeguards of our peace, let us hear (as he refused to hear) the warning voice--"Come out from among them, and be separate."

What especial carefulness is demanded in the formation of friendships and companionships likely to imperil the soul's best interests, by tending to lower the standard of spiritual principles, or to sap the foundations of religious beliefs. Nor need we be deterred from specially including, the most sacred and momentous of human alliances; the most fatal in its influences for evil--the most permanent in its influence for good.

How many, like the King of Judah, rush thoughtlessly into an unholy, unsanctified MARRIAGE union? In the case of how many who have begun life full of bright promise and noble aspirations, has their first retrograde step been traced to a frivolous, ungodly connection! Solomon's political alliances and commercial adventures doubtless produced their unwholesome and fatal results too; but it is expressly said of him--"His

WIVES turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." This is no theme to be turned aside with a flippant smile. Many there are, who, in old age, review the bitterness of a misspent life; and a life misspent, because those who shared its hours frittered them away in superficial excitement or selfish pleasure. Hundreds of such could warn, with tearful eyes, those venturing on the precipice--those who make outward attractions, or wealth, or brilliant connection, a substitute for moral and spiritual qualities. Though beautiful as Tirzah--though patrimoned with the gold of Ophir, the silver-mines of Tarshish, and the ivory palaces of Phoenicia--though encircled with every splendor of house and equipage, which, in our own times, money can bestow--better far is the man whose wealth is "the clean hands and the pure heart," and the noble purpose--better she, who, destitute in anything else, has "the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price." Solomon, nor Solomon's Bride, in all their glory, were not arrayed like one of these!

As we gaze yet again on these ruined Temples, let us learn, the perpetuative power of evil influences. More than three hundred years had elapsed since the idolatrous shrines had been erected; and even although in the spirit of a reformer--an ancient iconoclast--Josiah had demolished them as places of worship, their relics, (the old stones and debris, if not some of the pillars and architecture,) remained so late as the days of our Lord--yes, indeed, even to this day the old site retains a name of bad pre-eminence--"the Mount of offence."

To all the true-hearted among Israel, these stones were, for generations, an "offence." They shook the dust off their feet as they passed them by. Solomon may have reared them at the time in a moment of caprice, never dreaming of their permanency, or that they would even outlive his reign. It may have been simply to satisfy the pride or vanity, the superstition or passion of some of the heathen women to whom he had sold himself. But long after he was laid in the last still sleep in the sepulcher of David, they lived! The sad memory of his apostasy was handed down and perpetuated from generation to generation. It needed no divine chronicler to write, as in the case of Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin"--the mournful truth was carved on these tablets on the brow of Olivet.

Every worshiper in the Temple-courts read, morning and evening, the humiliating fact--that the most renowned of all their kings--the builder of their Temple--the penman of some of their sacred books, had miserably forsaken the Lord God of his fathers--that the mightiest ruler on earth, had failed to rule his own spirit. It matters not what is the truth respecting that often-debated question of Solomon's state of mind at the end of his life--whether he went down to his grave in the deep darkness of despair, a ruined unreclaimed castaway, or (as we are rather far disposed to think) repentant and saved--saved at the eleventh hour--saved, "yet so as by fire."

But what of this? His repentance could not demolish these stone memorials, nor obliterate the memory of his great crimes. His penitence may have been (and we charitably trust was) sincere--accepted by Him whom he had disowned and provoked. Twice over, called "the Beloved of God," we may trust, that when laid in his regal tomb on Zion, God gave "His beloved, sleep." But it was enough to disturb that quiet "sleep" in the adjoining mausoleum, to think of these ruined walls and pillars, bearing witness for a thousand years to his lust and cruelty, his selfishness and atheism--that instead of the memories of a holy, saintly life, uncontaminated with the impurities of the heathen, he had transmitted a legacy of foul example, to those who would not fail to screen and cover their own infamy by his greatness.

Parents! you who have in any way compromised truth, and honor, and virtue, and religious principle in the eyes of your children--bear in mind the truth, that, in a dreadful sense, you too must come one day to be like these ruined temples on Mount Olivet. When you die--when your voice is silent--the memory of your sin will remain. The sad memorials will be still there! Your children will look at them. To some, they may be beacons of warning--to others, encouragement and authority for similar guilt and wrongdoing.

May the reverse rather be the happy reality. How many among us can call up the unblemished recollections of a sacred parental home--its pure light guiding and comforting amid the treacherous billows which have since been traversed. God keep us, in our turn, from being "mounts of offence;" that when we die, the world, or those dearer to us than the

world, may gaze back upon us with the sigh and the tear--we, who are now, in a nobler sense, God's living Temples, becoming ruins, blackened and rent with the lightning and storm! We must be one or other. The temple of God, or the temple of Ashtoreth. We must either transmit a heritage of good or of evil.

Look at Abraham with his altar, pitched side by side with his tent. The tent was taken down--demolished. It left no vestige behind it. But the altar was enduring. The roving Canaanite marked the spot where the patriarch had prayed and vowed; and his own children (generations afterwards) loved to gaze on the memorial-stones, and associate them with the faith and devotion of their great progenitor. Shall ours be Abraham's commemorative and votive altars of faith, and trust, and holy hope? or Solomon's memorial-stones of apostasy and licentiousness and crime? Shall we be a blessing or a curse? Shall we be missed, revered, loved, when we leave the world? or shall our names be whispered with saddened look and bated breath? Shall our children point to our graves and say, "He ruined me," or "He saved me?"

Let us close, with what the subject naturally suggests, a word to those occupying the two extremes of existence, Youth and Old age.

YOUTH--look at these ruins on the Mount and be warned. Do not say, 'I require no warning, I have been piously brought up--religiously educated--no fear of me.' So also was Solomon. Never did father dote more fondly on a son--and he appeared, also, all that a father's fondest hopes could desire. The Book of Proverbs, written in his best days, attests the purity of his life and the grandeur of his aim and purposes. But what the old writers call "the world's trinity"--"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life"--these, which he had trifled and tampered with, proved his ruin.

Go and read another of his sacred writings, that plaintive and dolorous "utterance of the heart," the Book of Ecclesiastes. That book, may we not fondly hope, was composed in the last hours of penitent life. It is a mournful autobiography--a mournful retrospective diary. In it, he records all his various and ingenious ways of solving the problem of existence--the problem of happiness--by intellectual pursuits, aesthetic pleasures,

schemes of ambition, commercial enterprise, splendor of court and palace and honor--all that eye or ear or heart could wish or devise.

Yes, come to this shocking drama; come seat yourself in front of that stage--watch the scenic effects there, and the characters which flit to and fro in that bright and bewildering background. A magnificent palace first attracts the eye, with its vast colonnades--its central tower, with a thousand golden shields hung outside, gleaming under an oriental sun, "all shields of mighty men." Gardens or paradises stretch away in the distance, beautified and adorned with every tree and shrub, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall; while birds of rare plumage flit from bough to bough! Presently, the scene is lighted up with living actors--five hundred youths, clad in purple, and their dark-flowing ringlets powdered with dust of gold, await with fleet steeds outside the palace gates. The gush of music meanwhile sweeps through adjoining cedar-galleries, and an expectant crowd line the distant highway.

But while these are the brilliant accompaniments--see the chief actor in this scene of imposing grandeur. In the foreground is a throne of ivory--its base is of gold, with six golden lions flanking the flight of golden steps. Seated on that throne, is the object of all this pomp of circumstance. But alas! it is a countenance dark with despair--a faded--wasted--glutted voluptuary. All that array of magnificence behind, seems to be but a mockery of his anguished thoughts, as he wails out the confession of a misspent life--a futile chase after happiness--"All is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

From Solomon's sad but brilliant life we surely have the truth forcibly brought home to us, that goodness is alone true greatness. It is neither the gifts of fortune, nor the gifts of intellect which give happiness. It is worth--the state of the moral affections, which makes the man. There are many possessed of great wealth and great intellect without souls. Many of great means and of great attainments, who are little else than cold masses of physical or intellectual fuel, unlit by the glowing fire of goodness. They become cynical, supercilious, unsympathizing, unloving; in religion often skeptical. And a sadder phase still is, when, as in the case of Solomon, great genius is wedded to great crime!



You who have the dew of youth upon you--if God has given you gifts, bring them early to Him as consecrated offerings. Solomon's was one of those strong, ardent, impetuous temperaments, which, had they been guided aright, would have made him the greatest and best, as well as the most gifted of all kings of antiquity. But in an evil moment--to use a modern simile--with rash hand the engine was reversed just at the top of the incline, and, without rope or brake, down it plunged through the dark tunnel, and no mortal power could avert the fatal crash of ruin.

Had virtue been the helm of his life, what a freight of glory would that noble vessel have carried, in its course through summer seas. But he recklessly surrendered the helm to passion; and with him, as with thousands on thousands of hapless ones, the saying of a later and wiser Christian philosopher became true--"Lust, when it has conceived, brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death!"

The life and example of Solomon has a special moral and warning also to the AGED--to those--not who are climbing the mountain--but who are descending, and are facing the westering sun. We often hear of the unsteadiness of giddy youth--youth wavering between the right and the wrong--vacillating between fixed principles; and, alas! the current of evil too often proving the strong and the fatal one. But we seldom think of unsteadiness and vacillation in connection with maturer years--we generally suppose that on the turn of manhood or womanhood, character is fixed, principles rooted, and that once the ship has cleared the sand-bar, there is no more fear of foundering.

Generally, it is so--but not always. And in the case of Solomon, we have a beacon lighted on a rock in that open sea, and warning words wafted to us on the wings of the storm--"When you think you stand, take heed lest you fall!" Here was no young, easily broken sapling--no reed shaken by the wind--but an old gnarled cedar of Lebanon, a sturdy oak of Bashan bent before the blast of temptation. It was not in early blossom nor in tender bud, but in full flower, that the frost nipped him--in full blown glory, leaf by leaf withered and fell. What a lesson for watchfulness! What a testimony as to the need of grace to the very last, in the battle with inward corruption and outward temptation! Truly, "there is no discharge in that war."

Nor must we conclude, without a word of comfort and encouragement to the erring, the backsliding--it may even be the apostate--who, in the memory of their sin and ingratitude, can at times think of nothing but abandonment and despair. Solomon, we believe, low as he fell, was not allowed to die unreclaimed. We cannot now go to the proof of this. But there are gleams of light emitted in the sad story of his life, which lead us to think and hope the best--that for this (in one sense) greatest "Jerusalem sinner," there was mercy.

Shut up as he was in the dungeons of "Doubting Castle," Giant Despair was not permitted to include his bones among the skeletons of similar hapless pilgrims. The volcanoes of lust and crime had poured their lava-streams over a heart once full of noble emotions--but as existence is closing, we can discern, through the seams of that crust, the buddings of a new and better life--vine-leaves are bursting through these ashes of desolation.

The mid pages of his life-volume are soiled and tattered, but the last leaf of the last chapter, ends, as life had begun, with "Jedidiah--the beloved of the Lord." Hear the words of the great and good Nehemiah regarding him, many generations after he had slept with his fathers--"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God," (Neh. 13:26.)

And are we not warranted to say, that for the most wandering and erring sheep, there is the blessed possibility of restoration and return to the Great and Good Shepherd? We dare not--even to the life-long prodigal with gray hairs and tottering step, say, "There is no hope for you!" Gazing upwards, once more, on these desolate temples on the Mount of offence--while pondering the silent lessons their mouldering ruins convey--let us hear, amid this saddest of Olivet memories, the voice of one Greater than Solomon--in one of the noblest and tenderest of His parable-discourses, describing the truant wanderer from the spiritual fold--"And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost!" (Luke 15:5, 6.)



## The Red Heifer

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Here is another ritual law required by the Lord: Tell the people of Israel to bring you a red heifer without spot or blemish and has never been yoked to a plow. Give it to Eleazar the priest, and it will be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Eleazar will take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tabernacle. As Eleazar watches, the heifer must be burned—its hide, flesh, blood, and offal. Eleazar the priest must then take cedar-wood, a hyssop branch, and scarlet thread and throw them into the fire where the heifer is burning." Numbers 19:1-6

"Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ritual defilement. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins." Hebrews 9:13-14

Among these Old Testament "Memories of Olivet," it is refreshing again to come on one, which seems so impressively to anticipate the words and teachings, and, above all, the priceless Sacrifice of Him, who was afterwards to sanctify that Mount with His Presence. It is a Gospel memory throughout. We shall almost seem to hear, as we proceed, the Litany of coming years sounding across the dark gorge of the Kedron, and echoed from the valley to the mountain summit--"By Your agony and bloody sweat; by Your cross and passion; by Your precious death and burial; by Your glorious resurrection; and by the coming of the Holy Spirit!"

The sacrifice of the Red Heifer has its earlier associations with the Tabernacle in the wilderness; but it is of its later celebration we are now to speak, after the conquest of Jerusalem by David.

Across a lofty bridge, leading directly from the eastern gate of the Temple--the gate Shushan--and spanning the Kedron a valley--(but no

trace of which is now visible,)--there was seen moving, ever and anon, a strange and unusual procession. It was headed by the elders and the Jewish High Priest, followed by the Levites and subordinate officers of the Holy Place. Along this sacred viaduct was conducted to the grassy altar on the Mount of Olives, one solitary victim. So far as we are informed, no pomp of circumstance heralded it; no sprigs of myrtle and olive, as at the Feast of Tabernacles, wreathed its devoted head; no sound of trumpets, as at the bringing of the water from the Siloam pool, announced its approach. Crowds, we may well suppose, were gathered on the green slopes, to witness a rite, unique of its kind, in the Hebrew ceremonial--all the denser would the gathering be, as the immolation of the Red Heifer was not, like the other great sacrificial convocations, an anniversary, but one which apparently occurred only at wide intervals. When the solemn procession paused, the victim was first slain, then consumed to ashes on one of the ridges; or, as some say, on the summit of the Mount.

When we think of this place of sacrifice as within view--perhaps within little more than a stone's-throw of the Garden of Gethsemane, it has, in connection with the later place of celebration, even a more touching and suggestive interest, as the type of Him who "suffered outside the gate."

It is Death, the curse and result of sin, which forms the foreground of the typical picture. The sacrifice of the Heifer was to provide a method of purification for those who had touched the dead. If a Hebrew, of necessity or by accident, came in contact with death in any form, he was considered ceremonially unclean. Were he, in entering his tent in the wilderness, or his home in Palestine, to behold the dead body of a friend or relative, or were he to perform the last sad offices of affection towards him--no more, if by accident he were to pass over the grave of the dead--touch the green sod or rocky tomb where their ashes reposed--if walking over the battlefield, his feet were to stumble on the unburied slain--or were he even to tread on a bone or fragment of the human skeleton--that moment the brand of ceremonial uncleanness is put upon him--he is debarred from any approach to the services of tabernacle or Temple.

What an affecting symbol is Death here of Sin! From the very minuteness of the directions given--extending, as we have just noted, even to the

earth scattered on the grave's mouth, and the fragmentary bone of the buried skeleton which accident left beside the tomb--the defiling nature of sin in every shape and form is emphatically proclaimed, disqualifying the transgressor from holding fellowship either with God or with His people.

But, in the case of the Hebrew, there was a strange yet gracious provision for purging away his ceremonial defilement; and in the olden type, we behold a striking representation of God's method of a nobler Redemption, both from the curse and the pollution of sin--for the procuring alike of pardon and holiness, Justification and Sanctification. Let us briefly enumerate (and it can be little more than an outline) the various features of this Gospel Remedy, as these are consecutively unfolded in the narrative of this remarkable chapter of Numbers.

We have first to observe that it was One Heifer which the children of Israel were commanded to bring. Not as on sundry, other noted solemn convocations, when each person, or each family, or even each city, had to provide their offering for the altar. At present, one animal was deemed sufficient for the whole congregation--one sacrifice for the whole land; and when the significant rite was finished, we have every reason to believe that the ashes of the one victim were carefully partitioned for distribution in every town in Palestine. That one offering was enough for all. Even the strangers in Israel were specially allowed to participate in the benefits secured. It was, in this respect, in significant keeping with most of the other Old Testament types--one Ark--one Ladder--one smiting of the Rock--one bronze Serpent--one Scapegoat--all impressively pointing to the "One offering for sin" by which Christ "has perfected forever those who are sanctified," and which enabled Him to proclaim with triumphant voice on the cross, "It is finished." "But now once in the end of the world has He appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," (Heb. 9:26.) "Neither is there salvation in any other," (Acts 4:12.) "Therefore also He is able to save unto the uttermost those who come unto God by him," (Heb. 7:25.) "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God," (Heb. 10:12.)

Yes, and as He is the one offering on earth, so is He the one Intercessor in

Heaven. As on the great day of Atonement, no voice was allowed to be heard within the veil, but that of the High Priest--as unaccompanied by human footstep, alone he pled--alone he sprinkled the blood--alone he waved the censer--so Christ has entered alone into the Holy Place, "having obtained eternal Redemption for us."

The next qualification of the appointed victim was, that it be a Heifer, spotless and red. "Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without spot." Among the flocks that were scattered far and wide in the glens or valleys of the desert, or afterwards, amid the herds gathered for sacrifice in the pens or folds of Olivet, it was no ordinary animal that would suffice. It must be a heifer of reddish hue, and all red throughout--no mottled spots must be seen on her hide; these would disqualify her for being a fitting oblation.

There is a danger in straining too far the typical interpretation, and in extracting evangelical and gospel meaning from what is merely accidental and arbitrary. But we are only following the oldest interpreters--no, we are only according with Scripture authority--when we take "Red" here, as elsewhere, in a figurative sense, as the expressive symbol or token of blood; with special significancy pointing to Him whose vesture was "dipped in blood"--the Warrior of Edom, "with dyed garments from Bozrah"--"The man" in Zechariah's vision "among the myrtle trees in the valley," riding on "the Red horse."

May not the expressive and peculiar symbolism also suggest, the legal transference of sin from the person of the transgressor to that of his divine Substitute--those sins of a guilty world which are spoken of as red--"red as scarlet and red as crimson," and which have been imputed to the immaculate Surety? "Surely He has borne our griefs." "He was made sin for us." "The Lord laid on Him the iniquities" (these red and scarlet iniquities) "of us all." Himself personally spotless, He stands before the congregation of His redeemed, as the sin-burdened and sin-stained Surety; and if we inquire with the wondering Prophet, "Why are you red in your apparel, and your garments as him that treads in the wine-vat?" He can answer, "I have trodden the wine press alone."

Nor is this red symbol (of blood and suffering) confined to the Church on

earth. "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" "These are they...who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And what is their song? It is this-- as they surround the throne of the adorable Redeemer, still wearing on His glorified Person the memorials of His bleeding sacrifice--"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The next qualification in the selected heifer was, that it be unblemished-- "wherein is no blemish." Not only was it to be red, without spot, its hide without diversity of color--but no scar--no wound--no bruise--no imperfection of any kind was to mark or maim its body. It was to be a perfect animal of its kind--the best and choicest of the herd.

So also, in a far nobler, loftier sense, with the Great Sacrifice. As one blemish on horn, or shoulder, or neck, or leg, or hoof, would have nullified the Hebrew victim, and rendered the memorable procession along the Kedron bridge a mockery--so, if one speck or stain of sin had blemished the Person of an Incarnate Savior, His sacrifice would have been unavailing, salvation unsecured, the world unsaved.

But He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." There are spots on the disc of the sun. Approach the snow-white Alp--glowing in the distance, a vast Pyramid of stainless marble--and you find its giant brow and virgin bosom rent and dislocated with scars--torn and disjointed with the fury of tempest and avalanche, and 'Time's corroding hand'. But approach that divine Redeemer--gaze upwards on that Sun of Righteousness--lift up your eyes to the Everlasting hills from whence comes your help--no spot, no scar, from sin's mutilating, contaminating touch, will you find there. From the first hour He drew an infant's breath in the manger of Bethlehem, until the last, when He closed His eyes in their deep sleep on the bitter Tree, He could utter the challenge to men and devils, "Which of you convinces me of sin!" His feet, as He trod the earth, as well as when He appeared in apocalyptic vision in Patmos, were "like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." "He offered himself WITHOUT SPOT to God!"

Another requisite in the selection of the Red heifer was, that no yoke had been put upon it. This is the next point in the divine injunction--"that has



never been placed under a yoke," (ver. 2.) Jesus, our adorable Savior, the Infinite, the Independent, the Omnipotent, was beyond and above all law--all the requirements of creatureship--He was "a law unto Himself." Of the highest created angels it could not be said, "that has never been placed under a yoke." They have the yoke of dependence laid upon them--the yoke of duty common to all God's family. They are the servants--the delegated messengers of Him before whom they cast their crowns; and as such, even had they been willing for the self-sacrifice, and had that sacrifice been in other respects adequate and admissible, they could, by no personal act, have surrendered their lives as a ransom for the guilty. By attempting to do so, though the expression is a strong one, they would virtually have been suicides--they would have been guilty of forfeiting that which was not their own, and for which they were responsible to another.

On Christ--the Eternal, self-existent Son, alone, had there come no yoke. He alone was free to undertake the Suretyship of the fallen. When the question was propounded amid the heavenly hierarchies, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He alone of the myriad throng was warranted to reply, "Here am I, send me." He alone could assert, (what neither angel nor seraph could do,) "I have power over my own life--I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again," (John 10:18.)

And then, add to this, the perfect voluntariness of His sacrifice. In this, the type failed. The Heifer was driven reluctantly from its herd--sent lowing to the place of offering. Not so with the great Antitype. It was no unwilling yoke to which He stooped, when, "though in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." "Lo, I come," was His joyful assent--"I delight to do your will, O my God." His only impelling motive was love. He "loved the Church," and consequently "He gave Himself for it." "Therefore," He says, "does my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again."

The reverse of the taunt hurled at Him during the crucifixion-agonies, was the true exponent of that Great oblation, 'He will save others; Himself He will not save.' He, the true "grain of wheat," according to His

own simple and beautiful illustration, "fell into the ground and died:" but had He seen fit, He might have "abode alone"--abode at His Father's right hand, never unrobed nor uncrowned of His divine glory. The tears of Olivet--the agonies of Gethsemane--the death-pangs of Calvary--all that baptism of blood and suffering, was His own voluntary undertaking. "Upon Him has never been placed a yoke!"

The next point to which our attention is drawn, is the conducting of the Heifer outside the camp. "Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp." This was a strange exception to the general rule. The appointed place of sacrifice was within the camp, or within the Temple-courts. But in the present instance, when, after searching among the flocks in the wilderness, or in the folds by the Kedron, or in the sheep-market, the required animal was found--forthwith it was led, not to the Altar of the Tabernacle or Temple, but away, four miles from the Holy place into the desert, or to some grassy knoll on the slopes of Olivet. It is brought "outside the camp."

"Christ also suffered outside the gate." Calvary's Mount as well as Gethsemane's Garden, were purposely outside the city wall--thus literally fulfilling the type. More than this. There was a deeper spiritual meaning in the Redeemer being thus denied the sanctity of the Temple-altar for His own divine Sacrifice, and being compelled to carry that ignominious Cross on His shoulders--going forth "outside the camp bearing His reproach." This exclusion impressively and emphatically denoted the dreadful nature of that accursed thing, which banished, as it were, the Surety-substitute of sinners from holy ground, sent Him outside that city, (within whose palaces Jehovah was known as a refuge,) to the place of common execution for felons and murderers--there, as if God-deserted and forsaken, to rend the air with His bitter Eloi-cry!

It was a typical comment on the strong--the mysterious words of the Apostle--"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a CURSE for us." Further, may not the fact of His suffering "outside the camp"--outside the precincts of the Holy place --have been intended to foreshadow and proclaim, that His propitiatory sacrifice was not for Israel only, but for the world. His cross is set up, outside the gates of the Hebrew city, that upon it the inscription may be written in Greek and

Latin, as well as in Hebrew--"This Is the King of the Jews"--This is the Savior of MANKIND!

He, on whom "never came a yoke," would proclaim to an enslaved world, "Take MY yoke upon you, and learn of Me"--"My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." "Unto you, O men," (men of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue,) "I call, and my voice is to the children of men." "Look unto me, and be saved--all the ends of the earth." With a similar reference to another part of the type, to which we shall immediately advert, it was predicted of the coming Messiah--"He shall sprinkle many nations."

The next injunction given in the inspired narrative is, that the Red heifer was to be slaughtered. "Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting." (ver. 3-4.) An attendant priest plunged the knife into the neck of the victim; and as the blood gushed forth on the green turf, the High priest, attired in white robes, gathered up in his hand the purple stream, and cast it in the direction of the Tabernacle or Temple. This, also, it is specially mentioned, was done "seven times"--(seven being the old Hebrew symbol, or expression of perfection.)

Christ, the great Antitype, (Himself both High Priest and Victim,) and, as the High Priest, attired in the pure white vestments of His spotless Righteousness--after shedding His own precious blood, casts, so to speak, the crimson shower in the direction of the Holy place, reconciling us to God "through the blood of His cross."

With Him, also, was it a sevenfold sprinkling, for the Captain of our salvation has been "made perfect through suffering." It was not enough, on the Socinian theory, that the unblemished, spotless Heifer was brought into the midst of the congregation as a specimen of perfection--or that Christ came into the world merely to manifest the virtues of a holy, spotless, blameless life. Here, as elsewhere, throughout the whole Levitical economy, the predominant gospel principle is enunciated--"Without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin." It was the first

and the last great truth set forth in Jewish history. It began with the besprinkled lintels and door-posts on the night of the Exodus, and the significant comment of the Jehovah-angel--"When I see the blood I will pass over you;" and when that Jewish dispensation was expiring, or rather had merged into a nobler economy, we hear it from the lips of an aged child of Abraham--the last survivor of the apostolic band, as he thus writes in his quiet home in Ephesus--"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Immediately following the slaying of the Heifer, was the burning and reducing it to ashes--"While Eleazar watches, the heifer is to be burned--its hide, flesh, blood and offal," (ver. 5.) It was to be a thorough committal to the flames--no portion was to remain unconsumed. Cedar and olive wood from the groves around were probably gathered to construct a fire. Further, according to an old Jewish writer, a covering of scarlet cloth (to carry out the expiatory significance) was thrown over both altar and victim--the torch was applied, and fresh fuel added, until all was reduced to a heap of white ashes.

What a dreadful testimony to the vileness of sin! what a significant representation of the uncompromising demands of that law which exacted from the spotless Surety payment to the uttermost farthing! HE was subjected to the devouring fire of wrath. The might of indwelling Deity prevented the bush--the "root out of the dry ground" being consumed; but, lo! "the bush burns with fire." The plowers plowed upon His back, and made long their furrows. "I gave," says He, "my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair." "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax--it is melted in the midst of my affections. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws, and you have brought me unto the dust of death." It was no mere mythical scene of suffering that on Golgotha--no acted tragedy--these were no simulated pangs. He could use the plaintive appeal, with an emphasis unknown to any of His suffering people--"Have pity upon me--have pity upon me, O my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!"

The next sequence in this expressive type, suggests a truth of elevating comfort--we have now to note the gathering together of the ashes--"Then

someone who is ceremonially clean will gather up the ashes of the heifer and place them in a ceremonial clean place outside the camp. They will be kept there for the people of Israel to use in the water for the purification ceremony. This ceremony is performed for the removal of sin," (ver. 9.) The ashes were not allowed to lie in that secluded spot, to be desecrated by the touch of the passer by, or to be scattered by the winds of heaven--but they were carefully collected, deposited in a vessel, and laid by themselves in a "clean place," as a means of purification from sin.

To what does this seem symbolically to point? but the perpetual efficacy of the Redeemer's atonement. He is no longer now in visible glory, as once He was, when He came as the Surety-mediator, to offer Himself as a whole, burnt-offering unto God. But in His divine Person and merits, and with a heart of unalterable love, He still sits on His Kingly throne above, dispensing the priceless covenant benefits He died to purchase. There, in that "separate place," on the true Olivet--the heavenly Mount--the virtue of His death and sacrifice continues undiminished. He appears there "a Lamb as it had been slain;" ever, in silent eloquence, pleading for the Church redeemed with His blood.

Blessed thought!--no time, no years, no centuries, can alter or impair the all-sufficiency of that atoning work. The cloud is ascending, this day, laden with incense--fragrant as at the hour when He, the true Aaron, sprinkled the warm blood on the mercy-seat, and cast into the burning censer the sweet spices of His merits. Be it ours, in the midst of our own vileness, and weakness, and unworthiness--our daily defilement and sin, to remember that the ashes of Calvary's Sacrifice thus symbolically "laid up," and "kept for the congregation"--the ashes of this "Faithful and true Martyr"--form the perpetual life of His Church.

We can point to them as the blessed pledge and guarantee of our everlasting safety and security. "Fear not," is His own unchanging assurance, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore," "because I live, you shall live also." If the first part of this olden type, then, be consoling and comforting, (the blood of the spotless heifer sprinkled towards the Holy courts,) let us think, with no less consolation and joy, of its ashes being carried into "the separate place"--and say with our eye on the great antitype, "It is Christ that died, yes

rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

But to proceed. The next point which claims our attention is the special mode or method of purifying the unclean--"For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean."

Numbers 19:17-19

The ashes of the heifer were enjoined to be placed in a vessel along with running (fresh) water, and a clean person (one himself uncontaminated by contact with the dead) was to take a cedar rod or stick, with scarlet cloth and a bunch of hyssop, and to sprinkle it, not only on the person ceremonially unclean, but upon his tent, and all the tent furniture. This was to be done twice, (on the third and on the seventh day,) and on that seventh day at evening, he was to be declared clean. This, also, is full of spiritual meaning.

Observe, the vessel of purification was to contain alike the ashes of the heifer and running water. What could more beautifully or significantly express the two great cardinal truths of the gospel--justification through the blood, and sanctification through the Spirit of Christ?--the conjoint work of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the salvation of the soul--Christ purging or purifying the dead conscience from guilt--the Holy Spirit purging and purifying it from pollution. That blessed Agent is often and again set forth in Scripture under the emblem of water. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean." When Jesus, in one of His Gospels, speaks of the "rivers of living" or "running waters," it is added expressly, "This spoke He of the Holy Spirit." It is the work of the same divine Person that is here represented under the same expressive emblem.

The unclean Israelite could not have the ashes sprinkled upon him without the water, or the water sprinkled on him without the ashes. In the new dispensation these are similarly combined--"We are washed, and, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." While, on the one hand, it is the sprinkling of the blood which imparts a virtue to the ashes; on the other, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the blood of Christ is made effectual to cleanse from sin--"He shall glorify me," says Jesus, "for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." How beautifully the Psalmist couples (and with evident reference to this very rite) these two great truths. In the same breath he says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; yes, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Take not your Holy Spirit from me--restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit."

And as the priest employed the cedar, with its bunch of hyssop, to sprinkle the contents of the vessel--so have these been generally considered as symbolic of faith--that living principle, by which the merits of Christ's death and sacrifice are received and applied. The ashes, unsprinkled, were worthless. It was not sufficient for the unclean simply to come and gaze upon them--to see the spotless heifer led forth to die--to see the sacrificial weapon plunged into its side, or the smoke rising from its consuming carcass--he had to repair to the "clean place," and have the drops of the commingling stream put upon him.

So with us. Christ must be appropriated. The cedar-rod of faith must bring us in contact with the virtue of His sacrifice. Nor, for the pacifying of the conscience, is once only repairing to "the blood of sprinkling" sufficient. The Israelite of old had to be sprinkled, first on the third day, and afterwards on the seventh; denoting the need, even for the justified believer, of the continual application of the merits of the Redeemer's death--in the words of the old writers, traveling continually between his own emptiness and Christ's fullness; or, in the Savior's own beautiful simile, the need for the Pilgrim to have the soles of his feet, which are daily soiled with the dust of the way, ever washed anew.

Yet, again, let us note the thoroughness of the sprinkling. ALL the man possessed was sprinkled and made clean. Not only his own person; but his tent, with all its appendages and contents, (everything he owned,) was consecrated and purified. So is it--or rather, ought it to be--with the Christian. Not only all he is, but all he has, should be sprinkled and washed and dedicated to God. His own soul and person first--not, however, resting with this. On the door of his tent should be the inscription, "I am not my own"--"Lord, I am yours." The name of his house should be "Jehovah Shammah--The Lord is there." His family, his business, his domestic arrangements, his employments, his enjoyments, all that belong to him should become consecrated things. With his own conscience sprinkled, purged, and purified, he should be ready to say with the Psalmist, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will you come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."

In conclusion, let us rejoice in the fullness and freeness of this gracious provision--as typical of an equally free and gracious dispensation of gospel blessings. All--without exception--who had been polluted by the touch or contact of death, were freely admitted to partake of this appointed method of purification. So there is not one to whom we are not warranted to say, "There is salvation, through the merits of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, for you!" If by reason of contact with sin, you may be among the vilest of the vile; "though you have laid among the pots, yet shall you be like doves, whose wings are covered with silver, and their feathers with yellow gold."

Complete justification you have all at once. Justified once, you are justified forever. Once within the Great Shepherd's fold, you are in the fold forever. You are "washed;" and, in accordance with our Lord's simple illustration, just referred to, "He that is washed needs not to wash, except his feet--he is clean every whit." But complete sanctification you cannot attain, until earth is exchanged for heaven. This, also, was prefigured in the olden type. The man was not made wholly clean until "the even of the seventh day"--the closing hour of the week. So believers are not 'made perfect in holiness,' until life's week ends, and the Sabbatic morning dawns. Meanwhile, be it ours to seek to become daily more and more fit for this glorious world, where the defiling touch of sin can be felt and



feared no more.

Let the whole subject lead believers--God's own people--to beware of the contaminating presence and power of iniquity. The pious Israelite, of old, felt he never could walk too warily, if he would avoid the risk of legal defilement. The fragmental bone might be stumbled upon in the place he least dreamt of finding it. The husbandman might come upon it in his vineyard--the shepherd in crossing the mountain--the reaper when plying his sickle--the wayfarer might tread on it in the wayside. Oh, beware of sin! It has many defiling graves, which, like the homes of the dead in our own churchyards, belie the corruption beneath, by their covering of virgin snow, or the flowers which the hand of affection has planted.

Christ, the undefiled One, could tread these graves without danger--He could come in contact with the flames without being burnt. But not so the best and holiest of His imperfectly sanctified people. Walk circumspectly. There are rocks and reefs often unseen in this treacherous sea. If we would avoid entering the haven with broken timbers and shattered rigging, be ours the daily, hourly prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

There is one other solemn statement added, ver. 20, "The man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation." This, like all the rest, has a solemn gospel and spiritual meaning. Reject Christ and you are lost! Neglect so great salvation--disdain this glorious offer (justification through the blood, and sanctification through the cleansing of the Spirit) and "there remains no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." If you are feeling now, the bitterness of exile and alienation from God--saying, "My iniquities have separated between me and my God"--there is (blessed be His name) a golden vessel of Salvation, filled with all you need for your guilty soul. Applying the contents of that vessel, you shall be no more "strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God."

Through this typical "Memory of Olivet," lay hold of the glorious reality it adumbrates. Your sins may be like that gloomy Kedron gorge, with the dark brook fretting and murmuring beneath. But fear not to cross the

provided bridge--to gather around the provided Sacrifice, and from the bunch of cedar and hyssop, to receive the sprinkling of blood and water. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord--though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," (Isa. 1:18.)

"Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ritual defilement. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins." Hebrews 9:13-14

## **The Home on the Mount**

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night. Matthew 21:17

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. John 11:5

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Mark 14:3

Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. John 12:2

A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. Mark 14:51-52

(see Luke 10:38-42; John 11:18-41; John 12:1-12)

The following striking passage occurs in the prophecies of Ezekiel— "Then the cherubim lifted their wings and rose into the air with their wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered above them. Then the glory of the Lord went up from the city and stopped above the mountain to the east (the Mount of Olives)." (Ezek. 11:22, 23.)

Upon these words, we may venture here to repeat the remarkable commentary of the Rabbi Janna, "The Divine Majesty (Shekinah) stood three years and a half on Mount Olivet, saying, 'Return to me, O you my sons, and I will return to you' 'Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near'--and then, when all was vain, returned to its own place."

Such is a befitting link, connecting the Old Testament "memories of the Mount" with the New--an relevant prelude and introduction to the chapters which are now to follow, and to the themes we are now to ponder. CHRIST was that true SHEKINAH PRESENCE. For three years and a half He dwelt in our world--ever and anon, during that time, making Olivet His place of resort. From its grassy knolls and green slopes, as from a throne of emerald confronting His own Zion, He pleaded in words of stern majesty and tearful tenderness--"Turn, turn, why will you die, O house of Israel." And when His divine mission was terminated, from that same cherished place He ascended in the Shekinah-cloud (the emblem of Divinity)--"A cloud received Him out of their sight."

It is, while trodden by His footsteps and sanctified by His presence, we are now to linger among the remembrances of Olivet.

We appropriately begin with what may well be called, the Home on the Mount. Our adorable Redeemer had more than one resort there. We have good reason to surmise, that in the olive grove or olive garden of Gethsemane especially, (of which we shall speak hereafter,) He had some stated place or locality--some "private place" for meditation and prayer--and where His otherwise unsheltered head would be protected from the drenching dews of a Palestine night.

While this, however, is conjectural, there can be no conjecture regarding

one beloved place on that Mount which He claimed as a sacred retirement--a calm and blissful retreat from coldness and ingratitude, ridicule and scorn--the malignity of avowed enemies--the treachery of trusted friends--that home was BETHANY. In His lonely, solitary nights among the hills and mountains of Galilee, we think of Him chiefly as the Son of God holding fellowship with His Father--here; we think of Him chiefly as the Son of man--the Brother of our nature--enjoying sympathetic fellowship with loving and congenial human spirits. Indeed, but for Bethany, the Mount would be deprived of its most sacred associations. It was coming and going from that hallowed home, which gave occasion for some of the most gracious, as well as some of the most solemn words which proceeded out of His mouth.

The Village of Bethany itself, is the solitary memorable spot in the eastern side of Olivet. It lies a mile from the summit, nestling in its own little hollow, embosomed in almonds, oaks, carobs, olives, and pomegranates, screened by the higher ridges of the Mount west and north, and thus removed from the noise and tumult of the city. Almost immediately on reaching it, the rapid depression to the Jordan valley commences by the steep road to Jericho, that same path down which Martha and Mary must, hour after hour, during these long days of unrelieved sorrow, have wistfully looked for the coming of the absent Savior. The wall of the Moab and Perea mountains rise erratic and precipitous to the far east--that same mountainous region in which Jesus and His disciples were sojourning, when the messenger from the bereft sisters carried to Him the tidings, "Lord, he whom you love is sick."

The name "House of Dates" would seem to indicate, that, at one period, the palm, now vainly sought for, was numbered amid Bethany's sylvan beauties. This tree is a native of lower and more congenial latitudes than the uplands of Judea. But perhaps it may have been the very strangeness of a group, or a grove of these, being found at this "mountain hamlet," which led to the distinctive epithet. Be this as it may, there, though "little among the thousands of Judah," the Divine Savior "ofttimes resorted," the Great and Good Shepherd oftentimes took shelter in this peaceful fold, from "the lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards;" the true Dove of peace, escaping "the windy storm and tempest," folded its weary wing

in this "cleft of the rock."

O thrice-blissful Home! thrice-honored household! If even "the cup of cold water, given to a disciple, shall not lose its reward"--what shall be the reward of that loving and beloved family, whose sympathy and kindness served to ease the burdens of "the Man of sorrows"--to brighten the woe-worn path of the Lord of glory?

We are always struck with the extreme vividness of John's description of the events connected with Bethany. It gives the idea of the photograph of an eye-witness. No one but a personal and interested spectator could have narrated so graphically and circumstantially as he does, the marvelous story at the grave-yard, and afterwards the no less instructive and beautiful one of the Supper and the anointing with the spikenard. None but he, who 'stooped down at another sepulcher and looked in,' could have so tenderly sketched that Divine-human picture. The Inspired artist transferred it to his canvas, when he was residing, probably in his old age, at Ephesus--but the long intervening years had not effaced from his soul the freshness of that wondrous scene.

When he wrote, all his compeers in the apostolic band had been taken to their rest and their crowns. Martha and Mary and Lazarus had, we believe, "fallen asleep:" he is the solitary survivor of the 'Feast in Simon's House'. He had manifested a wise and delicate reticence in withdrawing the veil from that home-scene during the lifetime of the family. Now, however, that they had paid the great debt of nature, he scruples not to become their divine biographer. He unlocks these long and faithfully-kept secrets for behalf of the Church to its last day. Like one of the group in his sacred drawing, he breaks the alabaster box, that the world may be filled with the odor of the ointment; and that "wherever the Gospel is preached" these hallowed memorials may be carried.

But let us, in thought, cross the mountain foot-road with our blessed Lord, and enter the household at Bethany.

From one or two incidental allusions in the combined narratives, we seem warranted to infer, that this Family occupied a position, if not of wealth and influence, yet certainly one above the humbler ranks of

Judean life. They were (what the ordinary villagers around them would not be) the owners of a rock-hewn sepulcher. The nard used by Mary to anoint her Lord is described as "a pound of spikenard, very costly." On the death of Lazarus, Jews of distinction came out to offer their condolence to the bereaved. Probably from the expression used, these Jewish visitors were composed of the Scribes and Pharisees, in general the representatives of the knowledgeable "upper classes" in Jerusalem. Moreover, from Martha's avowal in the course of her conversation with Jesus, we gather that she was not only conversant with the leading article in the Pharisees' creed, "touching the Resurrection," but had herself espoused it, as if personally at one time identified with the sect. These facts are indicative that the family were, at all events, raised above mediocrity in circumstances.

The very name given to the village, "the town of Mary and her sister Martha," would seem to imply that Bethany was chiefly known in connection with that one home; and as if theirs were a dwelling, conspicuous or distinguished amid the lowlier ones that surrounded it. Not that we can draw any special lesson from this in its connection with Him, whose presence encircles the village with its halo of heavenly interest, and who is "no respecter of persons." This much it teaches--that He was guest and associate alike of rich and poor, lowly and honorable. While He was pre-eminently the poor man's friend, and chose His apostles from the humblest homes in Galilee--it is interesting to think that the household which more specially gladdened and solaced Him in the closing days of His life, was one, whose inhabitants added the culture and refinement of a higher social position to those deeper religious feelings, which imparted to the sacred communion its peerless worth.

And it is beautiful to see in their case, (and this is the point which we would wish alone here more specially to illustrate,) as in the case of every human family where Christ is loved, and where He is in the highest spiritual sense a daily Visitor--it is beautiful to note, a gradual education and training--a progressive development in the Christian graces and spiritual character of the inhabitants. Martha, who attracts us first in the description of an earlier passing visit, (Luke 10:38)--though then a true disciple of her great Lord--is yet busy, bustling, impetuous, careworn,

harassed with her household duties, troubling herself very needlessly and fastidiously about dispensing the customs of every-day hospitality. Even when trial has banished, for the time, the thought of these poor earthly cares--still in the very hour of her crushing sorrow, we can discern the native faults of her character--bold, impatient, outspoken--unable to restrain the unworthy surmise and reflection on her Lord's mysterious tarrying beyond Jordan, (11:27.) And at the very grave's brink, when Omnipotence is about to work--proud outspoken Reason will discredit the possibility of ransoming from corruption.

But, our last glimpse of her when the long training is complete--is that of one calmed, subdued, softened. She is at the feast in Simon's house, serving indeed still; but she is a silent member. There was once a day, when she would have discussed with keen eagerness the question of 'waste' which then engrossed the disciples; when she would have perhaps taken Judas's view of the case, and condemned the unwarranted expenditure of her loving and generous, but improvident sister.

But she has graduated since then in a new school. She has had instilled into "her loyal heart," a nobler and truer life. The old Pharisee creed she held in common with her educated Jewish friends, as to a common resurrection at the Last day, had been supplanted by a grander and more elevating verity--that believing in Christ, a present life was imparted that could never die, (John 11:25, 26.) Let others indulge, as they may, in questions of casuistry, as to the claims of the poor, and the excess of such waste--she was now a subdued, unreasoning disciple--listening with trustful reverence, in common with her sister, to ONE she loved more than all the world beside; and if she, also, had had gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, she would have surrendered them willingly, to swell her sister's lowly offering.

In Mary's case, we note the same education and progress towards higher spiritual development. From the first, indeed, we mark her quiet, gentle, contemplative character. No fretting worldly cares absorb her nobler nature. Her place from the first, was what she retained to the last--at her Lord's feet. She moved in a little world of devotedness to this Great Redeemer. When we first see her in the Inspired Biography, it is seated thus, "hearing His word"--receiving from unflattering lips the noble

praise--"Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her," (Luke 10:42.)

When we see her next--it is when, roused from absorbing grief, she rushes to her Lord's feet with her wail of love and agony. All the Jerusalem comforters and sympathizers could not wake her from her trance of sorrow. But when Martha's brief word reaches her ear--"The Master is come!"--she rushes with fleet step "quickly"--carrying her griefs and fears, and tears and prayers, to the feet of the Great Restorer. Still she is silent. With the exception of the one utterance--'the pang of wounded affection,'--which had been often on the lips of the bereft sisters during these long days of sorrow in the lonesome midnight hour--"Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died"--still, I repeat, she is silent--her plaint is ended with a flood of tears, (John 11:33.)

Martha, even at the grave, (as we have already indicated,) where the crowd have gathered, attempts to doubt and reason and remonstrate--Mary preserves her characteristic silence--the mute eloquence of unsyllabled grief.

But, we pass from the scene of sorrow to the subsequent scene of joy, when the lost star is rekindled in their skies and death has surrendered his prey--mark the beautiful development of that hitherto silent, meditative devotion. The contemplative is merged into the active. Martha, is for the time passive--she "serves," but it is in silence. While Mary, (the heroine of the divine scene) brings forth her alabaster vase of precious nard--breaks it with her own hands, and pours its contents as an oblation of love and gratitude on the Head of her gracious Lord. Like some mountain-stream rising unnoted from its green mossy bed, only visible by the tinge of contrasted verdure--but on reaching the lower valley, on it flows, at first gently and softly but with ever-increasing volume of mountain-music--gathering strength and song as it speeds to its ocean home.

Beautiful type of true Christianity. Mary has been hitherto the recipient, now she is the giver. The question at the moment is-- "What can I render unto my Redeeming God and Savior for all His benefits towards me?"



Conscious of the reality of her love, she would like to give some visible proof of it. What has she to offer? Her poor services are worthless. Her more demonstrative sister might plead with obdurate sinners--reason with them, convince them. But she can manifest her devotion only by some lowly outward act. She has one valued casket in her possession--some souvenir of affection, long-treasured; or, it may be, purchased in Jerusalem, with the premeditated intention of using it as she does now. She brings it out with joyful heart--it is her all--the best she has to offer. Behold her now, the active one in the sacred group, busy in her office of lowly love, anointing the feet of Jesus, wiping His feet with her hair, and "the house filled with the fragrance of the perfume!"

Let us now transfer our thoughts to another dweller in Bethany, of whom we know little--indeed nothing--whose history at best must be subject of conjecture--him in whose house the Sabbath Feast took place, and who is called by two other Evangelists Simon the Leper. "While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper" (Matthew 26:6.)

The likeliest conjecture presumed regarding him is, that he was himself the father of the family. For years, it may be, he had been disjoined from all domestic ties by having become the victim of the most fearful of plagues. But the Divine Restorer who had plucked his son from the regions of Hades, had rescued him also from a worse than living death--cured him of a malady which was deemed, by human means, incurable. If this be so, we have also, in his case, surely a beautiful manifestation of pious gratitude and love. He makes a feast for his Divine Physician. That dwelling, which, a few weeks before, echoed with the wail of sadness--the desolate sisters, orphaned and friendless--father, mother, brother forsaken them--a future of blank despair!--now, behold, the house of mourning changed into a house of feasting--their adorable Savior is seated between the two trophies and monuments of His power and grace--"the living, the living" together praising Him who had "turned the shadow of death into the morning."

The Lord, their Redeemer "had spoken once, yes, twice had they heard this--that power belongs unto God." In the case of both, He had "taken off their sackcloth and girded them with gladness." Sickness in the one, and

death in the other, had been (as was designed) "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

For this brings us to the one other member of that rejoicing household--but the one around whom the main interest of the narrative gathers. We are allowed in the case of Lazarus, conjecturally at least, to trace the same evidence of grateful love. Oh how could his tongue be dumb, who had been delivered from so great a death? It is remarkable that in the narratives of John no light whatever is cast upon his character. We seem to know his sisters intimately, by their marked individuality--but Lazarus is shadowy--undefined--we are acquainted with him only as their brother, probably the youngest of the household.

We are unable to assent to the theory advanced by some commentators, who endeavor to recognize in him the young ruler "with great possessions," whom Jesus, on beholding, "loved." A kindred conjecture, however, seems to have more plausible support; and although it can at best be but conjectural, it casts an interesting ray of light on one of the strangest episodes recorded in connection with our Lord's last sufferings--an incident preserved by Mark, and by Mark alone.

At that dreadful crisis-hour, (which we shall dwell upon in subsequent pages)--when the struggle of Gethsemane was over--when the band of soldiers, with lanterns and torches, came, in company with the traitor, to meet Jesus, the panic-stricken disciples were scattered on the mountain sides--the Shepherd was about to be smitten, and the faithless sheep were scattered. At that moment the passover moon, and the light of the lanterns and torches, fell on a mysterious figure lurking close by. He was a youth. He had nothing round his naked body but "a white linen cloth." He followed, first tremblingly, then boldly, the assassin band. Who can this be? Who this noble young adherent, who, when the old and tried companions of the Sufferer have ignominiously fled, follows His blood-stained path undeterred by the murderous crew? Peter, with his brave soul--John, with his loving heart, have both shared in the general panic--but this youth dares to brave these flashing swords and threatening staves. We know only this of him, that he was immediately seized, as if recognized at once as a friend and ally of Christ's. Ruffian hands are laid upon him. They grasp the linen cloth which covered him; but, with fleet

foot, he bounded off from his captors--"He left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked," (Mark 14:52.)

Who then, we again ask, could this (or might this) youth be, who was recognized by the mob? We read in the immediate sequel to the narrative of the raising of Lazarus and the feast of Bethany, "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus." In the preceding context of Luke's Gospel, it is expressly said, that it was the chief priests, in conjunction with the scribes and elders, who sent out the assassin band and multitude for the apprehension of Christ. Is the surmise an unlikely one, that, hovering amid the rocks of the mountain, or olive groves skirting the well-known path leading from Gethsemane to Bethany, was one who had good reason to love his Lord with a love, which prison and death would never extinguish? What more likely, though unmentioned in connection with Gethsemane, than that Bethany had sent across the intervening ridge, a more faithful watcher than the unfaithful slumbering apostles?

Roused from his couch by the report, carried to him by his sisters, of the attempted seizure, would it not be the likeliest of occurrences, that their young brother would instantly rush, not perhaps with any vain hope of attempting a rescue, but to follow with loving and wistful sympathy the Adorable Sufferer, to whom he owed his restored life and being? We dare not give rein to imagination, and push such an hypothesis too far. But whence, we are led to ask, this strange clothing of this mysterious follower--the linen cloth cast round his body in the haste and hurry of that midnight arousing?

It is worthy of careful note, first of all, that the word, "linen cloth," as rendered by Mark, is not the same word at all, as is used in other places, with reference to linen garments employed as clothing for the living. For example, the "fine linen" in which the rich man is clothed in the parable, is altogether a different word from the one employed by Mark in his description of this young man, or "the linen cloth" in which was wrapped the body of our Lord. Moreover, while this latter is several times employed by the Evangelists, it is, with one exception, (Matt. 11:8,) always so in connection with the cloth or garment which shrouded the

DEAD. We know the Jews were specially careful and fastidious regarding all arrangements for burial. Their grave-clothes were reckoned among their sacred things. They yielded to no oriental nation in their attention to funeral rites--the embalming spices, and ointments, and linen shroud, were all providently laid up in store. We have just found even the Savior Himself recognizing, in Mary's alabaster box with its pound of spikenard, a 'mournfully foreseeing love' in reference to His death--"Against the day of my burying has she done this."

Even if all this had not been the case, we know, too surely, that Lazarus was in the possession of grave-clothes. But the linen shroud, which, in the case of others, would be a gloomy and forbidding thing, reminding them of death, would, in his case, be the trophy of the most wondrous victory ever achieved. We could imagine other Jews--notwithstanding all these devout feelings regarding preparations for the tomb--shrinking, just as we would, with sensitive aversion, from the grim and sad symbols and remembrancers of corruption and the grave--keeping them scrupulously locked up, away from sight. But with Lazarus it was different. Oh, never could hero look with such wondrous emotion on the spoils of victory, as would this young villager of Bethany regard these mementoes of his astounding resurrection! May we not imagine him, hanging up his linen shroud and the napkin which bound him, as sacred memorials of that never-to-be-forgotten moment, when "the dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave-clothes," and he heard, once more, the living tones of a living voice, "Loose him, and let him go"?

Can we dare venture, then, the hypothesis--still further to strengthen the previous conjecture--that, when roused, at dead of night, by the tidings of the assault in Gethsemane, he seized in his haste the suspended robe of which the King of Terrors had been despoiled? May he not, perhaps, have seized it, as being that by which his Lord would best recognize him in, the gloom? May he not have taken it as the best, though a silent, memorial of his gratitude, to suggest to the Great Sufferer, in His own hour of impending death, that He too would not be held by death, that His grave-clothes would be made vestures of triumph, the resurrection at Bethany being the shadow and pledge and precursor of a far greater?

Yes, and when he fled naked from those who had seized him, may it not

have been the accomplishment of all he had desired, to leave in their hands the linen cloth? Observe, it is not said that the captors wrested from him the shroud; but it is expressly worded, "He left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked"--more as if this had been his object and wish, to deposit with them, and through them, to leave with his Lord, the sacramental pledge and type of His own glorious conquest over death. If so, again would Jesus, in silent gratitude, echo the words He had a few weeks before uttered to that young man's sister, "For the day of my burying has he done this."

Thus then have we seen--dimly shadowed, it may be, in the case of some of them, but still more or less visible in all the members of the family of Bethany, as the result of their communion and fellowship with their beloved Lord--what we have ventured to call their 'divine education'--the illustration of that faith which works by love, which purifies the heart and overcomes the world--in the case of Martha, making the life of bustle, and unrest, and fretting care--merge into calm thoughtfulness and unreasoning faith. In the case of Mary, making the life of simple, childlike devotion--develop itself into the activities of holiness. In the case of Simon and of Lazarus, leading each, in his own way, to give proof, by the most expressive outward symbol, of their gratitude and joy and devoted attachment to the Person of their Divine Restorer.

Let us, in closing, inquire, as a practical question, Do we know anything of that spiritual Resurrection, which is the key-note to the sublime discourse of the Bethany graveyard? I do not ask if we assent to the article of Martha's pharisee-creed--belief in a future physical resurrection. But do we believe in a nobler present spiritual one?--a higher life, in the Resurrection from the death of sin, of which, if a man once partake, he shall never cease to live?

Death (what we call death) is the mere suspension, or temporary "breaking to pieces," of the bodily organism--not the extinction of the true and nobler being. It is the breaking of the casket, but the gem is safe. It is the walls of the tottering building overturned, but the living, deathless tenant is safe. "Whoever lives and believes on me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Do you believe in "life" despite of death--life, even while the King of terrors has stamped his mockery on the outward

clay--living the imperishable life, which death only exalts, elevates, sublimates?

Jesus, we read, "wept;" but these were not tears over the loss of a buried friend, for He, at least, knew well, that in a few brief moments, that friend would be restored at His side. Among the varied causes of these tears of Jesus, doubtless not the least, was the world's persistent unbelief of these grand truths He had been then unfolding--the groaning of His spirit, was His bitter, piteous lament over the impenitence and obduracy of a race of dying sinners; some of whom were then standing close by, ready (despite of the gigantic miracle just transacted before them) to go immediately and plot His murder.

Unbeliever of the present day! scorning, also, these transcendent utterances regarding what alone can meet and answer the deep needs of your spiritual being, there may at that moment have been, in these weeping eyes, a tear for you!

Reader, you who, perhaps, know experimentally the reality of this present and deathless Resurrection, let me ask-- if thus believing in Christ--if thus made partaker of this spiritual, the prelude to everlasting life--what have you done--what are you doing for the Lord who died for you--who has raised you from the death of sin, and who has enabled you to appropriate that noblest of truths, "Whoever lives, and believes on me, shall never die"? Has your heart become a Bethany-home, gladdened by His presence? He was but the passing visitor at the Jewish village; but to each one of us, He is daily, and in manifold voices of His Word and Providence saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Let us bring him our pound of spikenard--our linen covering (whatever we have) as a fit offering and pledge of grateful love. But for Him, tears more bitter far than those of the bereft sisters, must have been ours forever--but for Him, ours must have been spiritual nakedness in the dark midnight of despair. But, blessed be His name--through His atoning death and great propitiation, "we, being clothed, shall not be found naked."

Follow that crowd from Gethsemane to Calvary; see the buffeted One and crucified One laid in the silent tomb! But, lo, it is left tenantless! The shroud and grave-clothes are "laid by themselves" on the rocky floor; the overlaying stone is scattered in fragments at the grave's mouth, and the voice of victory is heard, 'You shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon, for mortality is swallowed up of life!'

## **The Mountain Oratory**

(n. b. an 'oratory' is a private place of prayer)

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Luke 11:1

"Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives." Luke 21:37

"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain (in Galilee) to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Luke 6:12;  
Matt. 14:23

Then, accompanied by the disciples, Jesus left the upstairs room and went as usual to the Mount of Olives. There he told them, "Pray that you will not be overcome by temptation." He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine." Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. Luke 22:39-44

This would seem the appropriate place for viewing Olivet under one of its most interesting aspects--pondering one of the most fragrant of its

memories--as the ORATORY of the Savior, the consecrated scene of His daily devotions. The "certain place" where He was "praying," spoken of in the first of these verses, immediately follows the account of His earliest recorded visit to Bethany, (Luke 10:38-42,)--as if, after leaving the hallowed home of Lazarus and his sisters, and before crossing the Kedron-gorge to Jerusalem, He retired to some well-known and frequented spot on the Mount of Olives, to get His holy human soul braced and strengthened for the duties and the trials of the day.

We are not, however, left to mere conjecture on the subject of the Savior's habitual devotions, and how, above all, He loved the solitude of the mountain, in order to hold prayerful communion with His Father in Heaven. It was so in northern Palestine, amid the scenes of His most frequent resort and unremitting labor. Those green, lonely hills, which belt the now desert and deserted Sea of Galilee, are still, to every devout mind, the remains of a nobler altar of Incense than ever was upreared in Tabernacle or Temple. For there Jesus, once and again, "went up into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God," (Luke 6:12.) When His disciples were tossed below on the stormy lake, He was watching, on His knees, their tempest-driven bark--"And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain by himself to pray and when the evening was come, He was there alone," (Matt. 14:23.) And when "in the fourth watch of the night He came to them walking on the sea," it was like the High Priest of their waning dispensation, coming forth from the Holy of Holies--from holding converse with the Infinite--to still their fears with His Heavenly benediction! (Num. 6:26.)

The eye wanders now in vain around the solitary mountains fringing the shores of Gennesaret, in quest of any one cherished height, which, more probably than others, formed the scene of these hallowed vigils. Their number and variety precludes any identification of the favored and favorite Oratory. But if it be so in Galilee around Tiberias and Capernaum--not so at Jerusalem. Even had the Evangelists given no indication of the "certain place," there is but one mountain near 'the city of the great King' where such retirement and seclusion was possible--that mount is the Mount of Olives.

There He "ofttimes resorted," (John 17:2.) "Jesus went out as usual to the



Mount of Olives." (Luke 22:39.) If few of these Olivet prayers have been recorded, we know at least two of them, one with strong probability, the other with certainty. The one is the model prayer of universal Christendom, the formula for His Church in all ages, the twice-taught Lord's Prayer--(Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2,)--the other, of which we shall in a subsequent 'Memory' come to speak, is the prayer of the Agony--the prayer which left Gethsemane's green sod bedewed with drops of blood, as the exponent of the fierceness and intensity of that soul-struggle.

We have good reason to believe, that Olivet was to the devout Jews--citizens of Jerusalem--a frequent resort for devotion--that those sequestered hollows, now so bleak and bare, were once, not only studded with olive groves and orchards, but in many of them were to be found "oratories," buildings specially erected and employed for stated prayer. Is the surmise unlikely, that one of these, in the Garden of Gethsemane, was "the certain place"--the spot of "often resort"--which, when the mighty city, close by, was hushed in midnight silence, listened to the divine pleadings of the adorable Redeemer? If so, we can understand why it was, that, when "every man went unto his own house, Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives," (John 7:53, 8:1;) and that more than once, of that sacred retirement amid its overshadowing trees, He would say to His disciples, "Sit here, while I go and pray yonder." There is an Eastern tradition that the leaves of the palm-tree, as they quiver in the breeze, whisper the name of Jesus. It may be more truly said of the Gethsemane olive-leaves, that they have listened to His prayers.

And surely there is something touching and astonishing in the very statement of the fact, that Jesus prayed! He, as Immanuel, God in our nature; in Himself all-sufficient; a Treasure-house of every blessing; in whose arm omnipotence slumbered; whose voice could still the tempest and summon back from Hades the dead; above the requirements of necessity, as He was beyond the reach of sin; a stranger, moreover, to all those fierce corruptions which war against the souls of His people--yet, wondrous and affecting truth, the Savior prays! and that too, at times, "with strong crying and tears."

For observe, we are not at present regarding Him as He stands before us in His sublime high-priestly prayer in the 17th chapter of John; or as we

think of Him, as He now is, at His Father's right hand, the pleading Intercessor, praying for others. We restrict our thoughts to the PERSONAL element, that He prayed for Himself. Let no one suppose that it savors of irreverence, or derogates from the glory and dignity of the adorable Redeemer, by thus so identifying Him with our poor weaknesses as to think of Him in the attitude of a Suppliant--a nightly Petitioner--seeking at the hand of His Father fresh supplies of strength, and coming forth invigorated and refreshed from His season of devout communion. All this only indicates, with a more beautiful and touching impressiveness, the reality of His humanity, and is fraught with lessons of precious consolation.

It tells--far more vividly than any doctrinal statement can do--that that kneeling Form, revealed by the moonbeams or bright eastern starlight amid the groves of Olivet, is indeed the Brother in our nature--compassed, not with like passions, but with like infirmities--"in all points tempted even as we are"--rising from His knees braced for duty, prepared for trial. As "the Son of man," prayer was a necessity of His humanity; moreover, as the sinless One, with a nature which not only had no affinity with evil, but an infinite recoil from it, there must have been struggles in a world of sin--an agony of endurance of which we can form no adequate conception, and which required, therefore, all the stronger divine supports and solaces.

And to pass to another view of these daily devotions--regarding them, not as a necessity but as a blessed PRIVILEGE--what comfort and joy must it have imparted, amid the coldness and thanklessness of an unfriendly world, to repair with filial love and confidence to unburden and unbosom into the ear of His Father the sorrows that were crushing His spirit; and to yield up His soul in reverential submission to the will of Him that sent Him? Condescending to pitch his tent amid human encampments, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt (lit. tabernacled) among us," prayer was to Him, what the Elim-palms and fountains were to Israel of old--giving refreshment and shade in the midst of earth's bleak desert, "the dry and thirsty land where no water is." It was "the brook by the way," of which He drank; and which enabled Him, even when crossing to the hour of trial and conflict, to "lift up the head," (Ps. 110:7.)

Of this Pilgrim of pilgrims it could be truly said, with reference to these devotions, "Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also fills the pools," (Ps. 84:6.) As He went forth, evening after evening, from the din and turmoil, the sins and sorrows of the city, amid the glades of silent lonely Olivet--the door of earth shut and the gates of heaven unbarred--He could say, in a truer sense than the sorrow-stricken Singer of Israel, "As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!" (Pa 42:1, 2.)

But while thus carefully including the personal element in these prayers of the Great Pleader, yet neither must we overlook or omit the INTERCESSORY. This true "Prince," who had "power with God and prevailed" for Himself, prevailed also for His people. The true Covenant Angel of Revelation first filled the golden censer which He now waves with the "much incense" and "the prayers of all the saints" before the throne, amid the mountains of Galilee, or the dells of Olivet. There is a beautiful and striking verse, in which the Incarnate Savior is represented "morning by morning" as receiving a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit, His tongue touched anew with living fire--His Heavenly Father "waking Him" at early dawn from His slumbers, that, in that first hour--that 'Sabbath hour' of the day--He might have His lips and His soul replenished with words in season for the weary--"The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary--he awakens morning by morning; he awakens my ear to hear as the learned," (Is. 50:4.)

It is interesting thus to think of Him in these morning hours--amid the silence and solitude of nature, bringing to the Ear that was ever attentive to the voice of His supplication, each individual case foreseen by His omniscient glance, of the weary and heavy-laden, the bereaved and desolate, the backsliding, the erring, the lost; and receiving balm-words of comfort--"words in season" suitable for each. It is interesting to think of the Great Shepherd thus "calling His own sheep by name"--calling not to them but for them; and thus "leading them out"--leading them out of trials and temptations, rescuing them from otherwise certain and irrecoverable falls.

Of this we have an pertinent illustration in the case of the wavering Peter--"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat--but I have prayed for YOU, that your faith fail not," (Luke 22:31, 32.) Peter stood the assault. His faith, severely shattered, remained unscathed. But how? May we not possibly trace the reason to one of these midnight or early morning prayers on Olivet, (the resort to which is specially spoken of in Luke's preceding chapter,) in which that unstable one--that "reed shaken with the wind"--may have been made the subject of Divine intercession?

And so also, may we suppose, in the case of other recipients of the Redeemer's grace and mercy. Who knows, but it was prayer on one of those lonely hills on the shores of Gennesaret, which led the Apostle Fishermen to abandon their homes at Bethsaida, or induced Matthew so readily to relinquish his receipt of custom, or impelled "the woman from the City"--the weariest of the weary--to rush, weeping and penitent, to the feet of the Great Restorer? Who knows but it was some prayer on the Perea mountains, that softened the heart of the exacting tax-gatherer of Jericho--brought Zaccheus down from his seat in the sycamore tree, to abandon forever his accursed gains, and to cast in his lot with the Prophet of Nazareth?

In His own final struggle in Gethsemane, (Himself now 'the Weary One,') may not the strengthening Angel have been sent in special answer to that agony of supplication? May not the thief on the cross--the last trophy of Redeeming love, before these lips of love were sealed in death--may not that repenting felon have been a trophy of prayer--his name included in that most sublime of Litanies shortly before uttered--"Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which you have given me"? (John 17:24.)

No, farther, if any one of us have either been delivered from some strong overmastering temptation, or have had consolations administered to our weary sorrowing spirits in some hour of sore trial--is the thought too bold or too fanciful, that we may, in part at least, owe the deliverance or the solace to Christ's prayers on Olivet; that then and there, there may have been a tearful, sympathizing petition for us? His intercessions were not, like ours, limited to the present--the race of living contemporary men had

no monopoly in His pleadings. To His omniscient eye the whole future was unveiled; and in that future, every heart history--the struggles and trials of each soul He had ransomed with His blood. Yes, that all-comprehensive glance may have included you who now trace these lines. These silent groves around Gethsemane may have listened once and again to that beautiful and comforting clause in His most fully recorded intercession--"Neither do I pray for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word," (John 17:20.)

Delightful thought, alike for the Church collectively and for believers individually. If there be "a Book of remembrance written, for those who feared the Lord and that thought upon His name;" and if, even in the case of His weak and erring children, "the Lord hearkens and hears," (Mal. 3:16,) how much more ready, surely, would that Almighty Listener be, to attend to the cry of this midnight Suppliant! How, we may imagine, would the Recording angel hover over these divine vigils, waiting with outspread wing to bear the intercessions up to "the Book of remembrance;" and when the first ray of early dawn was gilding the temple-pinnacles, saying, as of old to the wrestler of Jabbok, "Let me go, for the day breaks."

Oh, matchless, self-sacrificing, devoted love! Before His own great type in the skies had appeared over the mountains of Moab, He, the true Sun of Righteousness, had risen with healing in His beams; or rather, as the shadows of evening fell, inviting a weary world to repose, (and none, also, in that weary world more needing it than He,) this Heavenly King and Priest of His Church--His head wet with dew and His locks with the drops of the night--is heard exclaiming, "Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense," (Sol. Song 4:6.)

I conclude with one practical view of the subject, suggested by the second verse which precedes this chapter. It is the beautiful union in the Savior's life of the active with the devotional. "In the day-time He was teaching in the Temple"--there is the active. "And at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives"--there is the devotional element.

Looking at the first of these--His was a life of consecrated WORK. Not the existence of the dreamy contemplatist--sentimental pietism, mere saintliness, dissevered from duty. "My Father works hitherto, and I work," was His motto, His rule, His practice. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work" "I must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day--the night comes, when no man can work." Although, doubtless, breathing a constant atmosphere of prayer, maintaining unintermitted communion with Heaven, His public labors, during the twelve hours of the day, seem seldom to have been suspended in order to indulge in the refreshment of private devotion, far less of mere physical rest.

Once we read of Him saying to His disciples--as if conscious that a special emergency had occurred, in which both He and they required a pause for their over-tasked energies--"Come apart into a desert place, and rest a while," (Mark 6:31.) On another occasion, after a day of ceaseless toil, we find 'wearied nature' asserting her sway over that exhausted frame, and the Incarnate Redeemer lies with His head on 'a coil of ropes for His pillow,' fast asleep in the boat of the Bethsaida fishermen. But these exceptional seasons of constrained repose, only serve to bring out, in stronger relief, the ceaseless energies and activities of His holy being. How diversified these "day-labors!" In the Temple, in the street, on the wayside--by word, by parable, by miracle, by sympathy, by tears; restoring the sick, comforting the mourner, healing the deeper heart-wounds of sin; "who went about continually doing good."

Turn now to the other phase in this life of ideal perfection. The existence of Jesus was not all work. The active, was beautifully blended and intermingled with the DEVOTIONAL. The teaching "in the day-time in the Temple" had its sublime counterpart and complement, in the nightly devotions on "the mount called the Mount of Olives." Prayer, as we have already seen, was needed as much to refresh the soul of the Son of man, as repose was required to recruit and invigorate His body. He has set forever His own consecrated mark and seal on special times and seasons for devotion. Prayer sanctified every event in His public ministry, from the hour of its commencement at His baptism, until the dreadful moment at the close of all, when, on the breath of prayer, He yielded up the Spirit-

-"Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit."

And in this respect He stands before us, the all-perfect model and EXAMPLE for His people to imitate. Christians--those bearing His name--should, by some humble approximation at least, have the like combination--the one interlacing the other--of activity and devotion, work and worship. Maintaining their assigned and relative proportion, these should be, in the spiritual economy, what the perfect equipoise and adjustment of the two great forces is in the material world, by which the planets are retained in their courses and move in obedient harmony to their controlling central luminary; or, to employ another illustration, they should be, in the Christian life, what the two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, were to the Temple of old, "Beauty" and "Strength"--the strength for daily duty being derived from "worshiping the Lord in the beauty of holiness," (Ps. 29:2.)

The lamp must burn; but it must have the oil to feed it. On the other hand, the oil, good in itself, is worthless, if it be only treasured in vessels, stored unused in the soul's reservoir, and the lamp of life unlighted. This same truth--the composite character of the spiritual being is beautifully set forth in Isaiah's sublime Temple-vision of the seraphim--"Each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet," (Isa. 6:2) Four of these wings were thus in an attitude of holy rest, (emblem of the devotional,) covering face and feet. The remaining two were outstretched, plumed for flight, "With two he did fly"--(the equally significant symbol of activity)--telling that these reposeful worshipers were also "ministering spirits," employed in active embassies in the service of their Heavenly King.

And as if their Lord, moreover, too well knew that the Church and believers were readier for the active than for the devotional, readier for the Temple-work than for retirement to the Olivet of prayer, He gives the priority in the description, as well as the double proportion, to the latter element.

And is it not so? Take the case, first, of INDIVIDUALS. Is it not too true that many there are, ready to take the seraphs' outspread wings of service, who are not so ready to take the reposeful folding ones? We have

sought to draw, in the preceding chapter, the distinctive features in the character of the two sisters at Bethany. Martha was one of earth's flying seraphim. In her character, there was an undue proportion at least, of the active and practical and bustling, compared with the meditative and devotional. She had the wings to fly, but not so beautifully as her sister Mary, the wings of restful love. We do not depreciate Martha's character--we would desire more such--who, instead of living and dying with wings collapsed, opportunities for usefulness guiltily neglected, speed, seraph-like, from place to place with the living embers of Christian activity.

But better, because rarer, are the Marys, who have begun with the devotional, and made that the foundation of their religious character and life. Train the wings to be folded at the foot of the mercy-seat--in other words, let religion begin in the heart, and be nurtured by daily prayer, and no fear of the flying pinions of consecrated energy. The love of God, shed abroad in the heart of "the burning ones," will irresistibly prompt and impel to holy duty. To the question, heard by the same prophet-spectator of the Seraphim-vision, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" the answer will sooner or later be given, by the lips touched with the live-coal, "Here am I, send me," (Isa. 6:8.)

And what is true of believers in their individual, is equally true of them in their COLLECTIVE capacity. The Church, in these days, needs no exhortation to follow her Lord "in the day-time" to the busy teaching in the Temple. "The Temple of the Lord--the Temple of the Lord are we!" is the too loudly vaunted watchword of this age of "bustling Christianity." No longer can it be said now, as of the suggestive silence which accompanied the erection of the great sanctuary on Mount Moriah, "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building," (1 Kings 6:7.) The modern temple-court is resonant with voice and footstep and noise of busy implements.

But does the Church follow her Lord with equal fidelity into the solitudes of Olivet? Or rather, does she not require to be reminded of the word addressed to another Kingly Temple-builder, "This is the word of God unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts"? (Zech. 4:6.) If she has reason to utter a plaintive lament over doctrinal defection, decaying zeal, languishing spirituality,



the love of many waxing cold, efforts apparently unowned and unblest--if the heavens have become as brass, and the earth as iron--may not the reason only be too patent? may it not be, because, amid all the unabating activities of outer zeal in the cause of religion, (every implement wielded which ecclesiastical organization can employ to break up the fallow ground,) all is failure, because she has failed in employing the divine recipe, "Ask of the Lord rain, in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain"? (Zech. 10:1.) Church of the living God! or, rather, individual members composing the Church--arise to a sense of your sublime prerogatives--the blessings in store for you, as you follow your divine Master's footsteps to the silent groves of Olivet!

Remember, moreover, that Olivet, while it was the scene of His devotions, was also the scene of His TEMPTATIONS. It was there, "the horror of great darkness" surrounded Him; there, the mysterious cup trembled in His hand; there, in the paroxysm of soul-anguish He lay prostrate on the cold earth! In a far humbler sense, the world of your every-day life is such an Olivet--a scene of temptation too. But the Tempted, yet victorious ONE, comes to you with the same injunction--the same thrice-repeated entreaty which He uttered of old to the faithless disciples--"Watch, and PRAY that you enter not into temptation."

It is Prayer which will convert the Olivet of temptation into a place and memorial of triumph. It should be a solemn thought to us all, that the time of watching and prayer--the vigil of earth--for each of us, must be short at the best. Oh forbid, that the footway to this hallowed resort on the Mount, should be grown over, owing to habitual neglect, with the thorn and the thistle--the noxious weeds of sin. Forbid, that at the last, a forgotten Savior should meet us with the upbraiding words of righteous irony, "Sleep on now, and take your rest"--as if He had said, "This Olivet--this night-watch in the valley of tears--might have been characterized and glorified by noble soul-struggles and prayers. But the time for that is past--let us leave the place of inglorious slumber--let us cross the Kedron, and bid the earthly Olivet farewell forever--"Arise, let us be going!" (Matt. 26:45, 46.)

Reader! "let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Let

us "watch unto prayer." It was Prayer, in the depths of these Gethsemane olive-groves, which braced the Almighty Sufferer for treading His blood-stained path; and it is prayer which will best prepare us for the inevitable hour of trial, the long wearing sickness, the desolating bereavement, the crossing of the dark Kedron-brook, which severs one and all of us, from the Gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem. What motives, what encouragements He gives, to frequent the mercy-seat!

It was, we read, when praying at this "certain place," that, "when He had ceased," and when the disciples, (who had perhaps been privileged to share in His devotions,) put the question, "Teach us how to pray"--He summed up His answer with the following divine parable. We can do no more than transcribe it; but, spoken as it was, on this same occasion, it may appropriately conclude this 'memory of Olivet,' of which it is in truth itself a part--

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this illustration, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:5-10.)

## **The Message to Bethphage**

Matthew 21:1-3

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

Mark 11:1-8

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'" Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it." Luke 19:28-34

It was now six days before the Passover. Our Blessed Lord, after a brief sojourn at Jericho, had spent the Jewish Sabbath previous to His death, at the mountain home, in the endeared society of the Family of Bethany. He reached it, probably after sunset, on the day of the week corresponding to our Friday. The Sabbatic hours which followed, formed the last hallowed day of complete seclusion and rest preparatory to the dreadful and momentous events of the week on which He was about to enter. As the evening shadows of that Sabbath were falling, multitudes, attracted by His culminating miracle in the raising of Lazarus, were flocking out from Jerusalem to see with their own eyes this wondrous Conqueror of death, and the visible trophy of His power in the person of

the restored villager. The morning brought fresh additions to these enthusiastic crowds, who were thus, as we shall find in next chapter, unwittingly preparing to fulfill an ancient prophecy of one of their own seers, by forming a triumphant body-guard and retinue for the royal entrance of Zion's King.

The procession, probably after midday, was preparing to set out. We may imagine it had already left the little village embosomed in its groves of palm, branches of which may have been already cut down, in anticipation of the coming acclamation. The crowd, alike from Bethany and from the city, is swollen by the caravans of pilgrims, hastening to the feast from Perea and the Jordan valley. All at once there is a pause. Two of His disciples are dispatched to a nearby village, by name Bethphage, in order to fetch a donkey and its colt, for purposes not at first defined in the message. To a certain extent the site of this village is conjectural, but we can with confidence include it in the Olivet memories, as occupying a ridge of 'the Mount,' and close, also, by the track which the procession was about to pursue. The disciples, without remonstrance, execute their commission. On the sole plea addressed to the owners--"The Lord has need of them"--the two animals are led to the spot where the procession waited their return.

This embassy was strangely at variance with the usual manner of their Heavenly Master. On no other occasion in all His public ministry, do we find Him courting publicity; nor, indeed, so far as we know, did He ever before even employ the help of an animal in His long and tedious journeys under a Palestine sun. There seemed the less necessity for any such adventitious aid at the present time--as Bethany had just ministered to Him a Sabbath-day's physical rest, and Jerusalem, the place of destination, was scarcely three miles distant from where He sent the disciples on their mysterious errand. We shall not now anticipate, but leave for the following chapter, the reasons which led the Divine Redeemer, in the present instance, to depart from His invariable preference to remain an unpretentious wayfarer. The enthusiasm of the people gathered from all parts of the land, was stirred to its depths, and He did nothing to repress or discourage it; on the contrary, as we shall find, He seemed rather to court the plaudits of that exulting throng.

Meanwhile, however, let us, also, pause for a little, and gather a few lessons from this interesting incident, before we proceed with the jubilant crowd along their path of triumph.

Let us advert to the testimony this portion of Scripture offers, alike to the earthly humiliation and to the divine glory of Jesus--to His Humanity and His Divinity.

It is remarkable how frequently, in the course of His public ministry, these two are combined. Indeed there are comparatively few events of importance, during His Incarnation, but in which we have this juxtaposition of majesty and lowliness, the attributes and evidences alike of Godhead and manhood. "The Child born," the "Son given," yet "the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father;" "Immanuel, God with us"--'our God yet our Brother, our Brother yet our God!' When He came into the world--it was an infant of days, a helpless babe in a lowly cradle--yet, at that nativity hour, a mystic star, the symbol of royalty, was seen in the skies, and choirs of angels descended to Bethlehem's valley, to sing "Glory to the new-born King." At His baptism in Jordan, we see an apparently humble Galilean, 'receiving a sinner's rite at a sinner's hands;' but, lo! the heavens are opened, and an audible voice attests His Deity.

At the well of Jacob, we behold a travel-worn Pilgrim resting His weary frame "as best He could," and asking for a cup of cold water--but that Samaritan He has redeemed with His blood, bears witness to His omniscience, as one that "told her all things that ever she did." At the grave of Lazarus, we behold, one moment, a weeping man--the next, the omnipotent Lord of life summoning back by a word the dead. At the final scene of all, we see a tortured martyr transfixed in agony to the bitter tree, apparently powerless to rebut the scoffer's taunt--"He saved others, Himself He cannot save;" yet nature awakes to rebuff the insult, and to vindicate His dishonored glory--the sun puts on robes of sackcloth, and the earth heaves convulsed, as if it trembled to support the cross on which its expiring Creator hung.

In the passage we are now to consider, we have the same conjunction of greatness and condescension--the majesty of the Divine and the lowliness

of the HUMAN. We shall presently note the unmistakable proofs and tokens of Deity. But even in this hour of temporary triumph--the only occasion on which a halo of earthly glory encircles the brow that is soon to be crowned with thorns--He appears before us "as one that serves." Though, as Jehovah, He had an indisputable claim to all the possessions of His creatures--though His were "the cattle on a thousand hills"--at the very outset of the royal procession He puts himself in the position of a poor RECIPIENT, sending two of His disciples to get from a lowly villager the loan of two lowly animals.

By one omnific mandate, Mount Olivet might easily have been made, like the mountain at Dothan, as seen by the servant of Elisha, full of horses and chariots to grace the triumph of a greater than "Solomon in all his glory." But as the humble Nazarene--who had a borrowed cradle at his birth, and is soon to have a borrowed grave--He is content, on this occasion also, to dispense with dazzling pomp of circumstance. Though it is as a "King" He is foretold as "coming;" it is also "meek and lowly," a 'Pilgrim among pilgrims.' No emblazoned banners wave over His head, no jeweled crown, no sacred oil, no golden scepter or spangled vestments proclaim His royalty; no prancing steeds, no richly ornamented war horses convey Him along in triumphal chariot. An ignoble lowly animal, belonging to a neighboring villager, serves the purpose of Him who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." As a servant of servants, the Lord of all sends "two of His disciples, saying, Go into the nearby village; in the which, at your entering, you shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat--loose him, and bring him here," (Luke 19:30.)

But this incident affords also an attestation to the DIVINITY of Jesus.

It tells, first, of His omniscience. In sending His disciples to the owner of the animals at Bethphage, He gives minute particulars as to how and where they were to be found. It was to be "at the entering in of the village." There was to be "an donkey and its colt." They were to be "tied"--"tied outside, by a door;" and the spot was further marked as being "at a place where two ways met," (Mark 11:4.) He forewarns of the question or challenge with which the request would be received, and the success which would attend it.

Note further, in conjunction with the omniscience, the sovereign power of the Savior. He swayed the heart of that owner at Bethphage. It was in itself a startling, an unreasonable demand made to a stranger, to give up his property at the bidding of two unknown men of Galilee. But "the Lord has need of them." That was enough. Instead of demurring to the request, or treating as an insult the peremptory demand for what was his and not theirs, he cheerfully assents, and sends the two animals along with them. And observe, moreover, the present was unlike many of Christ's other miracles. In these, He was Himself personally present, His own mighty utterances forming part of the scene--as, for example, at Cana of Galilee, at the funeral of Nain, and at the graveyard of Bethany. But here, He remains at a distance--leaves the interview to His disciples--influences the will of the owner through the intervention of others.

How comforting to us is this combined Omniscience and Omnipotence of Jesus! and more especially now that He is at a distance from His Church, and acting through the instrumentality of His ministers on earth. He appeared purposely Himself to withdraw, and delegated others to transact with this villager, in order to assure His people in every age, that distance does not limit or impair His sovereign power! And He would seem desirous, by several of His miracles, to establish this same truth, that His will and word are as efficacious afar off as they are near.

See His power at a distance over matter, when He hung upon the cross--the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, the rocks were riven, and the sun was darkened.

See His power at a distance over the animals--summoning the fish with the coin in its mouth from the depths of Gennesaret; or, as in the present instance, leading the donkey and its colt to "the place where two ways met."

See His power exercised at a distance over the human body--in the raising of the centurion's son, or of the Syrophenician's daughter.

And see, as the culminating exercise of this distant power, His influence over mind, in swaying the will and heart of a Bethphage villager, to surrender in a moment his property at the summons, "The Lord has need

of them."

We know how apt we are to indulge the thought, how privileged we would be, were Jesus now moving in the midst of us--were we allowed to hear His loving voice, and to behold His wondrous deeds--how many more tears would be dried, and sorrows soothed, and death-beds averted, and careless hearts touched and melted. But though withdrawn from sight on the heavenly Mount, His omniscient eye is still upon us. He knows our frame--He marks our trials--He puts our tears into His bottle--He speaks, and it is done. The disciples themselves--these humble, uncouth fishermen--could have had poor success in making so startling a demand for the surrender of property. But there was a mightier Power influencing that stranger's soul. "The Lord, who had need of them," turned his heart even as He turns the rivers of water.

And though now removed to a distance from His Church on earth, "His hand is not shortened that it cannot save." All that concerns us and ours is at His disposal. If He could thus act on a poor man's heart, even in what was comparatively a small matter--if He condescended to employ His power through others, even to the inducing to part with two lowly animals, how much more will He delight to exercise His sovereignty in controlling higher things for His own glory and for His people's good! "A sparrow falls not to the ground without your heavenly Father knowing of it. Fear not, therefore--you are of more value than many sparrows."

Let us not, then, in our unbelief, "limit the Holy One of Israel," or imagine because Christ is not personally present with His Church and its members, He must be less intimately acquainted with their sorrows, and less able to minister to their needs. Let us not say, in the spirit of the bereft sisters of Bethany, 'Lord, if you had been here, this my brother--my friend--my child had not died.' By the present miracle on Olivet, He tells us, He is never "far from any one of us;" that He is still, though invisibly, yet really near the sick man in his chamber--the mourner in his tears--the stricken sinner in the agony of conviction. Distance is nothing to an ever-present Savior. Seated on the everlasting hills, "crowned with glory and honor," there is no change in His heart of everlasting love. The parting legacy He bequeathed to all time, still rings its endless and multiplying echoes, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."



Let us now, for a little, pass from the consideration of our Savior's part in this episode in the triumphal entrance, to the conduct of the Villager who owned the animals. He seems at first to have remonstrated, "Why are you untying the colt?" He thought it (as well he might) a strange demand. But when he heard the argument, "The Lord has need of them;" his objections were silenced, and, without hesitation, he "loosed them, and let them go."

It is impossible to say whether or not that owner at Bethphage was a disciple of the Redeemer's. By the term "The Lord," it is generally supposed he may have simply understood the Lord God of Israel--the God of his fathers. As a Jew--a worshiper of this God--he acknowledged "His sovereignty over him and His propriety in him." The man felt that the animals, in the earthly sense of "property," were his own--that none had a title to challenge his right to them. But as a pious Hebrew, he acknowledged that, in a nobler and higher sense, they were not his--that he had them on lease from a Mightier than earthly proprietor. They belonged to Him who says, "All the beasts of the forest are mine." When Jehovah's interests were mentioned, by a beautiful faith he at once owned the superior servitude, and "rendered to God the things that were God's."

What a lesson here for us! How apt we are to live independent of the Divine hand, as if our blessings were our own--health, wealth, friends, substance, instead of entering into the spirit of the king of Israel, when, at the consecration of the Temple, he uttered the sublime confession over the munificent offerings, "All is from you, and from your own, O God, have we given you." Seek to realize and to acknowledge, in all you have, the ownership of a Greater. Have you wealth? God has given it you; and when it is demanded, regard it not as your own, but needful for His cause, and immediately "send it." Is your substance taken away? Let this comfort you, "The Lord has need of it"--need of it for your sakes, to wean you from earth, and lead you to lay up your treasure in Heaven.

Or, is it dealings more mysterious still? Why is that life of consecrated activity suddenly paralyzed--noble resolves and nobler deeds repressed and arrested by years of familiarity with the darkened chamber and pining sickness--the bird, soaring once on buoyant pinion and singing up to Heaven's gate, now with broken wing struggling in the furrow? 'Oh

how willing,' many such a one is ready to exclaim--'how willing should I be, to join in that triumphal march, to spread my garment, cut down my palm-branch, and shout my Hosanna! Sad to hear these notes of praise preparing to ring around the valleys of Zion, while I am debarred from having any part in the festive throng. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me--for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday," (Ps. 42:4)

No, sick one, whom Jesus loves, 'the Lord has need of you,'--yes, need of just such mute worshipers as you are. Remember, He can listen to the heart-song, though no branch is waved in the hand, and no hosanna vibrates on the tongue. The trophies of His triumphal march are not confined to the palms and garments which strew the highway of Olivet. Those who tarry at home may divide the spoil. He who thus enters the gates of Zion will not forget the lowly dwellings of Jacob; therefore, comfort one another with these words, "This sickness is--for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." While He "has need" of some strong-handed and trumpet-tongued in His Church to fight His battles, proclaim His praise, and prepare His way--He "needs" others, also, unarrayed in festive attire, unequal to the fatigues of the public procession, curtained within "the tents of Kedar"--He needs such--He loves such, to glorify Him. Undemonstrative, passive resignation; unfretting, uncomplaining submission to His will, is as grateful to Him as the jubilant shout of the great congregation.

Why, above all, that deathbed? Why that Isaac laid on the altar of sacrifice? Why that Lazarus, in the pride of youthful manhood, stretched on that mysterious shroud? Why that loving and useful life lost prematurely to the Church and the world? The seared and withered leaves of autumn drop in their season to the ground; but why this withering of the early blossom--this abnormal falling of the green and tender foliage? "The Lord has need of them." Are there no flowers needed to waft their perfume and swing their censers in the gardens of immortality? Are there no "ministering ones" needed in the Sanctuary above? Yes. If there are no battles there to fight--no armor to prove--no "Harps on the willows" forbidding to sing the Lord's song as in the

strange land below--there are noble embassies of active service in which are embarked the unresting energies of the glorified.

Christian mourner! who, it may be, are now lamenting over your withered flowers--the blanks at your table--the music of cherished voices hushed for the forever of time--too truly you may feel, day by day, in the depths of your lone, aching heart, how ill you could spare--how much you had "need" of 'the loved and lost.' But take this as the explanation--let all murmurs be stilled to silence by the higher claim and claimant, "The Lord has need" of the crowned and glorified. At such deathbeds of those we love, we are too apt, like Jacob with the angel at Jabbok, in the agony of nature's fond struggle, to say, "We will not let you go"--oh, as the wing is pluming for its immortal flight, let the gentle whisper come to us rebuking all tears, "Let me go, for the day breaks"--let me go, for the Lord has need of me"--"If you loved me, you would rejoice because I said, I go unto my Father."

Would, then, there were always such simple acquiescence in God's will, as in the case of this owner of Bethphage! He asks no questions--he pries no further into the reasons of the Lord's "need;" he raises no fresh doubts or difficulties. The providential messages of God are often puzzling and perplexing. Severe afflictions at times come, like these two apostles to Bethphage, asking us to make surrender of what flesh and blood is unwilling to part with. Often to our poor blind, short-sighted vision, we can see no reason for the sacrifice--no call to give up what we fondly prize. Alas! we only have the one-sided view. We cannot judge of the infinite reasons hidden from our gaze, and known only to the Infinitely wise One.

We never should judge prematurely and rashly of an uncompleted plan, even on earth. Why disturb those lovely fields, and make crude gashes in those smiling valleys? Wait with your verdict until science finishes her work, and thousands are seen to speed along the iron highway. Why disturb the virgin marble slumbering in earth's bosom, leaving unsightly seams and scars in its native quarry? Wait until you see that unwieldy block a piece of breathing sculpture in the artist's studio. Why does Hiram send his hewers to deface and mutilate the glories of Lebanon? why should the inhabitants of her forest fall to the merciless axe? Would

not these cedars have been, better far, left as a diadem of glory on her majestic brow--for the birds of the air to nestle in the branches, or the panting gazelle to slumber under their shadow? No, "the Lord has need of them." They were beautiful in the Temple of nature, but He has a higher need of them in the Temple of grace--His holy and beautiful house at Jerusalem.

And, Reader, if, with regard to us, the axe be laid to the root of some favorite tree--if the Lord, according to the expression of an old writer, 'has His tools upon us'--let us remember, in the words of the apostle, "He that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God." For "all things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," (Rom. 8:28.)

The passage further teaches, that each of us can, in some humble way, do service to the Savior. We cannot all give Him magnificent offerings, or have our names associated with magnificent deeds for the furtherance of His cause and kingdom; we cannot all be equipped with apostolic zeal and fervor; we cannot all, with a Luther spirit, be "heroes in the fight"--but we can leave "footprints," to give heart and hope to the "shipwrecked brother." We can give the mite to the Treasury when we have neither the pound nor the talent; we can give the lowly animal when we have no other royal tribute. If we have not this, we can strew the garment on the way--and if even the garment be unworthy, poverty can cut down its own palm-branches--and with these, poverty's own offering, the symbol of willing spirit and loyal heart, we can swell the jubilant Hosanna!

It might have been (let us make, at all events, the supposition for a moment) that, with a stern and churlish negative, the disciples returned to their Lord from their unsuccessful mission to the dweller at Bethphage. Had it been so, what an honor would that villager have missed! What an opportunity would he have forfeited of doing humble but acceptable service to the world's Redeemer! But at the summons, "The Lord has need of them," he readily assents, "immediately" he makes the surrender--his name is added in the Heavenly records, to the roll of those who are "faithful over a few things." What does it matter that his was a lowly offering? He was asked to contribute but little. It may be he could only contribute that little to the service of the Savior. His was not the honor

which appertained to other followers of Jesus; his was not the noble self-surrender of the men of Bethsaida and Capernaum, who left their all for a life of undivided consecration. It involved no risk of name and reputation, worldly interests and social position, as in the case of Nicodemus, who came, not in the hour of hosanna and triumph, but in the hour of apparent defeat and despair, to beg from Pilate the body of his Lord; not even was it the constant devotion of the women of Galilee, who, like guardian angels, tracked His steps and ministered to Him of their substance; nor the costly proof Mary gave of her love, when, as we found at Bethany in the house of the restored leper, she broke her vase of precious nard--the most treasured of her possessions--and poured it ungrudgingly on His feet.

It was, in the case of this man of Bethphage, a loan--no more. But it is enough--he has done what he could. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver;" and wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this nameless benefactor has done, be told for a memorial of him!

Reader, God's messengers come also from the Great Master to us, with the demand for lowly service. Each of us may recall the time of their mission. It may have been the accredited ambassadors of the sanctuary; it may have been Providential voices requiring from us what possibly would involve sacrifice, but the doing of which would redound in glory to the Savior, or--for the good of His people. What have we done? What in each case has been our response to the demand? Have we accorded a welcome to the messengers and their message? or have we spurned them away--and are we now in the position of those who might have done good service to Christ, but who have once--and, it may be, in some specific instances, who have forever--missed the opportunity? Whether it be honoring the Lord with our substance and with the first-fruits of our increase; or whether it be simply giving the cup of cold water to a disciple in the Savior's name in lack of other substance, it matters not. It is motive, which, irrespective of mere degree, dignifies action.

The opportunity has come and gone--gone neglected. "You did it not to me," stands recorded against us in the Great Book. "You gave me no water for my feet--You gave me no kiss--you did not anoint My head with

oil," (Luke 7:44-46.) That Bethphage villager had but the one chance--no more. Had he denied the solicited boon, the possible willingness and regrets of tomorrow could not have atoned for the refusal of today. So with us; many are the opportunities which, neglected once, may not come again. The Savior waits the passing hour; but if we deny, if we even postpone His claim, the Hosanna crowd may meanwhile sweep on, the occasion demanding the service is over--we have lost the one chance, forever!

Let us again be warned by the case of His faithless guardians at Gethsemane, in an hour near at hand, whose drowsy vigils drew from the loving heart they had wounded, the words of deserved reproach we have commented on in a preceding chapter, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." 'Sleep on! the time was, when you might have watched--when your wakeful sympathies would have given Me support and solace--when your words of heart-cheer would have been of priceless value in the midst of My soul-struggle--but the fight is ended--the victory is won--your opportunity in sharing it is past--Sleep on now, and take your rest.'

Oh, if at no other season, to how many do these reproaches for lost opportunities come at a deathbed! how many, even of His own true followers, leave the world with the tear in their eye and the throb in their heart--that, for the dear Lord who died for them, they have done so little, and might have done so much more!

And if there be yet one other lesson, before we close, it is to those who are appointed as ministers of the everlasting Gospel; never to despond--never to shrink from apparent impossibilities--but to go fearlessly on, at the word, and in obedience to the command and authority of their great Master. Never apparently was there a more fruitless, hopeless errand than that of these two disciples--going to ask a stranger to surrender two animals at the simple bidding, "The Lord has need of them." They, also, might have been tempted to remonstrate--to shrink from this strange unwarrantable interference with another man's property, and to plead the almost absolute certainty of a refusal. But they went, because Jesus bade them. "The Lord gave the word"--and they forthwith proceeded on their embassy.

What an encouragement to all of us who are the heralds of salvation, never to allow the hands to hang down or the knees to become feeble-- never to deem any heart beyond the reach of divine saving power, or of a loving reception of the truth. He who sent His apostles with the sovereign message, still employs human instrumentality, and makes the very same "word" mightily efficacious. Vain, indeed, would many an embassy be, if we went on our own charges. But we are commissioned, like the disciples, by our Divine Redeemer. We are His heralds--His ambassadors; and He who influenced the will of that Bethphage villager, can subdue the most obdurate, and bring the most selfish and grasping, to glorious self-surrender to His own cause and service.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" In our moments of despondency, when the work at times seems vain and fruitless, may we have faith and boldness to say with Peter on another occasion, "Master, we have toiled all night, and caught nothing--nevertheless at your word we will let down the net." We will go with Your message, Lord; and though the world may scorn it, and the pride of reason reject it--and the pride of self-righteousness treat it with disdain, we shall trust the sure warrant, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

## **THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY**

Matthew 21:1-9

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said, "and you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them here. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately send them." This was done to fulfill the prophecy,

"Tell the people of Israel,  
'Look, your King is coming to you.  
He is humble, riding on a donkey;  
even on a donkey's colt.'"

The two disciples did as Jesus said. They brought the animals to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it. Most of the crowd spread their coats on the road ahead of Jesus, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting,

"Praise God for the Son of David!

Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Praise God in highest heaven!"

Luke 19:37-41

As they reached the place where the road started down from the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

"Bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven!"

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he wept over it.

Zech. 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—even on a donkey's colt.

It is the loveliest season in the Palestine year, when, the rain "over and gone;" the Mount of Olives is carpeted with green, and fresh foliage is clothing its varied groves. Multitudes, as we found in the preceding chapter, were congregated within Jerusalem and its suburbs, from every corner of the Hebrew territory, to keep the great national feast. Many of these, we further noted, attracted by the fame of the Prophet of Galilee, and more especially by His crowning miracle in the resurrection of Lazarus, poured in an enthusiastic stream to Bethany; some, after sunset,



on the Jewish Sabbath--others early on the following morning.

Then, as now, two main roads conducted from the city to this sequestered mountain-hamlet. The one, the shorter of the two, leads straight up the hill, crossing the hollow between its two principal summits. This is the way which we have already found, in a former 'Memory of Olivet,' was selected by David in his flight; the one which, naturally, all foot-travelers would follow. The other, longer and more winding, but adapting itself to a similar depression on the southern slope of the Mount, was (and still is, in a more limited sense) the great public way, traversed by horsemen and caravans from Jericho and the Jordan. It continues a wild mountain track at this day. But though it must have been always steep, it has traces here and there, by the cuttings in the limestone rock, of a road formerly more befitting the great eastern approach (and the only truly grand and impressive approach) to "the city of the great King." The Evangelical narratives leave us little room to doubt, that it was along this magnificent highway the Redeemer was to make His public and triumphal entry.

The disciples have returned from their errand to the villager of Bethphage, to the spot where the procession had paused--the crowd increasing every moment by fresh additions from Jerusalem on the one side, and from Perea and Galilee on the other. The commingled streams have met, and loud "as the noise of many waters" the air is vocal with festive song. The central object of attraction and homage in this enthusiastic crowd, is a lowly Pilgrim of Galilee; undistinguished by any outward badge of dignity. The mighty Victor over Hades, who had encountered and vanquished Death on his pale horse, was outwardly, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, an uncrowned hero--no purple dress--no warrior's sword--no conquering chariot, as we then remarked, had He.

And, so far as He Himself was concerned, He sought none. Easily might He have converted that hour of popular acclamation into an hour of triumph--easily could He have worked on the passions of those thousands now around Him. "Master, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" was the muffled thought of many an impatient heart--a spark was all that was needed to kindle the conflagration, and the appropriate moment might seem to have arrived. Not a few in that crowd,

as they stood, at the outset of the march, on the ridge overlooking the scene of wild desolation stretching down to the Jordan valley, must have remembered the trumpet-tones of one, who, by the severe sanctity of his life, had won their deepest reverence. Had not the Baptist said of this very Prophet of Nazareth, "He must increase, but I must decrease"? Might not the hour now be come for the prophetic fulfillment of "the voice crying in the wilderness"?--might not the kingdom spoken of by the faithful Herald be indeed at hand? What a favoring juncture, at least, to strike the blow! By the concurrent voices of that vast concourse--on the breath of their hosannas--how easily might the acknowledged Messiah-King have marched directly to the Palace, wrested the Roman standards from the walls of Antonia, and ascending as the Shiloh the throne of his father David, have restored to the people their lost prerogatives as a nation! He was, however, no political aspirant--no ambitious adventurer. Had He willed it, they would, before this, have "taken Him by force to make Him a king." But He declines the offered crown--He will "save others"--not glorify or "save Himself."

It was needful, nevertheless, at this solemn crisis, for reasons to which we shall immediately advert, to enter the metropolis, accompanied with some unmistakable badges of royalty. Though oftener He had not where to lay His head--though in a few days, stripped of robe and mantle, He was to hang naked on the cross, it behooved Him now to make a public proclamation and manifesto of His theocratic rights. The homage therefore which would, in other circumstances and on other occasions, have, been rejected, is now accepted. Suddenly, and without premeditation, Olivet is converted into a highway for a conqueror's triumph. An ovation is improvised befitting the occasion, and the "children of Zion are joyful in their KING."

The procession moves on. The donkey's colt, on which He rode, was, in one sense, as we have seen, a symbol of His lowliness--meekness--humiliation--and yet, in another, it gave a traditional significance to the doings of the hour. For it was the animal that had been rode, on more than one occasion of historic interest, by kings and judges, lawgivers and prophets. In present circumstances, its employment was still further suggestive. The words of one of their old seers could scarcely fail to seize

the popular mind, and stimulate the ardor of the moment--"Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—even on a donkey's colt." (Zech. 9:9.)

All strove to respond to this call from a prophetic past. Some of the more devoted threw their garments as saddle-cloths on the back of the colt; others spread them, as a tribute of loyalty and homage, along the rough road; others, from the groves and gardens of palm which have since perished, cut down branches of these, along with other green boughs, similar to what we found, in a previous chapter, was the used at the Feast of Tabernacles. Along this leafy carpet, composed of these symbols of rejoicing, rides Zion's King--for once, at least, not "despised nor rejected." Shouts of victory and welcome wake every echo of the Mount, which is so soon, alas! to listen to other and sadder exclamations from the lips of that fickle populace, before the palm branches have yet withered which they had just strewn on His path.

No traveler who has visited the actual scene, can fail to be struck with the remarkable accordance of the locality and its outer framework, with the description in the Evangelical narratives. Shortly after leaving the town of Mary and Martha, a turn in the road would bring the procession to the Valley of Bethany--at present, as has been previously noted, a wild, picturesque, and (notwithstanding its proximity to the city) a sequestered ravine; to avoid the deep depression of which, the path turns abruptly now, as it must have done then, to the right, skirting the southern slope of Olivet. At this point, before descending to the sharp and steep angle, the crowd would suddenly catch the first glimpse of Jerusalem. It would, however, be but a glimpse, as Zion alone is here visible. The intervening flank of Olivet would screen the Temple, with all the northern portions of the city, from view, and reveal no more than "the citadel" and what was once the Palace of David. But that glimpse is suggestive.

"Zion!" "Zion's King!" "David's Son!" It is the "Daughter of Zion" (the city of David) that is first to "rejoice," and she therefore must intone the first strophe of the song. The very song, also, is selected from David's minstrelsy--"for," we read, (mark the allusions,) "when Jesus was come near even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude

of the disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed be the kingdom of our father David," (Mark 11:10.) "Blessed be the King that comes in the name of the Lord--peace in heaven, and glory in the highest--Hosanna to the Son of David. Hosanna in the highest." Nor was it merely as a Prophet--a worthy successor of the now martyred Baptist--that He is hailed with these loud acclaims. For it is deserving of note, that this was the scripture which every Jew had been taught specially to connect with the advent of Messiah. It was the verse--the note--dearest to them in the great Hallel sung at their Paschal feasts. It was the nation's prayer for its coming King!

Full, doubtless, many a bosom is, with high-wrought expectation. As the crowd swells and the fervor every moment increases, may not the sanguine hope to which we have alluded, grow in intensity also, that the hour of emancipation has come? May they not hear in these thunder-shouts the doom of the Roman? Already may they not see in imagination the hated eagles driven from their perch in the most Holy Place--the invader and his armies dispersed and broken--"the Lord" whom they had long "sought" and longed for, suddenly "coming to His Temple," as the avenger and emancipator of the nation, the avenger of her cruel wrongs? (Mal. 3:1.)

But let us follow still onward the jubilant multitude. Owing to the rapid descent in the road just referred to, the view of the city is, for the time, lost. The aspect would be limited by the Valley of Bethany on the one hand, and by the top of the mount, crowned by David's old altar, on the other--which possibly also may have lent its silent voice in intensifying the ascription of the hour. Many lips, in these moments of transient enthusiasm, may have caught up, in spirit at least, the song of a more faithful worshiper. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David," (Luke 1:68, 69.)

And now, we may imagine, they have begun the ascent of the opposite side of the valley. New palm branches are cut from the groves abounding in this most sheltered hollow on the Mount, and increasing shouts are ascending--hymns from David's Psalter, mingling with more recent

angelic strains, (Luke 19:38.) The jealous Pharisees, the alone exceptions to the universal joy, ask of Christ to rebuke these mistaken acclamations. His reply is, that no voice dare be silenced; that the very stones of Olivet would resent the attempted suppression--"I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out!"

At last they have reached the height--the height which, at a future Paschal feast, was sprinkled with the tents of the Roman army. Even now, there is no such vision of any earthly city, if we may except perhaps the one famous view of Damascus from 'The Dome of Victory.' If so impressive to travelers at this day, when they can only look across to the widowed Queen as she sits in the ashes of her desolation, what must it have been in the day of her regal splendor, enthroned on her four hills, of Acra, Moriah, Bezetha, and Zion, "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of her God"! (Isa. 62:3.)

Not now, as in the earlier part of the procession, (the fragmental glimpse of Zion and the city of David,) but the whole metropolis--fortresses, walls, Temple, towers--rose in transcendent and surpassing loveliness, set in the blue azure Heaven--so "near" in that clear atmosphere, that, to the unpracticed eye, the existence of the intervening Kedron gorge can scarce be credited. That "Mountain of holiness" seems, from this height, like its sterner elder sister, "a mount that might be touched"--who that has ever seen the spot, can fail, in a moment, to recognize it; and identify it with the words, "And when He was come near, He beheld the city."

Touching and impressive procession! How different from the triumph of earthly conquerors! How different from those proud ovations up the steeps of the Roman capitol, or to the Temple of Victory on the Athenian Acropolis, when the wail of the captive and the bereaved, blended with the notes of Fame's bronze trumpets, and the wheels of the war-chariots were soiled with the blood and dust of battle! Every tongue here, has to tell only of mercy, compassion, and tenderest sympathy. The restored blind, with eyes unsealed, are there to lead the way. The restored dumb, with tongues unloosed, are there, to shout the cry of welcome. The restored cripple is there, to strip the palm-tree for his mute tribute of gratitude. The healed leper is there, to spread his now untainted garment on the road. The 'clothed' demoniac is there, to proclaim, "The Lord has

done great things for me, whereof I am glad." The widow and the orphan are there to tell, "He has taken off our sackcloth, and girded us with gladness." The very children are there, with their little palm-branches, to take up the refrain, "Hosanna to the Son of David," (Matt. 21:15) Yes, the restored dead are there--their once silenced tongues now set in glad music to the glory of their great Restorer--"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence--but we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore," (Ps. 115:17, 18.)

Let us now proceed, in a few, sentences, to state the main object of this remarkable incident in the closing chapters of our Lord's earthly history, and, in its outer accompaniments, the most imposing and impressive of all the "Memories" of the Mount.

We must recur for a moment to the point on which we have already incidentally touched, that is, its PUBLICITY--and this too a purposed publicity. It was a thing of Christ's own deliberate choosing and arrangement. In this respect, we noted in the former chapter, how unlike all the other deeds of our Lord. It was prophesied regarding Him, "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall he lift up his voice in the streets;" and all the previous incidents of His life serve only to illustrate and confirm this prophetic description. At other times, He seems to desire and to court, no, He enjoins, the utmost privacy. He goes forth all alone to the Temptation in the wilderness--no human eye witnesses that stupendous struggle. On another occasion, He charges "to tell no man."

He retires to the northern shore of Gennesaret, when the proposal, we have already referred to, is whispered, to make Him a King. He meets again and again His disciples alone. The glories of Tabor were witnessed by no multitude. The treading of the sea was at midnight, and when His apostles were by themselves. It was after He had "put all out of the house," and amid the hush of impressive silence, He raised the daughter of Jairus. The last rite of His dying love was instituted in the strict privacy of the "upper chamber." He meets the disciples at early morn by the shores of Tiberias!

Why, then, this startling exception? Why on the present occasion "cry and lift up His voice"? Why, for once, contradict His own assertion, "The

kingdom of God comes not with observation"?

It does NOT seem enough to say, that this entrance into Jerusalem was intended, as we have just been regarding it, as a manifestation of His Kingly glory--a foreshadowing of the future, when He would be hailed as King of Zion and Prince of peace, (though this doubtless was one end contemplated.) Nor, as others have held, that it was specially designed to brace and nerve His disciples for the scenes of humiliation and suffering which were at hand. Had this been all, He might, in conformity with previous instances, have given them in private and separate from the world, some such equivalent regal manifestation. A little while before, He had been in the region of Caesarea-Philippi, where first He began to discourse of His death and passion. He might there, among the sublime solitudes of Hermon, have summoned legions of angels to do Him homage; and instead of sending to borrow, from a Judean villager, two lowly animals, every lordly tenant that roamed these northern forests, "from Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards," might have graced His triumph, and ten thousands of rivers of oil, as consecrated ointment, flowed at His feet. There, He might have appeared, as He did at a future time to John, with "His eyes as a flame of fire; His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters."

What then, we again ask, seems to have been the chief reason, on the present occasion, of this unprecedented publicity? We answer, It was in order to draw public attention to the great crowning act of His Incarnation--(and which in two days was to be consummated)--His death for the life of the world. It was of the greatest importance, that the eyes of the whole Jewish nation (the representative of the world's nations) should be directed towards a crucified Savior. While, as we have seen, in other incidents of His earthly existence, He courted retirement--it was necessary to surround His death with every possible notoriety. Hence Augustine truly says, in his comment on this episode in a life of unobtrusive humility and self-abnegation, "It is not so much the triumph of a king, as the procession of a victim to the sacrifice."

It was remarkable, (the coincidence could not be by Him undesigned,) that this jubilant day was the 10th of Nisan--a day pre-eminently sacred

to the whole Jewish people, and specially to the congregated worshipers--as that upon which the Paschal Lamb was set apart. Jesus, the great Antitype, in presence of the assembled nation, and by a voluntary act, sets Himself apart, on this same day, for His own sacrifice. As a KING, claiming solitary spiritual sovereignty--He enters the Temple as His royal Palace. But He enters it, too--PRIEST and VICTIM combined--as the place of sacrifice; "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"--"Christ our Passover sacrificed for us."

It would have been indeed sufficient, (so far as the virtue and efficaciousness of His atonement was concerned, as the surety-Savior,) had He died in solitude. There would have been even something perhaps grand and impressive, and also more in keeping with His antecedents, if, instead of the crude shouts of Calvary, and the ignominy of open crucifixion, He had closed His eyes in their death-sleep, like Moses, all alone, on the heights of another Pisgah--or, as with a still earlier type, been offered up, like Isaac, on the summit of some kindred lonely mount.

But it was needful for the Church, in all future ages, that His death be attested, without a shadow of doubt. And never could season be better selected, to attract universal attention, than when Jews and proselytes were assembled from all the neighboring countries in the Hebrew capital. This very mountain, which witnessed the procession, was itself studded over, in its green hollows, with the black and white tents of the assembled pilgrims, who, owing to the scanty room in the city, were driven to erect their temporary booths in the public Park. Doubtless, on that day, this Triumphal entrance formed the talk of Jerusalem. It would be the topic on every tongue; and, weeks after these startling events, when the Jews now assembled at the Paschal feast returned to their several distant homes, they would, more strikingly still, connect the two prophecies of Zechariah--"Behold your King comes;" and the "sword awaking" from its scabbard--the "wounds in the hands"--"wounded in the house of his friends," (Zech. 13:6-7.)

Behold, then, in the Triumphal entry, the public presentation of the priceless Sacrifice. It was, if we might be allowed the expression, the bleating of the true Paschal Lamb; as He was led to the slaughter. It was the sounding of silver trumpets summoning to the great festival--the



Sabbath-bell of the world's long week of expectation, tolling on the heights of Olivet, to gather the multitudes around the Altar of offering. That bell rang the chimes of another Evangelical Prophet, "O Zion, that bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah--Behold your God!" (Isa. 40:9.)

Although, however, we have now indicated what formed the principal object of Messiah's public entrance, there was doubtless what was prophetic in it also. It was a foreshadowing of future glory--that Christ (soon to suffer) would one day come to reign; having His dominion, according to the words embraced in Zechariah's prediction, "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth"--when the Alleluia of the children of Abraham would mingle with the Hosanna of the Gentile, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord."

That day, at Jerusalem, was doubtless a joyful one to the disciples, when they saw their beloved Lord and Master so worthily honored. But if they had been able, in any measure, to understand the mysterious intimations which had recently fallen from His lips, there must have been also sadder thoughts intermingled with the glad acclaims. These shouts of triumph must have been marred with dark forebodings, which were only too truthfully realized! Not so, is it, regarding His second coming. No shadow of death darkens "that blessed hope"--no traitor will lurk in that triumphal path--no sorrow cloud that hour of joy.

Reader, are you ready to glorify Christ? Are you ready to strew the palm-branch on His path, and to greet Him with the Hosanna? Remember if you will not glorify Him, He will get others to do so. "If these hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." 'Attempt not,' He says still, as He said of old, 'to rob me of my Hosannas. The rocks around--dumb nature--would enter her protest--the stones would become vocal, and shout my praise.' I repeat, if we refuse to honor Christ, and to join the willing multitude who do Him homage, He will get others more loyal to take our place. His glory will not suffer--out of the mouth of babes and sucklings He will perfect praise--yes, from the mute creation, He will raise up a special seed--He will put a tongue and a song into the insensate stone.

"Tell the daughter of Zion," so ran the prophecy, "Behold, your King comes." This is a concluding but most solemn view of the Triumphal entrance. It was a last--a closing offer of the Redeemer to the "daughter of Zion." This slow procession wending across Olivet, was a final, long-rejected overture of kindness--one other opportunity to hear His voice and turn at His reproof.

Christ makes His entrance, Sabbath after Sabbath, to the courts of the earthly Zion, and in the case of some, as with Jerusalem of old, with the last message of His mercy--a closing appeal--a final remonstrance--a farewell knock at the door of the heart, before His offers of love pass forever away. Let us meet Him now--meet Him joyfully as Christ the Savior; that when the advent cry shall be heard--when the world shall be startled by the summons, "Behold, your King comes!" we may be able--each with the prepared palm-branch of victory, to line the royal path--and to say, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord."

## **THE TEARS OF JESUS ON THE MOUNT**

Luke 19:41-44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

In the previous chapter, we followed the rejoicing multitudes along "the olive-bordered way"--until they had attained the ridge of the Mount overlooking the valley of Jehoshaphat--which disclosed in all its glory and magnificence the towers and palaces of Zion. First the walls and fortresses, and then the Temple on its rock, set as a magnificent jewel in this casing, burst upon their view. These multitudes were occupied with

their shouts of welcome; but other thoughts--other sounds were engrossing the central figure in that procession, when He beheld 'the elect metropolis of God.' There was a solemn pause. He had reined in, for a moment, the docile animal on which He rode. His eyes, "homes of silent prayer," dissolve in tears. "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it."

Strange and startling emotion! It requires some vast--some peculiar cause--to make a great man weep. A child, or one of feeble mind, is easily melted into tears, when danger or trouble is impending. But a heroic spirit, superior to the ordinary frailties and weaknesses of humanity--much more, in the present case, the Son of God and Lord of Life--He who had recently stormed and conquered Death itself in his own stronghold--how vast--how stupendous must have been the cause which opened the sluices of His heart--the floodgates of such grief! He had wept, indeed, only a few days before. But there is a remarkable contrast between the two occasions. The one was a crowd of sorrow. His tears at Bethany were in harmony with the scene--at a time of bereavement we look for tears. There, moreover, He wept not alone--they were, in part at least, tears evoked by the grief of the surrounding mourners; for as He saw Mary and Martha weeping--and the Jews also weeping which came with them--He could not forbid the tribute of a Godlike sympathy, and we read, "Jesus wept!"

Here, however, it was different. Olivet, as we have seen, was, at the moment, a scene not of weeping and sorrow, but of universal gladness. Palm-branches were waving, and a mighty choir of voices from all parts of Palestine were waking, with strains of jubilee, the echoes of the Mount. One of that dense multitude refused to participate in the joy. When the others rejoiced, "Jesus wept."

Why this solitary cloud amid the bright sunshine? Why this one strange inharmonious note in that burst of melody? When we see joyous faces and joyous smiles, and hear kindly words and greetings, the heaviest heart can scarce refuse to take off its sackcloth and share in the general gladness. Surely, then, it must have been no ordinary reason, when every face spoke of brightness, and every buoyant step of triumph--that the Object of the loyal acclaim was Himself the only exception--that He

maintained, not only a seemingly passive indifference to all that was transacting around Him--but burst into a strange agony of tears.

Yes--an agony of tears; for it is worthy of note also, that the word in the original Greek used to describe the tears of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, is an altogether different one from that employed, on this occasion, of His weeping over Jerusalem. In the one case, the word for ordinary grief is selected. He wept, as one bereft friend weeps in the chamber of death over the memories of a cherished friendship. But the sorrow over Jerusalem was of an intenser kind. Tears, intensely bitter, welled up from the lowest depths of His heart--tears accompanied with a wail of passionate exclamation--the sob of irrepressible anguish which one may have heard, not over the holy memory of buried love, but over other and darker woes too deep for utterance--transcending tears!

What paroxysm of grief, then, can this be? Are these tears forced from His eyes at the dread anticipation of His own sufferings? As He now comes in sight of Gethsemane--the Kedron murmuring at His feet--and the place of crucifixion looming in the distance, does the thought of His own severe anguish unman His soul? No--more unselfish far is the heart of that Divine Philanthropist. His tears are not for Himself, but for the doomed thousands in the devoted city nearby. He is the hero of the hour. A burst of acclaim, such as never before greeted Him, rises from the surging multitudes, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord--Hosanna in the highest."

Can these remarkable sounds of gladness fail to revive His drooping spirit? Can He who was more sadly familiar with ridicule, and taunt, and scorn, remain unmoved and ungladdened amid these paeans of Victory? Yes! what was outward pomp and glory--what the capricious breath of popular applause--the fitful cry of the fickle multitude--what the glittering crown they were prepared to place on His brow, in comparison with souls over whom hung the doom of so terrible a retribution? He has no ears for the hollow shout of loyalty--no eyes for the dense throng and their waving branches of evanescent triumph--"He beheld the CITY, and wept over IT!"

But let us advert, more particularly, to one or two of the CAUSES OF THE

## TEARS OF JESUS on the heights of the Mount.

1. The first of these, we may mention, was the abuse of past privileges. The record of a thousand years of privilege and blessing, enjoyed by the Jewish nation, was now unfolded to His omniscient eye. God had made Zion His holy habitation--"Beautiful for situation--the joy of the whole earth--the city of the great King!" There, prophets had unsealed their rolls and uttered their warnings. There, Psalmists had sung their hymns of praise. There, Priests had waved their censers, and daily shed the typical blood which pointed to the Great coming Sacrifice. There, Jehovah Himself had dwelt, in visible glory, in the Shekinah of the mercy-seat. Jerusalem had been the Mahanaim--or rather, the Bethel, of a later age, where rested the base of the mystic ladder between earth and heaven, traversed by angels, and conducting into the true Holiest of all.

Well might God say, "What more could I have done for my vineyard?" He had planted the 'wild vine' from Egypt with His right hand--He had nurtured and fenced it--often and again had He prevented the boar out of the woods from ravaging it, and the wild beast of the field from devouring it. Amid rebellion, forgetfulness, and backsliding, He had dealt with Israel as a loving and forgiving father deals with a wayward son--saying, with the tender anguish of a parent's soul, "How can I give you up?" And yet Prophets had warned, and Psalmists had sung, and sacrificial blood had been shed in vain. They were centuries filled with mournful recollections of grace resisted, privileges abused, opportunities slighted.

Jesus, at that moment, scanned these ages of foul ingratitude--hollow formalism--hypocritical insincerity--Pharisaic pride--national apostasy--His prophets slain--His servants beaten--His vineyard trodden under foot, or become a barren wilderness. That thousand years had been loading the cloud of vengeance--and now, as He saw it about to burst, the tears streamed from His eyes. If the loss even of one soul is represented as a catastrophe, in comparison with which the gain of a world sinks into insignificance, what must have been at this juncture, to the eye of Christ, the guilt and doom of a whole city, a whole nation? We know some of the holiest and bravest hearts among Israel, wept hot tears of lamentation over the apostasy of their countrymen. JEREMIAH wished that his "head were waters" and his eyes were "a fountain of tears," that he might "weep

day and night." "My soul," said he, "shall weep in secret places for your pride, and my eye shall severely weep and run down with tears." PAUL had "great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart" for his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh. What, then, must have been the bitterness of those tears which took in at a glance, not years, but ages and centuries? Oh need we wonder, that, at that eventful moment, when Incarnate Love beheld the outstretched wings of a destroying angel hovering over the old metropolis of patriarchs and prophets-- need we wonder that at the thought--the sight--He could not control His Divine-human emotion; and that tears bedewed the very palm-branches of triumph that were lying unheeded at His feet!

But these tears of Jesus embraced all time. The earthly Jerusalem which then met His eye, was a type--a miniature picture--of mankind at large; yes, and of many among ourselves who cannot, if they would, refuse to own the truth of the parallel! Has He not loaded each one of us with benefits--filled our cup with unmerited blessings--proclaimed in our ears the great salvation--sent messenger after messenger of rebuke and entreaty--remonstrance and warning? Have His counsels been despised? Have the soul's temple-courts been converted into desecrated shrines--places of unholy traffic, unrighteous barter, the haunts of hollow hypocrisy and base formalism, selfishness and mammon, malice and envy, pride and passion?

As He comes, day by day, to make inquisition--as He sees hundreds living on, in guilty unconsciousness of their sin and danger, despising His warnings, treating His ambassadors with scorn, and His words as idle tales--or, perhaps, as He sees, what we cannot, the final doom impending--the messenger of death at the door, and a long life of guilt and sin beyond the reach of penitence--may we not realize, in symbol, this exalted Son of God looking down from the enthroned heights of the Heavenly Olivet; and as He beholds the metropolis of the human heart despoiled of its glories--a pillaged city, with ramparts broken and temples defiled--by a bold figure of speech as applied to a glorified Being in a tearless world, may it not be said, "And when He came near, He beheld the city, and wept over it"?

2. Another cause of the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem was, her rejection of

present mercies and warnings. When other attempts and remonstrances had failed, God had sent His best gift, saying, "Surely they will reverence my Son." For three years, that Divine Messenger had been knocking at the gates of the impenitent city. He came to His vineyard "seeking fruit." He dug about the vine; He pruned it and dressed it. How unwearied the means employed to arrest the ears of the impenitent! How tender, loving, considerate His dealings with all! He invited the sin-stricken to crouch at His feet. Disease touched the hem of His garment, and was healed. Sorrow had the tears of bereavement dried. He had walked in the midst of their streets; and gathering the weak and weary, the helpless and wretched and desponding around Him, He had uttered the gladdening invitation, irrespective of age or character, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Himself homeless and houseless--subject to every privation, He had traversed the length and breadth of the land, scattering blessings in His path, and pleading for admittance to obdurate hearts. Despite of all indifference, undeterred by ridicule, He had pursued His ministry of kindness. No frown in His countenance spurned the suppliant from His presence. There was no wearying of His patience--no repressing His consuming zeal. The waves of mercy, beaten back by these rocky hearts, only returned afresh in a refluent tide of untiring, unresting love. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He says, in an oration of touching pathos, "how often would I have gathered you!" He stood by her gates, as He is represented standing in the imagery of the Canticles, saying, "Open unto me, my love, my dove, my undefiled--for my head is wet with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night."

But it had been all to no effect. "For my love," (in return for my love,) "they are my adversaries," (Ps. 109:4.) The hour of grace and reprieve is fast passing--the cup of long-deferred wrath is fast filling. Jesus reaches the brow of the hill, and sees, in dread perspective, the consummating act of guilt in His own crucifixion and death--(Oh, if they had looked into the depths of that loving, merciful, unselfish heart, they could not "have crucified the Lord of Glory.")

As He stands on the ridge, the sheep-gate is before Him, leading into the Temple, through which, for hundreds of years, animals had been

conducted for sacrifice. It was soon to open for the great Antitype, taken "by wicked hands," "as a Lamb to the slaughter." As it has been beautifully said, "The Sun of Righteousness lingers a moment on Mount Olivet, as if to respite the doom," before He sets in darkness and blood behind these devoted towers. He seems to say, O city of David! is it yet too late? Mercy, that has long hovered like a guardian angel around you, is now pluming her wings for farewell flight. But still she lingers, as if loath to leave. Still it is "your day," (the day of merciful visitation.) Yes! THIS your day. The day is nearing its close--the cold twilight shadows are falling--the sun is fast setting. Can it be, that you will yet know in this waning day "the things that belong to your peace"? Or, is the curtain to fall, and the knell of irrevocable judgment to be tolled, "but now they are hidden from your eyes!"

Is there any such rejection of present mercies and monitory voices among ourselves? I speak not of the past, with its array of privileges and providential warnings and blessings. That may be a solemn retrospect too; but I speak of present unbelief--present hardness and impenitence of heart. The most solemn period of responsibility to the Jewish people, was when Jesus was in their midst. It was "that generation"--the generation who had rejected Him--who were most guiltily culpable. He could well arraign the whole nation, in the words addressed on another occasion to Philip--'It is not servants, delegates, prophets to whom you have refused to listen; but "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me?"' (John 14:9.)

How many, in our own day, may well have against them a similar indictment! Jesus speaking, sometimes by mercies, these mercies unacknowledged; sometimes by judgment and solemn warning, these warnings rejected. By blessings bestowed and blessings removed--by gourds given and gourds withered--and yet, this pleading, importuning Savior, has in their case, also, to utter the reproach of unrequited love, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me?" I have exhausted every arrow of my quiver--I have spoken by the volleyed lightning, and the heaving earthquake, and "the still small voice"--"but you would have none of my counsel, you despised all my reproof!" 'Sinner,' He seems to say, 'if you are destroyed, it is yourself who are



alone responsible. "You will not come unto me that you might have life."

A third cause of the tears which Jesus wept on the ridge of Olivet, was, the thought of the future temporal retribution that would fall on the Jewish nation.

The details of this we shall reserve for a future chapter. Meanwhile, be it enough to observe, that, as He looked down from these heights on tower and Temple beneath, His omniscient glance discerned, too truly, the eagles of Rome hastening to the scene of ruin; His ear listened to the tread of the hosts mustering for battle; He saw the flames bursting from the gates of the Temple, the Holy and beautiful House laid level with the ground-heap of smouldering ashes! More than this, He beheld the Jewish nation scattered and destroyed. After the Roman ploughshare was driven up the steep of Zion, and her streets given over to the alien and the stranger, He saw thousands on thousands of the unhappy race scattered in every land like wrecks on a desert shore.

Yes! we may imagine the eye of the Great Redeemer, at that moment, carried down succeeding ages, far beyond Olivet and the Kedron-- beholding the Jew--the inhabitant of all lands, the chartered citizen of none--seated by the banks of every stream, hanging his broken harp on the willows; traversing all climates with weary feet and saddened countenance--'a nation without a home, often without a grave.' Nothing, indeed, in that moment of elation and triumph, seemed to forecast so terrible a destiny. The Holy city was then in the zenith of her glory. Herod, in the pride of his magnificence, had lavished Roman wealth and the proceeds of oppressive Jewish taxation, on the embellishment of his capital. Tower upon tower girdled with strength his own royal Palace. The great fort or arsenal of Antonia rose by the side of the Temple, as if the pledge and guardian of inviolable safety. Moreover, who could have predicted, from the loyal shouts of welcome, that the hailed Messiah of today was to be the betrayed of to-morrow, and that these green palm-branches were so soon to lie withered at the foot of an ignominious cross? But He penetrated through the hollow, painted pageantry of the hour. He saw underneath the verdant turf of Olivet, a smothered volcano of fiery passions. Floating up the vista of ages, He listened to a wail of anguish-- the plaint of retributive vengeance--from children's children, immured in

dungeons, or hunted in forests, or tortured in flames. Terrible to that Heart of doating love must have been the anticipation! We know the agony of the mother who sees the child of her idol affections cut down in a moment by plague or pestilence, or, it may be, plucked too late from the waves, and laid a withered, faded flower at her feet. Sadder still, that of the parent who gazes on worse than death--the child, too fondly loved, that has brought dishonor and disgrace on a virtuous name, and dragged gray hairs prematurely to the grave. What parent ever loved his child as Jesus did that nation? From their infancy in Egypt, on to this the time of their regenerate manhood, did He not bear them, "as a man bears his own son that serves him"? If it be mournful to mark the desolating track of invading armies; or to witness the bleeding wounds--the death-throes of freedom, --liberty expiring under tyrant hands--dynasties with a proud record of historic deeds falling "unwept without a crime"--what must have been the deep emotion of Jesus for a country that had sealed its own doom--forged its own fetter--loaded its own cloud of wrath? His exclamation was not, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you, and you could not--it was some iron hand of despotism that crushed you--another Pharaoh or Sennacherib that frustrated my designs, and dragged you an unwilling captive to foreign climates and chains;'--but "'you would not.'" Often did I seek to avert this now inevitable hour. Your past defiant ingratitude and resistance of my pleadings, again and again demanded prompt and instantaneous retribution. The bolts of vengeance were impatient for their volleyed mission; but I stayed them, to see if, peradventure, you would yet repent, and return and live. But it is all in vain. You have exhausted Mercy's time of respite. With reluctant step she now descends the golden steps of her throne, and Justice is preparing to take her place. The arm "strong to save," and willing to be so, must now show itself "strong to smite."

A remark may be here interposed. In all this dealing of Jesus, let us acknowledge at least, if we cannot fully comprehend, the compatibility of God's sovereign purpose with man's free agency. We believe both. If asked to reconcile them, it is impossible. Christ foresaw, with all the certainty and foreknowledge of a divine decree, that Jerusalem would despise the day of her visitation, and remain obdurate and impenitent; and yet the guilt and responsibility of rejected mercy lay with herself. We

never can dare speak of that touching scene in this passage as an occasion of mimic grief--that Christ wept for what He knew was the stern result of an absolute decree, which no tears of His, or no penitence of theirs, could alter or prevent. Theological systems, in their dogmatism, may well learn a lesson of humility--to submit to revealed truths and believe them, though they may often be difficult to weld together. Christ doubtless said what He meant, and meant what He said, when on that memorable day He gazed down from the Mount of Olives on a doomed and guilty city, and, through tears of no semblance of sorrow, exclaimed, "If you, even you, had known in this your day, the things which belong to your peace." "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me!"

Another cause of these tears of Jesus was, the thought of the final and eternal retribution that would be visited on all the adversaries of God.

Temporal retribution on one kingdom and people, could hardly fail to suggest a more saddening train of reflection still. The Jew and his city, were here also--as already observed, and as we find in other sayings and parables of Christ--the type and representatives of the world and of mankind. Our blessed Lord saw a cloud as of a man's hand rising over the earthly Jerusalem; but He saw darker and denser clouds hovering over the horizon of a limitless future. He saw the gates of the earthly city burst open on the assault of the victorious legions of Titus, its walls succumbing before the torch and the catapult; but He saw the gates of a more terrible destruction unfolding--fiercer flames bursting forth on the condemners of His mercy. He saw the earthly Temple, with its Holy of Holies--the consecrated audience-chamber of His own earthly Palace--sacked and pillaged; but what was that to the destruction of a Temple more hallowed still--the Temple of the human soul--that Temple wrecked for eternity--suffering the vengeance of eternal fire? All earthly, finite comparisons, are vain to shadow forth a grief infinite like this.

We have heard of a great sculptor weeping like a child, as he looked on the fragments of his breathing marble--the toil of a lifetime--which the blow of a crude hand had scattered on the ground; we have read of the Alexandrian sages gazing in tears on the smouldering ashes of their colossal Library; the treasures of ages, in a few hapless hours, lost to the world. Here we have, with reverence be it spoken, the Divine Artist

mourning over the ruin and destruction of that which was fashioned after the image of God--archives given over to the flames, wherein are cloistered volumes, whose pages burn and glow with immortality. Yes, the Redeemer, that hour on Olivet, had, suggested to Him the fate of millions on millions unborn who, in every century and climate, would despise alike warning and mercy. His eye, in that lightning glance, may have rested on our age--(who knows but on some guilty sinner among ourselves)--whose persistent rejection of His pleadings may have given a new intensity to the words--"If you, even you, had known, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace!"

There is often the most thrilling eloquence in broken, half-finished sentences. The greatest orator of antiquity, in addressing his Athenian auditors, was often so enthralled and spellbound by emotions he had himself roused, that utterance failed him. He communicated the intensity of his own feelings to others, by constrained, impressive silence. In this respect, there is no more touching portion of Scripture, than the account of this passage--the 'stifled utterance' from the lips of Incarnate Truth.

Observe, the sentence is incomplete. It is abruptly broken in the middle. There is an ellipsis--words which He leaves those who heard Him to supply--as if His tears and profound emotion prevented supplying them Himself. He got the length of saying, "If you had known, even you, in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace..." Here He stops. We can almost picture to ourselves the visions which, during that momentary pause, rose before the eye of the weeping Savior! Perhaps that is another reason of the ellipsis--He hurries through His sentence, as if to suppress fond hopes that were to know no fruition. If it be lawful to paraphrase the words--to fill up that significant blank which He has left to our imagination to complete--it might be thus--'If you,' He seems to say--'if you had known the things which belong to your peace, then what a bright future would have been yours!--if you had, in the day of your visitation, hearkened to Me and to My prophets, how glorious the things which that future would have spoken of you, O city of God! I could think of you, now, as I gaze down upon your walls, as the metropolis of earth; an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations; the focus of the world; the Citadel of truth; the Ark of mercy--whence the dove would issue forth

among the nations carrying the olive-branch of peace. But--vain is the picture. My words falter in the description of these visions of forfeited bliss--for now they are hidden from your eyes!

Were there no other visions of vanished hopes and ruined glory, which rose at that moment, before the eye of Omniscience? From Olivet He overlooked the world. And do not the words come with an dreadful personality--a solemn individual application, "YOU, even, YOU?" Yes, think of Him at this moment, stooping from His throne--yearning with tenderness and pity over those who have no pity on themselves. It is with Heaven now, as with Olivet of old--the palm-branches and Hosannahs with which He is familiar in the midst of "the multitude which no man can number," do not exclude from His heart, thoughts for the ruined and lost--deep and tender concern for those who are still despising His counsel and rejecting His grace.

Do we not hear Him as if thus addressing some such scorner of mercy? 'If you--even you--had known in this your day, the things that belong to your peace. Guilty one! if you had listened to sacred parental counsels--if you had carried into the world the principles instilled in your Christian home--if you had been faithful to your Bible and your bended knees--if you had evaded that haunt of temptation, scorned the impious bribe which tempted you to dishonor, or plunged you into sin--if you had listened to the voices of Providence, or to the faithful teachings of the sanctuary, when the messenger of Heaven reasoned to you of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come--then how blissful your present, how safe, how peaceful, how joyous your future! But you have been a traitor to your holy trust. You have resisted grace--abused privilege--smothered conviction--despised warning. Your heart is settling down to the fatal hardness of a confirmed impenitence; and if death overtakes you as you are, what else can I say regarding the things which belong to your peace but this--Now they are hidden from your eyes?'

Let none deceive themselves. It is a possible thing to do outward homage to the Savior--to be Christian in profession--to attend His sanctuary--to meet Him on the Mount of ordinances and to join in the Hallel and Hosanna--and yet the heart, whose loyalty alone He prizes, may be estranged. There may be but the name to live, while the true vital energies

of the soul have succumbed to spiritual death. He therefore tells us of a crowd, like that on Olivet, who are in future to confront Him on His throne, and who are to plead that once they sang His praise and waved their palm branches and owned Him as King--"Many will say to me at that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you--depart from me, you that work iniquity," (Matt. 7:22, 23.)

"If you--even you had known--in this your day." What day? Each one of us has "A DAY"--"a day of visitation." "This your day" is the PRESENT. It is this hour that is passing over our head--not, "a more convenient season"--not "Tomorrow." It is not-- Let me balance these accounts first-- Let me close my business first--Let me educate my family first--Let me finish this engrossing work in hand first--but, "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And observe, it is but "a day." It is not 'these your days'--but "this your day." The Spirit of God, willing to plead with you today, may be withdrawn tomorrow. The arrow that may pierce today may be powerless tomorrow.

"This day"--it is this day of TIME. Time's day is brief--and it is but one. Let its swift hours pass, and the day is ended. There is no second chance--no 'Try again.' "He that is unjust" must be "unjust still," and, "he that is filthy" must be "filthy still."

And it is YOUR day--weal or woe, for eternity is in your hand. The day is your own, and the guilt will be your own, if you allow that day to close without accepting offered mercy. The journey to which your God calls you may be easily completed in "the day." Woe upon you, if you loiter and linger until the Sun of Righteousness sets, and you are left belated in the blackness of eternal darkness!

These are solemn considerations. But, before we close, be it ours to remember that the Savior's tears are TEARS OF MERCY and encouragement, as well as of warning and judgment. These tears shed on the earthly mountain, are a pledge, that seated on His Eternal Throne in Heaven, He pities the sinner. "He came near to the city." Reader, in various ways at this moment He may be coming "near" to you--by His

word, by afflictions, by solemn providential dispensations. Yes! we ask you to accompany us once more in thought, up these slopes, and if the threatenings of the law fail to move you--if warning, and rebuke, and chastisement make their appeal in vain--yes, will the tears of Jesus--these drops of living fire not melt the icy heart?

And, oh, His tears were the least He gave. He did not come to Olivet, weep over Jerusalem, and then leave the world to its fate; He shed, not His tears only, but His blood! We have seen how His lamentation closes--the emphatic ellipsis, the solemn pause; and then the irrevocable words, "But now they are hidden from your eyes:" With reference to any one of us He has not reached that part of the sentence yet. No; the fact that we are still spared, is a proof that the things which belong to our peace are not hidden from our eyes. He is lengthening out our day of mercy--the sunbeams of grace are still lingering. He is pausing, as He did on the ridge over against Jerusalem, and seems to say, 'If this day, in simple faith, you will receive Me; then, peace is yours--pardon is yours--Heaven is yours.' It is your peace--"the things which belong to your peace." Peace! money cannot purchase it. Intellect cannot reach it. Wisdom cannot bribe it. But He is willing to give it. It is yours and mine, this day, if we only reach forth our hands to take it as 'the gift of God.'

Blessed be His name, the recording angel still stays his flight. The chimes of mercy still float from the Sabbath-bells of Heaven. "Now is the day of salvation." "Turn! turn! why will you die?" Melted by these tears of Olivet, be it ours to take up the palm-branch and the Hosanna, throwing open the long-closed Temple-gates of our alien hearts to Zion's King, saying, "blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!" In the quaint but beautiful and appropriate lines of Jeremy Taylor, let us thus paraphrase the welcome--

"Lord, come away;  
Why do you stay?  
Your road is ready, and your paths made straight,  
With longing expectation wait  
The consecration of Your beauteous feet,  
Ride on triumphantly; behold, we lay  
Our lusts and proud wills in the way.

Hosanna! welcome to our hearts. Lord, here  
You have a temple too, and full as dear  
As that of Zion, and as full of sin—  
Nothing but thieves and robbers dwell therein.  
Enter, and chase them forth, and cleanse the floor;  
Crucify them, that they may never more  
Profane Your holy place,  
Where You have chose to set Your face.  
And then if our stiff tongues shall be  
Mute in the praises of Your Deity,  
The stones out of the Temple wall  
Shall cry aloud, and call,  
'Hosanna!' and Your glorious footsteps greet!"

## **THE BLIGHTED FIG-TREE**

Matthew 21:17-19

Then he returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight. In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, he was hungry, and he noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs on it, but there were only leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" And immediately the fig tree withered up.

Mark 11:12-14, 20-21

The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. He noticed a fig tree a little way off that was in full leaf, so he went over to see if he could find any figs on it. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard him say it.

The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it was withered from the roots. Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Teacher! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

Following the chronological sequence of the Evangelical narrative, an Olivet 'memory' of a different kind, claims our attention in this chapter.



The incident has the one remarkable peculiarity, that it stands alone in the ministry of Christ as a miracle of PUNISHMENT. At other times, as we follow the footsteps of our blessed Lord, and are the spectators of His mighty works, He scatters MERCY on His path. By miracle and parable, by word and deed, He countersigns and endorses His own declaration, "The Son of man came not to destroy, but to save." Here, however, though it be but on an inanimate object in outer nature, we are arrested with a strange, solitary exception.

As He is crossing from Bethany on the Monday of the Passion-week, early in the morning, before the great influx of worshipers at this festive season would throng the Temple, a fig plantation, near to the beaten pathway, attracted His eye. "The time of figs was not yet." As a general rule, it was not yet the fig-season, except perhaps in the earlier and more favoring climate of Jericho and Gennesaret. It was therefore altogether premature and precocious at this period of the year (the end of March) for a fig-tree to be in full foliage, and especially on the comparatively elevated region of the Mount of Olives. While, however, the fig-orchard, now visible, was still destitute of leaves--or, at all events, these were only in embryo--one abnormal and exceptional member of the group is covered with foliage, giving reason to infer that the figs also were ripe and ready for gathering.

You may be aware of the peculiarity in the fig-tree, that the fruit, contrary to the ordinary order of development in the vegetable kingdom, appears before the leaves; so that the spectacle of a tree in full leaf, afforded ground to believe that fruit would be found thereon. Our blessed Lord approaches it, as if He had a right thus to expect, from its leafy appearance, that it should be covered with figs. He finds it to be a mass of pretentious foliage--nothing else; and He utters against it a withering curse. On returning by the same road, that afternoon, to His mountain home, the shades of eventide prevented the disciples noting how literally the blighting word had taken effect. But the next morning, as they are again wending their way to the city, the withered, blasted stem and drooping leaves arrest their attention--"Master," said Peter, "behold, the fig-tree which you cursed has withered away," (Mark 11:21.)

Undoubtedly for this strange exception to the customary tenderness of Christ's miracles, there must be some special reason--a loving Redeemer

punishing, and that, also, not a moral, responsible agent, but a dumb unconscious tree. Some peculiar reason indeed there must have been for the miracle at all. Jesus, we may be well assured, did not work it merely to give farther proof and exhibition of His omnipotence. The withering of a tree would, in itself, be comparatively a small attestation to His power, after the grandeur of Lazarus's resurrection. What, then, meant He? We must go to Himself in the lowly spirit of the disciples, saying, 'Declare unto us the parable and miracle of the fig-tree.'

The preceding day had been an illustrious one. In the week, it corresponded with our Sabbath, and, as we have found, was signaled by what was outwardly the most brilliant Olivet memory, the Triumphal entrance of the Redeemer into Jerusalem. It closed with an act of sovereign power--the cleansing of the Temple, and the dispersion of the traders, who, with their usurious traffic, were desecrating its sacred precincts. The blighting of the fig-tree forms the completion and complement of this series of expressive symbolic actions, relative to the doom of Jerusalem. And mark the order--the gradation rising to a terrible climax. First, The tender tears--the last pleadings of rejected love. Second, The righteous anger at the desecrated Temple courts, and the figurative dispersion of the Jewish people. Finally, and last of all, the impenitent nation, under the type and symbol of a blighted fig-tree, pining and withering away. These together, formed three acted parables--three illustrations in deed, of the dirge He had spoken in words--"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen does gather her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," (Luke 13:34, 35.)

Here, then, is the key to this (in some respects, perplexing and enigmatical) incident, in the closing scenes of the Savior's ministry. That fig-tree is the kingdom of Israel. One thought, next to the great redemption of His Church, seemed, at that time, to occupy the mind of Jesus--it was the nation's downfall and ruin. It drew tears from His eyes. He who wept not for Himself, wept for the despisers of His mercy and patience forbearance. The tears on the brow of Olivet passed into holy indignation and anger at the sight of the Temple sacrilege; and this again,

led these lips, which loved to utter nothing but tenderness, to frame a final, irrevocable, sentence of doom. In order to teach and impress the great lesson, He invests, for the time, that dumb fig-tree with moral qualities--He makes it the expositor of a moral truth.

And observe how specially and singularly applicable the mute symbol was. The Jewish nation stood forth amid its compeers--the empires of the earth--a proud claimant to goodness and righteousness. The other Gentile kingdoms were in darkness and error. These latter had no fruit on their branches; but then, there was this distinction--they made no boastful pretension of having any. They were empty, poverty-stricken, as the Jew himself; no, a deeper blindness sealed their eyes. But, unlike the Jew, they made no vaunting boast of spiritual superiority. They felt that, in moral development, it might figuratively be said of them, "The time of figs was not yet," they were waiting with longing earnestness for the dawning of some better day, which would give life and light to the world. The nation of Israel, on the other hand, sought to stand out in proud, self-confident pre-eminence. It was a fig-tree clothed with leaves. It had its imposing outward religion--its hallowed traditions--its boasted Temple--its mitred priests--its phylacteried Pharisees--its morning and evening sacrifices--its aromas of incense--its prophets' sepulchers--its synagogues, and oratories, and mountain-altars--the land was studded with these outward signs and symbols of religious life.

Yes, when we think of all these, there were "leaves" enough. But beneath this ostentatious foliage, what was there? Pride--formalism--vain glory--selfishness--oppression. "How striking the image of that theocracy of solemn form, proudly displaying its ceremonials of worship, while the very heart of the nation was become dry and dead as sapless wood." (Pressense's Life of Christ.) This ought to have been the confession of that privileged people in the day of their merciful visitation--'We, like that fig-tree on our sacred mountain, have had every fostering natural advantage. In a spiritual sense, ours has been the favoring climate, the congenial sunshine, the rains and dews of heaven. But we feel and acknowledge that we have perverted and abused these sacred influences. We are naked, leafless, fruitless, unproductive cumberers. All true and acceptable righteousness in us is lacking. Our ancestral law, which should have

produced holiness, proclaims our deficiency--utters our condemnation. We participate in the longings of humanity, and of the holiest and best of our nation, for a better righteousness than our own. We feel our need of such a Savior as that of whom our prophets have thus spoken, This is the name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.'

And was not that Savior in their midst? Had not all the ardent aspirations of the sainted fathers and worthies of Israel met and been fulfilled in the person of "God manifest in the flesh?" Yet, in blinded unbelief, they closed their eyes to irresistible attestations of His divine majesty and power. Though disease fled at His touch, and winds and waves were lulled at His bidding, and devils crouched at His word, and death, at His summons, gave up its reluctant prey, yet 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' In defiant pride, the fruitless fig-tree shook its vaunting branches and foliage before the eye of the heart-searching God, and urged its boastful claim to that of which it was utterly devoid. The Incarnate Redeemer approached in divine-human majesty. He unmasked the pretentious hypocrite, and left it with a blighting doom. Like the earth, which, despite of all genial influences, brought forth only briars and thorns, it was 'rejected--near unto cursing, whose end was to be burned.' And as we come at this day, like the disciples of old on Mount Olivet, to gaze on this tree once planted by God's right hand, what do we see? It is a nation scattered and stripped. The Jewish race, for eighteen hundred years, like withered leaves--carrying the tidings of their curse to the kingdoms of their dispersion.

We can understand, then, the primary meaning and intention of the Savior in this strange exceptional act among His miracles of mercy--mutilating and destroying a work of His own hands--it was, that that blighted tree of the fig-forest might take up a parable to the house of Israel. Nothing could be more impressive. There, on one of the heights or undulations of that holy Mount, like the solitary calcined pillar which once overlooked the Valley of Siddim--stood a withered thing, all the more conspicuous by contrast with the rich carpet of spring-flowers and verdure which doubtless then, as now, spread around; on its scarred stem the doom written, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself."

But we have not exhausted the divine purpose and meaning in this

symbolic action. That stern deed was a prophecy and sermon to EVERY AGE--a solemn sermon preached for all time, alike for the Church collectively and for believers individually. The Savior's dooming sentence on the fig-tree, is a searching word to all formalists--boasting hypocrites--who stand forth before the world in pretentious leaves, but who are utterly devoid of that which the great Seeker alone values--fruit to His glory.

CHURCHES are involved in that doom. Since the introduction of Christianity, down to our own days, have there not been too many examples of leaf-covered, but fruitless fig-trees--churches with imposing worldly splendor; decorated aisles--splendid liturgies--venerable relics--dim religious light--gorgeous festivals--priestly and hierarchal orders boasting apostolic succession and sacramental efficacy--and yet, within all this pomp of show, this imposing ecclesiastical organization--an utter dearth and destitution of spiritual energy and life? What have all such been, and proved? deceptive leaves--outer foliage, screening and masking utter barrenness, the outward work of man attempted to be put in the place of the inner work of God--the pomp of ritual and sensuousness of ritual, having the precedence over repentance and faith--the external of the casket looked to, more than the enclosed jewel of holiness.

Is it not this ostentatious outward profession (clustering foliage without corresponding fruit) which is delineated by an inspired pen, as the attribute of the Church in its latter day of lukewarmness and apostasy? Hear the words of the apostle, "But mark this--there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good," and then, mark how the mournful catalogue is summed up--it is by telling us, that this accursed, cumbering tree--not one branch of which has a redeeming cluster of fruit--is nevertheless clothed with pretentious leaves; for it is added, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Nor does the searching lesson terminate here. The doom of the withered fig-tree has a personal application to individual professors. Who has not seen the living counterpart in the ostentatious Christian, the flaming

orthodoxy of whose creed is sadly belied by the daily life--by the manifestation of selfishness, peevishness, fretfulness, pride, frivolity, discontent, uncharitableness, censoriousness--no inward crucifixion of sin, no molding of the heart in conformity with the will of God? These are the poor, withered, scarred stems, which the leaves of profession overlap and conceal.

How Christ again and again, by word and deed, shows how He hates all facade, pretense, display, unreality. He ever dealt with tenderness to the very chief of sinners. He never spurned true penitence, however great the guilt, from His feet. But with what burning invective does He hurl His denunciations against Pharisees, "HYPOCRITES!" Fruitless professor, sad and mournful indeed is your state. There is more hope for the open sinner than for you. Yours is the mimic life of the dumb insensate mummy in the Egyptian sarcophagus. It is the hectic flush in the maiden's cheek--the appearance of loveliness, the deceitful sign of beauty--but, in reality, the ominous symbol of inner waste and decay and death. The blight of God's curse is upon you. "How soon is the fig-tree withered away!"

The great practical deduction from this solemn passage, may be expressed in the words which the old Preacher of the desert addressed to the thronging crowds around him--"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees--therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." This whole passage, indeed, seems to bring out "the goodness and severity" of Jesus. His goodness and tenderness towards all--but that goodness when insulted, injured, despised--passing into needful severity and doom!

We may mark, also, in these chapters, the same gradation in the case of individuals, we have already noted with reference to the Jewish nation collectively. First, There are the tears of divine human emotion; the unutterable sorrow over His rejected overtures of love, as the Redeemer still strives and pleads with the impenitent, saying, "How shall I give you up?" The next step, is when He enters the soul-temple, and sees it degraded and desecrated with works of darkness and sin--that soul, with its Godlike chambers converted into a robber-haunt of Satan, a den of thieves. Then comes the sad climax of all. The soul He has loved, wept

over, borne with, entreated, becomes a doomed, blighted, withered thing, a dreadful monument of His righteous judgment and avenging wrath!

In these different ways He may be dealing with those whose eyes trace these pages. With some, it may be, in the way of tears and tenderness. Seated on the brow of the Heavenly mount, He may be bending over you in pitying love, and addressing you in words of affectionate admonition. In the case of others, He may be using sterner means, He may be entering the Temple with the whip of small cords, "driving," with affliction's scourge, these robber spoilers from what He would still reclaim and purify for Himself, saying, "Except you repent you shall all likewise perish." In the case of others (may there be none such) it is the last, sad, utterance of all. Warning, and admonition, and forbearance, and patience, are terminated. The tears have wept themselves away; compassion has exhausted its treasures; and the thunder-cloud rises in its stead. He must (dreadful alternative!) curse those who will not receive His blessing--"Henceforth let no fruit grow upon you forever." Oh what a terrible state is this, into which the doomed soul then passes! The tree--the moral, thinking, living agent, is dead. Yes, living on, a conscious existence, and yet dead while he lives!

There are two ways by which God deals with incorrigible sinners, corresponding to the two ways He dealt with the two fig-trees of the Gospels. Both were cumberers. Both were doomed. But by different methods was their doom consummated. The one was 'cut down.' After a three years' patient bearing with it, (continuing to resist all efforts to make it fruitful,) the insulted Husbandman clears the grass around the stem; the axe descends; it lies prone on the ground, stripped, bared, plucked up by the roots; the place which once knew it knows it no more!

The dealing with the other is different. It still keeps its place in the plantation. But it is a naked, lonely, blighted stem, bearing upon it the curse of permanent unfruitfulness. It needs not a judgment to come. It is judged, 'condemned already'--"I the Lord have dried up the green tree," (Ezek. 17:24.) The dreadful doom is consummated in silence. There is no audible voice to record its fulfillment; no avenging angel descends to pour his vial on the stem of the fig-tree; no horde of devouring locusts to strip its leaves; no tempest to wrestle with its branches. Unlike the symbolical

vine of Egypt, no boar out of the wood desolates it, no wild beast of the field devours it. God simply withdraws the agencies which have been so long repelled and resisted--the moistening rains and the reviving sunshine, which, in the case of others, have quickened life and fruitfulness.

Like Gilboa, on whose arid top, amid its sisterhood of mountains, the refreshing dew seems, to this day, to fall in vain--the barren tree stands in its life of death, given up by God--"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone"--"Let no fruit henceforth grow upon you forever!" Yes! I repeat, dreadful indeed such a case as this. Abandoned! Like that picture of the abandoned vessel, so truthfully delineated by the pencil of a great modern painter, a hulk on the wide sea, abandoned to its fate, the sport of winds and waves and ruffian elements, an unwieldy log on the great waters, without mast, or sail, or helm, or crew--drifting, drifting onwards along the ocean, amid the bleak howling winds and wastes of a dark and cheerless eternity!

'Forever,' 'irreversible,' did I say? No, not so! God speaks of those who are 'near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' "But the end is not yet"--while there is life there is hope. In the middle acted parable to which we have adverted, (the driving from the Temple,) there is an incident of blessed significance introduced. Jesus healed the diseased ones--"And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them," (Matt. 21:14.) It was an evidence interjected in the midst of righteous retribution, that 'in wrath He remembers mercy;' that even now, that heart of Divine power and human love is a hoarded garner of pity and compassion, open to all who will avail themselves of its treasures.

We dare never, to one lost soul on this side the grave, shut the door of pardon. "Forever" is the fearful word for the dungeons of despair. Mercy, pardon, forgiveness, are still words for the living. There is a summer-time of grace ever near, even in the dreariest winter of spiritual desolation. God is giving us a reprieve. Every new day is such--another chance of salvation, another offer of mercy, before the knell of the soul be rung forever! Prisoners--but "Prisoners of hope."

Yes, go stand by that stripped, speechless, silent fig-tree, on the crest of



Olivet, and while you behold there a dreadful witness to the Redeemer's wrath, look at the same time at that sister fig-tree to which He pointed, at an earlier date of His ministry, in the regions of Galilee. He came to it, as He comes to each one of us, expecting "fruit;" "I looked that it should bring forth fruit." There was none. Is it doomed at once?--No; an all-prevailing Intercessor pleads for one other year of respite and mercy--one other year to fertilize and dig about its roots, one other blessed chance of hope and forgiveness; and then, if there be no fruit, "after that," to cut it down.

'After that'--who can tell how brief the duration? 'After that'--it may be a measured, meted out, perhaps nearly-exhausted season, for some one of us! Reader, self-convicted and self-condemned, are you led in prayerful penitence to exclaim--'Lord, I am that fig-tree; the message of this 'memory' is for me. That one year of gracious respite and reprieve, oh let me improve it! There may be but some weeks of it, some days of it, yet to run. A few more swings of the pendulum, and the time so graciously included in "after that," will have fled forever, beyond the possibility of recall. Oh spare me that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more!'

And if we would add one word more, it is a closing gospel thought, suggested by the fig foliage of this parable-miracle. It was with the pretentious leaves of this same tree, that Adam and Eve, in Paradise, sought to cover their nakedness. God stripped away the leafy garments, and provided them instead, with the hides--the skins of the animals slain on the sacrificial altar. That was the earliest of the Bible's acted parables. It was a Gospel Parable uttered in Eden, but one full of gracious comfort to the Church in every age. The fig-tree clothing of self-righteousness is utterly unavailing; the Lord who walks amid the trees of the garden strips it away--it cannot abide His righteous glance, His avenging scrutiny. But He has a blessed substitute at hand. He has woven, into a divine texture, the leaves of the Tree of life for the healing of the nations. "I will bring near," says He, "my righteousness"--the covering, the glorious vesture provided by the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. He reveals "the righteousness of Christ, which is unto all and upon all those who believe." Oh! dead, barren fig-tree, lift up your drooping withered

leaves and live. "For whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life!"

## **PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS**

Matthew 25:1-13

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' " 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Jesus is still seated on 'the Mount,' "over against the Temple," surrounded by the chosen few, to whom He had just been unfolding, in prophetic discourse, the deeper mysteries of the kingdom. He proceeds, through His favorite medium of parable, to graft on these remarkable predictions of His 'coming,' farther teachings on the same transcendent topics.

Two of these new memories of Olivet, will in this, and the following chapter, engage our thoughts.

The evening shadows have fallen over Jerusalem--the sun has set behind the mountains of Bethel--the gates are shut; and the sound of the footfall of the passers-by is diminishing in the darkened streets. While the curtain of night has thus been drawn around other homes of the city, one of these is illuminated for a festive occasion. Lights are seen gleaming through the latticed windows, and an expectant crowd indicates that a marriage procession is momentarily expected. The Jewish nuptials, as in many parts of the East to this day, were celebrated in the evening--generally after sunset. In accordance too with Hebrew usage, the Bridegroom, with his own special friends, has gone to fetch home his affianced bride. By torchlight--amid the flare of flambeaux--he will conduct her along these streets from her father's house to his own, where a banquet is prepared for the invited guests. Near to the Bride's home, lingering not far from the doorway, are seen ten young women in white festal attire. The number ten was sacred among the Jews. Ten bridesmaids was the usual number at the marriage festivities--ten people was the number which constituted "a family" for the celebration of the Passover feast--ten were required before a synagogue could be built. Each of these bridal attendants has a lamp in her hand, and a small flagon or vessel of oil is slung at her side. Their lamps are lit. They have been waiting--moment after moment, hour after hour, for the coming of the Bridegroom--their eyes wistfully turned towards the house where he has gone, eager to catch the first gleam of light issuing from the vestibule betokening his approach.

Some unforeseen reason has occasioned delay. Wearied with excitement and the fatigue of the long and unexpected vigil, these vestal watchers have, one after another, dropped asleep, their lamps left to burn as they may. Several hours have passed. At last, midnight arrives; and in that silent season the sleepers are startled with the cry from the lips of some herald or messenger, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" All at once, the sealed eyes are opened--drowsiness and slumber are exchanged for life and activity. The ten virgins have sprung to their feet; the procession which they have been waiting to join, is close at hand, with its waving torches and loud joyous music, "the voice of the Bridegroom, and the voice of the Bride," (Jer. 7:34.)

The Bridegroom is walking by the carriage, in which, under silken canopy, is seated his Bride veiled in white, decked with ornaments flashing in the torchlight--bracelets upon her hands and a chain on her neck--a jewel on her forehead, ear-rings in her ears, and a beautiful wreath or garland upon her head, (Ezek 16:11, 12.) Instinctively, the maiden watchers seize their lamps and commence to trim them. Five of these watchers have been wise and provident. They have their flagons filled with oil, anticipating the contingency of delay in the return of the Bridegroom. From these flagons their lamps are refilled and replenished, and the decaying flame burns with renewed luster. The other five have not been thus foreseeing. They had made no provision for such an emergency as postponement until the midnight-watch. When they awoke refreshed from slumber, it was only to discover, when too late, that their lamps had either gone out or were fast expiring; and when they looked to their oil-flagons, with dismay they made the discovery that they were empty and unreplenished.

What was to be done? Their first impulse was to make application to their more fortunate companions--"Give us of your oil." But these latter had no extra supply. To wise forethought, they had added wise economy. They had only enough for their own use; they had made no provision to supplement a neighbor's shortcomings. One alternative only remained--to go to the adjoining street to the shop or store of the oil-seller; and though the likelihood would be, at that untimely hour, that his store was closed and he himself in bed, it was their one chance, and they risked it. Meanwhile, the procession has come up; it is joined by the five wise with their re-trimmed lamps. They proceed to the home of the Bridegroom. Soon the darkness is left behind--the bridal train has entered within--the door is shut.

By and by, quick footsteps are heard approaching. It is the five unwise watchers, hastening also to the banquet-hall. They knock; but an unexpected negative is returned. Bitter are their reproaches, when they see the lights of festive joy gleaming through the windows, and hear the sound of minstrel music, while they themselves are left standing in the vacant street amid the blackness of night.

Such is the outer framework of the spiritual picture contained in this

most impressive 'Olivet memory.' Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom, repeats in parabolic form, the same great truth He had recently prophetically proclaimed on the Mount, that He is coming a second time, to conduct His affianced Bride in triumph to His Heavenly Home--that Bride constituting the entire Church in every age of the world, and which He has betrothed to Himself forever. The Church on earth--the visible Church, composed of wise and foolish, is symbolized by the ten virgins who are represented--some prepared, others not prepared--some ready, others unready, to follow the glorious procession into the eternal banqueting hall.

Without entering minutely into the interpretation of the Parable, or straining unnecessarily the application of its several parts, let us gather from it a few practical truths; starting with the great lesson which it would seem again to be the special design of the Divine Speaker, as in the discourse which preceded it, to inculcate-- that is, the necessity of WATCHFULNESS in the prospect of His coming.

There is one utterance, indeed, in the Parable, which seems at first sight rather to neutralize the power and efficacy of this lesson--the clause where the Bridegroom is spoken of as "tarrying"--"while the Bridegroom tarried." This was doubtless intended by Jesus, to be a word of guidance as well as comfort to His Church in the long ages that were to intervene before His second advent. The Christians of the early centuries--indeed of the apostolic age, as we have recently had occasion to observe--had indulged in erroneous expectations as to the imminence of His coming. He did nothing expressly to extinguish the hope, or to weaken the motive to holiness of heart and life therein supplied. He knew how salutary the expectation, thus habitually and solemnly cherished, would prove. But He here, by parable, drops the significant hint, which we now can understand and appreciate, that the Church need not be surprised though centuries should elapse before the advent hour strikes--that she must not despond at the long tarrying of the chariot-wheels of this true Sisera, or utter the despairing complaint as she looks vainly through the lattice, "Why is His chariot so long in coming--why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

In no respect, however, was this uncertainty--or this probable

postponement of His Advent, to diminish the need of habitual watchfulness--leading to any relaxation of vigilance in respect to the replenishing of the oil-flagons or the trimming of the lamps. "Watch therefore," says He, "for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man comes," (ver. 13.) He renews the prophetic warning given in the preceding chapter, that it will be "at midnight"--the time He is least looked for--the cry will be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes."

How striking and impressive is this frequent reiteration of the same truth from the lips of the Son of God! If we had some very special injunction often-times repeated by the lips of a beloved earthly friend--if there were some one utterance more than another associated with the last days or hours of a revered parent, with what hallowed fondness would we cling to it and cherish it--how it would ring its echoes in our ear, and stir to its depths our heart of hearts! What friend had we ever had like Him, who has so often and so solemnly said to us, "Watch therefore--for you know not when the master of the house comes, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning--lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" (Mark 13:35-37.)

A special warning word in this Parable, is surely addressed to the ungodly. Observe, we have before set forth, in strong and impressive coloring, the eternal detriment and loss resulting, not to the impious and profane, but to unwise and unwatchful professors; those who had a fair exterior--who were attired in the same festal dress as the wise virgins--who had the same lamps in their hands--who had gone forth professedly to meet Christ--who called Him "Lord, Lord;" and yet, with all this apparent resemblance and identity, who were disowned at last by the Divine Bridegroom.

In the case of the foolish virgins moreover, it was disownment at a season when, above all others, we would have naturally looked for the manifestation of mercy, if this had been compatible with the principles of rectitude and justice. The Bridegroom had come to fetch home his Bride. It was "the day of espousals, the day of the gladness of his heart." On earth, and in the case of earthly kings, it is the bridal or coronation day which is the day of reprieve and amnesty--when the prison-doors are

thrown open, and liberal things are devised and done. But observe, when these importuning virgins are repulsed with the withering words, "I know you not," it is at the very hour when the Heavenly Bridegroom and enthroned King would be expected to be thus lavish in his benefactions--when, joyous Himself, every other thought would be excluded from His heart but kindness for others--when the joy, deepest in the great Center, might be expected to send its concentric waves out to the very circumference of being, setting even the lost and stranded vessel floating on its waters.

Yet, even at this time, when if Mercy could stretch forth her golden scepter, it would be done--come and hear the solemn assertion--"and the door was shut!" What, then, will be the doom of the obdurate sinner, the openly profane, the stout-hearted scorner of Divine love? "If these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

You who are now all apathetic and unconcerned, the day is coming when you will be startled from this atheist dream, and when you will be driven to entertain those momentous questions you are at present evading and professing to despise. "Fearfulness shall surprise the hypocrites." "Then ALL arose and trimmed their lamps."

Blessed be God, the Bridegroom tarries.--"While he tarried!" What comfort is in these words, for those who have for the first time woke up to a sense of their guilt and danger. He still tarries! The wickedness of the world, rising every day before His throne, might well quicken His advent-steps to consume it with the breath of His mouth, and destroy it with the brightness of His coming. But see His forbearance--He tarries! For all this His anger is turned away, and His hand of patience and mercy is stretched out still--He is not willing that any should perish. He tarries! but presume not on His forbearance. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry!"

I repeat the remark we had occasion to make in connection with the same subject in the preceding chapter--remember, if the advent of the Lord be itself distant--though ages should elapse before the final trumpet be heard, there is another advent that cannot, with any of us, be very far off.

As it has been well observed, "There is a relative nearness of all of us to the time of Christ's second coming in judgment. There is an absolute nearness of all of us to Christ's second coming at death." It matters not whether it be the archangel's trumpet or our own funeral bell--either will, to us, really sound the same summons, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes."

Be not among the presumptuous number who are lulling themselves into a yet deeper sleep by the cry, "My Lord delays His coming. Death may come to other doors, but not to mine. No furrow is on my cheek, no dimness in my eye. Other gnarled trees in the forest may tremble at the sound of the woodman's axe, or succumb to the winter storm; but my roots are moored firm and fast; I am strong as an oak of Bashan. Others may do well to prepare for the midnight cry, by trimming their lamps and replenishing their empty vessels; but there is no such urgency in my case. I have time enough before I die."

Another hour, eternity may be at the door, the Bridegroom at hand, the gates of mercy closed forever! You may affect indifference to the concerns of your souls now, but it will be a dreadful reality then. You may mock at prayer now, but it will be, with no pretended anxiety, that the cry will ascend from your lips then, "Lord, Lord, open!" Yes, all will be in earnest then, when a gloomier than Hezekiah's messenger will come with the startling mandate, "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live."

That old man grown gray in the SERVICE OF SIN--the lamp of salvation left untrimmed for a whole existence--will be in earnest then. That selfish worldling, whose life was a fevered scramble in the race for riches, will be in earnest about the true riches then. That votary of pleasure, who bartered all that was great, and, lovely, and generous, and good, for the flippant superficial gaieties of a vain world, will be in earnest then. Oh, neglectful one, prepare to meet your God! Rouse yourself from your guilty lethargy; go in the gladdening sunlight, when the oil is not sold but gifted, when the flagon may be filled "without money and without price."

"Give us of your oil" is the frantic cry of many a man on his DEATH-BED--the unsuccoured wail and appeal of desperation to the anguished relatives standing around. But another Bible saying has, at that solemn



hour, a new and dreadful truthfulness imparted to it--"None of them can by any means redeem his brother," (Ps. 49:7.)

This parable, indeed, forms another of the reiterated calls of Christ, which we have had again and again to note in these Olivet memories, to beware of forfeiting present opportunities--leaving the concerns of the soul to hinge on the risk of a peradventure; toiling on, the livelong day, at the world's mill, making sure of the world's promised "penny" to its fagging laborers--but oh, at what a peril and cost of bankruptcy has that penny been earned! The world has been true to its promised wages; the stipulated recompense is paid--but at what a sacrifice of eternal peace and happiness! Jeopardize not your safety. It is a solemn thought surely to all, that every new week is bringing you nearer the midnight summons, "Go out to meet Him!" yes, and if unready, to find no place in the festal procession and festal hall--to discover the closed door and the cheerless repulse! "Go" not only today, but "go and buy for yourselves." You cannot get from a brother or sister. There are no works of supererogation--"There is not enough for us and for you." "Why do they not cry to the Bridegroom," says Luther, "why do they run to men for oil?" But there is enough and to spare in that inexhaustible store garnered in Jesus. "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

If there be a special word of warning to the sinner, there is a word, alike of exhortation and comfort to the GODLY--Christ's true people. Be waiting. This is the bridal attitude. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and you yourselves like unto men that wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding; that when he comes and knocks, they may open unto him immediately," (Luke 12:35, 36.)

An apostle breathes the prayer, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him." No sooner were the Thessalonians brought under the regenerating power of divine grace, so as to "serve the living and true God," than it was further said of them, that they "waited for his Son from heaven," (1Thess. 1:10.) Beware of anything and everything that would defraud you of your full festal joy, and mar the prospect of that "blessed hope."

Be sober, be vigilant; watch the first dimming of your lamps, the first shortcomings in prayer, the first symptoms of spiritual slumber, any defection and declension from your first love. Beware of resting content with the mere spasmodic religion of feeling and emotional impulse--a fitful intermittent flame--"He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

For this purpose, and above all, see to your store of oil. It was this which made the difference between the virgins of the parable. Oil is the Scripture symbol and emblem of the Holy Spirit. The wise virgins--the waiting ones, had their faith and love and patience fed and nourished by the indwelling and anointing of the Spirit of God. He is one of the two Olive-trees which distilled the golden oil into Zechariah's typical reservoir, (Zech. 4:12.) By His gracious agency, the lamp is kept from flickering, faith from decaying, and believers are made to "shine as lights in the world."

Readiness to meet the Lord, is not the gathering up of the wrecks of 'a worn and withered love' at the last--not the attempt to buy oil and to furbish the lamp, when the cry of the Bridegroom is heard, and the bridal procession is on its way to the festive hall. Life is the true preparation for His coming. Indeed, in this view, we are partial to the interpretation given by some of the older divines to the sleep of the wise virgins. We may take, at all events, the alternative meaning, that it may have been intended, not to indicate a participation in the drowsiness and sloth of the foolish, but rather the calm sleep of the mind at peace with God--the soul soothed to tranquil repose, under the sublime consciousness that torch and flagon were all ready--the waiting, prepared Christian, having nothing to do but to die, and to wake up in glory everlasting. "So gives He his beloved SLEEP;" or as we observe it beautifully expressed regarding the recent death of an eminent Eastern missionary, "Wearied in his toil, he lay down to rest, and the angels came and bore him away."

Happy those soldiers of the cross, who, feeling that they are all ready to meet the last enemy, can lay themselves down by the camp fire, and wait tranquilly the blast of the warning trumpet, or the voice of the sentinel summoning to the brief closing struggle. Happy they who are thus ready--

thus ready, also, to meet their Lord in the midst of earth's employments--ready, at any moment, to doff the soiled garments of a workday world, to be arrayed in wedding attire--the hand begrimed with earthly toil, ready, at any moment, to take the palm--the voice uplifted amid earth's busy industries, ready, at any moment, to take up "the new song."

Yes, to be truly prepared, does not imply that you be, at the hour of the advent cry, busied in direct acts of religiousness--called to meet God, as we have known some to be, in the very attitude of prayer, beckoned from their knees to the Bridegroom's presence--prayer suddenly changed into praise--one instant engaged in noble service for their Savior on earth, the next, translated among ministering seraphim! Work, secular work, must, in the case of God's people, be mingled with worship. The Christian may receive the final call, as we have already seen, when grinding at the mill, or plying the shuttle, or serving at the counter, or busied in the mart; or, like Hedley Vicars, when engaged in the roar of battle. Many (indeed most) are arrested by the summons of death amid the commonplace drudgeries of the world, and not a few, in the twinkling of an eye, translated to the consecrated activities of the glorified.

These five wise virgins, though the festal procession found them asleep, were nevertheless, 'ready'--their ordinary duties and business had not allowed them to neglect the bridal lamp, and the oil to trim it. Of each one of these it might be said, as of their sister at Bethany, when the words were addressed to her, "The Master has come, and calls for you"--"as soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came unto Him." The readiness of a Christian to meet his Lord, is not the readiness mechanically attained by cloistered seclusion, 'bidding his work and his neighbor farewell,' but holiness of heart and consecration of the will and the affections to Christ. We repeat, this is the perfection of the saintly life--to have the lamp and the vessel so replenished beforehand, that death can never overtake too soon, or too suddenly. Sad only is the case of those, who have, for the first time, to seek a living Savior in a dying hour--to go to the oil-vender in the blackness of the night of death, when the store is locked up, the bridal procession has reached the festive hall, and the door is shut.

Church of the living God! if thus ready, if thus "waiting for HIM," how

glorious, how gladdening your prospects! In what an endearing attitude is He here brought before you as your heavenly Bridegroom! If even the Baptist, when that bright nuptial and coronation hour was yet in a far distant future--when the day was one of "darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains"--if even he 'rejoiced greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice,'--if the children of the bride-chamber, amid fasting and weeping, and the surroundings of humiliation and sorrow, had, in that lowly and despised Jesus of Nazareth, their "joy fulfilled"--what will be the joy of that bridal day, when the cry will ascend from a triumphant Church, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready!"--when the days of sadness and tears are ended forever, and when "with gladness and rejoicing she shall be brought, and she shall enter into the king's palace"?

The door of that banquet-hall, the door of your Father's house, will shut you in, and that forever, from the night of a dark world--from all temptation, all sin, all sorrow. No vacant seat, no absent guest, will be found there. What is life's best banquet often, but a scene of vanished mirth; the flowers which adorned the festive hall withered--gaps found in the home circle; marred friendships; saddened memories coming forth like the writing of old, of a man's hand on the wall? The brightest nuptial procession on earth, must have, sooner or later, the inevitable sequel of widowhood; the weeds must, sooner or later, succeed the wreath of white blossom; the funeral dirge drown the festive strain.

Not so these espousals of the heavenly Bridegroom. These are ties which know no dissolution--"I will betroth you unto me forever." No shadow will ever darken that heavenly feast--no funeral dirge ever interrupt the music. "Oh what a moment will that be," said a faithful watcher, who has now felt the reality of his words, "when the lamp of faith will be suddenly extinguished, not amid the darkness of eternal night, but amid the splendors of everlasting day!"

And, better than all, it will be to enjoy eternal fellowship with Jesus! At earth's most hallowed seasons of spiritual communion, such fellowship is fitful, intermittent, transient--the heavenly Bridegroom is seen "behind the lattice," or like "a stranger in the land, a wayfaring man that turns

aside to tarry for a night;" but a glorious element in the bliss of the triumphant Church is thus specified in the parable--"those who were ready went in with Him to the marriage." "With HIM." It is the presence of Christ which is to constitute the chief bliss in that eternal festival. The bridal dress, the music, the decorations, the provisions of the banqueting hall are not mentioned. They are to be 'with Him;' and that is the joy of their joy, "Enter into the joy of your Lord;" "As the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." "Blessed are those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb!"

"The watchers on the mountains  
Proclaim the Bridegroom near;  
Go meet Him as He cometh,  
With hallelujahs clear.  
The marriage feast is waiting,  
The gates wide open stand;  
Up! up! you heirs of glory,  
The Bridegroom is at hand!"

## **Parable of the Talents**

Matthew 25:14-23

For the kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled

accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Jesus is still on the brow of Olivet. It is 'toward evening, and the day is far spent,' when He utters the parable which is now to claim our attention--the last of the many spoken in the course of His public teaching. There was no single day, perhaps, in His previous ministry, into which so much was compressed as the present. Early in the morning, He had crossed the Mount to the courts of the Temple, there to encounter a succession of captious discussions--"the strife of tongues," to this had been added the delivery of the momentous prophetic discourse, with its accompanying exhortations, to His own disciples. As the Son of Man, "partaker of the human frame," He could not fail to be wearied alike in body and in spirit--and as the twilight was deepening around Him, (with Gethsemane in view--the anticipation of a gloomier, darker night at hand)--the feelings expressed on another occasion, could alone have led Him to task exhausted nature by prolonging these themes of prediction and warning, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night comes wherein no man can work." For the last time previous to His Passion, He was returning to Bethany. Before He retraces that path, His eyes will have closed in death--the event, waited for by all time, will have been consummated--the redemption of the world completed.

Most of our recent commentators have correctly seized on the special distinctive lesson of this parable, and its relation to that of the Ten Virgins, which immediately precedes it. The great duty inculcated by the latter, is vigilant waiting for the coming of the Lord. The lesson of the present is the counterpart and complementary duty, of vigilant working in the prospect of that solemn event. It is indeed the union and

combination of the two, which constitutes the ideal of the Christian character, 'the perfect man in Christ.'

Not all waiting or contemplation--not a life of quiet, prayerful meditative abstraction--the mere subjective of religion; nor yet all outward bustle and busy excitement, to the neglect of the cultivation of personal piety--but the happy incorporation and blending of both, 'not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,'--the lamps of the soul trimmed--the oil of grace filling the flagons--every precaution used to prevent spiritual declension and "that day overtaking as a thief." At the same time, the earnest practical exemplification of the active virtues. In one word, to carry out and illustrate that simplest but most comprehensive definition of the Christian life and spirit--the being good and the doing good.

The sequence of the two parables is, in this respect, also, well worth noting. The subjective must precede the objective--waiting before working--the heart and affections must be right before God, before there can be any honest or acceptable outward activities. What Paul said to Timothy, may be addressed to every member of the Church, "Take heed to yourself, and to the doctrine." 'Yourself' first, then to the ministry. Yourself first--the trimming of the inner lamp--habitual readiness to obey the Bridegroom's call--then, the diligent prosecution of the activities of the Christian life. God can never accept the most splendid services, unless they be first consecrated by the surrender of the soul. Unless the root be holy, there can be no sound, no possible fruit. The great Apostle, in commending his Corinthian converts for their good deeds and Christian liberality, gives the secret of it in the emphatic words, "They first gave their own selves to the Lord."

The incidents and framework of the parable require no explanation. The Lord Jesus is Himself the Master, traveling to the far country, who, before leaving, summons his servants into his presence, entrusting them with his household property and the investment of his capital; and while the main or general lesson is an exhortation to diligence or activity, we shall find there is also a special truth interweaved and inculcated-- that is, that the responsibility of each Christian is exactly commensurate with the amount of gifts, or graces, or talents received in trust from his absent

Lord. All are to be workers; but on that worker rests the heaviest obligation whose means and opportunities and abilities are greatest. The Divine Redeemer had uttered, more than once, in the course of that memorable day, the midnight call. He enforces it by different, though certainly not conflicting considerations, in these twin parables; which, moreover, to complete the sequence, are appropriately followed by the magnificent representation of the general Judgment--a fit conclusion for these closing unrivaled utterances. There the Shepherd-Judge illustrates and enforces, by the most sublime of all His descriptions, the great principle which is to regulate the proceedings of the last assize, "Justified by faith, judged by works."

But, not to anticipate, let a few thoughts be offered, on these two points--the day of TRUST, and the day of RECKONING.

I. The day of TRUST. This heavenly Master, in His contemplated absence, allocates a sum of money to each of His servants, "Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his ability, and immediately took his journey."

The first remark which presents itself is--that to all of us are committed some peculiar gifts or talents. There is not the professing member of the Church of Christ who is not the possessor of some such trust, for which he is responsible to the almighty Donor, and which may be sanctified for the Master's use. A writer has noted, that the word "talented" has, with us, been diverted from its original meaning--it has come to be applied exclusively to a favored class--those peering above their fellows in superior genius and mental endowments. Not so are the "talented" of this parable. They are God's whole family of responsible moral agents--from the lowliest and most obscure, to those in conspicuous positions in the Church and in the world.

All, in a greater or less degree, are invested with the goods of heaven, either natural, moral, or spiritual; from the trust committed to the FEW--the talents of wealth, station, influence, intellect--to the talents belonging to the MANY--time, reason, unimpaired intellect, kindly sympathies and affections, the blessings of civil and religious liberty, and the like.



Oh, never make light of the smallest gift; never despise or repudiate the smallest moral, or intellectual, or spiritual resources. Has not many a man in our great mercantile communities, by diligent trading, not on pounds, but on mites--not on pounds, but on pence and farthings, by God's blessing on unwearied diligence and successful investment, placed himself in opulence and splendor? And shall we not make light of small natural advantages, and yet trifle with our moral responsibilities--despise Heaven's "day of small things?"

Observe next--The varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. The master of the parable gave his servants "every man according to his ability." God, in the dispensing of these sacred trusts, does not act capriciously; He distributes the talents according to the known powers and capacities of His servants--"to every man his work." He gives equitably, and He expects a corresponding return. Some, from peculiar outward circumstances--from their position in the Church and the world--will be able to invest a large capital, and draw in a large return--these are the five talented servants. Others move in a humbler and less influential sphere--they have only two talents, and from them, as the result of trading, their Lord expects no more. In either case, they have done their duty up to the measure of their responsibility; the amount entrusted to them has been doubled; and their fidelity being thus tested and proved, their Master is satisfied.

The Church of Christ is made up of "vessels of large and small quantity;" but the Lord does not unreasonably expect the smaller vessel to hold the contents of the large one. The Church is a garden adorned with trees and plants and flowers; but the Lord does not expect the hyssop to assume the dimensions of the cedar, nor the olive tree to attain the height of the stately palm, nor the myrtle to be laden with the fruit of the vine, nor the lily to waft the perfume of the rose.

He does not expect the lowly unlettered Christian to fight like the champion of the faith. He does not expect from poverty the alms it has not to give, nor from the sick-bed sufferer the active energies which bodily prostration forbids. Let none needlessly mourn that they cannot glorify God by talents He never gave them, and for which therefore they are not responsible. Let none say, 'Had I been in another position in life, I

might have invested a large capital for my Lord.' Though you are narrowed and restricted where you are to the one talent, use it well, and God will accept "according to what a man has, not according to what he has not."

There is nothing more beautiful than this arrangement, alike in the Church and in the world, of "diversities of gifts," like stars of diverse magnitude among the heavenly bodies. And the desirable thing is, not to be aspiring after great things, in order to do great services; but to do our little work, to trade on our limited talent, our few pence, with a solemn sense of our responsibility for its right employment in the sight of God.

I repeat--let no man despise the humblest moral or spiritual resources. The rill does not say, I need not pursue this narrow course because I am not a river. The grass or lichen do not say, We need not grow, because we are not forest trees. The lamp does not say, I need not shine, because I am not a star; nor the star, I need not shine, because am not a sun. The common soldier does not say, I need not gird myself for the battle, for I am neither officer nor commander. No; alike in the natural, moral, and spiritual worlds, there is to everything, and every man, their own peculiar sphere and place and vocation; and God asks no more and no less, from the lowliest as well as the mightiest, than that they fulfill their appointed and prescribed destiny. The interest expected, will be in proportion to the amount of entrusted capital, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

A third remark suggested is, that Christ has a right to our services. The very name of servant involves the idea of hire, work, responsibility. And what (especially as professing Christians) is our relation to Him? We have become His servants by grace. It is not our own property we have entrusted to us for investment--had it been so, we might have exercised a discretionary power; we might have hoarded it or spent it as we desired. But the capital being His, we are responsible for its use or abuse. We shall be justly challenged and condemned for our unworthy stewardship, if this capital, with so many outlets for eligible investment, has been allowed to lie dormant in our coffers, or buried in the earth. He speaks, towards the close of the parable, of receiving (not ours) but "His OWN," with interest.

Jesus has been delivering His goods, age after age, to His Church. One generation after another has been gathering up the hereditary trust; and now these talents, eighteen hundred years ago put into the hands of His apostles, have descended to us. Do we realize our true position as His hired servants? He has paid us the wages of His own blood and sufferings to secure our willing servitude and obedience. Do we feel our responsibilities regarding the committed trust, whatever it be? Do we feel that all we have, is a loan from Him--that we are stewards of His grace; custodians of the great Master's goods; and that the lowliest talent, the humblest service, may become a consecrated gift, if exercised and employed with the high end of doing our Master's bidding, and promoting His glory?

And let none rest in the mere complacent feeling of being possessed with talents, if they do not turn them to advantage for Him who bestowed them. There, is often self-delusion in this. A man, for example, is conscious of being possessed of a generous heart, a love of doing kind things. He pities the poor miser who, in his narrow soul, grudges the smallest pittance to the needy in a time of distress. But he is, nevertheless, contented himself with doing nothing. He reposes in the unctuous thought, that if opportunity offered, (which he imagines it has not,) he would be capable of rising to do some magnanimous deed; but, meanwhile, he folds his hands, and rests satisfied with the reflection, that he feels at least better than his mean-souled neighbor. Ah, he is the greater delinquent of the two! The man with the narrow mind is responsible for his niggardliness. But more responsible is he, whose soul has been filled by his Master with generous impulses and kindly affections, if he padlocks the door of his heart, and keeps the talents hoarded, wasting, rusting, unemployed, and unimproved. The mere having qualities and affections, instead of releasing us of obligation, only increases and intensifies our responsibility. The question with us is not 'What have I of my Lord's!' but, 'What do I do with what I have?'

II. Let us pass now to consider the second leading theme of the parable--the day of RECKONING.

Yes, of reckoning; for the minute and detailed account required and given of the talents used and abused, shows that there will be a personal

dealing on the part of God with each individual. The doings and trusts of earth will not be jostled together in a general indiscriminate mass. The divine Master, in bestowing His rewards, will scrutinize the return of every talent; the great Shepherd will call, one by one, His own sheep by name, and "lead them out."

It is said in the parable that, "after a long time, the master of these servants comes and reckons with them." "After a long time." In one sense it is a short time. To the Almighty Lord Himself, these few thousand years will be but as "one day;" and to His servants also, in comparison with that condition of infinite being on which they are about to enter, oh, how short!

Yet, in another sense, to them it is "a long time" of solemn privilege and sacred trust. If our anxious, solemn moments, the crisis-hours of life--those seasons of deep suspense which all know from personal experience--if these always seem longest; well may the present probation period, to all Christ's servants--to all immortal beings--be a LONG time indeed! It is the season of infinite suspense on which hangs their happiness or their woe forever. It is the long momentous period, which will be regarded by them through an endless eternity, either with feelings of adoring thankfulness and joy--or with the pang of unutterable despair.

But to proceed. The first thing to be noted with regard to this day of reckoning is, that as the rewards are received by the faithful servants, they appropriate no merit in the diligent trading to themselves, they give their Lord all the glory. "You entrusted to me," or, as it is expressed in the kindred parable in Luke, "Your pound." And when they speak of their gain, they take care to tell whence it emanated. No gain could there have been without the deposit--no interest without the principal. "I have gained beside them," (that is, along with them--by their help.) They feel they have done no more than their duty. The capital was advanced by Him; and if they have traded on it successfully, He shall have all the glory of the return.

And yet observe, in conjunction with this, that though they owe all to the sovereign grace and mercy of Jesus; though, but for His generous benefaction--His advanced capital--they must have been bankrupts for

eternity--when He comes to confer the tokens of His approbation, He rewards, as if the merit were their own. He speaks to them in language of singular and encouraging approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things--enter you into the joy of your lord."

What blessed words, overflowing with comfort! The countenance of the Master, in uttering them, seems full of joy; as if it were a delight to Himself to shower upon them the infinite blessings of His love, and to recompense faithful service performed. If the architect has joy, in seeing the stately edifice he has planned, reared by discerning and diligent workmen; if the teacher has joy, in seeing his laborious toils resulting in the intellectual distinctions and triumphs of his scholars; if the commander has joy, in seeing his brave men mounting the ramparts for the release of the beleaguered garrison, putting glad hope into countenances wan with despair and death--what will be the joy of the great Lord on that Day, when called to distribute His own rewards to 'devoted love and earnest toil'--when upon those faithful unto death, He confers the crown of life? He celebrates His return with a festival of joy; He invites His redeemed to enter His own banqueting hall, there to receive His cheering commendation. In a nobler sense than the words bore when He uttered them on the eve of His humiliation on earth, will He say at that festal gathering, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends."

One other thought suggested in the parable regarding that day of reckoning, (to which, indeed, we have already referred, but which is here again brought before our notice,) is, that the approving sentence of the great Master is not grounded upon having gained many things, but on account of fidelity over a few things. "Well done," is the twice repeated encomium, "good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things."

Be not cast down or disappointed, because, as Christ's servants on earth, what you may have accomplished is small--because the measure of your success has not been commensurate with your labor. It is not results, but motives He looks to. It is not the successful man, as has been well observed, whom He praises in the parable, but the good and faithful one.

Thanks be to God fidelity, not success, is to regulate the final reward given. If it were otherwise, how hardly would many a brave heart in the battle of life, fare at the Great Day. How many a noble, unselfish, kindly spirit, has on earth been baffled and buffeted, misapprehended and misrepresented; his best deeds turned into ridicule, his best efforts thwarted, his kindness requited with insult, his faithful warnings and admonitions scorned! How many a spiritual soldier has sunk broken-hearted into the tomb, conscious of not one successful result to his labors! How many a faithful missionary has had to return home from his field of self-sacrificing toil, with health ruined and energy prostrated; or, sadder still, has had to turn, after years of patient work, from a field that refused to yield fruit, and from degraded souls that would be caught neither by love nor by expertise! But see, in this parable, how the sentence and utterance of the Master runs. It is not "Well done, good and successful," but "good and faithful servant." Oh, many an unrequited laborer, who had not so much as one sheaf gleaned on the earthly field, will doubtless, in that day of the world's great Harvest home, come again with rejoicing, bringing the sheaves of 'recompensed fidelity' with him.

Reader, are you prepared for that season of solemn scrutiny? Make the most of your present fleeting hours of mercy and forbearance. We never know how long or how brief these may be. "Occupy," says Christ, "until I come." That coming, as we have seen in a previous chapter, is to all of us, practically, the day of our death; and who among us, with reference to that unknown hour, can measure the span of that little word until! "Until!" It may be after the snows of many winters have gathered on our heads, and age has ploughed its wrinkled furrows on our brow. "Until!" It may be a few years hence--before some bright project we now have mapped out for the future has reached its realization. We may imagine we are near our coveted prize; a few steps more up the ladder, and it is ours--the dream of life fulfilled and consummated--when a noiseless footfall is heard behind us, tracking us up the dizzy eminence, and the startling word is whispered, 'I come!'

"Until!" It may be a year, a month, a week, tomorrow. Oh, what a narrow bridge that word may be!--a plank between two seas--the narrow sea of time, and the wide sea of eternity--"until"--verily there may be but a step

between us and death!

You, who peruse these pages, to whom some trust, be it great or small, is committed--are you conscious until now, of misused or abused talent, wasted hours, neglected duties, despised privileges? What is to be done? Abandon yourself to ignoble despair? No, Christ's is a nobler philosophy--"Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die." Satan's cruel whisper is, 'Hopeless, unredeemable bankruptcy.' But let the apostolic injunction be a heart-cheerer to any who may have been lagging behind, conscience-stricken for the present, and trembling for the future, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Remember (for this is the gist, the keynote, the interweaved lesson of the parable) all depends on the USE you make of your entrusted talents. Keep them unused, they will turn to decay. The hoarded garments which would have clothed the naked will become moth-eaten; the hoarded bread that would have fed the hungry will mold. Your mental gifts and endowments may make those within the sphere of your influence wiser and better, or, they may be prostituted and degraded to the basest of uses. Your WEALTH may be employed in scattering around you a golden shower of blessing, and when you die, the tears of the orphan and widow will be your noblest recompense; or, it may become cankered--turn to rust; and, as an abused talent, witness against you at the last. Your POSITION in society may be made a mighty engine and instrument of good, throwing a shield over the defenseless, redressing the wrongs of the injured, setting a lofty example of purity, virtue, beneficence, to inferiors and dependents. But be unfaithful, let position and influence be made the mere apology for reckless extravagance, profligate selfishness, or unprincipled ambition--and the beacon for guidance and example, becomes the balefire luring to destruction.

Up, then, and be doing! The heavenly Master is on His journey, and the talents for use or abuse are now in our hands. Oh, let us not have to mourn, when too late, forfeited opportunities! It may be now, or never. The talents, ours today, may be demanded by the Owner tomorrow. Trading may be done by us today, but the mart of the exchanger may be closed tomorrow. Staking all for time, all may be lost for eternity. But, laying out, with honest fidelity, the talents entrusted to us, no fear of a

usurious interest on our capital thus invested for the good of men and the glory of God. "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not."



## GETHSEMANE– THE SCENE

"When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."  
Mark 14:26

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Matthew 26:36

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

We approach now--let it be with reverent steps, the most deeply sacred of all the memories of Olivet.

However hallowed it be to follow the Divine Redeemer to His most cherished and frequented Home on the Mount, or to track His footsteps to its oratories for midnight prayer; however delightful to join in thought the jubilant multitudes on the Hosanna road and listen to their glad acclaims, far more solemn and impressive surely is it, to enter the precincts of that lonely Olive Garden--the scene of the last agony--the field whereon was waged the stupendous conflict, on whose outcome was suspended the world's redemption. If around no other spot of the Mount there gathered hallowed memories but this, GETHSEMANE alone would have given to Olivet peerless and undying sacredness. No locality is visited with intenser interest by the traveler in Palestine, than that cluster of venerable olive trees, with "their gnarled trunks and scanty foliage"--the reputed relics of earth's most sanctified scene of anguish and

suffering.

Even though there be a difficulty--an impossibility--in identifying with certainty the precise spot, this we confidently know, that if the traditional scene be rejected, (which we are not disposed to do,) the true locality must at all events be close at hand.

Let us gather then in imagination, eighteen centuries ago, within these consecrated precincts, and watch Redeeming Love in its deepest agony and most glorious triumph. Let us turn aside and see this great sight--the bush burning with fire, and lo! the bush is not consumed.

From the old Fathers Cyril and Augustine, downwards, in commenting on the transcendent subject which is now to engage our thoughts, an appropriate comparison and contrast has been drawn between the first and the second Adam; a GARDEN being, in either case, the scene of conflict. "Gethsemane," says a later German divine, "becomes to us an Eden, and is transformed with its horrors into a peaceful retreat. Within its circuit we are safe from the judicial inquiry, 'Adam, where are you?' In this garden flows the never-failing river of God which waters the new Paradise."

We shall limit ourselves, in the present chapter, to the SCENE itself and its accompaniments; reserving for the next, the consideration of its DEEPER MYSTERIES.

THE SCENE. It may help us in the contemplation of the outer framework of this mysterious picture, to mark a few of the preliminary details given by the different Evangelists. On the evening of the day corresponding to our Thursday, the Lord of Glory, at the close of the Paschal Supper, in the small upper room on Mount Zion, had instituted, in the presence of His disciples, the great New Testament memorial feast--"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into THE Mount of Olives." What else could this hymn be, which rose from the lips of these assembled guests, but the well-known Hebrew Hallel, that cluster of time-honored psalms which had been for centuries used on the same occasion by thousands and tens of thousands; and which, that very night, was being intoned by thousands more? That "Hymn" was a nation's prayer for the coming of her King; a

nation's supplication for the offering of the great sacrificial Oblation. But it contained in a nobler, truer sense, the utterances of Messiah Himself, the sublime words with which He went forth to His mysterious struggle as the Vanquisher of Death, and "to open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers."

The annals of the suffering Church record, how her martyrs braced themselves for rack and flame, by making their cells--like the apostle-prisoners at Philippi--vocal with songs of praise; or in some of those bloody encounters, where truth and conscience were at stake, we have read of strains of Christian melody rising to heaven, when the ranks were in the act of forming in battle. How interesting to think of this Prince of Martyrs, this great Captain of Salvation, (Himself about to be made perfect through suffering,) singing these songs of Zion on the eve of conflict--the pledge of victory!

Strange and incongruous indeed may seem such jubilant melodies, preceding the darkest 'memory of Olivet,' when the Divine Sufferer had unveiled to His omniscient eye, all His untold and unutterable anguish. But for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. In crossing the brook Kedron--the "brook by the way"--He could with joy "lift up his head," (Ps. 110:7.) God, His Heavenly Father, who gives "songs in the night," (Job 35:10,) had imparted, in His case, a new and holier meaning to the prophetic words, "And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel," (Isa. 30:29.) Christ "singing a hymn" before He went to 'the Mount!' It was like the first note of the "new song" that was to be sung through everlasting ages in heaven, by the "hundred and forty and four thousand"--the ingathered church of the Redeemed.

That Hallel, as we have just said, was on the lips of rejoicing multitudes throughout the land at that hour. But ONE alone, had the right to take up and appropriate, in the truest sense, its loftiest strains--"The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!" I will not die but live, and will proclaim

what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord." (Ps. 118:14-19.)

Having sung this Paschal hymn, they went out immediately in the direction of the Mount of Olives, descending from Mount Zion by the King's Gardens, or traversing the pathway which in all likelihood would lead then, as now, under the eastern wall of the city. In either case, they would cross the Valley of Jehoshaphat--where the Kedron, (the black brook, as the word means,) swollen it may be by the last of the latter rains, murmured along its rocky gorges. It was night--probably the last watch--between our eleven and twelve o'clock; night in its silent hour, yet not night in its darkness. The bright passover moon, with its attendant stars, shone in the quiet heavens. A few twinkling lights may have lingered in the city close by, or among the white tents that covered the slopes of Mount Olivet, and told of the great yearly convocation from all parts of Palestine to keep the solemn anniversary.

Near the eastern bank of the Kedron was this olive grove or plantation--in the present moonlight, the shadow from the opposite side of the ravine may have been projected upon it, veiling it in partial darkness. Jesus, as we have noted particularly in a previous chapter, was no stranger to that Garden. Some indeed suppose it to have been an olive yard or farm, belonging to a disciple who had joyfully granted it to his Divine Master. Luke, introducing the history, says, "He went, as he was his custom," to the Mount of Olives. That same spot, as we have also previously observed, had doubtless often before listened to His prayers, as if He had been desirous, by previous fellowship with His Father in Heaven on the same hallowed ground, to consecrate it, and to nerve Himself for that struggle on which He was now to enter!

The betrayer, also, seemed to have been familiar with the favored resort. He may have often tarried at the gate of that garden, and heard the same direction, which was now to be given under more dreadful circumstances, "Sit here, while I go and pray yonder."

Nor need we limit it to a place of devotion. We may here repeat the surmise, that it may have shared the honor with Bethany, of being the

Judean Home or Lodging-place of the Divine Pilgrim. That houseless Wanderer who slept on the planks of a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, may have pillowed His weary head, often and again, on the sod underneath these sheltering olive-boughs--as a stranger in the land, and a wayfaring man, He may have turned often aside here to tarry for a night.

Gethsemane may even have been a place of resort--a rendezvous--for inquiring disciples. Who can tell, but it may have been there that Nicodemus came "by night," to speak of the deeper mysteries of the kingdom? If so, we should be warranted in including that beautiful and instructive third chapter of John's Gospel (wherein are some of the most gracious and precious utterances of Redeeming love) among the memories of 'the Mount.'

While on the way to the Garden, Jesus seems to have delivered His farewell discourse (or the latter portion of it at least) in hearing of His disciples. At the close of the 14th chapter of John, He suddenly interrupts His solemn address--His wondrous words of comfort--as if some sudden impulse had seized Him, or some inner voice had whispered that "His hour was come." He pauses at the supper-table and gives the summons, "Arise, let us go hence!"--Hence? Where? From the hour of communion to the place and the season of conflict.

He resumes the interrupted farewell by His well-known spiritual comparison of the 'Vine and its branches'. The new figure is supposed by some to have been suggested by an actual vine revealed in the moonlight as they walked along, in one of the Jehoshaphat vineyards, or on the slopes of Olivet. But His own agony is at hand. The olive-grove is in sight. "After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees." He dare not keep His disciples longer in ignorance of the impending trial. The discourse being finished, and they proceeding as we may suppose for a while in profound silence, wrapped in meditative thought, with a strange undefined premonition of what was at hand, He makes the revelation, "This very night you shall all fall away because of me--for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad," (Matt. 26:31.)

"The hour has now come," says He again, as they have reached the depths of the valley--(to Him truly in a figurative sense "the Valley of the shadow of Death")--"that you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone!" These were, doubtless, to them, startling announcements. The disciples were very familiar with that road, especially so, during the preceding days. Each evening of that eventful week, as we have seen, had been spent in the quiet village of Bethany, under the roof of Lazarus. Doubtless, therefore, in rising from the supper table and taking the customary path conducting to the Mount, most (or all) of them would imagine, that their Divine Master was about to resort, as heretofore, to the same hallowed retreat, and renew congenial seclusion and fellowship among the friends He loved. But on reaching the gate of the olive garden, there is a different resolve announced; and He thus alike prepares them and Himself for His hour of trial. "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, Sit here while I go over there and pray." (Matthew 26:36)

Let us mark at the threshold of this mysterious place, His gentle, tender, unselfish dealing towards His apostles. Throughout His whole farewell discourses, there is not a word breathed of His own sorrows. The opening sentence is the key-note to all--it is their broken hearts alone He thinks of, "Let not your hearts be troubled." And again, when He alludes, for the first time, to their 'scattering'--forsaking Him when their sympathy would be most needed--He adds, in the same breath, the merciful and kindly promise, "But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." As much as to say, 'Do not think of this gloomy period of anguish and desertion. You shall fall away because of me; I know too well you will act an unworthy part; but here is a keepsake for you--a word of solace which I ask you to treasure in your memories. I am to triumph over this mystery of darkness. Though ignominy and death are this night before me, I shall rise again; and, remember the word I now speak--I shall go before you into Galilee; there, I shall forget and forgive all your weakness of faith and unrequited love; there, I shall see you and meet you and comfort you!'

And again, in this first injunction at the garden-gate, mark, once more, His considerate reluctance. He does not wish to affright them with a full

revelation of that tragedy of woe, which was all unfolded to His own inner gaze. He speaks of it as gently as He can. He uses the mildest description of what is before Him, "Sit here," (not while I go to that uttermost conflict,) but "Sit here while I go and pray!" It was indeed 'prayer;' but such a wrestling--such a soul-struggle, as neither earth nor heaven had ever before witnessed--prayer "with strong crying and tears, unto Him who was able to save him from death," (Heb. 5:7.)

The eleven are left at the outer precincts; but three out of the sacred company are permitted more nearly to approach--just as in His Church still, there are some privileged to gaze more deeply than others into the mysteries of His love, and to hold with an unseen Savior more intimate and endearing communion. The three apostles here selected to be within a stone's cast of their beloved Master, and to be witnesses of His humiliation, are the same three who had been the witnesses of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, who had made the magnanimous but too confident avowal of fidelity, and the two sons of Zebedee, to whom He had previously promised fellowship in His cup of suffering.

While these follow their great Lord amid the deeper shadows of the garden, the mysterious Sufferer himself seems to have plunged farther still into the solitude. A horror of great darkness comes upon Him. Mark says, "He began to be filled with horror and deep distress." Matthew says, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death!"--encompassed and environed, as the word means, round and round with grief.

He fell on His face. He is prostrated on the cold clay amid the chilling dews of that season and that midnight hour. Great drops of blood mingling with His sweat, are the expounders of supernatural agony, and moisten the turf to which He convulsively clings. In these moments of intense and vehement emotion, feeling Himself companionless, alone, three times He rises and goes to the three disciples, telling them of His anguish, and then returning afresh to the conflict.

Oh touching testimony, in the midst of this tremendous scene, to the perfect manhood of the great Redeemer--His yearning after human sympathy. It is too solemn an hour and spectacle for the eyes of all the

eleven--but He seems as if He could not dispense with a limited number--  
"Tarry you here and watch WITH ME!"--With me!--'Your presence is the only prop and support I have in this fearful struggle!' And when, on His return, He found them "asleep," see how He mourns the absence of the sympathy He so needed. "What! could you not watch with ME one hour?" He returns a second and third time, even though He knows their eyes are sealed in slumber; just as the child clings to its parent in the thunderstorm, and clasps that parent's hands; although he can render no aid, the very feeling of presence mitigates fear and dispels a sense of danger. But, what a withering rebuke! It might well have gone as an arrow to their hearts, "could you not watch with Me?"--'You promised to die with me, Can you not watch one hour? Often, O faithless ones, for whole nights have you toiled at your nets on Gennesaret, and surrendered your hours of needed repose. On this one night of temptation and anguish can you not spare your Lord one hour? Simon, where is your boasting, "are you still sleeping?" John, where is your love? Where is he who so lately leaned on my breast at supper? I have come looking for pity and I find none, and for comforters and I find none!'

If He were to have uttered the challenge now, "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism which I am baptized with?" which of the coward sleepers could dare venture on the old presumptuous answer, "We are able?"

In connection with these sufferings, He speaks of some mysterious cup. You will observe, this cup, whatever it be, formed the main cause of His woe. At the sight of it or thought of it, His soul recoiled. As He holds it with trembling hand, He utters the prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!"

It seems to have been after the first approach to the disciples, and after the first utterance of the prayer for the passing of the cup, that a new incident arrests us in the inspired narrative--a new personage appears. Hitherto the Lord had been alone; not a sound of step or voice obtruded on His silent agony. The hum of the Paschal multitudes in the city was hushed at that midnight hour; nothing was heard, but perhaps the murmur of the Kedron, or the rustle of the olive boughs in the nightly breeze. But a bright angel from the mansions of heaven is now seen by



His side--an angel "strengthening Him." We dare not be wise beyond what is written. What that angel did or said is unrecorded. Man--His own disciples--had denied Him sympathy in suffering. While the Divine Bridegroom tarried, they slumbered and slept. It would seem as if the arrested gaze of the celestial multitudes was directed on the spot where their great Lord was bowed in anguish; and a representative was sent down to assure Him, that if EARTH was wrapped in grief and unconscious slumber, all HEAVEN was watching, in silent expectancy, the stupendous conflict.

One thing we may well believe, the angel did not tell Him. He did not tell Him that he was sent to answer the thrice-uttered prayer, and to proclaim it 'possible' that the cup might pass--if so, the disciple representatives of the Church on earth, might well remain outside the gates 'sleeping with sorrow'--sunk in the slumbers of everlasting despair! If we can dare surmise what passed, (if anything passed these angelic lips,) would it not be, to rehearse the dreadful necessity for these sufferings, and the glorious rewards consequent on them? would it not be to tell of the crown rising above the cross--the resurrection morning--the triumphal ascension to Heaven, as Conqueror over sin and death--the glories of the second Advent--the everlasting joy and triumph of His ransomed Church through eternity.

Or possibly, that celestial Visitant may have been delegated to convey no more, than some solacing but all glorious message of love from the Eternal Father. Be this as it may, the angelic appearance had mightily invigorated Him. His great depression, after that, is over. The language of the prayer is changed. Convinced of the impossibility of eluding the cup, He says, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it; may your will be done."

At last, the conflict is ended, (the soul conflict at least.) Though other sufferings are at hand, physical suffering is little to Him, after the moral contest from which He had now come forth as conqueror. Oh, as the torchlight and the moonlight together reveal to us the Person of the Sufferer, as we see Him coming forth from the gate of the olive-garden, perhaps with the drops of agony still crimsoning His attire, we are led to adopt the language of the prophet, and to listen to the Redeemer's reply,

"Who is this who comes from Edom, from the city of Bozrah, with his clothing stained red? Who is this in royal robes, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, the Lord, announcing your salvation! It is I, the Lord, who is mighty to save! Why are your clothes so red, as if you have been treading out grapes? I have trodden the winepress alone; no one was there to help me!" Isaiah 63:1-3

"He knelt, the Savior knelt and prayed,  
When but His Father's eye  
Looked through the lonely garden's shade  
On that dread agony;  
The Lord of all, above, beneath,  
Was bowed with sorrow unto death.

"The sun set in a fearful hour,  
The stars might well grow dim,  
When this mortality had power  
So to o'ershadow Him,  
That He who gave man's breath, might know  
The very depths of human woe.

"He proved them all; the doubt, the strife,  
The faint perplexing dread,  
The mists that hung o'er parting life,  
All gathered round His head.  
And the Deliverer knelt to pray—  
Yet passed it not, that cup away.

"It passed not--though the stormy wave  
Had sunk beneath His tread;  
It passed not--though to Him the grave  
Had yielded up its dead.  
But there was sent Him from on high  
A gift of strength for man to die.

"And was the Sinless thus beset  
With anguish and dismay?  
How may we meet our conflicts yet,

In the dark and narrow way?  
Through Him, through Him, that path who trod,  
Save, or we perish, Son of God."

## **GETHSEMANE— THE DEEPER MYSTERIES**

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

John 18:1-9

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave

me."

In the previous chapter, we entered the sacred precincts of Gethsemane, and in the dead of night beheld a Divine Form kneeling there. Olivet rises above Him, silvered with the Paschal moon. Pomegranate and cypress, olive and palm which encircle His solitude--the silent witnesses of His unspeakable anguish--are hanging thick with dew; as if sympathetic nature would shed her mute tear-drops over the Adorable One, wrestling unsuccoured at the base of that mountain which had so often been trodden by His footsteps of love, and listened to His words of tenderness.

We now come to speak of the DEEPER MYSTERIES of the scene. It is one thing to contemplate the mere framework of the picture--another to comprehend the meaning of the picture itself; to enter the dreadful depths of that olive-grove, and understand the secrets of what is transacting there.

"The synoptic record of Gethsemane," says Stier, an able commentator, "follows in strong contrast with the seventeenth chapter of John." Striking indeed is that contrast! In an instant, we become spectators of a strange, and, at first sight, unaccountable disturbance--a mystery of suffering. The customary calmness and equilibrium of that divine-human nature seems, for the time, shattered and destroyed. A few moments before, He is the mighty cedar--now He is a bruised reed. A few moments before, we contemplate a sea of glass mirroring the peace of heaven--now every billow seems crested with wrath and woe. A few moments before, when under the quiet moonlit heavens, He pours out His soul in a majestic utterance of devotion--sublime unfaltering accents--the co-equal, co-eternal Son claiming the rights of His elect Church and people in the language of a conqueror--now, by a sudden collapse, the voice of triumph is subdued, and merges into a wail of tearful anguish. Bewildered, fearful, panic-stricken, He lies prostrate on the ground, with blood forced from the pores of His sacred body--the expounders of a supernatural and ever-deepening agony. That cup--that agony, what is their inner meaning? The Greek liturgy speaks of "all the sufferings of Christ known and unknown." What is the nature of sufferings which can thus be measured by no earthly plumb-line? We may venture on three preliminary remarks regarding them.

(1.) It is manifest that this struggle in the garden was one Jesus had been looking forward to with profound emotion. "There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished." "Now," says He, "is the hour and the power of darkness." "Now is my soul troubled, what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour."

(2.) Another element that strikes us in the agony is, that there was no visible outward cause for it. There was no hand of man upon Him--no crown of thorns, no sword, no nails, no spear, no scourging, no frown of mortal foe! No, He had sympathy so far--He knew that though they were asleep, there were sympathizing hearts among the slumberers at the gate, and He had the higher sympathy and support of the ministering angel. Yet, notwithstanding, we hear, groans, and mark tears and blood. He seems to make the words of the prophetic psalm His own, "I am poured out like water;" and, in the absence of any apparent reason, to utter the appeal in that midnight of suffering, "Behold, and see--was there ever any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Or, as that has been paraphrased from the original by an eminent divine, "Were ever wounds like unto my wounds, causing me to be melted as in a furnace, with which the Lord, in the day of his fierce anger has stripped me bare, as a tree that is stripped of its leaves?"

(3.) Another feature in this mysterious hour, worthy of note, is, that He never lost the consciousness that God was His Father! "Father!" "My Father!" "Abba, Father!" are the expressions used by the different Evangelists as proceeding from the lips of the majestic Sufferer. He approaches the garden, saying, "Father, glorify your name." He speaks of the cup as His Father's mingling, and the prayer for deliverance is a prayer to His Father. Though He lies struggling on the earth, apparently a weak, helpless worm, "I am a worm and no man;" yet He never loses the consciousness that He is a Son.

Again, then, we ask, what was the cause, what the constituents and ingredients of that bitter cup, what the mystery of that agony and bloody sweat?

We may arrive most satisfactorily at an answer to that question, by one or two negative assertions. Let us state what does not account for these sufferings. This may be done in a series of propositions.

(1.) The agony was not caused by the presence of SATAN. Some have thought so. They have resolved the whole story of Gethsemane into a stupendous conflict with Satan. True, he was there. We have reason specially to believe that on that hour of supernatural suffering he concentrated all his might; that he regarded it as the decisive moment which would determine whether he was to retain the world in vassalage, or be himself vanquished and destroyed. In the description of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, when the Arch enemy found himself foiled and baffled at each successive attack, the description closes with the words, "And the devil left him for a season"--"For a season!" language that would seem to indicate that he went back beaten and panic-stricken to the place of darkness, to concoct with his emissaries one other grand assault against the world's Incarnate Redeemer. The season--the time for this great struggle had arrived, and, with his newly-forged weapons, he comes forth, burning with revenge, to try and reclaim his former defeat.

Nor was he, at the moment, without ready material for malicious assault. With bitter irony he could use the old argument and temptation of the desert--to unbelief and distrust in the divine protection and goodness. Would not such barbed missiles as these be hurled at the Adorable Sufferer--'Where are Your trusted friends at the hour they are most needed? One of them is a traitor plotting Your death--some are asleep; all the rest will before long prove craven and coward, and be scattered like deer upon the mountains. Where is Your Father? Where the answer to Your prayers? God-deserted and God-forsaken--unsuccoured in Your agony, "O Lucifer, Son of the morning, how are you fallen?"

Christ, also, had evidently anticipated his coming and his assaults. He speaks of "the hour and power of darkness"--The "Prince of this world comes and has nothing in me." No, we are forced to infer that some dread spirit of temptation WAS prowling in these gloomy precincts, and that the Redeemer found it necessary, three times, to warn His disciples of his presence, "Watch and pray that you enter not into TEMPTATION." We

recognize, therefore, the presence and power of Satan as one dreadful element in these moments of suffering; and, to the pure, stainless soul of Jesus, contact with this 'spirit of evil' must have been anguish indeed. Even for a pure, high-minded human being to be compelled to associate with the degraded and polluted and profane--how painful the association. What, then, must have been the meeting of purity with impurity--essential holiness with essential sin--the Prince of darkness with the Prince of light?

But the presence of Satan cannot account for all. The great Redeemer encountered, as we have just noted, the same antagonist in the wilderness. But we read of no such overpowering prostration of soul and body, we read of no tears, no groans, no convulsive struggles, no prayer for the passing of the cup, no copious sweat of blood. No, rather, all was the calm majesty of triumph; the King of Truth silencing the Father of lies with no other weapon but the Word of God, saying, "It is written."

(2.) The agony was not caused by the dread of DEATH. Some have thought so. They dwell exclusively on the words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." True, indeed, He who was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, could not be exempt from this fear. There is an instinctive law in human nature which leads to a recoil from the thought of dissolution, and the finer the sensibilities are, the greater this shrinking is. His sinless nature made Him no exception to the sentiment of universal humanity, "It is a dread and awful thing to die."

Death, moreover, to the Lord of life must have been "a strange contradiction"--or rather, it must to Him have been a sad and terrible testimony to the fearfulness of sin. "Death by sin" had wrought such havoc in His own world, He could not fail to shrink from the anticipation of it. But the mere dread of dying, in itself never could account for such intensity of agony. To say so, would be to represent the Divine Master as infinitely beneath His disciples and martyrs in courageous endurance and magnanimity. Thousands of them faced death, and that, also, in its most revolting and aggravated form, without a pang; rejoicing, in the very hour of ignominy and torture, that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Nor, indeed, do we require to go to the Christian Church and the noble army of martyrs for examples of brave and heroic suffering. The 'common soldier' is ready, for a meager pittance, to join the forlorn hope, and face without wincing the terrible assault and the cannon's mouth. Shall we mock the Prince of Sufferers by assigning as the main (or sole) reason for that horror of great darkness, that prostrate body, that thrice-repeated agony of prayer, these drops of blood exuding from His brow, that He is merely standing in dread of the hour, which even the wretched felon is found to confront with the smile of indifference?

(3.) These sufferings were not for PERSONAL GUILT. Who among us, if God were in a moment to gather into one heap, and place vividly before our eyes the sins of our past lives--unveiling all the turpitude and malignity of our transgressions--who among us, but might well clasp the ground in trembling agony and be filled with the horror of despair? Cases there have even been, of bodily interpreters of mental anguish, akin to those of which we have now been speaking. History records of the royal murderer of hapless thousands at the massacre of Bartholomew--that the thought not only haunted his dying moments--but saturated his dying pillow with blood. This was conscience waking up in avenging retribution against the guilty.

With the 'Sufferer of Gethsemane' all was different. He was without sin--not a shadow of impurity ever darkened that stainless soul. He could at that moment have summoned from every hamlet and village in Palestine, which His steps of mercy had visited, hundreds of witnesses to His pure and holy and beneficent life and deeds. Here was a tongue that knew no deceit--an eye that never cast a lustful look--a soul that never harbored an unholy thought. Without one shadow of deviation, His food had been to do the will of His Father in Heaven. Even devils had been forced to bear the attestation, "We know you who you are, the HOLY ONE of God." Every other child of humanity might have pointed to that cup filled to the brim with personal transgression, and trembled at the retributive vengeance of hand; but there could have been nothing of personal retribution in these untold sufferings of the pure and holy Jesus!

(4.) These sufferings were not necessarily connected with His death and resurrection. It is true He needed to die before He could rise--He needed



to descend into the grave, before He came forth 'the abolisher of death' and the 'Resurrection and life' to all His people--"Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit." But why such sufferings? If He required to die, merely, that He might rise from the dead and be a pledge of resurrection, why not some gentle dismissal of His spirit? Why spread that couch of protracted anguish in Gethsemane? Why not a death-pillow tended by His own disciples or by the gentle hands of the brother and sisters at Bethany? What the need of these superfluous tortures of mind and body?

If all these different surmises fail to explain the causes of His sufferings, let us devoutly ask, though it be but in a single sentence--Why and whence this agony?--why the Rock of Ages thus "stricken, smitten of God"--or buffeting these waves of woe? I answer--Reader! it was your SINS and mine that were filling that cup and extorting that wail of sorrow! Jesus was there as our Substitute and Surety. The infinitely pure ONE was there standing at the bar of Justice--"The Lord laid upon Him the iniquities of us all." Sinless Himself, He was 'federally' counted as guilty. "Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Mark, it is SOUL SUFFERING that is the burden of His anguish. In fulfillment of the words, "You shall make his soul an offering for sin," He cries, "Now is my soul troubled"--"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." That cup was filled to the brim with curses--His holy soul was like a vast reservoir, into which the transgressions of every elect child of Adam rushed from every age, demanding satisfaction. He was "filled with horror and deep distress!" He was filled and overwhelmed with horror and consternation at the fearful havoc sin had wrought, and at its dreadful penalty, which He was now bearing. The wrath of God--the terrible manifestation of His displeasure at iniquity--was upon Him. He was the true spiritual Atlas, bearing on His shoulders the sins of a guilty world.

He, was the true antitype of the Red Heifer, immolated somewhere close by, on that same Mount, its fleece stained with blood. "Surely," we may well exclaim, as we see drop by drop crimsoning the sods of Gethsemane,

"He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin."

In all these respects it is manifest, that a parallel between His and His martyrs' tortures is inadmissible. The mysterious withdrawal of the Divine countenance, in consequence of imputed guilt, was an element of soul-anguish all unknown to them. Oh! no other, no less a cause, will suffice to explain this tragedy of suffering. Take away the idea and element of vicarious sacrifice, and Gethsemane becomes a sealed mystery. Take away the element of vicarious sacrifice, and we ask in vain, how could He who stilled the waves and walked on their crested tops, who made devils crouch submissive at His word, who made disease take wings and flee away, and plucked the very crown from the brow of death--how could He, on any other or lower supposition, be subjected to such apparently helpless and humiliating ignominy--saving others, and yet with an apparent inability to save Himself?

But, with this Gospel key, we can somewhat (yet, how feebly) understand and unlock the secret. We can withdraw these curtains of thick darkness, and find them shrouding the peerless truth, "Christ our passover, has been sacrificed for us." These sufferings were not calamities--they were punishment judicially inflicted. Christ was the Sin-bearer, bearing not merely the punishment of sin, but sin itself. "Deep," in His case, literally "called unto deep." Need we wonder that humanity should stagger and tremble in an hour like this? It was anguish beyond the endurance of any finite nature--an eternity of woe was condensed into it!

Who has failed to be arrested by that significant question of the Sufferer, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" "What shall I say?" Shall it be, "This cup must pass--I shall dash it untasted to the ground--I shall cancel my covenanted engagements--I shall escape this travail of soul--wipe the blood drops from my brow--cast the garb of flesh aside, and ascend to my Throne above the stars of God?'

No! as He struggled, "like some strong swimmer in His agony," with the billows of wrath sweeping over His defenseless head, He heard a voice of woe (loud as the sound of many waters) coming floating up from the future--a surging never-ebbing tide of human anguish. Is He to listen to

this cry of suffering ages, and by His own baptism of blood to work out for perishing millions an everlasting salvation? or is He to snap these chains which bind Him, "save Himself," and leave the world and its myriads to perish? "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered?" (Isa. 49:24.) Shall He convert that Jehoshaphat Valley, where now we behold Him, into (what the Jews supposed it to be,) the place of Judgment? Shall He erect a throne of retributive vengeance on the heights of Olivet, and utter the word of terrible condemnation?

The dreadful alternative--"condemn" or "not condemn," seemed, at this moment, in His hand--trembling in the balance--to pass the cup or to drink it; to save Himself or to save others. But, it is done!--the work is accomplished! His soul "HAS been troubled," and what has He said? Let the hosts of heaven tune their harps and sing the glorious answer--"God sent not His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world through Him might be SAVED!"

"O Holy Jesus, who for our sakes suffered incomparable anguish and pains, commensurate to Your love and our miseries, which were infinite, that You might purchase for us blessings upon earth and an inheritance in Heaven!" (Jeremy Taylor)

Here we might well pause. But to complete the "memories" of that ever memorable night, in their relation to Olivet, let us, in a few sentences, follow the Divine Sufferer on leaving the scene of His supernatural struggle. He rejoins His still sleeping disciples. He employs words of tender reproach--reminding them that the opportunity they had of watching with Him and for Him was now over. Once (a few moments ago) it was theirs. But the one chance they had, of keeping such holy vigil in the hour of His sorest need, had passed away forever--"Sleep on now, and take your rest." Often, doubtless, in the future, must the merited taunt have come back upon them, forcing a pang from their inmost hearts. This we may imagine, in spirit at least, would be the soliloquy evoked by so painful a remembrance --'What an opportunity we lost by these unhappy slumbers! How sad--how ungrateful then; of all times, to have wounded and lacerated His loving soul by our faithlessness! How undeserving we were of the shelter of His extenuating words--His merciful excuse--the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

Oh, are we not reminded, from the case of the disciples, of our own similar often and cruel defections?--traitors to holy trust--unfaithfulness to holy vigils, at the very time when these were most sacredly imperative--great opportunities of watching with Christ and glorifying His name, which, forfeited and foregone once, can never return. Well may we breathe the prayer in all such times of our weakness--

"O You, who in the garden's shade,  
Did wake Your weary ones again,  
Who slumbered at that fearful hour  
Forgetful of Your pain;  
Bend o'er us now, as over them,  
And set our sleep-bound spirits free;  
Nor leave us slumbering in the watch  
Our souls should keep with Thee."

The hour of sleep, however, is now ended, and the trumpet again sounds for battle--"Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand who betrays me." It cannot escape the observation of attentive readers of the inspired narratives, that from this moment, onwards to the last bitter cry on the cross, (which does not fall within these memories,) the Sufferer of Gethsemane presents a different and totally altered bearing. The hand of MAN is indeed now upon Him; the gleam of the lantern--the midnight torch, and the flash of the traitors' swords, beheld from the scene of the agony coming down the opposite ravine, all tell of dastardly purposes of betrayal, torture, and death.

But they disturb Him not, in comparison to His sufferings in Gethsemane. The climax has been reached--the death of His death is over in that garden. The confidence which characterized His customary life is restored. He emerges from the gloomy glades, no longer a trembling, agitated, convulsed sufferer; but composed--resolute--self-possessed. The storm is changed into a calm. A learned commentator heads this new chapter significantly as "The Invigoration." Invigorated--revived--indeed He was. He had "poured out His soul in strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared."

Even with Calvary before Him, God, His Heavenly Father, seemed to have already taken off His sackcloth and girded Him with gladness--joyfully the Good Shepherd goes forth to lay down His life for the sheep. The last jubilant words of the Hallel hymn He had sung in going to the Mount, might appropriately still be in the lips of the Great Victim on His way to the sacrificial altar--"God is the Lord, who has showed us light--bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you--you are my God, I will exalt you. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good--for his mercy endures forever," (Ps. 118:27-29.)

Even the troop of traitors who are now confronting Him, composed, as they were, of iron soldiers of Rome as well as Jewish mercenaries, are awestruck by His 'meek majesty'. They require no torch or lantern to track out His lurking-place--He is ready to meet them, and answer their demand by self-surrender. "Whom do you seek?" He asks, in a voice of unfaltering composure; and when He again says, in similar calmness, "I am He"--so staggered were they at the demeanor of their Victim, that, as if struck with a thunderbolt from heaven, they reeled backwards conscience-smitten, and fell to the ground!

Nor need we add, was there any attempt at resistance, although it is too evident, from the recorded incidents, that any encouragement on the part of the Divine Master would have received a willing response from the surrounding disciples. It is not too much to affirm, that, had He pleased, He might have easily escaped from the sufferings that were gathering around Him. In the light of that full Passover moon, His captors could not stealthily come upon Him, as they might have done had the night been dark. Even when lying, as they now were, panic-stricken on the earth, might He not (leaving them thus unmanned and paralyzed) have fled like His royal ancestor across the Mount, and taken shelter amid the wild ravines of the Jordan wilderness?

Or, to make a supposition more befitting the dignity and divine glory of His Person, might He not either have exercised His own supreme prerogative as the Lord of Life; or summoned that strengthening angel (who had just been with Him in the garden) as a minister of vengeance, and left the ground strewn with corpses? He desires, however, no such evasion. The lost apostle might have spared the injunction, "Take Him

and hold Him fast." He calmly awaits His fate. He wishes to illustrate His own former saying, "I have power over my own life--I have power to lay it down." "For this cause came I unto this hour." With the Kedron before Him, and the dark memories of that night on Olivet left behind, "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

Let us leave Gethsemane with the saying of the Master in our ears--His noble, unselfish appeal to these murderers--surrendering Himself--shielding His disciples--"If therefore you seek Me, let these go their way." It sounds like the voice of the Shepherd regarding "other sheep not of that fold." They seem befitting words in His lips, just as He emerges from the agony. It was, in a sentence, the announcement of the great principle for which His soul-struggle had there been undergone--giving up Himself, that these--(yes, these countless millions on millions of all time)--might have their captive bands loosed, and "go their way," "walking and leaping, and praising God." "He saved others, Himself He cannot--no, Himself He WILL not save." "Let these go their way!" As we hear this petition of the Mighty Pleader ascending before the bar of Justice for us, and see the Sinless One going forth, across the Kedron valley, a willingly bound Victim, that the guilty, through eternity might be free--well may we catch up from His lips the glorious refrain of His own Hallel hymn--"O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good--for His mercy endures forever!"

## **THE ASCENSION-- the Last Parting on the Mount**

Luke 24:50-51

"Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven."

## Acts 1:9-12

It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!" The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened.

Redemption is now completed, and the Divine Conqueror is about to ascend to His Heavenly Throne; THE Mount of Olives is again selected as the scene of this closing, hallowed memory of His sojourn on earth.

Spots which have been peculiarly and sacredly associated to us in life, are often those fondly clung to in the prospect of departure. 'In that village churchyard,' says the old man who has weathered many of life's storms, and feels the winter of age set in upon him, 'I would like these ashes of mine to repose--they would be close by the cottage-home, where a mother's voice spoke to me life's earliest and best lessons, and a mother's love and tenderness wiped many tears away. It was under yonder spreading oak, that voices, now hushed in silence, were accustomed merrily to ring. It was under yonder lowly sanctuary roof, that I first heard words of consolation and hope--that wayward youth received its timely warnings, and that I was first made alive to the momentous concerns of eternity. There, God willing, within hearing of the old murmuring brook and the Sabbath bell, and under the shadow of the ancestral trees, would I like to wing my departure to a better world--there I would seek to die, and there to be buried!'

It was a kindred feeling that made old Barzillai prefer his rough mountain-dwelling in Gilead, to the luxurious seat that was offered to him at the king's table in Jerusalem--"Let me go back again," said he, "that I may die in my own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother." It is a similar sacred and hallowed magnetic power which induces, at this day, the old Israelite, as age furrows his cheek with wrinkles, to bend his steps towards the earthy Zion, that his body may sleep with the dust of his fathers in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

May it not have been some such kindred feeling and association which prompted our Blessed Lord--sharer as He was of human sensibilities--to make selection, as the scene of His final departure, that which had been peculiarly and pre-eminently hallowed during His earthly pilgrimage? OLIVET! it was the spot of all others consecrated by suffering and love; often and again it had been perfumed with the incense of His prayers--it had been suffused at midnight with His tears; down amid the grove of its Gethsemane olives, it had been bathed with His blood; its rocky highway had echoed to the songs of the jubilant multitude, and its soil been carpeted with the palm-branches which strewed the Conqueror's path--the hallowed village on its ridge (ever-sacred Bethany) had been selected as the scene of His most enduring friendship. It was surely befitting that this earthly audience-chamber--this haunt of mingled joy and woe, abasement and triumph, it was fit that He should make it the gateway of Heaven, the entrance-room of His Celestial Palace--that on its height He should convene the chariots of God, "twenty thousand, even thousands of angels"--the bright convoy that was to bear Him to His everlasting Throne!

Behold, then, the Savior and the Eleven wending their way up the mountain. It is their last week together. If the disciples were not fully cognizant of the fact, their Lord at least was. He employs the time in sacred converse. He promises them the aid of supernatural power in prosecuting their gigantic mission. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth, are to be the wide field of their labors. And now, as the divine Redeemer is about to take farewell of the world, where in a garb of flesh He had sojourned for three-and-thirty years, how does He leave it?

It was a world that had disowned Him, scorned Him, slain Him. The memories of unrequited love were studding the earthly landscape all around. Even those warm hearts at His side (His trusted friends) had, in the hour of peril, proved faithless. There was nowhere His great heart of purity and goodness had a perfect reflection of itself; except in that blue expanse above, where His eye was now turned. Might we have wondered, if, at that moment, when the songs of Heaven were floating in His ear--when its 'burning spirits' were waiting by the opened portals to welcome



Him in--could we have wondered had He resolved, once and forever, to forget an ungrateful earth--to obliterate from His thoughts the dark story of its forgetfulness and sin--that all His thoughts and joys would now be centered on that blessed world where no sin can enter--where no dark experience of sorrow can interrupt a Sabbath of endless communion?

How different! His parting act, as the bereaved men of Galilee strain their eyes upwards, is one of benignity and love to the world He is leaving. With uplifted hands, He breathes on these representative men His blessing. Words, not of upbraiding or wrath, but of unutterable tenderness, are the last which die on their ears; and when these can no more be audible, the outstretched arms are a silent symbolic legacy bequeathed to His disciples and His Church in every age, declaring that His interest in them is still the same. Bereft though they be of His visible presence, they may rise from their posture of awe and prostrate sorrow, conscious that His benediction and blessing are still following them--that no distance, no space, no time, can ever separate them from His love.

And what is the great fact of the Ascension--that which undoubtedly must have impressed itself most powerfully on the minds of these eleven spectators? It was, that Christ ascended as a MAN; that He left this world still carrying with Him His glorified humanity. The very same Savior who had broken bread with them at their communion feast--who had met them and ate with them on the shores of Tiberias--who had walked with those who day up the steps of Olivet--yes, "the man Christ Jesus" had ascended in a bodily shape.

The last vision they saw, was a smile on the same lips that were used to say, "Peace be unto you!"--the same hands that were laid on the sick, and that had been stretched in anguish on the tree--these same hands had just been seen uplifted still, as if He could embrace a whole world in His arms of mercy; and in that attitude, and wearing unchanged the well-known human form and features, He had vanished into the world of the glorified.

We may imagine, when the disciples were walking up the mountain-side, or when they had reached the top of the secluded ridge, and had some dim strange premonition--some indefinite idea that they were about to be

deprived of their Master's blessed presence--we can well imagine that they would at least be ignorant as to the nature of His departure. Would it have surprised them if He had said, 'A body was prepared me to come to this world, which I had undertaken to redeem. In a body, I needed to offer myself a whole burnt-sacrifice--my divine nature, being spiritual, was incapable of suffering. But now, having completed the expiatory part of the mediatorial work, I leave behind me this earthly tabernacle--Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. A bright cloud will presently encircle me--a lustrous robe to clothe my divinity; in this cloudy chariot, the indwelling Godhead will ascend to its own heaven.'

Might He not thus have left the disciples and the attendant angels to consign His body (as the body of Moses on Mount Nebo) to some quiet resting-place in these secluded heights? Might not the Marys have been again summoned with their spices and linen to embalm the hallowed frame, before laying it in its honored sepulcher? No--with a body (glorified indeed, but in a visible form like theirs) He ascends. Bidding defiance to one of earth's most stable and unalterable physical laws--showing that He was Lord of matter as well as of spirit--the body rises without wing or chariot-wheel up in its radiant garment of cloud, the invariable symbol of Deity. When, in profound amazement, (their bosoms swelling with alternate fear, and hope, and joy,) the disciples saw the last speck vanish in the blue distance, and when the thought may have occurred to them, 'Before He reach the celestial gate; angels (the warders of that spiritual world) may yet divest Him of His humanity, and usher Him, in His glorious spiritual nature, into the heaven of heavens;'--lo! two of these white-robed beings are present at the gazers' side, with a message to dispel all doubt--"You men of Galilee, why stand gazing up into heaven? THIS SAME JESUS, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven."

"This SAME Jesus!"--He has entered heaven wearing that humanity; and in ages to come, when the number of His elect are completed, in that humanity He will again come forth. As a Man, He is now seated on the throne. As a Man, He has gone to prepare a place for His people. As a Man, He ever lives to make intercession. "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that MAN whom he

has ordained." 'Go, go,' men of Galilee, on your glorious errand to the ends of the earth; and as you proclaim that gospel of peace and joy to the weary and heavy laden--the poor, the broken-hearted, the storm-tossed--tell them this glorious fact--you have seen it with your eyes and we endorse its truth--"a Man--(a MAN)--shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and as a covert fro the tempest!"

What a joyful assurance! We can follow the great Redeemer through His pilgrimage of matchless love on earth, and think that "that same Jesus," wearing the same body which groaned, and toiled, and suffered, is now at the right hand of God. The gates of heaven soon closed on the straining eyes of these gathered disciples. As they looked wistfully towards the spot where the vanishing cloud was last seen, there was nothing but the calm azure--the still, silent air--like the path of the vessel furrowing the ocean, athwart which the waves have again closed, leaving no trace behind of its course.

One of these eleven, the Beloved disciple, was privileged, at a subsequent period, in his Patmos-exile, to gaze in vision within these distant portals. What did he see? It was "that same Jesus"--the loving Being with outstretched hands on Olivet, only under another expressive and touching symbol. "Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" crowded around some object of mysterious adoration, in the form of a Lamb, bearing scars and blood-marks. He could be in no doubt who it was. The word which had formerly designated Him on earth, spoke of Him in glory--"Behold THE LAMB of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Not only is it Christ ascended, Christ glorified, but Christ wearing the old badges of humiliation and suffering--"still red in His apparel"--His vestments "dipped in blood;" and the song of that ransomed multitude, as they cast their crowns at His feet, is, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!"

Another disciple was also gifted with the same heavenly vision. Stephen, on his martyr-pillow, was privileged to look within the half-opened portals--and to proclaim to his murderers and to the Church, the sight which arrested his enraptured gaze. It was 'that same Jesus!'--"I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Yes! Jesus "standing" with outstretched arms, (the arms and the smile of Olivet still

unaltered,) stooping over His servant's tortured frame, as if impatient to receive the first of the noble army of martyrs who were hereafter to "praise Him."

Reader! be it yours to exult this same theme of exalted comfort. You have a Brother on the Throne. Changed indeed He is in His outward condition; for His season of trial and temptation and suffering--His "hour and power of darkness" being now at an end--He has passed amid the joys and hallelujahs of the Church of the glorified, the songs of eternity ever vibrating in His ears. But His human heart--the heart which of old loved, and pitied, and sympathized, knows no change! It remains a heart of unaltered and unalterable tenderness still.

"That same Jesus" addresses every soul striving with temptation--battling with evil--crushed with sorrow; and says, "Fear not; I AM He who lives, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore--I know your sorrows, I have endured them--I know your soul-struggles, I have felt them--I know your temptations, I have encountered them--I know your very tears, I have wept them. Amid the wreck of dear earthly hopes and friendships and sympathies, let your heart-throbs be stilled and your tears dried, by this elevating assurance, that there is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother."

## **THE ASCENSION– the Joyful Return Across the Mount to Jerusalem**

"Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy." Luke 24:50-52

"The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem." Acts 1:12

In the preceding chapter, we ascended the heights of Olivet, and from one of its eastern ridges, within sight of honored Bethany, we listened in thought to the parting benediction. We beheld the cloud receiving the Person of the glorified Redeemer, and the Eleven straining their eyes until its glory vanished from their sight. We may linger with profit, yet a little longer, around the same hallowed scene, and glean a few of the comforting truths with which the theme of the Ascension is replete. We shall cease to wonder at the climax to which the apostle rises in his summation of gospel doctrine, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory," (1 Tim. 3:16.)

When the disciples, all solitary, had to wend their way back to Jerusalem, what, we are ready to think, must have been the agony of their bereft feelings? Surely no sons ever returned from laying the head of an honored parent in the grave with a sadder sense of utter desolation and abandonment. What! to tread the world alone! To enter these temple-courts uttering, through their crushed hearts and irrepressible tears, "Ichabod! for the glory has departed!" Shall they abandon themselves to despair?

Does Matthew say, 'I shall return again to my tax-house and my illicit gains'? Does Peter say, 'I shall return again to my fishing-craft on the lake of Galilee'? Does Nathaniel say, 'I shall go again under my fig-tree, and, spreading sackcloth under me, bewail my absent Lord'? Does Thomas say, 'I can no longer reach there my hand and thrust it into His side; I must lapse into former incredulity, and be faithless and unbelieving as before'? Does Andrew go smiting his breast, asking in vain his old question, "Where are you staying?" while the reply is no more returned, "Come, and see"?

When a brother comes from a far distance, we hail him--his advent is subject of great joy. How do loving hands at home deck his apartment, and make hearth and walls smile a greeting on the long absent one. But when the time of furlough is over, and when he has to go back again to

the far country, the last farewell is muttered through tears and swelling emotion, and the house is hung with a drapery of sorrow. We can understand Christ's first coming to be joyful. We can understand His second coming to be a "blessed hope." But to leave His Church in widowhood and loneliness--to gladden it no more with His personal presence--oh do we not expect to hear these disciples of Olivet (at that moment of mysterious parting, when the cloudy chariot is bearing Him from their sight,) crying out in an agony of importunate supplication, "Tarry, Lord, stay with us!" And when they find that to be in vain, we expect to see them, with tear-dimmed eyes and faltering step, descending the mount, and uttering the one note of overwhelming sorrow, "They have taken away our Lord, and we know not where they have laid Him!"

No--with hearts unusually brave in such an hour, we read that "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy." We look for tears, and we hear songs; we look for sackcloth, and, lo! they are girded with gladness. We look for them daily in the Temple, mourning over the wreck and ruin of their dearest earthly hopes, and crying with the plaintive prophet, "How does the city sit solitary!" but they are "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." This ascension of their Master, which, to all human appearance, would have overpowered them with inconsolable grief, seems to have put a new song into their lips. When Christ first said these things unto them, "sorrow filled their hearts;" but He had forewarned them also that their "sorrow would be turned into joy." Some mighty equivalent would be given, which would more than compensate them for the loss caused by the deprivation of His personal presence--by His leaving the world and going to the Father. Let us follow, for a little, the footsteps of the disciples across the well known path so often trodden in the companionship of their beloved Lord, and offer some reasons why His ascension, to them and to the Church in every age, is subject-matter of joy.

As we have just observed, and more particularly referred to in the preceding chapter, Jesus Himself had prepared the disciples for His departure. He had taught them to associate that departure with a positive blessing. "It is expedient for you," said He, "that I go away." "If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father." Again, when

on His Resurrection morning, He met one of the Marys, and saluted her with the "greetings" of joy, and when He wished, moreover, through her, on that joyful occasion, to send a gladdening message to His apostles--what was that message? Was it, 'I am now risen, the Lord of immortal life. I shall now remain permanently with you, never more to leave you; death itself shall not separate between you and Me'? No, it was this--'I am speedily to leave you--to be withdrawn from visible fellowship--Go, tell my disciples, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.'

And the Church, in her own inspired songs, has been taught to make the ascension of Christ material for thanksgiving and joy--"Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." "You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive--you have received gifts for men; yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them," (Ps. 68:18.)

The ascension of Jesus was a joyful event, because it attested the full completion of His mediatorial work. Redemption was the great remedial method of restoring all that man had forfeited by sin. By the great consummating deed of the Savior's resurrection, emphatic demonstration had been given that the penalty of sin was removed, the demands of the broken law fully satisfied. If there had been one flaw in His person or work, or had one single transgression of His people been unatoned for, He still would have been detained the victim of death--Death's iron fetters would still have bound Him; the overlying stone would still have been fast over the mouth of His grave. By rising triumphant from the tomb, and leaving behind Him His vacant sepulcher, He proved incontestably that the wages of sin were all paid--the discharge granted.

But this was only the partial, or, if we might call it, the negative result of the atonement. It gave the glorious assurance that the awakened sword of Justice had been returned to its sheath, and that there was now "no condemnation." But we needed a loftier attestation; we needed to be certified, not only that He had made "peace through the blood of the Cross," but that the gates of the true Eden--the kingdom of heaven--were again opened to all believers. And how shall we obtain this desired certification? His own entrance within these gates as our Representative,

and the Representative of His people, will form the alone satisfactory pledge and guarantee of our final admission into the realms of glory--that Paradise lost will be, in every respect, Paradise regained and restored.

But He has ascended; and in doing so, He has given His people the pledge--the first installment, so to speak, of their everlasting bliss. In the words of an otherwise enigmatical passage, "He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places." He, the first sheaf, has been waived in the heavenly sanctuary--the "offering of the first-fruits"--the pledge of the myriad sheaves which are yet to follow. When we see, therefore, a chariot of cloud, in the sight of the infant Church, bearing her adorable Lord to the celestial portals, what more powerful assurance could be given to those He has redeemed with His blood, that the lost heritage of everlasting bliss was theirs, alike in possession and reversion; and that with a life, deathless as His own, where He is, there they should be also?

If, as their federal Head, His resurrection gave them the public guarantee that the wages of sin being paid, they were in the eye of a righteous God and a righteous law 'justified' fully, freely, and forever; His ascension was the pledge and evidence that "whom He justified," them He would also "GLORIFY," (Rom. 8:30.) If the eleven disciples of old "looked steadfastly" (unmoved) up into heaven, as they saw the cloud ascending; so may we, by the eye of faith, look steadfastly on this great and peerless truth. Yes, I may love to linger around the Cross of Calvary, and to hear the expiring cry of anguish, (which was truly the shout of victory,) "It is finished!" I may love to traverse in thought the way to the tomb, and stooping over the rifled cave, to bear the angel's gladdening announcement, "He is not here, He is risen!" but if I wish to have the crowning assurance of a salvation completed--"the gift of God which is eternal life"--I love better to go to Mount Olivet and witness "the receiving up into glory;" and as I join the returning disciples, to listen to words sung through their tears, "God has gone up with a shout--the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to our God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises."

The ascension of Jesus was a cause of joy, because it secured for the Church the gift of the Holy Spirit. The reason He assigned for it being



"expedient for Him to go away" was the sending of the "Paraclete" or "Comforter." "If I do not go away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." Again, it is said, "The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." As the old dispensation was one of type and figure, and ceremonial observance, so, the new dispensation was to be emphatically a "dispensation of the Spirit."

At that interesting hour we have been contemplating on Mount Olivet, may we not think of this new dispensation being, so to speak, inaugurated. It was a solemn crisis in the world's history. As God the Father had been revealed in the early dispensation--as God the Son had been revealed during His incarnation--so the Holy Spirit was now, in "the last days," (the closing era of the Church,) to complete the full manifestation of a Triune deity. As the gate of heaven opened to receive the glorified Son, the Dove of peace, and joy, and consolation was ready to take his flight down to earth, and to hover with outstretched wings over the Church of God. The sacrifice made by a nobler than Elijah being completed, the answer was to be "by Fire"--"He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

At the very first meeting of the bereaved Church, this baptism by fire, of the Holy Spirit, took place. The apostles became mighty in word and in deed. Out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. While they mourned an absent Lord, they felt the greatness of the compensating boon. He "brought all things to their remembrance"--He enabled them to write with accuracy their Gospels--the narrative of the never-to-be-forgotten scenes in their Lord's personal ministry. He showed them things to come--He gifted them with prophetic pens to sketch the destinies of the Church in the future; and to that Church, in all ages, He was to be known (and is known) by the blessed name of 'Comforter'--enlightening it with His presence, and sanctifying it with His grace.

One of His special offices, moreover, was to be the unfolder of Christ to His Church and people--"He shall glorify me." May not our blessed Lord, as has been suggested, have had reference to this, when He thus addressed Mary, "Touch me not, FOR I have not yet ascended." As if He

had said, 'When I have ascended, THEN you may touch me!' How? You may touch me by faith; the Holy Spirit, as my Glorifier, will enable you to "reach here your finger." "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

The ascension of Jesus was to the Church subject-matter of joy, because it enabled Him to reap His own heavenly reward. God the Father had promised, that when He had made His soul an offering for sin, He would "see His seed and prolong His days." In His own last intercessory prayer, as a victorious King, He claims the stipulated recompense of His conquests--"I have finished the work which you gave me to do; and now, O Father! glorify me with your own self--with the glory which I had with you before the world was." And in this same wondrous prayer, He tells what the essence of that mighty recompense is, which makes Him forget all the anguish of His blood-stained earthly path--"I am glorified in them." In them! It is His ransomed Church who are to supply through eternity the chief revenue of His glory; through them, "unto principalities and powers," in heavenly places, is to be made known "the manifold wisdom of God."

The ascension of Jesus is thus frequently in Scripture represented as the recompense of His mediatorial sufferings, "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; therefore also has God highly exalted Him." If it gives us joy on earth to see the advancement of a beloved friend--a son, a brother, a parent, if we hear that their goodness and worth, their unwearied beneficence and sterling integrity, have been acknowledged and rewarded by some substantial earthly recompense--what ought to be the Church's and the believer's joy at beholding the Friend of all friends--the Brother of brothers--set as King on His holy hill of Zion, seeing of the travail of His soul and being satisfied; enthroned in the midst of His Church-triumphant, and rejoicing with them in their everlasting joy!

The ascension of Jesus is matter of joy to the Church, as He is engaged in heaven to carry on the work of intercession. By His death He wrought out atonement--by His intercession He perpetuates its purchased blessings and renders them forever efficacious; so that in the noblest of senses it may be said, "He being dead yet speaks." What a wondrous subject for

contemplation! God in our nature, (He who once trod this earth in our tried and sorrowing and suffering and tempted nature,) now wearing a glorified human form at the right hand of His Father, and, "with His own precious blood," appearing in the presence of God for us!

He is the Great Angel of the everlasting covenant, with the censer "full of much incense," waiting to receive the prayers and pleadings of His people, that He may present these sprinkled with the fragrance of His own adorable merits--our "Counselor"--one whom the Father "hears always"--whose plea is not that of Mercy for the undeserving, but of Justice suing for the blood-bought rights of His Redeemed. His bosom of love is represented as "girded about with a golden belt," emblem of His inviolable affection and attachment to His people--that loving them from "the first of time," He will love them "unto the end."

Myriad prayers are ascending from burdened hearts, (and that, also, every moment,) but none bewilder Him by their diversity, none weary Him by their constancy. The "much incense" of His golden censer knows no diminishing--ever emptying and yet ever feeding, and always full. He can ask for all, and answer all, and attend to all--no boon within the compass of Omnipotence to bestow, which cannot be secured by the Omnipotent--"Father, I will!"

Is it no subject matter of loftiest joy and consolation, to look upwards to the right hand of God, and behold "the Lamb that was slain," pleading, in silent eloquence, for His Church on earth through these memorials of anguish? to behold this "Rainbow round about the throne" (the cloud of His people's sins behind it) claiming for them exemption from the deluge of wrath--God Himself saying, "When I see the blood I will pass over you"--"The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, and remember the everlasting covenant!"

Often, doubtless, had these eleven disciples seen, in their own earthly Temple on the great Day of atonement, the High Priest vanish from the sight of the multitude, as he went into the holiest of all with his vessel of blood--now, they would understand the full significancy of the olden type. How, in a moment, would all their thoughts and previous conceptions of heaven be changed! Before, it was a wide, dreamy, ethereal region,

tenanted by spiritual essences. Now their eyes (yes, their heart of hearts) were fixed on their own beloved Master. It was now no longer a strange and distant world to them. It had already a Home-look. They saw One there, for whom they had a love greater than for all on earth beside, consecrated as a Priest for evermore. We know not what their prayers had been previously; but as they descended the mountain, we can almost fancy we hear their musings and converse--'Let us hasten,' they would say, 'to that upper chamber in Jerusalem. Let us gather our little band. Let us use our new and mighty argument. HE said before He left, "Whatever you ask in my NAME, I will give it to you. Hitherto have you asked nothing in my name; ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full." Let us go and pray in His name--"Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand; upon the Son of man whom you made strong for yourself." 'For His name's sake, hear us, pity us, strengthen us! We shall glory in our infirmities if your power, O Christ, will rest upon us!' Could even they not join a later apostle, as he climbs from step to step, until thus he reaches the height of his high argument--"It is Christ who died, yes, RATHER that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us!"

What a lofty subject is suggested by this hallowed memory of Olivet! What an incentive for having our hearts, our conversation, our citizenship in heaven--that there our Living Head is--the Being of beings--"that same Jesus," with His unchanged humanity! Many can look with sacred interest to the graveyard--"the long home" of earth--and say, 'I have a friend, a brother, a sister, a parent THERE!' Christians, you can look to the everlasting home of the skies, and say, 'I have a Brother on that throne! One who feels so tender an interest in His people, that He is said to keep them as the apple of His own eye. No intermission in His love, no alteration in His tones, no diminishing of His affection.'

Nor can we omit to add one closing thought. In doing so, we have to retrace our steps, for a moment, from following the disciple-band, with their mingled musings of sadness and joy, to stand once more on the ridge of Ascension, and listen to the last words of the heavenly messengers as they still spoke of "that same Jesus." It was this, that He was "so to come again." It was His second coming in glory; the same

theme we have found, in the course of these "memories," so often on His lips--the most frequently repeated of all His Olivet sayings--as if He had counseled His delegated angels to wake once more the silent echoes of the Mount with the great truth, on which upon its sacred ridges He had loved to dwell. And it was with reference to this blessed truth and blessed hope that they added the question, (shall we call it the gentle rebuke,) "You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing?"

They say the same to us. Church of God! drawing ever nearer to this solemn event, "why do you stand gazing?" why do you stand lingering? Christian, why loiter on the mountain top? Tarry not--squander not your precious moments. Who can tell how soon again the Heavenly gates may be opened for the descent of your enthroned Lord? Go, go! trim your lamps! put oil into your vessels, "He comes--He comes to judge the earth!" "That same Jesus shall so come!" The apostles, when they heard this, did not fold their arms in indifference and sloth. They went ahead with stout, bold hearts, to do their work manfully in the Church and the world. They would long, doubtless, for that blessed moment of reunion, when they could exclaim, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him." But they knew that the best waiting for Him was working for Him--waiting by patient suffering, or working by active duty.

"Who," asks the Psalmist in that beautiful ascension-psalm, where the gates are summoned to lift up their heads that the King of Glory may enter in--"who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy Place?" He answers, "He that has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully." "If you, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God." Be assured there is nothing that will so raise you above the world, as the elevating consciousness that you are partakers of the endless life of your living Redeemer; that your lives are now hidden with Christ in God, and that when Christ who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.

Seek often to climb, by faith, these steeps of Olivet, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said, "A little while and you shall not see me, and again in a little while and you shall see me." That first "little while" will soon be over--the little while of the Church's widowhood,

mourning her absent Lord. But the great while when "we shall see Him," is every day drawing nearer. Every hour is giving fresh emphasis to the words, "Yet a little while and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

Remember it is "to them also that look for Him, He shall appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." The assembled Jewish worshipers looked for the re-appearance of their High Priest, when He was ministering in the Holy of Holies. They waited anxiously in the outer porch to see the veiling curtain drawn, and the Intercessor of the nation come forth, to pour upon the multitude, with outstretched hands, the old benediction, "The Lord bless you, and keep you--the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you--the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace," (Num. 6:24-26.) Not until then, were the imposing services of that high day of Hebrew festival completed. Do we (of this gospel day) see through the type? Are we on the outlook for our reappearing High Priest, coming forth from the heavenly Presence to stand (who knows but it may be literally again) on that height of Olivet, and, with the same outstretched hands of love, to say to the waiting myriads of His expectant Church, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?"

Are we thus "LOOKING for that blessed hope?" It was a gladdening sound to the Jewish multitudes in their Temple area, when they heard the sound of the silver bells on the hem of their high priest's garment, giving intimation of his approach--"Blessed are they who know the joyful sound." "Blessed are those servants who, when their Lord comes, shall be found watching!"

# **A NEW TESTAMENT CHAPTER IN PROVIDENCE AND GRACE NOONTIDE AT SYCHAR (The story of Jacob's well)**

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### **THE NEEDS BE**

"He had to go through Samaria." John 4:4

In the previous chapter we considered some of the outward accessories in this beautiful and instructive narrative of the Apostle of Love, and grouped together a number of historical associations and personal recollections which may serve to vivify the spiritual lessons which will henceforth claim our attention. John's narration forms one of those episodes in the life of his divine Master, full of circumstantial details, which are peculiar to himself. It reminds us of another and similar chapter of his Gospel—his domestic portraiture, touched with so delicate a hand, of the family of Bethany, and which, as in the present case, he alone of the four evangelists has delineated—"apples of gold in pictures of silver."

There is much interesting material to invite attention without further premise, but one preliminary incidental remark on the threshold of the Evangelist's narrative must claim our consideration in the present chapter—"He had to go through Samaria."

Samaria lay in the direct route between Judea and Galilee. There was, indeed, an alternative road by the eastern side of the Jordan valley and Perea. But the former, for various reasons, was most frequently traversed



then, as it is invariably now; and that, too, notwithstanding the indignities, to which we shall subsequently allude, which the Galileans had often to encounter in the transit, owing to the hostility of the lawless mixed tribe inhabiting the valleys around Ebal and Gerizim. Josephus specially mentions that the pilgrim Hebrews from northern Palestine, in going to their anniversary festivals in Jerusalem, preferred this shorter journey, although these were the very occasions when the spirit of malignant and inveterate enmity between the conflicting races was most violently expressed. If this, then, were the favorite, most usual, most frequented highway between Jerusalem and Nazareth, does it not seem, unless for some specific reason, to be redundant phraseology, (and more especially as addressed to readers who were thoroughly conversant with the itineraries of their own country) for the Evangelist so strongly to assert in his narrative the axiomatic fact as to the "had to" or necessity laid upon Christ to go to Galilee by the ordinary route? Moreover, from a subsequent statement (ver. 40) it could not have been purposes of expedition which in His case made this route imperative, as we find He was induced so far to alter what seemed His original intention, by tarrying at Shechem for "two days."

What then was this divine constraint imposed upon the adorable Redeemer which demanded so special an entry in the narrative of the inspired recorder? We answer, it was because of an occurrence registered in an older and more majestic volume—the Book of the Divine decrees. 'By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,' a wandering star was, in the course of this memorable journey, to be reclaimed from its devious orbit, and a glorious testimony given as to how God's sovereign grace can triumph over all obstacles, and be independent of all place and circumstance.

To no locality could the Great Sower have 'gone forth to sow,' with the prospect of more unpromising results, than to that morally and spiritually rocky and thorny wayside. "Thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins," (Prov. 24:31) It had acquired an evil reputation. The very name, Shechem, had, by common parlance, been merged into the disgraceful epithet "Sychar," which means "drunkard" or "folly." It was one of

Jeroboam's cities—the wicked prince whose name has been cursed with the unenviable notoriety that "he made Israel to sin." Perhaps it may have been the dreadful depravity, and, humanly speaking, invulnerable unbelief of the Samaritan race which dictated the Savior's earliest commission to His yet untried disciples, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel," (Matt. 10:5, 6.)

What, however, deters the servant is not to deter the Master. "Who are you, O great mountain?" Before the true Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. The wisdom of God is not "Sychar:" it is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. In the midst of drunkards and debauchees the Christ of Nazareth is to prove and vindicate the omnipotence of that divine energy which can change the vulture into the dove, the lion into the lamb, and bring the outcast of Shechem, like the demoniac of Gadara, to sit submissive at His feet. In the glowing figure of the prophet, these mountains around are to break forth before him into singing, and all the trees of the field are to clap their hands: instead of the thorn, is to come up the fir tree; and instead of the briar, is to come up the myrtle tree. His own declaration by the lips of the same seer is to receive a remarkable fulfillment in the case of the Church of Samaria, and especially in her who was the first ingathered sheaf, "I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. To a nation that did not call on My name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'"

Need we wonder now, at the apparently superfluous entry in the Gospel narrative, "He HAD to go through Samaria?" What would the infant Church, yes, the Church in all ages, have missed, had our Bibles been stripped of this fourth chapter of John? A sweet, silver tone of the jubilee trumpet would have been lost to the trembling, the despairing, the perishing. Oh most memorable incident! Oh most honored fountain! Well may the 'Israel of God' stand round the stony margin—as did the Hebrew nobles and princes of old with their rugged staves, at Beer, on the borders of Moab, by the brooks of Arnon—and say, in the words of that oldest pilgrim song, "Spring up, O well: sing to it," for a nobler than Hebrew "prince" or "noble" has made you oracular—put a tongue into your depths—and made you speak of "living water springing up into everlasting life."

There is one special practical thought which this "had to" of the great wayside Traveler suggests: it is, the peerless value of a single soul in the sight of Christ.

It is the truth of His own exquisite parable exhibited in impressive reality: the heavenly Shepherd, when, out of the hundred sheep He had missed one erring wanderer, going amid these mountains of Samaria to seek 'that which was lost.' There were many in populous Jerusalem to whom we might have expected rather that He would have borne the water of life, crowds of far more willing and receptive hearers were in the district of Aenon, near to Salim, the scene of the Baptist's successful labors. In His own city of Capernaum were waiting responsive multitudes—many who had long sat in gross darkness, but who now saw and owned the great Light—friends of the Bridegroom, who were rejoicing greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice. But on His way there, the sigh of one lone captive is borne to His ear—the bleat of one truant of the flock, fleece-torn, and footsore, and weary, is heard under the shadow of Ebal, or rather under the shadow of those curses which of old rang from Ebal's frowning rocks—for the sake of that one, not an inspired penman, not a recording angel, but His own infinite love and mercy dictates the words, "He had to go!"

Nor is this a solitary example given us in Scripture of the priceless estimate put by the Divine Being on the worth of one soul. Take as another illustrative case, that of the Ethiopian eunuch traveling through the desert of Gaza; a case all the more suitable as having a topographical connection with the Church in Samaria, of which this woman was the honored founder. That prime minister or chief treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia, a Jewish proselyte—like the Hadjis one meets so often still in the East coming from the shrine of the false prophet at Mecca, or like the Greek and Russian pilgrims returning from their pilgrimages to Jerusalem—was proceeding homewards from the Hebrew 'city of solemnities' (Jerusalem), where he had been doing homage to the one living and true God. Despite, however, his renunciation of the polytheism of Ethiopia; despite his formal subscription to the creed of Judaism, and the earnestness and sincerity evinced by his undertaking that vast journey from Africa to Asia, it is evident that he was retracing his steps still a stranger to peace; the deep longing of his soul had been unmet and

unsatisfied. It seemed as if in vain he had braved for weeks, hot suns by day, and drenching dews by night. But unlike the hardened, indifferent Samaritan woman of our narrative, he had been in the way of duty. Unlike her, he had been seeking the living water, although he had failed to find it, and was returning in his chariot scanning the scroll of the great prophet, which was opened at the most glorious and gladdening of Isaiah's gospel visions. He had gone as a worshiper to Pentecost; and although his eyes continued blinded to those elevating verities of a new dispensation, which alone could give him light and life, he was still cherishing and manifesting the child-like spirit of a devout inquirer. This Ethiopian was "stretching forth his hands to God"—"seeking the Lord, if perhaps he might find Him." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

At that time a new life had stirred Samaria's valley of dry bones. Living streams had reached it better than those which had made a little material Paradise of the adjoining glens of Ephraim and Manasseh: the thirsty spiritual land had become pools of water. Philip the Evangelist had been specially sent to this scene of revival. He was preaching with acceptance; hundreds were hanging on his lips: for we read, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ there; When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. . . So there was great joy in the city." This religious awakening, commencing in Samaria as the capital, extended among the surrounding villages and towns; Shechem doubtless participated in the shower that had come down in its season—the "shower of blessing." In the midst of his career of usefulness, an angel—a delegate from the upper sanctuary—is sent on a special mission to this greatly owned and successful minister of God. Strange to say, it is to arrest him in the field of his abundant labor, just when he is scattering the good seed with bounteous hand, and seeing it springing up under the rain and dews of heaven. It is a mandate, however, from which there can be no evasion, and he immediately obeys the summons. But what is this new sphere of more imperative duty? Why are these souls, hungering for the bread of life, left all at once without assistance? why these fields abandoned for the time by this faithful reaper, just when inviting the sickle, already "white unto the harvest?" It is, that one weary spirit may be comforted; that one

stray sheaf may be gathered into the heavenly garner; and not until that solitary traveler in the Gaza desert is sent on his way rejoicing, does Philip return to his labors.

Yes, we again say, reverting to the narrative of John, beautiful testimony to the yearning personal love of the Savior. "He had to go;" and that 'necessity' was to polish one stone for the building of His temple, one gem for the embellishment of His crown—to give to one shipwrecked abandoned vessel, drifting fast to destruction amid wild tempests and wintry seas, rest and safety and repose in the haven of His own infinitely pure presence and compassion. It reminds one of what is so often seen, and is always so touching, a mother's tender affection for her pining invalid—the weary suffering inhabitant of the sick-chamber—the caged bird of the family, with drooping wing and wailing note and ruffled plumage. The hardier plants are left to battle with the storm; but her most tender care is lavished on the sickly flower prematurely drooping. The others are for the time forgotten, as she watches the blanching of these tender leaves, the early falling of these cherished blossoms. Or more touching still, when with bated breath she speaks of the blank in her household, and how, with all her gratitude for remaining blessings, her heart of hearts wanders to the silent churchyard after that which was lost!

"My brothers, if one of you (any one of you) should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over ONE sinner who repents."

God still "sets the solitary in families, and brings out those who are bound with chains." Is there not the richest and most tender encouragement here for the guiltiest? The "had to" which brought the Savior of the world to that wayside well of old, may bring Him still, in His ineffable compassion, to the chief of sinners—to manifest the same divine solicitude, the same personal love. Let none deem themselves beyond the pale of His divine power and sympathy and support, as if that great Central Sun had lost its sovereign control over the wandering star plunging amid the ever-deepening darkness; or as if He had altered or modified His own saying, which in this narrative passage has received so

sublime an illustration—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Rather, as with your eye on the well of Sychar, and on the compassion and pity garnered in the divine heart, you exclaim, "Can it be that He will receive 'ME, even ME?'" go, turn the words of the simple but beautiful hymn into a prayer—

"Pass me not, O gracious Father,  
Sinful though my heart may be;  
You might leave me, but the rather  
Let Your mercy light on me—  
Even me.

"Pass me not, O tender Savior—  
Let me live and cling to Thee—  
I am longing for Your favor;  
While You are calling, call for me—  
Even me.

"Have I long in sin been sleeping—  
Long been slighting, grieving Thee?  
Has the world my heart been keeping?  
Oh, forgive and rescue me!  
Even me.

"Love of God so pure and changeless,  
Blood of Christ so rich and free,  
Grace of God so strong and boundless,  
Magnify it all in me—  
Even me.

"Pass me not—this lost one bringing,  
Bind my heart, O Lord, to Thee;  
While the streams of life are springing,  
Gladden others—gladden me!  
Even me."

## THE WEARY PILGRIM

"Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat thus down by the well. It was about the sixth hour." John 4:6

Nothing more frequently impressed the writer while sojourning in Palestine, than a feature in the humiliation of our blessed Lord which never so much as occurred previously—the bodily fatigue which He must have constantly undergone in His often pilgrimages along arid plains and sultry valleys. If even now, with all the comforts of tent and equipage, the modern traveler finds walking oppressive and exhausting, what must it have been to traverse these, with no aid but the staff and rough sandal. The Ethiopian eunuch, referred to in the preceding chapter, traveling through the desert of Gaza, was "sitting in his chariot." We picture Abraham, or his grandson who dug the well of Sychar, as they came and went from Mesopotamia or Hebron, mounted on their camels, with "all the substance they had gotten" following in long file; but, He, whose day they saw afar off and were glad, seems on all occasions, except one, to have journeyed on foot; that one (the Hosanna entrance) being an exceptional public assertion of His theocratic and royal rights as Zion's king. While the pilgrim father of old, and the pilgrim wayfarer still, pitch their canvas or goatskin tents, this Lord of pilgrims was content to spread His garment of camel's hair under the shade of some fig tree or thorny nook; or perchance within one of the abounding natural caverns in the limestone rock, He would catch a few hours of broken slumber, either when night drew its curtains around Him, or, as is the used of travelers and caravans still, during the sultry heat of noon. Often in His own touching words, (among the most touching He ever spoke,) 'the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head.'

It is such a picture which is now brought before us in the course of our narrative—"Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat thus down by the well. It was about the sixth hour." Touching description! He had been traversing as already described in the introductory chapter, during the long hours of morning, the valleys of Ephraim, on His way to the Wady El-Mokhna, and then along the unsheltered plain itself, under the blaze

of that Syrian sun. The ordinary mealtime of noon had arrived, when hunger was superadded to physical fatigue, and being weary with His journey and long fast, He "sat down by the well." This is an expression which, indefinite in itself, has received various interpretations. By some it has been supposed to mean that He sat there 'as best He could;' either on the hard parapet, or else on the beaten ground, making the rough curbstone a pillow for His head. By others, and among these Chrysostom, that He flung Himself down 'as soon as He could,' upon the first seat He could find. Others, connecting the word "thus" with the word "tired," refer it to His weary position; He sat "thus"—faint, toilworn—His hand, perhaps, on His throbbing temples, shielding His head from the oppressive sun-rays. Whichever meaning we adopt, here at least, we have an apparently poor pilgrim of Galilee, companionless, hungry, thirsty, prostrated with fatigue, thankful, as we shall find, of a cup of water from a wayside well, but being unprovided with rope or pitcher or other appliance, compelled to wait for some chance visitor to supply the boon.

It is in such incidental occurrences that our Lord's humanity and the lowliness of His humiliation are most touchingly exemplified. We have other more marked and expressive illustrations of His weakness and weariness—His participation alike in the sufferings and innocent infirmities of the race He came to save. As when, amid the peculiar white limestone deserts which overhang the Dead Sea, utterly devoid of sustenance for man and beast, the arch-enemy assaulted Him through one of the avenues of our physical nature, and, on the plea of demonstrating His divinity, would make Him yield to the temptation of converting the rocks around into bread, to stay the race of hunger. Or as, after a long day's unremitting labor on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, overtaken nature asserted her claims, and on the rough planks of a fishing-boat He lay fast asleep. Or when, in the lingering agonies of the Cross, His life-blood ebbing away, He gasped forth with fevered burning lips, "I thirst."

But, we repeat, it is in the quieter nooks of that valley of humiliation which He trod, that we come often on the most affecting of such testimonies. As when His poverty is attested by His virgin mother, eight days after His birth, "when the time of her purification according to the



law had been completed," unable to bring the customary sacrifice of "a lamb for a burnt-offering," she resorts to the gracious alternative provided for the poor of the people—"a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons." Or when He has to summon a fish from the sea of Gennesaret to pay the tribute-debt He is otherwise unable to pay. Or when mind and body together shattered by the news of the beloved Baptist's cruel death, He has to suspend His labors; and seek the restorative for a wounded spirit in rest and solitude. Or in crossing Mount Olivet, when it is touchingly said, "Early in the morning as He was on His way back to the city He was hungry;" and when that bodily hunger was mocked by the pretentious leaves of a fig tree "where He found no fruit." Or when, on His way to Calvary, the agonizing strain of the preceding day and night, alike on His physical and moral nature, caused Him to fall powerless under the weight of His cross.

Or yet again, as here, when we behold Him a weary, exhausted wayfarer on the Palestine highway, the sun of high noon beating on His unsheltered head, asking a cup of cold water from the poor sinner He was about to pluck as a brand from the burning! It has often been noted, that though from time to time He exercised miraculous powers to provide for the needs and even the redundancies of others, (as in the case of the wine at Cana, or the bread and fishes at Bethsaida-Julias,) He never called these into requisition for Himself.

At this very moment, how easily could He, to whom belonged the cattle on a thousand hills and every bird that soared among these surrounding valleys, have summoned from the groves of Shechem and Gerizim winged messengers like those which fed of old His great prophet, to minister to His necessities. No, He had only to speak the word, and nobler ministering spirits—legions of angels—would have trooped to His side with the bread of heaven—the best fruits culled from the celestial paradise. But "in all things it behooved Him to be like His brethren." He had chosen poverty as His birthright; and His divine prerogatives, so far as regarded Himself, are never employed to mitigate the needs and woes and privations of the estate to which He thus voluntarily submitted. Even on the cross He refused the soporific offered to deaden the acuteness of pain. And now, faint and weary at the well of Sychar, He is content with

the draught of water, until His disciples return from their errand to the adjoining city "to buy food."

Oh most precious and consolatory truth! That Savior to whom I owe my everlasting salvation, is the Brother of my nature—in all points tempted like as I am. It is impressively said regarding Him by the great apostle, "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham," (Heb. 2:16.) In other words, it was not the Angelic, but the Adamic nature he given to assume. Why not the angelic? why not the nobler nature of these principalities and powers—the chieftains and aristocracy of God's family? We answer, for two reasons: first, The angelic nature is a spiritual essence. "A spirit has not flesh and bones:" it is incapable, therefore, of corporeal suffering. It behooved Him as the divine oblation to suffer, and to suffer in the nature—the human nature which had sinned. "Therefore," says the apostle, adverting to this very point, "we see Jesus made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." And then, secondly, in addition to this, and more especially—had the assumption of the angelic nature been otherwise compatible with the requirements of the divine law, it would have prevented participation in feeling and sympathy with the myriads He came to redeem. An angel can sympathize only with his brother angel—the brotherhood of ministering spirits. It requires a man to sympathize with his brother man. But we have SUCH a Brother—such a High Priest "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Moreover, while He had it in His power to select from all the degrees and gradations of society—the mass of the human family being composed of the lowly and the poor, the children of need and poverty and suffering, He has forever sanctified and dignified POVERTY by taking it as His earthly inheritance. And thus, while those occupying the pinnacles of worldly greatness—while widowed royalty on the throne can cling to Him in this blessed identity of humanity as the Prince of sufferers, preeminently can the widow and orphan of the mine, and the hut, and the lonely garret—the teeming thousands struggling with hard toil and privation and poverty, claim the exalted sympathy of Him who, "though He was rich, yet for their sakes became poor."

But it would be a poor and insufficient anchorage for the human soul, in

its deathless interests, if this were all. However pure and untainted that HUMANITY was, however wide and comprehensive in its sympathies, we require something else, something more stable to lean upon, than the mere virtues of a spotless human life—the ideal of a perfect manhood nature. Blessed be God, the might of DEITY is revealed in conjunction with the tenderness of Humanity, "His name is Immanuel, God with us."

And it is remarkable how often, how generally, the two natures in the one Person are associated, alike in typical prefiguration, in gospel narrative, and in dogmatic statement. The modern Socinian or Unitarian overlooks or ignores this. He takes the coin and gazes only on the side bearing the human mark and superscription—the manger, the temptation, the unsullied life, the hero-death: he has not turned to the reverse golden side, gleaming with divine attestations. He goes to the old Sinai wilderness, where that same Savior, the covenant angel, revealed Himself as the deliverer of typical Israel; but he sees only a bush—a desert shrub, "a root out of a dry ground," burning with fire—the emblem of lowly, yet pure humanity: he has failed to hear the voice emanating from that oracle of burning flame, "I AM THAT I AM!" "I am the Lord God of your fathers, the GOD of Abraham, the GOD of Isaac, and the GOD of Jacob." He goes to the gospel story. He beholds a lowly individual baptized in the Jordan, receiving a sinner's lowly rite; but he fails to see that "fulfillment of all righteousness" transfigured into a divine manifesto, by the opened heavens and the descending dove and the witnessing voice. He beholds a slumbering man breathing heavily on the deck of a Tiberias fishing boat; but he fails to hear Him rebuking, with the voice of omnipotence, the winds and waves. He beholds the expiring criminal on Calvary, thorn-crowned, scourged, naked, buffeted—a pure and innocent, but a helpless, powerless martyr, dragged to unmerited death; but he fails to note how that mysterious Sufferer evokes a tribute from the dumb earth as it trembles to support His ignominious cross—the upheaving rocks around resenting the insults to the great Lord of all. And here, while he beholds an exhausted traveler reclining on the parapet of the well at Sychar, he forgets the omniscient glance which could unlock the deep secrets of the heart which quailed under the eye of Infinite purity, and the tongue which "told her all things that she ever did."

It is the same with regard to the dogmatic and doctrinal assertions of evangelists and apostles. The Unitarian sees proof positive of the humanity of Christ in John's unequivocal assertion, "The Word was made flesh;" but he has failed to mark the antecedent announcement, equally unequivocal, in the same page, "The Word was God." He reads the unchallenged statement of Paul in the commencement of his Epistle to the Hebrews, "You are my Son, this day have I begotten You;" but he has omitted the counterpart assertion, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." He reads in the declaration of the same apostle, the undoubted testimony to the lowly humanity assumed—"He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men;" but he has eliminated from his creed and his proof the opening words, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He reads in connection with the noble pedigree of Israel, "Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came;" but he fails to finish the sentence, "who is over all, God blessed forever," (Rom.9:5.) He looks to Christ as an example. He owns it to be the noblest, purest, loftiest, of restored and regenerated humanity; and he reads in the Epistle to the Colossians, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him;" but he has culpably concealed and overlooked that lofty introduction in the same epistle, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," (Col. 1:15-17; 2:6, 9.)

Reader, be it yours to rejoice in the glorious combination; that He who orders the magnificent marchings of Pleiades and Orion, who guides Arcturus with his sons—took into union with the might and majesty of Deity, the lowliness and the weakness of suffering humanity; that He who had the borrowed manger at Bethlehem, and led the youth of artisan toil at Nazareth, and sat the fainting pilgrim by the well of Jacob, can enter not only into the deeper and nobler sympathies of our nature, but even into its lowliest necessities and poorest, lowliest needs—hunger and thirst and faintness and lassitude—so that we may cease to wonder that many a

soiled leaf has been doubled down by the begrimed fingers of the children of poverty, at the fourth chapter of John's Gospel.

May it not have been this which induced the very beggars on the streets and highways of Palestine, when they heard that "Jesus of Nazareth passed by," to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon us!"

And He wears that humanity now. He is changed indeed in His outward estate. The wayfarer of Shechem is enthroned as King of saints amid a multitude which no man can number. But it is not the less true that the Divine Shepherd, who is now leading His flock to the living fountains of waters in heaven, is, in the sympathies of His glorified manhood, the unchanged Savior, who sat by the fountain on earth. When the loud wail of suffering humanity is borne to His ear, it gets the response of a Human heart. That noontide hour of Sychar is in habitual remembrance with Him, to whom a thousand years are as one day, for He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

Are there any whose eyes trace these pages, who, like Him, are weary—wary in another sense—wary with life's journey, the sun of TRIAL beating on their unsheltered heads; weary with pain, weary with heart sorrows—the disciples gone away—left companionless and alone; that too at the noontide hour, the hour they most needed rest and refreshment and comfort? "Consider Him . . . so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Go seat yourselves by that weary One, and hear Him whisper in your ears, in the midst of His own languor and faintness, "I know your sorrows!"

Are others weary, but, not like Him, weary with SIN? who have come up through these hot valleys of temptation, and are now sitting by the poisoned wells of existence, the pitcher broken at the cistern; nothing to draw with; the zest of life gone; the hot sun blazing in the meridian; no canopy, no fig tree shade, no rocky shelter to screen them from the fierce rays? Go, seat yourselves, too, by that weary One. Like the bird long struggling with baffled wings against the storm, drop into the crevices of this true Rock and hear the word of welcome, 'Come to Me, and I will give you rest.'

Are there others again—how many such are there—who have reached that period of existence which reminds them of Sychar's noontide—who are undergoing the burden and heat of the day in the very midst of life's arduous callings. Manhood's sixth hour; manhood in its prime! It is a befitting pausing place and pausing season in the journey, a blessed opportunity to seat yourselves by the well and the water of life. "About the sixth hour." One half of existence over. The morning and early hours gone. The steep valleys of early manhood, with their climbing struggles, their "hill difficulties," surmounted. But still, who that has been most successful in the past half journey—who that has reached life's midway well with least toiling effort—but has to fling himself down and confess that he is 'weary,' and if the living water be yet untasted, to cry out, in the anguish of unquenched and unsatisfied longings, "I thirst." Half way!

Oh, with many, with most, it is past the half-way journey. They have seen that sun, which has now attained its zenith, rise; but they are not to see it set. The valley of death, like the valley of Shechem, may be close at hand, its entrance within sight, while the true fountain of life is still unrepaired to.

My brother, as with the pilgrim in the caravan of old, or the traveler at this day by the Well of Jacob, you are seated in a spiritual sense there, gazing either on the Ebal of curses, or the Gerizim of blessings. Which are you to choose? to go on and brave the entrance under Ebal's frowning rocks; or to drink the living, life-giving water, and begin forthwith the ascent of the true Mountain of beatitudes beyond the Valley of the shadow? Is it the Sabbath's reposeful noontide hour which you are now enjoying; in which you are invited to turn aside and "rest a while," after traversing the week's rough highways of toil—to take off the dust-covered sandals and be alone with Jesus? Convert the hour of rest into the hour of solemn meditation and prayerful resolve. Look upwards to these mountain summits which enclose the valley. Select your alternative. Behold there is set before you the blessing and the curse, (Deut. 11:26.) "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart: who does not lift up his soul to an idol, or swear by what is false." He shall receive THE BLESSING from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

## **"THE DRAWER OF WATER"**

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" John 4:7

In the previous chapter we contemplated the Divine Pilgrim, wearied from His journey, seated by the well of Jacob. Let us turn for a little to the other visitant, at that consecrated spot, who divides with Him the interest of the narrative: "A Samaritan woman came to draw water."

The first question which naturally suggests itself is, What brought her there? And the question is all the more pertinent to those who are familiar with the locality. The well of Jacob, as has been previously noted, is at a considerable distance from the modern Nablous. Indeed, if the ancient Sychar be identical with the present Shechem, it cannot be less than a mile and a half. At all events, much nearer her home were two copious fountains, Ain Defileh and Ain Balata, which must have been as old as the days of the Canaanites, besides innumerable springs within and around the city; and whatever else may have been the changes which eighteen centuries have produced, we may feel assured that the number of the wells and streams of ancient times can have undergone no diminution. There must have been, therefore, some special reason to induce this female of Sychar, in the heat of noontide, to take an otherwise superfluous and unnecessary journey to a well that is specially designated as "deep" and the drawing from which must have been accompanied with considerable manual labor. The very hour, too, was unusual and peculiar. Of old, and to this day, evening was the time at which the wells and cisterns of Palestine were surrounded with living throngs. It is only the chance wayfarer or passing caravan that are found pausing at noon for refreshment. Moreover, as has been observed by Dr. Robinson, "that is was not the public well of the city is probable from the circumstance,

noted in verse 11, that there was here no public accommodation for drawing water."

The answer which we think is, on the whole, most satisfactory, is the one suggested by the same learned writer and followed by others, that it was more than likely a peculiar value set on the water—a superstitious virtue supposed to attach to the old patriarch's well—which induced this woman to protract her journey and brave the midday heat. In various parts of Europe, superstition has reared its convent, monastery or shrine around reputed sacred fountains which have borne for ages the name of their founder or patron saint, and been credited with an inherent charm for the cure of diseases alike physical and spiritual. What must have been the sanctity which, in the Jewish age, gathered round these holy relics of Israel's Pilgrim fathers at Beersheba and Sychar! no mythical saints of a mythical calendar, but the veritable spots where the tent and altar of the Friend of God and of His children's children were pitched, where the smoke of their offering ascended, and the rites of patriarchal hospitality were dispensed.

An objection, however, to this surmise may reasonably occur. We can quite imagine such a motive (we could not denounce it as superstitious, we would, to a certain extent, rather commend it as hallowed) actuating a true child of Abraham and Jacob—a partaker of their faith; but we can scarcely imagine a profligate and degenerate descendant of these holy patriarchs making any such nice discriminating distinction between the distant ancestral well and one of the gushing fountains that sang its way in the valley close by her own home.

This objection would be tenable, were it not for a strange peculiarity, in this composite fallen nature of ours, by which cringing superstition is not infrequently found allied with licentiousness. It has been well observed, "There is a kind of 'religious' feeling (often possessed by people of a susceptible and emotional temperament) which, where moral principle is lacking, gives birth at once to a sensuous superstition and a sensuous life." In the most abandoned heart there is always something to utter a protest against its sin; and along with this, some false refuge or expedient to shake off the uneasy feeling of guilt and of abused and violated responsibility. As, at times, amid the wrecks of the old ruin tangled and



matted with rank weed and nettle—crumbling in decay, may be discovered the piece of now marred, but once delicate sculpture, indicating and memorializing its vanished glory—so even in the soul which is a moral wreck, there is found, now and then, in the midst of its fallen capitals and moldering walls, some strange indices, so to speak, of the tracery of a diviner than human finger "on the plaster of the wall" of that once kingly palace.

In the case of some, this manifests itself in a groping after higher life and truer verities. With others, as with the Samaritan woman, it is no more than a dim recognition of that moral responsibility of which we have just spoken, coupled with an undefined mysterious dread of divine retribution; but taking the counterfeit form of seeking to atone for inner heart impurity by the performance of some outer act of religiousness. In one word, counterbalancing the life of guilt, and quieting the stings and rebukes of conscience by the penance and the pilgrimage—giving the fruit of the body, or the toil of the body, for the sin of the soul.

We see it in the case of the Mohammedan, reveling in all that is morally debasing, yet saving the pittances of a lifetime and braving weeks and months of perilous endurance to accomplish his pilgrimage to Mecca. We see it in the case of the Roman Catholic: for in what but this consists one of the fatal charms of Romanism and of the semi-Romanism of the day, whose essence is contained in what is called 'sacramental efficacy;' and where the mere external act of worship, is made a counterbalance for the worldly or abandoned life. Such is frail, inconsistent, fallen human nature; and this too, we may add, not alone in the case of the gentle Hindu, or the sensual Mussulman, or the superstitious Romanist, or the mediaeval Ritualist; but under every phase of religion, not excepting the nominal Protestant and Puritan, where that religion is a mere form, not a regenerating power.

The woman of Samaria is thus the type and representative of a by no means limited class, among whom depravity of character is found associated either with silly superstition or with hollow sanctimoniousness; a degraded citizen of Sychar, yet going at times with meditative step, and in the pride of sect and of religious ancestry, to the "Holy Well," and thereby, in spite of a life of unblushing sin, thinking she

was doing the God of Jacob service! Oh, the human heart, like that well of Jacob, is "deep"—deep in its corruptions, deep in its self-deceptions. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?"

But to pass to one other more practical reflection—the Guiding hand which brought the woman of Samaria at that particular time to draw water. We shall afterwards come to read in her brief biography a wondrous chapter in the volume of Grace: but we have here to mark a preliminary page in the book of Providence.

Nothing, in the earthly sense of the word, was more purely accidental, than the going of this citizen of Sychar that day to the well at sultry noontide. She left her home with no thought but to bring in her pitcher a draught from the well-known fountain. Never dreamt she for a moment of an undesigned meeting that was to shape, and mold, and recast her whole future. Had she come there a day sooner, or at the usual evening time for the drawing of water, amid the hum of voices and the bleating of flocks, she would have missed that "still hour" of divine musing and heavenly communion: she would have returned the heathen and reprobate she had gone. But there is a directing, controlling, superintending Power guiding all human plans and purposes, "rough hew them as we will."

Who can doubt that, all unknown and unforeseen by her, it was one of those ordinary everyday providences of God, included in the supervision "of all His creatures and all their actions," which we are compelled implicitly to believe, if we would unriddle and understand the mystery of the world. Make that journey to the well a mere happy accident—a curious and singular coincidence in which there was no divine foreknowledge and decree, and as a matter of course we write "chance" on the momentous results to which the meeting led—the founding and extension of that Church which sprang from the woman of Samaria as its nursing mother. If we stop short of the only true solution of that journey, as being one of the eternal purposes of the Most High—prearranged and predetermined by Him—we virtually dissever God from history. Accident! Chance! No; the name of that woman was written in the Book of life. The same "needs be" of the divine 'determinate counsel' which brought the

Redeemer there, brought also her, who, before that noontide sun sank behind Gerizim, was to He made a trophy of His grace.

Indeed we cannot speak of such apparently trivial occurrences as "accidents" without virtually dethroning Deity, wresting the sovereignty of His own world from the hands of the Supreme. The peradventures and contingencies of men are the interpreters of His will, the executioners of His purposes, heralds sent forth to fulfill His high behests. If we deny particular providences, we must deny more special ones. If we deny God's hand in the minute events of daily life, we must, to be consistent, eliminate His overruling power in the rise and fall of empires. Minute occurrences, apparently the most trifling, have not infrequently involved the destinies of nations, and the blessing or curse of generations unborn.

Every schoolboy knows the authenticated fact in our own early Scottish history, how the fate of this kingdom hung, so to speak, on a spider's web; how the success of that tiny insect nerved the arm of her chieftain kin—as like himself, six times baffled, it reached on a seventh effort the rafters above his head—roused him from his couch of despondency and led to the victory which secured his country's independence. By refusing to recognize God's direct overruling providence in an incident so trifling, we must, as a matter of course, sever from His cognizance and supervision every subsequent historic event in our nation's annals to which that apparently trivial accident gave birth.

The reader of "The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire" may remember a similar story with a lesson: the passage wherein the skeptic writer, in the pomp of stately history, tells of the little bird of the desert which rose from the mouth of the cave, where Mahomet, the false prophet, had taken refuge from his pursuers, and by which occurrence he evaded certain death. He records, with a covert skeptic's sneer, (what the Christian may read as a great truth) that "the flight of that bird changed the destinies of the world." Yes! this is true, 'but not as the infidel would represent it—as if that winged tenant of the wilderness had usurped the place of the Great Supreme. We accept his saying, but it is with the interpretation that the almighty Ruler, the God of providence, had set that tiny warder by the cave's mouth, prepared its perch by the rugged entrance, and gave the summons to fly.

Deny God's providence as extending to so minute and trifling an occurrence, and you wrest from Him the cognizance and foreknowledge of the vast influence which that impostor was yet to exercise on the world's history. In other words, you admit the 'heathen deity of chance' into your Parthenon; you fling the reins on the coursers' necks and surrender all idea of Divine control—resolving all history into a fortuitous concurrence of chances, just as the infidel world-maker would resolve all this fair creation, with its harmonious movements and nicely adjusted machinery, into the old fortuitous concurrence of atoms. No, no; man proposes, but God disposes. He who wheels the planets in their courses, marks the sparrow's fall. He who swept Babylon with the broom of destruction, or overthrew Pharaoh in the Red Sea, or raised up the princely Cyrus to be the deliverer of His people, conducted that female's steps that day, at the noontide hour, to Sychar's well. He who brought (in similar circumstances) Rebekah, Rachel, and Zipporah to other eastern fountains to be wedded to the princely fathers of the Hebrew people, brought their descendant to nobler and more glorious spiritual espousals—to pledge her troth to the Divine Redeemer, who was soon to ratify these espousals by the outpouring of His precious blood, and proclaim to a whole outcast world, "Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of Hosts is His name."

We see every day the same truth illustrated in our own individual histories. Events, often apparently trivial and unimportant—what the world calls accidents, form really and truly the mighty levers of life, altering and revolutionizing our whole future. The relationships of earth, the spheres of our labor, the connections of business, the bounds of our habitation, are all in one sense accidental. The merest trifles have touched the springs of action; a twig or stone has altered the direction of life's footpath; the jutting rock in the stream has altered its course in the valley; the casual meeting of a friend on the street may have led to the most important crisis in our history: the youth on the verge of sin and ruin by stumbling accidentally into some house of God, has been led to hear the word, which to him now is like the memory of that well of Sychar to the saved penitent of Samaria—associated with living streams and everlasting life.

Let us rejoice in the simple but sublime assurance that all that happens is ordered for us—that the vessel in which we sail is not like the abandoned ship of the great painter—a deserted log in the wild waters, without helm or mast or compass, driven here and there by the capricious breath of the tempest—but that rather, like the gigantic wheels in Ezekiel's vision, the wheel within wheel is propelled by Omnipotence. Better still, as in the same vision the prophet of Chebar saw "above the firmament the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it;" so it is for us to know, and to rejoice in the knowledge, that every event is in the hands of the Savior who died for us, and who has given us this mightiest proof and pledge of dying love, that all things (even the most mysterious) are working together for our good.

Oh, even over our bitterest trials let us write the gleaming words, "He had to go." Blessed for us if that "had to" result—as it did in the case of the Lord of pilgrims and the repentant sinner, in bringing us to the well's mouth, to hold close converse on the all-momentous question of our salvation, and in the thirst of the world's sultry noon to get our parched souls filled with the water of salvation. Meanwhile be this our prayer, "Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths;" "Lead me in Your truth and teach me;" "Lead me in the way everlasting!" Whether it be amid the groves and singing streams and sunshine of Gerizim, or amid the "blackness and darkness and tempest" of Ebal, I will hear the guiding voice saying, "Follow Me. This is the way, walk in it."

"Lead, kindly Light; amid the encircling gloom

Lead me on:

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead me on.

Keep my feet, I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that You

Should lead me on;

I loved to choose and see my path, but now

Lead me on.

I loved the glare of day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

"So long Your power has blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
Over valley and hill, through stream and torrent, until  
The night is gone;  
And, with the morn, those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

## **THE CONFERENCE**

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" John 4:7

The meeting and conference here unfolded to us with the woman of Samaria, is a graphic representation of what has occurred thousand thousand times since; when the soul is brought into real, though invisible communion with the Savior. Other moments of our individual histories may be solemn and momentous, and vast worldly issues dependent upon them; but none to compare with this. It is death coming in contact with life—the mortal with the immortal—the finite with the infinite—time with eternity—dust with Deity—the sinner with the great God. What an impressive, mysterious contrast, between those two who now met for the first time by the well of the patriarch! Frowning, lightning-scathed, storm-wreathed Ebal was confronting close by, the smiling groves and sunshine of Gerizim: but what a feeble type and image of these living beings standing face to face: impurity confronting spotless purity: a lost and ruined soul confronting its holy, yet forgiving Redeemer. It is the gospel in expressive parable.

This prodigal daughter is a striking counterpart of the prodigal son in our Lord's touching discourse. Like him, she had wandered from her father's house. In all riotous living she had reveled. She had probably at that

moment around her head and neck and arms, what we have seen often and again adorning the females at the wells of Palestine, strings of coins, or, it may be, jewels, (in her case the mementos and rewards of sin.) But this glittering outer tinsel screened moral beggary and misery within. She had been feeding on the garbage of the wilderness; and her inarticulate cry was the echo of his wild plaint, "I perish with hunger!" May we not imagine her in her hours of deep remorse, (for who, the most degraded and reprobate, have not these?) brought up as she must have been in the knowledge of the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob—may we not imagine her saying at times within herself, "I will arise and go to my Father"? We do not say that any such definite religious longing or aspiration now brought her to the Well: far from it. As we shall afterwards find, though it may have been partly dissembled, she affected rather the contrary—lightness of heart and levity of speech, to the unknown stranger. But that she had her seasons of deep soul misery and self-reproach cannot be doubted; and coming as she now did, with a superstitious feeling at least to the fountain of the patriarch, she would be so far tutored and prepared, by her approach to that holy ground, for the unexpected converse which awaited her there.

At all events, if this prodigal had at the moment no thoughts of her Father; her Father—her Savior—her Brother—her Friend, had gracious thoughts of her. He "saw her afar off and had compassion upon her." He stripped the meretricious jewels off her head, and put the ring of His own adopting love on her ringless finger, and the sandals of a peace she had never known before, on her feet. Yes, and so great was His joy at finding the long-lost one, that when the disciples came afterwards from the city to their weary, hunger-stricken Master with the purchased bread, and with the request, "Master, eat;" we believe, for very joy, He could not look at the provided earthly refreshment. "I have food to eat," says He, which the world knows not of—"This my sister, my prodigal child, was dead and is alive again; she was lost and is found!"

In adverting, in the present chapter, to some preliminary features of this conference, we would remark How the Lord Jesus, in His dealings with His people, adapts Himself to their peculiar character and circumstances and necessities.

This is specially illustrated in the narrative of the woman of Samaria, from its juxtaposition in John's Gospel with another recorded interview of a similar kind—that with Nicodemus. In the one case, Christ had to bear with a proud Pharisee, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, one at whose door probably could be laid no glaring sin—a man scrupulous in external decencies, "as touching the righteousness which is of the Law, blameless." Moreover, in the character of this inquirer there was a constitutional timidity which is manifest even in the subsequent avowal of his discipleship. Though he brings costly offerings of his affection and love for the embalming of his Lord's body, he does not share the bolder moral courage of his Arimathean brother, in demanding from Pilate the sacred treasure. Jesus accordingly deals tenderly and sensitively with him, as one who is the prey of that "fear of man which brings a snare." He meets his case and its difficulties. He will not wound either his pride or his fears by challenging him to converse in broad day; but He will open for him His silent oratory on Olivet. He will permit him and encourage him to steal there, night by night, to unburden the doubts and misgivings of his anxious, thoughtful, truth-seeking, candid soul. He who suits the soldier to his place, and the place to the soldier, who "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," will not break this bruised reed nor quench this smoking, flax, until He bring forth judgment unto victory. "The same came to Jesus by night."

In dealing with the woman of Samaria, again, with her bold spirit and blunted feelings, there were no such tender scruples to consult; there was rather a propriety in holding converse with this impure child of darkness in the blaze of day. She needed the piercing blast of the north wind, bringing with it sharp convictions of sin; barbed arrow after arrow was sent through the folds of guilt covering her heart, until that heart lay broken and bleeding at the feet of her Divine Restorer—while the other, requiring rather the south wind of tender consolation and comfort, was led step by step, from the necessity of "the new birth," up to the sublime unfoldings of the love of God in the free gift of His Son and the bestowal of everlasting life. The two form a living commentary on the prophet's description of the Almighty's dealings, "In measure, when it shoots forth, you will debate with it; He stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind."



We may gather another affecting and impressive thought from these two conjoined, yet contrasted cases. They together recall the truth, already referred to in a preceding chapter, but here brought before us under a fresh illustration—the unresting love which, while on earth, Christ had for sinners: that any personal sacrifices He would make, any personal deprivation He would endure, to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins.

In the case of Nicodemus, night by night Jesus willingly surrendered or cut short His needed rest, that He might calm the perturbations of one agitated spirit. He would not give sleep to His eyes, nor slumber to His eyelids, until in that man's heart He found a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. And in the interview with the Samaritan woman, as we have seen, the hour of greatest recorded bodily weariness is with equal willingness alienated from rest, that He may bring the wanderer to His fold. We have watched the Great Shepherd of the sheep just terminating a long and fatiguing bodily journey through the hot valleys of Ephraim. But a soul is to be saved. He suspends needed repose from toil; and, as it were, with staff in hand, resumes the journey over rock and hedge and tangled precipice, in order that when His absent disciples return from their errand to the neighboring city, He may call together these His friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Here is the true covenant Angel who wrestled with Jacob at the brook Jabbok. "He wrestled," we read, "all night with him until the breaking of the day." But when day broke, did the wrestlings of that mysterious visitant terminate with the experience of that solitary man in the gorges of Jordan? No; daybreak is only a new summons for fresh efforts and deeds of love. Some new case requires His presence; some other pilgrim by some other brook, at that early morn, demands His aid and support. "Let Me go," He says, "for the day breaks." Immediately He takes His departure. Leaving the patriarch with a new and significant name, the badge at once of blessing and victory, He speeds His way—on, still on—saying, to this soul and that in His untiring flight, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help!"

Another and different thought suggests itself in connection with the

interview at Jacob's well. It is, that this conference of Christ, the most minutely detailed conference of the Bible, was with a Woman.

This strikes us comparatively little in our land of gospel privilege; because, females have been exalted by Christianity, and Christianity's founder, to the place they were designed by their Creator to occupy. There is nothing to us strange or unusual in a woman taking part in a conference about divine things. On the contrary, it is females who now throng our religious meetings, and are the best and most effective auxiliaries in every department of practical Christian effort. But it must be remembered it was far different among the Hebrews. The same social degradation which characterized the female sex amid pagan nations, and which is the curse of Orientalism at this moment, was so far at least, and especially in the age to which we refer, grafted on Judaism. "The Rabbis forbade her instruction, deemed her incapable of it; first made her despicable, and then despised her." Even the disciples, those whom we might have thought had already been taught the creed of a nobler Christian chivalry, "marveled that He talked with the woman," (ver. 27.) It was a violation of their conventional ideas talking to her at all; above all, talking to her about religious themes, the soul, "the gift of God," "everlasting life."

But has not Christ, by this very conversation and interview, inaugurated a new era and warrant for the spiritual activities of woman: not only conversing with her about her own soul, but sending her forth a herald of salvation to her fellow-townsmen, and making the Church of Samaria imperishably identified with her name and labors? To all of us, therefore, that hour of converse has its sacred—with many, the most sacred memories of life. Jesus consecrating this female's mission was, in one sense, consecrating the mission of every mother as she bends over her infant's cradle, or as she gathers her children around her knee and tells them of the great salvation.

Yes, if there was one thing more than another that made Christianity stand out in bold and beautiful contrast with the debasing and sensual creed of heathenism, it was when the adorable Redeemer removed the swathing bands and fetters from the body and soul of woman, and sent her forth from her couch of degradation, earth's ministering angel,

"walking and leaping and praising God." Where would have been the noblest and the best names in the Church's annals, had female influence, had a mother's tongue, been gagged, and a mother's prayers been stifled? Where would have been our Augustines and our Origenes, our Zwingles and Luthers, our Watts and Bunyans, if Christ had not stood by His vacant sepulcher in the morning of His resurrection, and asking the question before an enslaving world, "Woman, why are you weeping?" dried her tears, elevated her nature, refined her sympathies, vindicated her rights, redressed her wrongs, burst her bonds and set her free!

That hour and that conversation at Sychar were the first-fruits of a glorious harvest—a prophecy and pledge of unnumbered blessings, which many a pious son has to thank God for; yes, over which many a prodigal has to rejoice through the burning tears of a dying but penitent hour. John Newton, in that dark night at the helm of his vessel, would not have remembered the hymn which his mother taught him, and which revolutionized his life, but for the new charter which Christ put into the hands of the woman of Samaria, and such as she.

And with the same reference, let us read in the touching story also a prophecy of the future; not as to what Christianity has done for us and for Christendom, but what the power of Christianity will yet do for those down-trodden lands where that new and glorious charter was first written, and where woman is still the soulless drudge, the grinding slave of unnatural oppression. In no part of Palestine more so than near and around this very spot where Christ spoke these wondrous words at Jacob's well, is woman overtaken and degraded—toil her cruel birthright; her dwelling is not on the sunlit slopes of Gerizim, but amid the frowning curses of Ebal. The cross has waned and the crescent is triumphant. Since the light of the Christianity of early apostolic days has there been extinguished—the sacred name of its Founder become a reproach and a scorn—well may the wailing words of the noblest in the early band of Jewish females be echoed by her oppressed successors, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!" But the day of emancipation is at hand. What Christianity has done for us, it will yet do for those sitting under the shadow of death.

It is remarkable that in many of the inspired prefigurations of Israel's

glowing future in the millennial era, the equality of woman is a specified feature and characteristic, "My sons shall come from far, my daughters shall be nursed at my side." "Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Who can forget that it was a woman, a Jewish woman, who was last at the cross and first at the grave? Who can forget that it was the women of the early Church whose devotion and moral heroism evoked Paul's warmest benedictions and salutations—Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and others in the honored sisterhood of the faith. So, may we not expect, as one of the bright features in the ingathering of regenerated Israel that woman, Christianized, and, by being Christianized, dignified, elevated, and refined, will prove, like this female of Sychar, a herald of glad tidings—the gentle dove of peace sent forth with the olive-branch from the true ark of God. In that lofty Hebrew Alleluia, which is to blend with the Gentile Hosanna in welcoming in the King of the Jews to His throne on Mount Zion—the metropolis of a millennial earth—loud amid timbrel and harp will be the voices of the Miriams and the Deborahs, who, in higher strains than on the Red Sea, or amid the hills of Kedesh, will "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb," and help to carry the glad strain from home to home, from valley to valley, from city to city, until the whole land will send up the shout, loud as the sound of many waters, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Rejoice, O daughter of Zion; behold, your King comes to you!" "Loose yourself from the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion." You may now be like the bird with broken wing—a caged captive, unable to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. But the day is at hand when the Gospel's soaring pinion of life and liberty will be yours again; when "you shall be as a dove whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

While we are permitted thus joyfully to remember, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, "male nor female;" the great practical question for each of us as individuals, is not what the religion of Christ has done for the world in the past, or may yet do in the world of the future, but what has that religion done for me? Do we know anything of the converting and regenerating power which plucked that degraded Samaritan as a jewel from the crown of the prince of darkness, to irradiate the brow of Jesus? What grace can do, in

changing and transforming the worst and most hopeless; quickening those who are dead; and animating the groveling spirit with new motives, new principles, new tastes, new feelings, new aspirations! That very patriarch at whose well she stood, was himself once wily, cunning selfish, worldly-minded; his name too truly was Jacob, "supplanter." But he became a converted man; as much so, and as truly so, as his degenerate descendant standing at the brink of his fountain. From being the supplanter, his name was changed into "Israel," "the soldier of God."

And what, in both cases, was the turning point in their spiritual histories? It was the sight of Christ; the revelation of His person and character and work. It was on a memorable night, (twenty years before the wrestling with the Angel at Jabbok,) on the stony pillow of Bethel, that Jacob received his earliest revelation of redeeming love. The supplanter dreamed a dream. He saw a ladder planted between himself and heaven; or, as some think, his dreams took their shape and coloring from the physical features of his nightly solitude—that these strange, white, grey stones in the desolate moorland, formed themselves into a colossal staircase, leading up to heaven; at the base of which the outcast wanderer slept, angels beckoning him upwards, and the God of Abraham smiling upon him a welcome. It was a type of Him who was to be revealed as the way to the Father; "the way and the truth and the life," conducting the most foreign and outcast into the holiest of all. He rose refreshed and comforted: "This," He exclaimed, "is the gate of heaven!" And that first and earliest revelation was completed and confirmed at the memorable night of soul-struggle, of which we have just spoken, where he wrestled, and prevailed, and saw the angel Jehovah face to face. What was revealed to him at first in type, was revealed to the Samaritan woman in visible reality and by living word. It was the manifestation of Christ in the glory of His person and fullness of His grace, which demolished in her case, too, the strongholds of Satan, and redeemed them for the service and glory of her accepted Savior!

And the same mighty power, the power of the cross, can vanquish and subdue us—can transform us who were once rebels, traitors, supplanters, into "soldiers of God." How many, touched by that omnipotent grace and by the attractions of that cross, are ready to utter the same glad and

grateful testimony—

"See me! see me! once a rebel,  
Vanquished at His cross I lie!  
Cross—to tame earth's proudest able,  
Who was e'er so proud as I?  
He convinced me, He subdued me,  
He chastised me, He renewed me;  
The nails that nailed, the spear that slew Him,  
Transfixed my heart and bound it to Him;  
See me! see me! once a rebel,  
Vanquished at His cross I lie!"

## THE CONFERENCE, (continued)

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" John 4:7

Each one of us must come, at some time or other, to have a personal dealing with Christ. It may be at one of those crisis-hours of existence, of which few are ignorant, when the even flow of life's current is arrested; when, to use the suggestive simile of this narrative, the pitcher is drained and emptied, and we are summoned away from our Shechem-homes and broken cisterns to seek supplies of some better 'living water.' It may be at a dying hour. It must be on the Great Day of Judgment. Blessed for us if that solemn and all-momentous conference and interview has already taken place—if we have already listened to His words of wondrous mercy—let down our vessel for the draught in the deep well of His love, and drank of that perennial stream which quenches and satisfies the soul's thirst forever!

The sinner who now confronted her unknown Savior at Jacob's well, as we shall afterwards find, was not—could not, with all her simulated lightness of soul, be happy. She had no part, and knew she had none, in the blessings of the true Gerizim. If she ever recalled, in her journeys to and from the fountain, Joshua's old rehearsal of promise and threatening, more than one curse must have thundered its anathema over her head; and although the many thousands of Israel were not there to respond, her own guilty conscience must have uttered its assenting 'Amen.' But as at that same memorable scene of patriarchal days, the Ark of the Testimony was placed between the adjacent hills, so now did the true Ark stand between her and the Ebal of curses, directing and conducting her up to the Mountain of blessing, and saying, "Woman, your sins are forgiven you." Shechem, her ordinary dwelling-place, was one of the old cities of Refuge. She may possibly have seen with her own eyes the manslayer hastening with fleet foot along the plain of Mokhna, up the narrow Valley she had just traversed, to be safe within the appointed walls from the avenger of blood. That Old Testament institution and type had, in the Adorable Person standing by her side, a nobler meaning, and fulfillment.

Though all unconscious at the moment of her peril and danger, He was to her the great antitypical Refuge from the avenging sword of that law which she had so flagrantly outraged in heart and life.

"Jesus said to her," briefly, abruptly, "Will you give me a drink?" That request is preferred in the first instance for Himself—uttered as an introduction to the subsequent converse. But it is evident He wishes to put it in another and far more urgent form into her lips as well as into ours. It is the call of unfulfilled humanity, in its unquenched longings after something more than perishable fountains can yield; a cry to which the world gives its ten thousand and mocking answers, all, however, telling of a thirst which, with anything short of the true answer, cannot be met or assuaged. It is the cry of the spiritually wounded or dying soldier on earth's battlefield in the rage of his moral fever—Water! water! water! "Give me a drink."

Thus does the Savior start the question. It is the keynote of the subsequent divine music. It regulates the strain throughout. It touches the chords of that tuneless soul, and waked up its latent slumbering harmonies. The long-sealed and hardened lips come to sing, (and the strange Music impels hundreds of her fellow-townsmen to sing, too). "Will you give me a drink:" "As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

We may, in the present chapter, regard the interview unfolded to us in the narrative, as exhibiting several features which characterize those spiritual conferences to which we have just referred as still taking place at this hour between the Savior and the sinner.

Christ often comes and speaks UNEXPECTEDLY. When that woman of Sychar left her home, never did she dream of such an interview. No thought had she but of going to replenish her empty pitcher. If she had been a modern Romanist, she might, on reaching the "holy well," have perhaps counted her beads and muttered her 'our Father', but only to return light-hearted as she went. All unlooked for was the advent of that Divine Stranger. Still more unexpected the mysterious conversation which resulted in the change of heart and change of life.



Is it not so still? How often Jesus comes to the soul unexpectedly. Sickness has with appalling suddenness struck that strong man down. It was but yesterday when he was at his desk, or pacing the exchange, or studying his ledger, in the ardent pursuit of gain and engrossing earthliness—strong in pulse and brawny in arm, no premonition of an arrest on all worldly schemings. By sudden accident, or fever, or disease, he is chained to a couch of pain and languishing; it may be a bed of death. For the first time the dreadful realities of eternity are projected on his sick pillow. He has been summoned in the twinkling of an eye from the Shechem of his earthly pursuits, secluded from the hum of busy life, 'the loud stunning tide of human care, and crime,' the excitement of secular interests, the scramble of money-making, and he is lying by the Bethesda pool of affliction, with the hot, fevered sun as of midday beating on his brow. He is for the first time conscious—unexpectedly conscious—of a Personal Presence there. "JESUS sat thus on the well, and it was about the sixth hour." A few days before, he had not so much as a thought about Christ or his soul, with its everlasting interests. If you had spoken of these, he would have resented the allusion as a mistimed and impertinent interference. But it is, in his case, as in that of the mounted persecutor of old on his way to Damascus, of whom we read, "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Take another case. It is that of a household who have until now enjoyed a happy immunity from outer trial, who have been strangers to those shadows of death which have darkened the homes of others. Theirs until now has been a Shechem Valley, musical with streams and song of birds, carpeted with flowers and fragrant with perfumes. But clouds have suddenly gathered; the streams have been arrested in their courses; the birds have ceased to sing; the blossoms have drooped and withered "Man goes to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." At times, too, (not infrequently,) these are households where the Divine Redeemer has until now been a stranger, His name not hallowed, His love not felt, His presence not realized. But now He comes unexpectedly, as He did that night on Gennesaret, saying amid the wailings of the tempest, "It is I!" or, in the beautiful imagery of the Apocalypse, when the long-rejected

voice is suddenly heard—its tones no longer disregarded—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Some loved one has been borne away to the narrow house appointed for all living, leaving in swept and desolate homes and hearts the irreparable blank: but in that hour of inconsolable earthly sorrow, the Divine Wayfarer of Sychar, now the exalted Sympathizer on the throne, draws near, and says, in tones of ineffable love, 'Sorrowing one! I will come in the place of your loved and lost. Your golden goblet is emptied; your earthly pitcher is lying in fragments about the well's mouth. But trust Me. I have broken these perishable cisterns, to lead you to imperishable ones. I will be to you more and better than all you have forfeited. I am the True Well of living water springing up into everlasting life.'

Or, to take yet another illustration. That worshiper came to the House of God, if not to scoff, at all events careless and uninterested in the stale message of the preacher—a reluctant victim and martyr to the conventionalisms of the age. No tongue had he to sing; no heart to pray, no desire to listen. Let the tedious moments be dragged out, the tiresome penance completed, and the congenial world, as soon as may be, return again. Ah, but a certain one, surer and more unerring than the Syrian archer on the heights of Ramoth-Gilead, drew a bow at a venture. The arrow sped forth with its message of death and life. Again the Damascus midday scene is repeated. Suddenly "the shining light which unhorsed the persecutor brings yet another Saul to the earth; and as suddenly and unexpectedly as in that solemn moment a voice speaks: "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting: it is hard for you to kick against the goads." This worshiper left his home, like the woman of Samaria, with nothing in his thoughts but the earthly pitcher and the perishable streams. He leaves the sanctuary—he leaves the wayside-well, with this new song in his lips—

"My heart is fixed, eternal God,  
Fixed on Thee;  
And my eternal choice is made:  
Christ for me!"

Christ often comes and speaks to the sinner when he is alone. The woman of Samaria was alone when Jesus met her. Had it not been so—had she

been in company with others from the city—had she come at evening hour, when the wells of Palestine are alive with herds and flocks and drawers of water—it would have rendered close and prolonged conversation impossible. But with no other eye or ear to disturb or distract, her deep-rooted prejudices would be calmly combated, her sin detected and denounced by the unerring Censor at her side, and the light of heaven admitted to her darkened soul.

It is when alone—in the solitude of the sick chamber, or in those solitudes of life already spoken of, created by bereavement and death, that Christ comes nearest to the soul, and speaks at once most solemnly and most comfortably home to it. The great questions of salvation and eternity cannot be weighed and pondered in a crowd. The ruts of busy life jostle them in confusion. The whirl of business, the frivolities of society, the oblivion-power of the world, come with their tidal wave and sweep the impressions away. Another convicted sinner of the Gospels—we trust, too, another stricken penitent—is the picture and type of many a sinner still. "Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus straightened up, and saw no one but the woman, he said to her, . . . Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more." (John 8:9, 10.)

Even in regard to His own people, the Savior loves to speak to them alone; when, separated from the absorbing power of outer things, (it may be even Christian activities for the time suspended,) they obey the call He Himself of old addressed to His disciples, "Come apart into a desert place and rest a while." The ordinary occasion for such seasons of lonely silent conference is unquestionably the closet. The 'still hour' is the hour of prayer. Not even will the public services of the Sanctuary make up for this. These latter are the times for the jubilant multitudes crowding around the golden goblets of water brought up on the great day of the feast, amid hosannahs of joy, from the pool of Siloam.

But this is the meditative silence and seclusion by the well of the Patriarch, when the soul is alone with its divine Redeemer. It is the brook Jabbok we spoke of in previous chapters, where Jacob was "left ALONE," and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Had he not been alone, there would—there could—have been no such wrestling, no new name, no spiritual victory; and as a Jabbok, so still, in the words

of an old divine, "the battle of the soul is lost or won in the closet."

But it is not Christ's conversation with true believers to which we are now adverting, but rather to His first solemn conference with the sinner. It is often in times of loneliness and solitude that He speaks to him most loudly, most solemnly, most tenderly. How many may be able to tell of such seasons? Reader, do you not vividly call to remembrance that hour, when the very Gerizim of your worldly blessings, with its usual sunshine, was mantled in thick darkness; when, with sad heart and sorrowing step, you left the busy world behind you, and went forth, in the loneliness of your bereft spirit, (you knew not where,) in search of peace and comfort, which the once-smiling valley of life could not now give, for it had been changed into the Valley of the Shadow of Death? do you remember, when bowed to the dust in the presence of the King of Terrors, who had stamped mockery on your dearest earthly treasure, how amid the stillness and solitude of that darkened house and hushed chamber there was a new voice that for the first time broke the dreadful mysterious silence? You felt yourself alone with Jesus; and your experience was that of Job, who, not when his cattle were feeding around him in abundant pastures, his family unbroken, and his own health unscathed, but when all had passed away like a wild dream of the night, and he was left with nothing he could call his own but the bed of ashes and the broken potsherd—then, yes, then—in that hour of wondrous loneliness, these fevered leprous lips sang aloud, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

We repeat, the ear will not, cannot, give earnest heed amid the world's distractions and petty cares, and poor, flippant, superficial pleasures. Hagar of old would never have sought for the well had she not found herself in the midst of the desert. The soul would often never seek for Christ or find Him but for the solitary places of affliction. "Behold," says the Lord, in a beautiful passage in Hosea, where He speaks of Israel in the midst of utter alienation and spiritual debasement, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and will speak comfortably unto her," (lit. will speak to her heart,) "and I will give her her vineyards from there." In the very place where vineyards are least looked for, (the depths of the arid wilderness,) there, says God, speaking metaphorically, there, in the midst of the wilderness of trial, in these unbroken solitudes of the soul, where

all green grass is burned up, no sheltering rock to screen from the flaming sun—where earthly shelters have perished, and earthly voices are hushed for the forever of time—that is the hour for my "speaking to the heart."

As it was when alone with the dead, the Prophet of Cherith raised up the widow's son, "so that the soul of the child came unto him again and he revived," so, often it is with Jesus in the case of the "dead in trespasses and sins." In the loneliest, dreariest spots of the Valley of tears, with barren mountains all around, amid the desolate sense of human isolation and friendlessness, the spirit catches up the sound of heavenly music—"It is the voice of my Beloved! Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills!"

Or, returning to the picture of John's narrative, how many, holding life's empty pitcher in their hand, bereft, companionless, having nothing in their unsolaced hour to draw with, for the well of their affliction is deep, have been admitted then and there into the heavenly household, and had, in their spiritual experience, the Psalmist's beautiful words to the lonely fulfilled: "God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound with chains."

We observe yet once more, Christ often speaks in the midst of the ordinary duties of life. The woman of Samaria, while she was alone, was engaged, too, in the most commonplace occupation—drawing water at a Palestine well; and while doing so, Jesus meets her, and speaks to her of spiritual verities through the earthly element. He who called one apostle while at his ordinary occupation at the custom-house of Capernaum, and four others from their nets at Bethsaida—summons here another disciple when she had gone on the everyday errand of replenishing her pitcher for household purposes. He thus beautifully, though indirectly puts His seal on the sanctity of life's daily drudgery. He speaks to a Samaritan female, not only when employed in this her most ordinary duty, but He makes pitcher, and rope, and well—these common material things she was dealing with—the vehicles, so to speak, for imparting deathless spiritual truths to her soul.

There is a lesson to God's own people in this too. We have just adverted to the desirableness of occasional seasons of loneliness and seclusion, to

afford opportunity for contemplation and prayer. But we must qualify this with the counterpart and complementary truth; the "not slothful in business" must dovetail with "fervent in spirit." Men are ever apt to rush to extremes. The monkish theory and practice is religious retirement and loneliness caricatured—loneliness in its exaggerated and abnormal form, in which life, real, true life and vigor, mental and spiritual, is rendered impracticable. In the case of the man of the world again, in the sensuous and irreligious sense of the term—the man so absorbed and engrossed with the pursuit of perishable gain on the one hand, or with sinful excitement and pleasure on the other, as to leave no room or thought for higher interests—here also the only true life of the soul, is overpowered, paralyzed, strangled. In spiritual things, as in most other, the middle road is the safe one; where the active and the contemplative are intermingled and blended; where worldly work is nobly, honestly engaged in, but not permitted to exercise an overmastering, absorbent power; where there are solemn hours and moments in which the valleys of busy life are left behind; when the pitcher is set down by the curb-stone of the well, and, with folded arms, and eyes intent on the Great Teacher, the mind forgets the household care, the noontide drudgery, and the material is merged in the spiritual.

Never allow the thought to disturb you, "Can this be lawful? can this be Christian?—this constant wearing contact with dull, earthly pursuits—these poor little, lowly, petty anxieties, that are fretting away precious moments." If your complaint or confession is that yours is an idle, do-nothing life, we have nothing to say to that. There is more work for Satan in such case. But never fear healthy, invigorating, worldly occupation. God has sanctified it, because He has Himself ordained the sweat of the brow. And while He can meet His people at all times and under all circumstances, He loves to meet them in the pursuit of ordinary duties—yes, the lowliest and the humblest—with the pitcher on the head, or the draw-rope at the well, or the broom or shuttle in hand—Zebedee's children with their nets; David and Amos with their herds and flocks; Elisha with his plough share.

"We need not bid, for cloistered cell,  
Our neighbor and our work farewell,

Nor strive to wind ourselves too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky.

"The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we ought to ask,  
Room to deny ourselves: a road  
To bring us, daily, nearer God."

We close, as we began, with the great question for us: Have we had our conference with the Savior of Sychar? It matters not whether He may have come to us suddenly and unexpectedly—when we were alone or in the crowd. But have we met by some of life's wayside wells; and whether prosperity or adversity were our portion—whether our pitchers have been full or empty—have we listened to His divine voice and closed with His great salvation? It was His first meeting with that Samaritan female; and never are the appeals and words of Christ so impressive as when He first speaks to the soul. If that woman had listened in vain—had she heard all His pleadings unmoved, and returned hardened and reprobate as she came—little would have been the likelihood of any subsequent impression under the same circumstances.

It was springtime around her in plain and valley; all nature was robed in its earliest green; the trees were putting forth their bud; the song of birds was welcoming the reviving earth. It was springtime in her soul. The storms of life's dreary winter had passed over her. She seemed, a moment before, a tree twice dead, plucked up by the roots. But the Sun of Righteousness was shining; as He shone, the sap, defiant in her case of nature's analogies, rushed up through the dried and wasted tissues, and the withered stem became clothed in summer glory! What if that day's convictions had been resisted, and the cumberer had despised the offered dews and heavenly radiance?

My brother, see that you do not refuse not Him who speaks. See that you resist not first convictions. If it is springtime too with your soul, let not the young bud be nipped, let not the young shoot be blighted, when it is putting forth its tender leaves. But listen to the divine Pleader as He thus calls you in the words of the Son—

"Lo! the winter is past,

The rain is over and gone,  
The flowers appear on the earth,  
The time of the singing of birds is come,  
And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.  
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

## RIVAL RACES

"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink? For (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)'—John 4:9

"Give me a drink," said Jesus, opening the conversation that was to issue in such momentous results.

An answer, probably such as He had anticipated, was returned, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink?"

These words open to us an instructive, a painful chapter in human nature. The creed-feud—we had almost said the blood-feud—existing between Jew and Samaritan, has had, alas! its thousand lamentable illustrations and repetitions in the history of the world. Though involving a brief historical explanation, it will be necessary for the comprehension of the narrative that we advert to the cause of this fierce and fiery antagonism between the conterminous races—the dwellers in the same land, whose social and religious unity seems thus to have been so hopelessly destroyed.

The first Assyrian conquest of the kingdom of Samaria took place under Tiglath-Pileser. The wealth and nobility of the land of Ephraim were on that occasion carried forcibly away to Central Asia. A second and more sweeping invasion occurred under Shalmaneser; while the total depopulation of the country and the extirpation of the inhabitants, seems to have been consummated in the reign of this conqueror's grandson, Esarhaddon. He, however, in his turn reseeded the now desolate



territories, not with restored exiles, but with a colony of aliens from the Tigris and Euphrates. During the interim, while the nice fertile lands were evacuated and left to waste and silence, the wild animals from Hermon and Lebanon, and the adjoining jungles of the Jordan, had taken possession of the dense and rank untended vegetation of the mountains and valleys of Samaria, and, as was natural, spread terror and dismay among the new settlers. The lion, now unknown in that region, was conspicuous among these. The colonists became haunted with superstitious fears. They were Gentiles—Pagans. But on this very account, being worshipers of 'lords many and gods many,' what was to hinder them adding one more deity to those they had imported from the East? By doing homage to the local god of the new country, they might propitiate his wrath, and have these wild beasts driven away, which, they doubted not, were the messengers and executioners of his vengeance. How were they, however, to attain a knowledge of the creed and rites of the old inhabitants, so as to graft and incorporate these on their own? They adopted the expedient of asking their distant conqueror to send from among the captives by the rivers of Babylon, one of the priests of Israel, who would indoctrinate them in the worship of the God of Jacob, or, as they expressed it, "teach them the manner of the God of the land." The request was complied with; and the result was the framing of a strange, enigmatical, compound worship—a hybrid between Judaism and Paganism. The captive priest took up his abode at Bethel and having imbibed the ecclesiastical laxity of Jeroboam's age, he had probably only too readily accommodated himself to the religious presuppositions of his new disciples, and taught them to worship the one spiritual Jehovah of Israel through some visible symbol—other imported idols adorning, or rather desecrating and defiling, the sacred place. The colonists from Media and Persia, or "Cutheans," as they were called, were subsequently supplemented by Greeks and Phoenicians at the time of the conquest of Alexander the Great. These, in their turn, brought a fresh accession of false gods to the paganized territory—Baal and Ashtaroth, Minerva and Jupiter—or, as this religious medley is described in the Bible narrative, "They feared the Lord and served their own gods."

The one only portion of the old Jewish creed which seemed to have been sacredly retained, (and which, after a lapse of thirty centuries, continues

intact and inviolable to this day among the handful of representative modern Samaritans,) was the five Books of Moses. Rejecting all the other prophetic writings and later Jewish traditions, the Samaritan Pentateuch has remained to this hour a sacred heirloom in their synagogue at Shechem. In later years, indeed, they had evidently shared in some of the nobler beliefs of their neighbors—notably that specified by the woman of Samaria in the course of her conversation—an indefinite expectation of the coming of a Messiah. From all we have advanced, however, it is evident that the new kingdom was essentially composed of sensuous and sensual idolaters who had no inheritance in the blood of the ancient chosen people, and to whom pertained not the adoption or the covenants. They were a heathen colony planted in the very midst of Palestine, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. A few Hebrew women and slaves—possibly a few vinedressers and husbandmen—as we find in the case of the Jews at the time of the Babylonish captivity, were all that were left of the old inhabitants, so that their descendants could only by the slenderest links retain a claim to hereditary descent from the patriarchs of the land, Abraham and Jacob, Rachel and Joseph.

We have a remarkable proof, indeed, in the very words of our divine Lord Himself, how thoroughly Samaria was heathenized, and identified with Gentile territory. When He sent forth His seventy disciples, it could be, in His case, from no unworthy popular prejudice or antagonism of race that He gave this strict injunction, "Do not enter any towns of the Samaritans." The explanation is evident. His gospel was in the first instance to be proclaimed to the Jews alone, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and it would have alike contradicted prophecy, and marred and neutralized the exclusiveness of this primary offer, if the Gentile Samaritans, who had so little in common with the Jews, had shared in the benefits of that earliest apostolic mission. Such being their heathen descent and half-heathen creed, it is not difficult to understand how the old kingdom of Judah and Benjamin should, from the first, have entertained a rooted and unconquerable aversion to the aliens. Circumstances, year after year, tended to widen this separating gulf, aggravating and intensifying the mutual antipathy. On the return of the Jews from their captivity under Zerubbabel, these suspicious and

untrustworthy Samaritans made offer of their friendship and good offices, to help the returned exiles in rebuilding their walls and temple. It was sternly refused. If the former had been the genuine representatives of the old ten tribes, the others might have overlooked past jealousies; and for the sake of the national unity have hailed them as auxiliaries. But not a stone of their sacred walls is to be touched by Assyrian and Greek colonists, who had so basely compromised and mutilated the religion of their fathers. Therefore, with reference to this very proposal to assist their southern neighbors, they are spoken of, not as "Samaritans," but under the unmistakable title of "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin." The result showed, that patriotic far-seeing Ezra had not miscalculated their duplicity and treachery; for, stung to the quick by this rejection, they immediately set themselves by every means to impede the work of the rebuilding of the temple on Zion, and joined with the children of Edom in the cry, "Raze it, raze it, even to its foundation," (Ps. 137:7.)

This they could not effect; but, to carry out the spirit of revenge and rivalry, they determined to outdo the restored capital and temple of the south, by the erection of a still nobler temple on the top of their own Gerizim. In 420 B.C., this new and magnificent temple, arose. Alexander the Great, then with his army before Tyre, not only sanctioned its building, but sanctioned the appointment of an unprincipled Jew of priestly lineage (Manasseh) to be its first hierarch. The worship set up in this rival temple was the embodiment of all that strange jumble we have described, of heathen mythology and diluted and desecrated Judaism. It remained to crown the summit of their holy mountain for two hundred years, when it was destroyed by John Hyreanus, a Jew.

Meanwhile, however, the animosity of the northern and southern kingdoms if possible increased, as did also the moral laxity and debasement of the Cutheans. Shechem became the refuge of vagabond Jews: the unclean and excommunicated in Judah and Jerusalem—the libertines who rebelled against the needed reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah—found a ready asylum in Samaria.

Perhaps of all the religious battlefields this world has been compelled in sadness to witness, none has bequeathed such lamentable memories of exasperation and deadly hate: not even those disgraceful feuds (a scandal

to Christendom) on the same sacred soil of Palestine, which the Mohammedan and Turkish soldiery at this hour gaze upon in dogged silence, as they see Greeks and Latins closing at times in mortal strife, on the occasion of their most sacred anniversary and at their most reputedly sacred place—the traditional Holy Sepulcher. The Samaritan sought, by every petty annoyance, to fret and irritate the Jew, and the Jew was not slow or reluctant to retaliate in kind and degree.

Samaria, as we have previously seen, was the nearest road for the caravans of northern pilgrims going to the feasts in Jerusalem. The Samaritans churlishly refused these the poorest rites of hospitality, and compelled them often to avoid maltreatment, by taking the circuitous and more fatiguing route by the Jordan Valley. Again, it was one of the few consolations enjoyed by the bands of exiled Jews in Babylon, to have announced to them, by means of the only ancient telegraphic communication—beacons on the mountain-tops—the appearance of the paschal moon. The first beacon-fire was lit on the summit of Olivet, and thence caught up from mountain to mountain in luminous succession, until, within sight of the Euphrates, they could, for the moment at least, take down their harps from the willows as they remembered Zion and its holy solemnities. But the Samaritans indulged the mischievous delight of perplexing and putting them out of reckoning by the use of false signals. Another wicked and successful exploit is recorded; and occurring as it did under the government of Coponius only a few years previous to the gospel era, may have tended at this time to deepen these animosities—A band of Samaritans succeeded in stealing to the courts of the Temple of Jerusalem during the Passover season, and defiling the sacred precincts by scattering them with dead men's bones; thus incapacitating the Jews that year from celebrating the great Feast of their nation.

Yet, combined with all this, there was, on the part of the Samaritan, the proudest assertion of hereditary right and ancestral glory. The Jew was but of yesterday, compared with the descendants of Jacob and Joseph, and Jerusalem was a modernized capital beside the old walls of time-honored Shechem, with its oaks and terebinths, under which the Father of the faithful pitched his tents. In the words of a graphic writer, Shechem was the city of Joshua and the Judges—Zion that of David and the Kings.

Shechem was Moscow; Jerusalem was only St. Petersburg. The Jewish Pentateuch was the handiwork of a modern scribe, unworthy to be named in the same breath with that written by Abishua, the son of Phineas, the grandson of Aaron!

The Jew was in no way behind in his boastful assertions of prerogative and prescriptive right, as well as in the manifestation of malevolence. An extract from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus describes the intensity of the feeling—"There be two manner of nations which my heart abhors, and the third is no nation: those who sit on the mountain of Samaria and those who dwell among the Philistines; and that foolish people that dwell in Shechem." The Jew would refuse to eat with them; to do so, was "as if he ate swine's flesh." He denounced the Samaritan as a base time-server, who would not hesitate to purchase immunity from pains and penalties by forswearing Jehovah and kissing the impious shrine of Baal or Jove. He regarded him as unclean as the evaded leper; to harbor him in his house would entail a heritage of judgments on his children. The name 'Samaritan' became a byword of reproach. He was publicly cursed in the synagogue—cursed in the name of Jehovah, by the writing on the two tables of the law, by the curse of the upper and lower house of judgment. He was pronounced unworthy of eternal life, excommunicated alike from the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. The bitterest word of scorn the Jew could hurl at the Infinitely Pure One was this, "You are a Samaritan, and have a devil."

The yet untutored apostles shared the same exasperated feelings, when they asked their Lord to call down fire from heaven on some Samaritan village. All worthy of remembrance is His gentle yet sharp reproof, "You know not what spirit you are of." A new spirit of love, in which hereditary hate and malevolence were to have no place, was to be grafted on the hearts of men. And while, as corroborating all we have said, it is stated in our narrative, in a parenthetical clause, "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," it is striking to observe, how in the very same breath the disciples seem to contradict the statement. For they evidently had such dealings—it being distinctly asserted that they had "gone to the city to buy bread," How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction, but on the surmise, that they had already been so far instructed and educated by

their divine Master into a more conciliatory spirit; led, in these temporal interchanges, to take down the unnatural barriers of separation, preparing the way for a higher, purer, nobler fraternity, which was, in one sense, to have its birthplace that day at the well of Sychar?

For the same reason, our Lord's request for water from a Samaritan, and a Samaritan woman, must have sounded equally strange. The very strangeness perhaps, of the request, and the kind tones in which it was given, may have made the astonished listener all the more ready to give heed to the conversation that followed. There was nothing remarkable, indeed, (as we see in the case of Eleazar and Rebekah, Moses and Zipporah,) for a wayfarer asking a female to draw water to quench his thirst. But what was no breach of courtesy or etiquette in Mesopotamia or Midian, was a startling violation of national prejudice when Jew and Samaritan met at Jacob's well. How beautifully is the comprehensive charity and love of the Great Philanthropist, in breaking down all these unnatural and wicked antipathies, illustrated in His own graphic parable of the Good Samaritan! Jesus rejected and condemned, as much as did His Jewish brethren according to the flesh, the half-heathen creed of the Samaritans. We shall come, in the subsequent narrative, to find Him boldly stating so to this woman, "You know not what you worship)." But He would enunciate and proclaim at the same time that great truth, which, alas! is so often ignored by all modern Churches—Greek, Roman Catholic, Protestant—that while there are errors, grievous errors, which we must deeply deplore, and against which we must manfully protest and contend, there are ever, among the adherents of these different creeds, to be found beautiful exceptions in moral worth and in kindly deed—men who, despite of their doctrinal errors, have the loving spirit—whose creed is their character; or whose character, rather, rises above all creeds and doctrinal formulas, noble in heart and nobler in life, who may well put their orthodox neighbors to shame.

Such is His lesson in the great parable of the Good Samaritan. "A certain man" who "went down from Jerusalem," had fallen a prey to Jewish bandits, lying bleeding amid the rough stones which still line the old robber-haunt. The priest and the Levite (the impersonations of pure Judaism) strut past without a thought of aid; while a "certain Samaritan,"

a chance traveler, far from his own home and all the sympathies of home, dismounted his horse, bound up the sufferer's wounds, poured into them the oil and wine he had brought for his own use. (and which, as a Samaritan, he could not get easily replenished from Jewish vendors,) set him on his own donkey, brought him to the wayside inn, and shared the very contents of his scanty purse. It was at the peril of the man's life and limb. He might have been falsely branded as himself the robber and plunderer, accused of the old crime of wreaking vengeance against a helpless Jew, and letting him feel the severity of Samaritan hate. But undeterred by all such fears and false accusations, this despised outcast and alien, heretic and schismatic, whom priest and Levite would doubtless, as they passed, eye with malignant scorn, proved in time of need the real philanthropist, the brother man. With what withering sarcasm (if we can dare use in its mildest sense such a word in connection with the holy Jesus) did He turn round to the captious questioner with the query, "Which now of these three was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

Thank God, the principles of religious toleration are now better understood among ourselves in this age; although the monstrous records of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, as well as the deadly strifes between Greeks and Latins, Druses and Maronites, to this day, show how deeply rooted these religious animosities are in the corrupted human heart, and how much need we have, amid all our modern civilization and enlightenment, to moderate the fervor and intensity of party and sectarian feeling. If such were the feuds between Jew and Samaritan, where, on account of the compromise of vital religious truth, there were at least substantial grounds for quarrel and schism, how should those bearing the name of their tolerant Master blush at the antipathies and party shibboleths which have no such palliation: soldiers fighting nominally under the same banner, but who, instead of cheering their comrades in the fight, are rather frowning on them with hard looks, upbraiding them with hard words, and leveling at them the curse and the anathema! There is no denying it, that one of the saddest triumphs of the Evil One is, and ever has been, this virulence of party strife, this tendency to party isolation, ecclesiastical exclusiveness. Even the Apostles, as may be remembered, were slow to relax their old narrow prejudices. It

required a special miracle to enable Peter to rise above the trammels of exclusive Judaism, to teach him the magnificent truth which his "beloved brother Paul" subsequently proclaimed, that "God has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth." Be the prejudices of His disciples, however, what they might, their Divine Master at least gave no sanction to the contracted spirit.

It is instructive to observe how specially these same Samaritans were included in His last legacy of love. In oblivion of all the past, He thus frames His parting apostolic commission—"You shall be witnesses to Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth." Oh, for a like spirit! not to anathematize, but to Christianize; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; trusting in no boastful hereditary claims, the pride of creed or sect or ritualism, saying, in arrogant superciliousness, "It is not fitting to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs;" but remembering that Paul's weighty words have a Christian, as well as a Jewish meaning and significance—that holy lives are the true exponents of orthodox principles. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

The case and words of the woman of Samaria tell us too plainly, how possible, how common it is, for one of scandalous and flagitious life to be a bold religious sectary, a zealous partisan; to speak glibly and haughtily on ecclesiastical differences about "Father Jacob" and "this mountain," and to wonder that there should be such a violation of religious etiquette that a High Church Jew should hold parley with a Low Church Samaritan. Lutheran may be ranged against Calvinist, Prelatist against Puritan, Predestinarian against Arminian, Baptist against Anabaptist, State Church against Dissenter. But tell us, among all, (collectively and individually) who is doing most honest, earnest work for Christ and humanity—who, amid the robber haunts of evil, are pouring most assiduously wine and oil into the wounds of this bleeding world? and the answer will not be hard to give: "Which now of these, then, is neighbor to him that fell among the thieves?" God speed the time, (yes, then, and not



until then, will the Millennium dawn,) when Christendom, now mangled with a thousand wounds, will have these 'deadly wounds healed;' when Ephraim (that is, Samaria) shall not vex Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim; when the holy word, "Brotherhood," mimicked and travestied in these modern days in a hundred base forms, will have its true and noblest meaning illustrated and vindicated, in loving hearts, in a united Church, in a converted world!

"Down the dark future, through long generations,  
The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease,  
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,  
I hear once more the voice of Christ say, 'Peace!'"

"Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals  
The blast of dismal war-sounds shakes the skies,  
But, beautiful as songs of the immortals,  
The holy melodies of love arise."

## **THE GIFT OF GOD AND THE LIVING WATER**

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." John 4:10

In the preceding chapter, we considered the astonishment expressed by the woman of Samaria at having her religious scruples so tampered with, as to be solicited by a member of the rival tribe for a draught of water from the well of Sychar. We saw to what painful excesses these neighboring kingdoms had pursued their jealousies, social and ecclesiastical; indulging in mutual anathema and excommunication, such as has seldom been equaled in the war of race, and the often fiercer war of opinion. To such extremes, indeed, was this repulsion carried, that it would doubtless form matter of wonder to this female, how He who now sought the boon, unless very different from others of His countrymen,

should have no conscientious scruple in touching rope or pitcher that had been defiled by alien hands. While, on the other hand, we might have expected her to repudiate the thought of these being polluted and desecrated by the fingers or lips of a Jew.

His answer in the circumstances must have sounded startling. Instead of the retort and retaliation for which she was doubtless prepared, He arrests her attention, and at once softens and subdues any resentful feeling by the reply, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water," and He would not have refused you; He would not have been so ungracious as to reject the request given by a toil-worn traveler. Uninfluenced and unbiased by any such selfish and contracted feelings, "He would have given you;" and given you something better, nobler than that earthly element: "He would have given you living water."

Living water! The mysterious suggestive words could not fail to arrest her attention; and more arresting still, as it always is, the magic power of kindness. Who could this be, in Jewish attire, speaking in the Jewish dialect, yet in words strangely conciliatory? so different, probably, from other Judean pilgrims she may have met, time after time, at the same spot, with whom she was used to engage in virulent and fiery debate and banter, meeting and parting with expressions of mutual contempt and scornful hatred. "Living water"—The expression may have stimulated better, profounder thought. She was evidently not a stranger to religious truth. Apart altogether from her knowledge (derived from their revered Pentateuch) of Father Jacob, and the great theme of ecclesiastical dispute as to the worship on Gerizim and Zion, she expected "Messiah, who is called Christ," one greater than the greatest of the prophets, who was to "tell all things," and the blessings of whose kingdom she may have heard that these prophets had, again and again, described under the similitude of refreshing water.

Be this as it may, the Divine Speaker, in rising above her sectarian prejudices, seemed at once to secure her interest. With a divine sagacity, He seizes on what was most likely to rouse and sustain her attention and gain the great end in view, her everlasting salvation. He makes nature His text. He who, on other occasions, took the sower at Gennesaret, the bread

at Bethsaida, the vine on Olivet, the golden goblet and its contents at Siloam, to discourse of Himself and spiritual truths, takes the water at their side to symbolize and illustrate the better "wells of salvation." No more is said about the quenching of His own thirst. He merges His own lower needs in the higher, deeper necessities of one who has never as yet risen above the material to the spiritual. "Living water!" How that image from that day forward must have been enshrined in her heart of hearts. It must have been to her like the never-to-be-forgotten look which the Savior cast upon Peter; or the "Do you love Me?" on the shores of Tiberias or the pronouncing of her own name to Mary on the resurrection morn; or the "Peace be to you!" breathed on the gathered disciples. Yes, ever afterwards, when, as a new creature, she trod her native valley, the ear of faith must have caught in every murmuring brook divinest music, every stream that furrowed the mountain sides must have sang the song of redeeming love, or been like an angel whispering to her, and beckoning her nearer to her Savior-God!

But giving these words a general application, let us refer more particularly to the two salient points in this reply of Christ—the two hinges, so to speak, on which this golden gate turns: "THE GIFT OF GOD, and THE LIVING WATER."

First, THE GIFT OF GOD. There is nothing in this world which is not a gift of God. Every morsel of the bread which perishes, the sunlight which gladdens us, the atmospheric air which sustains us, the fuel garnered deep down in earth's storehouses to warm us, the succession of seasons, the living streams which fertilize our fields, the waving harvests which crown the year with their plenty, the thousand tints of loveliness and beauty in garden, and dell, and forest; far more, the blessings which rejoice and consecrate social life—the wellsprings of gladness in our domestic circles; these are severally and collectively "gifts of God." "Every good and perfect gift is from above."

But what are these to the gift here preeminently spoken of?—the Gift of gifts—a gift whose magnitude transcends all thought and illustration—the Son of the Highest to become of human virgin born—the lisping babe of Bethlehem's lowly cradle—the God of eternity condescending to be a pilgrim on life's highway, that He might open living streams for the lost

and the perishing? "God so loved the world (and who can ever fathom or exhaust the meaning of that so?) that He gave His only begotten Son." God's "Gift"—it was unpurchasable by money, the unmerited benefaction of Heaven—free as the desert pool to the thirsty wayfarer, who has only to stoop and drink!

And this greatest and mightiest Gift, moreover, consecrates and sanctifies all minor ones. As the sun glorifies with his radiance the tamest landscape and transforms the barren rock into a pyramid of gold; so are all earthly and material blessings glorified and beautified and sublimated by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Christ gives a new and enhanced value to every subordinate gift. He has been well likened to the numeral which, put before the unmeaning ciphers, invests them with peerless and untold preciousness. The very outer world of nature wears a new aspect when seen through eyes spiritually enlightened: all earthly discipline has a new meaning and when the minor gifts are blighted or diminished or withdrawn, there is ever the imperishable Gift remaining beyond the reach of vicissitude or decay so that we can say, as the woman of Samaria doubtless could, in all time following this devout conversation, as she looked around the beautiful valley of her habitation, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

While feeling alive to God's goodness in His diverse other gifts, can we heartily join in the transcendent estimate of the apostle, "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" Truly with this gift, having nothing "we possess all things." In Christ's glorified person as the God-man mediator "all fullness dwells." No earthly gifts can compensate for the lack of this. But the Gift of God can make up for the absence of every lesser earthly mercy. "All my springs are in You!"

"Oh bounteous Giver of all good;  
Who are, of all Your gifts Yourself the crown,  
Give what You can, without You we are poor  
And with You rich, take what You will away."

The second main topic of the Savior's reply in this beautiful verse, is THE LIVING WATER. As by the expression "the Gift of God," He points to Himself, to His glorious Person and character and work—so, by "living water" He would seem to designate all purchased blessings of His salvation, beginning with pardon and acceptance here, and culminating in eternal glory and bliss hereafter. The twofold symbol or similitude seems to accord with a striking kindred figure in the closing chapter of Revelation, where this Gift of God, the glorified Mediator, is represented under His apocalyptic name of 'the Lamb,' as seated upon His throne; while proceeding from these sublime recesses there flows "living water," "the river of the water of life, clear as crystal." It is the magnificent stream of gospel salvation to a dying world, life and luxuriance and beauty upspringing wherever it wends its way. In other words, the expressive symbol of those priceless spiritual benefits which flow from the Person and meritorious work of the divine Redeemer—forgiveness, peace, adoption, sanctification, tranquility in life, victory in death, triumph in eternity.

And observe, it is living water. There is no glory in anything from which life has departed. The tiniest mountain stream that sings its living song on its way through moor and rock, has more true glory and beauty than the dark, inky, stagnant lake or pool. The tiniest flower or moss, or grass, have more true glory in them than the inanimate trunk of the giant tree lying prone on the ground. Why? Because the one is living and the other is dead. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." So is it with all dead lifeless things, wherein the soul has no part, and which are of the earth earthy, springing from the earth and returning to earth, the mere accidents of this fleeting existence, such as wealth, possessions, rank, worldly honors; in one word, mere material good and prosperity. You may call them streams, but they are not living streams. They dwindle and evaporate as they flow; they warble no music in the ear in the hour of waning nature; they are only summer brooks which are congealed in death's wintry, sunless valley. But these blessings of salvation are living, they touch the immortal part, they belong to the soul, they are deathless as the God who gives them.

And as the blessing of salvation (the water) is living, so also is the

Fountainhead—He who is here called "the Gift of God." "If you knew the Gift of God, and who it is (the Person) who says to you, Give me a drink; you would have asked of Him." It is not dead doctrine, dry formulated dogma which the soul needs, but a living Being. "My soul," says the psalmist, "thirsts for God, for the living God." Paul, in words often misquoted, and in the misquotation their sense and beauty mutilated and destroyed, thus exults, in what may be called a dying testimony, "I know," (not "in whom") but, "I know whom I have believed." It was not sects, or creeds, or doctrines, or churches, or ecclesiastical organizations, that the dying hero clung to, in the hour of departure, but the glorious Person of the divine Immanuel, the living Presence of the ever-living, ever-loving Savior—the Brother, the Friend on the throne, whom he had learned to love more dearly than all the world beside!

Two other thoughts still claim our consideration. We have incidentally likened this verse to a golden gate on two hinges. Expanding the figure, it may be added we have here two keys to open that gate.

First, There is the key of FAITH. How was the woman of Samaria to appropriate that "Gift of God" and that "living water," symbolizing the blessings of a priceless salvation? If she had apprehended at the moment, which she did not, all the meaning of this divine utterance, how many conflicting thoughts, we may well imagine, would rush to her soul, ready to overwhelm her in confusion and despair. What a barrier between her and mercy must be her life of flagrant guilt; lock upon lock, bolt upon bolt, must exclude her from all participation in these spiritual privileges. Truly, in her case she had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep—too deep for such a sinner as she! Or, if she can dare dream of pardon and peace, what a long process of preparatory reformation and self-mortification must be undergone; how often must she climb the heights of Gerizim to load its altars with penitential offerings and costly expiatory sacrifices. It must be through long months of tears and penances before she can weave the rope of creature-merit to reach the living water!

What says that Divine Being standing before her, and who has made to her the glorious revelation she as yet so dimly comprehends? Belief in His word, in His ability, in His willingness, is all that is required. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me a drink, you would

have asked and He would have given you." It was in figurative language what Paul translated into plain words in an analogous case of conversion, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Yes, Faith can remove mountains—mountains of sin! Faith is a key which can fit the wards of every lock, the intricacies of every heart. Faith brings the soul into immediate contact with the Savior. It reveals salvation as a glorious free gift, without works, or preparations, or merits, or penances; no rope to weave, no "golden goblet or jeweled cup" to fashion, before the living water can be brought to quench the soul's thirst.

As the beggar kneels by the running stream at the wayside, and bears the refreshing draught—the free gift of bounteous nature to his lips on the rough palm of his hands—so the vilest spiritual beggar in the rags of sin—nothing to draw with, the well of his own sins deep—can partake, without money and without price, of a free, full, everlasting redemption—"the gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Like 'Christian', immediately on reaching, with the outstretched hand of faith, the cross on the top of the hill, the load of sin rolls down to the bottom. Oh for faith, simple faith, to credit the divine testimony and accept the free invitation. If not at this stage in the narrative, the woman of Samaria could, doubtless at least subsequently, and that too until her dying day, thus sing of the "living water" and the "Gift of God," in the Spirit of the Simple words of Cowper—  
"E'er since by faith I saw the stream,  
Your flowing wounds supply;  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
And shall be until I die."

And as Faith is one key here spoken of, so PRAYER is another. "You would have asked, and He would have given you."

How many blessings are forfeited by failing to use this key? How many are doomed to a life of spiritual poverty and starvation, for this reason, "You have not, because you ask not." While, on the other hand, how often is the divine saying verified and fulfilled, "I have not said to the seed of Jacob, Seek my face in vain."

We have, in another scripture example, a beautiful illustration of the combined power of these two instrumental means—faith and prayer. Blind Bartimeus, despite of his sealed, rayless eyeballs—despite of the thronging crowd that would intervene between him and the Great Physician, and drown his suppliant cry for help, knew the Gift of God: "When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy upon me." See how faith and prayer together arrest the ear and the footsteps of Christ! See how, together, they bring the blind soul, like this blind wayfarer, near to the Savior! In the sublime simplicity of the narrative, "Jesus stood still." "And he, casting aside his garment, rose and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said to him, What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man said to Him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go your way, your faith has made you whole," (Mark 10:46-52.)

Faith and Prayer! Would that we may know, experimentally, this blessed composite—the two golden keys of the two-leaved gate of salvation! To use the homely figure suggested by Sychar's well, Faith is the rope and Prayer is the bucket let down for the living water. The two are joined in the briefest and simplest of creeds and confessions—"Lord," (that is prayer)—"I believe," (that is faith)—"Lord, I believe;" and deep conscious unworthiness adds the supplementary petition, "Help my unbelief!"

Have we known, do we know, the Gift of God? or, sad alternative, are we among the number of those of whom it shall be said, "They knew not, the time of visitation;" over whom a despised Savior will utter the wail of rejected mercy, unrequited love, "If you, even you, had known in this your day?" "This your day." Blind Bartimeus, and the woman of Samaria, had, each in their different experiences, probably but that one day, the one chance of a Savior passing by; in the case of the former, to have the eyes unsealed, and in the latter to have the deeper blindness of the soul removed. That one opportunity, foregone and forfeited, might never have been renewed.

Doubtless, with respect to this female of Sychar, the Savior saw how all-important was her immediate acceptance of the gift of salvation. As the omniscient Shepherd, He discerned her infinite danger—how this erring sheep was plunging deeper and deeper amid the wilds of an ever sadder



ruin—how a few more days or months of wandering, among these bleak mountains of sin would have made her irrevocably and irrecoverably, "the sheep which was lost." But He has followed after her "until He finds her." He pleads with her—reasons with her—tells her of her dreadful danger and peril, amid these savage deserts of her wandering, and of the peaceful pastures and living waters she was guiltily disowning. In the beautiful but expressive imagery of the Song of Songs, thus does the Heavenly Bridegroom address her—"Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."

And what is her experience, as, obeying His summons, these perilous mountain heights are left forever? She is enabled to exult in the Gift of God, under the very image of these verses—"A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon," (Sol. Song, 4:8, 15.)

And the same grace that was free to her is free to us; the same living water offered to her is offered to us. The gospel is replete with invitations to the Fountain of life. The vision of Jacob's Well mingles with the closing utterances of inspiration: the last accents which "He who sat on the throne" bequeathed to the Church, when the vision and the prophecy were on the point of being sealed up, were these: "Let him who is thirsty come, and whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." We are empowered and warranted to echo, in His name, the words of the Great Inviter—no barrier, no condition, no qualification is there in approaching that living stream:

"Just as you are, without one trace  
Of love, or joy, or inward grace,  
Or fitness for the heavenly place,  
O guilty sinner, come.

Come, here bring your boding fears,  
Your aching heart, your bursting tears,  
'It is mercy's voice salutes your ears—  
O trembling sinner, come.

Come, say 'the Spirit and the Bride;'

The stream is full, the channel wide;  
Who wills may drink the living tide;  
Your Savior bids you come!

## **THE WELL IS DEEP**

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" John 4:11-12

This is the reply given by the woman of Sychar to the address of the Savior. It is an answer which begins, at all events, deferentially. Her previous reply was that of a churlish, uncourteous Samaritan, startled and offended at the familiarity of a hated Jew: "How is it that you, a Jew?" But now the kindness alike in the tone and substance of His language has apparently disarmed the virulence at least of her dislike and antipathy, taken the rough edge off her sectarian prejudice, and she addresses Him with the respectful title of "Sir," or "Lord." The promise, however, in the opening of her reply is not sustained. She gradually lapses into the old feeling and expression of disdain. He had designed to elevate her thoughts to everlasting verities—from the well at their feet to the water of life. But she has no spiritual discernment to raise her above the material; the human supersedes the divine; what was spoken figuratively is taken literally. His golden gate of salvation becomes, in her hands, iron and brass. So true is it that "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

With no higher thought, then, than a supposed reference to Jacob's Well, she starts difficulties in her rejoinder. There is, first, the lack of any mechanical provision (rope or pitcher) to fetch up the water, this, as we

previously noted, not being the public well of the city—"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." And, secondly, if it were some other well or fountain he referred to which contained this living water, she repudiated the tacit claim of superiority on the part of a modern Jew over the illustrious Father who gave the well, and "drank thereof himself, his children, and his cattle." There is evidently an implied antithesis in her expression, "gave us the well," to that of Christ's words in the previous verse, "the gift of God."

Could this novel gift He speaks of with such emphasis (living water), dare be compared with the patriarchal gift which had consecrated the whole valley, and around which clustered the most sacred memories of her tribe and nation? Indeed, though beginning with the courteous salutation of "Sir," she would seem, with the passionate fire of her race, to wax indignant at the slur expressed or implied on her great progenitor. After all, had this stranger only muffled his reproaches and deep-rooted antipathies under a feigned and counterfeited blandness, while there lurked underneath an unworthy reflection on Father Jacob? And yet, too, with an inquisitive nature, we note her eager curiosity to discover who this traveler was.

Question follows question. "From where have You?"—"Are You greater?" Who can this be, to dream of any other, any better fountain? The most prudent and sagacious of all the shepherd patriarchs had deemed this the best in the neighborhood. It had proved sufficient for the supplies of a vast encampment, to the cattle that browsed on the pastures around. Who is this apparently weary, exhausted wayfarer, who speaks so mysteriously of some superior well of "living water?"

The second part of her reply might appropriately furnish a motto or illustration for one of the boldest and most meaningless heresies of these our times. If not of apostolical succession, she was a bold and brave upholder and defender of patriarchal succession. "Our Father Jacob," says she, in words of suppressed indignation. That name was with her a charm. That well contained holy water, because historically identified with the ancestor of her race. She speaks as if, moreover, her Samaritan tribe had a monopoly of the grace and virtue descending from the veins of old Israel. Her words are not, "Father Jacob," but, "Our Father Jacob."

We have already treated in full, in a previous chapter, the history of that Samaritan nation which, in the person of this female, claimed the rare and exclusive prerogative and blessing of being Israel's children. As we then saw, they had neither part nor lot in this assumed inheritance. They were aliens—a mixed multitude from surrounding heathen countries, strangers in birth and blood, and more alien still in creed and practice. The Patriarch would have repudiated and disowned the illegitimate offspring. His mantle had fallen on no such degenerate seed. The claim was spurious, absurd, presumptuous. She spoke of Jacob as her Father, when alike, she herself personally and her tribe collectively, had failed to inherit the only true patriarchal succession, the legacy of his virtues and spirit. She had not heard words, uttered by bold brave lips, not far from the place where she was at that moment standing, "Do not begin to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

And what is the pretension advanced by the Sacramentarian body among the Romanists, and by a segment in a Church which otherwise we delight to honor as a great witness of God's truth, but which, were it represented by that section, would utterly forfeit and belie the name Protestant: what is the figment of 'apostolic succession,' but just the question of this Sacramentarian at Sychar—the clinging to some supposed mythical virtue descending from the Fathers and apostles of the Christian era—saying, as they address other Churches beyond their pale, "Are you greater than our Father Jacob who gave us the well?" "Our father Jacob "is their self-constituted claim—"us," to whom the well was given.

Of all heresies this is alike the most preposterous and the most arrogant. What are the grounds on which those speak with such boldness and exclusiveness—unchurching and unchristianising all others, whatever be their unmistakable symptoms of a deeper and truer life? What is this boasted charm of apostolic descent? or, in other words, who is this Samaritan tribe, with its succession of golden links descending through the centuries after the age of Constantine—links which impart an assumed validity to their own ordination alone, while invalidating and negating that of all others? The ecclesiastics of the middle ages have about the same claim to the name and spirit and grace of the apostolic

fathers, as the profligate and heathenized Samaritans had an exclusive claim to the name and spirit and Well of Jacob. It passes comprehension to an unbiased mind, to a plain reader of his Bible, to a plain reader of the facts of history—to a plain student of the simple stern logic of common sense, how any monopoly of virtue can be claimed through a succession, not of piety and purity and a noble heritage of Christian and primitive graces, but through a succession of apostate bishops and debased popes, many of whose private lives were so stained with every vice and crime, that to speak of them as inheriting, in any true sense, the patrimony of the apostles, were enough to stir the bones of these holy founders of the faith, like those of Elisha, to rise and mutiny at such an abuse and perversion of sacred language and sacred thought.

No! our Father Jacob gave 'the well' with no such prescriptive rights. No Samaritan body is entitled to extrude and ostracize Churches who, in simple faith and earnest zeal, are doing Christ's work, or claim any such monopoly of that name or that free grace which belongs to Christendom—which belongs to the wide world.

There is a clause in these verses which, separated from its original connection, may be made to suggest one or two profitable reflections with which we shall occupy the remainder of this chapter. "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." These words may be affirmed with regard to the insufficiency of Reason, apart from Revelation, in fathoming the deep things of God. Deep, unsearchable, inscrutable are the divine counsels. The name of Jehovah, as the covenant angel said to Manoah of old, is "secret" or "wonderful." All the vastest problems which concern the human spirit and its relationship to God, and more especially the relationship of the sinful, conscience-stricken soul to a Being of infinite holiness and justice and truth, are insolvable by reason. Reason stands baffled at the well's mouth, exclaiming, "Oh, the depth!"

The world, for four thousand years, deifying Reason, strove to work out the solution. Greece, in the culture of her refinement and the wisdom of her philosophy, with all the possible data, which, apart from revelation, the human intellect could supply, addressed herself to this problem of the ages. But "the world by wisdom"—the mind of man in its highest condition of development and activity—"knew not God." All its shrewdest

guesses were splendid but shadowy dreams, or rather gigantic failures. Human nature was a profound enigma. The high priests of her temple, professing themselves on these transcendental questions to be wise, became fools. There were on every side strange and puzzling aberrations, which Reason could neither explain nor reconcile—the harmony in the material world without—the disharmony in the moral world within—the glorious casing holding a broken, dislocated, tuneless instrument—the palace walls festooned and tapestried with all that is fair and lovely, enclosing a once royal, but now unscathed and uncrowned inmate, with sackcloth on his loins, and the shadows of sin and sorrow on his brow. And more perplexing than all, how is that sackcloth to be taken off and the royal insignia refurbished and renewed? How are these tuneless strings to have the old harmonies restored? In one divine word, "How can man be just with God?"

Oh, proud baffled reason, "you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." The solution of the mystery of ages and generations is beyond you; as far beyond you as these distant planets are beyond the range of the naked eye, unassisted by the telescopic lens. But where Reason fails—where the well is too deep, Revelation, like rope and pitcher, fulcrum and lever, comes to our aid. Yes, blessed be God; in this precious Bible, deep though the well be, we have the "something to draw with." Revelation speaks where reason is silent—unfolding to us the Divine method (undreamt of by human wisdom or human philosophy) for restoring the fallen—bringing the present discords of the inner world into harmony with the order and melody of the outer, and solving in the cross of Christ that mystery of mysteries, "How is God to deal with the guilty?"

The few brief words of the preceding sentence, uttered in the ears of this outcast wanderer of Samaria, had given a glorious response to a question on which all heathen and all reason's oracles had been dumb, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink, you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water." Through that life and immortality which have been brought to light by the gospel, the little child, as well as the profound philosopher, can stand by that well's mouth and exclaim, "Oh, the depth!" But it is now with the apostle's addition, "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and

knowledge of God!"

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." These words may be uttered with regard to the mystery of God's providential dealings. "The well is deep." Many a sorrowing broken-hearted one is brought to the well's mouth, and, stooping over the darkness, is heard to exclaim, "Your judgments are a great deep!" Here, in this imperfect world, there is nothing to draw with, nothing to gauge the "needs be" of the divine dispensations. The more we try, with our puny wisdom, to fathom the depths of Jehovah's dealings, the more unfathomable they are. The best, fondest, most treasured names are written on gravestones. Why is this? The vicious, the selfish, the false-hearted, the unthankful, the useless, are allowed often to live on, pampered with prosperity—the fabled horn of plenty pouring its contents into their lap; while the good, the kind, the true, the loving and beloved are either prematurely cut down, or go bowed with pain, or with penury, or with blighted affections to the grave—This well is deep!

The aged, the decrepit, the suffering, are often left to drag on an apparently useless existence. The old, gnarled, decayed trunks are spared, while the axe is laid at the root of the green sapling, the pride and beauty of the forest. Why is this?—This well is deep! The careless, indifferent herald of the truth—the unfaithful watchman of souls, is left to slumber at his post and trifle with his Master's work, while the bold standard-bearer in the battle of evil—the toiling, wakeful sentinel at home, the hero-heart in the mission-field abroad—have their weapons shattered in their hands, and the Church of God is left to exclaim, through her tears, over the irreparable blank, "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!"—This well is deep!

But why stand straining your eyes down the dark cavity? "You have nothing to draw with." Here in this imperfect state, all is mystery. All the earthly explanation of these deep, these 'great deep' judgments, is this, "Verily You are a God that hides Yourself." If you had rope and bucket, so as to descend the shaft and reach its unsounded depths, there would be no harsh verdict, no questioning the rectitude of the divine dispensations. Standing as you now are at the well's mouth, amid the glitter and glare of the world, you cannot understand or comprehend these mysteries of life

and death, these baffling enigmas in providence. But the hour will arrive when you shall have the needed apparatus, when the profound secret of the divine works and ways will be revealed and unfolded. "In your light, O God, we shall see light." To use the language of Deborah's ancient song of triumph, there is at present 'the noise of archers' at the brink of the well. But the day is coming when we too shall be able to take up her joyous strain: "Those who are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord!"

There is a tradition regarding one of the other sacred wells of Palestine—the Well of the Wise Men between Jerusalem and Bethlehem—that when the Eastern Magi had at one time lost the guidance of the mystic star, while stooping over this fountain they saw it once more reflected in its waters; forthwith it guided them to the place where the young child was—"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." True, at all events, is this beautiful tradition regarding God's providential dispensations. At times we lose the guiding star; it is swept from our firmament; we travel on in darkness, in our unpiloted way—led in our sorrowful musing to exclaim, "Where is now my God?"

But when on our bended knees we stoop over the well—yes, often in our very darkest night of mystery and sadness—lo! the heavenly light reappears—we see the lost star of Providence mirrored in the fountain of salvation. The work and the love of Christ explain what is otherwise often inexplicable. God our Maker—God our Redeemer—gives "songs in the night."

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." These words may be affirmed with reference to the veiling of the future. Standing by the mouth of that well, looking down its unexplored cavity, "The well is deep." The future—that dark, ungauged, unfathomed future, how many a thought it costs! Yet it is a vain musing, a fruitless conjecture. "You have nothing to draw with." Even tomorrow has no pitcher that can be let down for a draught: you know not what a day may bring forth! The past we do know about, and there are special times when it comes before us with fresh vividness. Memory follows group on group, coming through the glades of the olive-forest to draw water; some with elastic step, and ringing laugh, and joyous song; some with mourning attire, and tearful



eye, and broken pitcher; yes, some, unknown to themselves, to draw their last draught, to fill their last flagon: we lose them among the twilight shades; they are never again to return.

But from the standpoint of the present, who can forecast the doings at the well's mouth? who has rope or pitcher or plumb-line to fathom the depth? Some may now be gazing, as the writer did from the literal Well of Jacob, on golden vistas, bars of glorious amber clouds stretched across the luminous horizon, lighting up with parting radiance Gerizim, the mountain of blessing; but before another week or month or year measures out its course, every such vista may be curtained with mist and thick darkness, Gerizim obscured from view, and Ebal alone, with its dark, gloomy grey, meeting their eye.

But it is well for us we cannot anticipate the future. Thank God for the gracious provision, "You know not what shall be on the morrow." Were the morrow unveiled, this world would be hung with curtains of sackcloth; there would be fewer happy hearts among us. Inevitable trials, of which, by a wise and kind arrangement of Providence we are kept in ignorance, would then project their long deep shadows athwart life's bright sunshine, and make existence itself one protracted period of anticipated sorrow. It is a merciful thing, when, ever and anon at solemn anniversaries, we attempt to cast a glance down the future, to hear Him who has that future in His hand saying, "You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep."

Yes, but this is our comfort. Though too deep for us, it is not too deep for Him. He has the rope and pitcher in His hand; and whether, in drawing up the vessel from the unseen depths, it reaches safely the well's mouth, or is broken in the transit, all is appointed and ordained. "The Lord reigns." "Trust Me," He seems to say; "that Well is Mine. Trust me; that white, unwritten scroll of the future is Mine. It will be filled up by Me, whether in gleaming letters of gold, or with the dark lettering of sorrow." "Although you say you can not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust in Him."

## THE CONTRAST

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:13-14

In the preceding chapter and context we found the thoughts of the woman of Samaria were of the earth—earthy. Nothing but the well at her feet presented itself to her dim unspiritualised vision, as the mysterious Stranger spoke to her of "the gift of God" and "the living water." Unrepelled by her insensibility to divine realities, the Heavenly Teacher pursues His theme; not, however, by answering her challenge—in vindicating the dignity of His own person compared with that of 'Father Jacob.' He had a higher end in view. He wished to raise, not only her, but all who in after ages would read this story of the wayside fountain, above the things of earth to "the river of God which is full of water."

Again, therefore, He recurs to His text, and continues the emblem by the announcement of a startling and significant contrast. He begins His reply with the assertion regarding the well of the Patriarch at which they stood, "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again;" an assertion which may appropriately be invested with a wider meaning, enshrining as it does the great truth, that all creature and created-good is inadequate of itself to satisfy the yearnings of the human soul. In every breast there is a craving after happiness. "Who will show us any good?" is the sigh, the soliloquy, of weary humanity. There are many streams of created enjoyment. Some of these lawful, innocent, exhilarating, which have the blessing and favor of God resting upon them. Others are poor, vile, degraded, unworthy.

But even the best and purest, viewed by themselves and apart from Infinite excellence, can afford no permanent bliss or satisfaction. They do not, cannot quench the immortal thirst. Pitcher after pitcher may be brought to the well's mouth; the golden goblet of riches, the jeweled flagon with the luscious draught of earthly glory, the brimming transparent pitcher drawn up by the silken cord of human affection. But He who knows the human heart pronounces, that "thirst again" is the

property and characteristic of them all.

The finite can never be a satisfying portion for that which was born for the infinite. Satisfying portion! Philosophy, with its eagle soarings, says, "It is not in me." The pride of rank—crowns and coronets, and lordly titles—says, "It is not in me." The laurel of conquest, as it withers on the warrior's brow, says, "It is not in me." Gold, with its glittering heaps, laughs its votaries to scorn, and says, "It is not in me!" The most renowned of earthly conquerors seated himself by that well. He brought the monarchs of the world to be his drawers of water; each with his massive goblet going down for the draught, and laying the tribute at the victor's feet. But the tears of the proud recipient have passed into a proverb; and if we could ask him to translate these dumb tears into words, his reply would be, "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again."

But if such be the unsatisfactory nature of earthly happiness, the brokenness of earthly cisterns—what nobler compensations, what more enduring pleasures are there to take their place? You cannot attempt to dislodge one object of earthly affection or pursuit without having some other and better to substitute in its room. It was a dictum of the old philosophy that nature abhors a vacuum, and this is as true regarding the moral as the material world. The dove of old with weary wing, would have retained its unstable perch on the restless billow had it not known of an ark of safety. You cannot tempt the shivering child of poverty to desert his garret or crude covering, until you can promise him some kindlier and more substantial shelter. You cannot induce the prodigal to leave off the husks of his miserable desert exile, before you can tell him of a father's house and welcome. You cannot ask him to part with his despicable rags and tinsel ornaments until you can assure him of robe, and ring, and sandals. The husks and the tatters, wretched as they are, are better than nothing.

In one of the islands in our northern coasts, a daring adventurer scrambled down one of the steep cliffs which rose perpendicular from the ocean, in search of the eggs of some sea-fowl; the precarious ledge of rock on which he stood suddenly gave way, and with one giant bound plunged him into the boiling surge beneath. In a moment, the instinctive love of

life made him spring from the yielding footing and lay hold on a branch of ivy which clung with uncertain tenacity to the precipice that rose sheer above him. Who would have had the madness or cruelty to shout to that wrestler for dear life, to let go the treacherous ivy branch? Worthless as it was, it was his only chance of safety; and those on the summit of the cliff, the spectators of his imminent peril, were wise, not by word or sign to disturb his grasp of what they anxiously felt might prove a brittle thread in these moments of suspense. But when a fleet foot had returned with the rope, and let it down by the side of the exhausted man, then, with no hesitating accents did they call upon him to let go the fragile support and lay hold of what brought him up safe to their feet.

In the same way do we find the inspired writers dealing with the human soul. They never are content with negative admonitions. They never exhort to 'abhor that which is evil,' without telling of some objective 'good' to which the heart can cleave in stead. "Charge those who are rich in the world that they do not be high-minded nor trust in uncertain riches, BUT in the living God." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world... The world passes away, and the lust thereof; BUT he that does the will of God abides forever."

This is the procedure of the divine Redeemer with the woman of Samaria; conveying, through her and through the outer material symbol and similitude, a deeper moral lesson for 'all mankind.' He tells her, pointing to the well at her feet, that returning there day by day she would require continually to refill and replenish her emptied pitcher; but that He had nobler living streams in store which would quench her soul's thirst forever.

He says the same to us. As in her case, so also in ours, in a higher figurative meaning, He does not condemn many of these worldly streams of innocent pleasure, or forbid their being resorted to. The needs of the body, the claims of our physical and social natures are integrated with our moral and spiritual natures; for man is a complex being, with intimate relationships binding him to both worlds; and the imperious calls of the one, can as little as those of the other, be with impunity neglected or ignored. Jesus recognizes both. He who knows our frame would lay no cruel arrest on many objects of lawful earthly pursuit—many

wells of earthly happiness. All He says of them is, If you restrict your journeyings to these, you will not be satisfied—you will assuredly thirst again.

But I have a well of living waters to tell you of, more far lasting than all earthly sources of supply. You will not require the glow-worm and the starlight when you have the meridian sun; the shifting sand when you have the solid rock; the tiny stream when you have the infinite ocean. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

There are many salient points presented to us here. Space will only permit touching on one leading and beautiful thought suggested by the two central words of the latter verse; where all other outer objects of perishable pleasure are brought into contrast with that which is inward, "IN Him." "It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The believer has an inner well in his soul—something within the renewed being which makes him independent of all external earthly good and earthly happiness. Let outer things smile or frown, it matters not. That 'source of lasting joy' is no 'summer-dried fountain.' But being fed from the everlasting hills, it is always full, always flowing, overflowing.

What though the world grow false and treacherous? What though worldly means are abridged, worldly pleasures fade, or bereavements narrow the beloved family circle? The inner sources of truest peace cannot be invaded! Of the believer, outwardly impoverished, it can be said, as of the Church of Smyrna of old, "I know your poverty, but you are rich." In these hidden sources of satisfaction and happiness imperceptible to the eye of the world, we are furnished with a key and solution to Paul's paradox, "Having nothing, yet possessing all things." How often was the reality of this inward satisfying and sustaining good illustrated in the case of this great man? Look at the closing scenes of his life when a prisoner in bonds in the world's capital. See some of the pitchers which he brings up from this inner fountain, when all other shallow rills were rapidly drying in their channels. "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every

situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need. At the moment I have all I need—more than I need!"

Or see him in the same place, at a yet later period, when the earthly streams of comfort had well-near perished; lonely, deserted by man, he could yet, with the unimpaired energy of 'the life hidden with Christ,' write the glowing words, "All men forsook me. . . . Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." Or again, when in the hour of sinking nature, his enemies were insulting his gray hairs, loading him with reproaches and indignities, and doing what they could to shake his constancy in his great Lord—when every other well and stream had deserted him—when his aged and tremulous arm could no longer fetch up the flagon from the failing earthly pool—when the pitcher was about to be "broken at the fountain," and the wheel "broken at the cistern"—the fountain of his soul's peace was clear and sparkling as ever. He seems to say, 'Attempt not to cloud my hopes or eclipse my faith. Dream not that I am to act the coward's part, and purchase immunity from suffering and death by base retractation. You may shut me off from all earthly streams of joy—you may bind heavier irons on these tottering limbs—you may threaten me with the horrors of the amphitheater—you may sprinkle my insulted ashes on the waters of your Tiber river, or scatter them on the wide sea, or by the winds of heaven; but "nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.'"

If you asked him the secret and spring of all this superhuman faith and magnanimity and hope, he would reply in the brief words, "Christ in me the hope of glory." Jesus, in the glories of His person, and in the fullness and completeness of His work, was that inner fountain of gladness and peace, the "spring shut up, the fountain sealed"—and "when He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" The apostle tells the Philippians what alone would prove the secret of their heart tranquility, as it was of his own, "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Is that peace ours? After, it may be, long vainly seeking peace—a resting-place for the soul elsewhere, have we returned to the true Ark—the refuge

from the storm and the covert from the tempest? Has the true Noah put forth his hand and taken us in? and are we now, with folded wings, enjoying that, without which all outer calm is vain, illusory, worthless—reconciliation through the blood of the cross? "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

Reconciliation! Have you known the meaning of that word, even with regard to earthly friends; when, after years of bitter estrangement, the prodigal is locked in the arms of his father; or brother is reposed in the early love of brother; or sister is cuddled in the embrace of a long alienated sister?—what is this, compared to reconciliation with the Being of all beings, the Friend of all friends? For if God be for us, who can be against us? if God gives peace, who can give trouble? if God smiles upon us, who can really frown? If God be our reconciled covenant God and Father, then we have the sweet persuasion that all things are working together for our good; and even the very rills of creature bliss that were before in themselves unsatisfying, become invested with new elements of happiness and joy.

"I can truly say," to take the testimony of one, illustrious as a Christian, but illustrious too, among our country's scientific explorers, and who, escaping many treacherous reefs in the literal ocean, had reached the truer spiritual haven. "I can truly say, that I have found the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. I was never half so happy before I came to this knowledge, and never enjoyed so much of life. Pleasures or enjoyments which are sinful, have no temptations for me. But I have yet many rational enjoyments and pleasures—domestic pleasures, social pleasures, the pleasures afforded by communion with great and good men, and above all, the pleasure derived from a sense of the favor of God in the heart, which indeed passes all understanding. I used to fancy I must give up all enjoyments if I became religious. But now I find that things I used to call pleasures now disgust me, while a multitude of new enjoyments have burst upon me."

"How pleasant," says another beautiful and well-known exemplification of the Christian life, "How pleasant it is to have God for a friend, to know that He is about my path and with me. How pleasant it is to consider that nothing can hurt me, nothing can injure me, for God is my portion

forever and ever. He feeds and will feed me; He supports and will support me. In Him I become independent of the world. I desire not riches, pleasures, or the favor of men. Having God I possess all things." "My days," says Doddridge, "begin, pass, and end in pleasure, and seem short because they are so delightful."

"I never knew happiness," said Wilberforce on his death-bed, "until I found Christ as a Savior." Oh, what a lever true religion is thus found to be in elevating the soul to the enjoyment of satisfying bliss! And how is it so? We answer again, because nothing finite can satisfy that which was made for the infinite. You might give to the eagle, of which we have spoken, a golden cage, and feed him by princes' hands; but this would never be to him an equivalent for his native, free-born, sun-ward soarings.

Water never rises above its own level; and so, the best of earthly joys and rills of pleasure can rise no higher than earth. They begin and terminate here. But the living water with which Christ fills the soul, springing from heaven conducts to heaven again. Flowing from the Infinite—flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, from the city of the crystal sea, it elevates to the Infinite! It finds its level in the river of the water of life which flows in the midst of the celestial Paradise. And just as on earth, so long as our mighty lake-reservoirs are full of water and the channel unimpeded, the marble fountain in street or garden, sends up, on the gravitation principle, its crystal jets in unfailing constancy—so (with reverence we say it) never shall these fountains of peace and joy and reconciliation and hope cease in the heart of the believer until the mighty reservoirs of Deity are exhausted; in other words, until God Himself ceases to be God. Everlasting life is their source, and everlasting life is their magnificent duration!

We have witnessed the memorable and interesting spot at the roots of Mount Hermon, familiarly known as 'the sources of the Jordan.' There, the river of Palestine is seen bubbling out of a dark cave, and thence hastens on through its long tortuous course to lose its waters in the Sea of Death (the Dead Sea). That is the picture and illustration of every stream of earthly happiness. They terminate with the grave. But this inner fountain in the hidden man of the believer's heart flows onwards to the



Sea of Life; and the hour which terminates the worldling's happiness only truly begins his!

On the other hand; how awful the state of the soul continuing in guilty neglect of this 'living water.' Every well resorted to but the true well; partaking of all waters but the living waters; a stranger to the only satisfying good, feeding on husks, and starving for lack of the bread of life. You have heard of the rage of bodily hunger—what those may be impelled to in the agony of famine—in the straits of siege or shipwreck. You have heard how the very mother has been untrue to her deepest, tenderest instincts; or how the famishing crew on the wild untenanted shore have had to cast lots for nature's direst extremity.

But who can tell the famine of the soul? Alas! we cannot tell it, for we cannot now feel it. There are expedients to which we can, and do betake ourselves to stop that infinite rage of spiritual hunger. We throw sops to the immortal appetite. There are husks with which we can keep it down, messes of pottage to decoy from the true heavenly birthright. But when the husks are ended, what then? When life is ended, what then? When cast on the inhospitable shores of a bleak and ruined eternity, what then? It will be an unresponded-to cry, ringing its undying echoes, "I perish with hunger!"

You have heard of the rage of bodily thirst. Here is a picture of it from a graphic pen: "Many years ago, when the Egyptian troops first conquered Nubia, a regiment was destroyed by thirst in crossing this desert. The men, being upon a limited supply of water, suffered from extreme thirst, and deceived by the appearance of a mirage that exactly resembled a beautiful lake, they insisted on being taken to its banks by the Arab guide. It was in vain that the guide assured them that the lake was unreal, and he refused to lose the precious time by wandering from his course. Words led to blows, and he was killed by the soldiers whose lives depended on his guidance. The whole regiment turned from the track and rushed towards the welcome waters. Thirsty and faint over the burning sands they hurried, heavier and heavier their footsteps became, hotter and hotter their breath, as deeper they pushed into the desert, farther and farther from the lost track where the pilot lay in his blood; and still the mocking spirits of the desert, the phantom of the mirage led them on, and

the lake glistening in the sunshine tempted them to bathe in its cool waters, close to their eyes, but never at their lips. At length the delusion vanished, the fatal lake had turned to burning sand. Raging thirst and horrible despair! the pathless desert and the murdered guide! lost! lost! all lost! Not a man ever left the desert, but they were subsequently discovered parched and withered corpses by the Arabs sent on the search."

Such is life—a mocking mirage, the phantom of the wilderness! Thousands, lured by the brilliant spectre, hurry on in the chase after happiness, in hot pursuit after the vain and unreal. But all is illusive, ending in mockery and disappointment, 'as a dream when one awakens,' leaving the thirst of the deathless soul unquenched; and, unless a nobler Fountain be resorted to, this remains the irreparable doom, the unchanging destiny—"Him that is thirsty, let him be thirsty still."

But, thanks be to God, there is no such malediction now ringing in our ears. We may listen rather to one of the blissful cadences of the Bible—a sweet strain, a sublime harmony, wafted from the heights of heaven, "They shall HUNGER no more, neither THIRST any more." It is further added, in the same beautiful passage, "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to LIVING fountains of waters." Yes, He it is, this slain Lamb of the Heavenly Paradise, who has solved the problem of human happiness. He is the true "Fullness," the only satisfying Good, groped after by the Platonic philosophy. "In Him all fullness dwells."

It is over the portico of the Gospel Temple, not over any heathen shrine, the superscription is written, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the abundance of Your house, and You shall make them to drink of the rivers of pleasures!" What is to be our choice? The phantom or the reality?—the substance or the shadow?—the earthly waters, with their inseparable characteristic, "thirst again"—or the 'rivers of pleasures' springing up into everlasting life? At any moment the curtain of the seen and temporal may be rent in twain, and the world and all its hopes scattered like the leaves of autumn. As we are seated in thought at Jacob's Well, listening, from holy lips, to the contrast of the earthly with the perennial stream, may it be ours to breathe the fervent prayer:

"Hear me! to You my soul in suppliance turns  
Like the lorn pilgrim on the sands accursed.  
For life's sweet waters, God, my spirit yearns;  
Give me to drink; I perish here with thirst!"

## **FIRST EVASION AND REPLY**

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." John 4:15-25

These opening words, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water," have received varied and almost conflicting interpretations. We dismiss at once, as unsatisfactory, that which would represent them as the expression of a childlike faith, a further development in the woman's dawning convictions, which were

soon to culminate in perfect unwavering belief. Two other interpretations appear alone to be tenable. Her answer may have been simply dictated by stupid, ignorant wonder; it may have been the utterance of a carnal, sensuous heart, dull and dead to all spiritual apprehension—unable, as we have already seen, to rise above earthly things, or to extract any higher meaning from the sublime and gracious declaration of the stranger than a poor material reference to the well at her feet, and the economy of time and toil in being relieved of the necessity to "keep coming here to draw water."

An alternative interpretation is perhaps more in harmony alike with the woman's character and with the tenor of the narrative, that is, that her response was neither the dictate of wonder nor of faith, but rather an attempt, by evasion and banter, to trifle with divine realities—that it was uttered in a sarcastic, frivolous spirit, in a tone of playful irony. As if she had said, purposely to evade the spiritual application, 'Yes, truly, this mythical living water of yours would be a good thing indeed! it would really be worth knowing and having. Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither keep coming here to draw water.'

She had, it is true, in an earlier part of the conversation, given promise of better things. She had seemed, at all events, impressed with the unwonted courtesy of this Jerusalem Pilgrim, and to have reciprocated it. But the impression, on a heart in which pride and sin were dominant, was only momentary—the wave only touched the living rock to retreat back again amid the eddying waters. The old nature and the defiant tone return and resume the mastery. She petulantly spurns a style of discourse at variance with the whole current of her carnal thoughts and carnal life. She has no belief in, no patience for, such serious talk as this. Her answer is in the taunting, skeptical, scornful spirit of the scoffers in Ezekiel's time, "Ah, Lord God, they say of me, Does he not speak parables?"

Although of comparatively little importance which interpretation we select, we are inclined to think that the latter is most in consonance with the immediately subsequent dealing which our Lord deems it necessary to employ. When He thus saw that she was trifling, or affecting to trifle, with the profoundest needs of her soul, He resorts to the use of strong means in order to rouse her from her apathy, and guilt, and awful peril.

'The wind, and the earthquake, and the fire' must follow 'the still small voice.'

He therefore breaks off the conversation abruptly, and pursues a new theme. There is nothing more said now in connection with the beautiful similitude of the well and the living water. If she cannot be approached by imagery and figure, He will come home to her hardened conscience by the use of facts from which there can be no escape. She may misunderstand and misinterpret symbolic teaching, but there can be no misunderstanding about the stern and sad realities of her own life. He drags to view her besetting sin. Suddenly terminating the figurative conversation, he sends home this arrow of conviction, "Go, call your husband, and come here!"

In a light, bravado spirit—the reflection of her character and history—she replies, with no sense of shame or sorrow, "I have no husband." Or, it may be, ignorant of the omniscient Being she confronted, who then read the blotted pages of her heart, she tried to evade the truth by the utterance of a lie. But she was soon convinced that He in whose presence she stood, was one 'from whom no secrets are hidden'—the discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. In one brief sentence He unfolds a terrible life-story with its crowning act of present guilt. "Jesus said unto her, You have well said, I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; in that said you truly."

We might have supposed that after this, evasion was impossible; that, as the timid bird cowers under the glance of the falcon or the eagle, so would this convicted sinner have trembled under the revelations of that infinitely pure One, who, from the deep well of her polluted life, had drawn up the evidences of impurity and debasement; and that casting herself convicted and condemned at the feet of her Divine Censor, she would have exclaimed, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

The barbed arrow indeed could not fail to reach its mark; but even now, as it pierces her seared conscience, she makes a bold and adroit attempt to turn the subject—to evade the scrutiny. This she tries to effect by a twofold deception. The first only of these two efforts, and the manner in

which our Lord meets it, we shall be able to examine in this chapter.

By a dexterous shift and diversion she starts a controversial topic. It is only those who have stood by the actual spot, with all the old, unchanged surroundings of the Well of Jacob, who can fully realize and picture the scene, as, pointing upwards to the heights of the sacred mountain close by, she exclaimed, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She had already, in the context, adverted to religious differences—the old feud existing between Jew and Samaritan. She had passed from that, to historical and ancestral questions regarding Father Jacob. Now she invites discussion on the controversy between the rival temples of Gerizim and Zion, and their comparative claims to superior sanctity.

What does this teach; but how possible it is to talk fluently on controversial themes, to start speculative questions—points of religious debate—to fight sectarian battles, defend to the death every letter of party shibboleth, exclaiming, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," and yet to live godless lives. Here was one; not only outraging the laws of heaven and earth, but also utterly indifferent to her own abandoned career; and yet, apparently with a martyr's heroism, she enters the lists as a sectary; she could speak readily on semi-religious questions; she could talk, with all the fiery zeal of a partizan, of "our fathers," and gloried in being a separatist from the tribe of Judah.

Picture, alas! of multitudes still, who are living in deepest ignorance of their own guilt and danger, their corruption in heart and life; who are yet great champions in some denominational battlefield; who, with stern self-isolation, entrench themselves in sectarian pride and formalism—blow loud the trumpet of religious partisanship; valiant athletes in some debatable question of creed and sect, plying their weapons with untiring ingenuity so long as the personal and practical issues can be evaded and eliminated; very tolerant of their own frailties, but very intolerant of the frailties and short-comings of others—loyalty to party, usurping the place the gospel assigns to charity, in covering a multitude of sins. Such, then, was the woman of Samaria's first attempt at evasion.

Let us listen now to the Savior's memorable reply; the order of which, for the better elucidation of the meaning, we may somewhat transpose. He first gives a bold and decided answer to her question, and then grounds upon it some grand truths, whose comfort and consolation were intended for all ages of the future. To her query as to the rival claims of Mount Gerizim and Zion, He affirms, without hesitation, the orthodoxy of the Jewish and the heterodoxy of the Samaritan worship: "You worship you know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews." He thus unflinchingly condemns the defectiveness of the Samaritan creed—their rejection of the entire succession of inspired prophets, as well as their partial toleration of the half heathen ceremonies which had been incorporated in the worship of the God of Israel on Gerizim. By assimilating their religious ceremonial to the rites of Phoenicia and Greece, they had practically set up an altar with the inscription, "To the Unknown God."

Moreover, Zion being the appointed city of solemnities where the tribes were to go up, they were guilty of breaking, unsanctioned, the old historic unity of worship. On the other hand, Jesus adds, as Himself of the tribe of Judah, "We know what we worship." The Jews were the divinely accredited custodians of the truth; "Unto them were committed the oracles of God." Apostate, in one sense, as the worshipers on Zion had become from the living faith of their forefathers, they at all events retained intact and un mutilated their monotheism, as well as the ancient Mosaic and Levitical institutions. Along with the Pentateuch, they revered the authority of the prophetic voices which age after age had been preparing the way for the new Gospel era. They were uncorrupted by Baal worship. The temple courts were undesecrated by the arts of the magician and necromancer. More than that, "Salvation" (literally, in the original, "the Salvation," or, as some would render it, "the Savior," the promised Messiah, "is of the Jews." Of them, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come. From the tribe of Judah, not from Ephraim, He was to spring.

The fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness was, in the first instance, "for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem." The Lord had chosen Jerusalem as the place to put His name there.

Ezekiel's living waters, emblematic of Gospel grace and blessing, were to go forth from the Temple of Zion to refresh and fertilize earth's waste places—the moral wildernesses of humanity. No, farther, not without note and significance is the tense of the word here employed. It is not "the Salvation" shall be, but "is," of the Jews, probably indicating to the listener that that Savior or "Salvation" had already appeared, and thus forming a preparation for the more distinct and unqualified assurance which follows, when He declares Himself, without reserve, to be the promised Messiah.

But having thus unhesitatingly vindicated the claims of Jerusalem and Zion, He at the same time announces two truths of world-wide interest, regarding alike the object of worship and the manner of worship. We may invert also the order in which these stand in the narrative. As to the OBJECT of worship, He gives to this ignorant woman a revelation of the Supreme Being under two distinct aspects—

(1.) "God is a SPIRIT," or "God is spirit." He may, in her case, have had a double reason for thus adverting to the immaterial nature of Jehovah. Material forms, as we have previously mentioned, had been sanctioned in the compound mongrel-worship on Gerizim, in accommodation to the tastes and propensities of the heathen colonists—forms that were of necessity localized, and which were supposed to exercise no influence save in the vicinity of their shrine or temple. Moreover, the pure faith had been farther corrupted by combining with this material, a spurious spirit-worship. The votaries of Baal had a spirit presiding over the scenes and elements of nature—woods and mountains, fire, air, and water. Jesus reveals the glorious truth, of which this latter was the debasing counterfeit.

God is a spirit. Not a local God, restricted to that neighboring hill; but the Great Universal—not presiding over any favorite haunt or segment of the globe, but according to the beautiful description of one of those Psalms which the Samaritan had rejected, "If I ascend up into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me." In opposition to spirit-worship—the false teaching of their magicians and enchanters—



here was the glorious unseen reality. These spirits, supposed by some of them to haunt the woods and groves and streamlets of Gerizim, or, in demon form to take possession of the human soul—were the phantoms of their own brain, the forms of a credulous superstition. But here with the Jews, was the only true (the Omnipresent) Spirit, who needed no temples made with hands.

And, yet once more, the Samaritan worship, either of the material symbol or of the local spirit, had become a heartless form. Religion had degenerated into the most worthless and debasing ritualism—a round of externals, in which true worship, the worship of the heart and the obedience of the life, had no place. Not so was it in the worship of this spiritual Jehovah. "Those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Thus, then, the Savior's declaration was a needed counteractive to false views on the great elementary truth of all religious creeds—the nature of the Supreme Object of worship.

This woman may have been conversant, probably from infancy, with some of these strange, extravagant beliefs in a spirit-world. She had been surrounded by lying prophets, and credited their lying wonders. Christ directs her to the true spirit-worship. "You worship you know not what."—You have conjured up a spirit-land and a dream-land which have no existence. But I now reveal to you the great truth you have overlaid by your demonology, and desecrated by your practice: "God is a spirit, AND those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

(2.) He makes a second and still more glorious—still more novel and startling revelation of the nature and name of the Supreme Being. God as a FATHER. "The Father." It was a new name—a new apocalypse of the Almighty Ruler of her nation. She had just spoken in sectarian pride of "our fathers," and of Father Jacob. In emphatic contrast with this, Jesus can tell of the true Father—the eternal Father—the Father of His universal Church and people. It was a name, not indeed unknown in the books of the Jewish prophets, but it was a name which specially belonged to the new and dawning Gospel dispensation. "The hour, (that is, the Gospel hour), comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father."

The woman of Sychar had done foul dishonor to other most sacred ties of earth. Could no muffled harp-string in her soul wake up in trembling melody, as to an old familiar strain, by the mention of this new name? Debased as she now was, might she not, amid the memories of childhood-innocence, recall the hour when she loved to lisp that word? Amid the wreck of all other human relationships, might she not think of, and cling kindly to, the oldest and tenderest of all?

God was such to her—God was her Father—that universal Spirit was the universal Parent of all who worshiped Him in spirit and in truth. The thought would bring Him near as He never was before. It would invest Him with a new attractiveness. It would unteach in a moment many of the falsities of the Baal creed; and specially, its tendency to cause the Jehovah of Israel to be regarded with repulsiveness and terror—a Being of wrath to be appeased, but not of love or beauty in whom affection and trust might repose.

Of this Almighty Parent, Jesus adds, "the Father seeks such to worship Him." May not these words have further endeared to her His new name? The term "seeks" is not in the sense of 'wishes' or 'desires,' but of going after, to search and find. It is the Shepherd "seeking his flock that are scattered in the cloudy and dark day." "Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and find them out." Was she not one of that scattered flock, the worst truant of all the fold? The Shepherd was seeking her—or rather, that Old Testament figure and simile is superseded by the more touching Gospel symbol, "The Father" seeks his prodigal child—yes, and the Father waits not in his palace halls for the wanderer's return, but he goes forth on his mission of parental love. New and glorious step in the ladder by which she was brought up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay!

'Father, my Father;' 'He seeks me.' That earthly name, as we have just said, may have been to her, a fading remembrance. One of the rocky sepulchers at the base of Gerizim may now have been all that could recall it; and she may have felt thankful that he who claimed the relationship had not lived to see it disgraced in her own immoral life. But the old and hallowed earthly tie may be revived in a new and more enduring form. The God of Gerizim, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—He is my Father. I may cry unto Him, "You are my Father, my

God, and the Rock of my salvation."

If unable yet to grasp the blessed truth, she came before long to do so. Perhaps long after this interview was over, she may have lived to read in future years, in a letter from one, who, like herself, was a monument of Redeeming grace and divine parental love, "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18)

But it is not only a revelation of the Supreme object of worship the Redeemer makes to the woman of Sychar. He has an equally glorious and important revelation as to the PLACE AND MANNER OF WORSHIP. "Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes when you shall neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem worship the Father," (or rather, "not in this mountain only, nor in Jerusalem, you shall worship the Father.") All local worship is to terminate; all old things are to pass away, and all things are to be made new. Hitherto, under a preparatory dispensation, God had chosen out a people for Himself. Jerusalem had been His earthly audience-chamber, the repository of the true faith; the mystic cloud, the symbol of Deity, had rested in the holy of holies within Zion's temple. But the Gospel hour has now dawned, the substance has come, and the shadows are fleeing away. Soon the symbolic veil of that Temple shall be rent, intimating not only the abolition and abrogation of all ceremonial worship, but the extinction of all exclusive religious localities, privileged "holy places"—the inauguration of an era of worldwide blessing—the brotherhood of the nations under the one universal Spirit—a church gathered out of every country, under one Father.

The Great Shepherd will go forth, not as of old, on the mountains of Judah or Israel, but out amid earth's pathless wastes, from distant east to distant west, wherever the lost and the wandering are to be found. And no one spot in all the vast circuit will be more sacred than another. Gerizim—that boasted "mountain of blessing" is now to give its name to the whole earth. "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto you and bless you." The round globe, with the blue vault of heaven for its canopy, will henceforth form the stupendous temple of the great Unseen and Invisible. The true and accepted Israel—the "Father-worshippers," will be

found in every corner of the habitable world—in those glorious climates of the sun where idolatry has long reigned with undisputed sway—where the mosque and the pagoda have for ages frowned defiance on the Christian sanctuary—in the distant isles of the ocean—amid the prairies and pastures of the far west, the arid sands of the tropics—or amid the icebergs of eternal winter—yes, and not more under the gorgeous church or fretted aisle, than in the crude garret of the city, the humble hovel of the country, the secluded cavern of the mountain, the pathless forest of the settler, the solitary craft or deck of the fisherman and seaman, the lonely chamber of the poor, the sick, the bedridden, the dying—  
"Wherever they seek You, You are found,  
And every place is hallowed ground."

The woman of Samaria pointed, with the pride of sect and tribe, to the locality as if that were everything. But, in His brief answer, Jesus proclaims the great truth, that the locality is nothing. The material offering was unimportant, but the acceptable and grateful incense to this Great Spirit and Father was the fragrance of a broken heart and a holy life. All outward symbols, Gerizim and Zion, and their conflicting claims, are to be merged in the sanctities of a nobler temple, an inner shrine —"You are the temple of the Holy Spirit." "The temple of the Lord is holy, which temple you are."

Among other solemn and urgent lessons these magnificent utterances bring home to us, surely one is, the duty, not only of moderating the wild excess of religious exclusiveness, but the folly of putting external forms on the same level or platform with eternal principles of faith and obedience. When will men take down this complicated scaffolding which obscures and obstructs the grand proportions of the Temple of Truth? When will the sun arise to quench these fires of our own kindling? When will the material give way to the spiritual; the human and the incidental to the divine and the everlasting? When will individuals and Churches, as the children of one redeemed family, come, in childlike faith and childlike love, to worship 'the Father?'

What a different world would this be, did these two eternal words—eternal 'articles'—assert their glorious sway, and be allowed to perform their limitless errand! "God is a SPIRIT"—this is the first and

fundamental teaching of the missionary in overturning all idolatries and gross material forms and sensuous worship—demanding 'spirit and truth,' purity and earnestness, the homage of the heart and the consecration of the life. "God is a FATHER"—this is the Gospel's precious and consolatory message to the prodigal, the disinherited, the lost.

Do we know the preciousness—do we ponder alike the solemnity and the consolation, of this twofold name? God is a SPIRIT! How soul-stirring, how awe-inspiring would be the habitual recollection of this simplest but truly greatest of elementary truths; that that august Being, that Great unseen, unknown, untraceable, intangible—is everywhere present, beneath, around, about me—the witness of all my actions, with the eye of unerring scrutiny searching the secret labyrinths of my heart! "Where shall I go from your spirit, or where shall I flee from your presence?"

God is my FATHER! The feeling of awe encompassing the Supreme Spirit melts into affection. The cloud and the darkness resolve themselves into a halo of softened tenderness. That all-seeing One is the prototype of the dearest of human relations—the earthly parent is the shadowy image of the heavenly. "The Father"—but it is the Father in Christ the Son; "My Father," and therefore "your Father." Not the Father of universal humanity, that modern travesty of the true Fatherhood of God—but the Father of that redeemed humanity which has its representative elder Brother now before the throne, and who gives, in one glorious sentence, the condition and qualification of sonship: "As many as received Him, to them gave He power (the right) to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name." "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says unto you, Give me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water."

Could the revelation of the God of Christianity, the God of the Gospel go no farther than this? Yes; yet another name and title of the Almighty, flowing from this paternal relation, was reserved for one of these apostles (who had now gone into the city to buy food,) subsequently to unfold to believers and the Church. This woman of Samaria, now groping in the darkness, may, too, have one day read in his epistles, its letters of living light. With it, the evolution of the Divine character terminates. Heaven knows no more—can give no more. The archangel can climb no higher. It

is the loftiest expression of the august Fatherhood; and Jesus leaves it to the lips, we may reverently say, next best qualified to His own to pronounce it: "God is LOVE."

This bright pinnacle of faith—this third and last step in the golden ladder, may we also be enabled to reach. Rising in the sublime gradation, may it be ours to grasp the threefold name—that trinity of divine attributes, with all their elevating motives and everlasting consolations. The triple theme of meditation in the Church on earth, it will form the triple theme of adoring contemplation and immortal praise in the Church of the glorified

—  
God is a SPIRIT,  
God is a FATHER,  
God is LOVE!

## **SECOND EVASION AND REPLY**

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." John 4:25-26

In the previous chapter we considered the first means employed by the unknown and unrecognized Heart-searcher to rouse the dulled, torpid conscience of the woman of Samaria. We considered the evasive answer which she gave to the unexpected revelation of her flagrant life, by attempting to divert the conversation to a controversial topic about the competing claims of Mounts Gerizim and Zion. This in its turn drew forth our Lord's sublime reply, in which He announced the abrogation of all ceremonial worship, the abolition of all distinctive "holy places," the establishment of a universal Church, and proclaimed Israel's God under a new gospel name, setting forth His paternal relation to His believing people—"The Church throughout all the world does acknowledge you, THE FATHER of an infinite majesty!"

We might have expected, after the gracious and impressive words which had thus proceeded out of His mouth, (beginning with the condescending offer of the living water, passing to the prophetic cognizance of her heart and life history, and ending with the revelation of the divine Fatherhood,) that she would at once have bowed in lowly humility before Him, confessing her sin—recognizing one who, with divine intuition, "understood her errors," saying, "Cleanse me from secret faults;" at the same time adding, in a very different spirit from that in which it was first uttered, "Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not."

But not so. The stricken deer tries once more to wrench the rankling arrow from the wound. The lost wanderer of the fold, thus caught amid the entangling thorns, makes yet one other effort to escape from the arms of the pursuing shepherd. Or, dropping all figure, this bold transgressor, unable to discuss these spiritual themes which her Lord had just been unfolding, tries to stifle her convictions by the new plea of procrastination. "I know that Messiah who is called Christ is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."—"He will tell us all these things of which you have now been speaking—He will decide all controversies; He will settle all rival claims; He will unfold to us these deep and glorious mysteries about the nature and the name of God, and regarding the Church of the future." She wished apparently with this, to break off and silence the conversation, and in the spirit of a later conscience-stricken sinner, to say, "Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you."

PROCRASTINATION, in its Proteus shapes, is the most effectual and the most fatal device which Satan has in every age employed for luring unwary and unthinking thousands to destruction. Postponing the great question of salvation to this indefinite convenient season, the cry of the convicted soul is, "Give me this water!"—but not yet.

"Give me this water!" is the cry of youth—but not yet. Disturb not my bright sunny morning; wait until I reach the threshold of manhood.

"Give me this water!" is the cry of ripening manhood—but not yet. Disturb me not in the burden and heat of the day; wait until I have leisure and breathing-time; wait until the eventide sets in, and the shadows are

lengthening, and the drawers of water stand with their pitchers around life's fountains.

"Give me this water!" is the cry of old age—but not yet. Though far advanced in the pilgrimage journey, my strength is yet firm. I have a long evening before the sunset hour. I may linger yet a while amid these olive-glades, before the flagon be let down for the draught.

"Give me this water!" is the cry of the dying. But postponement cannot be pled now; procrastination merges into despair. "Give me this water!" but it is too late. It must now be an unresponded-to call. These tottering steps cannot now bear me to the well's brink; these feeble hands are unable to grasp the pitcher and quench this deathless thirst.

Oh, Procrastination! how many has your siren voice lulled, and beguiled, and ruined! How true, if it be quaint, is the well-known saying of an old divine—the sad verity it describes redeems it from triteness or commonplace—that "Hell is paved with good intentions;" or, as this is expressed in another form, in one of the sententious lines of the poet of "Night Thoughts"—

"Men resolve, and re-resolve, then die the same."

But to return to the narrative. Although such was the woman's dexterous new expedient to divert and terminate the conversation, she could hardly fail to have had other conflicting thoughts also in that most momentous hour of her existence. In her very attempts at evasion, she could not shake off altogether the conviction, that she was standing in the presence of a superior Being; one who had unmasked her inner life, laid bare her ignominious past. She owns him as "a prophet." He had spoken in authoritative accents; His sayings were as strange as they were impressive. If she was perplexed and staggered at the similitude He had employed about "living water," and "everlasting life," still more unconventional were His earnest, commanding, arresting, comforting words—"Believe Me" "The hour now is" "The Father (whose lost child you are) seeks," and seeks you. He had, moreover, pointedly adverted (verse 22) to "the salvation," or "the Savior."

She remembered the great tradition of her nation. A nobler life and hope



and reality, indeed, this tradition was to the neighboring Jews, whose sacred writings were full of predictions of a mighty coming Deliverer. But their own venerated Pentateuch had inspired the same expectations. The Jews looked for the Messiah as a great temporal King; but the one prophecy of Moses was in true harmony with her present reference to the Messiah-hope as a Teacher—"When He has come, He will tell us (or teach us) all things." "The Lord your God," was the remarkable Pentateuch prediction, "will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me—unto Him you shall hearken."

When she listened, therefore, with arrested ear and smitten soul to the divine utterances of this mysterious Jewish Rabbi, may not the thought possibly have flashed vaguely across her mind, mingling with her defiant unbelief, and with her real or pretended evasions, "Can this be Him?" It must be remembered that not the dwellers in Palestine only, but the nations of the world were, at this epoch, in dreamy expectation of some divine advent or incarnation. Across on those Trans-Jordanic hills on which she could gaze from where she stood through the opening of the valley, a strange prophetic voice had, fifteen hundred years before, taken up the parable with which her own Pentateuch may have made her familiar—"I see Him, but not in the present time. I perceive Him, but far in the distant future. A Star will rise from Jacob; a Scepter will emerge from Israel. It will crush the foreheads of Moab's people, cracking the skulls of the people of Sheth."

The caravans of travelers, passing daily Jacob's Well on the high road to Galilee, must have deepened these anticipations by their tidings of the marvelous preacher of the Jewish desert—"the voice crying in the wilderness." That voice, indeed, had in thrilling words announced the very truths to which she had now been the strange auditor—"Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

And what was to her more arresting far than these general prophetic hopes, He who now addressed her had roused her slumbering conscience—the arrow was sticking fast there. If he had not "told her all things," He

had, at all events, vindicated His claims to her attention and reverence by an irresistible argument—He had told her about herself. She could not stifle these aroused convictions. To use Chrysostom's quaint but emphatic words, she must have been "made dizzy with Christ's discourse." It was the crisis-moment in her spiritual history; verily but a step between either life or death. Guilty cavalier that she was, who knew not the time of her visitation—meeting overtures of grace with evasion after evasion—it might have been said of her as of the tribe of Ephraim to which she belonged, She is "joined to her idols, let her alone!"

Is the divine Savior, whose forbearance she has thus been trifling and tampering with, to abandon her to her procrastination and unbelief and cherished sins? or, by one bold and gracious answer, will He lift the curtain from the glories of His divine Person, as it had not yet been lifted either in Galilee or Judea? Such a premature disclosure of His Messiah claims may be fraught with peril and disadvantage, seeing that His hour had not yet come. But the destinies of one human soul are suspended on that revelation; He will save others, not save Himself. If the inward sigh of her burdened heart corresponded with that of the Greek Gentiles at a later period, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" the glad and astounding response is now given from the living oracle—"Jesus said unto her, I who speak unto you am He."

What an unexpected rejoinder to her recent question, "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" "Yes!" is His reply, 'I am greater. I am the Shiloh of whom he spoke. I am the true ladder he beheld in mystic vision on yonder heights of Bethel, by which the guilty can climb to the heaven they have forfeited and the God they have offended!' The triumph is complete. The darkness is past, and the true light shines—"I am He!" It is enough. The Baptist's bold words, uttered on the neighboring banks of the Jordan, have now their first echo and fulfillment at the base of Gerizim, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner."

Whatever had been her prejudices, her sectarian bitterness, her sarcasm, her evasions, she re-traverses at a glance the glowing words of the conversation. She understands all now. The kindness, the grace, the truth, the penetrating revelations of Omniscience, the strange urgency

and earnestness, the living water, salvation, everlasting life. HE, the great Giver of all, is standing by her side, and offering these priceless blessings to her! yes, to her with her legion-sins—the demon-throng that had reigned unchallenged for long years in her degraded heart. She asks, she needs no outer sign. He had told her 'all things that ever she did.' She requires no attesting angels to gather around the well—no horses and chariots of fire on Gerizim, as of old on the mountain at Dothan, to authenticate His mission.

The pilgrim garb the Traveler wears, and the signs of weariness and languor, cannot in her eyes belie His claims to be the true Messiah. The "follow me," which had acted with omnipotent spell on the fishermen at Bethsaida, had fallen with like irresistible energy on her own soul. She heard, she listened, she repented, she believed, she rejoiced! She has already let down her pitcher for the draught, and feels as if for the first time that her deep spiritual thirst was quenched forever.

The sequel is unrecorded. Whether she fell prostrate adoring at His feet, exclaiming, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God," we cannot tell. Her feelings at that moment are left to our imagination. Very possibly there was nothing more for the evangelist to note. She may have been dumb with silence, unable to utter a word—dumb, it may be, with tears.

Already, too, the disciples are appearing from the city amid the olive-glades with their purchased food. But as we see this now saved one hastening with buoyant step on her mission of wonder and gratitude and joy to her native town, we can imagine the heart-song which the lips failed to embody in utterance—"I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name for evermore, for great is Your mercy towards me, and You have delivered my soul from the lowest hell!"

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents."

Let us come once more, at this climax of the story, and admire and adore the riches of redeeming grace and love. Behold Christ standing at the door of a closed heart, still waiting and knocking in wondrous patience and forbearance, though His head be wet with dew, and His locks with

the drops of the night, until the response was heard, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord; why do you stand outside?" It was truly predicted of Him, "The bruised reed He will not break; the smoking flax he will not quench, until he bring forth judgment unto victory."

Seated as He now was at that well-side amid the mountains of Ephraim, His own words, uttered aforetime by the mouth of His prophet, had a new and significant interpretation: "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah and Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not punish you as much as my burning anger tells me to. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy." The lesson may well be engraven as with an iron pen and lead on these rocks forever, that none need despair—that the first may be last, and the last first; that for Samaritan sinners, as for Jerusalem sinners, there is mercy. The vilest prodigal may come and read the superscription on the well of Jacob: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." That day salvation had come to her house. As the first fruits of Israel's ingathering, the longing aspiration of the great Psalmist prophet was fulfilled, "Oh that the Salvation (or the Savior) of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

"I who speak unto you," said Jesus to the woman. Christ is speaking to us in many ways. He speaks in the mercies He bestows, and in the blessings He withholds; in life's storms and life's sunshine; in the earthquake and the fire, as well as in the still small voice. "I who speak unto you." That is His utterance, if we would but hear it, in the midst of our worldly losses—our desolate homes—our sickbeds—our deathbeds.

Blessed be God, too, as in the case of the woman of Samaria, He has one louder utterance still: "I who speak in righteousness—mighty to save!" Never is there the season, or the exigency, in which He is unable or unwilling to reveal Himself. During his ministry on earth, He seemed as if He would make every hour take up its parable as to His readiness at all times thus to "speak peace to His people and to His saints." Early in the

morning, before the sun had risen on the hills of Bashan, He spoke to His disciples on the lake-shores of Galilee. At midday—with the glaring sun in the meridian—He met this sinful woman at the well of Jacob. At eventide, on the way to Emmaus, when His disciples were indulging in sorrowful musings about their absent Lord, the mysterious stranger who joined their company said to them, "I who speak unto you am He." At night, when all was hushed in Jerusalem, He spoke comfortable words to Nicodemus. Or on the sea of Gennesaret, when, amid darkness and tempest, the disciples, like this woman of Samaria, failed to recognize their divine Master—when they could see nothing but an evil spirit (as they surmised, a demon of the deep) walking on the crested waves, the voice was heard, "It is I; do not be afraid!"

And if we take all these as symbolic of the varied hours in life's little day, Jesus speaks in each of them. Youth! in life's early morning, the dawn of existence, He speaks to you. Manhood and womanhood! at the well-side, in the hot noon of life, He speaks to you. Old-age! in life's evening, in mellowed sundown, He speaks to you. Dying! out in the midst of the cold dark sea, death coming in spirit-form, and extracting at first the cry of fear—He speaks to you in the gentle accents of His own love.

Has He spoken to us? Like that woman at the well at Sychar, that poor wandering bird of Samaria, long having no resting-place for the sole of our feet, have we found it at last in the true Ark? Have we listened to the gracious revelation, I am He? Have we listened to these balm-words which fell of old on the ears of other similar outcasts—"Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?"

It is said of Goethe, the great German, that in one of those dark unsatisfied hours in which his mighty intellect and soul groped after the true rest, he thus recorded his undefined longings for that which he had failed to attain—

Fairest among Heaven's daughters,  
You who stillest pain and woe,  
Pour Your refreshing waters  
On the thirsty here below;  
Where tends this restless striving!  
Faint and tired I long for rest.

Heaven-born Peace,  
Come and dwell within my breast!"

These words were found on a scrap of paper lying on his writing-table. A devoted friend of kindred intellectual pursuits, but who had tasted of a better fountain and therefore knew what alone could quench these unsated aspirations, wrote on the other side, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"If you knew the GIFT OF GOD and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and HE would have given you living water." And if we would add yet one word, it is that Christ, in the glories of His person and offices and work, as revealed here and elsewhere in the Gospels, with His free message of salvation, is the very Savior we need, and who alone can satisfy the soul's thirst. Christianity is to have no new phases or developments. Its glorious distinctive truths are not to be molded and metamorphosed to suit the restless spirit of the times, to adapt themselves to new conditions of thought, and to square with modern theories and speculations. Jesus, from being the adorable God-man, "Immanuel, God with us," is not to be dishonored by merely having a place assigned Him as one of many deities in the world's Pantheon—regarded simply as the human Founder of one of earth's religions or philosophies—and the doctrines of His school to take complexion and color, shape and modification, at the caprice of human opinion—the age molding the gospel instead of the gospel molding the age. Poetry is at fault when this is one of her oracular utterances, "Ring in the Christ that is to be."

The Christ that 'is to be' is the Christ that is. "I who speak unto you am He." "They shall perish," may be true of all other philosophic creeds and systems, "but You remain the same." "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

May we know Him as the unchanging Savior, the Giver of the living water, the Speaker of peace, the Bestower of rest to the soul. Renouncing and loathing our sins, and having had answered in Him the cry of thirsting humanity, "Give me to drink!"—may we be able to say, with holy

earnestness and believing joy,  
"Is there a thing beneath the sun  
That strives with You my heart to share;  
Ah, take it thence, and reign alone,  
The Lord of every motive there.  
Then shall my heart from earth be free,  
When it has found repose in Thee!"

## **MOMENTS OF SILENCE**

"Just then his disciples arrived. They were astonished to find him talking to a woman, but none of them asked him why he was doing it or what they had been discussing." John 4:27

Sacred story has on record many crisis-hours of thrilling interest. Such was the occasion when the old Judge of Israel sat by the wayside 'trembling for the ark of God'—when the liberties of his country, the safety of the sacred symbol of which he was custodian, and the fate of his own family, were all involved in the momentous issues of the struggle. Such, too, was the kindred occasion when David sat in an agony of suspense between the two gates when the battle was raging in the woods of Ephraim, and when, with parental feelings triumphing over the larger interests at stake, he inquired in eager and anxious haste, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Few among ourselves, doubtless, in our individual histories, have not known of similar seasons—when the telegraph flashed its unexpected message of the distant bereavement, or the appalling accident; or when in our own home we watched the herald symptoms of dissolution gathering round some loved pillow—'life balanced in a breath'—when hope and fear had for long days their alternate triumph, and when the unmistakable indication was given by skilled watchers, which quick-sighted affection too well understands, that recovery was hopeless.

Or, to take the converse of these; many doubtless can recall experiences of a different kind—life's gladder recollections—bright milestones and way-marks in the pilgrimage—momentous events enshrined in sunny memories—the birth of a child—the return of a long-absent son or brother from a far-off land—the first success in business—the triumph in some struggle of honorable ambition; or, it may be, the electric message which conveyed the cheering intelligence that the illness and danger of our friend was over, or that he had come unscathed out of the fiery tide of battle, or was rescued safe from some perishing crew. These, and such like, which each separate experience doubtless has to suggest, form the "illi dies" of the old Roman—days which he was used to mark with the white or black chalk, the symbols of joy or sorrow.

But what season can be compared in its momentousness to the great crisis-hour of a soul's conversion; an hour similar to that which we contemplated in the preceding context—the triumph of light over darkness—truth over error—life over death? What return so glad as the return of the long lost prodigal to the heavenly Father's home? What day so deservedly to be marked with the white chalk of gladness as the day which records the soul's deliverance from everlasting danger and ruin? What birth compared to that of an heir of immortality?

Is it to be wondered at, that such momentous epochs of our earthly histories as those of which we have spoken, should, at the instant of their occurrence thrill the spirit into silence? that the tongue in such seasons of agitating emotion should be unable to speak—that utterance should fail?

Is it a time of grief, overpowering sorrow? That word "overpowering" expresses our meaning—the lips at the moment refuse to tell out the secrets of the speechless, stricken, smitten heart. Sorrow is always deepest, profoundest, where the mourners can exchange only silent glances through irrepressible tears. Job's three friends, when they heard of his aggravated woes, sat along with him upon the ground with torn mantle and dust-covered heads for seven days and seven nights, "and none," we read, "spoke a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

Or, is it some joyful occasion? Joy has its strange, stunning moment, too.



The receipt of sudden and gladdening information has been known, for the time being, to paralyze into silence the overstrung feelings, to hold fast for the instant the flood-gates of speech. Thought is absorbed in itself.

Such is the picture we have now before us. The person around whom gathers the main interest in this narrative, has owned that weary pilgrim seated on the edge of Jacob's well, to be the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. She remains mute under the revelation which had been made to her—she maintains expressive silence, or a silence that may have had its outlet only in tears.

Jesus, her great deliverer, who had broken the bonds of a lifetime in sunder and ushered her into glorious liberty, beholds, in this signal triumph of His grace, the first-fruits of a vast spiritual harvest in Samaria—the earliest trophy among the outcasts of Israel. Absorbed in the musings to which such thoughts gave birth, He, too, preserves significant silence.

The disciples have come up at the moment from their errand to the neighboring town. The last, but most momentous words of the conversation had possibly fallen on their ears—"I who speak unto you am He." They could not fail to observe the effect of this disclosure. The woman's profound but suppressed emotion; the pitchers and water-pots lying at her side, now forgotten and unheeded. But though by their exchanged glances, (still imbued with the old prejudices,) they marveled that their Master talked with this forbidden Samaritan female, there was not a word uttered—all the three parties were thrilled and spell-bound—the woman, a moment before so fluent and talkative—the disciples, with their curiosity and amazement excited at the violation of national and sectarian etiquette. But whatever might be the workings of their inward thoughts, these are suppressed—"They were astonished to find him talking to a woman, but none of them asked him why he was doing it or what they had been discussing."

And the third and greatest of all, surrenders Himself more than all, to the significant stillness of that still hour. As if unaware of any human presence, His eye and His heart seem arrested by some theme of distant

but magnificent contemplation. "The noise of archers in the places of drawing water" is for the moment hushed; every bow is unstrung, every rope and pitcher is at rest; the subordinate actors in the scene stand gazing on one another, while their Lord still remains seated on the curbstone of the well, gazing on the fields of living green waving all around Him in that expanse of plain, and allowing these, as we shall afterwards see, to be the expounders and interpreters of His own heart's joy.

Very possibly the disciples, even already, were no strangers to similar moments of absorbed contemplation on the part of their divine Master; and though they understood not the nature of these mysterious communings, they felt that they dared not, or would not, intrude on their sacredness. The aged Apostle and Evangelist, when he wrote this last Gospel, seemed to have a vivid recollection of more than one such solemn spellbinding being put upon otherwise familiar and confidential communion. Amid the waste of memory, he then recalled these moments of repression and significant silence at the well of Sychar; and at the close of his history, he again records a similar inhibition put upon himself and his fellow apostles on the occasion of the final interview on the lake-shore of Gennesaret: "None of the disciples dare ask him, Who are you?"

Thus, we repeat, it would appear as if they were accustomed, at special occasions, to put a restraint on their needless curiosity. And yet, at the same time, they had learned to repose a perfect unwavering confidence in the wisdom and rectitude of their Master's doings; they knew full well that even in these silent cogitations there were wrapped up unrevealed purposes of love and mercy. "None of the disciples dare ask him, Who are you? knowing that it was the Lord." These purposes might be mysterious. The well, like the earthly symbol at their feet, might be deep; yet no man said, "What do you seek?"

Although already led so far to anticipate the subject in a previous chapter, let us yet again draw the one great lesson from the words which head the present—the duty of silence under the divine dispensations. Often, like the disciples at Sychar, have we reason to marvel at the Lord's doings. Their marvel on this occasion arose from a poor reason, a mere sectarian and rabbinical prejudice—that their Master, who was of the tribe of Judah, should break through Jewish conventionalism by holding

converse with a female, and that female one of the excommunicated Samaritans. They would, before many weeks had passed, cease their astonishment. They would have their prejudices rebuked, and their Lord's wisdom and grace vindicated.

Often have we, though in our blindness, greater reason than they had to marvel at His ways. Providence is often spoken of as a dark enigma. God's name, as He declared it to Manoah, is "Secret." He gives no account to any of His matters. "I the Lord dwell in the thick darkness." 'He plants his footsteps in the sea.' These footsteps are untraceable on the varying billows. They are like the wake of the vessel furrowing a momentary depression in the ocean; the dark waves close over, and not a vestige of love or wisdom is discernible—"Your way is in the sea; Your path in the deep waters, and Your footsteps are not known."

Blind unbelief, arraiging the rectitude of the divine dispensations, is prone to ask, "What do You seek in this catastrophe?" That sudden ruin of my worldly business and prospects—the heart would sincerely prompt the inquiry, 'What do You seek in this?' The pillaging of dearer household treasure—"What do You seek here?" "All you who know His name say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!" 'The beautiful rod,' the budding branch, the infant blossom—"What do You seek here?' These cradles emptied; these dimpled smiles turned into pale marble! Why has death not taken the seared and withered drapery from the autumn branch, but stripped the green sapling? Why not taken the browning leaves of the decaying rose, rather than the incipient bud, before the summer sun had fallen on its tints, or extracted its fragrance?

Or, stranger still, "The strong staff broken!" What do You seek here? The beautiful rod is missed for its beauty, but the strong staff is missed still more for its strength. Where is the wisdom in taking away the crutch from the arm of the feeble—the prop from the tottering steps of old age? Why thus lay the axe at the root of manhood in its glory? "How is the strong staff broken?" Such (say as we please) is the wailing soliloquy of many a crushed and sorrowing heart under the mystery of the Divine dealings. But the duty, the delight, the prerogative, the triumph of faith, is to be silent. "They were astonished to find Him talking to a woman, but none of them asked Him why He was doing it or what they had been

discussing."

To ask no reason, no "why or wherefore;" to lie in devout submission under the inscrutable chastisement, owning, though we may be unable to discern, the faithfulness of the great Chastener, who often thus hides Himself and keeps silence, just in order to elicit unquestioning faith and implicit trust. What did David say, under a complication of dark individual and family trial? "I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good."—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because You did it." What did Aaron say under a trial deeper, sadder, more overwhelming still? He said nothing—"And Aaron held his peace." What did a Greater than earthly priest or king, say in moments of mysterious suffering? "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth."

How often is this duty of silence under the dealings of God, inculcated in sacred Scripture. "Rest in, the Lord, (margin, "be silent to the Lord,") and wait patiently for Him." "Truly my soul waits (or is silent) upon God." "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord." Or, yet again, in the sublime and striking prophecy of Habbakuk; the prophet, though appalled by the divine judgments impending on the nation and which the divine lips had themselves uttered, resolves to be silent, and to say not, "What do you seek?" He resolves to wait for further disclosures of the divine will—"I will stand upon my watch, and set myself upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

And what is God's first message to him? It is simply to continue silent—to wait. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though, it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." He compares and contrasts this silent, patient waiting, with the restless invocations of the heathen to their dumb idols—calling upon them not to be silent, but to speak—"Woe unto him that says to the wood, Awake; and to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach." But, he adds, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." And then this silence is only broken by the prophet's sublime prayer, in the first part of which he dwells on the mystery of God's dispensations, only

that he may wind up with his grand profession of faith and trust and holy joy!

Blessed it will be for us, amid all these 'frowning providences,' if, instead of presuming in a spirit of unbelief and distrust, to ask, "What do You seek?"—we are ready to hear the voice of the Unknown and Invisible saying, "Be still, and know that I am God!" The dutiful servant asks no reason of his Master—he does his appointed work in silent obedience. The loyal soldier asks no reason of his commanding officer for what he may think the hazardous and fatal movement in the day of battle; he obeys in prompt and willing silence. The faithful workman asks no reason for these crude gashes in the quarry; he is content to wait until builder or sculptor fashions the unshapely block into symmetry and beauty. We are apt, with Joseph, in our blind ignorance, to say, "Not so, my Father;" but, like aged Jacob on that same occasion, God refuses our erring dictation, our unwise counsel, saying, "I know it, My son; I know it."

It is the grandest triumph of faith thus to confide in the divine leadings in the dark—when the Almighty's wings are not bright and refulgent with love and mercy and goodness, but rather projecting a mysterious shadow—then, yes, then does faith vindicate its own strength and reality, when it can utter this song in the night, "How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the SHADOW of your wings."

If at any time we be called to stand by some broken cistern; nothing to draw with—the rope of fond affection snapped—God's judgments 'a great deep'—be it ours to seat ourselves speechless by the brink of the shattered fountain—not marveling, not asking questions, not saying in querulous skepticism, "What do You seek?" "knowing that it is the Lord."

When Jacob crossed the brook Jabbok, (to revert, in closing, to an incident in the life of the old Patriarch, more than once already referred to,) he met, under a clear midnight sky, an angel-form—this same Redeemer. "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." There was to that solitary human wrestler a strange mysteriousness in the apparition of the magnificent visitant. He had struggled with him in the darkness; put his thigh out of joint; made him a cripple for life. But in this

case, unlike the disciples at Sychar, Jacob dared not be silent. In irrepressible eagerness he asked him, and said, "Tell me, I ask you, your name?" And the other said, "Why is it that you do ask after my name?" The wrestling angel did not satisfy his curiosity by revealing his history. But he blessed him there, and sent him away, with the new name of "Israel."

Oh, how often is this true! God meeting His people in the brooding darkness of their night of trial—wrestling with them; and if they, in the deep mystery of their sorrow, are tempted to ask, "What do You seek?" He does not answer directly—He does not answer as they would like Him to answer, by desisting from the struggle. But He does better. They come out from the conflict maimed and crippled and heart-stricken it may be, but with a new name and blessing—as princes who have had power with God and prevailed.

"Come, O Traveler unknown,  
Whom still I hold, but cannot see,  
My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with Thee;  
Wrestling, I will not let You go,  
Until I Your Name, Your Nature know.

"'Tis love! 'Tis love You died for me!  
I hear Your whisper in my heart!  
The morning breaks, the shadows flee;  
Pure universal Love You are!  
To me, to all, Your affections move;  
Your Nature and Your Name is love!

"The Sun of Righteousness on me  
Has risen, healing in His wings;  
Withered my native strength, from Thee  
My soul its life and support brings  
My help is all laid up above;  
Your Nature and Your Name is Love!

"I know O, Savior, who You are;

Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend!  
Nor will You with the night depart,  
But stay and love me to the end!  
Your mercies never shall remove,  
Your Nature and Your Name is Love!

"Lame as I am, I take the prey,  
Hell, earth, and sin, with ease overcome;  
I leap for joy, pursue my way,  
And as a bounding deer fly home!  
Through all eternity to prove, Your  
Nature and Your Name is Love!"  
—Charles Wesley, 1742.

## **THE HOME MISSIONARY**

The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him. John 4:28-30

In the former chapter, we found that the disciples had meanwhile joined their Lord at the Well, while He was still conversing with the woman of Samaria. Until now, she had enjoyed undisturbed her interview with the Divine Wayfarer; but other eyes being upon her, the conversation abruptly terminates. So it is with all our most hallowed seasons of communion with the Savior on earth. They are necessarily brief. He is to His people still, in a spiritual sense, as He was to that daughter of Israel, "as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night." Blessed will that time be, when no disturbing intrusive element can interrupt the bliss of fellowship whose duration will not be a

transient noontide-hour of burden and weariness, but ETERNITY!

The silence of that speechless group seems to have been first broken by the sudden departure of the woman. In the intensity of her newborn emotions she is forgetful altogether of the purpose which brought her to the well of the Patriarch; and, leaving her pitcher behind, she hastens to her native city to proclaim to her fellow-townsmen the astounding intelligence that she has found the Messiah. How altered her whole character and feelings since she left her home a brief hour before! She had left from the gates of Shechem a miserable sinner; she returns a rejoicing believer, with her deep spiritual thirst quenched, once and forever, at a nobler fountain.

There is something true to human nature, and truer still to the expansive, unselfish spirit of the Gospel, in seeing her thus hastening to make others partakers of her own joy and peace. The impulse is natural to communicate to others whatever may have imparted happiness to ourselves. A son who gets advancement in the world delights to take the earliest means of sending the tidings to the paternal roof. The soldier in the forlorn hope hastens to give to those who are waiting with breathless interest, the intelligence alike of his safety and of his feat of successful daring. The shepherd in the parable is represented, on finding the lost wanderer, as calling his friends and his neighbors together, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." The father of the prodigal is not contented with his own happiness in giving welcome to the long absent one, but his banqueting halls are thrown open, that others may have a sympathizing participation in the gladsome return.

We may recall a moment of deeper, stranger, intenser joy still—a joy which quickened the pulses of the world's life; when Mary Magdalene had not only entered the deserted sepulcher, but had listened from unmistakable lips to words of wonder and gladness—with fleet step, unable to keep the ecstatic assurance to herself, she hurried to proclaim it to those most intensely interested—"She departed quickly from the sepulcher, with fear and great joy; and ran to bring His disciples word." The two travelers to Emmaus, when their wondering eyes were opened, hastened forthwith to the eleven with the glad news, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon."



So it was in the case of the woman of Samaria. She, too, had seen her living Lord—the Messiah promised to her fathers. Her joy and wonder cannot be unshared. It was with her as with the brethren of Joseph: no sooner had the patriarch made himself known to them, saying, "I am Joseph," than they hastened to convey the startling intelligence to their aged father, "Joseph is alive!"

The true Joseph had made Himself known to this alien sister. She cannot keep to herself the joy of all joys. "The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him."

And this is ever the true result of saving conversion, the necessary consequence of the reception of the truth into our own hearts—a longing desire to make others sharers and participators in our joy and peace in believing. If Christianity be real and living, it must be expansive. The work of the Spirit of God in the heart is not a fiction, not a form, but a life. To use the simile of this narrative, it is a fountain not only 'springing up,' (bubbling up,) but overflowing its cistern, and the superfluous supply going forth to gladden other waste places. Not the mass of stagnant water without outlet, but the clear, sparkling lake, discharging its rush of living streams which sing their joyous way along the contiguous valleys, and make their course known by the thread of green, beautifying and fertilizing as they flow.

Or, if we may employ another figure, let it be that whose appropriateness redeems it from commonplace—the stone thrown into the same still lake. The ripples formed are deepest in the center. Christianity is deepest in the heart in which its truths have sunk; but its influence expands in ever-widening concentric circles until the wavelets touch the shore. Religion, intensest in a man's own soul and life, should embrace family, household, kindred, neighborhood, country, until it knows no circumference but the world!

Oh, how unlike is the true spirit of the gospel to that of the world's selfishness; that selfishness which would retain all with tenacious,

avaricious grasp, with no thought or care for the happiness or well being of others. Christianity breaks down these walls of narrow isolation, and proclaims the true brotherhood of the race. Selfishness closes the heart, shuts out from it the rains and dews and summer sunshine; but Christianity, or rather the great Sun of light, shines—the closed petals gradually unfold in the genial beams—and they keep not their fragrance to themselves, but waft it all around. Every such flower, the smallest that blushes unseen to the world—becomes a little censer swinging its incense-perfume in the silent air, or sending it far and wide by the passing breeze.

The woman of Samaria became, as every Christian who has tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious ought to become, a home evangelist and missionary. Origen calls her "the apostle of the Samaritans." The entire words in the song of an elder sister in Israel, which we have more than once partially quoted, are beautifully true in her case with reference to the inhabitants of her city: "Those who are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates."

And her case and character are, in this respect, only in beautiful keeping and harmony with manifold examples in sacred Scripture—"going down to the gates," and proclaiming to others, "This gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter." Job was such a missionary. Not content himself with knowing and rejoicing in the revelation of a 'living Redeemer,' that evangelist of the Arabian desert, in words appropriate to his barren home, expresses his ardent desire that others might participate in the glorious discovery, "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! that they were engraved with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!"

David was such a missionary. The tokens of God's forgiving grace and mercy vouchsafed to himself, acted as a stimulus and incentive to convey these to others, "Then will I teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted unto You"—"Come, all you who fear God, I will declare what He has done for my soul."

Andrew was such a missionary. For, having himself beheld and welcomed the Lamb of God, we read, "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus."

Philip was such a missionary. Himself the recipient of the glad news, he "finds Nathaniel, and said unto him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth" at the same time extracting from the simple-hearted Jew, the noble avowal, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

The converted maniac of Gadara became such a missionary. He was not permitted to continue his posture, "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind," a passive subject of the wondrous transformation—"Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to your own house and show how great things God has done to you. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him."

And so it was also with the greatest of all converted men. No sooner was Paul struck to the ground by the heavenly light, and heard the voice of that Jesus whom so long he had persecuted, than he "immediately preached Christ in the synagogues of Damascus, that He is the Son of God." "You," says Christ, to all and of all His people—"you are the light of the world." As little can the sun retain his heat to himself, or the moon her borrowed luster, as the believer cease to be a radiating center of holy influence. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." And if this influence, in the case of not a few, fail of being of an active nature, let all remember that there is one of another kind equally acceptable to God, and equally potent for good. The Christian, confined for weary years to a sickbed, is rendered physically incapable of the outer activities of the spiritual life; but there is a speechless eloquence and power in a holy, Christlike character. Such may prove silent evangelists, commending the gospel to others by their meek, patient, enduring, uncomplaining resignation—like the alabaster box of old, broken unnoticed and unobserved; but the whole house, (the little sphere of their influence), is filled with the odor of the ointment!

To return to the narrative. The mission of this female evangelist was signally successful. For it is added, "So the people came streaming from the village to see Him." Now there is something in this statement which is remarkable, and well worthy of our attention. She has made a startling assertion in the midst of those who were only too cognizant of her character. Yet they credit her testimony; they obey, apparently with alacrity, her summons, and crowd with her to see the Judean Pilgrim. With some of these, doubtless, there may have been no higher motive or inducement than curiosity; but from the sequel, we seem warranted to infer that this was not the predominant reason. They had given a ready and hearty credence to the wondrous story of this strangest of attesting witnesses, and at her bidding, and under her guidance, they hasten without hesitation to the old traditional Well.

What could it have been which rendered her testimony so strong, so self-evidencing and self-authenticating? We may note one or two particulars which must have specially tended to conquer their prejudices, and prepare them for a recognition of these same Messiah-claims.

(1.) Her honesty and outspoken candor must have gained her a favorable hearing: "Come," she said, "see a man that told me all things that ever I did." It was the last thing we could have expected her to utter—the last message they would have expected her to deliver—to ask them to come to see one whose penetrating glance had read and revealed her blackened history. She would in ordinary circumstances have shrunk from such a revelation of herself. Indeed, when we see her leaving the well and disappearing among the old olive trees on the road to the city, the natural suggestion which occurs to us is, that she is glad to rush away from the withering glance and exposure of that Heart-searcher, saying, in the spirit of the oldest world-transgressor, "I heard your voice, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

We expect that if she makes any reference at all to the mysterious stranger, it would be by doing what she could to keep others from going to listen, possibly to fresh disclosures of her character and vicious life; that if she said anything to her fellow-citizens about that Jewish traveler, it would rather be to depreciate His authority and turn into ridicule His words and similitudes. But this, on the contrary, is the very point on

which she emphatically dwells. This is to her the credential of His Messiahship, that He has told her all her nefarious past history—that He is fully acquainted with her life of sin.

Could this honest avowal fail to carry its own moral weight to the minds of these simple, straightforward villagers or townsmen of Sychar—that despite of these disclosures, instead of evading Him—belittling Him—mocking Him—throwing discredit on His claims, or keeping the strange interview of that morning a profound secret locked up in her heart of hearts, she invites them to come and see Him, and hear for themselves His omniscient and searching words?

(2.) Another thing which must have won for her the attention of her fellow-citizens, was her earnestness. "Come!" she said, with inviting urgency. Her strange assertions might at first be met by obstinacy and scorn. She might probably at first be regarded as a raving enthusiast and fanatic—the victim of some sudden bewildering phantasm, possessed with one of the demons of their false spirit worship; or perhaps as subserving some hypocritical ends—a deceiver, and being deceived. But probably her tears and heartfelt genuine penitence, coupled with the transparent veracity of her statement, satisfied them that there was in her case no pretense, no delusion.

There was about her tale and her manner an indubitable reality, which conquered and annihilated the strength even of Samaritan prejudices. She may have appeared at first, like Lot to his sons-in-law, "as one that mocks." But in abrupt, importunate earnestness, the smitten penitent implores them to go and see—to go and judge for themselves. These pleadings are irresistible. They went out of the city, she herself probably accompanying them, "and came unto Him." What is to compare with earnestness? There is a true ring about it which cannot be simulated or counterfeited. What Christian ministry, what Christian life, so powerful as an earnest one? It is not the charm of intellect, not the subtlety of reasoning, not the magic of eloquence, that will commend the gospel to others. It is the living words welling up from the believing soul, the lips uttering and proclaiming what has been experimentally felt and tested. "I believed, therefore have I spoken."

Unsanctified intellect has often preached an unknown Savior. Strange as it may seem, unsanctified intellect has even at times not delivered its message in vain, just as the trumpet which stirs the hearts of the brave in battle may be sounded by coward or unworthy lips. But the ministry and the mission most signally owned and blessed by the great Master, is not the wisdom of human words, or the grandeur of flowery orations, but where there is the irresistible cogency of living fervor. Men of the world are quick-sighted enough to penetrate the flimsy veil of unreality and pretension, to discover those who are the mere imposters in the great army of the brave and the true.

On the other hand, where there is unction and reality, other deficiencies will be overlooked and palliated. Even intellectual superiority willingly stoops to hear the heartfelt tale, though it may be delivered with unlettered and stammering tongue. Hence, in the Gospels, the two most honored of preachers, with the exception of the Baptist, just because their tongues were touched with burning earnestness, were that converted demoniac of Gadara, and this converted woman of Samaria. Oh for an earnest Church and an earnest ministry! the baptism "with the Holy Spirit and with fire!"

(3.) We may add one other impression which must have been made upon the people of Shechem—the effect which that mysterious interview at the Well had upon the woman herself. It had made her happy. He had told her all things that ever she did. That, we might have thought, and so would they, should have had the effect of making her wretched. We know the awful feeling which another's cognizance of some crimson sin inspires. It makes the transgressor miserable. Hush-money is the well-known human quietus of a troubled conscience—the ready bribe to muffle the anguish of discovered wrong-doing—the key which locks up the terrible secret. But this woman's guilty secrets were out and disclosed—One Infinite yet human heart at least knew them all. He knew the worst of her. He was within a mile of where she now was—yet she was happy!

Among these half heathen Shechemites were there no spiritual burdens as heavy to be borne as her own? Do we think, amid these rough hewers of wood and drawers of water, there were none of the world's aching hearts to be found? Would they not willingly too pass through the same

ordeal as she, if only the oppressive load could be removed? Would they not willingly brave the scrutiny of this omniscient One, and allow Him to unlock their deepest secrets, if only the storm, as in her case, could be changed into a calm by His omnipotent, "Peace, be still?"

Such, then, being the credentials of this female messenger, let us glance at the subject of her MESSAGE. This, too, is remarkable and worthy of note; for in it she tells her fellow-citizens the very fact which we might have expected she would have withheld, and she omits what we would have expected her rather to proclaim. We expect, as she enters Sychar, and gathers the wondering crowd around her, to hear her speak of what we deem alike the most beautiful and the most memorable part of her story—that, too, which would be most impressive to the Oriental mind—about the Well, the thirst, the living water, the gift of God, everlasting life. Or if not this, the mystic sayings about Gerizim and Zion, the world-wide worship, the revelation of the Great Father.

Not a word is said of any of these; no, not even does she speak of the stranger's own closing avowal of his Messiahship. The one declaration—that which has stirred her heart to its depths (she seems to have room for no other) is this, "He told me all things that ever I did." As in the case of Felix, when a greater than Paul now spoke of 'temperance, righteousness, and the judgment to come,' conscience spoke, and her immortal spirit trembled! And as in speaking of the Christian ministry we have adverted to one element at least of persuasive power in the character of the messenger, so have we here the most effective and influential characteristic of his message. It is not figurative expositions, not controversial disputes, not subtle metaphysical distinctions about the nature and character of God, but the direct commending of the truth to the conscience; awakening a deep sense of sin—rousing the soul to a consciousness of the virulence of its disease, and thus preparing it for a revelation of the one glorious remedy.

It was asserted by divine lips to be the first part of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion, "He will convince the world of sin." The evidences of the schools are not without their peculiar value—but the stateliest array of these will never of themselves bring home conviction to one heart. They are not what prove most effectual in gathering in wanderers to the fold—

they are not the pitchers which fetch up from the well of life its reviving draughts.

That rather which wins and arrests and conquers, is the knowledge which the Bible has of myself, in telling me "all things that ever I did"—the adaptation of the Great Physician to the wounds and heart-sores of aching humanity—the adaptation of the living water to the thirsty soul. This is the history of every drawer of that water—"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The Great Teacher, 'the teller of all things,' the true "Word of God," is a "discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart." The gracious words to ancient Israel collectively, seem to have a special beauty and significance in their application to this individual case of the Samaritan woman—a comment on the later saying, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound."—"She decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and will speak comfortably unto her." (lit. speak to her heart.)

A gospel faith is the response of the human spirit within, to the Revelation without. The unlettered Christian can confront bold skepticism, and fight it with this "proved sword," this unanswerable argument, "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did!" "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

Let us close with one practical remark, the power of feeble influences. If it has been a matter of interest to us to watch the dealing of Christ with an individual sinner at the well of Jacob, more interesting still is the sequel we have been now considering—the crowd, appearing among the trees, of anxious seeking souls, coming to test for themselves the truth of the wondrous tidings, and to prefer the prayer—"Lord, give us this water that we thirst not!" But it is of further interest and significance to note, that this flocking of the people of Shechem to listen to the Divine Stranger was the result of the pleadings and urgency of one feeble woman. She herself had become, to use the beautiful figure of the Psalmist, as a dove whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. In the



freshness of her heavenly plumage, this dove of Samaria flies immediately with the olive branch in her mouth to her own Shechem valley, not to seek with folded pinion some quiet perch on Gerizim, but rather to hasten her flight back again to the true Noah, the Giver of "Rest," bringing along with her a flock with weary wing and wailing cry. "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

Never let us undervalue feeble instrumentality! It was the blast of rams' horns, accompanied with the shout of the army of Israel, which brought to the ground the walls of Jericho. It was the crash of three hundred pitchers and the gleam of torches by the well of Jezreel, accompanied by the battle-cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," which routed the mighty host of the Midianites. It was a few pebbles from the running brook, and a sling in the hands of a shepherd boy, which laid low the giant of Philistia.

Let none make the feebleness of their efforts in the Church of Christ the reason for neglecting or abandoning them. Let none make the smallness of their talent a reason for burying it in the earth; but rather put it out to interest, that when their Lord comes He may receive His own with interest. It is by small and often insignificant means He still effects the mightiest of His purposes in His Church on earth. He would make this still the motive to all exertion—the secret of all success—the watchword to every Faint-hearted and Ready-to-halt in the day of battle—"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

## **THE HEAVENLY FOOD AND THE FIELD OF HARVEST**

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then His disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought Him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." John 4:31-38

The departure of the woman of Samaria to communicate her tidings of wonder and joy to her fellow-citizens in Shechem introduces us to a second scene in the shifting drama of the narrative. Up to this point the whole interest is concentrated in the conversation between her and the Savior. Now it is between Jesus and His returned disciples. They are once more alone. The verses which head this chapter are so full of material for thought, that little more can be done than to give a running commentary upon them, leaving the reader to fill in with details the outline of the suggestive picture.

The adorable Redeemer, as we have previously seen, was seated on the brink of the Well, absorbed in mysterious contemplation. No one ventured to intrude on His sacred musings. "Just then his disciples arrived. They were astonished to find Him talking to a woman, but none of them asked Him why He was doing it or what they had been discussing." The disciples now resolve to break silence. They observe His wan and weary countenance. They know that He cannot fail to be hungry, with His fast unbroken since the early morning meal, and with the long and toilsome travel through the hot plain. With earnest imploring accents they asked Him to partake of their provided refreshment, "In the

meanwhile His disciples urging Jesus to eat." Their request was apparently disregarded. With His eye and soul still riveted in these mystic communings, He replies in the enigmatical words, "I have food to eat that you know not of."

The disciples looked at each other in perplexity. Though they may have heard the last words of the conversation with the woman, they were in entire ignorance as yet of its results; they said one to another, "Has any man brought Him anything to eat?" 'Has His hunger been satisfied in our absence?—has some passing wayfarer shared his food with Him?—or has this Samaritan drawer of water so far overcome her sectarian scruples as to minister to His needs? Or has He departed in the present case from His usual measures, and called in the exercise of supernatural means? Has He summoned, as His great prophet of Cherith, the ravens from Ebal or the silver plumaged doves of Gerizim to be His suppliers?—or have angels, as in the Mount of Temptation, been sent to Him to strengthen Him?'

Poor earthly dreamers! they had utterly failed to grasp the meaning and grandeur of His saying; the material thoughts which for the moment were occupying them, prevented them fathoming these profound musings. They had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep. His reference was to food of a far different kind—"Man does not live by bread alone." Who can wonder, as Augustine well observes, at the 'inability of the ignorant, uninstructed Samaritan woman, in the previous interaction, to comprehend the spiritual symbol of the living water, when the Savior's own disciples manifest a similar inability to comprehend the meaning of the living bread! But He bears with their lack of spiritual discernment; He upbraids them not; but rather, we may imagine, His face suffused with joy, He continues in a tone of sublime mystery, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work."

It was another noble utterance. The whole grandeur of the scheme of Redemption seemed, as in a vision or trance of glory, to pass at that moment before His eyes—the work that was to be finished on the cross by giving Himself a ransom for the world—bringing up the living water by the golden cord of His everlasting love, in order that perishing millions might be saved forever. It was the partaking of these streams of salvation

by one of these millions, (the unlikeliest unit among them all,) which had given birth to these divine meditations. We have already noted the suggestive silence which closed the preceding interview: such silence, we found, as is often the result, or attendant of strong emotional feeling. The same mental agitation has been known, not infrequently, to put a temporary arrest on the demands of bodily hunger.

There are great crisis-hours—times whether of yearning affection or of patriot valor—when the whole nature being in a paroxysm of suspense, the pangs of physical hunger are overborne and suppressed. The brave leader in the beleaguered fort or garrison, where the lives of hundreds are staked on a few hours or days of heroic resistance, is sustained by doing his duty—the cravings of the lower nature are subordinated, for the time being, to the demands of the higher. Or the mother, when her child is being rescued from the surging waves, can stand hunger-stricken for hours together on the bleak shore; the food which sympathizing hands have brought lies untouched at her side, as she watches with eager gaze the return of suspended animation—the revivifying of her withered flower—the call of hunger is forgotten until she is relieved from her agonizing vigil by the glad word, "Your child lives."

He who was "bone of our bone," partaker of our nature in all its finer and grander emotions, surrenders Himself here to the same absorbing power. He rises, in these magnificent musings of obedience and love, above the sensation of bodily hunger. The meal procured in the Samaritan town is laid at His side, but He heeds it not; another banquet of better spiritual food rivets His thoughts; another Gerizim—another Mount of imperishable blessing rises before Him—"And on this mountain the Lord Almighty will spread a wonderful feast for everyone around the world. It will be a delicious feast of good food, with clear, well-aged wine and choice beef. In that day he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears."

And here we have to note a new turn in the conversation. A new object seems at this moment to arrest observation and to offer fresh food and theme for holy joy. As He gazes along the wide green plain in the direction of Shechem, a crowd appears in the distance. He does not

require to be informed of whom that crowd is composed; for His omniscient eye has followed the woman in her mission to her fellow-townsmen, and He now recognizes her returning at their head, towards the spot which had so hallowed a place in her own dearest memories. He resumes His divine discourse, and secures afresh the attention of His wondering disciples by quoting a Galilean proverb to these men of Galilee.

It is worthy of note, how largely the Divine Redeemer, in His sayings and discourses, loved to use the book of nature as the interpreter of the volume of grace. We know how His parables teem with pages from that volume. He loved to make the outer natural world a consecrated medium for the illumination and illustration of spiritual verities. He had done so already in the previous part of this conversation at the well. He had taken the water to symbolize what alone could quench the thirst of the deathless spirit. He had taken the bread, which the disciples had laid on its stone margin, and made it speak of higher realities—the sustaining power derived from the consciousness of doing God's will and finishing His work. And now, as once more He looks around Him on the magnificent plain flushed with the green of early spring—an unbroken expanse of verdure—He takes this beautiful page in the same illuminated book of nature, as the exponent of the great thoughts that were burdening His soul—"Do you not say [in other words, are not you accustomed to this proverbial saying], 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

He passed from the green sprouting corn all around, to the glorious fullness of a spiritual ingathering, whose first ripe sheaf in the person of the Samaritan woman had that day been reaped. As if He had said, 'In this present case of better spiritual reaping, it is not as in the natural world where development is gradual, where the grain is ripened and matured by slow invisible processes—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Here is a more glorious harvest ready—a harvest of souls—a people born in a day—in the fields of unpromising Samaria the reaper-angels may already put in their sickles, for the harvest is ripe. The glory of Lebanon has been given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; it has seen the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God.'

But it would be a restricted and imperfect view of these divine reflections—these ecstatic thoughts and emotions, did we regard them as evoked merely by the appearance of that handful of approaching Shechemites. He regards such only as the representatives of a vaster throng, the first-fruits of a redeemed multitude which no man can number, who are to be gathered at the great harvest of the world. He sees now a handful of corn on the top of these mountains of Ephraim, but the fruit thereof is one day to shake like Lebanon, and they of the city to flourish like grass of the earth. They are the Eshcol-pledges of a far more glorious vintage. Perhaps, in the language here employed, He may be instituting a comparison between the woman with her fellow-Samaritans, and the green fields around yet untouched with the latter rains, and on which the glow of harvest was yet far off, though it would in due time surely come. That company of human souls formed the early seed sown; but in them, as through a telescopic glass, He beheld in prophetic vista the bounteous fields of the wide world waving in their summer and autumn glory.

This was the true interpretation of His enigmatical words—this was the food which those at His side knew not of. Under the shadow of the great mountain of blessing before one of the holy places of nature's gigantic temple, He, the great High Priest, waves the sheaf of first-fruits. It is the pledge and harbinger of a glorious reaping-time at the final harvest, when He, the Man of sorrows, now going forth weeping bearing precious seed, would doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing His sheaves with Him.

The spectacle before His eyes inspires Him with a new longing and incentive to finish His work. He sees of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. A later saying seems already to stir the depths of His divine emotional nature: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" But (to complete this rapid paraphrase of the verses yet remaining) though His own soul is thus full of joy—though He is Himself the mighty Sower—the Author and Finisher of the faith, in that hour of glowing anticipation He embraced also His own disciples, and through them all His faithful harvest-men and reapers, who, to the end of time, were to be subordinately associated with Him in bringing many sons unto glory. Great also, He declares, will be

their joy and reward, "And he that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal."

Oh, noble thought and recompense for all Christ's true servants, struggling, toiling, baffled, and discouraged! The Master says, "He gathers fruit unto life eternal." The toiler of earth has only an earthly recompense. That recompense, moreover, is uncertain, capricious, precarious. The drought may leave the harvest sickles hanging rusting on the walls, or a sudden wave of calamity may come and sweep the harvest of a lifetime away. But the spiritual laborer sows and reaps for eternity! Reaping, too, beyond the reach of casualty or disaster. No shortcoming in the garner of immortality; no blight to mock his hopes; no failure to defraud him of his harvest joy. And, better than all, it is added, "Both he that sows, and he that reaps, shall rejoice together"—the Master and the servant, the Lord and disciple.

In the great reaping day of Judgment, when every faithful harvestman will be called to receive his reward, and when fidelity, not success, will form the ground of approval, this will be the noblest—the peerless element in the recompense, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." "They rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

The writer of these pages vividly recalls the last glimpse he took of the Well of Jacob, with Mount Gerizim rising behind in its sky of cloudless azure. The lines of a simple but well-known hymn, prized more on account of child memories, than for their own, intrinsic excellence, occurred at the time. Their otherwise enigmatical emblems seemed, amid these surroundings at least, to be invested with new meaning and significance. They may appropriately end these chapters, as we, too, take our last mental glimpse of the same hallowed spot, suggesting in symbol a better Fountain, and the Gerizim of truer spiritual blessings.

They are lines which might befittingly have been put into the lips of the woman of Samaria herself—the once lost, but now reclaimed 'wanderer from the fold'—as we may picture her at times stealing out alone to the place of her spiritual birth, standing by the well with all its consecrated remembrances, and with the knowledge that Gerizim and Zion were

henceforth to be displaced and superseded by a nobler Mountain—that of  
'God's unchanging love!'

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.

Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
Sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer;  
Here by Thy great help I've come;  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,  
Safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed His precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

O that day when freed from sinning,  
I shall see Thy lovely face;  
Clothed then in blood washed linen  
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace.



Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,  
Take my ransomed soul away;  
Send thine angels now to carry  
Me to realms of endless day.

**An Old Testament Chapter in Providence and  
Grace  
EVENTIDE AT BETHEL or The Night-dream  
of the Desert**

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## Preface

Dedicated to all on the journey of life--especially to those just starting on their pilgrimage.

This is intended as a companion volume to "Noontide at Sychar." "The story of Jacob's Ladder' and 'The story of Jacob's Well,' may appropriately be conjoined in sacred interest. The one, forming as remarkable an Old Testament, as the other does a striking New Testament, 'Chapter on Providence and Grace.'

"Why select an incident in the life of a base circumventing Jew?" was the observation of a friend, on mentioning that I was engaged in writing what follows.

The speaker, I felt assured, was too just and discriminating seriously to maintain so disparaging an estimate of the illustrious Patriarch. But while accepting his remark with the qualifications I well knew were implied, I answered, it was just because of the faults and failings of a very composite nature, that whether in the separate scenes of his history or as a great whole, I thought the character of Jacob formed a valuable and interesting study.

In the case of such "Great Hearts of the olden time" as Abraham and Moses, we have lofty ideals of "patriarchal saintliness,"--lives which contain passages of rare and exceptional excellence. If I may be allowed the simile, they resemble Alpine peaks with their virgin snow, towering far above their compeers, inaccessible and discouraging from their very loftiness. In JACOB, on the other hand, we have an average type of frail, fallen humanity or, to follow out the figure, we have one of the lowlier eminences of a commonplace world--one, also, with its scars and blemishes only too faithfully revealed to the eye of the spectator. We trace in his half-dramatic, half-tragic history, God's dealings with one of Nature's least lovable products; a man who originally had comparatively few elements of worth to recommend or redeem him; who, had he been left to himself, uncontrolled by any higher impulses, might have become a confirmed liar, if not a wrecked and abandoned castaway.

Did we seek indeed from Old Testament history, in the era in which he lived, a more winning portraiture, we do not require to travel beyond the tent-home of Isaac. In the person of Esau, even if we take him as he is often regarded, the representative man of the world, we have more engaging native excellencies. Our sympathies are all with the bold, brave hunter--his noble demeanor and manly ways and filial devotion, rather than with the deceitful equivocating brother, who has tricked him out of his patrimonial rights, and drawn down thereby a very righteous vengeance.

Add to this, there is nothing either brilliant or heroic about Jacob. Absent are those mental gifts and those courageous exploits which throw a halo of interest over the lives of some even subordinate characters in Bible story. Though we may admire a tenacity of purpose and unflinching determination, which go far to redeem baser and less amiable qualities--a certain worldly adroitness, energy of will, fertility of resource, and perhaps, more than all, patient endurance--yet he is neither philosopher, nor minstrel, nor warrior. His name is the key-note to his inner nature, "the crafty"--having a shrewd eye to business, and to self. His prosaic calling and ways are brought out in the sacred narrative, when he is briefly described as "a plain man dwelling in tents" (Gen. 25:27).

Yet there are lessons, more ample and more varied far--lessons alike encouraging and humbling, to be gathered from the less attractive and more commonplace personage, which the chivalrous yet reckless companion of his youth fails to furnish. Not to speak of the higher spiritual beauties to be found in the story of the heir of the Covenant, is there no special heart-cheer, for what, after all, must ever form the great majority--baffled, tempted, struggling humanity?

Is there no "courage to take heart again," when we see this "forlorn and shipwrecked brother," sentineled by angels, followed, tended, loved, restored, by a better than earthly Father, until his name "the Supplanter" was changed into "the Hero of God," and he passed away at last triumphantly to the better Canaan? Is there no word of comfort and strength to those conscious of strong, inborn, demon-passions, which may have even developed themselves into baser deeds, in the Divine whisper--"Jacob have I loved"? (Rom. 9:13)--the Being who had fed him

all his life long, purging out of his soul the alloy; making him a monument of His grace; that grace triumphing over whatever was unlovely and unloving, until, after a series of strange vicissitudes, it brought him at the last to rejoice in the God of his salvation (Gen. 49:18)?

We restrict ourselves in what follows, to one solitary scene in the varied drama of the Patriarch's life; so far as we are aware (and we marvel at it), the only monograph on this sublime episode, which for sacred interest and Gospel lessons has no parallel in Old Testament Story.

The writer cannot fail to remember the words of a long deceased and aged relative, from whose exalted piety and consistent walk, more than one have derived their earliest impulses for good--that 'of all passages in the Bible he most loved that night-dream at Bethel.' I can now vividly recall, how, with gleaming eye, he contrasted the monarchs of earth sleeping on their couches of down in royal chambers, with the far truer nobility and glory, which, all unconscious to them, gathered round that lonely wanderer and his pillow of stones. The great German scholar (Ewald) speaks of it as "that passage of rare grandeur placed at the beginning of Jacob's history."

Be it ours, with profound reverence, to approach this Holy Ground whose very name has become hallowed. "The God of Bethel" is a title no less loved on Christian than on Jewish lips. The incidents of the Sleeper, the Angel-ladder, and the Heavenly Voice, have, with endless diversity, been cast and re-cast in sacred poetry and song. In Scottish Churches, as we can testify, the well-known lines of Doddridge inserted at the close of this preface, have led and stimulated, with their simple strains, the devotions of worshipers--more than perhaps any other scriptural 'Paraphrase.' How often have they stirred the pulse of congregations on the Sabbath eve of a Communion, or in the waning light of the closing Sunday of the year! Nor can the writer forget the last memorable occasion on which they were heard by him. It was when they rang their plaintive cadences through the aisles of Westminster Abbey over the grave of David Livingstone. Words, familiar to the illustrious traveler from earliest boyhood, and which had doubtless often cheered him amid the scorching suns and sands of Africa, were appropriately selected for the concluding solemn rite--when the 'desert dust' of the "weary Pilgrim," "all his wanderings ceased," was laid

in the great church of Britain's consecrated dead--

"O God of Bethel! by whose hand  
Your people still are fed;  
Who through this weary pilgrimage  
Have all our fathers led.

"Our vows, our prayers, we now present  
Before Your throne of grace;  
God of our fathers! be the God  
Of their succeeding race.

"Through each perplexing path of life  
Our wandering footsteps guide;  
Give us each day our daily bread,  
And clothing fit provide.

"O spread Your covering wings around,  
Until all our wanderings cease,  
And at our Father's loved abode  
Our souls arrive in peace.

"Such blessings from Your gracious hand  
Our humble prayers implore;  
And You shall be our chosen God,  
And portion evermore."

Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone for a pillow and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from earth to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down on it.

At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will cover the land from east to west and from north to south.

All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. I will someday bring you safely back to this land. I will be with you constantly until I have finished giving you everything I have promised."

Then Jacob woke up and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it." He was afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God—the gateway to heaven!" The next morning he got up very early. He took the stone he had used as a pillow and set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it. He named the place Bethel—"house of God"—though the name of the nearby village was Luz.

Then Jacob made this vow--"If God will be with me and protect me on this journey and give me food and clothing, and if he will bring me back safely to my father, then I will make the Lord my God. This memorial pillar will become a place for worshiping God, and I will give God a tenth of everything he gives me." Genesis 28:10-22

## **OUTSET FROM HOME**

"Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran." Genesis 28:10

The world in many of its outward phases has undergone important alterations since the era of the Pilgrim Fathers of Canaan. Its infancy has been merged in the maturity of age. And yet the heart that beat under a Beersheba tent, or under the nightly sky of Palestine, is identical in all the "unchanged humanities" which pulse and throb to this hour under a British tree in the nineteenth century. With little variations there are the same struggles of inexperienced youth, the same stern conflicts of ripened manhood. Looking, too, to the Divine side, we have to note a similar continuity of spiritual influence. The moral forces which arrested and controlled the patriarch in his flight to Haran have their repetition now. That dream was the rehearsal of Divine revelations to the individual

soul ever since. Many a heart, during the intervening three thousand six hundred years, has become a Bethel, many a dwelling, the pathway of angels.

Outset from Home! How much is implied in the brief words which head this chapter! Few there are, regarding either themselves or others, in whom they do not awaken mingled recollections; all the more so, if, corresponding with the case of Jacob, it be the first blank in the tent--the first break in the magic household-circle--the first vacant chair by the fireside. At the inexorable calls of life, the cherished nest sooner or later must be broken up. Not a day passes but there are thousands of such departures--the scene in the desert and pasture-lands of southern Judah repeated amid the green lanes and smiling fields of modern England--the remnants of the long-unbroken group gathered at the door, whether of lordly castle or of thatched cottage, uttering the last farewell, and then re-entering that which will never be the same to its inhabitants again. Many an Isaac and Rebekah have thus watched their favorite boy until lost from view in the winding road or receding glades; or standing with mute tears upon the harbor, have followed the wake of the disappearing vessel until they caught the last wave of the "vanishing hand."

Each may conjure up their own remembrance of that hour; whether in the remoter past or recent present. The first entrance at school or university, waking up under the strange roof, listening to the strange voices, and noting the unfamiliar ways. The more frequent case still in humbler life, the commencement of the novel toils and duties of ordinary domestic service. How many have lain down thus in their new dream-land, to whom may have come, in visions of the night, the glow of familiar faces in the "fitful firelight" with its "shadows on the parlor wall;" or the picture of loved ones seated on the mossy turf, where childhood was used to weave its necklace of primrose and daffodil, the ringing laugh still echoing over the meadows; or while listening to the music of the tuneful brook, singing its way through rocky dell amid birch and heather. How many such have opened their eyes in early morn, with the consciousness that to them at least these cherished scenes and sounds are amid the visions and echoes of the past--"as a dream when one awakens."

"Far away a place is vacant



By a humble hearth for me,  
Dying embers dimly show it,  
Where I would sincerely be!

Faded Autumn leaves are trembling  
On the withered jasmine tree,  
Creeping round the little casement,  
Where I would sincerely be!

There some simple hearts are waiting,  
Longing, wearying for me;  
Far away where tears are falling,  
Where I would sincerely be!"

Yes, few among us can fail to recall the day, with its bygone vistas of holy sunshine (a tear may be condoned for its memories) when we went out from our Beersheba towards some unknown Haran!

"Happy, thrice happy," says one of the most illustrious secular writers of the past age in concluding one of his works, "as an after remembrance, be the final parting between hopeful son and fearful parent, at the foot of that mystic bridge, which starts from the threshold of home--lost in the dimness of the far-opposing shore--bridge, over which goes the boy who shall never return but as the man."

The first home-leaving, in the case of the patriarch, was in many ways singular and exceptional. Its sadness must have been augmented by the fact that he was no youth when he thus took his pilgrim staff to begin the pilgrim life. For many long unbroken years of fellowship he had lived, either within, or at all events near, the paternal tent. His one only brother from boyhood had been devoted to a roving life. Impatient of the restraints of home, the latter despised the dull, unexciting monotony of sheepfolds and pasture lands. From dewy dawn until the sun crimsoned with its last rays the desert sand, Esau, the cunning hunter, the Nimrod of his day, loved to roam the woods and scale the rocks with his bow and quiver, rejoicing his father's heart by bringing home trophies of the chase from forest, and breezy upland; or, when marauding tribe made a foray on the peaceful tents and herds of the Hebrew settlers, we may conjecture

he would be off for days with his picked band of fighters to make reprisals. For this very reason, had his been the departure from the family home, it would not have created the blank caused by the absence of the more domestic brother, whose simple tastes seem to have made him, at all events, his mother's undisguised favorite. Rebekah had kindred sympathies with Jacob which she seemed never to share with Esau. In the case of the elder-born there was nothing in common to unite save the strong bond of nature--while, in addition to other causes of repulsion and estrangement, the mother's jealousy was pronounced and irrepressible towards the Hittite wives of her nomadic son. The ascendancy of these idolatrous women over his pliable disposition, seemed to have formed her chief domestic trial (Gen. 26:35; 27:46).

There were well-known impelling reasons in Jacob's sudden outset from home which rendered it especially painful. It does not fall within the scope of these pages to rehearse the thrice familiar story of the too successful impersonation; the duped and deceived father; the wronged, and defrauded heir; the anguish of the unscrupulous mother when she woke up to the full consciousness of the peril for which her duplicity was responsible.

All companionless and alone, this too apt pupil in the school of treachery and intrigue goes forth on his journey.

Not many years before, that same route had been traversed by a trusted servant. Slave as he was, old Eleazar of Damascus was not allowed to undertake, in behalf of his young master, the long pilgrimage to Haran unaccompanied. He had ten richly adorned and well-laden camels with their drivers. While now "the heir of promise," with vast material and spiritual wealth, if not in possession at least in promise, is allowed to leave with nothing but the small bag slung on his shoulders, and the pilgrim staff in his hand.

The reason of the contrast is obvious. Jacob is fleeing for dear life. The wrath of a deeply-injured brother has compelled him to dispense with all preliminary preparations, and to resort to instantaneous flight. With the thought of the fleet, vindictive huntsman tracking his footsteps, he hastens along the rugged plateau of South Palestine (scarce knowing

where), with the dim purpose of reaching, after days and nights of wandering, the home of his maternal relatives on the other side of the Euphrates, a distance of 400 miles. We cannot venture with confidence to describe the precise route he would follow, nor how long time it would occupy before he reached Bethel. The distance between the latter and Beersheba would render the completion of the journey, in less than two days, at least, an impossibility. He would pursue his way through rustic stretches of hill and valley, then all void of historic renown, but which, in coming ages, were to assert for themselves a name and a place unrivaled in sacred interest. Among these, he could hardly miss skirting the gorge from which was to rise the future walls of the great capital, and whose rocky heights were at this time occupied by the strong Canaanite fortress of Jebus. On he would speed through the tortuous windings of the green hills of Judah and Benjamin, sprinkled here and there with clusters of the indigenous olive tree. Probably on the second evening, the sun which had been pouring its rays on the head of the fugitive during the noontide and afternoon hours, was fast sinking behind the mountains of Ephraim; or perhaps as he surmounted at times the higher slopes, he could see beyond the Plains of Sharon--what, after his stationary home-life would be to him a less familiar feature--the great orb dipping its disc in the western wave.

Be this as it may, "the last faint pulse of quivering light" was gone; the stars were gemming the heavens, as we watch the lone figure of the exile, his body weary with fatigue, his soul filled with conflicting "home memories," seeking a halting place for the night in the dreary surrounding uplands.

## **HOME MEMORIES AND THEIR LESSONS**

"Up to me bright boyhood looks,  
Heart and mind and soul awake;  
Guide my steps, O gracious Father

For my loved one's sake.

Let Your holy counsel lead me;  
Let Your light before me shine;  
That he may not stumble over  
Word or deed of mine!"--Whittier

"Amazingly great is the power which mothers exert over the spiritual life of their offspring. It goes to one's heart to see a young tree, which while still slender and soft might have been trained to grow straight and bear fruit and show a beautiful head, ABANDONED."--Tholuck.

"And Rebekah spoke unto Jacob . Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command you." Genesis 27:6-8.

"Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran." Genesis 28:10

In subsequent chapters, the unfolding of the Patriarch's dream will be suggestive of topics of highest interest, alike regarding God's providential and spiritual dealings--the soul and eternity. We may well, however, before proceeding, pause on the threshold, and gather a few lessons of a more purely domestic complexion, but not on that account less momentous or important, with which the story is replete. Moreover, though it be mainly filial calls and encouragements--filial duties and responsibilities--to which indirect reference will be made in this volume, we cannot well omit all allusion to those parental influences which so vividly challenge our attention in the opening of the narrative. To the latter we shall give the priority in this chapter, reserving the former for that which follows.

Jacob was trained for long years under the eye of his God-fearing father, who, if we may transfer modern phraseology to an age innocent of theological erudition and book-lore, had himself been a devout student alike in natural and revealed religion. He who delighted to "meditate in the field at eventide" (Gen. 24:63) would not likely allow his child to grow up to youth or manhood with that 'outer oracle' of God unread and unreverenced. No minstrel had yet arisen to sing of "the green pastures, or the still waters" where the Divine Shepherd led His flock; of "the

valleys covered with corn, the little hills rejoicing on every side." But the meadows around, fringing the desert, and the oasis where we may imagine the tents were pitched, would then, as now, form a floral lesson-book for the young and enquiring mind; while the bright heavens above, whether vaulted in their canopy of blue, or arched with the rainbow, or gleaming with oriental stars, would serve as a mighty diagram to illustrate the power, and love, and glory of the Almighty Framer.

Isaac, also, could unfold to his son more sacred revelations of Jehovah than those seen in the hieroglyphics of external nature, the penciling of desert flower, or the lighting of the burning fires in the temple of night. By that desert tent there was an altar on which, morning and evening, sacrifices were slain, and from which the incense cloud ascended. More than this, it is evident from an expression Jacob afterwards employs, that the Divine Being was so constantly realized by him, (although as yet by no outward palpable manifestations), that the "no creed," so common in apostate Christendom, never threw its malignant shadow across his early mental vision. There were other wilds on which he might roam, but not the bleak wilds of sceptic doubt. He speaks of God with the familiarity of a recognized, ever-present friend--"The Lord before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God that fed me all my life long" (Gen. 48:15, 16).

These simple but sublime verities, these religious principles in which he had been nurtured from his earliest years, were further illustrated and authenticated by his parents' holy and consistent life. For although Isaac is the least prominent and conspicuous of the founders of the nation, reticent, retiring, unambitious, he never seems to have lost the impress and reward of his early faith, on that memorable occasion when he so meekly bowed his young head in unexampled self-sacrifice at the bidding of his father and his father's God. That patient, uncomplaining act of filial obedience appears to have given a tone of peacefulness to his subsequent character.

The well of Lahairoi, the well of Hagar and her outcast boy, where the Patriarch occasionally pitched his tent, was well calculated, from its name and associations, to give Jacob his earliest impressions of the "all-seeing God." Nor must we forget the most venerable form in that primitive

domestic circle. During the most impressible period of his existence (from childhood to fifteen years of age), he enjoyed the ever-brightening faith of his grandfather Abraham. We can think of the aged Patriarch Abraham, seated by the tent-door, listening with the subdued rapture of old-age to the ringing laugh of childhood and youth, watching with tender interest the dawn of two young lives with diverse tastes and dispositions rapidly developing. Or we can picture those sacred sabbaths when the family group were assembled, and father and grandfather, uniting the traditions of the past with the fuller Divine disclosures of the present, unfolded in the ears of wives and household-slaves, children and children's children, the earliest stories of providence and grace. "I know him," said Jehovah, speaking of the revered "father of the faithful," "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). When Jacob, indeed, at the time of which we are about to speak, sped on his journey towards Haran, Abraham, the saintly head of the race, had long been gathered to his fathers. But the memories of his life must have been fragrant as ever. The fugitive, therefore, in his flight, could not fail to bear along with him in vivid recollection, despite of counter-acting impressions to which we shall immediately refer, the beneficial influences of a godly home--influences which we may pronounce to have been unique in their kind, and which were never shared before or since by any who have left the paternal roof to pursue the world's great pilgrimage.

But there was another side, another and a sadder phase to this parental example.

Mournful exception, also, was it to the general experience--the deteriorating and counteracting influences coming from the quarter which is generally the sacred one. The maternal training which, in a hundred instances to one, is so hallowed and blest, was in the case of Jacob baneful and blighting. Rebekah (herself inheriting the deceitfulness and treachery of her father's household and race) trained her boy from his earliest years in deceitful deeds. His susceptible nature was only too open to such impressions and teachings. Strange, indeed, seems her resort to the wicked dealings which formed the impelling cause of Jacob's present flight. Strange that she should have deemed it necessary to stoop

to a domestic scandal--dishonorable plottings and contrivances which she must have known to be unnecessary. She had been made personally cognizant that a future of greatness, riches, and renown, as one of the spiritual chiefs of a new divine dispensation, had been infallibly secured to her favorite son by what was equivalent to a legal bequest. She may possibly have thought that it would extenuate the guilt of thus clandestinely obtaining the blessing for Jacob, that she was thereby only taking an indirect means of accelerating and fulfilling the divine decrees--accomplishing the divine will and purpose. As if He whom she professed to own and worship could not, in manifold ways unknown to her, fulfill His own pleasure beyond any risk of miscarriage and without human help or expedient.

How different her conduct, with its rationalization and chicanery, from that of more than one of the saintly heroines of the future, whose attitude was simply to "stand still and see the salvation of God." REBEKAH is placed before us in the sacred page an exceptional beacon of warning among the mothers of Israel. What, after all, did she make of her promptness of invention and heartless, though successful, shrewdness? She had indeed obtained the coveted blessing for her son; but she had to pay for the triumph of her scheming and maneuvering, among other penalties, the life-long forfeiture of his presence and companionship. The glimpse she obtained of him that morning when he went forth a trembling, conscience-smitten impostor and outcast from her sight, was, unknown to her at the time, her final one. Their eyes never again met. She was left with a companion for the rest of her years--the son she had basely duped and whose affections she had rightly forfeited. In her solitary moments in the Beersheba tent, how terrible the reflection that the arrow which pierced her was one feathered from her own bosom! The unwritten words of a future inspired penman might in many ways ring their retributive monitions in her ears--"These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself; but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes" (Ps. 50:21). Her own bold, reckless challenge was only too painfully and faithfully ratified--"Upon me be your curse, my son!"

Thanks be to God, the annals of Christendom are replete with nobler

testimonies to a mother's sovereign power over the young heart. "The Church owes much to the glorious company of Christian mothers. They have saved and adorned it in every age. They obtain no public recognition; but they have their reward, and they are enshrined in the hearts of their sons." (British Quarterly Review.)

The mother truly is the Angel of the house. The might of her beneficent sway is more than that of all other moral forces. She speaks and is listened to as the oracle of God. Silent, undemonstrative, it may be, but her influence is like the aroma of the precious nard spoken of in the Gospels, diffusing its fragrance, until the whole heart--the whole house is filled with the odor of the ointment. A father's domain is the mind--the intellect. A mother's is the will and the affections--the heart and the life. "Let France," said another, who knew the silent workings of human nature as well as the tactics and strategy of battlefields, "Let France" said Napoleon, "have good mothers, and she will have good sons."

Yes, and like that fragrant perfume of which we have spoken, these hallowed influences often survive after the casket is broken. Indeed, when the grave has closed upon her, the mother at times wields a sovereign power which she may have failed to command in life. In her case, more than in any other, there is 'a speech of the dead'--the memory of gentle looks, and kindly utterances, and holy prayers, like the rustle of angels' wings, inciting to all goodness and deterring from all baseness.

Sad, on the other hand, when alike present and posthumous influence may be on the side of evil. When in life, by equivocating word and sinister deed, she may take the keen edge off the moral perceptions, weaken the strength of principle, dull the fires of truth and integrity within the shrine of the youthful soul. Sadder still, when life is ended, the shaft of evil still speeds on its fatal mission of ungodliness, when the hand that drew the bow is mouldering in the dust!

## **HOME MEMORIES AND THEIR LESSONS. (continued)**



"Oh take the green ears of an early life,  
And lay them on God's altar."--Anon.

"It is one of the peculiar beauties of Scriptural narrative, that no veil is ever drawn across the frailties or the sins of those whom it describes--there is no flattery and there is no omission. In the case of Jacob, we have the whole man placed faithfully before us--his piety and virtues distinctly portrayed, that they may be imitated; his infirmities and errors as candidly avowed, that they may be shunned.--Blunt.

"Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future lies before those who love peace." Psalm 37:37

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba."--Gen. 28:10.

If, in following the footsteps of the fugitive from the Beersheba home to the Bethel dreamland, the first lesson suggested has reference to parental duty and obligation, the next is surely that of filial responsibility--the bliss and happiness of early piety, the shame and degradation of early sin.

Had it not been for Jacob's scheming of a wicked deceitful plot, he might have left his father's tent on his northern pilgrimage with light heart and elastic step. Sin compels him to steal away a coward and outcast. With all Canaan for his inheritance he is not to be envied. He speaks of it in long subsequent years as "the day of his distress" (Gen. 35:3). The iron had entered into his soul. He was filled with fear; the inward shame of guilt and self-accusation; the consciousness that he had brought this swift exile on himself by a web of falsehoods; all the time knowing the right and doing the wrong. How the flagrant dishonor, involved in the attempt to cheat and out-manoeuvre his blind, unsuspecting father--the unblushing lie, told with unscrupulous effrontery, "I am Esau your firstborn;"--the loud and pathetic wail of injury, and the glance of stifled resentment which rose from the lip and flashed from the eye of the defrauded brother--how would one and all of these memories rise up before him, as with trembling step he now pursued his way! Like Cain he had gone forth with a curse-mark upon him. All the more terrible must have sounded in his ear that despairing cry of the outwitted elder-born, when the latter asserted (27:41) that it was only the pang which fratricide would inflict on

a father's heart, which prevented him obeying the impulse of instantaneous revenge. Would even that purpose of repression be kept? Might it not before the morrow be cancelled? The thought the dread at least--of so righteous a penalty of his baseness would haunt the fugitive!

Young reader--still it may be within the curtains of the modern tent, or perchance on the eve of setting out from it--let Jacob instruct you by the reverse in his own miserable experience, the blessedness of the spirit of him "in whom there is no deceit" (Ps. 32:2). The night-winds of Bethel sighing around him, the shock of a life of isolation and solitude succeeding that of home endearment, would have been nothing had his been the inner sunshine of a pure heart and stainless soul. But a defiled conscience, far more than an injured brother, was the nemesis that was tracking his steps. He might moreover have had good reason to dread that, with the forfeiture of human friendships, he had surrendered all claim to a better guardianship. If, in anticipation of coming night-dreams, he had thought of visitants from the spirit-land, it might only have been of avenging angels--those flaming cherubim with burning swords, of which in boyhood he had heard as having guarded the entrance to a forfeited Paradise.

He doubtless afterwards came to be, what might be called, 'a prosperous man.' He lived to see one of his sons the ruler of a great kingdom; but at the same time, in righteous resurrection, these very acts of early deceit and wrongdoing seemed ever and anon to be disentombed, and to reappear in the guilt and punishment of others of his family. It is certainly noteworthy, that his heaviest cares and sorrows arose from the repetition of his own early crimes, especially in the two points which stand out in most painful prominence in his history--unscrupulous deceit, and the violation of the sacredness of human relationships. The bold subtlety and cunning artifice of the Beersheba tent, had its counterpart and revenge in the web of falsehood and outmaneuvering woven by the grasping, hard-hearted LABAN; in the life of drudgery to which the predestined heir of Canaan was subjected, toiling as a bondsman under exasperating demands more cruel than the tyrant's lash. He tells us that his weary frame was well-near prostrated with the burning sun by day, and the chilly frost by night--sleep was banished

from his pillow.

His breach of filial honor and devotion, on the other hand, had its righteous recompense in the long story of family sorrow--the living trial of a dishonored only daughter; the early grave of a beloved wife; the cruel dissimulation by which jealous brothers led him to believe that his dearest son had been devoured by wild beasts. The hairy mantle with which he himself duped his own half-blind father, having its mimicked retribution in the coat of many colors--the sight of which threatened to bring down his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

"God," says Bishop Hall in his "Contemplations" on this passage, "comes oftentimes home to us in our own kind--and even by the sin of others pays us our own when we look not for it." Even when the end of all was near; when life's vesper chimes rang in the Patriarch's ear, there seemed to mingle solemn remembrances, like the tolling of a funeral bell, from that distant past. In the proudest hour of his waning existence he sighs out the confession, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been" (Gen. 47:9). Though he clung to the Rock of Ages, he heard the boom of far-off billows, or rather the waves of saddened memory chafed at his feet. He had salvation on his dying lips; but he could not, he dared not say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight!"

Those are indeed to be envied, who, at life's evening hour, are unconscious of having done anything to cause the blush of shame, or to sadden the visions of the past--who can make the grand protest of Samuel--"Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right." (1 Sam. 12:3). Doubtless one secret of this prophet's evasion of corrupt and corrupting influences, arose from the sunny memories connected with a holy infancy and childhood at Shiloh. Happy is he who can revert to similar hallowed remembrances; who can look back on the long chequered vista of life and think of the household history--the family surroundings--only in connection with lofty principle and earnest faith, loving words and kindly deeds--the FATHER who would recoil from a lie as from a demon's presence; who would scorn all

sinister dealing; all deflections from the path of honor--compassing worldly ends by base and unworthy means--the MOTHER who would rather her children should go penniless than stoop to the heartless stratagem or equivocating deed, that would compromise fidelity to God or man.

When such are the bonds which unite parent with son, brother with sister, there can truly in the best, the noblest sense, be no breaches in the circle. Oceans and continents may divide you; weekdays of familiar greeting or the solemn hush of former Sabbaths may be exchanged for the hum of the city and its fevered crowds. But it is not locality which determines the true home and the true rest of the soul. It is not the grave which can destroy it. The most lasting links of dear household life survive and defy landmark and distance. Many a family are far nearer to one another, some of whom may be in different continents; than those living all unsympathetic and uncongenial under the same roof. Retain the love of the Great Father of all; and the tie of sonhood, and sisterhood, and brotherhood, go where you may, will be inviolate and unbroken. Yes, cleave if you can to such sacred retrospects, cleave to them especially in moments of fierce temptation, whether of assailed creed or assailed passion, and let them serve to beat back the adversary. You may have little or no other patrimony. It matters not. "No riches," says Lord Bacon, "are comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth." By the allegiance of the soul to honor, purity, and integrity, you are served heir to that which is better than thousands of gold and of silver. These are heritages which never die, which no fire can consume, and of which no throws of capricious fortune can defraud you. These are 'treasures' which will come to your help, and may be the means of averting moral bankruptcy, in moments when you are brought to feel the weakness of all that is strong, and the insecurity of all that is human.

Beware of the false, conventional estimate of earthly riches and honors. Virtue is wealth; principle is wealth. Raise your protest against the world's perversion of a divine saying--"A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses" (Luke 12:15). Be assured you can know no ruin and disaster, so fearful as the insolvency of character. No darkening and eclipse of your earthly sky can equal the blackness and

the shame of evil-doing, the tyranny of servile vices, the hell of a heart no longer pure. Age has no such decrepitude as that of guilt.

Aye, and remember too, as in Jacob's case and experience, THE POWER OF MORAL EVIL TO LIVE ON, AND PERPETUATE ITSELF. His early failings and propensities clung to him. The foundations of truth had been early shaken, and there was much in his character of the worldly-wise and calculating, the crafty and fictitious to the very last; as if he never could get altogether disentangled from the coil of the inward foe. The foul wrong cannot be incarcerated within bars--chained to the hour or place of its committal; it cleaves with remorseless tenacity; do what you will to be rid of it. The violated conscience, like the broken mirror, cannot be pieced together again so as never to show its flaws; the chime-bell, when once cracked, can never again give forth the same clear ring of goodness. By a natural and moral law, deterioration--unless arrested by other counteractive forces of which we shall afterwards speak--becomes inevitable. After the horror of the first plunge into sin, every fresh committal becomes easier.

Thank God, however, we can assert the converse too. Just as the base, or unworthy deed leaves the slimy trace of the serpent in its path; so the resolute wrestling, the moral struggle with temptation will preserve the fruits of victory far on in life, yes even to a dying day. The impulses of good as well as those of evil send out their moral vibrations through all space and all time.

You who have the dew of youth upon you, be assured, life is no mimic, mythic battle. If you are to bear heroically the strain of the contest, to conquer the demon-horde of passion, or the dark agony of doubt, look well to your armor and lose no time in proving it. Delay may be perilous. Your safety lies in early and immediate consecration to the divine service. Be it yours, conscious of the danger of procrastination, to say in the words of one of Bunyan's heroes, as a true recruit in the a great army of the faithful--"Put my name down, sir, for I too am to be one of the host of the Lord." Say not that you are temptation-proof. No man is; and one false step, one deflection from the path, may result in the dreadful plunge down the precipices of ruin. If you try to shape your own destiny independent of God, and the soul, and eternity, be assured destruction is

ahead.

How all-momentous therefore to you are the words which head this chapter--"the outset from home;" the first time alone in the great world with its bewildering surroundings; commencing, each on his own responsibility, to build the giant bridge--the infinite viaduct--which spans immortal being, linking time with eternity--and to determine whether it is to bear traces of untempered mortar and insecure foundation, or whether it be work which is to endure. However gentle and tender the restraints of the parental dwelling just left--perhaps by very reason of these--there is apt often, at this new crisis, to steal over the spirit a dangerous feeling of independence; what I might call a despotic consciousness of self-power. The youthful pilgrim feels himself reveling in a new sphere of untrammelled freedom. The old natural spontaneous obedience is at an end; he is sovereign of a new realm of his own. The world is all before him; he has his own paths to select and his own moral weaknesses to indulge. He has no other arbiter for appeal but the bidding of his own sweet will. Let him beware of too readily abandoning these home moorings, and of drifting out without helm or compass amid the perils of a treacherous sea.

Now is the time to test the strength of character and the stability of principle, when thus confronting alone, unwatched and unwarded, and with no patrol over the Trinity of the world's forces--"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." When the charmed Tempter lulled asleep in the tent awakes, then is the time to have courage to repel his insidious wiles, and to show that no new scenes or associations will tempt to swerve from loyal allegiance to duty and to God. The first heroic resistance of temptation, the first stern refusal to capitulate the moral fortress is a noble point gained. The first refusal to resort to the gambling table; the first refusal to conniving at fraud; the first turning away with firm step from the haunt of intemperance; the first firm and loathing recoil from the siren call of impurity. To be able, regarding one and all of these, to say in the words of good Bishop Hooper at the stake, when he had the offer to barter conscience for dear life, "If you love my soul, away with it!"

All honor to those who show, at once and unmistakably, their colors amid

associates of doubtful principle or evil morals; associates who may carry moreover contagion under a fascinating exterior and congenial manners--it may even be in conjunction with culture and accomplishment. Specially would I say, in these times, be on your guard against the attempts, under many a subtle form, to tamper with the beliefs of earlier days and often of more trusted teachers; as if it were something noble to doubt, as if it were not something nobler still to believe; groping your darksome way, not to a Bethel with its angel-guarded pillow and heavenly voices, but to some defiled and desecrated portals with their 'Ichabod' of departed glory.

"I do not presume," said the late Lord Lytton, "to arrogate the office of the preacher; but believe me, as a man of books and a man of the world, that you inherit a religion which in its most familiar form--in the lowly prayer that you learned from your mother's lips, will save you from the temptations to which life is exposed more surely than all which the pride of philosophy can teach." Remember, you have no second trial. Youth comes but once. "The outset" is a solitary landmark in your life history. What would many who have been irrevocably ruined by folly and passion give to have your chance again; the shadow moved back on the dial; the white unblotted page yet to be written; the gates of an unexplored and unsaddened future yet to be opened--standing, girded athletes, with the possibilities of a glorious race before them!

At my first visit to the fairest of Italian cities, I was enthralled, as all travelers are, with the two well-known colossal works of Michael Angelo, his statues of "Morning" and "Evening." Both equally challenge admiration. But there is one marked difference between them, doubtless accidental so far as the great sculptor was himself concerned, but which has conveyed to more than one spectator a suggestive spiritual lesson. The figure of "Evening" is finished. Every feature of the face has received its last touch; the chisel could do no more. It is a type, in breathing marble, of the close of existence, the completed character, the moral expression fixed forever, incapable of alteration. With the other, the figure of "Morning," it is different. The face there remains in rough outline. We can only discern the initial strokes of the master. All the delicate work of hand and chisel still remain to be completed. Equally

significant and expressive symbol of Life's commencement, the outset of the journey--the moral lineaments all unhewn, habits and character, and bias unformed--the character yet to be molded.

Youthful reader, the chisel is still in your own hand. Are the features to be loving or unloving; generous or selfish; noble or base? When life's evening comes, is the living marble to take the shape of scornful look and sensual lip and lowering brow; or is it to be the calm restful "sleep of the Beloved;"--the image of the Pilgrim-dreamer who begins life's battles with the angels, the bright ladder, and the realized divine presence, and ends with the song of triumph?

Beware, we may still further venture to add, beware, above all, of your BESETTING SIN whatever that may be. Keep your eye on the loopholes that require to be specially guarded. Jacob's hereditary tendency, the vice of Laban's family which had transmitted its moral taint to his mother and himself as a fatal inheritance, was covetousness--the lust of gain, the basest, perhaps the most ineradicable of the secondary lower appetites, with its inseparable accompaniment of duplicity, unscrupulous deceit, and degrading selfishness. Let whatever you feel to be your master-temptation form the subject of wakeful vigilance and constant self-scrutiny, taking with you the Word of God as your surest weapon of defense in the hour of peril and conflict.

In an after episode in the life of Jacob (Gen. 32:10) he expressly tells us that in this outset from the tent of Beersheba, he had in his hand nothing but a pilgrim staff (Gen. 32:10). Happy for those in an equally momentous epoch, when for the first time alone in the great world, brought to grapple with the stern realities of life--their head bared to the night and darkness--who have taken as the one trusted prop of their future journey what has proved to thousands better than earthly supports--"Your rod and YOUR STAFF they comfort me." "With this staff," said Dr. Marsh, near the close of a saintly life, as he greeted friends in his sick-room by holding out the Sacred Volume--"With this staff have I traveled through my pilgrimage, and with this staff will I pass over Jordan."

Nor can I better close this chapter than in the weighty, earnest words of



another illustrious wayfarer whose acquaintance and personal kindness will ever be to the writer a treasured memory. "You are about," said the late Sir James Simpson addressing his students, "to pass into the busy and bustling scenes of active life. The great city of the world is already throwing open her gates to receive you. Through that city you must now pass, whether through its darkness or its splendor, its profligacy or its virtue, its misery or its happiness, and in it all the honors of time and of immortality are to be gained or lost. . . Pursue earnestly and undeviatingly the direct course of Christian and professional duty, and then you need fear not. But tremble if you allow yourself to be drawn aside from it at any one point. Temptations that may at first lure you from your path with the gentle hand of a indulgence or a pleasure, will, if yielded to, soon hold you with the iron grasp of a giant. Your future career is a matter of your own selection, and will be regulated by the conduct which you choose to follow. That career may be one of happiness and of self-regret, one of honor or of obscurity, one of wealth or of poverty. During it the present fond hopes of professional fame and fortune, that breathe in the breasts of all of you, may be won or lost, may be fulfilled or falsified, may be nobly realized or ignobly ruined."

## **THE CERTAIN PLACE**

"As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep."--  
Pilgrim's Progress.

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep." Genesis 28:10-11

We must now follow Jacob on his lonely way, as after successive days of journeying, under the blaze of an eastern sun, the shadows of eventide

were gathering round him. As the flaming orb was descending, and the hills of Benjamin were rearing their rounded crests in front, he would naturally assign a preference for his next halt to the place familiar to him by name as his grandfather's first camping ground and sanctuary. The gates of Luz had already probably been shut, like those of eastern towns, at the close of day. But it would be no strange or unusual occurrence for the exile to spend the night on a grassy couch under the canopy of heaven. He must have been familiarized to such an experience in his pastoral life at Beersheba.

In the hush of that somber twilight, the spot where he was directing his steps could not surely be approached without emotion. Every relic of the tent whose image had been stored in child-memory was doubtless gone; but while the movable canvas shelter left no trace behind, the altar-stones would still be there to memorialize the devotion of him who reared them, and to revive and suggest sacred lessons to his chartered heir. These 'stones of Bethel' would be invested with an interest somewhat akin, only far deeper and intenser, to that which is associated with the Register in the Family Bible of modern times--the genealogical record of ancestral piety and worth, often the one heirloom of the Christian dwelling. While the ruins of Bethel's Sanctuary spoke of his fathers, may they not also, after the exciting and agitating events of the preceding days, have formed the first mute remembrances of his fathers' God. They may thus have rendered his mind more susceptible to those devotional feelings we shall find evoked by the vision so soon to follow.

In the great pilgrim journey, of which Jacob's was the type, we are in one sense the creatures of circumstance. The Patriarch, when he left his resting place that morning, must have had a dim premonition where, as a wayfaring man, he would turn aside to tarry for the night. It is not so with us. Often, at least, the turns and windings of the earthly way are very different from those we dreamt of at life's early start. Our own anticipations how often thwarted; our sagest forecastings how often singularly reversed! Those who commenced with firm step and buoyant hope, have been arrested before noontide with the unforeseen 'Hill Difficulty,' or made to leave the sunny path to thread the gloomy ravine--while those who began faltering and in darkness, have reached, almost

without impediment, the goal of their desires and aspirations.

Each, also, has to tread his own separate and peculiar road with few features of resemblance to that of others. The two youths who may leave their village homes the self-same day to enter on the stern realities of life, may be sundered ever after in their pursuits and avocations, their sympathies and fellowships. Or, to vary the figure, they embark from the same haven, their sails are filled by the same gale; but either they part for different shores; different charts severing them on the great ocean highway; or else, for the one, there is the favoring propitious breeze, while for the other, there is buffeting storm and fatal disaster.

But while all this is true, there is another experience of a different character, as comforting as it is real, which the words at the head of this chapter without any violent strain in their meaning suggest— that is, that there is a Higher Hand and, a Higher Will than our own, that directs this "reaching a certain place;" that no events in our history are fortuitous, but all form part of a divine plan. The Jews had a belief that a guardian angel waited at every birth to attend the spirit through life, its protector, defender, and guide. What may be regarded in their case as only a beautiful figment of imagination, is at least a sublime reality regarding God. He compasses our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. In quaint oriental simile, He is said to "put our tears into His bottle," and to "keep us as the apple of His eye." There is, there ought to be, no such thing in the Christian creed as chance in the appointments of existence. Every turn in the road has a divine signboard and warning, if we would only see it, and read it, and hear it—"This is the way, walk in it." The saddest of all things is to crush ourselves on the rock of fatalism. The dreariest of all beliefs is that of an impersonal God, who has relegated His sovereignty to whim and accident; left man to a capricious destiny, to be driven by the wanton winds here and there like the leaves of the forest. The Pilgrim, day by day, follows "the certain road," and eventide by eventide reaches "the certain place."

In the case of Jacob, this Almighty Guide authenticated and verified, in the after vision, His directing hand and ever-present guardianship. Each future returning night, the sentiment at least of an inspired though yet unwritten legend must have sounded in the dreamer's ears—"I will lie

down in peace and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe."  
(Psalm 4:8).

In one sense we err when we speak of God's 'Providential dealings;' for in doing so, we seem to limit or restrict them to some specific and exceptional experiences--some crisis-hours in life; while the simple but sublime verity is, that there is no moment when we are exempt from His paternal supervision. In the words just quoted, "He is ACQUAINTED with ALL our ways." Of course it follows that if He interests Himself in the minute and the trivial, much more may we trace His hand and own His guidance in great emergencies.

Take some other analogous Scriptural examples, illustrating what is thus called the doctrine of particular Providence. The woman of Samaria 'arrived at a certain place,' at the very noontide hour when the weary Traveler (but in truth the Son of God who had redeemed her with His blood) was passing from Judea to Galilee. Lydia, the seller of purple, 'arrived at a certain place,' when she found herself at a riverside prayer-meeting, near the European city of Philippi, some hundred miles from her own Asiatic Thyatira, just at the time when the Great Apostle was present to cheer her heart with the full revelation of God's grace and mercy. The Ethiopian chamberlain 'arrived at a certain place,' when, returning from Jerusalem through the Gaza desert, a Pilgrim Missionary confronted his chariot, and, expounding to him truths he had sought for in vain amid the rites and splendors of an abrogated ritual, sent him on his way rejoicing.

Nor need we confine ourselves to Bible instances. Many a youth among ourselves has 'arrived at a certain place' immediately after leaving, like Jacob, for the first time the parental roof. The call to a secular profession or trade, the hope of promotion and advancement, directed his steps to the distant city; but it was the means of taking him to some hallowed dreamland--some Bethel sanctuary, where he had unfolded to him the plenitude of redeeming love. The words of everlasting life came home with saving energy to his soul, altering from that hour the whole current of his mental and moral history.

In these and similar cases there was apparently nothing but accidental

occurrences, curious coincidences; but the true key to all, "the reading and interpretation of the writing," is to be found in the saying of Jacob's illustrious son--"So then it was not you that brought me here, but God." "The certain place" ("THE place," as it is in the original), was of His appointed choosing; "He knows the way that I take" (Job 23:10).

Reader! be it yours obediently, lovingly, joyfully to conform to the arrangement of your outward circumstances as the decree of Heaven. If conscience within, can countersign the leadings and indications of Providence without, then accept the career, be what it may, which has been opened to you and assigned you. Cast yourself without reserve or hesitation on 'the certain place.' It may be unpromising--not what you yourself would have selected or desired. Bleak and unattractive in its mere outward aspect would that moorland, doubtless, be to Jacob. Tufts of rough and rugged heather, scorched with the remorseless rays of noonday, take the place of verdant meadows with beds of anemone and fragrant thyme.

But, undeterred by the cheerless and unloving surroundings, he sets about preparing his couch. So it may be in your case as regards the surroundings of your daily life. There may be little else than what corresponds in the experience of the Bethel-dreamer to the ledge of rock and the deepening shadow, the drenching dew and the sigh of the night wind; no tent for the traveler, no hospice for the pilgrim. Like the patriarch on an after occasion, you may be tempted even to say in your moments of despondency, "All these things are against me." But, "be still, and know that I am God!" The shuttles may dart ever so capriciously to us, but the weaving of the life-web--is in the hands of the Great Craftsman.

If 'the certain place' He selects be not amid the blooming gardens of Gerar, or by the wells of Beersheba, but in the dreary uplands of Benjamin, He has some wise reason for it, and He will yet, in His own time and way, vindicate the wisdom and rectitude of His procedure. If He sees it to be well, sunlit heights may yet disclose themselves in the wilderness. The rough stones of the desert may yet, as in the case of the sleeper at Bethel, be transmuted into steps for angels.

That was a dreary place in olden-time for the future minstrel of Israel, amid the rocky wilderness of southern Judah, when he was chased like a panting gazelle on the mountains, uttering ever and anon the plaintive soliloquy, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;" but after generations would have been defrauded of the most touching portion of his Psalter, had he known no experience but that of "the green pastures and still waters."

That was a dreary place for Paul of Tarsus, when he was flung a shipwrecked castaway on the rocks of Melita. But there was work to do even on such an inhospitable shore. So, without a murmur on his lips, he gathered his "bundle of sticks," and kindled the fire, and left the morrow, with the unfolding of its yet unknown calls and duties, to that God-- whose he was, and whom he served.

That was a dreary--a still drearier place for him, when immured in a Roman dungeon, the itinerant Apostle felt the chain of captivity dangling at his side--his life-work apparently arrested. How would the chafed imprisoned eagle beat his wings against the enclosing bars, and long for freedom to speed as aforetime from city to city! It may have been so at the time, but he could write afterwards on the retrospect--"everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News."

That was a dreary and cheerless exile, when a later but not less illustrious dreamer than Jacob, was confined within Bedford jail--his lips muffled, his message silenced. The Church could ill spare her humble but stalwart champion. Yes, honest Bunyan, it was hard for rough, stirring, enlightened eloquence like yours, to be thus gagged within those silent walls. But be still! The God who sent you to that 'certain place' has work for you to do there. Dream your dream, weave your similitudes--the hundreds of Bedford miss you; but the world's millions will yet bless God, and you in Him, for that cell and that chain!

That was a spot of dreary solitude, the sick-chamber of Richard Baxter, with its experience of racking, excruciating pain. It was hard, amid the cherished activities of a consecrated life, to drag about from day to day that weary body, the gates of death ever ajar, added to other heavy sorrows. But that nook in the dark valley, that gloomy niche in the

Temple, was assigned and appointed for reasons unknown to the meek sufferer. These forty years of prolonged weakness and pain enabled him to dream a kindred dream for behalf of the suffering children of God in all future ages--not of the Pilgrim's Journey, but of the Pilgrim's Home. The "Saint's Rest" could never have been written but by one who, with trembling hand and tear-dimmed eye, waited in habitual anticipation of the welcome summons within the Gate into the City.

Perhaps by none are these lessons of 'the certain place' more needed, than by those who are in the thick of the great battle of life--sore pressed in the unequal fight; looking, it may be, with envious eye on fortunate comrades who have already attained victory and promotion, while they are still lagging behind--the base-born spirits of dissatisfaction and discontent, hardest of all to grapple with among a demon horde of like assailants. Even those who have little reason to complain of harassing conflicts, are often too apt to make their allotments the cause of heart-burning. They long for some better, imaginary destiny--something other, at all events, than that which they have. It is the child-allegory of the firefly that was ever moping and fretting because it was not a star; of the marigold and daisy that drooped their heads and refused the light, because they were not the rose and the lily; the spikes of grass and coils of lichen that spurned the rain, and dew, and sunshine, because they were not exalted to the rank of oak and cedar.

It is enough to say that He who 'appoints the bounds of our habitation,' knows what is best for us. The Pilgrimage is shaped not by us but for us. "The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). Do nothing that will tend to thwart the Divine plan, and by seeking some softer pillow and more curtained couch to defraud yourselves of 'the visions of God.' Believe it, it is not outward fullness and prosperity which secure the softest, balmiest rest. There is a striking verse in Ezekiel where God thus speaks of the peace enjoyed by His own chosen people, even when called to a life of outward hardship and endurance-- "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods" (34:25). If conscience be pure and unsullied, then His lullaby can hush to quiet repose amid the dews of the wilderness, or under the boughs of the forest, as well (often better) than on the couch of down. He can convert

the bed of rock into the Gate of Heaven. Yes, and when the end of all is reached, and the Bethel road is retrospectively traversed, the testimony of many a Pilgrim will be joyfully re-echoed as you stand by the gate of the many mansions--"He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation!"

## NIGHT SHADOWS

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep." Genesis 28:10-11

None but those who have been in Palestine, can understand or appreciate the beauty and grandeur of an eastern sunset. The tamest of its landscapes is ennobled and transfigured with the magical light of 'Eventide.'

While many such scenes may occur to the recollection, there is pre-eminently one which, owing to its being seen from so many different points, leaves on the mental vision an ineffaceable impression. I refer to the varied tints on the mountain wall of Moab, when its dull rocks are transmuted by 'the last fires of day' into a delicate mass of purple, amethyst, and gold. These remarkable mountains of the Land of Promise would in all likelihood now meet the eye of Jacob. From the upland territory, along which he hastened, this great trans-Jordanic "bastion" is specially conspicuous. He would watch the melting hues until, one by one, they had died away, and left nothing but the cold grey mass behind. Not an inapt picture of his own inner experience at the moment; when what had given to life its best morning brightness had faded from his sight. "The sun had set!"

And if a Palestine sunset is gorgeous, equally so, also, we may add, is its



nightly sky. No wonder the Israelites loved to travel to their great annual celebration when the luster of moon and stars irradiated their path (Isa. 30:29), the pensive hour of thought doubtless adding intensity to their pious enthusiasm. Possibly these brilliant galaxies spoke to Jacob as they could speak to none other. Fugitive as he was, he could not be unconscious of the fact that he had been served heir to the covenant promise. Could he fail to think of those evenings of his boyhood, at Kirjath-Arba, when his aged grandfather had led him forth by the hand, and pointing him upwards to the myriad lights gemming the skies, told him how the God he served had made them the silent prophets and evangelists of the future. "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall your seed be" (Gen. 15:5).

Nor is what we have now said regarding those hours of night, when "echo slumbers," to be relegated to the domain of mere sentiment. It is the season which brings God and spiritual things specially near the soul. The garish light of day is shut out. The din of the world's traffic and busy industry is hushed. Night is a great temple, in whose courts the Omniscient Presence is specially felt and realized.

"It is a season for the quiet thought,  
And the still reckoning with yourself.  
The night gives back the spirits of the dead,  
And the heart, calling its affections up,

Counts its wasted ingots. Life stands still,  
And settles like a fountain; and the eye  
Sees clearly through its depths, and notes all  
That stirred its troubled waters."

It was "by night" Eliphaz was startled from his couch with the Divine appearance and the Divine voice. Night was the season when the King of Judah rose to his highest inspiration. "I meditate on You in the night watches," has been the utterance of many a devout spirit, since the Great Minstrel sang "The heavens are telling." When Jacob, twenty years later, wrestled with the covenant angel at Jabbok, it was at night. The wrestling continued until morning dawn, when it ceased as if the special season for

Divine communication was then over--"Let me go," said the mysterious Personage, "for the day breaks."

May it not have been so with the patriarch now. The natural darkness was preparing his soul the better for the disclosure of inner light. It was the outer portico which conducted him into 'the Most Holy Place,' the haunt of ministering Seraphim. Under the gleam of these celestial altar lights, the sense of the Divine nearness and presence comes over him, and before he left that spot he would be able to add his joyful experience, "I remembered Your name, O Lord, in the night" (Ps. 119:55).

All this, however, has a higher and truer spiritual acceptation. No pilgrim is without his night season. There are moments in every life when, in a figurative sense of the words, "The sun has set."

Such a 'setting' is that, when suddenly summoned to a bed of pain and sickness, when "wearisome nights are appointed." The world, that was so lately clothed with light as with a garment, puts on its sackcloth attire, and the sufferer is made familiar only with the dim lamp, the restrained footfall, the whisper with bated breath.

Such a sunset is that, when some treasured orb in the domestic skies is quenched; when, through the long, dreary night-watches, sleep is banished, and the pulses throb like the heaving of the ocean which cannot rest. Nothing seems to fall on the ear but the dirge over buried love, and a later cry of the patriarch of Bethel is wrung from the broken heart, "I AM bereaved!"

But with many, how often are these, and such like seasons, made the foretastes of the heavenly dream; the introduction to Divine realities before unthought of. It is affliction, in some one of its diversified forms, which has dictated or repeated the utterance of the Beloved disciple in his island prison--"I saw a door opened in heaven, and I heard a voice saying unto me, Come up here!" (Rev. 4:1). The discipline and strengthening of the moral nature cannot be effected amid the distractions and fascinations of broad day; but when the sun of earthly prosperity goes down, in the realized loneliness and desolation which steals over the soul, out come the clustering stars of Divine promise. These require to have the

blaze of light withdrawn, in order that they may be revealed to the spiritual eye. The saying becomes true, "God, our Maker, gives songs in the night." The sorrowing come forth comforted, the weak strengthened, the doubting confirmed--yes, and often the gloomy and the selfish are transfigured into the noble, and manly, and sympathetic. "By the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better."

With some who read these pages it may be more than the shades which follow sunset--the gloom of one solitary watch. It may be, as with Jacob, a "tarrying all night." The infinity of darkness may seem gathering and deepening around you, every star swept from your stormy skies. Night-watch succeeds night-watch, but no response of the warder is heard with tidings of the dawn.

**TRUST GOD IN THE DARK.** This is the highest effort and triumph of faith. Whether it be the darkness engendered by bodily affliction or by inward trouble--physical, intellectual, or spiritual; your "tarrying time," as much as "the certain place," of which we have spoken, is of His appointing. Jesus tarried in distant Perea two days after getting the urgent message from the disconsolate sisters at Bethany. How they marveled (perhaps murmured) at the apparently strange, unusual indifference with which the tidings sent by them were received; instead of hastening, as they expected, up the Jericho valley to emancipate them at once from their anguish. When He did come, His 'tarrying' elicited the reproachful remonstrance--"If You had been here, our brother had not died!" How did that Lord of life and love, however, subsequently vindicate the wisdom and righteousness of His mysterious delay? But for that 'tarrying,' what lessons would have been lost to the family of Bethany--to His own disciples at the approach of the great crisis-hour; to believers in the Apostolic age--to the Church until the end of time. His gentle rebuke to the outspoken child of sorrow is what He whispers in the ear of many still, who are ready in His tarrying seasons to accuse the love and rectitude of His dealings--"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11--40).

To not a few, who for the present are thus dwelling on the night-watches of Bethel, instead of the sunny memories of Hebron and Beersheba, the 'needs be' may yet be made apparent even here. At all events, be assured,

these gloomy experiences during the exile of earth, are designed only to lead you the more to center your desires and thoughts on "The Better Country"--to endear to you the more the home and harbor of the skies. "Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence as clear as the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun." Psalm 37:5-6.

"The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud  
Is gathering thickly over my head, and loud  
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand  
Like one bewildered! Father, take my hand.

"The day goes fast, my Father! and the night  
Is drawing darkly down. My faithless sight  
Sees ghostly visions; fears, a spectral band,  
Encompass me. O Father! take my hand.

"The way is long, my Father! and my soul  
Longs for the rest and quiet of the home,  
While yet I journey through this weary land,  
Keep me from wandering. Father, take my hand."

There is a gracious answer--

"The way is dark, my child! but leads to light,  
I would not always have you walk by sight;  
My dealings now you can not understand,  
I meant it so, but I will take your hand.

"The way is long, my child! but it shall be  
Not one step longer than is best for thee;  
And you shall know, at last, when you shall stand  
Safe at the goal, how I did take your hand."

Youth has often its own exceptional experiences of sunset and night. Not to speak of others, one phase of that darkness, often too among the noblest and most ingenuous minds, is that to which I have already incidentally alluded--the darkness and convulsion of intellectual doubt, an experience so well described by the poet, with Bethel for the

foreground and imagery--

"I falter where I firmly trod;  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the world's great altar stairs  
That slope through darkness up to God:

"I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope."--"In Memorium."

Religion hitherto has been accepted on trust. But the young explorer, waking up to the consciousness of fresh intellectual convictions and responsibilities, begins to test for himself the strength of the old foundations. Not infrequently, also, we must add, in the traffic with baser minds, disquieting misgivings are at times unhappily insinuated; the stable is made to seem insecure, the strong links of the golden chain seem to pulverize into dust, the vessel of faith is adrift from its moorings. Perhaps worse than all, in the sudden revulsion of family influences, the crushing secret of these devil-born doubts has to be borne alone and unshared, the hand of home sympathy and loving authority and counsel has relaxed its grasp. The future is blank--there is truly a "tarrying all night, for the sun is set!"

What is the panacea (one panacea at least), in ministering to a mind diseased like this? It is prayer to God to enlighten the eyes of your understanding. "Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death" (Ps. 13:3). I repeat, that very agony of doubt is not infrequently part of a tribulation through which many of God's best and truest children have to pass--"walking in darkness and seeing no light." Their cry of despondency is "Watchman, how much longer until morning? When will the night be over?" The watchman replies, "Morning is coming, but night will soon follow." (Isa. 21:11, 12).

Be assured the utterance of simple faith--"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief;" "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law," will not be uttered in vain. "Unto the upright there arises light in the

darkness." Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God" (Ps. 112:4; Is. 50:10). "There is, indeed," says Bishop Ellicott, an able scholar and divine, "a quick and living truth in every sentence of the blessed Gospel, and they who read with a loving and reverential spirit shall find it in its fullest measures. Oh! pray fervently against the first motions of a spirit of doubt and questioning. By those prayers which you learned at a mother's knee, by that holy history which perchance you first heard from a mother's lips, give not up the first childlike faith of earlier, and it may be purer days--that simple heroic faith which such men as Niebuhr and Neander knew how to appreciate and to glorify, even while they felt its fullest measures could never be their own. Remember that when faith grows cold, love soon passes away, and hope soon follows it. And oh! believe me, that the world cannot exhibit a spectacle more utterly mournful, more full of deepest melancholy, than a young yet doubting, a fresh yet unloving, an eager yet hopeless and forsaken heart."

Go then, pray on, trust on, believe on, hope on, and "the still, small voice" will in due time come--after the thunder, and the earthquake, and the hurricane have spent themselves. The sun is only below the horizon. "O my God! Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember your kindness-- from Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar. I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life." Psalm 42:6-8

And then, in the midst of these night-watches and night experiences, whether in the case of youth, or manhood, or old age; when we think of Jacob--when we think of ourselves--can we fail to make the application which some of the early writers give to this passage, as suggestive of One, who Himself, (and that for no sin of His own) left His Father's house "a Pilgrim," and all solitary and alone traversed the desert of earth! How often did He, also, in a literal sense, stretch His weary frame under the open canopy of heaven, with no other covering but His cloak, to protect Him from the dews of night. How often had He the stone of Palestine, or

the coil of rope, on which to rest His head; and at last a harder pillow even than these! In our nights of darkness and sorrow, well may we recall the Divine experience of this Prince of sufferers; the sun set, but no sanctity of stars to relieve the gloom--"My God! My God! why have You forsaken Me? I have trodden the winepress alone." Prayer was His resort in the very climax of His woe--"Father!" "O My Father!" "Being in an agony, He prayed the more earnestly." It turned His night season into a time of invigoration and strength. So also will it be in the experience of His waiting people. "The Lord is near unto all who call upon Him"--"A very present help in trouble." In every Gethsemane of life, an angel will be sent from heaven to strengthen. It is in "the fourth watch," when the darkness is often deepest, that He Himself, mightier than any angel, still comes "walking on the sea." It is when "the sun has set" on the mountains of Bethel, that, as we shall presently find--

"The sky is as a temple arch;  
The blue and wavy air  
Is glorious with the spirit-march  
Of messengers of prayer."

## **THE PILLOW OF STONES**

"And will You hear the fevered heart  
To You in silence cry?  
As the inconstant wild fires dart  
Out of the restless eye.

"You will, for many a languid prayer  
Has reached You from the wild  
Since the lone mother, wandering there,  
Cast down her fainting child.

"You will be there and not forsake,  
To turn the bitter pool  
Into a bright and breezy lake,  
The throbbing brow to cool!

"Until, left awhile with You alone,  
The willful heart be sincerely to own  
That He, by whom our bright hours shone,  
Our darkness best may rule."--Christian Year.

"The wilderness and the solitary place."--Isa. 35:1.

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep." Genesis 28:10-11

The fugitive, having selected his resting-place for the night, would again unbind his belt and open the bag containing the few provisions with which doubtless he had been supplied on his hasty departure. After concluding his simple meal, he betakes himself to his stony pillow.

In the preceding chapter, we have taken the 'night' and the 'sunset' as figuratively descriptive of a peculiar class of sorrows; such as the darkness of personal and family bereavement, or the yet denser gloom of intellectual and spiritual doubt. May we not make the title of the present chapter suggestive of a different phase of trial what may be brought under the category of the hardships of existence--the fight with adverse circumstances--the often hopeless struggle with secular things. This, with many, (though feebly realized by those in affluence and abundance), is indeed a 'pillow of stone.' Hapless seems the destiny of such sufferers! The sun sets placidly on the hamlets in the valley--curling smoke, and gleaming lights telling of peace and serenity, while they are out with Jacob in the bleak uplands, with scanty coverlet and downless couch. Can they fail to contrast that happy fire-glow and the music of child-voices, with the cold of the rock and the sigh and sob of the night wind; perhaps the memory of some Beersheba tent, with similar loving hands and cheerful faces in the far away of life, only adding a fresh pang of



bitterness to the experiences of the present hour? We have known not a few of such cases, when the cruel load, pressing like the chill of an avalanche on the soul, seems as if it were greater than could be borne, and the cry of wild despair rises unsuccoured. Why such a fate as this? Why this toiling misery? Why the rod instead of the smile? Why the pitiless rain streaming on the desert rocks, instead of the sunshine falling on the sheltering roof? Why, while OTHERS can warble of

"Lilies white,  
A painted skiff with a singing crew,  
Sky reflections soft and bright,  
Tremulous crimson, gold and blue."

Or others, of  
"A shining reach,  
A crystal couch for the moonbeam's rest,  
Starry ripples along the beach,  
Sunset songs from the breezy west."

Why should MY experience be--  
"foam and roar.  
Restless heave and passionate dash,  
Shingle-rattle along the shore,  
Gathering boom and thundering crash?"

We cannot reply. It would be presumption to attempt answering the question; and the more so, when the mysterious fact is too patent, that the rough stone seems at times the appointed lot of the brave and loving, the generous and true; while the soft bed and the fine linen are often bestowed on the selfish and grasping, the base and unworthy. It is the old startling perplexity embodied in the plaintive wail of the Psalmist--"My steps had well-near slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world" (Ps. 73:2, 3, 12).

All we can say is, that in the case of Jacob (and is it not so in the case of many?) it was the stony pillow which was followed by the heavenly vision. If we may so express it, it was through an iron, not a golden gate, that he had revealed to him the vista of angels and the dream of God. He was not

the first who was able to take up an inspired after-song--"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God--many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (Ps. 40:1-3).

It must be borne in mind, as a key to many enigmas deemed now insoluble, that life, with all, (but with some more than others) is a probation. "I proved you," says God, speaking of and to His Israel (Ps. 81:7). But what is the end of that probation-discipline? Is the burden always to crush? Is there to be no remission of the load, no rift in the cloud of sorrow, no escape from the hard degrading bondage? Is the "thundering crash" to boom in the ear forever? Hear other words of the Divine Speaker in that same Psalm--"Now I will relieve your shoulder of its burden; I will free your hands from their heavy tasks. You cried to me in trouble, and I saved you; I answered out of the thundercloud. I tested your faith at Meribah, when you complained that there was no water." (Ps. 81:6, 7). It has been well remarked that Adam fell, not in a wilderness, but in a garden, while the second Adam conquered, not in a garden, but in a wilderness. The training to "endure hardness" is the true stuff of which men and heroes are made--

"Oh, fear not in a world like this  
And you shall know, 'fore long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is,  
To suffer and be strong."

That is the noblest victory of faith, which after protracted struggle can convert apparently crushing defeats into trophies; hard trials into material for praise. Just as we have seen a forest tree ravaged by the storm, torn up by the roots, and lying prostrate on the sward with the nests of its feathered tenants scattered pitilessly around--yet the birds, which for a time uttered their wailing cries around the pillaged home, come at last to nestle in the prone branches and to resume their warblings. The man with his head resting on the hardest stone is not to be pitied, in comparison with many whose downy pillows are only inducing a deeper sleep of apathy and forgetfulness--

"Those hearts that cower  
In willful slumber, deepening every hour;  
That draw their curtains closer round,  
The nearer swells the trumpet's sound."

Better far to have the poet's prayer answered, for the couch of rock and  
the crude awakening--

"Lord, before our trembling lamps sink down and die,  
Touch us with chastening hand, and make us feel You nigh."

Another thought suggested by the Patriarch and his desert pillow, is in connection with the loneliness of his present position. He, who, as the great Sheikh's son at Lahairoi, Beersheba, and Kirjath-Arba, had night after night his mat spread and his meals served by scores of willing slaves, was now absolutely unattended. So lonely was he, that these very stones which were to form the night-rest for his head, were carried by his own hands. "He took the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows." One who was habituated from boyhood to the stir of camp life, and the sympathy of friendly voices--accustomed ever and anon to hear the well-known welcome of hospitality to the passing stranger or wayfarer, "Turn in, my lord, turn in" (Judges 4:18), while he was served up in the "lordly dishes" (Judges 5:25), is all at once plunged into solitude. The very tinkle of bells on sheep and camels, once so familiar to him, has died away in the far distance. But here, again, solitude was another factor (to use a modern term) which prepared him for the visions which followed. He entered the vestibule of silence, before being admitted into the Inner Sanctuary.

His experience was in harmony with that of the most privileged saints of every age. Loneliness indeed would almost seem to be a necessary condition of receptivity in regard to the loftiest and divinest revelations of a personal God. Moses was alone in the solitudes of Sinai when Jehovah appeared to him in the midst of the burning bush (Exod. 3:1). Eliphaz was alone, (in the passage previously alluded to,) when the mysterious spirit passed before his eyes. He specially notes "There was silence" (Job 4:16). Job was alone on his bed of ashes, resting on a harder pillow than Jacob's, when the near Presence there unfolded itself--and when he thus solitary, the foundation Article in the creed of Christendom was uttered--

"I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25). Elijah was alone in the cave of Horeb, when he became spectator of the great drama of the desert, which began with the mighty wind, and ended with the still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). John was alone in the Isle of Patmos, when he heard behind him "the voice of a great trumpet" and beheld his Lord arrayed in the lusters of glorified humanity (Rev. 1:9). And it was when all other lights were paled, and when, (no other footstep near,) Jacob lay in the darkness away from the trodden highway, that the path of angels was made visible and the voice of God was heard.

It is so, often, with His most favored people still. Periods of loneliness, stated seasons of quiet and retirement, are demanded for the nurturing of the spiritual nature. The finer sensibilities get soiled by constant contact with the world, its fevered heats and tempted hours, and restless turmoil. The soul needs, at times, removal to a calmer atmosphere--"the sphere of silence."

The picture may be recalled of penitent Israel in future times. All the tribes are represented as mourning alone; "every family apart, every individual apart" (Zech. 12:12). But what, are we told, is the immediate result and sequence of that season of solemn seclusion and heart probing--sitting thus alone, in meditative silence? It is the fullest revelation of Gospel grace and mercy--"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Zech. 13:1).

Not that by any means "frames and feelings" are to be made tests and interpreters of reality in religious experience. But this introspection has its genuine side, as well as its counterfeit. We never surely can suspect the Apostle Paul of being the morbid analyst of mere emotions. He was far too real and practical for that. Yet his exhortation stands recorded--"Let a man examine himself." He knew the tyranny of the secular--the constant friction which wears the wheels of the spiritual as of the physical life. He who had his own lengthened season of solitude and retirement in the desert of Arabia (Gal. 1:17), knew how wise and needful were occasional pausing-places in the journey, to enable the Pilgrim of Eternity to breathe with greater intensity the soliloquy which closes the Old Testament psalm to the omniscient Jehovah--"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try

me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24).

More than this; there is an instructive lesson surely conveyed, when ONE, greater than Apostle or Psalmist--One who required no such retreat to purge His soul from sin, and who was most habitually conversant with heavenly things, said to His disciples, (and that too in the midst of their round of spiritual activities,) "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31). No, who Himself ever preceded what may be called the great crisis-hours of His life and ministry, by silent prayer and communion--alone in the wilderness--alone on the midnight hills around Gennesaret--alone in the moon-lit glades of Olivet. "And He continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). "Sit here" (He must be alone) "while I go and pray yonder" (Mark 14:32). The Divine breathings, "O My Father, if it be possible;" "Not as I will, but as You will," were uttered, not amid the holy fellowships of the supper table, but amid the loneliness of Gethsemane.

To return to the solitary dreamer at Bethel. Would the conflict of inner feeling--the sting of bitterly-felt self-reproach--forbid him, before he laid his head on his stony resting place, to accord with the hallowed usages of his previous life, by kneeling on the bare rock in this open Temple of the Great Universe and invoke the blessing of his father's God? We cannot tell. Perhaps the lustrous, watchful stars gleaming above him--in one sense the chapters and verses of His Bible--would suffuse a calming, reassuring influence on his perturbed spirit. It might be as if one of the angels of the vision, preceding his fellows, had thus addressed the exile before he resigned himself to slumber--"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, that brings out their host by number--He calls them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one fails. Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary?" (Isaiah 40:26-28.)

And HOW are His people still brought into this silent, secluded contact with the God of Jacob? It is, often at least, by means we have already

dwelt upon; through temporary seasons of trial; by having their hearts and homes darkened with sorrow. They are thus impelled to escape from the fever and whirl of life, the passions and interests and engrossments of the hour, and taken out on the lonely Bethel-heights to hold converse with Himself. "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence" (Hosea 2:14, 15). The vineyards would have been unsought and untasted, the "comfortable words" would have been unheeded, but for the wilderness discipline, the wilderness silence--the tearful eye closing on the wilderness pillow. "Come, My people," says the same Divine Being in another place, as He beckons apart from 'the loud stunning tide of human care,' "Come, My people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you" (Is. 26:20).

It is in such moments of often enforced retirement, that they are able to realize the littleness of the frets and annoyances of the way which have too frequently disturbed their serenity and poisoned their peace; and which, moreover, may have dimmed and dwarfed their faith. While it is at such seasons, also, that they rise from the rough stone and the night-watch with fresh incentives for holy duty, and resolutions for a nobler life. They have "seen God face to face;" and a new dignity is given to human existence by vividly linking it with the divine.

"Oh for 'a desert place' with only the Master's smile!  
Oh for the 'coming apart' with only His 'rest awhile!'  
Yes, I have longed for a pause in the rush and whirl of time,  
Longed for silence to fall, instead of its merriest chime.

"Longed for a calm, to let the circles die away  
That tremble over the heart, breaking the heavenly ray,  
And to leave its wavering mirror true to the Star above,  
Brightened and stilled to its depths with the quiet of 'perfect love.'"  
--Ministry of Song

## THE NIGHT-DREAM

"The day is done, and the darkness  
Falls from the wings of night,  
As a feather is wafted downward  
From an eagle in his flight.

"And the night shall be filled with music,  
And the cares that infest the day  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away."--Longfellow.

"The dream of Jacob is not merely natural, but prophetic; it is the medium of Divine revelation."--Kurtz.

"Come here with your tongues and pens, all you that have them--sing and play all you that can, that so we may in some small degree comprehend the import of these words."--Luther.

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven--and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."--Gen. 28:12.

"By whom shall Jacob arise," asks the prophet, "for he is small?" (Amos 7:2.) Such might well be the question prompted, as the weary traveler casts himself down at eventide on his pillow of stones on one of the heaths of Palestine.

The question is now to be answered. The rocky uncurtained couch, which even a wandering child of Ishmael would have spurned, has no equal that night on earth. The Pharaohs in their palaces might well envy him. His bleak resting place is to be radiant with a vision of angels; and, while the ornate chambers of Rameses and the other Pharaoh's with their gold and purple have vanished long ago, it still retains its imperishable name.

"By whom shall Jacob arise?" There can be but one reply. He can arise

from his weakness and shame alone in the might of his fathers' God. To use the words uttered by himself, at the hour of death, regarding his best loved son, "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24). It is evident the present divine revelation is one which the inspired narrator records with profound interest and wonder; for the interjection, indicative of reverential astonishment, is used no less than three times in the course of the brief description--"Behold," "Behold," "Behold!"

The Lord has in all ages had different methods of communicating His will and purposes to the Church. At one time, as in the case of Abraham, it was through the vision of "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp" (Gen. 15:17). At another, it was by the oracles of the Urim and the Thummin with their mysterious flashing of spiritual illumination. At another, it was through prophetic announcements. At another, and most frequently of all, it was through the medium of dreams. "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction" (Job. 33:15, 16).

Nor was this instrumentality employed regarding His own people only. It was common alike to Jew and Gentile. Familiar Bible instances may be recalled, from the case of the young sage of Arabia, (whose words we have just quoted) and the kings of Egypt and Babylon (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar), to the New Testament examples of the Persian Magi, and the wife of Pontius Pilate. On the present occasion, however, it is with no stranger or foreigner, but with the heir of the covenant, the head and representative of His chosen Church and nation, that God adopts the same means to reveal His presence and protecting care.

All of us know the vivid--sometimes the overpowering reality of these visions and pageants of dreamland. The mental nature seems for the time to be abnormally quickened and intensified. Long forgotten scenes are revived and re-peopled. In the silent studio of night, when the senses are sealed in slumber, long forgotten faces start afresh from the ghostly canvas, yes, and, from the intensity of revived impression, cherished smiles and sacred tones long since passed away, bring the tear to the eye,



and the irrepressible sob to the heart. It is the hour when the judgment abdicates its control and imagination holds undisputed sway--

"Of all external things,  
Which the five watchful senses represent,  
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,  
Which reason, joining or disjoining, frames  
All what we affirm, or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion; then retires  
Into her private cell, when nature sleeps."

There are dreams, however, whose combinations are controlled by a Higher power than the caprice of the imagination; taking their rise and shape from the direct influence and inspiration of the Spirit of God. This writing of the finger of Deity on the mind's silent walls was, at least in olden time, the chosen method of the Father's disclosure of Himself to His children on earth.

Such the dream which now broke the trance of the Patriarch's sleep, and environed with divinest phantasms his desert pillow.

It would almost seem (at least we have nothing in the sacred narrative leading us to infer otherwise) that up to the present time, though very familiar with the name and the worship of Jehovah, Jacob had enjoyed no personal, individual communication with Deity. No external visible revelation had been conveyed to him of the purposes of grace, such as were again and again given to his favored grandsire. The first of a long course of devout teaching and training begins with the stony couch. It would be too strong and pronounced a statement to call it 'the night of Jacob's conversion.' But it was undoubtedly the first eventful crisis in his spiritual history--one which dominated all the subsequent ones, and carried its sacred impress to the hour of his departure. He laid himself down, anticipating little else but feverish visions of revenge and blood, that might well banish sleep from a softer pillow. He awoke to the sublime consciousness that he was no longer the alien and the outcast, but in very deed a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. This midnight transaction has been well called "his formal inauguration by God Himself, into the high and holy position of the heir and child of the promise." Strange spot for so momentous a conference!

The first place at which Paul preached in Europe was a river side; the second, a dungeon at midnight. Truly, the Lord is not confined to temples made with hands.

We need not recur to the physical features of the locality, further than to recall to the mind of the reader what was stated in the introductory chapter. These features seem to have impressed themselves on the mind and imagination of the sleeper, and to have given shape and embodiment to his dream. We can, however, have no difficulty or hesitation in discovering what may be called its spiritual coloring. We have assigned to it, indeed, a distinct heavenly origin and inspiration. But the Divine Inspirer produces these passive mental impressions through human associations and emotions. The long wistful gaze over the moaning sea, and the noise of booming billows, are known to give form and substance to the dream of the fisherman's wife, when she falls asleep in the midst of anxious vigils. It was life's waking realities, which, in a similar manner, in the case of the Patriarch, had perpetuated themselves in his hour of slumber. The predominating thought of the past days had retained its hold on his fevered brain, that he was a fugitive for dear life, with guilt on his conscience and terror in his soul. By the revered lips, alike of father and grandfather, he had frequently, from earliest childhood, been familiarized with the truth how near God is. But even the evening prayer, we have supposed, could not enable him to realize the comfort at least of that nearness now. Rather in the opening of the dream was it sadly reversed. A wide and apparently hopeless distance seemed to separate him from the magnificent Presence. The gate of heaven (the "GATE"--the place among Easterns identified with unrestricted communion between ruler and subject, monarch and people) was nowhere to be seen through the impenetrable blank which stretched from the sleeper's pillow to the starry sky. There was brought vividly and hopelessly home to him the sense of his distance and alienation--his exile and estrangement from a greater than earthly parent.

But all at once, lo! from the spot on which he lay, a pathway of divine communication seemed gradually to emerge from the darkness. Whether we call it 'stair' or 'ladder,' that radiant highway seemed to stretch upwards in brightening gradations, from the head of the dreamer to the

now revealed portals of glory. The base of this stony ladder "was on earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." Glorious, white-robed beings, as we shall come afterwards more specially to note, thronged it; as if they carried up and down its gigantic steps messages of peace and mercy. And more than all, a voice from the unseen God, hidden in the blaze of light at its summit, seemed to address the wanderer.

There could be little doubt as to the primary object and significance of the vision and its accompaniments. It was to confirm the Patriarch's faith in the existence and providence of Jehovah. It was to assure him that, exile and wanderer as he was, the God of his father Abraham was still with him as "the Mighty God of Jacob;" that he was under the sleepless eye and protecting rule of Israel's unslumbering Shepherd, and that on that protection he might confidently and unhesitatingly rely. 'God sees me,' 'God cares for me,' 'God speaks to me,' were the first simple yet sublime thoughts that would flash across him. 'He is not the God of the Beersheba tent only, with its throng of souls. He condescends to follow me--yes me, alone, to this lonely place, who has forfeited all claim to His favor. For me, He sends a convoy of angels, and utters words of divinest comfort and heart-cheer!' Kurtz, a distinguished German commentator, well remarks, "Thoughts accusing and excusing one another would overwhelm him, and refused to be controlled amid the unusual solitude and loneliness of his position. The dark future before him is as yet unlit by a single ray of promise. The Dream and its Vision are the reply of God to the harassments and anxieties with which he has lain down to rest."

That dream of Bethel was for all times, for all ages, for all pilgrims in a pilgrim world. And this, its primary suggestion, ought surely for each one of us, as for Jacob, to be replete with gladness and consolation--the personal love of God for every individual member of His vast family. Go where we may, we can make the inspiriting strain of that song of an after age our own--"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:9, 10). The heavenly Shepherd has an individualized care for each sheep of the fold. As it utters its apparently unsuccoured bleat on the lonely moorland, or amid the thorny thicket of its wanderings, He tracks its truant footsteps, as if it engrossed all His

interest, restoring it to the green pastures by the side of the fold.

Yes, there is surely nothing more cheering, more sublime, than the thought of this unwearying tending of the Great Shepherd--this individual (if we can so call it, this microscopic), love of the Great Father. Not the Almighty following the majestic march of the planets in the skies, marking out their orbits--the Omnipotent One riding on the heaven of heavens, giving the sea His decree, piling the strata of the everlasting hills. But God, reading a parable to His people, as He keeps watch over the lichen on the rock, or the lily on the mountain side; tempering His wind to the fragile flower as it trembles on the lip of the Alpine glacier; following the timid bird to its cleft; feeding the young raven's brood; noting the fall of the sparrow.

And then, turning from the tiniest objects in the material creation--from the grass and the lilies and the fowls of the air, to the humblest and lowest of His human family, He says, "Fear not! you are of more value." On that memorable night, when Abraham was led out to contemplate the stars of the skies as the silent expositors of Divine grace and mercy, the future words of the Psalmist might have formed the natural expression of his feelings--"Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Ps. 145:13). But the succeeding utterances in the same Psalm would be the more appropriate exclamation on the part of his grandson as he awoke from his angel vision--"The Lord upholds all that fall; and raises up all those that be bowed down" (ver. 14).

But there was another higher and nobler typical verity unfolded, partially at all events, to Jacob by that night-dream. Abraham, in the scene and sacrifice of Moriah, "beheld Messiah's day afar off and was glad." Though we cannot think it possible that his grandchild--the heir of the promise--could have grasped the full and glorious reality, surely we may well believe that an impressive picture had, at least in dim outline, been presented to him of the crowning blessing of the great covenant bound up in his family, and in the faith of whose provisions he was henceforth to live and at last to die. Here, also, as in the primary lesson of the dream to which we have just referred, there was more than a personal revelation. It was a parable-vision for the Church of God in all time to come, of "the

King in His beauty and the land that was very far off."

We may regard the Patriarch, in his loneliness and isolation, as a type of the sinner severed from the home of his heavenly Father; an accusing conscience within, the terrors of a violated law behind, a dark eternity before! Wide, apparently insuperable, is the distance which separates him from God. Is there no way by which that distance can be curtailed--that intervening space abridged? Is he consigned forever to that pillow of despair, to gaze on heights hopelessly unattainable? Is he to sigh in vain for a gleam in the lowering clouds, for the whisper of a voice of love to dispel the environing gloom?

Lo! a firm pathway of communication is disclosed, with its base on the earth, and its summit in the skies--"a new and living way of access into the holiest of all." It is "Jesus Christ evidently set forth." The ladder or staircase had its BASE on the earth. He who is the Divine Antitype was, and is, partaker of our nature--"found in fashion as a man;"--"made like unto His brethren." But "the top of it reached to Heaven," and was lost in the blaze of glory--for His name is "Immanuel," "God with us." It is the connection of that bright pathway with both worlds which makes it so perfect. It would be of no avail--no comfort were it otherwise. By the union of Manhood with Godhead, Jesus is a complete Mediator--all we need, living or dying, for time or for eternity. "I am the Way," is His own gracious utterance--God's way to the sinner, and the sinner's way to God. In His Deity mighty to save; in His humanity mighty to pity and compassionate.

Let us fix our thoughts yet a little longer on these peerless truths--for they may well be regarded as the central point of the Bethel-vision--at all events as they present themselves to us in their fuller antitypical significance--"God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself;"--suggestive alike of the divine Person of the Redeemer and the completeness of His work. There is no gap or crevice in the luminous pathway. It forms one glorious whole, stretching continuously up to its resting-place in the celestial heights. The lamentation of another Patriarch, no, the long drawn sigh of humanity itself, seems in that symbol to be answered--"Neither is there any arbitrator between us who can lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33).

Jesus is such a "Arbitrator." While the hymn of adoring Christendom reaches its climax in the ascription--"You are the King of glory, O Christ! You are the everlasting Son of the Father." It can add also to the loftier strain, that complementary ascription which carries so soothing a cadence to the heart of all He came to redeem--"When you took upon yourself to deliver man, you did not abhor the Virgin's womb." "A MAN shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Is. 32:2). Had He been God alone, we would have been dazzled with His ineffable majesty; we could not have gazed unblinded on that countenance which is "as the sun shines in his strength." His immaculate holiness, His burning purity, His unbending rectitude, His resistless power, would have awed and confounded us in our dealings with One so infinitely removed. But let us rejoice! the ladder which has its top in the brightness around the throne, has its base resting on the platform of earth. He is "THE MAN Christ Jesus." The very lowliness of His humanity, also, seems shadowed forth in the type--whether that may have been the vision of a familiar 'ladder,' or the rough boulders of the desert piled one upon another. Had uninspired poetry been left to fill in the dream, and to delineate the pathway for the God of high heaven to hold converse with His creatures, it would in all likelihood have despised the commonness of the revealed symbol. Golden steps, glittering with sapphire and emerald, would have been taken as more befitting "altar stairs" conducting into the upper sanctuary. But in the vision given, we behold the significant emblem of Him, who, often like the Patriarch that night at Bethel, was houseless and homeless--no couch but the cold earth, no canopy but the sky--His unpillowed head often denied the rest of the lowest of His creation.

Yes, thanks be to God, we can grasp, in its fullness, the comforting truth which Jacob could at best have so dimly and inadequately apprehended. We can exult in the revealed assurance, that in the bosom of that lowly Christ of Nazareth there slumbers the tenderness of humanity. Not a pang can I endure, not a temptation can I encounter, but He has encountered and endured the same. The Great Being who counts the number of the stars, counts also the number of my sorrows, for He felt

them all Himself. I can think in all my trials, Jesus was tried; in all my sufferings, Jesus suffered; in all my tears, "Jesus wept." I can love Him as a brother while I adore Him as a God. And then, when once more tracing the pathway up to the heights of glory, I remember that He, "who for us men and for our salvation became incarnate," was "Jehovah's Fellow" (Zech. 13:7)--that His nature is Infinite, His years Eternity, His counsels Immutability, His arm Omnipotence, His wisdom Searchless, His love Unchanging--on that ladder I may fearlessly climb--on that ladder I may fearlessly trust my everlasting destinies. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich" (rich in all the attributes of Godhead--rich in all the plenitude of divine perfections), "yet for our sakes He became poor" (stooped to the lowest depths of humiliation), "that you through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). We may appropriately use the words, regarding this wondrous night-dream, spoken at a long subsequent age by one whose eyes had gazed on no symbolic vision, but on the Adorable Antitype--"The God of JACOB, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus" (Acts 3:13).

"Unutterable love!" is the exclamation of a pious and learned traveler, as he writes in his tent pitched on the Patriarch's dreamland--"Oh, unutterable love, which has given, in the 'Son of Man,' an imperishable ladder, not only for Bethel and for Israel, but for all the ends of the earth."

But the vision may be made suggestive of other great truths. It has been rightly regarded as typically unfolding the method--as well as the means of salvation.

While we never can forget that it is Jesus who is at once "the Alpha and the Omega"--"the Author and the Finisher;"--that there is none other way by which the sinner can be saved and obtain entrance within the heavenly gate; still, the ladder must be climbed. Hence the figures employed to illustrate faith in the Redeemer seem beautifully to meet in the symbol of the dream--a "fleeing" to Christ--a "laying hold" of Christ--a "leaning" on Christ--a "trusting" in Christ--a "following on to know" Christ; and at last, when the summit is reached, a "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Hopelessly could we look for salvation without "the way of access;" and yet as hopelessly, with that way of access, could we attain

the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, if we neglected to make the upward ascent. True religion is no mere mystic, passive dream of devotion--a gazing in rapt reverence, and no more, on the great mystery of Godliness. Its best definition is a 'doing' as well as a 'being.'

That is a spurious faith which is inoperative; which cannot stand the crucial test of "working by love, purifying the heart and overcoming the world." Indeed the more simple and real the belief in Christ, the more unmistakably will it evidence itself by earnest aspirations after holiness, and conformity to the Divine will and image. "Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). The way to heaven may be beside us--Salvation is offered to us--God standing, as in the Bethel vision, at the portals of glory, addressing us with the voice of pardoning mercy; but never let us cherish the delusion that these heights may be scaled and the gates reached, by remaining, like the Patriarch, slumbering at the ladder's base.

Two ideas, more prominent than others, seem to be brought before us by the symbol.

The first is that of **SUSTAINED EFFORT**. Later inspired writers, as if with the Bethel vision in view, thus exhort in a variety of figure--"Work out your own salvation"--"Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure"--"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest"--"Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." It is the strenuousness of the combatant pressing on to the goal. It is the fortitude of the warrior with every muscle nerved for victory. It is the toil of the climber scaling the giddy battlements. It is the watchful vigilance of the sentinel who knows that one unguarded moment may be surrender and death. "The immortal garland," says Milton in one of his noble sentences, "is not to be won without dust and heat."

The second idea, one almost involved in that of effort, is **PROGRESS**. There is no possibility of standing still in the divine life. This is, or ought at least, to be the motto of every Christian climber, "Not as though I had already attained." His eye must be upwards, and his footsteps onwards. No leisure for halting, no loitering or lingering in the ascent. Every day should find him farther from earth and nearer heaven. The history of all



Pilgrims to the Celestial City should be that of the worshipers of old crowding to the earthly Jerusalem--"They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion, appears before God" (Ps. 84:7).

A saintly patriarch of the last generation, in answer to the question 'when he would rest?' significantly replied, "I shall rest in Eternity." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" ( Rev. 2:10). Elijah's chariot of fire, seated in which he peacefully went up from his tempestuous career on earth to the stormless skies and scenes of "the Better Country," is a true and beautiful emblem of the believer's calm departure, when the good fight has been fought--the course finished, the victory won--repose on the night of battle. But more appropriate to the Christian's daily spiritual history, is the emblem revealed over the couch of the Bethel dreamer--an ascending pathway--demanding toil, labor, progress; a pathway not to be admired and contemplated, but to be earnestly pursued--advancing from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue, from attainment to attainment; breathing an increasingly purer atmosphere, as earth is left behind in dimmer perspective.

Reader, whether young or old, whether at life's morning or mid day, have you fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you? Or, turning away from this glorious road, are you contented with the poor ascent by which thousands reach their ideal heaven (their only heaven), that of the present? We do not now speak of those baser ladders, scaled by not a few, who are all unscrupulous as to how their sensuous Mohammedan paradise, with its purple, and fine linen, and golden lures, is reached--it may even be by means of cringing flattery or villain imposture--their advancing steps (what is misnamed promotion) sometimes paved with the tears of the widow and the orphan. We speak rather to those who, it may be with fair moral characters and average worldly reputations, are yet indifferent and careless regarding "the one thing needful; whose sole dream is that of earthly success; who have no thought and no desire to knock at better gates, and to aspire at nobler climbings; who are lying pillowed on this cold world--dreamers like Jacob, dreaming and dreaming on, even though whispering voices from the earth itself, are heard continually proclaiming, "The world passes away."

As immortal beings you are not where you should be! You have within

you aspirations after the Infinite, and, with these capacities, you cannot be happy until you have found that Infinite One as your portion. We do not pity the insect creeping at our feet. It is in its native element. It was earth-born, and therefore its happiness is in earth. But the wounded eagle that has been cleaving the skies, mounting with bold pinion, if it be seen with broken wing fluttering and struggling on the ground, we pity it. Why? because it has fallen from its native element. That child of the sun--that winged Lucifer--has been hurled, disabled to the dust from its freeborn soarings. While the worm creates no pity, that fallen monarch does!

Such, also, ought to be the sorrow and sympathy for every human soul born for God and eternity yet oblivious to its lofty destinies. "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life." If yours still be early years--the starting point of existence, with the ascent still before you--all the more need and urgency to leave the fleeting, the counterfeit, the illusory, the temporal, and to aspire to the glory and grandeur of being a climber for immortality! "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall--but those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Is. 40:30, 31).

And if any who trace these lines feel repressed by a sadder deterrent and hindrance--a consciousness of the self-forfeiture of Salvation and its blessings by reason of indulged sin; that they have thereby rendered themselves, so to speak, ineligible for attempting the heavenward ascent; let them not be guilty of seeming to create impediment when God has erected none. Rather let past misdeeds and shortcomings serve as incentives for fresh efforts and aspirations after the holy, the good, and the true. Let them listen to the words of the greatest of the Christian Fathers, as they are thus paraphrased and nobly expanded by the American poet--

"Saint Augustine too truly said,  
That of our vices we can frame  
A ladder, if we will but tread  
Beneath our feet each deed of shame!

"All common things--each day's events,  
That with the hour begin and end;  
Our pleasures and our discontents  
Are rounds by which we may ascend.

"The low desire, the base design  
That makes another's virtues less;  
The revel of the giddy wine,  
And all occasions of excess!

"The longing for ignoble things,  
The strife for triumph more than truth,  
The hardening of the heart that brings  
Irreverence for the dreams of youth!

"All thoughts of sin--all evil deeds  
That have their roots in thoughts of ill;  
Whatever hinders or impedes  
The action of the nobler will.

"We have no wings, we cannot soar;  
But we have feet to scale and climb  
By slow degrees--by more and more--  
The cloudy summits of our time.

"The mighty pyramids of stone  
That, wedge-like, cleave the desert airs,  
When nearer seen and better known  
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

"The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight;  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night.

"Nor deem the irrevocable past  
As wholly wasted--wholly vain,  
If, rising on its wrecks at last,

To something nobler we attain."

Finally, let us all seek to be animated by the thought of multitudes who have already scaled the steps of the Heavenly stair, who are now lining the battlements of the sky, witnessing to its security and strength. Many of these were once weak and helpless and perishing as we. Yes, and by that Divinely provided way of access, the chief of sinners have reached their crowns. The thief on the cross is there--he stoops to tell that none can climb too late. The woman from the city is there--she stoops to tell that none can climb too vile. Saul of Tarsus is there--he stoops to tell what God's grace can do in transforming the blaspheming persecutor into the devoted apostle and the glorious martyr. Prophets call us! Saints call us! Departed friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus, call us! They testify that there is still an open door of welcome--room for all--grace for all--blood for all!--crowns for all! Can we decline the summons of the mighty multitude gone to colonize the many mansions? Let us not be slothful, but "followers of them (the true seed of Jacob), who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises!"

## **THE MINISTERING ANGELS**

"Creator of many servants who stand in the higher worlds, and who proclaim aloud with reverence the commands of the Living God, may Your Name be magnified forever! They are all of them lovely, chosen, and mighty."--Daily Jewish Morning Service.

"As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from earth to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down on it." Genesis 28:12

The exile at Bethel was not a stranger to the ministry of angels. Doubtless, one of the most memorable stories of early childhood,

rehearsed by the lips of his grandfather, would be that of the advent of celestial messengers at his tent door in "the plains of Mamre in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1). The grandson is now to become a personal spectator, in his night-vision, of these divine delegates from the upper sanctuary, thronging the staircase which rose above his couch of stone.

God has in all ages adapted the revelations of Himself to the character and circumstances of His people. To another fugitive of sterner mold, to whom reference has already been made--the bold-hearted Elijah--He manifested His presence in the earthquake and tempest, the fire and the whirlwind. To Jacob, until now the gentle domestic man, a tender home-flower unused to storms--ill-fitted, we may suppose, to grapple with the roughnesses of life, He reveals Himself in a dream of angels. Glorious spirits are sent to tend his lonely unsoled pillow. He beholds no symbols of terror. He listens only to the "still, small voice." So, also, at an after period of great strait and emergency in the Patriarch's history, when solace, comfort, and direction were greatly needed, we are told these same ambassadors of God, in double phalanx, again met him, "and he called the place Mahanaim (two hosts)" (Gen. 32:2). In the present case, a needful and merited rebuke may have been conveyed to the erring fugitive. The God of his fathers, and his own covenant God, would tell him that these messengers of Providence, with their divine ministrations, would accomplish his destiny better far than his own cunning plottings and crooked policy. How Jacob came ultimately to feel and to own this, see how at Peniel, twenty years after, he wrestled with a Mightier than any angel, though in angel-form, and would not let Him go unless he received a blessing! (Gen. 32:24.)

In the preceding pages, we have spoken of the wanderer as forming in his own person, on that memorable eventide, a type or picture of fallen humanity--man lying helpless on the outcast earth; while the ladder of salvation is let down to the pillow on which he slumbers, opening up a way of communication with the Heaven he had forfeited, and the God he had offended. The present chapter brings before us a new and interesting topic for consideration. The vision would seem to intimate that the human race, in cutting themselves off from fellowship with their Maker, had also been severed from all that was good, and holy, among the loftier

orders of intelligence. But Christ, "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven," has, by His incarnation and death, not only re-established a way of approach to the presence of the Holiest, and re-instated the lost in the divine favor, but He has also made, once more, the ministry of bright, pure, unfallen spirits possible to a sin-stricken world.

He Himself, in His enigmatical saying to Nathanael, is the best interpreter of the early type. For there can be no doubt that it is Jacob's dreamland and Jacob's radiant pathway which is referred to in the saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter (or as that may rather be rendered, 'from this time forth'), shall you see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man" (John 1:51). The Great Apostle still further expounds the same beautiful truth, that it is alone through the mediatorial work of the Redeemer, the sinner on earth and the angel in heaven can once more resume intermitted and forfeited fellowship. It is "by Him God the Father has reconciled all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20). "Who has raised us up together, and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (or "among the celestials") (Eph. 2:6). It is by Christ "you are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. 12:22).

Thus, then, as we see the angel shapes flitting up and down in the dream of the Patriarch, we may warrantably infer that to them is delegated some subordinate office, as agents in the economy of Redemption; or, in the words of Scripture, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

We learn, from the same source, the profound interest these bright spirits have taken, and are yet taking, in the gradual unfoldings of the Scheme of Grace, from the hour of creation's birth, when "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy," down to the time when they shall gather the immortal sheaves reaped by their sickles into the garner of heaven. Behold! as He whom that ladder typified came down to our world an Infant of days, angels heralded His birth, and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14). Behold them, the attendants in His sufferings; strengthening

Him after His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:11); supporting Him in His agony, and watching His dreadful struggle in the garden (Luke 22:43). Behold them in glistening clothing, the guardians of His vacant sepulcher, proclaiming His work finished and the victory won--"He is not here, He has risen, as He said" (Luke 24:4). Behold them in His triumphant ascension, forming a glorious retinue, conducting Him to His throne--"God's chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" (Ps. 68:17). And once more, when the Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father; when His throne shall be set, and the Books opened, "all His holy angels are to be with Him," as assessors on the Great day; gathering in the tares and the wheat (Matt. 25:31).

It opens up a more attractive theme still, to think of them as interested in the salvation of each member of the redeemed family; the incessant attendants of each pilgrim-climber, from the hour when he first plants his foot on the ladder until they leave him in glory. It is interesting to think of them in connection with the words of the Redeemer Himself--and in harmony with the legend of the Jews we have previously noticed, as in some mysterious way keeping watch and ward over individual souls--"Their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

It is interesting to think that they are present, and no unconcerned spectators, in the mighty conflict waging, which issues in the soul's conversion--when they carry up to heaven the tidings of a sinner weeping at the cross, and which causes their brother-angels to rejoice before the throne; from that moment encamping round about him, watching his every footstep in the unseen yet stupendous conflict with the powers of darkness. In the magnificent Temple-visions of Isaiah, they are represented as swift of wing; ever ready alike for lofty and for lowly service (Is. 6:2). Now they come to some humble shepherds keeping watch over their flocks in the hills of Judah; now it is to unloose the chains from a captive apostle; now it is to whisper into the ear of another in the midnight sea words of heart-cheer and safety; now it is to do battle against demon-passion and degrading selfishness; now it is to support the bereaved in their hour of sorrow, or to point to the healing virtue in some troubled Bethesda; or in the closing scenes of the pilgrimage,

waiting on by the death-couch, serenading it with "songs unheard by duller ears," ready to waft the spirit into the Savior's bosom; following the body to the grave; and watching the sleeping dust until the trumpet of the archangel quickens it into life.

In one of the most beautiful of modern poems, we have a succession of these "Angels of the stair of heaven" graphically depicted as descending to earth under the different designations of "the Angel of life"--"the Angel of joy"--"the Angel of pain," and "Angel of death;" and each in turn greeted with welcome on the part of the believer as the messenger of God. We can only find space to quote in a fragmentary form--

"Who is the angel that comes?

Life!

Let us not question what he brings,

Peace or strife,

Under the shade of his mighty wings.

"We will arise and go forth to greet him,

Singly, gladly with one accord--

'Blessed is he that comes

In the name of the Lord!

"Who is the angel that comes?

Joy!

Look at his glittering rainbow wings,

No alloy

Lies in the radiant gifts he brings.

"Soon he will leave us; but though for others

All his brightest treasures are stored--

'Blessed is he that comes

In the name of the Lord!

"Who is the angel that comes?

Pain!

Let us arise and go forth to greet him;

Not in vain

Is the summons come for us to meet him.

"Let us say still, while his bitter chalice

Slowly into our heart is poured--



'Blessed is he that comes  
In the name of the Lord!'

"Who is the angel that comes?  
Death!  
But do not shudder and do not fear;  
Hold your breath,  
For a kingly presence is drawing near.  
"Then let us, baring our hearts and kneeling,  
Sing while we wait the angel's sword--  
'Blessed is he that, comes  
In the name of the Lord!'"--A. Proctor

Manifold and multiform indeed, beyond what we can specify, may be the missions and services of these divine delegates to the family of God. It is easy to give rein to imagination on such a theme as this. The prose as well as the poetry of all countries, and of all creeds, has weaved out of it pleasing conceptions and fantasies. Take one such suggestion, though purely conjectural, from an old writer on sorrow. He is discoursing on that mysterious speculation which rises before the soul in its hours of bereavement--the cognisance which redeemed saints in glory have of those they have left behind in the valley of tears.

Who knows (is the hypothetical reflection to which we have referred)--but that these blessed "ladder angels" may be employed in embassies of fellowship between the still toiling and erring pilgrims below, and the ransomed friends and relatives above--bearing upwards the intelligence of all that would impart joy; keeping back all that would create sadness or dim the eye in a tearless world; carrying aloft the tidings of an earnest faith, calm resignation, loving self-sacrifice, noble strife with evil; but suppressing the revelation of unguarded moments, when the fortress may have surrendered--when the joints of the armor may have been pierced--the heavenly climber stumbled or fallen?

Nor can we omit to add one other conjecture that the holy traffic between heaven and earth, at present so concealed and mysterious, may expand in future and brighter times into wider and more visible manifestations; so that the agency we speak of now, may be regarded as a mere installment

of yet diviner and more frequent ministrations between these lofty beings and the redeemed tenants of a regenerated world.

We are aware that this "doctrine of angels," which has thus challenged a passing consideration in connection with the Patriarch, is regarded by some with suspicion. But although, as is well known, an interesting Bible truth has been diverted by the Church of Rome to dangerous and unscriptural uses, that is surely no justifiable reason for its being eliminated from the Protestant creed. A superstitious abuse of a revealed dogma should rather lead us to disentangle it from the perversions to which it has been subjected, and endeavor to restore it in its undoubted place in the spiritual Temple. The distortion of the doctrine was as early as Paul's time--"the worshiping of angels" evoked from him a solemn warning and protest (Col. 2:18, 19).

The Gnosticism, so prevalent in that early age, sought to incorporate Pagan mythology and Athenian philosophy with the Christian system. Among the false tenets thus held, was the alleged impossibility and presumption of approaching the Deity save through the intervention of angels. It was an easy transition from this, to the worship of these as mediators; and thus was necessarily imperilled one of the cardinal and foundation truths of the Gospel--the all-sufficiency of the intercessory work of the ONE only mediator. The Dream of Bethel puts the doctrine into its right place in "the proportion of faith." The angelic part of the vision is a mere accessory, not for a moment eclipsing or overshadowing the far loftier and grander verities therein set forth. Those burning spirits are no more than heavenly sentinels and messengers, pointing to the true means of ascent, and saying, "This is the way, walk in it." They are the mere satellites of the Great Central Sun--Christ Himself, the all and in all.

The same Scripture indeed, which sanctions belief in angelic agency, expressly prohibits the offering to them, in any shape, divine honors. It will be remembered that, when an inspired Apostle, in a moment of pardonable impulse, fell down in an act of worship at the feet of the angel, the offered devotion was at once rejected and repudiated--"Don't do that! I am your fellow-servant--(worship not me)--worship God" (Rev. 19:10). Oh! it is not angels that can give comfort to a sinner. Mary of old, as she entered her Lord's sepulcher, found herself in their presence. They

found her weeping; and, as has been well remarked, "how did they leave her? Weeping still." Yes! a Mightier than angels' hand is required to save a sinner's soul, and dry a sinner's tears, and speak peace to a sinner's bosom, and smooth a sinner's death pillow. The highest and holiest among the created "Sons of God" could not wipe away the guilt of a single transgression.

Let us close with the elevating, inspiring thought suggested by the foregoing considerations, the greatness and grandeur of the human destiny--the magnificence of the human temple even in its ruins. Sad, indeed, is humanity's fall! Terrible is the sinner's isolation! But it is the very contrast between the sleep on the desert boulder and the vision stretching overhead in vistas of golden light, which reveals the transcendent glory of salvation--the "translation" (as it is well called) "out of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col. 1:13); while the steps, rising to infinite heights, would seem to indicate the soul's capabilities for endless growth and expansion.

If there be one reader of these pages who sees in the lone Patriarch and his surroundings, only a too faithful picture of himself--exile, self-forfeiture, and outward gloom--it may be, even inward shame bordering on despair--here is a Gospel vision disclosed in the midst of earth's most desponding seasons. These bright inhabitants of the World of spirits, who, when the sun had set, rang the vesper chimes of hope in the ear of that one lone worshiper in his desert sanctuary, are waiting to do the same for you. With holy vigils and holy eyes they are looking down upon you; the sentinels of your slumbers. They tell, that you are not, as you suppose, disowned, unwatched, forgotten--still less surrendered to the spell and sway of the powers of darkness. No, rather, that the God they serve has given them "charge concerning you, to keep you in all your ways." They are commissioned, in the supreme crisis-hour of danger, to track your steps to the brink of the giddy precipice, down whose serrated rocks you might inevitably be hurled, but for their loving supervision. They would unfold to you the horror of the downward road, with its deflection from honor and virtue, and the bliss of that pathway of divine light and love, by which countless multitudes which no man can number have already entered within the gate into the heavenly city. By loving, and

by doing, what is "true and honest and of good report;" by cultivating and maintaining purity of heart, integrity of purpose, unselfishness of aim, consecration of life, you are thereby "entertaining angels unawares." Moreover, if, like the Pilgrim of Bethel, you have existence, with its struggles and emergencies, mainly still before you; the greater is the call to forestall these, by appropriating the divine realities of the vision.

It is a beautiful idea, which either poetry or painting has somewhere embalmed, the Angels of human life represented as standing, not by the brink of the full-volumed rushing river, but rather at its earliest fountain-head, as it trickles through the reeds and moss and gleaming pebbles of its source, there helping the youthful travelers to gird up their loins and to ease themselves of their burdens. Begin your pilgrimage, not, as with many, by an ignoble descent to darkness and death, scaring away the angels that are ready to beset you with their environing wings; but rather, by a glorious climbing of an upward path lined with immortal forces, who are doing battle, and will continue to the end to do battle for your soul against the powers of evil. "The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the Lord is good--blessed is the man that trusts in Him" (Ps. 34:7, 8).

"God's own children pure and holy,  
You the messengers He sends;  
'Tis an ever sweet remembrance  
That you are our guardian friends--  
That you watch our life-long journey,  
That, unseen, you often are near,  
Holy thoughts and deeds to strengthen,  
Or to dry the mourner's tear.

"Who would not retreat in terror  
From the evil yet undone;  
Who not turn with shame and mourning  
From the evil course begun;  
Who would e'er be found forgetful  
Of his calling and his vow,  
If the thought had only risen,  
'Angels are among us now'?

"Rise, my soul, in heart to meet them  
When this world would claim you fast;  
Rise among these freeborn spirits  
When her coils are round you cast.  
Be courageous! 'tis your journey  
Out of darkness into light;  
God and angels are around you--  
Tremble not, but rise and fight."  
--Hymns from the Land of Luther.

## **THE GOD ABOVE THE LADDER**

"Jacob sleeps in the open field, exposed to the attacks of wild beasts and marauders, protected only by the Guardian of Israel."--Kalisch.

"God found him in Bethel, even the Lord God of Hosts; the Lord is his memorial."--Hosea 12:4, 5.

At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone for a pillow and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from earth to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down on it.

An behold, at the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I will give it to you and your descendants. Genesis 28:11-13

There was something grander, more glorious still, awaiting the Patriarch than a heavenly staircase, and the footsteps of celestial messengers. "Behold a ladder!" "Behold the angels!" But, yet another "Behold" is

added, to reach the climax.

The Lord of angels, in some majestic, mysterious form, was seen by the desert-dreamer at the summit--"And, behold, the Lord stood above it." At another eventful occasion of his history, delegates from the spirit-land met him. But in the present instance, in the remarkable words of the prophet Hosea, quoted among our motto-verses, "GOD found him at Bethel!"

Delightful and comforting, indeed, must have been the first part of the dream to the weary, downcast fugitive--the luminous ascending way thronged not with avenging angels, but with radiant forms keeping loving watch over his pillow. Now, however, he receives proof that he is the object of a love and regard mightier far than that which ministering seraphim could render. The guardianship of the heavenly host is eclipsed by "a brightness which excels,"--the vigils of the great Jehovah Himself--"The Lord is your keeper." It is not the white-robed Levites of the upper sanctuary on whom he now gazes. The true Holy of Holies is unveiled to his enraptured gaze. He sees what Onkelos renders in his paraphrase, "The glory of the Lord." If we have spoken of the angels' visit on the plains of Mamre as one of the stories to which childhood listened in the tent at Kirjath-Arba--another, more memorable still, rehearsed by the same revered lips, would now rise before his mental vision--that of the averted sacrifice on Mount Moriah; when no mere created angel's voice was heard arresting the sacrificial knife, but the magnificent accents of Jehovah Himself--"Abraham, Abraham!"--when, in token of heart gratitude for his loved one's deliverance, the aged man called the place Jehovah-Jireh; as it is written, 'in the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen.' (Or, as that is rendered in the Septuagint, On the mountain Jehovah appeared.")

Jacob could now say the same. These heights of Bethel were, in his heart's holiest sanctuary of thought, consecrated for evermore; for he had for the first time "seen God face to face, and his life was preserved." "He heard the words of God and saw the vision of the Almighty" (Num. 24:16). Often before, in gazing on this beautiful world both by day and night, he had assuredly thought of it, in some magnificent way, as roofed in and canopied by the Divine Presence and protection. But that Presence had

not as yet been fully realized by him as that of a personal God. Had it been so, he would doubtless have lived and acted very differently. The base-born plots and deeds of earlier and recent years would have been more scrupulously shunned. The concept of the heart-searching and thought-trying Jehovah, ever near, and very near, gazing down upon him, "spying out all his ways," would have rendered former sophistries and sinister dealings well-near impossible.

From this hour onwards, however, there is a new page in his spiritual history. Not that the evil tendencies and passions of his nature were eradicated and destroyed. Far from it. Those who choose to trace his after life will find the old giant forces ever and anon reappearing--manifesting their latent and perilous sway--the subtlety and finessing; the keen, shrewd eye for outwitting, and "making the best of both worlds." But new counteracting principles now asserted their influence. The sight of the Invisible formed henceforth a deterrent power in many a season of strong temptation. In his times of weakness and lowliness and recurrent worldliness, the stony stair of the desert would rise to view, alike as a rebuke of his lapses, and an incentive to nobler and heavenlier ways. He would doubtless say of Bethel and its vision, what the Psalmist, in an hour of spiritual depression, said of localities specially associated with experiences of the Divine favor, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember You from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? hope you in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 42:6, 11).

Solemn, in the case of each one of us, as with the Patriarch, is our first meeting with the Almighty. We do not refer to the revelation (always to be reverted to with reverence) made of Him in the nursery, or on the mother's knee--but we speak of subsequent seasons--crisis-hours in life, for which these earlier teachings may have paved the way; when summoned, it may be by startling providential dispensations, into "the secret of His tabernacle," and led to cry out with another old-world Pilgrim of the desert, whose name has more than once been already mentioned--"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my

eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

Hitherto (as probably with Jacob), God has been no more than a distant abstraction--an incomprehensible Being, invested with certain august attributes which only seemed to render Him more dreadful and inapproachable. We have had our dream of Him; but not the dream of the Psalmist David, or of the Evangelist John, as with eagle wings they seem to soar into divine fellowship. We thought of Him, it may be, as childhood is at times unhappily taught to picture Him, with His dwelling above the stars, the thunder His voice, the clouds the dust of His feet, walking on the wings of the wind, shrouded in the dread mystery of Eternity. But now we have had disclosed to us the present God, actually in view; standing above the ladder in His glorious personality--the living One, the controlling One, yes, the loving and sympathizing One--"the Shepherd of the Stone of Israel."

"Clouds were Your chariots, and I knew them not,  
They came in solemn thunders to my ear;  
I thought that far away You had forgot,  
But You were by my side, and heaven was near."

"Most men," as it has been expressed by Robertson in "Sermons," in words of great force and pathos, "know nothing beyond what they see. Their lovely world is all in all to them; its outer beauty, not its hidden loveliness. Prosperity, struggle, sadness, it is all the same. In all this strange, deep world they never meet, or but for a moment, the Spirit of it all, who stands at their very side. And it is exactly the opposite of this that makes a Christian. Move where he will, there is a Thought and Presence which he cannot put aside. He is haunted forever by the Eternal Mind. God looks out upon him from the clear sky, and through the thick darkness--is present in the raindrop that trickles down the branches, and in the tempest that crushes down the forest. A living Redeemer stands beside him, goes with him, talks with him, as a man with his friend. The emphatic description of a life of spirituality is, 'Enoch walked with God;' and it seems to be one reason why a manifestation of God was given us in the flesh, that this Livingness of God might be more distinctly felt by us." We may be content, while the world is bright, and plans are prospering, and the pulse beats strong, with the mere superficial creed--



acknowledgment of the existence of the God with whom we have to do. But each one of us must be brought at some time into close contact--face to face with Him. Whatever dim and uncertain meaning the patriarch of Uz attached to his own words, we assuredly may say--shall it be with joy or with trembling?--"Yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Other hours of personal dealing with the Almighty One we may evade. There is one we cannot. It is that most solemn--that most lonely of times and seasons, the dreadful meeting-place between the irreparable past and the eternal future; when we come to be wrenched from all created objects of interest; when earthly voices grow fainter, and earthly presences dimmer; when, the feverish distractions of the world over, we stand waiting to have the gates of death unbarred, and to pass into the Infinite vision! What will avail us, if we have never, until then, reverently listened to the voice of Him, who, through long misspent years and forfeited opportunities, has been addressing us from the heights of glory?

On the other hand, how happy are they who, through all the events and vicissitudes of chequered life, have been able to keep the eye of faith firmly fixed on this God above the ladder--God at the summit of His own creation, directing and controlling all that befalls both His Church collectively, and believers individually.

You that are just commencing the all-momentous life-journey, seek especially to carry that lofty elevating truth with you from the very outset of the pilgrimage, that high above the stony stair is the searching eye of the All-Seeing One. The angels of the Patriarch's dream, (if we make them, as they are sometimes considered, the types and symbols of Providence,) are in His hand, under His control, doing His bidding, "hearkening to the voice of His word." It recalls a kindred vision, given at a later time of Hebrew history, to the prophet Zechariah--"I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom (of the valley); and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white" (Zech 1:8). What is this motley retinue, but providences--the varied dealings of God with His chosen; varied in their hues, "red, speckled, and white"? White--those whose meaning is clear. Speckled--those whose design is not so patent or easily discerned. Red--those which seem to suggest deep gashes, bleeding

wounds--dealings which are mysterious and incomprehensible. But mark, they are all "behind" the divine Horseman of the vision. HE marshals, arranges, controls these subordinate retainers. They can lop no branch of the myrtle-trees. They can discharge no dart of affliction, until He gives the commission. He comes between the myrtle trees (His own people) and these "ministers who do His pleasure." He is, to all that myrtle-grove in the earthly valley, "a shelter from the storm and a covert from the tempest."

Oh, joyous assurance! God foremost among the horsemen; God high above the ladder! No, represented in Jacob's symbolic vision as not 'seated' but 'standing!' He whose dwelling and watch-tower is in the everlasting hills, tracking our Pilgrim way in the upward toilsome climbing; warding off the demon foe who would seek to find us off our guard, and hurl us down; cheering us with the assurance, "I will not fail you nor forsake you." In dark and mysterious dispensations, He reveals Himself as holding the balances in His hands; proclaiming that He has not surrendered the rule of His world to chance or fate, the accidents of nature or the caprice of fortune; but that He has a wisely-ordered plan in all He does, however unexplainable and inscrutable to us. No more, that He personally loves us; and that when He chastises He chastises because He loves; making the true philosophy of Christian resignation that which was breathed of old from the depths of a crushed and broken heart--"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because YOU did it!" (Ps. 39:9.)

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls  
Whatever you fear;  
Round Him in calmest music rolls  
Whatever you hear.

"And that cloud itself, which now before you  
Lies dark in view,  
Shall, with beams of light from the inner glory,  
Be stricken through."

"Let us seek to grasp," says a master in Israel, "the true notion of Providence, for in it there is peace and deep repose of soul. Life has often been compared to a drama. Now in a good drama there is one plot,

variously evolved by incidents of different kinds, which, until the last act, show only entanglement and confusion. Vice has its temporary triumphs, virtue its temporary depressions. What of that? You know it will come right in the end--Life is God's great drama--It is on a gigantic scale--There seems to be entanglements, perplexities, interruptions, confusions, contradictions without end; but you may be sure there is one ruling thought, one master-design to which all these are subordinate--You know that the mind which organized this drama is Wisdom. You know more, you know that it is Love. Then of its ending grandly, wisely, nobly, lovingly, infinitely well for them who love God, there can be no doubt."

Let every climber of the ladder, (all the more so if youth be still nerving the arm, and years have ploughed no furrow on the brow) take home these thoughts of surpassing comfort. Believe it--even what may at first sight be regarded as hindrances and impediments in the upward ascent, may only, after all, be part of the plan and purpose of which I have spoken, of that "Shepherd of the stony pillow." Trust Him. The very voices of the night, sounding like the moan of the tempest, may turn out to be the disguised yet tender "voices of God," calling away from all earthly props, to mount with greater singleness of eye and ardor of aim the alone ladder of safety and peace--upwards, onwards, heavenwards, homewards!

"Not yet, you know how I bid  
Each passing hour entwine  
Its grief or joy, its hope or fear,  
In one great love-design.

Nor how I lead you through the night  
By many a various way,  
Still upward to unclouded light,  
And onward to the day."

## JEHOVAH'S NAME

"O my Father! it seems to me sometimes, as if You forgot every other being, in order to think only of my faithless and ungrateful heart!"--  
Madame Guyon.

"And those who know Your name will put their trust in You."--Ps. 9:10.

At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father, Isaac."  
Genesis 28:13

The theme of our last, forming as it does the climax of the vision, was suggestive of truths so solemn and momentous, that we may be pardoned for prolonging and expanding, under this new heading, the same topic. It admits of a still higher Gospel and spiritual application.

"What is Your Name?" was the urgent interrogation of Jacob, twenty years later, when he was alone at midnight grappling with the mysterious Presence, in the deep gorge of the Jabbok. Doubtless it was the same question which rose now in the mind of the Dreamer as he beheld the majestic Form at the summit of the stony ascent. The long familiar, and yet, in another sense, the only partially realized, God of the Tent and the Altar was now before him in the revealed majesty of His glory. How natural the silent promptings of the newly-illuminated soul, even though he gave no audible expression to them. 'Who are YOU?' "Tell me YOUR Name?"

The answer, or rather the voluntary declaration, was immediately given-- "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac." It is worthy of special note, that it is the incommunicable name of JEHOVAH which is here used. More than that, this holy designation--so holy, that the Jews came scrupulously to avoid, as they still do, the very mention of it as too dreadful and hallowed for mortal lips--is only on this and on one other occasion employed by God in the revelation of Himself--that other, being at one of His earliest interviews with Abraham, when He ratified to the patriarch His grant of the covenant land (Gen. 15:7). In subsequent

personal revelations, the title of El-Shaddai (God Almighty) is adopted; the same word which last fell on Jacob's ears, on leaving the Beersheba home, when his father's voice was heard pronouncing the parting benediction "God Almighty bless you" (Gen. 28:3).

It is of great importance and interest to advert to this specific name employed by the God above the ladder, as it gives a beautiful unity and consistency to the type we have been unfolding. Some learned writers hold, we think on substantial grounds, that the designation of Jehovah, employed in patriarchal communications, has reference to the first Person in the ever-blessed Trinity; while the El-Shaddai (the Almighty One, invested also with the attributes of Deity) denotes the delegated "messenger of the Covenant." In harmony with most; indeed nearly all ancient expositors, we have assumed the vision of the Patriarch to be a prefiguration of the great coming Redemption; and while the ladder forms a symbolic representation of the El-Shaddai as the Divine Way to the Father--in the Jehovah standing at the summit, we have the similar figurative representation of the adorable Father Himself--the glorious "Revealer;" the supreme "I am:"--"God in Christ."

How cheering to Jacob would be the first accents emanating from the Being on whose Form he now gazed in trembling emotion, and who announced His name as the "Jehovah-God of Abraham your father." And it was not only Jehovah, made known as very near--looking down upon the very pillow on which he slept--but the God also who had a tender cognisance of those nearest and dearest to Him--the Lord whose eye was at the same moment on the heath of Bethel and on the tents of Beersheba--"The God of Abraham your father." How, at once, would memory begin to re-traverse the hours and scenes of childhood and youth, and recall the manifold story of Divine grace which must often have fallen from the lips of his saintly grandfather--that grandfather whose body slept in the cave at Machpelah, but whose spirit seemed to be still in the presence of that Almighty One he had so faithfully served on earth. For the words of the Divine Speaker are not 'I was,' but "I AM the God of your father Abraham." "The God" (as Christ's own interpretation expounds it) "not of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32).

Could Jacob wish for more? The whole vision was a reassuring one--just

at the time, also, when he urgently needed such help and invigoration. At the later, darker experience of his history, it was God--the 'Dreadful,' the 'Mysterious,' with whom he came in contact, wrestling with Him as if in a life and death struggle; indeed leaving him maimed in the conflict. Now, it was God the Protector--God the Forgiver--the God who, by varied personal acts of condescension and kindness, had showered blessings on the household of his relatives--the Jehovah of the "everlasting Covenant, well ordered in all things and sure;" "the Shepherd of the stone of Israel:"--the same God who was most fully revealed to him at the close of all; when, with the word 'Salvation' on his tongue, and probably reverting to this earliest vision of it, he was ready to die.

All that, has been noted now regarding the Patriarch and this 'revelation of Jehovah,' may be transferred to ourselves. Most beautifully, and with a deep insight into human experience, has it been said, "We move through a world of mystery, and the deepest question is, 'What is the Being that is ever near, sometimes felt, never seen--that which has haunted us from childhood with a dream of something surpassingly lovely, which has never yet been realized--that which sweeps through the soul at times as a desolation, like the blast from the wings of the Angel of Death, leaving us stricken and silent in our loneliness--that which has touched us in our tenderest point, and the flesh has quivered with agony, and our mortal affections have shriveled up with pain--that which comes to us in aspirations of nobleness, and conceptions of superhuman excellence.'

Shall we say 'It,' or 'He'? What is It? Who is He? Those anticipations of Immortality and God, what are they? Are they the mere throbbings of my own heart, heard and mistaken for a living something beside me? Are they the sound of my own wishes, echoing through the vast void of nothingness? or shall I call them God, Father, Spirit, Love? A living Being within me or outside me? Tell me Your Name, you dreadful mystery of Loveliness; that is the struggle of all earnest life." (Robertson's Sermons, Vol. i p. 51.)

The revelation is made to us--

I. "I AM"--"I am Jehovah." Jehovah bending down from the heights of heaven over this ladder of salvation; every step in the ladder (rock-like)

an inviolable promise. JEHOVAH your covenant God! Not like the fabled king of gods and men on Olympus, only on rare occasions coming down to mortals from his realm of drowsy light, armed with the lightning and thunderbolt. Not like the God of the modern philosopher who has stamped on His world certain immutable, though profound laws, assigning pathways and orbits to the planets, filling the quiver of the sun with golden arrows, giving the sea its tidal decrees, painting the prismatic colors on the rainbow, piling earth's strata upwards from primeval granite, appointing the seasons to be the four evangelists of nature; but who, as "the Great Unknowable," has retired behind the visible curtain into a pavilion of awe and darkness, and left the vast machine to its own complex evolutions and revolutions. Not the God (though that be true also) who holds the scroll of the future in His hand, in which are inscribed the destinies of nations, but who has no time to care for the individual need, or to support the solitary soul trembling on the verge of temptation. Not the God of many a modern Church system--the inexorable avenger, the stern taskmaster "reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not sowed," exacting impossible sacrifices, and imposing unrighteous burdens. But, the ever-present, never absent; ever-living, ever-loving, personal Jehovah--who "dwells in light, and with whom is no darkness at all;" "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;" whose supervision is not fitful, capricious, inconsistent; but faithful as that of a father, and tender, "as one whom his mother comforts." "He that keeps you will not slumber; behold He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Truly "the name" of this Lord (Jehovah) "is a strong tower" running into which we are eternally safe (Prov. 18:10). We can echo the refrain of Hezekiah's great hymn of victory--"The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of JACOB (the God of the Bethel-dreamer), is our refuge" (Ps. 46:7).

But we have not to deal on this peerless subject in mere vague statements and generalities. We can understand, in more unmistakable language, what God means, when He says, "I am Jehovah," "Your God." A full unfolding of His character has been given to us. The question has been answered--"What is Your Name?"

That manifestation, need I say, was made in the cities and villages and

plains of Palestine, by a gracious Being, eighteen centuries ago, clothed in mortal form. That covenant land, on a portion of which Jacob slept, received, in diverse ways, an ampler revelation than by dream or vision of Jacob's God. Now it is at Cana with its associations of joy. Now it is at Nain with its memories of sorrow. Now it is on the Mount of Beatitudes with its mingled code of inflexible ethics and loving benedictions. Now it is while calming the disciples tossed on the stormy lake; now it is when feeding the hungry seated on the desert grass. Now it is at hallowed Bethany; now in the hush of the Paschal Supper room; now in the moonlight of Gethsemane; now amid the mysterious pangs of Calvary; now in the farewell words breathed on the Mount of Ascension.

Yes! To the eager cry of inquiring humanity, "What is God?" "Show us His face;" "tell us His name;" "disclose to us His moral attributes;"--the dark, uncertain, unsatisfactory guesses of heathendom are not what we have to rely upon, with their incarnations of terror and vengeance, often of impurity and sin. These queries are answered by listening to the utterances and beholding the deeds of Him who is 'the Image of the Invisible God,' the covenant El-Shaddai of Jacob's vision--"manifest in the flesh"--"Immanuel"--"God with us."

As we track His holy footsteps, we hearken, indeed, ever and anon to words of warning and vengeance against the persistent scorers of grace and mercy. But His pathway is truly, from first to last, one of gentleness and goodness. He scatters blessings wherever He goes--giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; calling the shunned leper to His side; wiping the tear from the eye of penitence; whispering forgiveness in the ear of the sin-stricken; breathing hope into the weary of life; healing the broken in heart; reclaiming the fallen, the despairing, the lost. Even when disciples would send away with the churlish word and the rejected petition, He opens wide the arms of His mercy. The Good Samaritan of His own parable, He finds humanity lying bruised, wounded--half-dead. Stooping over the mangled frame, He pours in wine and oil.

Such is GOD! "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." "He is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person." "No man has seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him." "We beheld His glory," says



the most favored of all the spectators of Incarnate Deity, "the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Both the closing statements of this latter verse unfold a name unrevealed to the patriarchal dispensation, and reserved for us, on whom the ends of the world have come. Christ is the revelation of the FATHER. "My Father and your Father, My God and your God." "He that has seen Me, has seen the Father. From henceforth you know Him and have seen Him." Jesus, in His longing to allure the world back again to the God it had either misapprehended or rejected, seems to delight in interweaving that paternal name with parable, and miracle, and intercessory prayer, and last agony, and first Resurrection words. It was something more comforting and endearing still, than "the Shepherd of the stony pillow."

How many forfeit the joy, at all events of their spiritual privileges, by entertaining hard, false, unscriptural thoughts about the Almighty. In the case of not a few, it is to be feared that unjust and repelling views of the character of God (to repeat the remark made in the preceding chapter) are imparted in early training! By an inversion and perversion of Bible teaching, must not the well-meaning mother, in order to deter her child from sin, at times be convicted of revealing more of the 'shadow' than of the glorious 'brightness' of Him "who is light and in whom is no darkness at all"?

We do not, indeed, (God forbid), in the spirit of many modern systems, discard from our creed one cardinal aspect of the divine character--God the Holy, the Just, the Righteous, the True--the Guardian and Dispenser of laws based upon principles of everlasting rectitude. We dare not divest Scripture of its plainest meaning, by eliminating all that is retributive in the government of the Great Supreme.

But we speak now of those who, like Jacob, are gazing upon the God standing on the summit of the Heavenly stairs--God seen through the appointed way of salvation, "reconciling the world unto Himself." We speak of those who, in accepting the free and gracious offers of the great Redemption, behold every attribute of His nature magnified, and every demand of His law "made honorable" in the cross of His dear Son; those who can look up with confidence and hope to the mightiest of all Beings,

and call Him by the endearing name of Father; who from the clefts of the Rock of Ages, like Moses in his mountain watch-tower, have seen a sublime vision and heard a sublime voice which can inspire no servile terror--"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious" (Ex. 34:6). The thought of God may be dreadful to those who habitually despise or dishonor Him; but the realization of that Father, speaking through the Elder Brother--this union of ineffable paternal and filial love, is the most comforting doctrine of Scripture, and takes the sting out of all the sorrows of life.

Jehovah--the Omnipotent One--yet Jehovah the Loving One. Oh, to feel in your dreams of DARKNESS and SUFFERING that you have God in Christ, and Christ in God, your constant though Invisible Guardian! Many are the crushing trials with which your kindest friend dare not intermeddle--his best-meant words only grate on your sensitive spirit; you know too well that he cannot probe your wound or measure the depths of your agony. But when, as in the case of Jacob at Bethel, the lonely hour, the desolate hour overtakes you (shall we call it the hour of the mourner's watch?); when you hear no footstep of angel on the ladder but the Angel of Death; when you are unwillingly wrenched from all that made life happy--the festal timbrel exchanged for the muffled harp and the silent chamber, there comes back from the Lord of angels the gentle reproof, as if borne on seraph's wing, to every such tearful dreamer--"Not alone! for the FATHER is with you!" 'and I, the Brother-man, the Son of the Highest'--"I know your sorrows!"

Father! Brother! how it puts the rainbow of calm trust into the darkest future, and rocks the angriest waves to rest. The key-note of the divinely taught prayer is--"Our FATHER who is in Heaven, hallowed be YOUR NAME!" Christendom, in the best known of her uninspired utterances, responds--"You are the King of Glory, O Christ; You are the everlasting SON of the FATHER!"

Take another experience of a different kind, in perhaps a sadder, gloomier hour still--the hour of your SIN. You who are painfully conscious of being wounded in the strife--shall we suppose some young pilgrim with a stain on the once spotless armor of early innocence--a blot on the hitherto white page of the early life-history, which all your tears

cannot wipe out--the inward wail rising in the silent corridors of conscience, "My sin is ever before me!"--how little can you often depend on help or commiseration from others in the carrying of your burden. If you unbared your heavy secret even in friendly ears, in many cases you would receive nothing but the settled frown in return. The conventional world is harsh and unrelenting in its judgments--slow to make allowance for sudden temptation. Thousands have never felt the sweep of the hurricane themselves, and they cannot understand how others should succumb to it. Like the Jew, who, having incurred defilement by accidental contact with the dead, was cast out as unclean, so many still, who have bent before the storm, have the similar brand of society put upon them. Simon of old, is still the type of those who would remorselessly crush the tendrils of the broken flower beneath their feet, spurn penitence from their presence, break the bruised reed, and quench the smoking flax!

You are in better hands with the God of the Heavenly highway. "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." "HE knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." Of the Prodigal--the self-exiled, the feeder on husks, the hunger-stricken, the perishing it is said, "he arose and went to his father." God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts--as it is written "Jacob" (the crafty, the deceiver, the unworthy one, the supplanter, whom man would have denounced as unfit for Angelic tutelage and guardianship); "Jacob," says the great Being who came to him in these Bethel night-watches, "Jacob have I LOVED! (Rom. 9:13). "Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are His mercies; but let me not fall into the hands of man."

Sinning one--abandoned one, despairing one, Trust HIM. In the darkness and isolation of your spirit, lift your drooping soul, like the battered sunflower, to the great Giver of light and life, saying, "When I am afraid I will trust in You:" taking refuge with one of the later prophets in the elevating assurance--"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and HE knows those who trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

And yet, before we close, let us not lose the beauty and comfort of another part of Jehovah's name, in this tender and loving revelation--"The Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac." "Our FATHER'S

God," the God of our families--The God whose name and love are associated with the sleeping dead--with the Great and the Good who have been gathered to their kindred--with those who served Him in their lives; and who have left behind them, as the dearest legacy, that of an undimmed faith and a priceless example.

All of us have such memories. Indeed no heirloom in our households is so precious as those holy traditions of the departed--the Fathers and Mothers, Fathers and Grandfathers--who first unfolded to us the blessed verities of the Patriarch's dream, and who themselves, having reached the radiant summit, are beckoning us to follow after. O God of our fathers! let us not live--let us not die--unworthy of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises! But rather, like the Athletes of old in the Grecian race, who caught up the smouldering torch of the exhausted runner, let us snatch up the torch of faith and hope and glowing deed, which sainted ones have let drop from their death-grasp, and bear it for their sakes bravely on, until we too sink in the contest, and hand it to our successors.

Let this, moreover, be our comfort and encouragement, that the God above the Heavenly stair has promised, whether it be figuratively to run the race, or scale the stony steep, to "make His grace sufficient for us." If you have too good reason, amid the vicissitudes of all that is human, to weave the mournful soliloquy, "Our Fathers, where are they?"--the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, "the GOD of our Fathers," is still the same--infinite, immutable. We can make our appeal from the past to the future. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our Fathers have told us, what work You did in their days, in the times of old." "Our Fathers trusted in You." We can write over the vanished tents of Beersheba and Hebron, over the Bethels of our wandering--over the Machpelahs of our dead--"They shall perish, but YOU remain!"

## **THE PROMISE**

"He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel--the Lord his God is with him."--Numbers 23:21.

"And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains; and My elect shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there."--Isaiah 65:9.

"The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will cover the land from east to west and from north to south. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants." Genesis 28:13-14

The voice of Jehovah having been heard at the summit of the bright stairs, announcing His Name as the God of faithful Abraham, we wonder what will form the tone and subject of further communication! It cannot surely be, that language of unqualified encouragement and heart-cheer is to be addressed to one, whose past life has so abundantly evidenced that neither natural nobility of character, nor spiritual grace are hereditary; on the contrary, who has proved himself all unworthy of his illustrious pedigree. Can these words of the Almighty fail to be mingled at least, with merited reproof, answering and echoing the thoughts and accusings which must have haunted the dreamer himself, when he laid his head on his pillow? Indeed, could we be greatly astonished, (after the tale of previous falsehood and treachery, plotting and counterplotting) had the Being he had dishonored now been heard canceling, by one righteous sentence, every covenant blessing hitherto promised; reversing the oracle of the younger son's predicted greatness, and reinstating the wronged and injured Esau in his right of first-born?

"I am the Lord, I change not, therefore (JACOB and) you sons of Jacob are not consumed!" (Mal. 3:6.) "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). All the unworthy past of that unpromising, and unlovable wayfarer is to be consigned to oblivion; and without a word of reproach he is to be reclaimed, strengthened, cheered, comforted. The words of the Prophet, descriptive elsewhere of the retributive dealings of Jehovah, are in his

case reversed--"For all this, His anger" is turned away, "and His hand (of mercy and loving-kindness) is stretched out still!"

Although the lesson has run, like a golden thread, throughout the whole preceding narrative; this may be a befitting place for us to pause, and more specially to admire and magnify the Sovereignty of God's Grace.

Many other sleepers there were that night in the Holy Land, who could have asserted a better claim on the divine regard than the wanderer from a home which he had embittered and disgraced--a home in which, as we now know well, he had left passions smouldering, which deceit and treachery had kindled, along with stifled purposes of revenge. We might have expected, therefore, the Keeper of Israel, in His universal watch, to have piled the Angelic stair over some worthier recipient alike of His temporal and spiritual blessings--leaving the wayward fugitive of Beersheba--(the "Underminer" as his name has been literally rendered)--to be haunted in the night with visions of anguish and terror; in which, prominent would be, a duped father, an incensed brother, and, worse than all, the alienated face of the Infinite Being he had offended.

But here, as in manifold other cases, the Lord would show that the divine and the human methods are often in conflict. "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy." The Patriarch dreamer's is the old, old story, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." At that hour, this man of like passions is pronounced, by the lips of Jehovah Himself, to be the chosen recipient and inheritor of honors such as no mortal ever shared before or since. We have vividly recalled to us the story of the erring sheep in the New Testament parable. Instead of that truant of the fold being left to its own estrangement, to plunge ever deeper into the thorny thicket of its wanderings, the unwearied shepherd follows after it "until he finds it;" and, "when he has found it," there is no anger in his look, no displeasure in his voice. In silent love "he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing." Such, in the later Gospel delineation, was a picture of God's present dealings with this exile on the bleak wilds of Bethel. He rehearses nothing in his ear, but the wondrous favors he had for him in future possession and enjoyment; anew proclaiming that he was the appointed heir to the Abrahamic covenant; recognized as the representative of the chosen seed--above all, that he

was the selected ancestor of the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of mankind. The promise itself is so far couched in the same terms previously employed to Abraham and Isaac. But it embraces also a wider sweep. It tells of the cosmopolitan character of the wondrous race that was to spring from his loins, as stretching "westward, and eastward, and northward, and southward."

Strange destiny, for that lonely wanderer on that lonely moorland! to be father of the multitudinous people, who, in addition to past annals of peerless interest, are at this hour found by the banks of every river, and within the walls of every city in either hemisphere; unmingled and unassimilated with Gentile blood and Gentile customs, and with a proud and noble destiny still to be unfolded for their children's children. "The land you are lying on belongs to you. I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will cover the land from east to west and from north to south. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants." (Gen. 28:13, 14).

It has been well noted, God accommodates the very words in which the promise is couched to the condition of His servant. Not only does He say, 'I will give you the land;' but, "The land you are lying on." "The land, all of which you can tonight claim as your own, is the stony pillow on which your head reclines--this land, as far as eye can reach, is your predestined and covenanted heritage. That stone you are about to leave behind you will remain a pledge of My word--"I am the Shepherd of the stone of Israel!" In the words of Matthew Henry, "He seemed to be plucked off as a withered branch, yet he is to become a flourishing tree that shall send out his boughs unto the sea." "Who can count the dust of JACOB?" (Num. 23:10.)

On leaving the Beersheba tent, his own father had pronounced on him a similar blessing, almost indeed in identical words (Gen. 28:3, 4). It is now endorsed by his father's God, and has put upon it the sign and signature of Heaven. Although, therefore, he had neither by priority of birth nor elevation of character any title to so magnificent a spiritual possession, yet Jehovah seems literally to address to him the after-words of the Great Prophet--"But now thus says the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and He

that formed you, O Israel, Fear not--for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine" (Isa. 43:1). And well might he have responded in the words used by himself at a later period--"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which You have showed unto your servant" (Gen. 32:10).

It is specially deserving of still farther note, that whatever were the vicissitudes and trials of his subsequent life--the name of this erring fugitive, far more frequently than in the case even of the nobler and saintlier Abraham, is identified with that of Jehovah--"the God of Jacob"--"the mighty God of Jacob." He lives, through long subsequent years, the chartered inheritor of unparalleled blessings. He dies, at last, "the Soldier of God." This was the distinctive name by which the Jewish nation were to be known--"You seed of Israel His servant, you children of JACOB, His chosen" (1 Chron. 16:13). "All you seed of JACOB glorify Him and fear Him" (Ps. 22:23). The beatitude, not of the Hebrew people alone, but of 'the Church throughout all the world,' runs thus--"Happy is he that has the God of JACOB for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 146:5).

How continually in the inspired pages are we reminded of God's absolute sovereignty in the calling and election of His people--a truth so contrary and antagonistic to human dealings and experience! Limiting ourselves to New Testament examples, is it not the woman of Samaria, the despised tax-gatherer of Jericho, the fierce demoniac of Gadara, the felon on the cross, the fiery Cilician bigot and persecutor, who form the conspicuous trophies and monuments of the Redeemer's love and power and compassion? "The chief of sinners," they "obtained mercy."

Such, also, are God's dealings with multitudes still. "I loved Jacob" (Mal. 1:2), is the strange legend written under many a name conscious in itself of having forfeited all claim to the divine favor. Still He meets the exile in the far country--the prodigal at a distance from his Father's house, when character is blighted, principle shaken, purity lost--the soul apparently surrendered hopelessly to some demon power. Oh, even then, at times, a voice is heard amid the maddening hurricane of passion--it is the lullaby of Everlasting love--"Come unto Me, you weary and heavy-laden one, and I will give you rest!" The Lord above the ladder suddenly reveals Himself;



the closed heavens seem mysteriously to open; the dreamer has suddenly flashed upon him the long-deadened--the almost extinguished sense of his high original destiny. He feels within him, in a moment, the yearnings after a nobler, truer, diviner life--wakes up to the consciousness of the irresistible presence of some divine Influence or Power hitherto evaded, fought against, resisted; which, as with the grasp of a giant, has now "apprehended him." It is the veritable touch of the Invisible God. The wandering star is reclaimed from its devious orbits, and set within the sphere of the divine regards. The loaded cloud breaks, not in storm, but in a shower of benedictions!

And what is the avowal and confession accompanying such visions of the Almighty? whether it be in rousing the sinner from his sleep of indifference and death, or awakening the backslider from his season of torpor and lethargy; when faith and hope have been burning with a feebler flame, and the consciousness of God's presence has been forfeited by indulged sin or omitted duty--whether, also, the means employed be by startling providences or by feeble instrumentalities? "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name we would give glory." "By the grace of God I am what I am." "So slow is He to anger," says an earnest believer of the past generation, in speaking of this wondrous theme--"so ready to forgive, that when His prophets lost all patience with the people so as to make intercession against them; yet even then, He could not be made to cast off His people whom He foreknew, for His great name's sake." (Lady Powerscourt's Letters.)

The beautiful words which inaugurated the Gospel era, may well be written as the motto and superscription over many a life-history from that of the Patriarch-dreamer to the present hour--"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Day-Spring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78, 79).

Yes, here is the only possible solution and explanation of these mysteries of grace in the case of each individual soul--"The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love--therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you" (Jer. 31:3). Listen to

one, not of life's dreamers, but of her noblest workers, when laid indeed on his pillow of outward darkness, but irradiated and encircled with a diviner light than the constellations above the Bethel Pilgrim-- "The text, 'God is love,' has kept me thinking for the last twenty-four hours; and the more I think of it the more wondrous and marvelous it grows. In some of our clear northern nights, the heavens above sparkle with countless numbers of bright and beautiful stars. The pages of the Bible sparkle with countless numbers of bright and beautiful texts. But I fancy, for the future, I shall deem the text "God is Love" as the greatest and grandest in the great and grand skies of texts; a kind of pole-star, around which, as around the pole star in our heavens, the other starry messengers and sayings of the Bible revolve." (Sir James Simpson's Life, p. 416.)

The Hebrew of future ages, in bringing to the Tabernacle or Temple his offering of first-fruits, was to accompany the dedication with words which kept in perpetual remembrance the sovereign grace of Jehovah to Jacob-- "You must then say in the presence of the Lord your God, 'My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live in Egypt. His family was few in number, but in Egypt they became a mighty and numerous nation.'" (Deut. 26:5). How many, in bringing their eternal thank-offering into the heavenly Temple above, will accompany it with the confession and ascription-- "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify Your name for evermore; for great is Your mercy toward me; and You have delivered my soul from the lowest hell" (Ps. 86:12, 13).

The magnificent promise God here given to the Patriarch, is delivered in a grander and more enduring form to us. There is a better Canaan in reserve for those who are spiritually "the seed of Jacob." As believers in Christ, we have already partaken of the closing portion of the Bethel blessing, the blessing promised through the Divine Messiah to all earth's families; and with this in present possession, we have the other in future promise.

There is a solemn exhortation addressed, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to "look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." And the special example of warning is taken from another member of the Beersheba tent with whose name we are already familiar. It is the case of one who made

light of temporal advantages, and suffered by their rejection irremediable and irreparable loss. Let us see to it that ours be not the self-forfeiture of Esau. His is the picture of those who dally and trifle with their soul's best interests--who, in the absorbing love of the present, are willing to barter their immortal felicity, for a bowl of earthly pottage; degraded votaries of the Epicurean creed, "Who snatch the pleasures of the passing hour."

How vividly are such characters reflected, in the brief but most graphic delineation of the elder brother, by the inspired pen--"Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and went on about his business, indifferent to the fact that he had given up his birthright!" Genesis 25:34

Young pilgrims on the way to Zion! seek to be ready with the reply to all earthly solicitations, "If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." (Heb. 11:15, 16). As from this outset hour at Bethel, onwards through the future years of his pilgrimage, the promised birthright blessings are ever before the mind of Jacob, stimulating him in all his efforts, raising him superior to his sorrows, cheering him in his exile, sustaining him in his bereavements, softening the harshness of his character, bracing him to noble endurance--So be it with you. Take, as your watchword and motto, "We look for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God;" remembering that "what He has spoken He is able also to perform."

And, whether young or old, let us ever seek joyfully to recall and rehearse the ground of our title-deed to "the Better Country"--"the smiling fields" beyond Jordan. It is ours alone through Him who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." "If you be Christ's (if you have found the true antitypical ladder of the Patriarch, by which you can to the Gates of the city) then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29). Striking and beautiful are the words of the psalmist as he invokes the blessing of "the God of Jacob," and names Him as such. On what does he found and urge his plea at the mercy-seat? He supplicates that the eye of the great Jehovah, averted and repelled by his

unworthiness, may rest on the alone All-worthy ONE. "O Lord God of Hosts, hear my prayer--give ear, O God of JACOB. Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of Your Anointed" (Ps. 84:8, 9).

As we hear the God of the Patriarch saying from the ladder-summit, "To you will I give it," let us lay hold of the promise in all the grandeur and magnificence of its spiritual meaning. Be it ours as the children of Jacob (the inheritors of that great covenant of grace ratified on the heights of Bethel), in reverent faith to say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak--for He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints" (Ps. 85:8).

## **THE GIVEN PRESENCE**

"And behind the dim unknown  
Stands God within the shadow,  
Keeping watch above His own."--Anon.

There is a promise to particular saints--"I will never leave YOU, nor forsake YOU."--Philip Henry.

"By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin."--Is. 27:9.

With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those who are afraid, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you." Isaiah 35:3-4

"I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. I will someday bring you safely back to this land. I will be with you constantly until I have finished giving you everything I have promised." Genesis 28:15

Jehovah had addressed Jacob not only as heir of Promise; but He had coupled his name with the other two representative fathers of His covenant people.

That promise, however, glorious and comprehensive though it be, was of a general kind. It related to the number of his offspring--their marvelous extension; the yet more marvelous blessing which in them was to embrace "all the families of the earth." The question therefore still remained with the dreamer, 'How is the Almighty Speaker to deal with me? What share am I individually to expect in His divine guardian care? Am I, the fugitive wanderer, included in this magnificent spiritual heritage which is in reserve for coming generations?'

God proceeds thus to assure him--"I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. I will someday bring you safely back to this land. I will be with you constantly until I have finished giving you everything I have promised." It is the Father of the prodigal giving to his lost son the most unmistakable pledge of welcome and affection, by bringing forth robe, and ring, and sandals; and making the paternal halls echo with festal jubilee. The banquet of divine love is now spread personally for the Pilgrim in the desert. An unknown future was before him--a future whose dramatic changes he, at present, happily little anticipated. How cheering to have the conviction, that, whatever these tragic pages might be in his yet unwritten history, the Omniscient One above the ladder knew them all. The vision and the voice together would, like a panoply of armor, strengthen and prepare him for every subsequent vicissitude. With the assurance, "I AM WITH YOU," the fugitive could rise, as we shall find him doing, from his stony pillow, and say, in the buoyant spirit of one whose experience was singularly identical with his own, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." Have we not reason to believe that, in the most trying scenes of his after life, those moments, for example, of deepest emotion, when he gazed on the blood-stained evidence of his beloved Joseph's violent death--he would recall the present tokens and visible assurances of the divine nearness and protection--the glorious appearance and the sustaining words--not only, "Behold, I am with you," but "I will not leave you"?

And this is the way of dealing on the part of "the Keeper of Israel" with

His people still. By special communications of His grace, He often nerves them for their hours of unexpected trial. He gives them the vision of the ladder, before the perilous journey across the border-mountains--their Gethsemanes are often preceded by Transfiguration glimpses--they are caught up into the third heavens, to prepare them for the buffeting "thorn in the flesh." Even when their Isaacs are called to the Mount of sacrifice, the summons is given in words of paternal tenderness--"Abraham! Abraham!" "He calls His own sheep by NAME, and leads them out!"

It was specially important for Jacob to receive these assurances at an early stage of his journey--before his hands began to hang down and his knees to be feeble. Perhaps at no time is the conviction of the gracious personal interest and supervision of God more valued--more needed, than in those circumstances to which we have often previously referred, as corresponding with the Patriarch's--the outset in life. When home ties are sundered--yes, and when the bright hope of revisiting the old hallowed haunts goes far to repress the tear and mitigate the struggle on leaving the threshold, what words are these, just quoted, to "brace and cheer!"--they seem to meet every aspiration of the young heart.

This method and sequence of God's dealings, also, is in accordance with human experience. He manifests Himself, to youth specially, as the Forgiver, the Comforter, the Father. In after years, Jacob had a different revelation. Not the luminous ladder, the heavenly sunshine, and the loving accents--but in the deep valley of Jabbok he meets with the wrestling Angel. He is maimed moreover in the struggle--a combat all night until the morning dawned. These are some of the entries at a long subsequent period of his history. "Jacob tore his clothes;" "Jacob put sackcloth on his loins;" "Jacob's heart fainted." Reader! before that wrestling time and that sackcloth time, which in one form or other are sure to come, take firm hold of this tender revelation of the divine character, as "the Shepherd of the stone of Israel." He does not put the youthful recruit all at once in the forefront of the battle. He does not expose the shorn lamb to the untempered wind. He reverses Elijah's desert experience. The still small voice precedes the sterner symbols--"He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are

with young" (Is. 40:11). Seek to climb now the upward ladder-way, high as you can, that when the after-tempests of life are raging, you may be found above the warring elements, bathed in the light of God. Hear His own divine words for your encouragement--"I will go before you, and make the crooked places straight--For Jacob My servant's sake, and for Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name" (Is. 45:2, 4).

And surely, whether for young or for old, it is, as in the case of Jacob, a gracious provision of your Heavenly Father--"You know not what shall be on the morrow." The morrow and all its changes and trials are mercifully screened from view. Had it not been so, many a pilgrim would falter on the very first step of the rough, rocky stair; and recoil, fearful and dismayed, from the dizzy heights above him. But while happily our futures are unrevealed--wrapped in impenetrable mystery--we can take comfort, not only in the assured truth that Jehovah and His angels are with us, but that that gracious Covenant God will make our strength equal to our day; enabling us to cope with all exigencies, surmount all difficulties, endure all trials, and finally be made more than conquerors.

The promise of the Bethel-dreamer was thus translated to another, whose eyes had just been opened to similar heavenly visions, but who also at the same moment realized his position as a struggling climber--"My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Note, in the case of the Patriarch, the varied links in the chain; the successive assurances of continual as well of individual care and supervision. "I am with you," "I will keep you." "I will bring you again." "I will not leave you until I have done." He might well have appropriated the future words of a great descendant--"There is no one like the God of Israel. He rides across the heavens to help you, across the skies in majestic splendor. The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you. He thrusts out the enemy before you; it is he who cries, 'Destroy them!' So Israel will live in safety, prosperous Jacob in security, in a land of grain and wine, while the heavens drop down dew." (Deut. 33:26-28).

But how, it may be asked, can these glorious truths, in the case of others, be realized? How can this vision of God be seen? How can this voice of God be heard? How can these utterances of God be brought to vibrate like

chords of music in the soul, and cause it to thrill with the consciousness of a present Deity? What we have been contemplating is beautiful in sentiment; or as an inspired patriarchal picture. But is it not altogether abnormal--removed from the region of the possible and the actual? If not, tell us how can it be brought within the category of ordinary spiritual experience.

We answer--There is one at least, among other ways, by which you can make these 'voices of God' as real as in the case of Jacob. You can do so by PRAYER. You can go, in the same way as patriarchs, and saints, and holy men did of old. You can resort to the mercy-seat; and pointing your finger to the divine, immutable promises, can thus invoke the Hearer of prayer--"Remember the word unto Your servant upon which You have caused me to hope." In the well-known and appropriate lines of Cowper--  
"Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw,  
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw;  
Gives exercise to faith and love,  
Draws down all blessings from above."

All the more encouraging thus to approach a God of grace, and a throne of grace, when we remember that the dreamer of the desert, on whom these blessings were showered, was the representative of the spiritual wanderer--fugitive and sin-stricken. God's promises are not alone for the good, and the virtuous, and the well-doing; but, in their full and royal amplitude, are for all penitent souls who have the humbling consciousness that they have forfeited every claim on the Divine consideration. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts--and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (lit. 'multiply to pardon') ( Is. 55:7).

In this 'divine portrait' of the ladder-vision, the God of Heaven seems to stoop over the sinner as he lies forlorn and outcast in the sleep of death, saying, "Prove Me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing for you, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." The Lord's blessings, indeed, in answer to prayer, at times may not appear to be blessings. The very reverse. He seems to blight our hopes; to cross our schemes; to blast our gourds. He leaves



vacant seats in our households, and yawning chasms in our hearts. We are forced to ask, 'Can the God of the olden dreamland--the God who spoke to Jacob these words of surpassing tenderness--can He be other than the God of Baal "asleep, or on a journey?"--has He not "forgotten to be gracious?"' Trust Him. The voice may, like that of Jacob's beloved son (Joseph) to his brothers, appear to be rough, but it is the voice of disguised kindness. Be it yours to accept His dealings, and all His dealings, as appointed discipline for the soul's life.

The description of the inspired annalist of "His ways to Israel," is as true regarding "the spiritual seed of Jacob" as it ultimately came to be of the exiled Patriarch, when the pillow of stones and the bleak moorland were memories of the distant past--"He found them in a desert land, in an empty, howling wasteland. He surrounded them and watched over them; he guarded them as his most precious possession. Like an eagle that rouses her chicks and hovers over her young, so he spread his wings to take them in and carried them aloft on his pinions. The Lord alone guided them." (Deut. 32:10-12).

The day at last arrived when Jacob came to turn over the varied leaves in the volume of his life, with incidents and entries that might well have crushed hearts even of a sterner mold. His long and wearying servile labor as a Mesopotamian shepherd; the feverish anticipation and dread, through all these years, of exile and bondage, of fraternal vengeance for early wrongs--this danger scarcely over, when the deeper pang of a family disgrace had to be endured; then the tender sorrow in losing his beloved wife; then the severance from the two main solaces of his widowhood and old age--when first Joseph and then Benjamin were wrenched from him, and he himself was taken away, from the land he loved, to die! Sad and mingled as the retrospect was, doubtless he would be brought to own all, as needed parts in the plan and purposes of Infinite Love. It seemed to require no ordinary instrumentality to root out the baser elements in his nature--the outgrowths of early subtlety and worldly wisdom. Milder, less stern and severe discipline might have done for others, not for him--"I will not leave you," was the divine promise of his Almighty Leader and Guide, "until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis 28:15.

By implicitly surrendering ourselves to God's leadings, and His blessing

accompanying us, we must be safe, we must be happy, independent of all place, all circumstances, all changes. Let us realize Him too, as the words we are now pondering specially suggest, as ever present. Let us see His loving form, and hear His loving voice not only in the midst of great sorrows and emergencies--the "fever-heats" of existence--its solemn passages and pauses, but "in all places where you go." That directing and overruling Hand should be recognized even in what may be deemed the trivialities of existence; its petty scenes, and petty duties; the daily journey, the daily business, the daily walk, the casual meeting. Not only amid the broad highways and thoroughfares of life; but in its hidden nooks, its bypaths, and byways--not amid its "loud stunning tide" only, but in its silent valleys, and lonely recesses, and solitary shores.

He has a corresponding comfort in His treasury for every thought of His people, be these thoughts great or small--"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19). The feeblest, as well as the strongest, form the objects of His solicitude and care. "Fear not, you WORM-JACOB, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 41:14). Without Him, you will tread the journey with a desolate heart. With Him, however dreary that path, you will have what will fill all blanks, atone for all sacrifices, supply all losses. Without Him, no worldly advantages will avail you. They will not minister to a soul diseased. They will cure no heart-wound. They will dry no tear. They will smooth no pillow either of pain or of death. But with Him, you can envision yourself heir to the Apostles' paradox, "having nothing, yet possessing all things"--peace of conscience; the blessed sense of forgiveness; calm contentment with your lot--under the glad assurance that the Great Ruler is alike a rich Provider and a wise Sustainer, in whose hand you need have no anxious thought for the future.

Yes, and anticipating the closing hour of all--when human scenes are dimming, and human voices are growing fainter; when human aid falters and fails, and the hour of supreme loneliness has come--you can hear the unfaltering, unfailing voice, whose music has been heard (fitfully it may be, yet breathing its sympathetic cadences through all the years of the pilgrimage). It is the voice of the God above the ladder--the Lord standing

by the opened gates of glory and saying, "I will bring you (I have brought you) into this land, for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of!"

## **THE WAKING, AND WAKING EXCLAMATION**

"The Pilgrim laid down in a large upper chamber, whose window opened toward the sun-rising--the name of the chamber was Peace. There he slept until break of day, and then he awoke and sang."--Pilgrim's Progress.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Isaiah 40:27

"When I awake, I am still with You." Psalm 139:18.

Then Jacob woke up and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it." He was afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God--the gateway to heaven!" Genesis 28:16-17

This is an interesting transition and turning-point in our sacred chronicle. Among the group of Biblical illustrations in the Memorial chapel at Windsor, which magnificently enshrines and illustrates the virtues of England's departed Prince, is included that of the Patriarch and his dreamland. The point of time, however, selected, differs from the usual treatment. It is not, as generally, when the wayfarer lies fast asleep on his pillow of stone, with angels over his head. The artist has chosen rather the moment which we have now reached-- that is, when, waking from his sleep, he looks wistfully and hopefully upon the clear heaven, as if in the act of uttering the exclamation which precedes this chapter.

We can picture and realize the scene--the tender light of a Palestine morning when the sun was just purpling the sky above the somber wall of Moab--the dew lying thickly on the grass around him--the last of the night-stars just vanishing from the sky, and the last of the night-breezes

fanning his brow.

"The dawn--the dawn has died away,  
And east and west, without a breath,  
Mixed their dim lights, like life and death,  
To broaden into boundless day."

He rises from his pillow; and with no eye or thought for the unfamiliar landscape around, the one fresh memory, or rather the present vivid and overpowering impression, inspires the first words which break upon the solitude--"Surely the Lord is in this place! I laid me down last night, lonely and joyless, sad and fearful. I saw no friendly form, I heard no friendly voice. Bleak wasteland and desert-stones appeared to be my sole silent companions. But I am conscious now that I had Divine watchers. I thought the God of my fathers had only His special consecrated haunts and His saintly favorites; that, though condescending to reveal Himself by the tent and the altar, He never would have deigned to own common-ground like this, on which I sought repose for my weary body. But, surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This place! I supposed it only the rough couch of a wayfarer--lo! I find it a habitat of Angels, as if Eden were spread out around me, and the God of early Paradise talked with me. This is none other but the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven!"

Thus was the evening dirge of the exile turned into a morning of praise.

And yet, how natural, also, were the feelings of the moment, and the farther utterance they prompted! It seems, from his waking words, as if he could hardly realize all he had seen and heard. Though it be only momentarily, he is in a state of strange bewilderment, no of positive fear. "He was afraid." We are reminded of other Bible instances descriptive of similar emotions, under similar circumstances. Gideon, on first waking up to the consciousness of having seen a heavenly visitant, exclaimed, "Alas, O Lord God! I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face" (Judges 6:22). The Greatest of the Prophets had suddenly revealed to him, in the Temple-courts underneath the winged seraphim, "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Overpowered with the splendor of the vision, he breaks forth with the utterance, "Woe is me! for I am undone--my eyes

have seen the King--the Lord of hosts!" (Isa. 6:1-5.) Another favored Israelite of a more distant day, as he beheld an angelic form standing by the altar of incense, "was troubled, and fear fell upon him" (Luke 1:12). The beloved Disciple, when in the opening vision of the apocalypse he gazed, in His ascension-glories, upon the Christ on whose bosom he had leaned on earth, "fell at His feet as dead" (Rev. 1:17).

But in the case of the Patriarch, as of his descendants, the first moments of fear were speedily displaced and superseded by very different feelings. As he starts up from his couch, the words of the no longer trembling Zacharias scarcely seem inappropriate in his lips--"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high has visited us!" (Luke 1:78.) No more sense now of loneliness and friendlessness--no more cause, for the present at least, to cherish emotions of dread. No need of the oblivion-power of sleep to cancel sadder memories--no more anticipation of feverish visions of revenge and blood, which might well banish slumber from a softer pillow. After the shock of amazement and wonder is past, all such agitations rock themselves to rest. Better still, as the assured child of the covenant whose inalienable blessings have been ratified to him, there is an end to further plottings and counter-plottings--to questionable human devisings and subterfuges. He has ONE with him, above him, around him, with resources mightier than if all the tents of Kedar had mustered sword and bow on his side--"The Lord of hosts" is with him, "the God of JACOB" is his "refuge."

The Patriarch's experience has its parallel and counterpart in that of many still, who can tell of their times and crisis-hours of "revival"--an intensified religious fervor--when, as with him, there is a quickening of spiritual apprehensions; a waking up to a more vivid consciousness of the realities of life; and more especially of the Great Unseen Presence in whom we live, and move, and have our being. The emotions of such could not be better delineated than by the picture of a dreamer rising from his pillow and exclaiming, "surely, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!"

These solemn memorable wakings come in various forms and with various accompaniments. At times they are the result of DELIVERANCE FROM GREAT TEMPTATION--owing to some sudden but successfully

resisted invasion of a spiritual foe. The soldier, made alive to the vigilance of the enemy and the imminence of danger, rises from his perilous camp-slumber, exclaiming, "It is high time to awake out of sleep"--"Let us put off the unfruitful works of darkness, and be clothed with the armor of light."

Take, without figure, the season specially dwelt upon in these pages-- YOUTH'S OUTSET IN LIFE--the commencement of the Pilgrim path--when some of those legion foes, under the garb of pleasure, have presented themselves--done their worst to assault and enfeeble the soul, and then to crush and ruin it. The antagonist forces of right and wrong, good and evil, vice and virtue, confront one another. They have joined in the clang of battle--the hot and deadly strife. But virtue has come off triumphant. Trembling on the verge of the precipice, the imperilled one has been graciously rescued--the keel of the vessel was just grazing the rocks when, by a timely turn of the helm, it was saved. Then comes the grateful realization of deliverance. From that hour the charter of duty, "the solemn league and covenant" of obedience to God, loyalty to conscience and honor, is anew signed and sealed. "One will say, 'I belong to the Lord'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's,' and will take the name Israel." (Isa. 44:5).

That crisis-hour puts into the lips a votive hymn of praise and new obedience. "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my foot upon a rock, and established my goings. And He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Ps. 40:2, 3) "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple--I was brought low, and He helped me. Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 116:5-9).

But most frequently such soul awakenings are produced by means and instrumentalities already more than once referred to--those SORROWS and AFFLICTIONS which, in every stage of life, occur in the course of God's all-wise but often mysterious Providence. How many a child of trial can bear testimony! Existence, and its solemn responsibilities, had

previously been feebly and imperfectly realized. Immortal truths had lain dormant. As barren creeds--dead dogmas, into which true vitality had never been breathed, they exercised no influence on the character. In the case of some they met only with the incredulous smile, or sceptic sneer.

But by reason of sickness, worldly disappointment, personal or family disaster, there has been a new and before undreamt-of apprehension of the sanctities of life and the grandeur of its destinies--along with this, a kindling up of faith, and hope, and spiritual aspiration. The awakened dreamer looks with a new eye on all around. What before were absorbing earthly interests, now dwindle into nothing compared with the interests of the Soul and Eternity. Emancipated from the tyranny of the present, he is undisturbed by trifles which formerly were used to vex and annoy. He has no ear for the little waves furrowing the sands and murmuring at his feet--his eye is on the wide horizon and the gleaming distance which the mist had hitherto obscured. A new atmosphere enwraps his being. He has "seen God." Long content to be outside divine influences, or to hover in the dim twilight, he is now, like the Apocalyptic Angel, "standing in the Sun." The instincts of immortality have been roused within him. To that immortality he now belongs as he never did before. Enlisted in the army of great souls, "all old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Take the most common and startling of these messengers of God sent to rouse the spiritual sleeper--BEREAVEMENT. Hitherto the world was paramount--its vanities, its ambitions, its hopes. His vision was bounded by its haunts of pleasure, and marts of gain; his life-motto was, "This is my rest forever." But, "he awoke, and behold it was a dream!" Like the man opening his eyes in the dull grey morning-dawn on the festal-hall, recently brilliant with gay lights and floral devices, now silent, deserted; its floor strewn with withered bouquets--"the fashion of this world passes away!" He has been touched to the quick; but these incisions he feels to be the living, loving probings of his Heavenly Father. He has learned by that sore discipline the secret of true existence. "My flesh and my heart fails--but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). Yes, and bereavement too may have appealed to his human, yet immortal instincts, in still another form. His spiritual waking-time may

have been, when he saw those he loved vanishing from sight within the gates at the radiant summit! The severing of dear earthly ties may have been the means of opening up the first vista-views of a glorious future--an infinitude of being and of bliss undreamt of before. One of the angels on the ladder has pointed on high to those once mourned as 'loved and lost,' but now thought of only as loved and glorified; or lost from sight only to be found again.

"Oh what were life, if life were all? Your eyes  
Are blinded by their tears; or you would see  
Your treasures wait you in the far-off skies,  
And Death, your friend, will give them back to thee."

The mourner's citizenship is transferred to heaven. He is like the imprisoned flower in the dark cellar, turning its blanched leaves towards the crevice in the roof above. Where the treasure is, there will his heart be also.

Reader! If God has roused you from your perilous dream, even though it may have been by "terrible things in righteousness," be grateful for it. You have reason only for joy, whatever be the means employed, if you have woken up with the great "Eureka! I have found Him whom my soul loves!" If you can say with the Psalmist, be the cost what it may at which such an awakening was secured, "I awake with Your likeness."--"When I awake, I am still with You," then your pillow may be the rock; your food may be weeping--the cherished ones in the Beersheba tent may be far removed; some of them--the Abrahams, and Isaacs, and Rebekahs of your early love and reverence--may have vanished for the forever of time. It may not be Beersheba, but Machpelah, where thoughts and memories now most fondly center. It matters not. That angel of sorrow has led you to the vision and fruition of God; and though on a couch of tears on earth, you are truly at "the Gate of Heaven".

But an important practical question, similar to that of last chapter, here suggests itself. How do we know when we can, with some good measure of lowly confidence, appropriate the words of Jacob and breathe his waking exclamation--"Surely the Lord is in this place"?



There might be many answers. A first and prominent one which may be given is this--We may conclude that we are in the enjoyment of God's presence and nearness, when we are conscious of an aspiration after the holiness and purity He loves, and a corresponding aversion to the sin which He dislikes. "Walk in light;" "Be the children of light." "Walk before me and be you perfect," was the patriarchal direction to insure being thus habitually encircled in the felt presence of the Holy One. That "God is with you of a truth" you will discover by your higher, better lives; by the increasing agreement of your wills with His. "You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you. If any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy--for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The "God-frequented temple" will be known by the subjugation of self, mastery of passion, purity of thought, nobility of purpose, unswerving loyalty to truth; love of love, and hate of hate; the humble walk, the mellowed temper, the tender conscience; in one word--by the holy life--making the beatitude of the Great Teacher your constant aim and aspiration--"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

With these upright aspirations--fusing the secular and the spiritual; protesting against the divorce of what God has joined together, when He wedded the duties and demands of earth to the sanctities of Heaven, you will be visited with the Dreamland Voice and Presence, go wherever you will. Not within consecrated walls alone; but in the every-day place of business; the realm of duty, wherever it is--the field, the office, the counter, the lonely lodging. What a preventive against temptation--what a stimulus to the performance of whatever is true and honest, and just, and lovely, and of good report, is the Psalmist's directory for daily walk--"I have set the Lord always before me--because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Ps. 16:8). The heart, the thoughts--even in the midst of the world's activities--gravitating ever towards Him as the central Sun of being and blessing.

Oh! noble souls, young or old, whether in a higher or a humbler lot, faithfully battling with evil, and having earnest strivings after what is righteous--keeping your hearts as an inviolate shrine--rejoice in the assurance that the God you love is very near you--not dwelling only in the

habitats of nature--aloft on the everlasting hills, or in sublime solitudes beyond the stars--but anywhere--everywhere. "You compass my path" (in the day-time), "and my lying down" (in the hours of darkness and its silent vigils).

The duties of earth thus blended and united with heaven, it will be no mystic or dreamlike stair that connects you with the upper sanctuary. You will see that Gate of glory standing open before you, in all you do, and wherever you go. Common places will be transfigured into Bethels. And whether you close your eyes on your nightly pillow, or open them in the morning light, you will be able, not in figure of speech or with the thought of exile, to say, "Surely the Lord is in this place."

Young Pilgrim (if I may again, in passing, address to you a special word), there is but one spot, one occasion when you need to exclaim "How dreadful is this place!" It is when by evil influences; when, yielding to the momentary feebleness or indecision of the will, you are decoyed into the border-land of temptation; stifling conscience--perverting your capacities for goodness--when, allowing yourself to cancel better memories and resolves, you drift from the old, safe, and happy anchorage. This part of Jacob's waking exclamation may well be taken as the handwriting on the wall, which, unless timely heeded, is prophetic of doom and disaster.

Remember how many vessels, once freighted with promise, are now lying with splintered spars and gaping sides on the sands or rocks, hopelessly sundered from the retreating wave that might still have borne them buoyantly to sunny shores! Believe me, (to return to the symbol of the Dreamland,) if you thus abandon yourself to spiritual slumber--if you surrender the intellect and conscience and will to be drugged and stupefied with moral narcotics, the time will come when you will have no eye for the ladder and its angels, no ear for the heavenly voice! Lying on the edge of a volcano--"How dreadful is this place!"

Time, the prelude to an undying existence, is rushing on like an arrowy river. In some cases (possibly in your case) that river may be nearing the Eternal ocean, the boom of whose billows may already be falling on your ear; and with the thought of these great waves ever nearing, and no shelter yet sought or found for the frail bark--"How dreadful is this

place!" And when death overtakes the irrevocable hour, and you feel that the world you had made your home and rest and portion is being wrenched from your grasp--"How dreadful is this place!"

Awake! arise! chase away these dreams of indifference, presumption, and procrastination. An old writer well says "indecision is a dreadful place"--living in a border-land, half-way between the regions of light and darkness. If bygone memories be those of sin, departed goodness, defiant unbelief, ungodly companionship, or unholy haunts--"Come out from among them, and be separate." Above all, do not for a moment allow yourself to lapse into a state of hopelessness. Never allow that word from the abyss "Too late" to grapple with efforts to rid yourself of an unhallowed past, and an unhappy present. Exorcize the devil-born thought of abandonment to fatalism and despair. There are bars of gold in yonder eastern sky which tell you, as they did Jacob, of a coming dayspring. If yours be the fear and dread of a first awakening, hear the voice of Him who never discourages, but ever stirs the pulses of the languishing soul by bracing to nobler deeds--"Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die."

Accept unhesitatingly and without delay the gracious overtures of ONE who loves to meet the outcast, the exile, the fugitive. Your trooping images of terror will gradually vanish before faith's steadfast musing on the stair of heaven, the footsteps of Angels, and the voice of God. With these, you will rebuild the collapsed purpose, the half-surrendered fortress; and out of weakness may yet be strong, "wax valiant in fight and turn to flight the armies of the aliens."

There is one other blessed and hallowed means here suggested of recruiting spiritual strength, and consolidating your resolutions of new obedience. The words of Jacob would seem to recall and enforce the Apostolic injunction--"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." "The House of God"--the earthly Temple--is made, in the experience of many, as 'the Gate of Heaven.' And as the forfeiture and abandonment of the means of grace is not uncommonly the first step in the decay of the spiritual life, (neglected weeds allowed to grow up and choke the unfrequented footpath to the Sanctuary)--so is the return to the Place of Prayer and its stated services,

often the first symptom and token of revival. The response once more to the Sabbath bell and its thousand memories is frequently the first means of re-awakening--stirring the decaying embers of the soul and fanning them into a flame. These Angels of the Patriarch's ladder, beckoning the dreamer upward, may be regarded as no unfit emblems of God-appointed instrumentalities to help us on our heavenly way. "The Lord loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." It is on "the mountains of Zion" the dew of His grace and blessing specially descends--"There I will meet with you." "There He commands the blessing, even life for evermore." The name of every Temple-court, where there is a gathering of holy hearts, is "Jehovah-Shammah--The Lord is there."

Who among us have not hallowed remembrances of these 'Hills of blessing'? Drawn there, not for any poor conventional reason; but leaving, dusty and travel-stained, the hot and sultry highway for the bracing mountain air, to plead common needs, to bewail common infirmities, to obtain strength for daily duty and the endurance of daily trial. As we listen to the deeds of 'the Great ones of the olden time,' to realize what the sanctity of life is; to think of our departed--those who have dreamt their dream, and scaled their ladder, and who, endowed with immortality, are bending over those still left behind amid the desert stones and the wilderness path, to battle with windy storm and tempest. Above all, to ponder the mighty truths gathering around our own everlasting futures--that great Eternity for whose shores, following the wake of others, we must sooner or later set sail--"the land that is very far off," but which Psalm and Prayer and Litany bring to the eye of faith very near!

Fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God! Members of a brotherhood extending to all countries, and embracing all time, bear witness! Is not this oftentimes your experience and testimony? "A day in Your courts is better than a thousand"--"My soul longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, to see Your power and Your glory so--as I have seen You in the Sanctuary"? Yes, and if the Gate of Heaven be thus blissful and glorious, what will Heaven itself be? If these angel-visits of earth be thus hallowed, what will be that Temple of which the earthly courts are the feeble emblem and reflection?--the House not made with

hands--the Sanctuary of holy hearts in a celestial world, where there is no recruiting of exhausted energy, no flaw or discord in the seraphic music! May it be ours to attain these glorious heights of the symbolic ladder.

## **THE MORNING CONSECRATION**

"The next morning Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had used as a pillow and set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it." Genesis 28:18

The Patriarch had fully realized the solemnity of the occasion, and the holiness of the ground which he had made his couch of repose. He felt it was no mere illusion of which he had been spectator. At all events the assurance grew with his waking thoughts, that his dream manifested divinest spiritual verities, of which he was himself the privileged partaker.

He obeys the first and natural impulse of these moments of mingled joy and dread. God has spoken to him; and, as the recipient of wondrous and undeserved mercy, he now makes preparation to address his divine Sustainer in return. He rises at dawn of day, when the fleecy clouds are still skirting the hill-tops and the earth around is "sown with orient pearl." The northern journey must before-long be resumed. Before, however, taking up his staff, he proceeds to erect a memento of this night of hallowed memories. Not only does he desire to set up a pillar of consecration; but, on the expectation of return from his distant pilgrimage, he would by this means also identify the spot whose associations would ever be the most sacred of his life. With the stones so abundantly lying around he would have wished, perhaps, to rear a commemorative "heap" of larger dimensions and worthier of the occasion. Being, however, alone and without aid, he must defer any permanent memento. Meanwhile, all he can venture to accomplish is to take the boulder which he had used for his pillow, and place it, as best he could, in an upright position. This crude monolith will be the pledge of

some more conspicuous and enduring monument in time to come. No chisel had he to carve any inscription, even had the stone admitted of this.

As it was customary, however, for all travelers in the East, as it is to this day, to carry with them a flask of oil for mixing with their food, as well as for external use, he pours some of the contents of his "skin bottle" on the extemporized pillar. It is the first consecration of notable places of which we read in sacred story--the setting apart of the rough rock of this upland from a common, to a holy use. If the grateful dreamer can engrave no lettering on its unhewn base, he can at least pronounce over it the name that has ever since sent its multiplying echoes through all ages--all lands--all believing hearts--BETHEL--"the House of God." It was the Jehovah-Shalom (Judges 6:24), or the Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7:12) of a future period--a STONE of everlasting remembrance. It was specially in connection with this incident, that the God to whose name and glory it was erected, had added henceforth to His other venerated titles that to which we have already made more than one allusion--the "Shepherd of the stone of Israel."

It may be worthy of remark in passing-- that, whether borrowed from the example of Jacob or not, the employment of 'commemoration stones' became common in all countries. "Crude stones and posts were the first memorials of the Phoenician people. Near Cadiz, heaps of stone used to be indicated as the famous 'Pillars' which are said to have commemorated the expedition of Hercules to Spain. The ancient people of the North preserved the memory of events by placing stones of extraordinary size in particular places, and this method is still used by the American savages, among whom writing is unknown. The manner in which such monuments were made subservient to this purpose is clearly described in Joshua 4. Parents explained to their children the object of such memorials, and instructed them in the facts which gave occasion to them. In this way tradition supplied in some degree the place of written records." (Pictorial Bible.)

The custom was specially prevalent in the East. Sacred spots and events were identified and memorialized by one--or it may be a group of stones; while oil, sometimes combined with wine, sometimes with blood, was

poured for a libation on the top, as the symbol of dedication to God. "I had often observed," to quote still further not only the words but the personal observation of Dr. Kitto, "such stones, without being aware of their object, until happening one day to overturn one that had been set upon another, a man hastened to replace it, at the same time informing me that to displace such stones was an act unfortunate for the person so displacing it, and unpleasant to others. The writer afterwards observed, that the natives studiously avoided displacing any of these stones 'set up for a pillar' by the wayside."

Let us note the instantaneous assent given by the Patriarch to the first impulse of his revived and reinvigorated soul. The voice of God begets an immediate and willing response. No time is wasted that might endanger the displacement or absorption of waking thoughts! No question or wonderment as to whether all he had seen was fantasy or reality until the very vision itself had been dreamed away and passed into nothingness. Neither was there any needless moping over a guilty past; no questioning of the sincerity of the divine assurance of forgiveness and mercy. He resembles the prodigal of the later parable, of whom it is said that when he came to himself "--in the first flash of conviction--the first dawn of nobler purposes--"then he arose and went to his father." Or it recalls the prompt resolve of the royal Psalmist--"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Your testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep Your commandments" (Ps. 119:59, 60).

In this we see one of the compensating features even in the natural character of Jacob, that of energetic purpose combined with immediate action. It accords with his vehement wrestling, in after years, with the Angel at Jabbok. He was resolute of will, alike in spiritual and in secular matters, and that despite of every hindrance and discouragement. These are qualities which go far to make alike the noble and the successful man. Many a fair life of promise is ruined by irresolution and procrastination. The iron cannot be welded which is allowed to cool. The waverer, driven by the wind and tossed, seldom reaches the "Fair Havens." The men who climb to the pinnacle are alike prompt in deed and undeterred by difficulty. Not infrequently with a covert sneer they may be called impulsive. Be it so. It is they, nevertheless, who thus make thought

germinate at once into purpose; who are the true heroes in the strife; for whom the world has been the better while they lived, and whom the world has honored when they died. Yes, we repeat, the victorious and laurel-wreathed in higher than earthly battles, are those who, acting on impulse if you will, the voice within responding to the voice without, have sprung resolute from the pillow of sentiment and ease and drowsy contemplation, to erect their stone and vow their vow. David was conspicuously, of all Bible characters, a man of impulse--(the Peter of Old Testament story). See how he resolves on rearing his pillar, and pouring upon it consecrating oil--"He swore unto the Lord and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Ps. 132:2-5).

Our Patriarch's conduct seems to teach farther, that each great crisis of our life should be sanctified and hallowed by the invocation of the divine blessing. Whatever be the new path we are to pursue, the new relation we are to form, the new duty on which we are to enter, the new scheme we are to undertake, whether it be domestic or public, personal or relative, let it be 'consecrated,' by at once seeking the Divine guidance, and hearing the Divine voice saying, "This is the way, walk in it." Let youth especially bear in mind that Jacob's was a morning dedication. There is little fear of the later period in one's life, if the altar-stones be reared and the anointing oil poured upon them in life's early dawn, before the great journey be undertaken. It was a noble motto and watchword bequeathed to us by the great Psalmist--"I shall be anointed with fresh oil" (Ps. 92:10). Thus anointed, in the very grappling with evil and temptation, you will become morally strong; just as the oak, in wrestling with the tempest, moors its roots all the firmer and deeper in the rock. Other inspired words form an appropriate invocation in beginning or renewing your pilgrimage--"Your Spirit is good, lead me to the land of uprightness." "Take not Your Holy Spirit from me." You can look undismayed along life's vista, when you have this all-glorious triple benediction to gladden the way--"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."



And what Jacob did one morning, be it yours to do every morning-- setting up the pillar and pouring upon it the consecrating oil. "My voice will You hear in the morning, O Lord! In the morning will I direct my prayer unto You and will look up!" Seek to wake, day by day, with the consciousness of the grandeur of life; armor yourself for its spiritual battles. The allegorical idea of a great painter of the Middle Ages is one specially appropriate for every Pilgrim commencing or renewing the spiritual journey. In Giotto's well-known picture in the Arena Chapel of Padua, Faith is represented at morning dawn with a cross in her right hand and the creed in her left. A key is suspended at her belt, while she stamps under foot the horoscope of the astrologer. The thought conveyed by this religious teacher of his day may be thus interpreted in words-- Christ crucified the young believer's hope; the word of Jesus his trust; all false confidences disowned and trampled upon the key of prayer ever at hand to open the rich treasure house of the Promises and make them all his own!

And oh! be it remembered, as we had occasion to note in last chapter, that there is, on the other hand, such a thing as the desecration of life's early morning--when the vision is given, the dream dreamed, the voice of God in childhood heard and unfolded by a mother's lips--but the Bethel-land is left, and the early perilous road is traversed without erection of pillar or consecration of holy oil. Can we wonder, when such is the case--when the knee is unbent in prayer--when religious opportunities are shunned and evaded; when every dream of heaven is blotted out with low counterfeit dreams of earth--that the moral courage falters, and moral strength becomes enervated--that the dark doubt displaces the simple faith; and the departure of child innocence is before-long detected by the restless eye and the lowering brow; the familiar, open, innocent countenance--the fellowship with true and faithful souls--exchanged for the embarrassed look and the questionable companionship. Can we wonder, that, caged in darkness, away from the light of Heaven and God, the eye of the young eagle should film and his wing droop--that the clear ringing voice should come gradually no longer to tremble at a falsehood, or to startle at the name of wrong-doing or impurity?

One other thought suggests itself at this part of the vision--that "every

place is hallowed ground." This Bethel dreamland was the first spot which was actually named "the House of God;" and in this sense, though preceded by other Patriarchal altars, it may be regarded as the earliest church of the Jewish nation, the prototype of the churches of future Christendom. How destitute it was of all ecclesiastical accessories and attractions we have already seen--a single stone--a crude monolith in a bleak sheep-walk!

We are not of those who discard all that is chaste and befitting in places of earthly worship, or who venture to denounce such as a return to the Jewish "beggarly elements." On the contrary, we never can see that true piety or genuine devotion is incongruous or incompatible with grandeur of form, or loveliness of ritual. But it is a comfort and consolation also for those who, from local, geographical, or other circumstances, are denied these external "beauties of holiness," to see in the case of this lonely exile, that the Divine Being is "not confined to Temples made with hands." The true Temple is not the 'holy building'. To that place belongs the real consecration where souls are saved and God is glorified. On the one hand, a man may worship in a cathedral, with all the accompaniments of embossed aisle--cloistered seclusion--luscious music--intoned litany--and yet remain cold and unmoved as the speechless unimpassioned stone or pillar at his side.

While on the other hand, some humble worshipers may be gathered in lowly mission-tent, or Highland barn; in African Kraal, or Australian log-house. They may show, by look and garb, that they are able to claim poverty as their only birthright. To cultured eye and ear, their ritual may be unadorned and repelling; their music may be dissonance. But yet, in the eye of God and angels, the latter may be the truer Bethel of the two--its "pillar" not the less accepted, because it is composed of rough stones instead of marble--its oil not the less holy, because it is not contained in golden vessels.

No, more--there may, and often is, a danger in the one which is not in the other. True devotion may be counterfeited and travestied. There may, by mere outward attractions, be the perilous appeal to imagination and sensuous emotion. An idol may be made of gaudy forms, voluptuous sounds, and 'dim religious light.' The evening rock of Jacob may be, in

truth, the better and safer altar-stone. At all events, we repeat, that we may gather from this record of the world's earliest Sanctuary, that the House of God--the most honored and hallowed Bethel--is where God Himself is, and where the Gospel-ladder is most faithfully set up before the spiritual eye.

In other words, where Christ, the one only Way to the Father, is most fully proclaimed in the united Majesty of His Godhead and the tenderness of His humanity. The Temple He loves is that whose fumes of incense are heart-breathed prayers and praises; whose true font is the invisible baptism of the divine Spirit; whose true apostolic succession is the succession of Christian virtues; whose altar-fires consist of devout desires kindled, and noble life-purposes formed; whose most radiant altar-lights are glimpses, revealed by the torch of faith, of the better Church above.

Let every 'sick one whom Jesus loves'--every lonely bed-ridden child of weakness and suffering--remember, that it is not within earthly Sanctuaries alone, or to the summons of the Sabbath-bell, that Cowper's well-known lines apply--

"Here we may prove the power of prayer  
To strengthen faith and sweeten care,  
To teach our faint desires to rise,  
And bring all heaven before our eyes"--

but that in the darkened chamber, and by the pain-stricken pillow, if there be a sincere believer there, there is a prayer-hearing, and a prayer-answering, and a covenant-keeping God. Loneliest vigils may themselves thus form the truest worship. Unseen choristers from the upper Sanctuary may be gathering within these curtains and hovering around that aching head. The Lord of Angels can make the house of mourning, and the bed of languishing, as the 'House of God' and as the 'Gate of Heaven'!

## THE VOW

"The purified righteous man has become a coin of the Lord, and has the impress of his King stamped upon him."--Clement of Alexandria.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." Genesis 28:20-22

We left Jacob, in the preceding chapter, setting up a memorial-pillar. He now proceeds to make it a votive one. God had spoken to him in wondrous mercy and grace, he now desires to make a return-avowal to his Almighty Protector and Friend. It is the voluntary declaration of new and devoted obedience on the part of a son to the loving Father who has tracked his wandering steps, and spoken to him "comfortable words."

In this recorded vow which accompanied the erection of the stone, the Patriarch has been much misunderstood. He has been credited with entering into the unworthy compact with his gracious Benefactor, that only on certain conditions of temporal good bestowed, he would "take the Lord for his God." Moreover, that on the same stipulation, (the fulfillment of this guarantee of divine guidance,) he will make corresponding acknowledgment and restitution. In other words, that his resolve does not take the shape of the free spontaneous offering of a trusting heart; but is expressed rather in the terms of a selfish contract, containing certain specified conditions, the deal of the old bargain-making, worldly-wiseman. He vows a vow, but it is only on the presumptuous understanding that the Divine Being will first of all redeem His own pledge. Add to this, that his mind is so engrossed with the thought of temporal good and personal protection, that all reference is excluded to the more glorious spiritual blessings promised to his posterity.

We concede that such a harsh interpretation would not be altogether out

of harmony with Jacob's antecedents. But we dismiss the thought of his thus degrading and desecrating the noblest moments of his life. Surely that ladder-dream and its accompaniments had taught him little, if, on his first waking moments, he were led thus to mock the divine Revealer with a requital like this. We may well cease, then, to regard the words as the compact of a hesitating man, doubtful whether he could, after all, take Jehovah as his Divine Benefactor, offering a loyal allegiance only on certain stipulations and contingencies. No; we are abundantly warranted to take them rather as the utterance of unswerving trust; the simple acquiescence in God's own terms; the recital of God's own declaration. As it has been, in brief, expressed by a scholar--"the saying of Jacob was not a promise for the future, but a reasoning upon the past."

If we might venture to give a paraphrase in modern language, the whole might read thus--'Lord, I take You at Your word. Your pledged promise, given by this wondrous vision, I know is faithful and true. I stagger not through unbelief. You have Yourself signed this charter of temporal good and spiritual blessings. You have said that You will be with me; that You will keep me in all places; that You will bring me again to this land; never leaving me until all Your promises and purposes regarding me be fulfilled. Be it so--I insinuate no doubts; I accept the terms, and joyously subscribe article by article of Your covenant. Since You will, indeed, in wondrous love thus be with me--thus keep me in my pilgrimage-wanderings; thus feed me with food and clothe me with clothing; above all, bring me back again from my exile, first to this dream-land and then to my father's tent in peace, thereby enabling me to call You and rejoice in You as 'my God,'--THEN I shall, even more than now, be in a position to utter the memory of Your great goodness by erecting on this spot an enduring monument of Your faithfulness. The pillar I have now set up will meanwhile remain a pledge of what is to follow. I shall rear on the spot, at some future day, an altar of sacrifice, whereon with burnt-offerings I will pay You the vows my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble. Yes, and as a further testimony to Your mercy and loving-kindness, "of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth unto You." "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid; You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of

the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord" (Ps. 116:16-18). "It was not, then," says Mr. Blunt, "as has been falsely represented by the enemies of revelation, the shrewd compact of an avaricious man to bind the Deity to his interests; but the overflowing of a grateful heart anxious to bind itself to its God." Or, to sum up with the words of Matthew Henry, the best of commentators, as he thus briefly expresses all we have said, "Jacob had now a gracious visit from heaven. God had renewed His covenant with him; and the covenant is mutual. When God ratifies His promises to us, it is proper for us to repeat our promises to Him."

Nor is this all. We still further fail to see the mercenary spirit which has entailed such heavy censures on the character of the Patriarch, when we note the moderation and simplicity of his desires. He just had had ratified to him the wondrous promises of the covenant. He had awoke with the intensified conviction that he was heir of the Holy Land. Yet the whole boon he asks is humble pilgrim's fare. No superabundance; only food and, clothing--willing to submit to any other privations. A divine lesson to many among ourselves who are apt to give way to peevish fretfulness and discontent in the midst of abounding mercies and even luxuries. "If God gives us much," says the same devout commentator last quoted, "we are bound to be thankful, and to use it for Him. If He gives us but little, we are bound to be content and cheerfully to enjoy Him in it."

In the future there would be many vicissitudes and trials now unforeseen by Jacob; but he lets the unknown ills of tomorrow slumber quietly until tomorrow comes; knowing that the God who guides him and feeds him will give the morrow's grace for the morrow's emergencies.

Moreover, it is of special moment and interest to observe the effect which the consciousness of "having the Lord for his God" had upon him. It braced him for duty. He was not content with the first effect of the vision--simply rousing his religious emotions, causing him to speak of the House of God and the Gate of Heaven. Sentiment, in his case, as in the case of all God's true Israel, passed into deed. Half the glory and grandeur of this desert-revelation--the most useful part of its lessons, would be lost to us, if there had been no more than the bright staircase and the heavenly visitants. We like to ponder the sequel, when we see the soldier of God, as he awakes from his camp, putting on the spiritual armor, the shield of

faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, "praying always." That is an unhealthy atmosphere in which to move where sentiment and contemplation form the staple of the spiritual life--where there is the weekly Sunday vision of the Most High, accompanied with appeals which rouse the sympathies and sensibilities, but when, for these awakened emotions, there is no practical vent or outlet. Feeble resolutions are allowed to filter through the soul. Truth and duty are listened to, but not fulfilled. Existence is resolved into a mimic battle--a mimic pilgrimage. There is the Bethel dream-land with its dream, but without its pillar of consecration and its votive resolves. "Good and faithful servant" will never be spoken regarding what was "well seen" or "well purposed," but what was "well done."

What pillar can I set up? ought to be the question of each heaven-bound traveler. It behooves each faithfully to find out what is his peculiar vocation; in what sphere or direction he can best serve his Lord and Master. There is "to every man his work,"--to every servant his stewardship. Happy is he who finds out what that work is, the peculiar and allotted place in the Temple to which he can consecrate a portion at least of time and talents. Few can be engaged in the more conspicuous services of the altar. To most must necessarily be allocated the humbler duties of hewers of wood and drawers of water. But what a nobility is given to life, when each, recognizing his peculiar sphere and gift, can say--"This stone I have set for a pillar!" God will not reject the offering because of its lowliness.

In a beautiful passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, hear what the Apostle says regarding one form, among many others, which that pillar may assume--"For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end that you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:10-12). To all who have thus ministered to the needs of the needy, or given other practical illustration of their faith, the words are equally applicable which were uttered to the Patriarch twenty years after the night of his dream--"I am the God of

Bethel, where you anointed the pillar" (Gen. 31:13). That visit to the sick bed; that gift to the widow and orphan; that word of comfort to the bereaved; that salutary reproof to the scorner or the careless; that text taught to the lisping child in the Sabbath-school--these lowly pillars are all remembered by Me. "These stones shall be for a memorial"--"A book of remembrance was written, for those who feared the Lord and that thought upon His name."

Nor must we omit to emphasize (what, indeed, is the special topic of this chapter), that Jacob embodied all these utterances and resolutions in the form of a vow. The pillar he set up was a votive pillar; the anointing with the oil was, as it were, the subscription with his hand to the covenant-deed.

Few there are among us who cannot recall similar seasons; times of emergency, imminent peril, threatened misfortune, or apparently impending death; when the solemn vow is recorded, though, it may be, unlike that of Jacob, without any conspicuous outward symbolism.

Some who read these pages may remember the hour of sickness, when wearisome days and nights were appointed--when excruciating pain or wasting fever were threatening to rend the earthly tabernacle, and they had the solemn possibility brought before them of being laid on a couch from which they were never again to rise. When life was then "balanced in a breath," and the herald symptoms of dissolution were gathering around your pillow; do you not recall the vow then recorded, that if existence were spared and prolonged, by God's mercy it would be dedicated to His praise? Or, is the retrospect rather in connection with the critical illness of some beloved friend--when the sand-glass seemed to be hurrying to its final grain, and you had all the unutterable sadness before you of anticipated bereavement--an empty chair, a broken heart, a desolate home? Do you remember how you then vowed the vow, that if God would bring back the shadow on the dial, and renew the lease of a valued life, future years would become one thank-offering to the Great Restorer? In both cases the vows were accepted, the prayers were heard, the solicited blessing was graciously given!

How have the vows then registered in heaven been kept on earth? Ewald,



a distinguished writer, from whom we have more than once quoted, speaks in connection with a subsequent passage in the life of Jacob, of "the erection of a watchtower (Mizpah), as if for a watchman, on the part of that God who looks down from His height to keep watch over oath and covenant." What shall the Watcher of Israel, in His searching scrutiny, have to say regarding your covenantings? If He were to appear now, as He did on that future occasion to Jacob, after the lapse of a score of years, and confront you with the words then employed, what would be your response? Would it be, that soul and body have been presented ever since as living sacrifices? that, amid much conscious unworthiness and shortcoming, you have been true to your solemn engagements? Or would it be the reverse? Would it be to tell that passions which should have been quenched have been pampered--that besetting sins which should have been slain have been nurtured--that you have refused to hear the voice at the ladder's summit--spurned from you the good angels thronging its steps, and invited a horde of demons in their stead--the fragments of the broken pillar--the smouldering ashes of the desecrated votive altar lying scattered around? In a word, that your vows have been like the morning cloud and the early dew--resolutions vanished like snowflakes falling in the wintry sea, or "as a dream when one awakens"?

Even Jacob, when he stood on that Bethel ground again, had reason to mingle tears of self-reproach and humiliation with grateful offering. The recollection of God's goodness was dimmed and darkened by the memories of his own defections and shortcomings. If such should be our experience--if we be waking up to a sense, it may be, of long and blameworthy failure, let us listen to the solemn admonition of Him 'who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks,' as He points to the far-reaching vistas of existence with their fleeting opportunities and solemn responsibilities--"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). With new thoughts--new resolutions of obedience, be it ours to say--"In God have I put my trust--I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me. Your vows are upon me, O God--I will render praises unto You. For You have delivered my soul from death; will not You deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living." (Ps. 56:11, 12, 13).

Jacob added yet one more substantial evidence of the practical character of his faith and trust--"And of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth unto You" (ver. 22).

This TITHING of substance was in accordance with primitive Jewish practice. We find Abraham, as he met Melchisedek, on coming up from the slaughter of the kings, making over to him a tenth part of the spoil which he and his courageous band had taken from the aggressors. In the patriarchal age, it would seem to have been a free-will offering--a voluntary obligation. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the Tithe, as it was called, was rendered obligatory for the support of the Levitical priesthood. In Gospel times, the proportion of giving is left to an enlightened conscience--"as God has prospered us." Not, indeed, that it should be made casual, fitful, precarious--a matter of mere impulse, evoked by emotional appeal and momentary caprice; but in harmony with the other requirements of the spiritual life, regulated by plan and system. The Apostolic rule and principle is thus briefly enunciated, "Let every man, according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). Christ's own rule and direction in His great ethical discourse should be paramount as to the mode as well as principle of giving. "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matt. 6:3, 4). Secret giving meets with no open reward; but it has a better, deeper, richer, than any conspicuous recompense in the face of the world. The brazen trumpet is carried and sounded before vaunting, self-glorious givers, "the hypocrites"--in that they have their poor reward. But the true, acceptable, and accepted donor has his reward--in what? In nothing visible; but in the silent testimony of a good conscience, the unnoticed approving smile of "the Father who sees in secret."

You who are going forth, or who may have lately gone forth, on the great pilgrimage of life, I close this chapter, as I have done others, with a word to you. Take as your model, alike the simplicity of the Patriarch's requests and the practical form in which his waking thoughts were embodied, as he set up his pillar and recorded his vow--not aspiring after great things;

thankful if a gracious Providence puts them in your way; but rather feeling that true happiness (truer than you think) is found in the limited aspiration of Agur, whose ambition, like Jacob's, was bounded by a modest competency--"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me."

On the other hand, seeking to embody religious sentiment and creed in some substantial form; embarking your youthful energies in some object of religious or philanthropic interest that will please God and do good to men; desirous, with reverent hand and effort, to disentangle the world from some of its elements of discord and confusion; lifting the burden off some of its aching hearts, and helping to redress some of its crying wrongs. Depend upon it, these practical ends of religion will aid you all the better in the fulfillment of the early vow 'to be Christ's servant and soldier unto your life's end.'

If, like Jacob, you trust God in little things, He may answer you by great things. He is a bountiful as well as a wise Provider. Many years later, in the retrospect of this very hour, the Patriarch could say, "He answered me in the day of my distress." And how did He answer him? "With my staff," said he, "I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two bands" (Gen. 32:10) What an encouragement to prayer! Jacob asked little--God gave him much. Jacob's aspirations were bounded by daily bread, and common clothing, and immunity from danger and assault--God gave him riches and blessings beyond what he could have conceived. He made the fugitive Dreamer a lordly Prince of the land.

So may it be, in a better sense of "prosperity," with you. Spreading out your petitions at the Mercy-seat, He may not answer them in the form given to the Patriarch, but He is as able and willing now, as ever, to give to His waiting, believing children "exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think." His are no miser fountains that feed the clouds. "The shower shall come down in its season, there shall be showers of blessing." It may not be "openly;" it may not be in accordance with the recompense most valued and appreciated on earth. Wealth may rear no golden ladder. Fame may sound no blast of clarion. But "the Father who sees in secret" will reward you with "the riches of His glory by Christ Jesus."



## THE RENEWED JOURNEY

"Arduous is the conflict, but abundant the strength--hard the toil, but glorious the reward. O forsake not me, Your child, when walking through the great tumultuous crowd, who know not Your Name. Wide is the sea through which I have to steer my course, and high its swelling waves; but grace is the breeze that fills the sails; my compass is faith, and my pilot, Christ."--Tholuck's "Hours of Devotion."

"Let me set forth anew, O Lord, as a pilgrim on the earth, with my rod and staff, and so set my heart on You, that in all places You may be my dwelling-place and home, until I return here to my last resting-place."--Memorials of a Quiet Life.

"Then Jacob went on his journey."--Genesis 29:1.

We cannot do better than begin this chapter in the words of Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress"--"Who can tell how joyful this man was when he had gotten his roll again! For this roll was the assurance of his life, and acceptance at the desired haven. Therefore, he laid it up in his bosom, gave thanks to God for directing his eye to the place where it lay, and with joy and tears betook himself to his journey."

So it was with the Pilgrim Dreamer of Bethel. "He went on his journey," or, as these words literally mean, "he lifted up his feet." They are rendered in the Jewish Commentary--"His heart lifted up his feet." The waking dread and terror had given way to reassured peace and joy. Vows of covenant love having been interchanged between him and his God, like a desert wayfarer of Apostolic times after a similar Gospel revelation--"he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). The spirit and sentiment of the unwritten 121st Psalm might well, from first to last, be his. Indeed, there is strong ground for surmising that when that "traveler's Psalm" was composed, the inspired Singer of a future age must have had "the Keeper of ISRAEL," "the Shepherd of the stony pillow," before his mental vision. The night scene, the name of the Divine speaker, the very words of the Divine promise, have their echo and reflection in the glowing strain--

I lift up my eyes to the hills--  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip--  
he who watches over you will not slumber;  
indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord watches over you--  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all harm--  
he will watch over your life;  
the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.

"Jacob went on his journey."--These words, in connection with the Patriarch, may suggest to us, in an emblematic form, some further practical thoughts regarding the life-journey which each of us is pursuing.

I. It is in the active prosecution of the journey--in other words, the earnest spirit in which we discharge our various duties and obligations to God and man--that we go either with "lifted up" or with lagging feet and heart. Life is, or ought to be, at least, no dreamland. It is the idle, purposeless existence which breeds morbid thoughts, and moping feelings, and peevish reflections on the Divine dealings. "Go," said God to another Wayfarer, whose case has already suggested more than one parallel with that of Jacob--"Go on your way; Return to duty. Leave juniper-trees and deserts behind you. Go anoint Hazael; Go anoint Jehu; Go anoint Elisha; and in the resumption of assigned life-work, languor and misgivings will take to flight" (1 Kings 19:15, 16).

The cobwebs of unbelief and incredulity, discontent and melancholy, are swept away by opening the windows of the soul to let in the breath of heaven. And this is as much a spiritual as it is a natural law of our being. It was in proportion as Paul "pressed toward the mark for the prize" that he "forgot the things that were behind," the brooding memories of sins

and shortcomings--vain, remorseful regrets over a vanished forfeited past. He braced himself for present duties. He had no time to waste, counting his lost paces and feeble pulse-beats and fatal stumblings, when the goal was still to be reached. He does better than weep over irreparable bygone days, by redeeming the moments of a yet available future--the pettinesses and shortcomings of his former aims and aspirations are lost in the truthfulness and earnestness of present purposes. Laying aside every weight, he runs with patience the heavenly race.

In starting on your journey, or rather, to carry out the parallel of Jacob, recommencing a journey already begun, resuming it with new and nobler resolves of duty and obedience, get yourself thoroughly indoctrinated with the same truth we sought to enforce in last chapter, that whatever your future be, whatever your lot and sphere in life, it will have its opportunities, however lowly and inconspicuous, of doing good to your fellows, and of glorifying Him in whose name you have vowed your vow.

We repeat, the humblest duties may be exalted, elevated, transfigured. Motive dignifies action. "Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ." Above all, whether much or little, strive to perform it worthily; to give the talent if you can; the mite if you have not the talent; and the willing heart and pure purpose if even the mite be not possessed. God has room in His kingdom for the "feeble folk" as well as for giant souls; for the infant learning to walk as well as for the swift-footed Asahel. "When Israel was a child, I loved him as a son, and I called my son out of Egypt. It was I who taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand." (Hosea 11:1-3).

"Thus I with faltering footsteps journey on,  
Watching the stars that roll the hours away;  
Until the faint light that guides me now is gone,  
And, like another life, the glorious day  
Shall open over me from the empyreal height,  
With warmth and certainty and boundless light."

With none of us, that journey should be a lounge, a summer day's walk. Life is an tremendous talent; and duty, as connected with life, is

measureless. It has a center, but it knows no circumference. Its center is in God; its emanations reach into infinitude. Cease to imagine that you are an isolated planet, lost in the great system--a star dwelling alone. Rather feel that hour after hour you are circling round a glorious center, which not only gives you light, but expects you to reflect back light in return. Depend upon it, in the recognition of obligations, perhaps before renounced, now discharged with faith and courageous trust, you will acquire not only nobler views of duty, but of real happiness. The proverbial 'leisure with dignity' has a ring of reality in it, but it has a deeper dirge of falsehood. Among other discoveries the day of fresh spiritual awakening makes to receptive minds is, that the true dignity of life is not ease and luxurious rest--the poor artificial existence which consists in quaffing from hour to hour and from day to day the bowl of pleasure--but in that angel-work of traveling up and down the ladder, doing the will and fulfilling the purposes of the Father who loves you and the Savior who died for you. How many there are who spend their early days in irreverent and defiant independence of God and the soul--a poor Epicurean life; the 'absorbing present' all in all; and then, when the evening shadows begin to lengthen, there is an effort to assume the Pilgrim garb and begin the Pilgrim journey. In other words, they give the best of their strength, and the best of their time, and the best of their hearts to sin and self and the world; and then presume to offer to God the crumbs and the sweepings of an existence from which the zest is gone.

How can there be "the lifted-up feet," how can there be joyous harvests or vintage, when the soul has thus scorned its spring-time--when the young furrow has closed its pores against "the early rain" and reviving sun; the seed scattered either in the drought of the ended summer, or amid the chill blasts of the waning year? Be it yours to make another Pilgrim-prayer of the Psalmist your own on each returning day or at each fresh milestone of the road--"Cause me to hear Your loving-kindness in the morning; for in You do I trust--cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto You. Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; I flee unto You to hide me. Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God--Your Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness" (Ps. 143:8-10). Thus, with the feet 'uplifted' in God's strength, will trials be made easy and burdens light. "It is God that girds me with strength, and



makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like hinds' feet" (Ps. 18:32-33). "Though he fall, yet shall he not be utterly cast down--for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Ps. 37:24).

Nor, in speaking of helps for "the prosperous journey by the will of God" (Rom. 1:10), can we forget the promise so specially brought before us in the ladder-vision.--"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:11-12). Who are the leaders in that viewless band? May we not think of each angel, excelling in his own peculiar strength, specially delegated on his allotted mission to the several Pilgrims to Zion? The Angel Faith, with gleaming eye; the Angel Courage, with fiery wing and burnished shield and flaming sword; the Angel Ardor, with fleet foot urging the wayfarer upwards and onwards; the Angel Patience, with gentle visage and white vestment and folded arms, sent to whisper resignation in the hour of sorrow; the Angel of Victory, high above all, holding in one hand a palm, and in the other a crown. Shall we add a beautiful conception of an old Florentine painter--two gleaming Angel-warders at the gates of Paradise, putting garlands on the heads of the saints as they enter the Celestial City!

Another and very different lesson and reflection may be gathered from Jacob's resumed journey. It is suggested by connecting his present with his future experience. The dreamland and its time of blessing was in strange contrast with the dreary, servile years of drudgery and discipline (must we add of spiritual retrogression), in Mesopotamia.

As with him, so with us. Our seasons of Divine elation and ecstasy, Bethel-visions, are not to always last. The booths are not allowed to be permanently pitched on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter and his brother-Apostles had to descend the hill at dawn of morning for stern duty and trial; alas! too, as it proved, for the manifestation of faltering and unwatchfulness, and the surrender of holy trust! Even Paul had to return from his heavenly "revelations" to "the thorn in the flesh," to the arduous race--the fierce battle-field.

And there are occasions which come to all of us, when with pain and sorrow we have to subscribe to the truth and reality of his recorded

experience--"There is a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). God does not change towards us, but we may be too conscious of a change towards Him. There may be fluctuations, no, sensible reductions, in our peace and joy in believing, and that, also, by reason of our own unfaithfulness and shortcomings. Like the sunlight dying from the mountains--the everlasting hills are the same; but the glow upon them for a time has faded; the roseate hues have paled into the cold grey. "Bunyan's Pilgrim," says Dr. Cheever, "in going up his Hill Difficulty set out almost with running, so full was he of zeal and hope, of animation and impulse; but he soon got to walking, and thence fell to climbing on his hands and knees, and that with such weariness that it seemed as if he could not go on."

Not infrequently, also, as in Jacob's case, it is after times of great spiritual enlargement that there is special danger of reaction and slumber. There is often but a brief way between the clear visions of the mountain and the mists hovering in the valleys. That very day of the Patriarch's renewed journey was itself emblematic of the spiritual history of his own future years. He must have had many a sigh for rest, as with blistered feet and beaded brow he sat on the lonely rocks by the wayside, or, after quenching his lips by scanty pools, he pursued his way over the stretches of burning sand. At night he had to descend the gorges of the Jordan and grope with his pilgrim-staff through its bristling bushes and rushing waters. Such also is the experience of every spiritual pilgrim. As an old writer has it, his way lies "uphill, downhill, to the city which has foundations." Not only has he, at times, great trials to encounter--heavy shackles to impede the "lifted-up feet"--but his faith is daunted; his peace and joy are impaired and rudely shaken by mere trifles--little things (what might be called life's undignified worries)--which in the retrospect he is ashamed he so allowed to fetter him, but which have nevertheless proved hindrances and stumbling-blocks--the infirmity of temper; the fretful word; the hasty speech; the peevish murmur; the uncharitable reflection; some old habit reasserting its vicious claim, whether that be allied to sloth or covetousness, to frivolity, or selfishness, or passion.

It is melancholy to think how this renewed and re-awakened Patriarch

(whom we have found at eventide at Heaven's gate, then at break of day 'lifting up his feet'--bounding along with elastic step, as if the physical frame participated in the joy that filled his inner nature)--was so soon drawn within the old coils of the Beersheba tent--giving way (the last thing he ought to have done) to distrust in the fidelity of a promising God. Alas! we see too plainly the lack of that lofty element in his grandfather's steadfast simple faith, "accounting that God was able" (Heb. 11:19). In sinful forgetfulness of this ability, we find him tempted to resort occasionally to former human and unworthy expedients, revealing the "ruling infirmities" of his earlier life--or what may apologetically be called his "constitutional bias." While manifesting, indeed, high-principled submission under aggravated provocation, we discover at the same time the familiar scheming, bargain-loving nephew, trying to outwit the bargain-loving uncle, "a trial of wits," as Ewald expresses it; "wherein subtlety is fitly matched against subtlety."

A further course of discipline, extending over twenty years, was needed, before the 'Supplanter' is finally driven out of him, and he comes forth the fully-armored "Prince of God." The first stage, at least, of that discipline seems completed at Jabbok. Until then, he refused to altogether let go of his old, crooked, distrustful policy. But on that occasion he thus proclaims the unconditional surrender--"I will not let YOU go." He has no boon now to ask, but one--that an undefined spiritual blessing may be given to him by the God of the heavenly ladder. In the spirit of a later wrestler on the same territory he seems to say, "My soul longs for YOU in a dry and thirsty land where no water' is!"--'Lord! O Shepherd of the stone of Israel! show me a token that You are my Shepherd and I shall not lack. Reveal Yourself to me as my portion, and I shall need no other!'

Thus was he brought to see and to own that the Jehovah of Bethel to whom he had erected the pillar and vowed his vow, was the only Being and Friend who could truly prosper his way and bring him in peace to his Father's house. We know, indeed, that the Divine discipline did not end even with Jabbok. God saw that there was still much needed, before the education could be complete. Accordingly He dealt with him as He speaks of doing with the figurative Jacob of the Prophet. Though "redeemed" and "called by his name," he was to pass through varied and diversified

trials, under the expressive figure of waters, rivers, floods, fire, flames (Is. 43:1, 2). In another sense the Bethel words were true, "I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of!"

And so it is in His probation dealings with all His spiritual Israel. The rod is required in some, more than in others, to subdue the defiant and obdurate will, to put an end to all schemings and compromise, and gain the heart to an unconditional surrender. "If Jacob," says Bishop Hall, "were willingly consumed with heat in the day and with frost in the night to become the son-in-law to Laban; what should we refuse to be made the sons of God?" "He has his tools," Rutherford says, "on the stones He wishes best polished for His Temple." To carry out the latter emblem, the Divine Sculptor, with each successive stroke of the chisel, has the great end in view of bringing out His own image in the soul, deepening in it the love of goodness, truth, purity, kindness. And while not one stroke of that chisel is an unnecessary one, He will not cease nor intermit His work until the spiritual marble has been fashioned so as to reach perfectly and forever His own ideal--

"No sign that the marble was white,  
'Twas only a block at best,  
But the artist with inward sight  
Looked further than all the rest;  
And saw in the hard, rough stone  
The loveliest statue the sun shone on.

"So he set to work with care,  
And chiseled a form of grace,  
A figure divinely fair,  
With a tender, beautiful face;  
But the blows were hard and fast  
That brought from the marble that work at last.

"So I think that human lives  
Must bear God's chisel keen,  
If the spirit yearns and strives  
For the better life unseen;  
For men are only blocks at best,  
Until the chiseling brings out all the rest!"

Go then, spiritual Pilgrim! on your journey--cheered with the memories of your night-vision, and with the given and promised strength of your God. Seek to make life henceforth (and all the better if from its earliest morning hours) a consecrated thing--that so, when the sunset is nearing, with its murky vapors and lowering skies, the very clouds of sorrow may be fringed with golden light. Then will you feel in the conscious possession of God's presence and blessing, that you are in fellowship, not with a stranger--but with a familiar gracious Friend; whose bounteous hand has given you the daily bread of temporal mercy, and the better bread which endures to Eternity. Thus will the song in the house of your pilgrimage be ever in truest harmony. It will be composed of no jarring discordant notes--but with all its varied tones will form one sustained, life-long melody--dropped for a moment in death only to be resumed with the angels, and blended with the everlasting cadences of your Father's house.

"Traveler! faint not on the road,  
Droop not in the parching sun;  
Onward, onward with your load,  
Until the rest be won.

"Swerve not, though your weary feet  
The pilgrim path would leave;  
From the burden and the heat  
You shall rest at eve.

"From the petty cares that teem  
Turn from with prophetic eye,  
To the glory of that Dream  
Which shall never die!

"Hark! it is the Father's voice;  
Welcome, Pilgrim, to your rest,  
Now within the gate rejoice,  
Sealed and bought and blest!"

## BETHEL REVISITED

"Grants of mercy call for returns of duty; and the sweet communion we have with God ought ever to be remembered."--Matthew Henry.

"Therefore fear not, O my servant Jacob, says the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel--for I am with you, says the Lord, to save you."--Jeremiah 30:10, 11.

God said to Jacob, "Now move on to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to worship me--the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau." Genesis 35:1

We revisit with emotion localities which have been consecrated to us in early years; all the more so, after a long period of absence. Whether it be the lowly cottage of the hamlet, or the residence in the busy city, or the more splendid ancestral dwelling. Some one special scene or haunt, also, may have its more hallowed memories; the tree whose shade vividly recalls childhood's playful hours; the murmuring stream and pendent willow where youth's first aspirations were formed; "the upland lawn" or "accustomed hill" where in the company of some cherished friendship "the early dews were brushed away;" the Church whose walls listened to the silent vows of a new spiritual life--the room where those now numbered with the dead spoke tenderly and lovingly of filial duty, and who have left behind them imperishable examples of holy living and happy dying.

The human heart is the same in every age--and akin, therefore, to the emotions just described, must have been the feelings with which Jacob once more stood among the stones of his former couch at Bethel.

For the previous nine years, he had encamped at Succoth and Shechem. At the latter place he set up an altar "in the grove of Moreh." In connection with it, however, he had no divine personal remembrances. It was sacred to him only as associated with his grandfather's primitive altar, erected 160 years previously, on the occasion of first receiving the Covenant promise. It was different altogether with the spot which had

awakened within his own breast his deepest religious fervor, and witnessed his own earliest vows of heart-consecration. What a change had passed over his history during the three decades! To how many vicissitudes had he been subjected since that never-to-be-forgotten morning, when, with elastic tread, he went forth fresh from the voices and visions of heaven on his unknown pilgrimage!

Then he was all alone--no companion but a bag and a pilgrim staff--now, he returns, the head and center of an imposing Eastern caravan. Whatever these varied experiences had been, one thing he could gratefully testify, that the Great Being who had spoken to him had been true to His promises. He had not failed him. He had 'kept him in all places where he had gone,' and had 'brought him again into that land.' It was a retrospect of covenant faithfulness. What Moses, in an after age, said in his dying admonitions to Israel, might have been appropriately addressed now to their illustrious progenitor--"You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you--in the wilderness, to humble you and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments, or not" (Deut. 8:2).

In accordance with the divine direction, the Patriarch now willingly returned to the old votive ground, anew to pledge his faithfulness to the God who had 'answered him in the day of his distress.' Nine and a half years previous to this, the recollection of the ladder-dream had been vividly brought before him. On the other side of the Jordan, just as he was approaching the borders of Canaan, the Angels of that heavenly Stair had again appeared. We may perhaps infer, that not during the twenty years of his exile, had they been visible to the outward eye of the Pilgrim Shepherd; but in that night of awe and trembling at Jabbok, an angelic revelation was again given. The exile "went on his way" from Mesopotamia, and (on reaching Canaan) the "angels of God met him" (Gen. 32:1).

Standing now upon the spot where formerly these radiant Beings had revealed themselves in a dream above his pillow of stone, he would gratefully recall, in addition to the bestowment of positive mercies, the evasion of many and great perils. There would be his escape across the Euphrates from the morose and exacting Laban. There would be the

averting of the anger of his once vengeful and vindictive, but, as he had proved, high-minded and generous brother. There would be the deliverance from more recent reprisals at the hands of the Canaanites, in consequence of his son's breach of faith in the exterminating massacre of the citizens of Shechem (a treacherous and perverse deed in which he himself had no complicity). Above all, there was Jehovah's own gracious meeting with him at the frontier river; a meeting which might truly be called the second birthday of his soul. He had been spiritually born at Bethel, but he might be said to have been born again at Jabbok. A soldier before, he was there panoplied with new armor. From that memorable crisis-hour, indeed, we note that he becomes truer, more real, more unselfish, more affectionate, more God-fearing. Ewald graphically remarks, "Then was accomplished the true spiritual triumph of the great hero, made a new man through such superhuman conflicts; though as the chronicle finally concludes, he receives a lameness, a memento of the mortal combat he has passed through, and a reminder of bygone weakness; as if the moral deformity of 'The Crafty' had passed into the body, and were henceforth to attach to that only."

A new altar we are told was erected on the dreamland, apparently by his own hands, and the name bestowed on the place twenty years before received a fresh and solemn confirmation. "He called the place El-Bethel" (Gen. 35:7). Jehovah once more appeared to His servant. In all probability that appearance on the present occasion was in visible form. The same voice, however, which of old spoke from the stair-summit, again addresses him. First renewing the covenant blessing; and then farther signaling both the place and the occasion by the reiteration of the new name bestowed at Jabbok. Jacob "the Supplanter" is changed into "Israel"--"the Prince of God." "And God said unto him, Your name is Jacob--your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name; and he called his name Israel" (Gen. 35:10).

As a fresh motto and watchword for the pilgrimage, the honored Patriarch listens to the additional announcement from the lips of his gracious Protector, "I am God Almighty!" (Ver. 11.) After certifying to him that the promise previously made on the same ground is to be made good, "to you and to your seed after you will I give the land"--farther, that he



was to be the father of a company of nations and of a line of kings; (ver. 12); we read "God went up from him in the place where he talked with him" (13). Another, probably more carefully built pillar was then erected to commemorate this new revelation of the Divine Being--"a pillar of stone," on which the customary libation was poured, consisting of a "drink-offering and oil" (35:14).

This scene and occasion has perhaps been truly called, "the time of Jacob's greatest happiness." His cup certainly was full as it had never been before. It was the pride of the wealthy sheep owner with his vast flocks and herds--of the chief surrounded with his clansmen--the Sheikh by his servants--the joy of the exile returning to his native hills; of the father in the midst of his numerous family and dependants. There was the lively recollection of the divine condescension and kindness in the past; and the renewal of the divine promises for the future. We may even picture his household, who had lately renounced their idols (Gen. 35:4), assembling around the votive pillar, and uniting in the simple rites of worship.

No anticipation of coming trial broke the trance of present bliss--Bethel, during these memorable days, must have appeared, even in an earthly sense, as the Gate of Heaven. The "Goodness and Mercy" of the future Psalm (as if two of the radiant Angels of the ladder) would seem about to follow him all the days of his life.

Alas! for the instability and insecurity of earth's best blessings! Jacob knew not (as we know not) what a day may bring forth. This solitary Shepherd of Palestine, like the laurel-crowned victors of a later age, must listen in the hour of blessing and prosperity to the needful monitory word reminding of vicissitude and mortality. In his present moments of elation, little did he forecast coming events. Little dreamt he, that only a few days later, after striking his tents, the impending cloud of bereavement which darkened his whole future was to burst upon him; that he would reach his father's encampment, now pitched at Mamre, a broken-hearted widower! His beloved Rachel he laid in her early grave at Bethlehem. Even the aged nurse, who formed the tenderest link which bound him to his mother's name and memory, was left with tears at Bethel under the "oak of weeping"--a name which surely carries with it a

touching testimony alike to the fidelity of the servant and the irrepressible grief of the master.

Meanwhile, however, in calm confidence, though all ignorant of that unknown morrow, he erects his altar and vows his vow. What was said of a great descendant may with equal truth have been said of him--

"Bold to bear God's heaviest load,  
Dimly guessing at the road--  
Rocky road and hard ascended  
Though his foot was angel-tended.

"Soon came heartache, care, distress,  
Blighted hope and loneliness--  
Sad success, parental tears,  
And a dreary gift of years."

Here by rights this volume should end. And yet, may we not well include in our pages still another and more solemn 'Eventide at Bethel'? Are we not warranted to believe that there was yet one other occasion when the Dreamland came conspicuously before the eye of the Patriarch? He was indeed, at the time we speak of, at a long distance from Canaan. Very different scenes had for seventeen years risen before his eyes. He was no longer among the sunny hills and pastoral valleys and lowly altars of Palestine, but far away amid the stretches of glowing sand and the colossal Temples and Pyramids of Egypt. We are summoned in thought to his death-chamber in that strange kingdom. The season has now arrived, the solemn hour in his, and in every history, when life is lived over again, and its most momentous incidents are recalled to impressive remembrance. As the princely Joseph and his sons stand by his bedside to take their last farewell, lo! it is the memories of the stony pillow which are first upon the lips of the dying Patriarch.--When Jacob heard that Joseph had arrived, he gathered his strength and sat up in bed to greet him. Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz (Bethel) in the land of Canaan and blessed me. He said to me, 'I will make you a multitude of nations, and I will give this land of Canaan to you and your descendants as an everlasting possession.'" Genesis 48:2-4

Then, after recounting some touching reminiscences of his pilgrimage, he

farther proceeds to pronounce a special blessing on his favorite son, and his two grandchildren. But even in doing so, the vision of Bethel seems anew to rise up vividly before him. He sets his dying seal to the veracity and fidelity of the divine promise which, it will be remembered, gave birth to his own responsive vow--"The God which fed me all my life-long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48:15-16).

May we not, moreover, well suppose, that the ladder-dream had its own due share in impelling the urgent and reiterated request regarding his own burial plans? He wishes no stately Pyramid or Sarcophagus reared over his ashes in the land of the Pharaohs. "Bury me not, I beg you, in Egypt, but I will lie with my fathers--in the land of Canaan." We are thankful for the record of this quiet eventide, after a stormy and troubled day--the peaceful migration of this great Shepherd-Patriarch to 'the Better country.' We hear of triumphant deathbeds. This surely is one of them. Like a glorious sun bursting from a bank of clouds in an evening sky, he seems to illuminate all around. Not Joseph and his sons only, but all his family are gathered round his couch to receive his benediction.

And such a benediction! It has been well called a "grand lyric." The religious fervor which dictated the morning vow and prayer and which reared the altar on the upland at Bethel, seems to return in these waning hours. Not in the prosaic imagery we generally associate with age and weakness, but in strains of loftiest poetry the spirit of the old man passes away. "Who," says Toplady, "that reads this chapter, would imagine, that elevated strains like these--strains that would have done honor to the genius of Homer, warbled from the lips of a dying man--of a man, also, laboring under the utmost decays of age, and over whose head no fewer than one hundred and forty-seven years had passed!

All the dross, from that complex soul of his, had now been burnt out and removed in the smelting furnace. He comes forth from his life of great mercies yet of great tribulation, refined as the gold. He seems transfigured before he is glorified. What could not have been said for many a long year of trial and discipline can be averred with confidence now, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile."

We hear no more of murmuring at calamities--no more mourning over failures--no more rash impugnings, as once there were, of divine wisdom and faithfulness. The "all things" he once thought "against him" are now owned to have been for him. He seems wrapped up and absorbed in the contemplation of the goodness of that Redeeming Angel-God. God's hand alone he traces in the varied events of his pilgrimage. His bounty had fed him, His Providence had shielded him, His presence had cheered him and He who had given him sustaining grace for a living-day, now gave him dying grace for a dying-day.

And if we might, for yet a few moments, linger at that death-scene, it would be to note one other minute particular in the narrative (trivial in itself), but not without its interest as the last link with the Dream-land. We have noted in its place, in a preceding chapter, that the solitary possession of the shepherd-pilgrim specially mentioned in connection with that lone eventide at Bethel, was his pilgrim staff. Nor indeed need we speak of this reference to the staff of the patriarch as 'trivial;' when it is not deemed to be so by an inspired penman of a long future age. It is surely remarkable, that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in his roll-call of worthies, should, in illustrating Jacob's faith, specially single out for mention the circumstance that in blessing the two sons of Joseph in the hour of his departure, "he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff."

As we associate Moses with his rod, and Elijah with his mantle, so do we associate Jacob with this pastoral crook. The same staff, perhaps, had been familiar to him in life's bright morning among the flocks at Beersheba--the same had been at the side of the Bethel-dreamer when he became spectator of angelic footsteps and auditor of the heavenly voice--it was probably the first thing his hand grasped in early dawn, when he raised himself from his stony pillow. It had been the companion of his pilgrimage ever since; the silent witness of his covenant-vows; the memento and souvenir of many loving-kindnesses and interpositions of the God he had served--with him in his joys, with him in his sorrows; on which he had leaned when bowed with grief at his subsequent trials, when "Joseph was not and Simeon was not," and they threatened to "take Benjamin also."

The blind old man, as he strengthens himself on his bed, leans reverently on the same cherished support, absorbed in thought. He can no longer see it. His eyes are dimmed with the haze of years and of death--but his aged hands can grasp it. That death-grasp would seem to help him to gather up the tangled threads of memory and to retrace all the varied steps in the ladder-dream of existence. No more; the humble prop which had guided him through the fords of Jordan (Gen. 32:10) would seem to suggest a nobler Shepherd's crook, leaning on which, he would pass safely at life's eventide through the deep gorges and rushing waters of a deeper and darker valley. He could anticipate gracious words which have cheered countless millions in the same hour, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil--for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4).

We almost forget the once trembling fugitive and scared dreamer on the uplands of Benjamin. We can hardly recognize the timid traveler at Jabbok. The mists and clouds that obscured his early morning have passed away forever. The rustic wanderer has risen to the dignity of Prophet. Before these eyes, dimmed to earth, but already kindling with the light of an opening heaven, there rises, in the far-reaching vista of a grander future, the vision of a Great coming Conqueror--the Messiah of his race. He even hails Him by names, in what Luther well calls "a golden text," as the SHILOH. He sees nations and peoples gathering around His standard; kings and princes casting their crowns and scepters at His feet, and welcoming Him to the throne of universal Empire.

Then, as if rejoicing in his own assured personal interest in these transcendent predictions, he puts his dying seal to the faithfulness, in a dying hour, of "the Angel who redeemed him." As if at last fully realizing the glories of the Bethel vision--"I have waited," said he, in a rapture of gospel triumph--"I have waited for Your salvation, O God!" With that Dreamland before his closing eyes, and the angels of the heavenly stair tracking his footsteps, he boldly crosses the border-river, and the noblest part of the Bethel promise is fulfilled, "he is brought to his Father's house in peace." "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people" (Gen. 49:33).

May such a tranquil Eventide be ours--the vision, the promise, the staff,  
the Angel-convoy, the memories of divine goodness, the song of salvation,  
the abundant entrance! May we be among the privileged number, who,  
having gazed with the eye of faith on the Dreamland ladder, are able at a  
dying hour to grasp its sublime spiritual and everlasting verities, and who  
shall at last "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and JACOB in the  
Kingdom of our Father!"

"Complain not that the way is long--  
What road is weary that leads there?  
But let the Angel take your hand,  
And lead you up the misty stair--  
And then with beating heart await  
The opening of the Golden Gate."

"Beyond the stars that shine in golden glory,  
Beyond the calm sweet moon,  
Up the bright ladder saints have trod before you;  
Soul! you shall venture soon.

"All finished! all the conflict and the sorrow,  
Sin felt and feared no more;  
There dawns the radiance of a dreamless morrow  
On the Eternal Shore!"

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee;  
Even though it be a cross  
That raises me;  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee.

"Though like the wanderer,  
The sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me,  
My rest a stone;  
Yet in my dreams I'd be

Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee.

"There let the way appear  
Steps unto Heaven;  
All that Thou sendest me  
In mercy given;  
Angels to beckon me  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee.

"Then with my waking thoughts  
Bright with Thy praise,  
Out of my stony griefs  
Bethel I'll raise;  
So by my woes to be  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee.

"And when on joyful wing,  
Cleaving the sky,  
Sun, moon, and stars forgot,  
Upward I fly;  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee."

# **THE DEER AND THE WATER-BROOKS**

"The portion of God's Word that is specially precious to me, more so than I am able to express, is the forty-second Psalm." -Evans

"What a precious, soul-comforting Psalm is that forty-second!" -Hammond

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## **THE SCENE OF THE PSALM**

This "land beyond the Jordan" derives an imperishable interest from

being the exile retreat of the Sweet Singer of Israel in the most pathetic period of his chequered life and reign. There is no more touching episode in all Hebrew history than the recorded flight of David from his capital on the occasion of the rebellion of Absalom and the defection of his people. Passing, barefoot and weeping, across the brook Kedron, and thence by the fords of Jericho, he sped northwards with his faithful adherents, and found a temporary shelter amid these remote fastnesses.

Minds of a peculiar temperament have often found it a relief, in seasons of sadness, to give expression to their pent-up feelings in poetry or song. Ancient as well as modern verse and music abound with striking examples of this—"Songs in the Night," when the mouldering harp was taken down from the willows by some captive spirit, and made to pour forth its strains or numbers in touching elegy. David's own lament for Jonathan is a gush of intensified feeling which will occur to all, and which could have been penned only in an agony of tears.

It was a spirit crushed and broken with other, but not less poignant sorrows, which dictated this Psalm of his exile. May we not imagine that, in addition to the tension of feeling produced by his altered fortunes, there was in the very scene of his banishment, where the plaintive descant was composed, much to inspire poetic sentiment? The alternate calm and discord of outer nature found their response in his own chequered experiences. Nature's Aeolian harp—its invisible strings composed of rustling leaves and foaming brooks, or the harsher tones of tempest and thunder, flood and waterfall—awoke the latent harmonies of his soul. They furnished him with a keynote to discourse higher melodies, and embody struggling thoughts in inspired numbers. In reading this Psalm we at once feel that we are with the Minstrel King, not in the Tabernacle of Zion, but in some glorious "House not made with hands,"—some Cathedral whose aisles are rocky cliffs and tangled branches, and its roof the canopy of Heaven!

Let us picture him seated in one of those deep glens listening to the murmur of the rivulet and the wail of the forest. Suddenly the sky is overcast. Dark clouds roll their masses along the purple peaks. The lightning flashes; and the old oaks and terebinths of Bashan bend under the tumult of the storm. The higher rivulets have swelled the channel of

Jordan—"deep calls to deep"—the waves chafe and riot along the narrow gorges. Suddenly a struggling ray of sunshine steals amid the strife, and a stray note from some bird answers joyously to its gleam. It is, however, but a gleam. The sky again threatens, fresh bolts wake the mountain echoes. The river rolls on in augmented volume, and the wind wrestles fiercely as ever with the inhabitants of the forest. At last the contest is at an end. The sky is calm—the air refreshed—the woods are vocal with song—ten thousand dripping boughs sparkle in the sunlight; the meadows wear a lovelier emerald; and rock, and branch, and floweret, are reflected in the bosom of the stream.

As the royal spectator with a poet and painter's eye is gazing on this shifting diorama, and when Nature is laughing and joyous again amid her own teardrops, another simple incident arrests his attention. A deer, hit by the archers or pursued by some wild beast on these "mountains of the leopards," with hot eyeballs and panting sides, comes bounding down the forest glade to quench the rage of thirst. The sight suggests nobler aspirations. With trembling hand and tearful eye the exiled spectator awakes his harp-strings, and bequeaths to us one of the most inspiring musings in the whole Psalter. The 23d has happily been called "the nightingale of the Psalms;" this may appropriately be termed "the turtle-dove." We hear the lonely bird as if seated on a solitary branch warbling its "reproachful music," or rather struggling on the ground with broken wing, uttering a doleful lament. These strains form an epitome of the Christian life—a diary of religious experience, which, after three thousand years, find an echo in every heart. Who can wonder that they have smoothed the death-pillow of dying saints, and taken a thorn from the crown of the noble army of martyrs!

## **THE GENERAL SCOPE OF THE PSALM**

"If the Book of Psalms be, as some have styled it, a mirror or looking-glass of pious and devout affections, this Psalm, in particular, deserves as much as any one Psalm to be so entitled, and is as proper as any other to kindle and excite such in us. Gracious desires are here strong and fervent;

gracious hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are here struggling. Or we may take it for a conflict between sense and faith; sense objecting, and faith answering." (Matthew Henry)

In these few words, the Father of commentators, with his customary discernment, has given us the key to the true interpretation of this sacred song. It may be regarded, indeed, as the Old Testament parallel to the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in which another inspired writer truthfully and powerfully portrays the same great struggle between corruption and grace, faith and sense, "the old and the new man."

There are two antagonist principles in the heart of every believer, corresponding to the great forces which act in the material world. The tendency of his new nature is to gravitate towards God—the Divine Sun of his being—the center of his fondest affections—the object of his deepest love. But "there is a law in his members warring against the law of his mind" (Rom. 7:23)—the remains of his old nature, leading him to wander in wide and eccentric orbit from the grand Source of light, and happiness, and joy! "What will you see in the Shulamite?" asks the Spouse in the Canticles, personating the believer, (at a time, too, when conscious of devoted attachment to the Lord she loved). The reply is, "As it were the company of two armies." (Sol. Song 6:13.) Sight on the one hand, Faith on the other. The carnal mind, which is enmity against God, battling with the renewed spiritual mind, which brings life and peace. Affections heaven-born, counteracted and marred by affections earth-born. The magnet would be true to its pole but for disturbing moral influences. The eagle would soar, but it is chained to the cage of corruption. The believer would tread boldly on the waves, but unbelief threatens to sink him. He would fight the battles of the faith, but there is "a body of death" chained to his heavenly nature, which compels him to mingle denunciations of himself as "a wretched man" with the shouts of victory. (Rom. 7:24, 25)

We may imagine David, when he composed this Psalm, wrapped in silent contemplation—the past, the present, and the future suggesting mingled reflections. The shepherd, the king, the fugitive! Sad comment on the alternations of human life! humbling lesson for God's Anointed! It furnishes him with a true estimate of the world's greatness. It has taught him the utter nothingness of all here as a portion for the soul. Amid

outward trial and inward despondency, FAITH looks to its only true refuge and resting-place. His truant heart softened and saddened by calamity, turns to its God—"As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ver. 1, 2.) But the wave is beaten back again! He remembers his sins and his sorrows, and (more galling to his sensitive spirit) the taunts of ungodly scoffers. "My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say unto me, "Where is your God?" (Ver. 3.) Moreover, he is denied the solace of public ordinances. He can no longer, as once he could, light the decaying ashes of his faith at the fires of the altar. Memory dwelt with chastened sadness on the hours of holy convocation. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day." (Ver. 4.) But, once more, the new-born principle regains the mastery. He rebukes his own unbelief, urges renewed dependence on God, and triumphs in the assurance of His countenance and love. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed in me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." (Ver. 5.) But again the harp is muffled! Unbelief musters her ranks; remembrances of sin and sorrow crowd upon him. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." (Ver. 6.) Faith, however, has its antidote at hand, and the momentary cause of depression is removed. The memory of former supports and mercies inspires with confidence for the future, and he immediately adds, "I will remember YOU (in this the place of my Exile) from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

But the storm-clouds are still wreathing his sky—no, it seems as if the tempest were deepening. Fresh assaults of temptation are coming in upon him—there seems no light in the cloud, no ray in the darkness. "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls; all your waves and your billows are gone over me." (Ver. 7.) But again, his own extremity is God's opportunity; Faith is seen cresting the resurgent waves. Lifting his voice above the storm, he thus expresses his assurance in God's faithfulness, "Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my

life." (Ver. 8.) No, he resolves in all time to come to provide against the return of seasons of guilty distrust and misgiving. He dictates and transcribes the very words of a prayer to be employed as an antidote in any such recurring moments of despondency. He resolves to rise above frames and feelings, and to plant his feet on the Rock of Ages, which these fluctuating billows can never shake—"I will say unto God my rock, Why have you forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" (Ver. 9.) The old nature makes one last and final effort, before abandoning the conflict. Unbelief rallies its strength. A former assault is renewed. "As with a sword in my bones, my enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is your God?" (Ver.10.) But he reverts to his prayer! He adopts his own liturgy for a time of sorrow. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? hope you in God; for I shall yet praise Him." (Ver.11.) He seems to be "answered while yet speaking;" for he closes with the joyful declaration, "Who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Ver. 11.) He had made a similar assertion in a former verse (ver. 5), "I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance;" but now he can add the language of triumphant assurance, "MY God!" The conflict is ended—sense quits the field, and faith conquers. He began the Psalm in trouble, he ends it with joy. Its notes throughout are on the minor key, but these merge at last into a strain of triumph. He began comparing himself to the stricken deer—the helpless, breathless, panting fugitive—he ends it with angels' words—with the motto and watchword in which a seraph might well glory—heaven knows no happier—"MY GOD!"

"He looked," says Matthew Henry, "upon the living God as his chief good, and had set his heart upon Him accordingly, and was resolved to live and die by Him; and casting anchor thus at first, he rides out the storm."

O child of God! touchingly expressive picture have we here of the strange vicissitudes in your history. The shuttle in the web of your spiritual life, darting here and there, weaving its chameleon hues; or, to adopt a more appropriate emblem, your heart a battlefield, and "no discharge in that war" until the pilgrim-armor be exchanged for the pilgrim-rest—sense and sin doing their utmost to quench the fires of faith, and give the enemy the advantage—yes, and they would succeed in quenching these,

did not the Lord of pilgrims feed with the oil of His own grace the languishing flame. "Sometimes," it has been well said, "in the Voyages of the Soul, we feel that we can only go by anxious soundings—the compass itself seeming useless—not knowing our bearings—nearing here Christ—then perhaps the dim tolling bell amid the thick darkness warning us to keep off." (Cheever's "Windings"). But fear not; He will "bring you to the haven where you would be." The voice of triumph will be heard high above the water-floods. The contest may be long, but it will not be doubtful. He who rules the raging of the sea will, in His own good time, say, "Peace, be still, and immediately there will be a great calm." Have you ever watched the career of the tiny branch or withered leaf which has been tossed into a little virgin stream on one of our high table-lands or mountain moors? For a while, in its serpentine course, it is borne sluggishly along, impeded by protruding moss, or stone, or lichen. Now it circles and saunters here and there on the lazy streamlet—now floating back towards the point of departure, as if uncertain which direction to choose. A passing breath of wind carries it to the center, and the buoyant rivulet sings its way joyously onward, bearing its little cargo through copse, and birch, and heather. But again it is obstructed. Some deep inky pool detains it in the narrow ravine. There it is sucked in, whirled and twisted about, chafed and tortured with the conflict of waters; or else it lies a helpless prisoner, immured by the rocks in their fretting caldrons. But by and by, with a new impulse it breaks away along the rapid torrent-stream, bounding over cascade and waterfall, home to its ocean destiny.

So it is with the Soul! It is often apparently the sport and captive of opposing currents. It has its pools of darkness, its eddies of unbelief, its jagged rocks of despair, but it will eventually clear them all. "All motion tends to rest, and ends in it. God is the center and resting-place of the soul; and here David takes up his rest, and so let us. We see that discussing of objections in the consistory of the Soul, settles the Soul at last—Faith at length silencing all risings to the contrary. Then whatever times come, we are sure of a hiding place and a sanctuary."(Sibbes)

Yes! your life, notwithstanding all these fluctuations, will end triumphantly. It may, as in this Psalm, be now a paeon, then a dirge; now a Miserere, then a Te Deum. The Miserere and Te Deum may be

interweaved throughout; but the latter will close the Life-story—the concluding strain will be the anthem of Victory. You may arrest the arrow in its flight—you may chain the waterfall, or stay the lightning, sooner than unsay the words of God, "He that has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil 1:6.)

Remember, God does not say, that "good work" is never to be impeded. He has never given promise in Scripture of an unclouded day—uninterrupted sunshine—a waveless, stormless sea. No, "the morning without clouds" is a heavenly emblem. The earthly one is "a day, in which the light shall neither be clear nor dark." (Zech. 14:6.) The analogy of the outer world of nature, at least under these our chequered and ever-varying skies, teaches us this. Spring comes smiling, and pours her blossoms into the lap of Summer. But the skies lower, and the rain and battering hail descend, and the virgin blossoms droop their heads and almost die. Summer again smiles and the meadows look gay; the flowers ring merry chimes with their leaves and petals, and Autumn with glowing face is opening her bosom for the expected treasure. But all at once drought comes with her fiery footsteps. Every blade and floweret, gasping for breath, lift their blanched eyelids to the brazen sky; or the night-winds rock the laden branches and strew the ground. Thus we see it is not one unvarying, unchecked progression, from the opening bud to the matured fruit. But every succeeding month is scarred and mutilated by drought and moisture, wind and rain, storm and sunshine. Yet, never once has Autumn failed to gather up her golden sheaves; yes, and if you ask her testimony, she will tell that the very storm, and wind, and rain you dreaded as foes, were the best auxiliaries in filling her yellow garner.

If the experience of any one here present be that of "the deep" and "the water-flood"—"the stormy wind and tempest," think ever of the closing words of the Psalm, and let them "turn your mourning into dancing; take off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness!" You may change towards God, but He is unchanging towards you. The stars may be swept from our view by intervening clouds, but they shine bright as ever—undimmed altar-fires in the great temple of the universe. Our vision may be at fault, but not their radiance and undying glory. The Being "not confined to temples made with hands," who met this wrestler of old in the forest of



Gilead, and poured better than Gilead's balm into his bosom, is the same now as He was then. And if you are a wrestler too, He seems through the moaning of the storm to say, "Though you fall, yet shall you not be cast down utterly, for the Lord upholds you with his right hand."

"My God!" Oh, if that be the last entry in the Diary of religious experience, be not desponding now because of present passing shadows, but "thank God and take courage." It is written that "at evening-time it shall be light." (Zech. 14:7.) The sun may wade all day through murky clouds, but he will pillow his head at night on a setting couch of vermilion and gold. "Though you have laid among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." (Psalm. 68:13). It was said by aged Jacob, in his prophetic death-song, regarding that very tribe on the borders of which the royal exile now sang, "GAD, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen. 49:19). Was not this the key-note of his present elegy? Faith could lift its head triumphant in the clang of battle, amid these troops of spiritual plunderers, and sing, "Though a army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in THIS will I be confident" (Psalm. 27:3)

## **A PECULIAR EXPERIENCE**

"I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray;  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer,  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour  
At once He'd answer my request;

And by His love's constraining power,  
Subdue my sins and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in every part." —Cowper.

"If we listen to David's harp, we shall hear as many hearse-like harmonies as carols."—Lord Bacon.

"If we be either in outward affliction or in inward distress, we may accommodate to ourselves the melancholy expressions we find here. If not, we must sympathize with those whose case they speak too plainly, and thank God it is not our own case."—Matthew Henry.

Although this Psalm, in bold and striking figure, presents a faithful miniature picture of the Believer's life, we must regard it as depicting an extraordinary experience at a peculiar passage of David's history, and which has its counterpart still in that of many of God's children.

The writer of the Psalm was evidently undergoing "spiritual depression"—what is sometimes spoken of as "spiritual desertion,"—that sorrow, dreadful in its reality—too deep for utterance—deeper than the yawning chasm made by family bereavement—the sorrow of all sorrows, the loss of God in the soul!

There is much caution needed in speaking of this. There are causes which lead to spiritual depression which are purely physical, arising from a diseased body, an overstrung mind—a succession of calamities weakening and impairing the nervous system. We know how susceptible are the body and mind together, of being affected by external influences. "We are," says Robertson, an able analyzer of human emotions, "fearfully and wonderfully made. Of that constitution which in our ignorance we call union of soul and body, we know little respecting what is cause, and what effect. We would sincerely believe that the mind has power over the body; but it is just as true that the body rules the mind. Causes apparently the most trivial—a heated room, lack of exercise—a sunless day, a chilling

northern aspect—will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness; between faith and doubt; between courage and indecision. To our fancy there is something humiliating in being thus at the mercy of our animal nature. We would sincerely find nobler causes for our emotions." Yes—many of those sighs and tears, and morbid, depressed feelings, which Christians speak of as the result of spiritual darkness and the desertion of God, are merely the result of physical derangement, the penalty often for the violation of the laws of health. The atmosphere we breathe is enough to account for them. They come and go—rise and fall with the mercury in the tube. These are cases, not for the spiritual, but for the bodily physician. Their cure is in attendance to the usual laws and prescriptions which regulate the healthy action of the bodily functions.

There is another class of causes which lead to spiritual depression which are partly physical and partly religious. There must necessarily be depression where there is undue elation; where the soul-structure is built on fluctuating frames and feelings, and the religious life is made more subjective than objective.

Many imagine, unless they are at all times in a glow of fervor—an ecstatic frame of feeling—all must be wrong with them. "You will not be asked in the last Great Day whether you had great enjoyment and much enlargement of soul here on earth. Speak to that vast multitude, which no man can number, now around the throne. Ask them whether they came through much consolation and joy in the Lord. No! through much tribulation. Ask them whether they were saved by their warmth of love to their Savior! No! But they had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Miss Plumtre's Letters)

Now, there is nothing more dangerous or deceptive than a life of mere feeling; and its most dangerous phase is a life of religious emotional excitement. It is in the last degree erroneous to consider all this glowing ecstasy of frame a necessary condition of healthy spiritual life. Artificial excitement, in any shape, is perilous. Apart altogether from the moral and religious aspect of the question, the tendency of the ball-room and theater, and a preference in reading for works of fiction, is to make a man nauseate the plain, commonplace work, the occurrences and themes of this everyday world. Feed him on dainties and rich meats, and he

despises husks and plain fare. Equally true is this with regard to the life of the soul. It is not fed on luscious stimulants and ecstatic experiences. When it is so, the result is every now and then a collapse; like a child building his mimic castle too high, the perpendicular and equilibrium are lost. It totters and falls, and he has just to begin again. The dew distills, and hangs its spangled jewels on blade and flower, gently and in silence. The rain comes down in tiny particles and soft showers, not in drenching water-floods. So the healthy Christian holds on the even tenor of his way, unaffected by the barometer of feeling. He knows this is apt to be elevated and depressed by a thousand accidents over which he has no control. His life is fed, not from the fitful and uncertain streams issuing from the low ground of his own experience, but from the snow-clad summits—the Alps of God. Were he thus allowing himself to depend on the rills of his own feelings, his brook would often be dry in summer—the season when he most needed it; whereas the supply from the glacier-beds on which the sun shines, is fullest in these very times of drought.

Add to this, religion is shorn of its glory when it is dwarfed into a mere thing of sentiment and feeling. Its true grandeur and greatness is, when it incorporates itself with active duty, and fulfils its best definition as not a "being" but a "doing." Of nothing, therefore, do we require to be more jealous, than a guilty, unmanly, morbid dwelling on feelings and experiences. You remember Elijah, when he fled pusillanimous and panic-stricken from his work, and took to a hermit-cell amid the solitudes of Sinai. We find him seated in his lonely cave, his head drooping on his breast, sullen thought mantling his brow, muttering his petulant soliloquy, "I am left alone." The voice of God hunts out the fugitive from duty. "What are you doing here, Elijah? Why in this cave, brooding in a coward spirit, unworthy of you? Are you to cease to work for Me, because the high day of excitement on the heights of Carmel are over? Here is food to strengthen your body, and here is "the still, small voice" of my love to strengthen your soul. Go forth to active duty. Leave your cave and your cloak behind you. Take your pilgrim staff, and with the consciousness of a great work in hand, and a brief time to do it in, arise, and onward to Horeb, the mount of God!" (1 Kings 19.)

But having thrown out these preliminary cautions, the question occurs:

Are there no cases of spiritual depression or desertion, arising purely from spiritual causes?

We answer, Yes. The Bible recognizes such. Spiritual darkness—absence of all spiritual comfort and joy—is no figment of man's theological creed. It is a sad and solemn verity—the experience, too, of God's own children. "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light?" (Isa. 50:10.) "Oh," says the afflicted patriarch of Uz, "that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness." (Job 29:2, 3.) "In my prosperity," is the testimony of David, at a later period of his life, "I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by your favor you have made my mountain to stand strong: you did hide your face, and I was troubled." (Ps. 30:5-7.) "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves: I sought him, but I found him not. ... My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spoke: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." (Sol. Song 3:2, v. 6.) Can we forget a more dreadful and impressive example? ONE soaring above the reach of all groveling human experiences, but yet who tells us, in His bitter Eloi cry, that even HE knew what it was to be God-deserted and forsaken!

Are there any whose eyes trace these pages who have ever undergone such a season? or it may be are undergoing it now? I stop not to inquire as to the cause—indulged sin, omitted or carelessly performed duty, neglect of prayer, worldly conformity. "In the time of need He hides Himself often, and seems to have forgotten me. Tears have thus been my food, because of their saying unto my soul, 'where is now your God?' But I am bound by all the experienced freeness and riches of the Redeemer's grace to say, that when He hides Himself from me, it is not because He has forgotten me, but because I have been forgetting Him." (Hewitson)

Are you feelingly alive, painfully conscious that your love, like that of many, has waxed cold—are you mourning that you have not the nearness to the Mercy-seat that once you enjoyed—not the love of your Bibles, and ordinances, and sacraments that you once had—that a heavy cloud mantles your spiritual horizon—God's countenance, not what once it was,

irradiated with a Father's smiles—nor heaven what once it seemed, a second home?

"O afflicted one, tossed with tempest, not comforted!" do not despond. In these very sighings and moanings of your downcast spirit, there are elements for hope and comfort, not for despair. They are the evidences and indications that the spark, though feeble, is not quenched—that the pulse, though languid, still beats—that faith, though like a grain of mustard-seed, is still germinating. "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" It is that very shadow that has now come athwart your soul, and which you so bitterly mourn, which tells of Sunshine. As it is the shadow which enables us to read the hours on the dial, so is it in the spiritual life. It is because of these shadows on the soul's dial-face that we can infer the shining of a better Sun.

"The wicked have no bands in their (spiritual) death." Their life has been nothing but shadow; they cannot therefore mourn the loss of a sunshine they never felt or enjoyed. Well has it been said, "When the refreshing dews of grace seem to be withheld, and we are ready to say, 'Our hope is lost, God has forgotten to be gracious'—this is that furnace in which one that is not a child of God never was placed. For Satan takes good care not to disquiet his children. He has no fire for their souls on this side everlasting burnings; his fatal teaching ever is, Peace, peace!" (Miss Plumptre's Letters)

But what, desponding one, is, or ought to be, your resort? Go! exile in spirit—go, like that royal mourner amid the oak-thickets of Gilead! Brood no more in unavailing sorrow and with burning tears. You may, like him, have much to depress your spirit. Black and crimson sins may have left their indelible stain on the page of memory. In aching heart-throbs, you may be heaving forth the bitter confession, "My iniquities have separated between me and my God." But go like him! take down your silent harp. Its strings may be corroded with rust. They may tell the touching story of a sad estrangement. Go to the quiet solitude of your chamber. Seek out the unfrequented path of prayer—choked it may be with the weeds of forgetfulness and sloth. Cast yourself on your bended knees; and, as the wounded deer bounds past you (emblem of your own bleeding heart), wake the echoes of your spirit with the penitential cry, "As the deer pants

after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God!"

## THE DEER PANTING

"O mysterious Jesus, teach us Your works and Your plans. Let our hearts pant after You as the deer after the water-brooks. Create a thirst which nothing shall satisfy but the fountain of eternal love. See the velocity with which the needle flees to the magnet when it gets within distance; so shall we hasten to our Magnet—our Beloved—as we approach Him."—Lady Powerscourt's Letters.

"As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God."—Verse 1.

We have pictured, in a preceding chapter, the uncrowned Monarch of Israel seated, pensive and sad, amid "the willows by the water-courses;" or wandering forth, amid the deepening twilight-shadows, with the roll of Jordan at his side, perhaps, like his great ancestor, to "wrestle with God until the breaking of the day."

We have already adverted to the simple incident which arrested his attention. A breathless tenant of the forest bounded past him to quench its thirst in the neighboring river. That unconscious child of nature furnishes the keynote of his song. Let us sit by the banks, as the Exile takes down his harp, and thus sings—"as the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God."

God is the only satisfying portion of the soul. Every theory of human happiness is defective and incomplete which falls short of the aspirations of our immortal natures. Born with capacities for the infinite, man naturally spurns the finite. No satellite, with its borrowed light, will compensate for the loss of the sun. You may as well expect the caged wild beast to be happier within the iron bars of his den than roaming lord of

the forest, as for the human spirit to be content with the present and the finite, as a substitute for the immortal and the infinite! The water-brooks alone could slake the thirst of that roe on the mountains of Gilead. You might have offered it choicest pastures. You might have bid it roam the sunniest glades of the forest, or repose under the majestic shadow of the monarch-oaks of Bashan; it would have spurned them all; and, with fleet foot, have bounded down the valley in search of the stream.

So with the soul. Nothing but the stream flowing from the Everlasting Hills will satisfy it. You may tempt a man, as he is hurrying on his immortal way, with the world's pastures—you may hold out to him the golden sheaves of riches—you may detain him amid the sunny glades of pleasure, or on the hill-tops of fame (and he is but too willing for a while to linger)—but satisfy him, they cannot! When his nobler nature acquires its rightful ascendancy he will spurn them all. Brushing each one in succession away, as the stag does the dewy drops of the morning, he will say—"All are insufficient! I wish them not. I have been mocked by their failure. I have found that each has a lie in its right hand—it is a poor counterfeit—a shadowy figure of the true. I need the fountain of living waters—I need the Infinite of Knowledge, Goodness, Truth, Love!" "In the Lord I put my trust: why do you say to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" (Psalm. 11:1)

The fact is, it is the very grandeur of the soul which leads it thus to pant after God. Small things satisfy a small capacity, but what is made receptive of the vast and glorious can only be satisfied with great things. The mind of the child is satisfied with the toy or the bauble; the mind of the untutored savage with bits of painted glass or tinsel; but the man, the sage, the philosopher, desires higher possessions, purer knowledge, nobler themes of thought and objects of ambition. Some insects are born for an hour, and are satisfied with it. A summer's afternoon is the duration of existence allotted to myriads of tiny ephemera. In their case, youth and age are crowded into a few passing minutes. The descending sun witnesses their birth and death—the lifetime of other animals would be to them an immortality. The soul, being infinite and unlimited in its capacities, has correspondingly high aspirations. Vain would be the attempt to fill up a yawning gulf by throwing into it a few grains of sand.



But not more vain or ineffectual than try to answer the deep yearnings of the human spirit by the seen and the temporal.

Yes! on all the world's fountains, drink at them as you may, "thirst again" is written. Of the world's mountains, climb them as you may, you will never say, "I have reached the coveted summit. It is enough." Men go sighing on, drinking their rivers of pleasure and climbing their mountains of vanity. They feel all the while some undefined, inarticulate, nameless longing after a satisfying good; but it is a miserable travesty to say that it has been found, or can be found, in anything here. "Who will show us any good?" will still be the cry of the groping seeker until he has learned to say, "Lord, lift upon me the light of your countenance."

We know how hard and difficult it is to convince of these sublime verities. The soul, even in its hours of trouble and deep conviction, is like a castaway from shipwreck, who sees from his raft-planks something cresting the waves. He imagines it an island! As he nears it, he fancies he sees purple flowers drooping over the solid rock, and the sea-birds nestling in the crevices. But it is only an aggregate of withered leaves and rotten branches, which the receding tide has tossed together, the wayward freak of old ocean.

"All are wanderers gone astray  
Each in his own delusions; they are lost  
In chase of fancied happiness, still wooed  
And never won. Dream after dream ensues;  
And still they dream that they shall still succeed,  
And still are disappointed. Rings the world  
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind,  
And add two-thirds of the remaining half,  
And find the total of their hopes and fears  
Dreams, empty dreams."—Cowper.

"I was at the very zenith of earthly happiness. On returning from the ball, I took a hasty review of the evening I had passed as I lay sleepless upon my pillow. The glitter—the music—the dance—the excitement—the attention—the pleasure—all passed before me. But, oh! I felt a deficiency I could not describe. I sighed, and, throwing my arm over my head,

whispered to myself these expressive words, 'Is that all?'"—Mrs. Winslow, Life.

Let him who would solve this great problem of Happiness go to that parable of nature—the hunted Stag seeking the water-brooks—the thirsty soul seeking its God. God is the home of the soul, and he is away from home who pitches his tent and weaves his heart affections around anything short of Him. Who has not heard of "home-sickness"—the desolate feelings of the lonely stranger in a strange land? Let affection, and friendship, and pity do what they may to alleviate the pang of distance and separation, though beaming faces be around, and hands of love and sympathy be extended, still will the heart (despite of all) be roaming the old hallowed haunts, climbing in thought the hills of childhood, gazing on the old village church with its festoons of ivy, seated under the aged elm, or listening to the music of the passing brook and the music of voices sweeter and lovelier than all! The soul is that stranger, dwelling in the tents of Kedar, and panting for Heaven and God. Its language is, "I am not at home, I am a stranger here." Manifold, too, are the voices in this the land of its exile, whispering, "Arise and depart, for this is NOT your rest!" (Micah 2:10)

You may have seen in our mountain glens, in the solemn twilight, birds winging their way to their nests. There may be lovely bowers, gardens of fragrance and beauty, close by—groves inviting to sweetest melody, Nature's consecrated haunts of song. But they tempt them not. Their nests—their homes are in yonder distant rock, and there they speed their way! So with the soul. The painted glories of this world will not satisfy it. There is no rest in these for its weary wing and wailing cry. It goes singing up and home to God. It has its nest in the crevices of the Rock of Ages. When detained in the nether valley, often is the warbling note heard, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest." And when the flight has been made from the finite to the infinite—from the lower valleys of sense to the hills of faith—from the creature to the Creator—from man to God—as we see it folding its buoyant pinion and sinking into the eternal clefts, we listen to the song, "Return unto your rest, O my soul!"

Reader! may this flight be yours. "Seek the Lord while He may be found!"

The creature may change, He cannot. The creature must die, He is eternal. "O God, you are my God; early will I seek YOU: my soul thirsts for YOU, my flesh longs for YOU in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is....Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You." (Ps. 63)

## **THE DEER WOUNDED**

"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
Long since. With many an arrow deep infixed  
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew,  
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There was I found by One who had Himself  
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,  
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
With gentle force soliciting the darts,  
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live!" —Cowper.

"It was in this extremity it occurred to her that, in the deficiency of all hope in creatures, there might be hope and help in God. Borne down by the burdens of a hidden providence (a providence which she did not then love, because she did not then understand it) she yielded to the pressure that was upon her, and began to look to Him in whom alone there is true assistance."—Madame Guyon's Life, p. 38.

"As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God."—Verse 1.

Are we not warranted to infer that it was the wounded stag which David now saw, or pictured he saw, seeking the brooks?—the deer hit by the archers, with blood-drops standing on its flanks, and its eye glazed with faintness, exhaustion, and death? But for these wounds it would never have come to the Valley. It would have been nestling still up in its native

heath—the thick furze and cover of the mountain heights of Gilead. But the shaft of the archer had sped with unerring aim; and, with distended nostril and quivering limb, it hastens to allay the rage of its death-thirst.

Picture of David, yes, and of many who have been driven to drink of that "river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." They are wounded spirits; the arrow festering in their souls, and drawing their lifeblood. Faint, trembling, forlorn, weary, they have left the world's high ground—the heights of vanity, and indifference, and self-righteousness, and sin—and have sought the lowly Valley of humiliation.

What are some of these arrows? There are arrows from the quiver of MAN, and arrows from the quiver of GOD.

The arrows of man are often the cruelest of all. "Lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart." (Ps. 11:2) ENVY is an archer. His shaft is dipped in gall and wormwood. JEALOUSY is a Bowman, whose barbed weapons cannot stand the prosperity of a rival. REVENGE has his quiver filled with keen points of steel, that burn to retaliate the real or imagined injury. MALICE is an archer that seeks his prey in ambush. He lurks behind the rock. He inflicts his wanton mischief—irreparable injury—on the absent or innocent. CONTEMPT is a Bowman of soaring aim. He looks down with haughty, supercilious scorn on others. The teeth of such "are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Ps. 57:4.) DECEIT—He is, in these our days, a huntsman of repute—a modern Nimrod—with gilded arrows in his quiver, and a bugle, boasting great things, slung at his belt. He makes his target the unsuspecting; decoys them, with siren look, within his toils, and leaves them, wounded and helpless, on "the mountains of prey!" "Save me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue? He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree." Psalm 120:2-4

But there are arrows also from the quiver of GOD. "The arrows of the Almighty," says Job, "are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit." (Job 6:4.) "He has bent His bow," says Jeremiah, "and set me as a mark for the arrow. He has caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into

my heart." (Lam. 3:12, 13.) And who will not breathe the prayer of the Gilead Exile at another time?—"Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are HIS mercies!" "Faithful are the wounds of THIS friend." (2 Sam. 24:14; Prov. 27:6.)

We need not stop to enumerate particularly these arrows. There is the blanched arrow of sickness, the rusted arrow of poverty, the lacerating arrow of bereavement, stained and saturated with tears, and feathered from our own bosoms! There is the arrow, too, (though of a different kind,) of God's own blessed Word, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." "Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies." (Ps. 45:5.)

Yet, blessed be God, these are often arrows which wound only to heal; or rather, which, from the wounds they create, send the bleeding, panting, thirsting soul to seek the waters of comfort in God himself. Suffering one! be thankful for your wounds. But for these shafts you might have been, at this moment, sleeping on the mountain heights of self-righteousness, or worldliness, or sin, with no thought of your soul; the streams of salvation disowned; forsaking, and continuing to forsake, the "Fountain of Living Waters."

Let me ask, Has this been the result of your woundings? Have they led you from the "broken (leaky) cistern" to say, "All my springs are in YOU?" Remember that affliction, worldly calamity, and bereavement, have a twofold effect. It is a solemn alternative! They may drive you nearer to, or they may drive you farther from, your God. They may drive you down to the gushing stream, or farther up the cold, freezing mountain-side. The wounded deer of this Psalm, on receiving the sting of the arrow, might have plunged only deeper and deeper into the toils of the huntsmen, or the solitudes of the forest. It might have gone with its pining eye, and broken heart, and bleeding wound, to bury itself amid the withered leaves.

How many there are whose afflictions seem to lead to this sad consequence; who, when mercies and blessings are removed, abandon

themselves to sullen and morbid fretfulness; who, instead of bowing submissive to the hand that wounds and is able to heal, seem to feel as if they were divested of their rights. Their language is the bitter reproach of Jonah—"I do well to be angry, even unto death." Muffling themselves in hardened unbelief, their wretched solace is that of despair—"It is better for me to die than to live."

"Blessed is the man that ENDURES temptation," not who rushes away to pine, and bleed, and die—or to feed still on husks and the garbage of the wilderness, but who makes the nobler resolve, "I will arise and go to my Father." Blessed is the man whose cry, like that of the child, is answered by his Heavenly Parent bending over the cradle of his sorrow—who feels, as the psalmist did, that his gracious Father and God is never so near him as in a time of trial. "When my spirit was overwhelmed, THEN YOU knew my path." The bird of the desert is said to bury its head in the sand on the approach of its foes, and to abandon itself to destruction; but blessed is the man who rather is like the bird of the grove, the first twigs of whose nest have been ruthlessly pulled to pieces by the hand of violence. Hovering for a while over her pillaged home, she fills the forest with her plaintive lament, then soars away from the haunt of the destroyer to begin a fresh one, in a place of safety, on the top branch of some cedar of God!

Such was the case with David on the occasion of this Psalm. He had read to him the most touching homily the world could read on the precarious tenure of earthly blessings. His scepter, his crown, his family, were like the bubbles on that foaming stream on which he gazed, dancing their little moment on its surface, then gone, and gone forever. Is he to abandon himself to an ignoble despair? Is he to conclude that the Lord has made him a target on which to exhaust His quiver—that He has "forgotten to be gracious?" Is he to join marauding chiefs beyond the Jordan, savage freebooters—to become a mountain adventurer on these Gentile borders, and forget Zion and Zion's God? No! the earthly crown may fade, but the homeless, uncrowned, unsceptred monarch has a better home and a better King above; invisible walls and battlements, better than all the trenches and moats of an earthly fortress, encompass the wanderer. With his eye on these, thus he weaves his warrior song—"I will

say of the Lord, He is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." (Ps. 18:2.)

Reader! let me ask you, in closing this chapter, are you panting for God?

This is not the way—this is not the history of most. They are panting, but not for God! They are panting up the hill, like Sisyphus, with their huge stone. Ambition is panting up the hill—no time to take a breath. Pleasure is panting up the hill—pursuing her butterfly existence—a phantom chase—rushing from flower to flower, extracting all the luscious sweets she can. Fame is panting up the hill, blowing her trumpet before her, eager to erect her own monument on the coveted apex. Mammon is pushing up the hill with his panting team, to erect the temple of riches. Multitudes of hapless wayfarers in the same reckless scramble have tumbled into crevices, and are crying for help. Mammon's wheels are locked—his treasure-chests have fallen into the mire—and yet, on he goes, driving his jaded steeds over the poor, and weak, and helpless—yes, those that assisted him to load before he started at the mountain base. He must gain the top at all hazards as best he may; and he will be crowned a hero, too, and lauded for his feat!

Ah! strange that men should still be pursuing that phantom-chase. Or, rather, strange that they should live so immeasurably beneath the grandeur of their own destiny; grasping the shallows when they should be out in the deep sea; furling and warping the sails of immortality, instead of having every available yard of canvas spread to the breeze of heaven.

These objects of earthly, perishable pursuit, may do when the world is bright, the heart unwounded, the eye undimmed. These may do when the sun shines unclouded in our firmament, when our fields are waving, when fortune is weaving her golden web, and the bark of existence with its white sails is holding its way through summer seas. These may do when the home circle is unbroken; when we miss no loved face, when we mark no silent voice, no vacant chair. But when the muffled drum takes the place of life's joyous music—when our skies are robed in sackcloth, when Nature takes on its hue of ashen paleness; when every flower, seared and frostbitten, seems to droop its head in sadness and sorrow,

and hide its tears amid withered leaves and blighted stems, exuding only the fragrance of decay!—what then? The prophet's voice takes up the lesson—"The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass!" Poor trifler that you are! to be so long mocked and deceived by a dead and dying world; desolate, friendless, hopeless, portionless; a vessel driven from its moorings, out unpiloted on a tempestuous sea! BUT there is a haven for the tempest-tossed. The Savior you have long despised and rejected, is a provided harbor for such as you. "A MAN shall be an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isaiah 32:2.) Are you panting after the streams of salvation? The Shepherd who feeds His flock by these "still waters" thus addresses you—"Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." Rev. 22:17

Thirsty! who is not thirsty? It is the attribute of universal humanity! Who does not feel that this world is presenting us with muddy streams and broken, leaky cisterns? Who does not feel, in their moments of deep and calm reflection, when we are brought face to face with the great enigma of existence, that the world is serving up faded flowers instead of those redolent with imperishable fragrance, and glowing with unfading bloom?

Friendless one!—you who are standing alone like a solitary tree in the forest whom the woodman's axe has spared—your friends and family cut down at your side—COME!

Child of calamity!—the chill hand of poverty laid on your earthly comforts—the widow's cruise fast failing, her staff of bread diminishing—COME!

Child of bereavement!—the pillars in your heart-shrine crumbling to decay, your head bowed like a bulrush—you who know that fortune may again replace and replenish her dismantled walls, but that nothing can reanimate your still marble, or refill the vacant niche in your heart of hearts—COME!

Prodigal!—wanderer from God, exile from peace, roaming the forest-haunts of sin, plunging deeper and deeper into their midnight of ruin and



despair—has an arrow, either from the quiver of man, or of God, wounded your heart? Are you, in your agony, seeking rest and finding none—having the gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction with all created things, and an undefined longing for a solace they cannot give? Yes! for you, too, for your gaping, bleeding wound there is "balm in Gilead, and a Physician there." I repeat, Jesus this day stands by the glorious streams of His own purchased salvation, and cries, saying—"If any man THIRST, let him come unto me and drink!"

"Yes, Lord!" be it yours to reply—"Lord, I come! thirsty, faint, forlorn, wounded, weary! I come, 'just as I am, without one plea.' You are all I need, all I require, in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, in time and through eternity. The snow-clad hills may cease to feed the brooks—that sun may cease to shine, or nature grow weary of his loving beams—that moon may cease on her silver lyre, night by night, to discourse to the listening earth—the birds may become mute at the voice of the morning—flowers may droop, instead of ringing their thousand bells at the jubilant step of summer—the gasping pilgrim may rush from the stream, and prefer the fiery furnace-glow of the desert sands—but "this God shall be my God forever and ever;" and, even when death is sealing my eyes, and the rush of darkness is coming over my spirit, even then will I take up the old exile strain—the great sigh of weary humanity—and blend its notes with the song of heaven—'as the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after You, O GOD.'"

## **THE LIVING GOD**

"Hear me! To You my soul in suppliance turns;  
Like the lorn pilgrim on the sands accursed.  
For life's sweet waters, God! my spirit yearns:  
Give me to drink. I perish here of thirst."

"Oh, it is His own self I pant after. Fellowship—living, constant, intimate fellowship with Him, is the cry He often hears from the desolate void of my unloving heart. How do I loathe the sin which makes the atmosphere so misty—the clouds so thick and dark!"—Life of Adelaide Newton, p. 246.

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"—Verse 2.

In the two former chapters, we listened to the first sigh of the exile—the first strain of his plaintive song. It was the groping and yearning of his soul after God, as the alone object of happiness.

You may have watched the efforts of the plant, tossed amid rack and weed in some dark cellar, to climb to the light. Like the captive in the dungeon longing to cool his fevered brow in the air of heaven, its sickly leaves seem to struggle and gasp for breath. They grope, with their blanched colors, towards any chink or crevice or grated window, through which a broken beam is admitted. Or garden flowers choked amid rank weeds, or under the shade of tree or wall, how ambitious to assert their freedom, and pay homage to the parent sun, lifting their pendant leaves or petals as a target for his golden arrows!

The soul, away from the great Sun of its being, frets and pines and mourns! Every affection droops in languor and sadness when that light is away. Its abortive efforts to obtain happiness in other and lower joys, and its dissatisfaction with them, is itself a testimony to the strength and loftiness of its aspiration—a manifesto of its real grandeur! The human affections must be fastened on something! They are like the clinging ivy which creeps along the ground, and grasps stones, rocks, weeds, and unsightly ruins, if it can find nothing else on which to fix its tendrils; but when it reaches the root of the tree, or base of the castle wall, it spurns its groveling existence, and climbs its upward way until it hangs in graceful festoons from the topmost branch or turret.

We are to contemplate, now, a second breathing of this exiled supplicant—a new element in his God-ward aspiration.

"My soul thirsts for God, FOR THE LIVING GOD: when shall I come and appear before God?"

This is no mere repetition of the former verse. It invests the believer's relationship to the object of his faith and hope with a new and more solemn interest.

For David's present condition and experience in the land of his exile—the feeling of utter isolation throbbing through the pulses of his soul—there were required some extraordinary and peculiar sources of comfort. The old conventional dogmas of theology, at such seasons, are insufficient. Who has not felt, in some great crisis of their spiritual being, similar to his, when all the hopes and joys of existence rock and tremble to their foundations; when, by some sudden reverse of fortune, the pride of life becomes a shattered ruin; or, by some appalling bereavement, the hope and solace of the future is blighted and withered like grass—who has not been conscious of a longing desire to know more of this infinite God, who holds the balances of Life and Death in His hands, and who has come forth from the inscrutable recesses of His own mysterious being, and touched us to the quick? What of His character, His attributes, His ways! There is a feeling, such as we never had before, to draw aside the veil which screens the Invisible. It may be faith in its feeblest form, awaking as from a dream; lisping the very alphabet of Divine truth, and asking, in broken and stammering accents, "Does God really live?—Is it, after all, Deity, or is it Chance, that is ruling the world? Is this great Being near, or is He distant? Does He take cognizance of all events in this world; or are minute, trivial occurrences, contingent on the accidents of nature or the caprice of man? Is He THE LIVING ONE?"

God, a distant abstraction shrouded in the dreadful mystery of His own attributes, will not do—we must realize His presence; our cry, at such a time, is that of the old patriarch at the brook Jabbok, or of his descendant at the brooks of Gilead—"Tell me your NAME." (Gen. 32:29.) Is it merely love, or is it the loving ONE? Is it omnipotence, or is it the almighty ONE? Is it some mysterious, impalpable principle, some property of matter or attribute of mind—or is it a personal Jehovah, one capable of loving and of being loved? Have the lips of incarnate truth and wisdom deceived us by a mere figure of speech, when, in the great Liturgy of the

Church universal, in the prayer which is emphatically "His own," He has taught us, in its opening words, to say, "Our FATHER who is in heaven, hallowed be your NAME!"

How earnestly do the saints in former times, and especially in their seasons of trial, cleave to the thought of this personal presence; in other words, a thirst for "the living God!" What was the solace of the patriarch Job, as he was stretched on his bed of sackcloth and ashes, when other friends had turned against him in bitter derision, and were loading him with their reproaches? It was the realization of a living defender who would vindicate his integrity—"I know that my Redeemer lives." (Job 19:25.)

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The symbol taught him encouraging truths—that the Hebrew race, after all their experience of fiery trial, would come forth unscathed and unconsumed. But the shepherd-leader desired more than this: he craved the assurance of a LIVING GOD—an ever-present guardian, a pillar to guide by day, and a column of defense by night. It was the truth that was borne to his ear from the desert's fiery oracle. There could be no grander watchword for himself, or for the enslaved people—"God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM!" No comment is subjoined—nothing to diminish the glory of that majestic utterance. The Almighty Speaker does not qualify it by adding, "I am light, power, wisdom, glory;" but He simply declares His being and existence—He unfolds Himself as "the living God!" It is enough!

Elijah is in his cave at Horeb. All nature is convulsed around him. The rocks are rent with an earthquake. The sky is lurid with lightnings. Fragments of these dreadful precipices are torn and dislocated by the fury of the tempest, and go thundering down the Valley. Nature testifies to the presence, and majesty, and power of her God: but He is not in any of these! "The Lord is not there!" The Prophet waits for a further disclosure. He is not satisfied with seeing the skirts of God's garment. He must see the hand, and hear (though it be in gentle whispers) the voice of Him who sits behind the elements He has awoken from their sleep. Hence this formed the closing scene in that wild drama of the desert. "After the fire there came a still small voice." The Lord is there! He is proclaiming Himself the prophet's God! with him in the depths of that howling

wilderness, as He had been with him on the heights of Carmel. "And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance in of the cave." (1 Kings 19:12, 13.)

Shall we go for illustration of the same truth to New Testament and gospel times? The disciples are tossed with storm in the Sea of Tiberias. The voice of a living Savior proclaims His name. "It is I (lit. I AM); be not afraid!" The assurance, in that night of gloom and tempest, lulls their trembling spirits to rest.

John, in Patmos, beheld, in a vision of surpassing brightness, his Lord arrayed in the lusters of exalted humanity. Overpowered by the glory which unexpectedly burst upon him, "he fell at His feet as one dead." His misgivings are stilled; his confidence and hope restored, by the proclamation of a living Savior-God. "I am He that LIVES" (lit. the Living One)—and a similar comforting symbol was given him in a subsequent vision, when he saw that same covenant angel "ascending from the east, having the seal of the Living God." (Rev. 1:18, and 7:2.)

This was "the living Jehovah" whom David now sought in the forest-depths of Gilead. He goes out to that solitude to meditate and pray. But it is no dream of earthly conquest that occupies him. Deeper thoughts have taken possession of his soul than the loss of a kingdom and the forfeiture of a crown! A fiercer battle engrosses his spirit than any mortal conflict. "Let me have God," he seems to say, "as the strength of my heart and my portion forever, and I need not other portions besides." At another time that lover of nature would have caught inspiration from the glories of the impressive sanctuary around. He would have sung of the water-brooks at his side, the trees bending in adoration, the rocky gorges through which Jordan fretted his tortuous way, the everlasting hills of Hermon and Lebanon—the silent guardians of the scene—"the wild beasts of the forest creeping forth" and "seeking their food from God." But now he has but one thought—one longing—"YOU are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey." (Ps. 76:4.) None was more dependent on the realized consciousness of the Divine favor than he. His Psalms seem to utter the language of one who lived in God's presence, and to whom the withdrawal of that endearing communion and communion would be death indeed. His expressions, in these holy breathings of his soul to the

Father of spirits, seem like those of one loving friend to another. God, the abstraction of the Philosopher, has no place in his creed. He speaks of "the Lord thinking upon him," "putting his tears into His bottle," "guiding him with His eye," "His right hand upholding him," he himself "rejoicing under the shadow of His wings;" and as if he almost beheld some visible, tangible form, such as Peter gazed upon when the question was put to him on the shore of Gennesaret, "Do you love me?" we hear this warm, impulsive Peter of Old Testament times thus avowing his personal attachment—"I love you, O Lord my strength;" "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications;" "The Lord LIVES; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted."

Reader, do you know what it is thus to exult in God as a living God? Not to think of Him as some mysterious Essence, who, by an Almighty fiat, impressed on matter certain general laws, and, retiring into the solitude of His own being, left these to work out their own processes. But is there joy to you in the thought of God ever near, compassing your path and your lying down? Do you know of ONE, brighter than the brightest radiance of the visible sun, visiting your chamber with the first waking beam of the morning; an eye of infinite tenderness and compassion following you throughout the day; a hand of infinite love guiding you, shielding you from danger, and guarding you from temptation—the "Keeper of Israel," who "neither slumbers nor sleeps?"

And if gladdening it be, at all times, to hear the footsteps of this living God, more especially gladdening is it, as, with the Exile-King of Israel, in the season of trial, to think of Him and to own Him, in the midst of mysterious dealings, as One who personally loves you, and who chastises you because He loves you. The world, in their cold vocabulary, in the hour of adversity, speak of Providence, "the will of Providence," "the strokes of Providence." PROVIDENCE! What is that? Why dethrone a living God from the sovereignty of His own world? Why substitute a cold, death-like abstraction in place of a living One, an acting One, a controlling One, and (to as many as He loves) a rebuking One and a chastening One? Why forbid the angel of bereavement to drop from his wings the balmy fragrance, "Your Father has done it?" How it would take the sting from many a goading trial thus to see, as Job did, nothing but the hand of God

—to see that hand behind the gleaming swords of the Sabeans, the flash of the lightning, and the wings of the whirlwind—and to say like David, on the occasion of his mournful march to these very wilds of Gilead, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because YOU did it." (Psalm 39:9.)

The thought of a living God forms the happiness of Heaven. It is the joy of Angels. It forms the essence and bliss of glorified Saints. The redeemed multitude, while on earth, "thirsted" for the living God, but they had then only some feeble foretastes of His presence. They sipped only some tiny rills flowing from the Everlasting Fountain; now they have reached the living spring; and the long-drawn sigh of the earthly valley is answered—"When shall we come and appear before God?"

And what this living God is to the Church above, He is also to the Church below. In one sense we need Him more! The drooping, pining plant, battered down by rain, and hail, and tempest, stands more in need of the fostering hand and genial sunbeam than the sturdy tree whose roots are firmly moored in the soil, or sheltered from the sweep of the storm. Pilgrims in the Valley of Tears! seek to live more under the habitual thought of God's presence. In dark passages of our earthly history we know how supporting it is to enjoy the sympathy of kindred human friends. What must it be to have the consciousness of the presence, and support, and nearness of the Being of all beings; when some cherished "light of the dwelling" is put out, to have a better light remaining, which sorrow cannot quench! All know the story of the little child who, in simple accents, quieted its own fears and that of others in the midst of a storm. When the planks were creaking beneath them—the hoarse voice of the thunder above mingling with that of the raging sea—his tiny finger pointed to the calm visage of the pilot, who was steering with brawny arm through the surge, "My father," said he, "is at the helm!" Would you weather the tempests of life, and sit calm and unmoved amid "the noise of its many waters," let your eye rest on a living God—a loving Father—a heavenly Pilot. See Him guiding the Vessel of your temporal and eternal destinies! Let Faith be heard raising her triumphant accents amid the pauses of the storm—"O Lord our God, who is a strong Lord like unto You? You rule the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, You still them." (Psalm 89:9.)

Above all, be it yours to enjoy what David knew imperfectly, the conscious nearness of a living SAVIOR—a Brother on the throne of Heaven—"Christ our life"—God in our nature—"the man Christ Jesus,"—susceptible of every human sympathy—capable of entering, with infinite tenderness, into every human need and woe—bending over us with His pitying eye—marking out for us our path—ordering our sorrows—filling or emptying our cup—providing our pastures, and "making all things work together for our good!" The words at this moment are as true as when, eighteen hundred years ago, they came fresh from His lips in Patmos—"I am the living One: Behold, I am alive for evermore!" (Rev. 1:18.)

What is the great lesson from this meditation? Is it not to strive to be like God? What does "thirsting" for God mean, but a longing of the soul after likeness and conformity to the Divine image? Let us not lose the deep truth of the text under the material emblem. To thirst for God is to desire His fellowship; and we can only hold fellowship with a congenial mind. No man is ever found to covet the companionship of those whose tastes, likings, pursuits, are opposed to his own. Place one whose character is scarred with dishonor and his life with impurity, introduce him into the company of high-souled men—spirits of sterling integrity and unblemished virtue, who would recoil from the contaminating touch of vice, who would scorn a lie as they would a poisoned dart—he could not be happy; he would long to break away from associates and associations so utterly distasteful and uncongenial. No man can thirst after God who is not aiming after assimilation to His character. God is HOLY. He who thirsts for God must be athirst for holiness—he must scorn impurity in all its forms, in thought, word, and deed. He who longs for the pure cistern must turn with LOVE. Love is pencilled by Him on every flower, and murmured in every breeze. The world is resonant with chimes of love, and Calvary is love's crowning triumph and consummation. He who "thirsts for God" "in him verily is the love of God perfected." He must have the lineaments in outline, at least, of a loving nature. He must hate all that is selfish, delight in all that is beneficent, and seek an elevating satisfaction in being the minister of love to others. "He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him."



And what shall be said to those who know nothing of this thirst for God—to whom all that is here written is but as an idle tale? You may pant not for Him. You may have no spiritual thirst for Him—no longing for His presence—no aspiration after His likeness. But still He is to you, as to the believer, a LIVING God. Yes—scorner of His mercy! ignore the truth as you may, the God to whom you are responsible, the God with whom you will yet have "to do," that God LIVES! His eye is upon you—His book is open—His pen is writing—the indelible page is filling! You may see no trace of His footstep. You may hear no tones of His voice. His very mercy and forbearance may be misconstrued by you, as if it indicated on His part indifference to His word and forgetfulness of your sin. You may lull yourselves into the atheist dream, that the world is governed by blind chance and fate, that His heaven and His hell are the forged names and nullities of credulity and superstition. As you see the eternal monuments of His power and glory on rock and mountain, you may affect to see in these only the dead hieroglyphics of the past—the obsolete tool-marks of the God of primeval chaos, who welded into shape the formless mass, but having done so, left it alone. The scaffolding is removed, the Architect has gone to uprear other worlds, and abandoned the completed globe to the control of universal laws!

No—GOD LIVES! "He is not far from any one of us." He is no Baal divinity, "asleep or taking a journey." The volume of every heart is laid open to the eye of the great Heart-searcher, and vainly do you seek to elude His scrutiny. Terrible thought! this living God against you! You living, and content to live His enemy! rushing against His shield! and if you were to die, it would be in the attitude of one fighting against God!

No longer scorn His grace or reject His warnings. He is living; but, blessed be His name, He is living and waiting to be gracious! You may be as stranded vessels on the sands of despair; but the tide of His ocean-love is able to set you floating on the waters. Repair, without delay to His mercy-seat. Cast yourselves on His free forgiveness. Every attribute of His nature which you have now armed against you, is stretching out its hand of welcome and entreaty. Each is like a branch of the tree of life, inviting you to repose under its shadow. Each is a rill from the everlasting fountain, inviting you to drink of the unfailing stream.

See that you refuse not Him that speaks. He who unlocked that fountain is even now standing by it; and saying, as He contrasts it with all earth's polluted cisterns, "Whoever drinks of THIS water shall thirst again: but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

## THE TAUNT

'Will you leave me thus,' I cried,  
'Whelmed beneath the rolling tide?'  
Ah! return and love me still;  
See me subject to Your will;  
Frown with wrath, or smile with grace,  
Only let me see Your face!  
Evil I have none to fear,  
All is good, if You are near.  
King, and Lord, whom I adore,  
Shall I see Your face no more?'—Madame Guyon.

"There is a persecution sharper than that of the axe. There is an iron that goes into the heart deeper than the knife. Cruel sneers, and sarcasms, and pitiless judgments, and cold-hearted calumnies—these are persecution."

"My tears have been with me day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is your God?"—Verse 3.

We are called, in this chapter, to contemplate a new experience—David in tears! These, his tears, brought sin to his remembrance. As, in looking through the powerful lens of a microscope, the apparently clear drop of water is found to be the swarming haunt of noxious things—fierce animalcules devouring one another; so the tears of the Exile formed a spiritual lens, enabling him to see into the depths of his own soul, and disclosing, with microscopic power, transgressions that had long been consigned to oblivion.

Ten years of regal prosperity had elapsed since the prophet Nathan, the minister of retribution, stood before him, in his Cedar Palace, with heavy tidings regarding himself and his house. Time may have dimmed the impressions of that meeting. He may have vainly imagined, too, that it had modified the Divine displeasure. Now that his head was white with sixty winters, he may have thought that God would exempt him from further merited chastisement, and allow him to go down to his grave in

peace. But the day of reckoning, which the Divine patience had long deferred, had now come. He was called to see the first gleamings of that sword which the anointed prophet had told him would "never depart from his house." (2 Sam. 12:10.) The voice of long averted judgment is at last heard amid the thickets and caves of Gilead, "These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself: but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes." (Ps. 50:21.) Nature, in her august solitudes, echoed the verdict! The waters murmured it—the winds chanted it—the forest wailed it—the thunders rolled it—and the tears of the lonely Exile himself wept it—"Be sure your sin will find you out!" As he sat by the willows of Jordan, with his crownless head and aching heart, he could say, in the words of an older Psalmist, "We are consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath are we troubled. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance." (Ps. 90:7, 8.)

How apt are we to entertain the thought that God will wink at sin; that He will not be rigidly faithful to His denunciations—unswervingly true to His word. Time's oblivion-power succeeds in erasing much from the tablets of our memories. We measure the Infinite by the standard of the finite, and imagine something of the same kind regarding the Great Heart-Searcher. Sin, moreover, seldom is, in this world, instantaneously followed with punishment; "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily;" and the patience and forbearance of the Almighty is presumptuously construed by perverse natures into alteration or fickleness in the Divine purpose. But "God is not a man that he should lie!" Even in this our present probation state, (oftener than we suppose,) the time arrives for solemn retribution; when He makes bare His arm to demonstrate by what an inseparable law in His moral government He has connected sin with suffering.

A new dart pierces this panting, wounded Deer on the mountains of Israel. One of those who hurled the Javelin is specially mentioned in the sacred narrative. His poisoned dart must have been rankling in David's soul when he penned this Psalm.

When the King was descending the eastern slopes of Olivet, on his way to the Valley of Jordan, we read, "As David and his party passed Bahurim, a

man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, a member of Saul's family. He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded them. 'Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!' he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for murdering Saul and his family. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, you murderer!" So David and his men continued on, and Shimei kept pace with them on a nearby hillside, cursing as he went and throwing stones at David and tossing dust into the air." (2 Sam. 16:5-8, 13.) Besides this son of Gera, there were many servile flatterers at Jerusalem—men once his cringing adherents, loud with their hosannahs in the time of his prosperity—who had now turned against him in his adversity, and become the adherents of the usurper. They exulted over his downfall, and followed him to the place of exile with the taunting cry, "Where is now your God?" "My enemies," said he, "speak against me; and those who lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, GOD has forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him." (Psalm 71:10, 11.)

There is no trial keener, no anguish of soul intenser than this. Let not any talk of taunt and ridicule being a trivial and insignificant thing—unworthy of thought. Let not any say that the believer, entrenched in a lordly castle—the very fortress of God—should be above the shafts hurled from the bow of envy, or the venomous arrows from the tongue of the scoffer. It is often because the taunt is contemptible that it is hardest to bear. The sting of the adder rouses into fury the lordly lion. The tiniest insect blanches the color of the loveliest flower, and causes it to hang its pining head. Sorrow is in itself difficult of endurance, but bitter is the aggravation when others are ready to make a jest of our sorrows. No water is bad enough to the fainting pilgrim, but worse is it when he is mocked by the mirage or bitter pool.

All the more poignant, too, were these taunts in the case of David, because too well did he know that such reproaches were merited—that he himself had furnished his enemies with the gall and the wormwood that had been mingled in his cup. The dark, foul blots of his past life, he had too good reason to fear, were now emboldening them to blaspheme. He

had for years been "the Sweet Singer of Israel;"—his future destiny was the Psalmist of the universal Church. His sublime appeals, and fervent prayers, and holy musings, were to support, and console, and sustain until the end of time. Millions on millions, on beds of pain, and in hours of solitude and times of bereavement, were to have their faith elevated, their hopes revived, their love warmed and strengthened by listening to the harp of the Minstrel King. And now, as his faith begins to languish, now as a temporary wave of temptation sweeps him from his footing on the Rock, and the "Beloved of God" wanders an exile and outcast—a shout is raised by those who were strangers to all his sublime sources of consolation—"Where is now your God? Where is He whom you have sung of as the help of the godly, the refuge of the distressed? Where, uncrowned one! is the answer to your prayers? Where is He of whom you did boast as being known in all your Zion palaces as a refuge? You have taught others and taught yourself to believe a lie. O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you fallen!"

For the moment, this crushing sarcasm can be answered by nothing but a flood of anguished tears. He was below the wave; and though he was soon to know that below that wave there was an Arm lower still, yet for the present he was silent under the averment. There was no light in the cloud. He was unable to lay hold of a former comforting experience—"YOU have known my soul in adversities." (Psalm 31:7.)

Oh, how jealous we should be of anything that would reduce us so low as this, and give a handle to the adversary! Beware of religious inconsistency. One fatal step, one unguarded word may undo a lifetime of hallowed influence. One scar on the character, one blot on the page of the living epistle is indelible. It may be washed away, indeed, by the blood of sprinkling, so that nothing of it will remain against you in the book of God; but the eye and memory of the world, keen to watch and treasure the inconsistencies of God's people, will not so easily forgive or forget! The Deer laid itself open to the aim of the huntsman. It was hit by the archers. One fierce dart of temptation sped with unerring aim. It has left the track of blood behind it in the glades of the forest—the unbelieving world bounds in remorseless pursuit, and the taunting cry will follow to the grave!

Are there any who feel that the experience of David is their own—who either by reason of religious inconsistency or religious declension have laid themselves open to the upbraiding question, "Where is your God?"—Perhaps religious declension is the more common of the two. You are not, as we have surmised in a previous chapter, what once you were. You have not the same love of the Savior as once you had—the same confidence in His dealings—the same trust in His faithfulness—the same zeal for His glory. Affliction, when it comes, does not lead you, as once it did, to cheerful acquiescence—to the cherishing of a meek, uncomplaining submissive spirit under God's sovereign will and discipline, but rather to a hasty, misgiving frame—fretting and repining when you should be prostrate at the mercy-seat, saying, "The will of the Lord be done!"

Not in scorn, but in sober seriousness, in Christian affection and fidelity, we ask, "Where is now your God?" "You did run well; who has hindered you?" What is the guilty cause, the lurking evil, that has dragged you imperceptibly down from weakness to weakness, and has left you a poor, baffled thing, with the finger of irreligious scorn pointed at you, and whose truthfulness is echoed back from the lonely voids of your desolate heart? Return, O backsliding children! Remain no longer as you are, at this guilty distance from that God who, amid all the fitfulness of your love to Him, remains unaltered and unalterable in His love to you. Be not absorbed in tears, wringing your hands in moping melancholy—abandoning yourself to unavailing remorse and despair. The past may be bad enough! You may have done foul dishonor to your God. By some sad and fatal inconsistency, you may have given occasion to the ungodly to point at you the finger of scorn. The fair alabaster pillar may be stained with some crimson transgression. Or if there be no special blot to which they can point, there may be a lamentable spiritual deterioration in your daily walk. They may have observed your love to God waxing cold—your love of the world waxing strong. They may have heard you murmur at your Lord's dealings, question His faithfulness, and refuse to hear and to bear the rod—manifesting tempers, or indulging in pursuits sadly and strangely unlike what would be sanctioned by the example of your Divine Redeemer. Up! and with determined energy resolve henceforth to repair the breach—henceforth to make a new start in the heavenly life. The shrill trumpet sounds—"Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and

Christ shall give you life!" We cannot say, like the King of Nineveh, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" He has never turned! You have turned from Him, not He from you. "Where is now your God?" He is the same as ever He was—boundless in His compassion—true to His covenant—faithful to His promises; "the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

Reader! if He be afflicting you as He did David—if with an exile spirit you be roaming some moral wilderness, the flowers of earth faded on your path, and the bleak winds of desolation and calamity sweeping and sighing around, let these times of affliction lead to deep searchings of heart. Let your tears be as the dewdrops of the morning on the tender leaves, causing you to bend in lowly sorrow and self-abasement, only to be raised again, refreshed, to inhale new fragrance in the summer sun. If, like the weeping woman of Galilee, you are saying, through blinding tears, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him,"—if, like the Spouse in the Canticles, you are going about the city in search of your Beloved—seeking Him, He will be found of you. The watchmen may smite you—repel you—tear off your veil—and load you with reproaches—but "fear not! you seek Jesus who was crucified!" He will meet you as He did the desponding Magdalene, and, listening like her to His own tones of ineffable love, you will cast yourself at His feet, and exclaim, "Rabboni! Master!"

## **THE TAUNT (continued)**

"He wounds, and hides the hand that gave the blow;  
He flies, He reappears, and wounds again;  
Was ever heart that loved you treated so?  
Yet I adore You, though it seem in vain."—Cowper.



"For I am mocked and shamed for your sake; humiliation is written all over my face. Even my own brothers pretend they don't know me; they treat me like a stranger. Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me."— Psalm 69:7, 8, 20.

"My tears have been with me day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is your God?"—Verse 3.

The Great Accuser of the brethren in a variety of ways attempts to insinuate the same dark doubts in the minds of believers, which we have spoken of in the preceding pages. He tries to shake their confidence in God—in the veracity of His word, and the faithfulness of His dealings. He would lead them to discover in His providential dispensations what is inconsistent with His revealed character and will. In seasons particularly of outward calamity and trouble, when the body is racked with pain, its nerves unstrung, or its affections blighted and wounded—when the mind is oppressed and harassed, the soul in darkness—the Prince of this world, who times his assaults with such consummate skill, not infrequently gains in such seasons a temporary triumph. The shadow of a cold scepticism passes over the soul. It is silent under the cry, "Where is your God?"

Have any of you ever known this acutest anguish of the human spirit—those appalling moments of doubt, when for a moment the whole citadel of truth seems to rock to its foundations—when the soul becomes a dungeon with grated bars, or in which the light of heaven is transmitted through distorted glass, and the finger of unbelief is pointed inwards, with the old sneer, "Where is the God you were used to boast of in your day of prosperity? Where is there evidence that one prayer you ever offered has been heard—one blessing you ever supplicated been granted—one evil you ever deprecated been averted or removed? Where one evidence of His hand in your allotments in life? These heavens have never broken silence! Hundreds of years have elapsed since His voice was last heard. Moreover, you have only some old parchment leaves written by converted Pharisees and Galilean fishermen to tell that Deity ever gave audible utterances out of the thick darkness. May not His very being be after all a fiction, a delusion—His Bible a worn-out figment which

superstition and priest-craft have successfully palmed upon the world?

Or if you do believe in a God and in a written revelation, have you not good reason, at all events, to infer from His adverse dealings that He cares nothing for you. He has proved Himself deaf to your cries. Where is the mercy in such an affliction as yours? He has crossed your every scheme, blasted your fairest gourds. His appointments are surely arbitrary. He takes useful lives, and leaves useless ones. He takes the wheat, and leaves the chaff. The chairs he empties are those of the kind and good, the loving and beloved. He leaves the wicked, and proud, and selfish, and profligate. Can there be a God on the earth? Where is the justice and judgment which are 'the habitation of His throne'—where the 'mercy and the truth' that are said to 'go before His face?'"

Such, you may say, are dreadful imaginations—too dreadful to speak of. But such there are! It is the horror of great darkness—spirits from the abyss sent to trouble the pools of ungodly thought, and stir them from their depths.

You who are thus assaulted, do you ever think, in the midst of these horrible insinuations, of ONE who had to bear the same? Think of that challenge which wrung a spotless human soul in the hour of its deepest anguish—"He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him: let Him deliver him, seeing he delighted in Him." (Ps. 22:8.) It was the same taunt in His case as in yours! It was the cruel, poignant sneer, that He had, during all his lifetime of confiding filial love, been trusting to a falsehood—that if God had really been His Father and He His Son, ten thousands of legions of angels would have been down now by the side of His cross to unbind His cords and set the Victim free!

Let the merciful, the wondrous forbearance of Christ be a lesson to ourselves in the endurance of the taunts of a scornful world and of the Father of lies. How easily might He have resented and answered the challenge by a descent from the cross, by having the pierced feet and hands set free—the crown of thorns replaced by a diadem of glory, scattering the scoffing crew like chaff before the whirlwind! But in meek, majestic silence the Lamb of God allows Himself to be bound, the Victim gives no struggle. Let them scoff on! He will save others, Himself he will

not save! Nor did all their scoffing, their taunts and ridicule, tend for a solitary moment to shake His confidence in His heavenly Father. These fell like spent spray on the Rock of Ages. When the cup of trembling was in His hands, sinking humanity for the moment seemed to stagger. He breathed the prayer, "Let it pass from me." But immediately He added the condition of unswerving filial trust, "Nevertheless, O my Father, not as I will, but as YOU WILL." Even in the crisis of all, when He was mourning the eclipse of that Father's countenance—in that last gasp of superhuman agony, He proclaims, in answer to the taunts of earth and hell, His unshaken trust, "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

Comforting surely to the reviled, the ridiculed, and persecuted, that, severe and poignant as their sorrow is, they are undergoing only what their Lord and Master, in an inconceivably more dreadful form, experienced before them! Yes! think how HE had to encounter the ingratitude of faithless, the treachery of trusted friends. The limbs He healed brought no support—the tongues He unloosed lisped no accents of compassion—the eyes He unsealed gave no looks of love. Those lips that spoke as never man spoke, dropping wherever they went balm-words of mercy, now in vain make the appeal to the scoffing crowd, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!" Oh, when in deeper than the water-floods of Gilead, this wounded DEER of Heaven lay panting and bleeding under the curse—when arrow after arrow was poured upon Him from the shafts of men, and the bitter cry resounded in His dying ears, Where is your God?—how did He answer? what was His response? Listen to the apostle's sublime comment on that scene of blended love and suffering—"Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He THREATENED NOT; BUT COMMITTED HIMSELF TO HIM THAT JUDGES RIGHTEOUSLY."

As the face, the hidden face of God, beamed upon the Son of His love in the midst of that apparent desolation, so will it be, children of affliction and sorrow! with you. Others may see in your tears nothing but an indication of the desertion of God—the visitations of His wrath and judgment. But believe it, these very experiences of trouble and calamity, of bereavement or death, are all meted out and apportioned for you in

love—drop by drop, tear by tear. Seek to see God's hand in all that befalls you. Try, even in the most adverse providences, to rise above second causes. Be it with you as with David in his conduct towards Shimei. When the insulting Benjamite was hurling these cruel taunts against the exiled King and the sorrowing Father, when his incensed soldiers, burning with indignation, were on the point of drawing their swords and inflicting full vengeance on the scoffer—"Why should this dead dog," said Abishai, "curse my lord the king? let me go over, I beg you, and take off his head"—David's reply is, "No! I hear not that man's voice—I see not that man's face—my eye is above the human instrument, on the God who sent him—'Let him curse on, for the Lord has bidden him.'" (2 Sam. 16:11.)

Trust God in the dark. Ah! it is easy for us to follow Him and to trust Him in sunshine. It is easy to follow our Leader as Israel did the pillar-cloud, when a glorious pathway was opened up for them through the midst of the Red Sea—when they pitched under shady palms and gushing fountains, and heaven rained down bread on the hungry camp. But it is not so easy to follow when fountains fail and the pillar ceases to guide, and all outward and visible supports are withdrawn. But then is the time for faith to rise to the ascendant—When the world is loud with its atheist sneer, THEN is the time to manifest a simple, childlike trust, and, amid baffling dispensations and frowning providences, to exclaim, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him!"

Yes—"troubled, we are NOT distressed; perplexed, we are NOT in despair; persecuted, we are NOT forsaken; cast down, we are NOT destroyed." We ARE ready, scoffing world! to answer the question, Where is your God?

CHILD OF SICKNESS! bound down for years on that lonely pillow!—the night-lamp your companion—disease wasting your cheeks and furrowing your brow—weary days and nights appointed you—tell me, Where is your God? He is here, is the reply; His presence takes loneliness from my chamber and sadness from my countenance. His promises are a pillow for my aching head—they point me onwards to that better land where "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick!"

CHILD OF POVERTY! Where is your God? Can He visit this crude

dwelling? Can God's promises be hung on these broken rafters? Can the light of His word illumine that cheerless hearth and sustain that bent figure shivering over its smouldering ashes? Yes! He is here. The lips of Truth that uttered the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor," have not spoken in vain. Bound down by chill poverty—forsaken and forgotten in old age—no footstep of mercy heard on my gloomy threshold—no lip of man to drop the kindly word—no hand of support to replenish the empty cupboard—that God above has not deserted me. He has led me to seek and lay up my treasure in a home where poverty cannot enter, and where the beggar's hovel is transformed into the kingly mansion!

**BEREAVED ONE!** Where is your God? Where is the arm of Omnipotence you were used to lean upon? Has He forgotten to be gracious? Has He mocked your prayers, by trampling in the dust your dearest and best, and left you to pine and agonize in the bitterness of your swept heart and home? No, He is here! He has swept down my fondest idol, but it was in order that He himself might occupy the vacant seat. I know Him too well to question the faithfulness of His word, and the fidelity of His dealings. I have never known what a God He was, until this hour of bitter trial overtook me! There was a "need be" in every tear—every death-bed—every grave!

**DYING MAN!** the billows are around you—the world is receding—the herald symptoms of approaching dissolution are gathering fast around your pillow—the soul is pluming its wings for the immortal flight; before memory begins to fade, and the mind becomes a waste—before the names of friends, when mentioned, will only be answered by a dull, vacant look, and then the hush of dreadful silence—tell me, before the last lingering ray of consciousness and thought has vanished, Where is your God?

He is here! I feel the everlasting arms underneath and round about me. Heart and flesh are failing. The mists of death are dimming my eyes to the things below, but they are opening on the magnificent vistas of eternity. **YONDER** He is! seated amid armies of angels. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!" "This God shall be my God forever and ever!"

## SABBATH MEMORIES

"Dear is the Sabbath morn to me,  
When village bells awake the day,  
And with their holy minstrelsy  
Call me from earthly cares away.

"And dear to me the winged hour,  
Spent in your hallowed courts,  
O Lord, to feel devotion's soothing power,  
And catch the manna of Your Word.

"And dear to me the loud 'Amen;'  
That echoes through the blest abode—  
That swells, and sinks, and swells again,  
Dies on the ear—but lives to God.

"Often when the world, with iron hand,  
Has bound me in its six days' chain,  
This bursts them, like a strong man's band,  
And bade my spirit live again."

David instructed Zadok to take the Ark of God back into the city. "If the Lord sees fit," David said, "he will bring me back to see the Ark and the Tabernacle again." 2 Samuel 15:25

"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day."—Verse 4.

We always commiserate those who have seen better days. Poverty, indeed, under any form, appeals with irresistible power to the sympathies

of our better nature. The most heartless and indifferent cannot refuse the tribute of pity to the ragged beggar shivering on the street, or seated in his hovel by the ashes of a spent fire, brooding over a wretched past, with the grim spectral forms of poverty hovering over a miserable future.

Sad, however, as the condition of such may be, the force of habit, in one sense, may have become to that squalid pauper a second nature. He may never have known a more prosperous state. He may have been accustomed from his earliest years to buffet life's wintry storm. Chill poverty may have rocked his cradle, and ever since sung her crude lullaby over his pallet of straw. Far more is to be pitied the case of those who have sunk from comfort into indigence, around whose early home no bleak winds of adversity ever blew, who were once pillowed in the lap of plenty if not of luxury, but who, by some sudden wave of calamity, have become wrecked on life's desert shore. If there be one being on God's earth more to be pitied than another, it is the mother of a once joyous home, turned adrift, in the hour of her widowhood, with her ragged children—forced to beg, from door to door, to escape the jaws of hungry famine—ill disguising, under her heap of squalid rags or her trembling notes of sorrow and despair, the story of brighter days.

Similar is the commiseration we extend (let the shores of this Refuge Island of ours bear testimony) to the hapless patriot or the fallen monarch. These may have been hurled from positions of influence or pinnacles of glory more by their crimes than by their misfortunes. The revolutionary wave that swept them from their country or their thrones may have been a just retribution for misrule; but it is their hour of adversity! They have seen better and more auspicious times. Pity for the fallen knocks, and never knocks in vain, at the heart of a great nation's sympathies.

Such was David's position at this time. Denied the sympathy of others, his own soul is filled with recollections of a far different past. The monarch of Israel, the beloved of God, the idol of his people; now a fugitive from his capital—his palace sacked—his crown dishonored—wandering in ignoble exile—a wreck of vanished glory!

But it is not these features of his humiliating fall on which his mind

mainly dwells. It is not the thought of his scepter wrested from his grasp —his army in mutiny—his royal residence a den of traitors that fills his soul with most poignant sorrow. He is an exile from the House of God! The joy of his old Sabbaths is for the time suspended and forfeited. No more is the sound of silver trumpets heard summoning the tribes to the new moons and solemn feast-days! No more does he behold, in thought, the slopes of Olivet studded with pilgrim tents or made vocal with "songs in the night!" No more does he see the triumphant procession wending up the hill of Zion—timbrel and pipe and lute and voice celebrating in glad accord the high praises of God—"the singers in front, and the players on instruments behind,"—he himself, harp in hand, (the true father of his people,) leading the jubilant chorus, and Jehovah commanding upon all "the blessing, even life for evermore!"

How changed! To this Sabbath-loving and Sabbath-keeping King nothing but the memory of these remained. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day."

Jerusalem was the pride and glory of the Jew. Wherever he went, he turned to it as to his best and fondest home. The windows of Daniel's chamber were "open towards Jerusalem." With his eye in the direction of the holy city, "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." (Dan. 6:10.) Jonah was in the strangest of prisons. "The depths closed round about him, the weeds were wrapped about his head, and the earth with its iron bars." From "the belly of hell" he sent up his cry to God. "I am cast out of your sight, yet I will look again toward your HOLY TEMPLE." (Jonah 2:2.) Captive Israel are seated, in mute despondency, by the willowed banks of the streams of Babylon. The Euphrates (an ocean river compared with the tiny streams of Palestine) rolled past them. The city of the hundred gates rose, like a dream of giant glory, before their view, with its colossal walls, and towers, and hanging gardens. Yet what were they in the eyes of these exile spectators? Shadows of greatness in comparison with the city and temple of their fathers amid the hills of Judah! When their oppressors demanded of them a Hebrew melody, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of



Zion," they answered, through hot tears of sorrowful remembrance, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:4.) So it was with David now. As a bird taken from its home in the forest and placed in a cage, refuses to warble a joyous note—beats its plumage against the enclosing bars, and struggles to get free—so he seems to long for wings that he may flee away to the hallowed eaves of the sanctuary, and be at rest!

He himself, indeed, uses a similar figure. He tells us, in another Psalm, written on this same occasion, that so blessed did he feel those to be who enjoyed the privilege of "dwelling in God's house," and so ardent was his longing to participate in their joy, that he half-envied the swallows who constructed their nests upon its roof. (Psalm 84.) He was not without his solaces in this season of reverse and calamity. He had many faithful adherents still clinging to him in his adversity. The best and bravest chieftains from the tribes on the other side of the Jordan supplied his drooping followers with the produce of their rich pasture lands. "When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was warmly greeted by Shobi son of Nahash of Rabbah, an Ammonite, and by Makir son of Ammiel of Lodabar, and by Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. They brought sleeping mats, cooking pots, serving bowls, wheat and barley flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, butter, sheep, and cheese for David and those who were with him. For they said, "You must all be very tired and hungry and thirsty after your long march through the wilderness." (2 Samuel 17:27-29.)

Glorious, too, was Nature's temple around him. Its pillars the mountains—the rocks its altar—the balmy air its incense—the range of Lebanon, rising like a holy of holies, with its reverend curtain of mist and cloud, and snowy Hermon towering in solemn grandeur above all, as the very throne of God! Yet what were these compared with JERUSALEM, the place of sacrifice, the resting-place of the Shekinah-glory, the city of solemnities, "where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord?" (Ps. 122:4.)

This wounded Deer pants for the water-brooks of Zion; Nature's outer sanctuary had no glory to him, "by reason of the glory that excels." The

God who dwells between the cherubim had "chosen Zion, and desired it for His habitation," saying, "This is my rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." (Ps. 132:13,14.) With the windows of his soul, like Daniel, thrown "open towards Jerusalem," and his inner eye wistfully straining to its sunny heights, his ear catching the cadence of its festive throng, he seems to say, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." (Ps. 137:5, 6.)

Do we prize the blessing of our Sabbaths and our sanctuaries? can we say, with somewhat of the emphasis of this expatriated King—"ONE thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple?" Alas! when we are living in the enjoyment of blessings, too true it is that we have seldom a vivid sense of their value. He who is born in a free country, to whom slavery and oppression are strange words, seldom realizes the priceless boon of liberty. But let him suddenly be made the victim of tyrant thralldom; let him feel the irons loading his body, or the worse than material shackles fettering liberty of thought and action, and how will the strains of freedom fall like heavenly music on his ear! When we are in the enjoyment of health and strength, how little do we prize the boon. But let us be laid on a bed of languishing; let the sick lamp flicker for weeks by the sleepless pillow; let the frame be so shattered that even the light tread of loving footsteps across the room quickens the beat of the throbbing brow. In waking visions of these lonely night-watches, how does the day of elastic vigor and unbroken health rise before us! how do we reproach ourselves that the boon was so long ungratefully forgotten and unworthily requited! A parent little knows the strength of the tie which binds him to his child during the brief loan of a loved existence. He gets habituated to the winning ways, and loving words, and constant companionship. He comes to regard that little life as part of himself. He does not fully realize the blessing, because he has never dreamt of the possibility of its removal. But when the startling blow comes—when death, in an unexpected moment, has severed the tie—when his eye lights on the empty chair or the unused toy, when the joyous footfall and artless prattling are heard no more—then comes he to gauge all the depth and intensity of his affection, and to feel how tenderly (too

tenderly!) that idol was enshrined in his heart of hearts!

So it is with religious privileges. In such a land as our own, in which, from our earliest infancy, we have been accustomed to a hallowed Sabbath, an open sanctuary, an unclasped and unforbidden Bible, we do not fully estimate the priceless value of the spiritual blessings bequeathed to us, because never have we felt the loss or the lack of them. But go to some land of heathenism, where the exiled child of a British Christian home finds neither minister nor House of God. Go to the thousands who have betaken themselves to a voluntary exile amid American forests or Australian pastures. Or go to the lands of apostate Christendom, where the Bible is a sealed book, and religious liberty is an empty name; where souls thirsting for the living stream are compelled to drink from some adulterated cistern. Alas! many in such circumstances are content to sink into a listless indifference; cold and lukewarm at home, they are too ready to lapse into the chill of spiritual death abroad. But there are others who have not so readily obliterated the holiest records of the past. Ask many tired and jaded emigrants, conscious of nobler aspirations than this world can meet, what recollections, more hallowed than others, linger on their spirits? They will tell you it is the memory of the Sabbath rest and the Sabbath sanctuary, when, at the summons of the village bell, mountain and glen and hamlet poured forth their multitudes to the house of God; seated wherein, the burdens and anxieties, the cares and disquietudes of the work-day world were hushed and set aside, and in listening to the words of everlasting life, sorrows were soothed, faith was revived, and hope brightened. "O God," their cry is, "our flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Your power and Your glory, so as we have seen You in the sanctuary." (Psalm 63:1, 2.)

Let us seek to prize our means of grace while we have them. In a country which is the reputed citadel of liberty—where the greatest of all liberty, the liberty of the truth, has been purchased by the blood of our fathers, the time, we trust, with God's help, may never come when these bulwarks will be overthrown—when our sanctuaries will be closed—our Bibles proscribed—our Sabbaths blotted from the statute-book—and bigotry, in league with rampant infidelity, again forge the chain and rear the dungeon.

But remember, that protracted sickness or disease may at any time overtake us, and debar us from the precious blessings of the public sanctuary. Yes! I say the public sanctuary. God's appointed ordinances can never be superseded or rendered obsolete by human substitutes. Some may urge that books nowadays are better than any preaching—that the press is more potent and eloquent than any living voice. But church or pulpit is not a thing of man's device. It is a divine institute. The speaker is an ambassador in his Master's name, charged with a vast mission from the court of high heaven, and the House of God is the appointed audience-chamber. God does not, indeed, (no, far from it,) forsake "the dwellings of Jacob." The lowliest cottage-home may become a Bethel, with a ladder of love set between earth and heaven, traversed by ministering angels! The secluded sick-chamber may become a Patmos, bright with manifestations of the Redeemer's presence and grace! But, nevertheless, "Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary." The promise remains, "I will make my people joyful in my house of prayer." It is the solemn "meeting-place"—the pledged ground of covenant intercommunion. "THERE I will meet with you, and commune with you from off my mercy-seat!" "The Lord loves the gates of Zion!" "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel!" (Ex. 25:22; Psalm 87:2; Numb. 24:5.)

Reader, let me ask, How stands it with you? Are you conscious of a reverential regard and attachment to God's holy place? Does the return of the Sabbath awake in your heart the old melody of this sweet singer of Israel—"This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it?" (Psalm 118:24.) Do you go to the solemn assembly, not to hear the messenger but the message—not to pay homage to a piece of dust, (the vilest and most degraded form of idolatry,) but feeling yourself a beggar in the sight of God, with a soul to save, and an eternity to provide for? Do you approach it as the place of prayer, over which the cloud hovers laden with spiritual blessings? Do you go to it as "the house of God," seeking fellowship and communion with the Father of spirits; desiring that all its services—its devotions, and praises, and exhortations—may become hallowed magnets, drawing you nearer and binding you closer to the mercy-seat?

Oh, let not the blessings of Sabbath privileges degenerate into an empty form, the mere pageant of custom. Let the Sabbath hours be sacredly kept. Let their lessons be sacredly treasured. Let their close find you a Sabbath-day's journey nearer heaven. Let their hallowed fragrance follow you through the week. Let them be landmarks in the pilgrimage; towering behind you the further you go—like Alp piled on Alp, flushed with roseate light, guiding and cheering you when low down in the valleys of trial and sorrow, and when called to descend the last and gloomiest Valley of all.

David is mourning, in the words which have given rise to these thoughts, over his altered Sabbath joys. It may be there are some reading these pages, who, though they know nothing like him of literal exile and banishment from the sanctuary, may yet be able painfully to participate in his feelings! They are seated, Sabbath after Sabbath, in their pews; their Bibles are in their hands—the living words of the preacher are sounding in their ears; but their experience may be best interpreted by the language of the Christian poet—

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?"

"How blest the hours I once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill."

Memory can travel back on Sabbaths and communion seasons when a sunshine of holy joy irradiated their spirits; when their Sabbath was one hallowed Emmaus journey—they, during its sanctuary-hours, traveling side by side with Jesus, and He causing their hearts, as He did those of the disciples of old, to "burn within them." They were used to come and depart, saying, "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Now they feel that all is sorrowfully altered. They have comparatively no joy, as once they had, when the Sabbath morning dawns. When they seat themselves in church, there is no fervor in their praises—no earnestness in their prayers—no childlike teachableness in

hearing. There is more criticizing of the preacher than worshiping God. There is no living flame on the heart-altar; their befitting exclamation is that of the prophet, "My leanness! my leanness!" They are ready, in the bitterness of their spirits, to say, "When I remember these things, my soul is poured out within me."

Sad it is to have no food; but sad, too, when we have food and cannot enjoy it! Sad it is, as exiles in a strange land, to have no Sabbath-gates flung open to us, and no Sabbath-bells to welcome the day of God; but sadder still to have these solemn chimes within hearing—to have our sanctuaries open, and faithful ministers proclaiming the words of eternal life, and yet to listen with the adder's ear—to listen as the dead in our churchyards listen to the tears and laments of the living!

What should be done in such a case as this? Trace the muddy and turgid stream to its source. Discover what earthly clouds are dimming the spiritual skies, and hiding the shinings of the Divine countenance. Sin, in some shape or other, must be the noxious cause. It may be some positive and persevered-in transgression; indulgence in which, shuts up the avenues of prayer, and denies all access to the mercy-seat. Or it may be some no less culpable sin of omission. That mercy-seat may have become unfrequented; the overgrown grass may be waving over its once beaten foot-road; the altar-fire languishing in the closet, must necessarily languish in the sanctuary too. How can the House of God be now fragrant with blessing, if the life is spent in guilty estrangement from Him? Religion cannot be worn as a Sabbath garment, if garments soiled with sin be worn throughout the week.

Self-exile from the joys of the sanctuary! return henceforth to God. If it be positive sin which is marring former blessedness, cast out the troubler in Israel. If it be duties omitted, or perfunctorily discharged, return to former earnest-mindedness. Cultivate more filial nearness to the Hearer of prayer. Seek, on your bended knees, to obtain more tenderness of conscience regarding sin—to have more longing aspirations after the beauties of holiness.

And delay not the return. By doing so, the growing languor and listlessness which is creeping over you, may settle into positive disrelish

of God's house. Imitate the example of the Spouse in the Canticles, who, in mourning over similar spiritual declension, resolves on an instantaneous seeking of the forfeited presence of her Lord. "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of your companions?" (Song. 1:7.) Go with the words which this exile of Gilead employs in the sequel to this Psalm, written on the same occasion—"O send out Your light and Your truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Your holy hill, and to Your tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." (Psalm 43:3, 4.)

Yes! go, and prove what the God of the sanctuary can do in the fulfillment of His own promise. He seems now to be saying, "Put me to the test." "Prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. 3:10.) Every church is a Peniel, where God meets His people, as He met the patriarch of old at the brook Jabbok. Go and see what may be effected by one lowly, humble, seeking soul—some wrestling Jacob, who, like "a Prince," has "power with God, and prevails!" The lowliest tabernacle on earth is glorified as being the House of God—the dwelling-place of Omnipotence and Love—the hallowed "home," where a loving Father waits to dispense to His children the garnered riches of His grace! The time may come when the holy and beautiful sanctuary where we worship may become a heap of ruins. The fire may lay it in ashes—the hand of man may demolish it—the slower but surer hand of time may corrode its walls and crumble its solid masonry stone by stone; but as sure as it is God's own appointed treasure-house of spiritual mercies, may we not believe that there will be deathless spirits who will be able to point to it in connection with imperishable memories, "buildings of God," "eternal in the heavens," beyond the reach of human violence, and wasting elements, and corroding years! Does not the promise stand unrepealed in this Bible—let it ever be the inscription on our temples of worship,"—"Of ZION it shall be said, This and that man was born in her; and the Highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when He writes up the people, that this man was born there." (Psalm 87:5, 6.)

Oh that ours may at last be the blessedness of that better Church above,

which knows no banishment, no exile, no languor, no weariness—where "the holy-day" is an eternal Sabbath—the festive throng, "a multitude which no man can number"—the voice of joy and praise, "everlasting songs;"—where God's absence can never be deplored—where He who now tends His temple-lamps on earth, feeding them day by day with the oil of His grace, removing the rust perpetually gathering over them by reason of their contact with sin, will, with the plenitude of His own presence, supersede all earthly luminaries, and ordinances, and sanctuaries—for "they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever!"

## HOPE

"When the water-floods of grief  
Round your helpless head shall rise,  
When there seems no relief,  
Lift your gaze to yonder skies;  
There behold how radiantly  
Beams the star of HOPE divine!  
Yesterday it shone for thee,  
And today it still shall shine.  
Ask no aid the world can give,  
LOOKING UNTO Jesus, live!"

"When I ask the question, 'Why are you cast down, O my soul?' I am ashamed of the answer that must be returned. What if property, credit, health, friends and relatives were all lost, you have a Father, a friend, an advocate, a comforter, a mansion, a treasure in heaven."—Bishop Hall.

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed in me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."—



Verse 5.

Take the wings from a bird, and it is the most helpless of animals. Bring the eagle from his eyrie, and rob him of his plumage, and he who an hour before was soaring monarch of the sky, is more powerless than the worm crawling at his side, or than the bleating lamb that trembled and cowered under his shadow.

Such was David now. The wounded bird of Paradise flutters in the dust. The taunting cry everywhere assails him, "Where is your God?" The future is a mournful blank, and the past is crowded with joyous and happy memories, which only aggravate and intensify the sorrows of the present.

But though soiled and mutilated, the wings of faith are not broken. He struggles to rise from his fall. In the verse we are now to consider, he plumes his pinions for a new flight. We found him a short time before, making his tears a microscopic lens, looking through them into the depths of his own sorrowing and sinning heart. So long as he does so, there is ground for nothing but misgiving and despair. But he reverses the lens. He converts the microscope into a telescope. In self-oblivion, he turns the prospect-glass away from his own troubles and sorrows, his fitful frames and feelings, his days alike of sunshine and shade, to Him who is above all mutation and vicissitude. In this position, with his eye Godwards, he begins to interrogate his own spirit as to the unreasonableness of its depression. He addresses a bold remonstrance to guilty unbelief. In the preceding verse, he alluded to the dense multitude—the many thousands of Israel—he was used to lead in person to the feasts of Zion. Now he is alone with one auditor—that auditor is HIMSELF. "Why are you cast down, O MY SOUL?"

And what is his antidote? What is the balm and balsam he applies to his wounded spirit? "Hope in God!"

HOPE! Who is insensible to the music of that word? What bosom has not kindled under its utterance? Poetry has sung of it; music has warbled it; oratory has lavished on it its bewitching strains. Pagan mythology, in her vain but beautiful dreams, said that when all other divinities fled from the

world, Hope, with her elastic step and radiant countenance and lustrous attire, lingered behind. HOPE! well may we personify you, lighting up your altar-fires in this dark world, and dropping a live coal into many desolate hearts; gladdening the sick-chamber with visions of returning health; illuminating with rays, brighter than the sunbeam, the captive's cell; crowding the broken slumbers of the soldier by his camp-fire, with pictures of his sunny home, and his own joyous return. HOPE drying the tear on the cheek of woe! As the black clouds of sorrow break and fall to the earth, arching the descending drops with your own beauteous rainbow! Yes, more, standing with your lamp in your hand by the gloomy realms of Hades, kindling your torch at Nature's funeral pile, and opening vistas through the gates of glory!

If Hope, even with reference to present and finite things, be an emotion so joyous—if uninspired poetry can sing so sweetly of its delights, what must be the believer's hope, the hope which has God for its object, and heaven its consummation? How sweet that strain must have sounded from the lips of the exile Psalmist amid these glens of Gilead! A moment before, his sky is dark and troubled, but blue openings begin once more to tremble through the clouds. The mists have been hanging dense and thick, hiding out the water-brooks. But now the sun shines. They rise and circle in wreaths of fantastic vapor, disclosing to the wounded Deer "the springs in the valleys which run among the hills; which give drink to every beast in the field, and where the wild donkeys quench their thirst." The wilderness has become once more "a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Rebuking his unworthy tears, Faith once more takes down her harp, and thus wakes its melodies, "I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I HOPE." "Let Israel HOPE in the Lord." (Psalm 130:5, 7.)

And is it not well for us from time to time to open the gates of our own souls, and hold a similar consistory?—to make solemn inquisition with our hearts in their seasons of trouble and disquietude?

"Why are you cast down?" Is it outward trial that assails you? Has calamity abridged your earthly comforts? Have the golden heaps you may have been a lifetime in amassing, dissolved like a snow-wreath—the waxen wings of capricious fortune, when you were soaring highest,

melting like those of fabled Icarus of old, and bringing you helpless to the ground? Or is it sickness that has dulled your eye, paralyzed your limb, and ploughed its furrows on your cheek; shutting out from you the din of a busy world, and chaining you down to a couch of languishing? Or is it the treachery of your trusted friend that has wounded you; blighting your affections, crushing your hopes, dashing your cup of earthly bliss to the ground? Or is it bereavement that has made gaps in your beloved circle; torn away the fixtures which gave your dwelling and life itself all its gladness and joy?

"HOPE in GOD." The creature has perished. God is imperishable! You may be saying in the bitterness of your spirit, "All these things are against me;" there may be no gleam of light in the tempest, no apparent reason for the dark dispensation; you feel it is with stammering lips and a misgiving heart you give utterance to the reluctant word, "Your will be done." But, "My soul, wait only upon God;" (or, as Calvin translates this, "Be silent before God;") "for my expectation is from Him." (Psalm 62:5.) "Commit also your way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass." (Psalm 37:5.) Here is the province of faith—implicit trust in dark dealings. God brings His people into straits; sends often what is baffling and unaccountable, to lead them devoutly to say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him." Oh! beautiful is it thus to see HOPE sitting, like the seabird, calmly on the crested wave. While others (strangers to the peace of the gospel) are beating their breasts in tumultuous grief, indulging in wild paroxysms of rebellious sorrow—beautiful is it to see the smitten one prostrate at the feet of the great CHASTENER, saying through teardrops of resignation, "Even so, Father; for so it seems good in Your sight!" Believe it, in the apparently rough voice of your God there is, as in the case of Joseph to his brethren, tones of secret love, disguised utterances of affection— "Although you say you cannot see Him, yet judgment is before Him; therefore trust in Him." (Job 35:14.)

Besides, this lofty grace of HOPE requires stern discipline to bring it into exercise, and to develop its noble proportions. It is the child of tribulation. The Apostle thus traces its pedigree— "Tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, HOPE." (Rom. 5:3, 4.) As there can be no rainbow in the natural heavens without the cloud,

so Hope cannot span the moral firmament, with its triumphal arch, without the clouds of tribulation. As the mother eagle is said, when other expedients fail, to put a thorn in the side of her nest to urge her young brood to fly, so tribulation is the thorn which drives Hope to the wing.

"And you shall yet praise Him." "YET!" We cannot venture to scan or measure that word. It may be after many bitter tears of sorrow—it may be after many struggles with a murmuring heart—many storms may still sweep—many hours of pining sickness may be endured—many a rough and thorny path may have to be trodden—the harp may be muffled in sadness to the last; but, "at evening-time it shall be light." There is a season infallibly coming when the fettered tongue shall be loosed—the lingering cloud dispelled—and faith's triumph complete; when, with regard to the very dispensation on earth which caused you so much perplexity, you will be able triumphantly to say, "I know" (yes, I SEE) "that Your judgments are right, and that You in faithfulness have afflicted me." (Psalm 119:75.)

But your depression may proceed from a different cause. It may not be outer trial, but inward sources of disquietude, which are causing despondency and doubt. It may be thoughts regarding your spiritual condition. Latent corruption in a partially renewed and sanctified heart—the power of remaining sin robbing you of your peace; at times leading you to question whether you have any real interest in Gospel blessings and Gospel hopes—whether you have not long ago quenched the strivings of the Holy Spirit by your impenitence and unbelief—whether your hopes of heaven may not after all be a shadowy delusive dream. "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" Who, I ask, is teaching you to breathe out these penitential sighings after a happiness to which at present you feel you are a stranger? Who is it that is teaching you thus to interrogate yourself about the erring past? It is not Nature's work. If there be within you one true breathing after repentance and return, that secret aspiration is the work of that Spirit who, although He will not always strive, is hereby showing you that He is striving still with you! Think of all that God has done for you in the past, and is still willing to do. After the gift of His Son—after such an expenditure of wrath and suffering on the head of a guiltless Surety, and all this that a way of reconciliation might be opened

up—think how dishonoring it would be to distrust either His ability or His willingness to save you. Having bestowed this greatest boon, He will "with Him also freely give you all things." Turn away from self—sinful self, righteous self, condemned self—and direct your believing regards to Him who is "the HOPE of Israel and the Savior thereof." Keep your eye steadily fixed on the infinite grandeur of His finished work and righteousness. Look to Jesus and believe! Look to Jesus and live! No, more; as you look to Him, hoist your sails, and buffet manfully the sea of life. Do not remain in the haven of distrust, or sleeping on your shadows in inactive repose, or allowing your frames and feelings to pitch and toss on one another like vessels idly moored in a harbor. The religious life is not a brooding over emotions, grazing the keel of faith in the shallows, or dragging the anchor of hope through the oozy tide-mud, as if afraid of encountering the healthy breeze. Away! with your canvas spread to the gale, trusting in Him who rules the raging of the waters. The safety of the timid bird is to be on the wing. If its haunt be near the ground—if it fly low—it exposes itself to the fowler's net or snare. If we remain groveling on the low ground of feeling and emotion, we shall find ourselves entangled in a thousand meshes of doubt and despondency, temptation and unbelief. "But surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of THAT WHICH HAS A WING" (Prov. 1:17, marginal reading). "Those who wait (or hope) in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles." (Isaiah 40:31.)

HOPE strengthens and invigorates her pinions the higher she soars. She gathers courage from the past, and looks with eagle eye to the future. "I know," says Paul, "in whom I have believed," (hoped, or trusted,) "and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him." "I will hope continually," says David, "and will yet praise You more and more." Again, using a kindred emblem—the bird in the tempest rushing for shelter under the mother's wing—"You have BEEN my help, THEREFORE in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice." (Psalm 63:7.)

Can such be said of the world's hopes? Does experience lead to repose in them with similar implicit confidence? Hope—the hope of earthly good, and earthly joy, and earthly happiness—is often (too often) the mirage of life; the bubble on the stream, tinted with evanescent glory, a flash of

prismatic beauty, and then gone! Multitudes flock to this enchantress in her cave, and though mocked and duped, and mocked and duped again, still they resort to her oracle, and kiss her magic wand. She has built for them again and again air castles—turret on turret, buttress on buttress, gilded dome and glittering minaret, and these have melted like frost-work. But yet these Babel builders, with the same avidity as ever, return to the work, and again the fantastic battlements are piled high in mid air!

We do not condemn these noble aspirations and struggles of this noble emotion—far from it. What would the world be without Hope? It is the oil which keeps its vast machinery in play; it is the secret of all success—the incentive to all enterprise. Annihilate hope, and you blot out a sun from the firmament. Annihilate hope, and the husbandman would forsake his furrow, the physician his patient, the merchant his traffic; the student would quench his midnight lamp; science would at this hour have been lispng its alphabet, and art and philosophy would have been in their infancy.

But this we say, that if so much is periled on a peradventure—if hope—the motivation of earth—be so greedily pursued—why the cold and careless indifference regarding "the hope which makes not ashamed"—the hope which is beyond the possibility of disappointment; promises which never fail; words which rest on a firmer and surer basis than the foundations of earth and the pillars of heaven? Shall the disappointed hewer still go on patching the shivered and broken earthly cistern? Shall the man of science, undeterred by successive failures, pursue his unwearied analysis? Shall the merchant remain un baffled by adverse markets that have drained his coffers, or successive storms that have stranded his vessels and wrecked his cargo? Shall the fragments of a brave army re-muster at the bugle call, and, amid dying comrades around and a shower of iron hail in front, return with undaunted hearts to the charge? Shall pining captives in a beleaguered garrison, pressed by famine, decimated by disease, outnumbered by force—shall these light their beacon-fires of hope, and sit to the last by their smouldering ashes, struggling on, either until calm endurance win its recompense, or until hope and life expire together? And shall the spiritual builder, or merchant, or soldier, be left alone coward and fainthearted, and give way to unworthy distrust, or

pusillanimous despair; and that, too, when the guarantees of their hope are so amazing? Listen to them! What words could be stronger? what pledges more inviolable? "IN HOPE of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2.) "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary." (Heb. 6:17-19.)

Oh, beautiful figure! Hope casts its anchor into the Rock of Ages within the veil. The ship may be tossing in the surging sea below, but a chain of everlasting love and grace links it to the throne of God.

I love to walk through the Bible, and gaze on its many delineations of Hope. It is a picture-gallery of this noble grace! As the great painters of the middle ages clung to favorite subjects, so HOPE seems ever to meet us in some form or other, as we tread this long corridor of inspired portraits.

Here is the earliest. A picture hung in a framework of sorrow. Its subject is two drooping exiles going with tears out of Eden. But, lo! a tinge of light gleams in the dark sky, and the angel of Hope drops in their ears healing words of comfort.

Here is another. An ark is tossed in a raging deluge. The heavens are black above. Neither sun nor stars appear. All around is a waste wilderness of waters. But, lo! by the window of the ark a weary bird is seen fluttering, and bearing in its mouth an olive branch of Hope!

Here, again, is a picture called "The Father of the Faithful." Its subject is a solitary pilgrim, one of the world's gray patriarchs. He is treading along amid some wild pastoral hills, all ignorant of his destiny; but he has a staff in his hand—it is the staff of Hope!

Here is another. It is an Arabian nobleman, once a Prince of the East, sitting amid ashes, the victim of a loathsome disease; and, worse than all, of Satanic power. But Hope tunes his lips to sing, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Here is a vast exodus of six hundred thousand slaves from a land of bondage, separated by an inhospitable desert from the land of their fathers; but Hope silvers the edges of their pillar of cloud, and gleams by night in their pillar of fire.

Here is another picture, of exiled patriots seated by the waters of Babylon. They have hung their harps on the willows. They refuse to sing the Lord's song in that strange land. But HOPE is represented restoring the broken strings; and with their eyes suffused with tears, yet glistening with joyous visions, thus they pour out their plaintive prayer—"Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south." (Psalm 126:4.)

Time would fail to traverse these halls and walls of ancient memory. HOPE, in every diversified form and attitude, is portrayed in the history of the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of prophets, the noble army of martyrs—yes, sustaining too, in the midst of His sufferings and sorrows, the very bosom of the Son of God—for was it not hope ("the joy that was set before Him") that made Him "endure the cross, despising the shame?" (Heb. 12:2.)

And what Hope has proved in the history of the Church collectively, it is in the life of every individual believer. By nature he is a "prisoner," but "a prisoner of hope." (Zech. 9:12.) The gospel is a "gospel of hope." Its message is called "the good hope through grace." (2 Thess. 2:16.) The God of the gospel is called "the God of Hope." (Rom. 15:13.) The "helmet of salvation" is the helmet of "hope." (1 Thess. 5:8.) The "anchor of the soul" is the anchor of "hope." (Heb. 6:19.) The believer "rejoices in hope," (Rom. 12:12.) and "abounds in hope." (Rom. 15:13.) Christ is in him "the hope of glory." (Co. 1:27.) He "sorrows not as others, who have no HOPE." (1 Thess. 4:13.) When death comes, Hope smooths his dying pillow, wipes the damps from his brow, and seals his eyes. "Now, Lord, what do I wait for? My HOPE is in You." (Psalm 39:7.) Hope stands with her torch over his grave, and in the prospect of the dust returning to its



dust, he says, "My flesh shall rest in hope." (Psalm 16:9.)

Hope is one of three guardian graces that conduct him to the heavenly gate. Now abides these three, "Faith, HOPE, and Love," and if it be added, "the greatest of these is Love," it is because Hope and her companion finish their mission at the celestial portal! They proceed no farther, they go back to the world, to the wrestlers in the earthly conflict. Faith returns to her drooping hearts, to undo heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free. Hope goes to her dungeon vaults, her beds of sickness, her chambers of bereavement and sorrow. To take Faith or Hope to heaven, would be to take the Physician to the healthy man, or to offer crutches to the strong, or to help to light the meridian sun with a tiny candle; Faith is then changed to sight, and Hope to full fruition. LOVE alone holds on her infinite mission. Faith and Hope are her two soaring pinions. She drops them as she enters the gates of glory. The watcher puts out his beacon when the sun floods the ocean—the miner puts out his lamp when he ascends to the earth. Hope's candle light is unneeded in that world where "the sun shall no more go down, neither for brightness shall the moon withdraw itself, but where the Lord our God shall be an everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended."

## **THE HILL MIZAR**

"All scenes alike engaging prove  
To souls impressed with sacred love!  
Wherever they dwell, they dwell in Thee;  
In heaven, in earth, or on the sea.

"To me remains no place nor time;  
My country is in every clime;  
I can be calm and free from care  
On any shore, since God is there.

"While place we seek, or place we shun,

The soul finds happiness in none;  
But, with a God to guide our way,  
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.

"Could I be cast where You are not,  
That were indeed a dreadful lot;  
But regions none remote I call,  
Secure of finding God in all."—Cowper.

"It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the dealings of God with their souls. It was Paul's accustomed manner, and that when tried for his life, even to open before his Judges the manner of his conversion. He would think of that day and that hour in the which he did first meet with grace, for he found it support unto him. There was nothing to David like Goliath's sword. The very sight and remembrance of that did preach forth God's deliverance to him. Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears for perishing forever. They bring afresh into my mind the remembrance of mercy and help—my great support from heaven, and the great grace that God extends to such a wretch as I."—John Bunyan.

"O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember you from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—Verse 6.

In the preceding verse, we found the Psalmist chiding his soul for the unreasonableness of its depression—calling upon it to exercise hope and trust in God, under the assurance that he would "yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."

But "what will you see in the Shulamite?" Another experience testifies afresh, "As it were the company of two armies." (Song 6:13.) HOPE has no sooner risen to the surface than despondency returns. The struggling believer threatens to sink. The wave is again beat back. His soul is again "cast down!" But one word—an old monosyllable of comfort—is borne on the ebbing billow, "O MY GOD!" This "strong swimmer in his agony" seizes hold of that never-failing support, the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping Jehovah. With this he breasts the opposing tide, and will

assuredly at last reach the shore. The very tribulations that are casting him down—threatening to submerge him—are only nerving his spirit for bolder feats; leading him to value more the everlasting arms that are lower and deeper than the darkest wave.

We have heard of a bell, set in a lighthouse, rung by the sweep of the winds and the dash of the billows. In the calm, stormless sea, it hung mute and motionless; but when the tempest was let loose and the ocean fretted, the benighted seaman was warned by its chimes; and beating hearts ashore, in the fisherman's lonely hut, listened to its ominous music. We read, in the previous verse, of the lighthouse of FAITH, built on the rock of HOPE. God has placed bells there. But it needs the storms of adversity to blow before they are heard. In the calm of uninterrupted prosperity, they are silent and still. But the hurricane arises. The sea of life is swept with tempest, and, amid the thick darkness, they ring the note of heavenly confidence, "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

My God! What a heritage of comfort do these words contain—in all time of our tribulation—in all time of our wealth—in the hour of death, and at the day of judgment! They describe the great Being who fills heaven with His glory, as the covenant portion and heritage of believers. His attributes are embarked on their side; His holiness and righteousness, and justice and truth, are the immutable guarantees and guardians of their everlasting well-being. Hear His own gracious promise—"I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God." (Zech. 13:9.)

Moreover, He is the only possession which is theirs absolutely. All else they have, is in the shape of a loan, which they receive as stewards. Their time, their talents, their possessions, their friends, are only leased by them from the Great Proprietor of life and being. But they can say unreservedly, "The Lord is my portion." "God, even our OWN God, shall bless us." Yes, and we are told, "God is not ashamed to be called THEIR GOD." (Heb. 11:16.) "The name of the Lord is thus "a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe." (Prov. 18:10.) That salvation purchased by Jesus—the amazing method by which every attribute of the

Divine nature has been magnified, and every requirement of the Divine law has been met—is "for walls and bulwarks."

The believer not only can lay hold on higher blessings—"the good hope through grace," "glory, honor, immortality, eternal life"—but even with regard to the circumstantial of the present, the appointments and allotments in the house of his pilgrimage, he can feel that they are so regulated and overruled as best to promote his spiritual interests; and that "all things" (yes, "ALL things") are "working together for his good."

Take then, desponding one! the opening words of David's lamentation. They quiet all apprehensions. This all-gracious Being who gave His own Son for you, must have some wise reason in such discipline. Oh, confide all your perplexities, and this perplexity, into His hands, saying, "I am oppressed, YOU undertake for me!" Who can forget that it was this same monosyllable of comfort that cheered a greater Sufferer at a more dreadful hour? The two most memorable spots in His midnight of agony—Gethsemane and Calvary, the Garden and the Cross—have this solitary gleam of sunshine breaking through the darkness, "O MY FATHER!" "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

Let us now proceed to the main feature in this verse. We have already noted how the exiled King had tried to reason his soul out of its depression by the exercise of HOPE—by looking beyond the shadows of the present to a brighter future. But the torch flickered and languished in his hand. He adopts a new expedient. Instead of looking to the future, he resolves to take a retrospective survey; he directs his eye to the past. As often at eventide, when the lower valleys are in shadow, the mountaintops are gilded with the radiance of the setting sun; so from the Valley of Humiliation, where he now was, he looks back on the lofty memorials of God's faithfulness. He "lifts his eyes unto the HILLS, from where comes his help." "O my God, I will remember YOU!" "This is my infirmity," he seems to say, when he thinks of the weakness of his faith, and the fitfulness of his frames and feelings: "but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old." (Psalm 77:10, 11.) With this key he proceeds again to open the door of HOPE. And as he treads the valley of Achor, he "sings there as in the days of his youth."

(Hosea 2:15.)

In connection with this remembrance of his God, David alludes to some well-known places in his Kingdom—"The land of Jordan, and the Hermonites, and the hill Mizar." What means he by this reference? His language may admit of a twofold interpretation.

1. He may possibly refer to his present sojourn in the region beyond Jordan, with the Hermon range in sight; and which had this peculiarity, that it was beyond the old boundary-line of the Land of Promise, making him for the time, "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel."

We know from a passage in Joshua (chap. 22.) how sacredly the division between the covenant people and the neighboring tribes was preserved. The latter were denominated a "possession unclean;" the former, "the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord's tabernacle is." How bitter must it have been to a patriotic heart like that of the Psalmist, thus to be cut off (even though for a brief season) from all participation in national and sanctuary blessings—to stand outside the land trodden by the footsteps of angels, consecrated by the ashes of patriarchs, and over which hovered the shadowing wings of Jehovah!

But he exults in the persuasion that Israel's God is not confined to lands or to sanctuaries. "I will remember You," says the banished monarch. "Though wandering here beyond the region You have blest with Your favor, I will not cease still to call You and claim You as my God, and to recount all the manifold tokens of Your mercy, even though it be from 'the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.' My foes may drive me from my home—they may strip me of my regal glories—they may make me the butt of scorn, the mark for their arrows—but they cannot banish me from the better portion and heritage I have in Your blessed self!"

If we should ever be in circumstances when, like David, we are divested of the means of grace—shut out from the public ministrations of the sanctuary—or, what is more common, placed in a disadvantageous position for spiritual advancement—when our situation as regards the world, the family, business, pursuits, companions, society, is such as to

prove detrimental to the interests of our souls—let us still "remember God!" Let the loss of means, and privileges, and opportunities, and congenial communion, draw us nearer the Source of all knowledge, and peace, and true joy. If the starlight be lacking, let us prize the sunlight more. If the streams fail, let us go direct to the fountainhead.

Yes, and God can make His people independent of all outward circumstances. In the court of an Ethiopian Queen there was a believing Treasurer. In the household of Nero there were illustrious saints. Down in the depths of the briny ocean, imprisoned in the strangest of tombs, a disobedient prophet "remembered God," and his prayer was heard. Joseph was torn away from the land of his birth, and the home where his piety had been nurtured, but in Egypt "the Lord was with Joseph." "At my first answer," says the apostle of the Gentiles, "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. ...Notwithstanding, THE LORD stood by me, and strengthened me." Comforting thought! that the true Sanctuary, of which all earthly ones are the shadowy type, is ever near: God Himself, the refuge and dwelling-place of His people to all generations, and who, wherever we are, can turn the place of forlorn exile—our "land of Jordan, the Hermonites, the hill Mizar"—into scenes bright with manifestations of His covenant love.

2. But the references to these several localities may admit of a different interpretation. David may be reverting to some memorable epochs in his past history—some green spots in the wasteland of memory, where he enjoyed peculiar tokens of God's grace and presence.

We spoke in last chapter of Hope's picture-gallery. Memory has one, stranger still—filled with landscapes of imperishable interest! Who has not such a gallery in his own soul? Let Memory withdraw her folding-doors—and what do we see? The old homes of cherished infancy may be the first to crowd the walls and arrest the eye—scenes of life's bright morning, the sun tipping with his rising beam the dim mountain-heights of the future! In the foreground, there is the murmuring brook by which we wandered, and the spreading tree under which we sat—countenances glowing with smiles are accompanying every walk and greeting us at every turn—the ringing laugh of childhood at some—venerable forms bending at others.

But more hallowed remembrances crowd the canvas. Ebenezers and Bethel-stones appear conspicuous in the distance—mute and silent memorials, amid the gray mists of the past, which read a lesson of encouragement and comfort in a desponding and sorrowful present.

David thus trod the corridors of memory. When the future was dark and lowering, he surveys picture by picture, scene by scene, along the chequered gallery of his eventful life! With Jordan at his feet, the Hermon range in the distance, and some Mizar—some "little hill" (as the word means) rising conspicuous in view, he dwells on various signal instances of God's goodness and mercy in connection with these localities—"I will remember You" (as it may be rendered) "regarding the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

We know the other names to which he here adverts, but what is this "HILL MIZAR?" The answer can only be conjectural. It may be some small mountain eminence among the hills of Judah associated with the experiences of his earlier days. May not memory possibly have traveled back to the old home and valleys of Bethlehem, and lighted perchance on the green slope where the youthful champion measured his prowess with the lion and the bear. As the soldier reverts with lively interest to his first battle-field, so may not the young Shepherd-Hero have loved to dwell on this Mizar hill, where the God he served gave him the pledge of more momentous triumphs?

Or, to make one other surmise, may it more likely refer to "the little hill" he most loved—the home of his thoughts, the earthly center of his affections, the glory of his kingdom, the joy of the whole earth—"Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King?" (Psalm 48:2.) We find Zion spoken of by him emphatically as "a little hill." In one of the most sublime of all his Psalms, he represents the other loftier mountains of Palestine—Bashan with its forests of oak, Carmel with its groves of terebinth, Lebanon with its cedar-clad summits—as looking with envy at the tiny eminence amid the wilds of Judah which God had chosen as the place of His sanctuary: "Why look you with envy, you high hills? this is the hill where God desires to dwell in; yes, the Lord will dwell in it forever." (Psalm 68:16.) Is the hypothesis a forced or unlikely one, that, in

this his season of sore depression and sorrow, he loved to linger on manifold experiences of God's faithfulness associated with Zion—its tabernacle, its festivals, its joyous multitudes—his own palace, that crowned its rocky heights, where his harp was often attuned and his psalms composed and sung, and in which midnight found him rising and giving "thanks to God because of His righteous judgments?" In the mind of the Sweet Singer of Israel, might not "glorious things" have been thought as well as "spoken of you, O city of God?"

But, after all, we need not limit the interpretation to any special locality. The speaker's past history, from the hour when he was taken from the sheepfolds until now, was crowded with Mizars—hill-tops gleaming in the rays of morning. The valley of Elah, the woods of Ziph, the forest of Hareth, the streets of Ziklag, the caves of Adullam and Engedi—all would recall some special memorial of God's delivering hand. He resolves to take the goodness and mercy given in the past, as pledges that He would still be faithful who had promised to "David His servant," "My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted." (Psalm 89:24.) "You who have delivered my soul from death, will not you deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Psalm 56:13.)

The saints of God, in every age, have delighted to dwell on these memorable spots and experiences in their past pilgrimage. Abraham had his "hill Mizar" between Bethel and Hai. "There," we read, "he built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord." (Gen. 12:8.) On his return from Egypt he retraced his steps to the same locality. Why? Because it was doubly hallowed to him now, with these former experiences of God's presence and love. It is specially noted that "So they left Egypt and traveled north into the Negev—Abram with his wife and Lot and all that they owned, for Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold. Then they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where they had camped before. This was the place where Abram had built the altar, and there he again worshiped the Lord." (Gen. 13:1-4.)

Jacob's "Mizar" would doubtless be his ladder-steps at Bethel, where the fugitive wanderer was gladdened with a vision of angels, and the voice of



a reconciled God. Moses would think of his "Mizar" either in connection with the burning bush or the cleft of the rock, or the Mount of Prayer at Rephidim. Isaiah's "Mizar" would be the vision of the Seraphim, when his faithlessness was rebuked, and confidence in God restored. Jeremiah tells us specially of his—some memorable spot where he had a peculiar manifestation of God's presence and grace. "The Lord has appeared of OLD unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." (Jer. 31:3.)

Or shall we look to the New Testament? The Roman Centurion would remember as his Mizar-height, the spot at Capernaum where mingled Omnipotence and Love uttered the healing word. The Magdalene would remember as hers, the Pharisee's banquet-hall, where she bathed the feet of her Lord with a flood of penitential tears. The Maniac of Gadara would recall as his, the heights around Tiberias, where the demon-throng were expelled, and where he sat calm and peaceful at the feet of the Great Restorer. The Woman of Samaria would remember as hers, the well of Sychar, where her Pilgrim Lord led her from the earthly to the eternal fountain. Peter would remember as his, the early morn, and the solitary figure on Gennesaret's shore. The Sisters of Lazarus, go where they might, would recall as their hallowed memorial-spot, the home and the graveyard of Bethany. Paul of Tarsus would ever remember as his, the burning plain near Damascus, where a light, brighter than the mid-day sun, brought him helpless to the ground, and a voice of mingled severity and gentleness changed the persecutor into a believer—the lion into a lamb. John, the beloved disciple, as he trod the solitary isle of his banishment, or with the trembling footsteps of age lingered in his last home at Ephesus—John would recall as the most sacred and hallowed "Mizar" of all, the gentle bosom on which he leaned at supper!

And who among us have not their "Mizars" still? It has often been said that, next to the Bible, there is no book so instructive as that volume which all God's people carry about with them—the volume of their own experience.

That is my earliest and fondest "Mizar," says one, the mother's knee where I first lisped my Savior's name, and heard of His love. Mine, says another, is that never-to-be-forgotten sermon, when God's messenger

reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come; when conviction was first flashed on my torpid mind, and peace brought to my troubled soul! Mine, is another's testimony, is that bed of sickness on which I awoke from the long life dream of indifference, and gave heed for the first time to the things which belong to my peace. Mine, says another, is that chamber—that closet of devotion (alas! too long and guiltily neglected) hallowed and associated with a renewed consecration to God, and with manifold tokens of His grace and goodness. That hour of resisted temptation, says another, is the "Mizar" on whose summit my stone of gratitude is raised—when I was trembling on the edge of some precipice, and God's hand interposed and plucked me as a brand from the burning. That dreadful bereavement is mine, says still another, which tore up my affections by the root, and led me to seek in God, the heritage and portion which no creature-blessing could bestow. It seemed at the time to bode nothing but anger, but I see it now the appointed herald of mercy sent to open up everlasting consolations. That solemn death-bed is mine, says another, when I saw for the first time the reality of gospel hope in the departing Christian, the sweet smile of a foretasted heaven playing upon the lips, as if the response to the angel-summons, "Come up here!"

It is well for all of us, and especially in our seasons of depression and sorrow, thus to re-traverse life, and let our eyes fall on these Mizar-hills of God's faithfulness. In seasons of spiritual depression, when apt in our sinful despondency to distrust His mercy, and question our own personal interest in the covenant—when tempted to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us?"—how encouraging to look back, through the present lowering cloud, on former instances and memorials of Jehovah's favor, when we had the assured sense of His presence; and with an eye resting on these Mizar-hills on which He "appeared of old to us," disappointing our fears, and more than realizing our fondest hopes—to remember, for our comfort, that having "loved us at the beginning," He will love us "even to the end!" If we can rest on one indubitable token of His mercy in the past, let it be to us a Covenant-keepsake, a sweet and precious token and pledge, that, "though for a small moment He may have forsaken us," yet that "with great mercy He will gather us," and that "with everlasting kindness He will have mercy upon us." (Isa. 54:8.)

Why not thus seek, in the noblest sense of the word, to rise above our trials, and perplexities, and sorrows, by taking the bright side of things. There are two windows in every soul. The one looks out on a dreary prospect—lowering clouds, barren wilds, bleak, sullen hills, pathways overgrown with foul and noxious weeds. The other opens on what is bright and beauteous—sunny slopes, verdant meadows, luscious flowers, the song of birds. Many there are who sit always at the former—gazing on the dark side of things, nursing their sorrows, brooding over their trials. They can see nothing but Sinai and Horeb—the trail of serpents and the lair of wild beasts. Others, with a truer gospel-spirit, love, with hopeful countenance, to watch the breaking of the sunbeam in the darkened sky. Like Paul, they seat themselves at the bright lattice, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice." Both look on identically the same landscape. But the one observe only dull heaths and moors draped in somber hue. The others see these glorified with sunlight. The one gaze on nothing but inky skies and drenching torrents. The others behold the bow of heaven arching the sky, and the raindrops glittering like jewels on leaf, and grass, and flower. The one can observe only "Hill Difficulties" and "Doubting Castles." The others love to gaze on Hermons and Mizars, on "the Palace Beautiful"—the land of Beulah—and, bounding the prospect, the towers and streets of the Celestial City. They are ready to acknowledge that, however many may have been their tribulations, their mercies are greater and more manifold still—that however many the shadowy valleys, the bright spots outnumber the dreary ones.

Are any who read these pages cast down by reason of trouble, and perplexity, and sorrow? Is God's hand lying heavily upon you—are you in darkness, and in the deeps? Seek to lift the eye of faith to Him. Seasons of trial must either bring us nearer to Him, or drive us further from Him. It is an old saying, "Affliction never leaves us as it finds us." It either leads us to "remember God," or to banish and forget Him. How many there are (and how sad is their case) who, when Providence seems to frown—when their hearts are smitten like grass, their cherished hopes blighted, their gourds withered—are led, in the bitterness of their spirits, to say, "My soul is cast down within me, therefore, I will pine away in disconsolate sorrow. I will rush to ruin and despair. My lot is hard, my punishment is greater than I can bear—all that made life happiness to me has perished—

THEREFORE, I will harden my heart. I do well to be angry, even unto death. Existence has no charm for me. I long to die—my only rest will be the quiet of the grave!"

Sorrowing one! May you grasp a nobler philosophy. Look back from these valleys of death and tribulation, to the gleaming summits of yonder distant Mizar hills! Mark, in the past, the tokens and memorials of unmistakable covenant love. "Call to remembrance your song" in former nights. Wounded Deer! on the hills of Gilead, do not forget your former pastures. Go! stricken and smitten, with the tears in your eyes, bathe your panting sides in the cooling "water-brooks." When the disturbers of your peace have gone, and when hushed again is your forest home, return to "the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense." Go, minstrel monarch of Judah, weeping exile! seat yourself on some rocky summit on these ridges of Hermon, and, surveying mountain height on mountain height, in the land of covenant promise—each associated with some hallowed memory—take down your harp, and sing one of your own songs of Zion. "You who have showed me great and sore troubles shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth!" (Psalm 71:20.)

## THE CLIMAX

"God of my life, to You I call,  
Afflicted at Your feet I fall,  
When the great water-floods prevail,  
Leave not my trembling heart to fail!"

"There is but a step from the third heavens to the thorn in the flesh."—  
Winslow.

"Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life." Psalm 42:7-8

The storm-struggle in the soul of the Psalmist is now at its height. In the previous verse, he had penetrated through the mists of unbelief that were surrounding him, and rested his eye on the Mizar hills of the Divine faithfulness in a brighter past. But the sunshine-glimpse was momentary. It has again passed away. His sky is anew darkened—rain-clouds sweep the horizon—"Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls." Amid the environing floods he exclaims, "All your waves and your billows have gone over me!"

The figure is a bold and striking one. Some have thought it has reference to the sudden rush of water-torrents from the heights of Lebanon and Hermon—that it was suggested by the roaring cataracts at his feet—Jordan with its swollen and winding rapids—the faithful picture of the deep-worn channels in his own spirit—fretted and furrowed with the rush of overwhelming sorrow.

But the word rendered "deep," is, in the original Hebrew, more applicable to the floods of the ocean than to the rapids of a river; and the image, in this sense, is bolder and more expressive still. Billow calls on billow to sweep over the soul of the sufferer. They lift their crested heads, and with hoarse voice summon one another to the assault. "Let us be confederate!" say they. "Let us rouse the spirit of the storm! Let the windows of heaven be opened! Let the fountains of the great deep be broken up, that we may shake this man's confidence in his God, and plunder faith of her expected triumph! You angry tempests, driving sleet and battering hail! come and aid us. You forked lightnings, gleaming swords of the sky! leap from your cloudy scabbards. Old ocean! be stirred from your lowest depths. Let every wave be fretted to madness, that with one united effort we may effect his destruction and leave him a wreck on the waters!"

They obey the summons. Already chafed and buffeted, they return with fresh violence to the shock. Affliction on affliction, temptation on temptation, roll on this lonely, surf-beaten cliff. Outward calamities—inward troubles; his subjects in revolt—his friends treacherous; his own son and favorite child heading the insurrection; he himself an exile, haunted with the thought of past sins that were now exacting terrible retribution—and worse than all temporal calamities, the countenance of his God averted. Affliction seemed as if it could go no further—"ALL your

waves and your billows have gone over me!"

We believe there are periods in the history of most of God's people corresponding to the dreadful experience recorded in this verse. Few there are who cannot point to some sad and memorable epochs alike in their natural and spiritual being—some solemn and critical crisis-hours, in which they have been subjected to special and peculiar trials—encompassed with the thunders and lightnings of Sinai—the trumpet sounding long and loud: or, to revert to the simile of the Psalm, when the moorings of life have been torn away, and they have been left to drift, on a starless, tempestuous ocean. Often, as with David, there may at such times be a combination of trials—sickness—bereavement—loss of worldly substance—estrangement of friends—blighting of fair hopes. Then, following on these, and worse than all, hard thoughts of God. We see the wicked around prospering, vice apparently pampered—virtue apparently trodden under foot—many passing through life without an ache or trial—their homes unrifled—their hearts unwounded—their every plan prospering—fortune smiling benignantly at every turn; while we seem to have been a target for the arrows of misfortune—tempted with Jeremiah to say, "I am THE man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." (Lam. 3:1.)

And doubting a God of providence, the next step is to doubt a God of grace. We begin to question our interest in the covenant—to wonder whether, after all, our hopes of heaven have been a delusion and a lie. God's mercy we imagine to be "gone forever." He seems as if He would be "favorable no more." There is no comfort in prayer—no brightness in the promises; the Bible is a sealed book—the heavens have become as brass and the earth as iron! Oh, so long as we had merely external trials, we could brave and buffet the surrounding floods. So long as we had the Divine smile, like the rainbow in the cloud, resting upon us, we could gaze in calmness on the blackest sky—yes, rejoice in trial, as only unfolding to us more of the preciousness of the Savior. But when we have the cloud without the rainbow—when outer trials come to a soul in spiritual unrest and trouble—when we harbor the suspicion that the only Being who could befriend in such an hour has Himself hidden His face—when we have neither this world nor the next to comfort us—smitten

hopes for time and despairing hopes for eternity!—this is the woe of woes—the "horror of great darkness"—"deep calls unto deep." We can say, with a more terrible emphasis far than the smitten patriarch, "I AM bereaved!"

The Psalmist had now reached this extremity. It is the turning point of his present experience. He has two alternatives before him—either to allow unbelief to triumph, to distrust God, abandon the conflict, and sink as lead in the surging waters; or to gather up once more his spiritual resources, breast the waves, and manfully buffet the storm.

It is with him now, as with a sinking disciple in a future age—when the storm is loudest and the midnight is darkest, the voice and footsteps of his God are heard on the waves: "And about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the sea." "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles!" (Psalm 34:6.)

And what is the first gleam of comfort which crests these topmost waves? It is discerning the hand and appointment of God in all his afflictions! He speaks of "Your waves and Your billows." These floods do not riot and revel at the bidding of chance. "The Lord sits upon the water-floods." (Psalm 29:10.) While, in one sense, it aggravated his trials to think of them as Divine chastisements—the expressions of the Divine displeasure at sin—yet how unspeakable the consolation that every billow rolled at the summons of Omnipotence. "The floods," he can say, "have lifted up, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea." (Psalm 93:3, 4.) "O Lord our God, who is a strong Lord like unto you? You rule the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, you still them." (Psalm 89:8, 9.)

But he could go further than this. He could triumph in the assurance of God's returning favor—that behind these troubled elements there was seated a Being of unchanging faithfulness and love. Already the lowering mist was beginning to clear off the mountains, and the eye of faith to observe sunny patches of golden light gleaming in the hollows. Soon he knew the whole landscape would be flooded with glory. The sailor does

not discredit the existence of the beacon or lighthouse, or alter the direction of his vessel, because the fog prevents these being seen. No rather, he strains his eyes more keenly through the murky curtain, in hopes of hailing their guidance. When a cloud or clouds are passing over the sun's disc, and hiding it from view, the sunflower does not, on account of the momentary intervention, hang its head, or cease to turn in the direction of the great luminary. It keeps still gazing upwards with wistful eye, as if knowing that the clouds will soon roll past, and that it will before long again be bathed in the grateful beams! So it was with David. He felt that the countenance of his God, though hidden, was not eclipsed. This pining flower on the mountains of Gilead does not droop in the anguish of unbelief, when "the Sun of his soul" is for the moment obscured. He knew that there would yet arise "light in the darkness." Amid the roll of the billows—the moaning of the blast—he listens to celestial music. Its keynote is "the loving-kindness" of his God. While the heavens are still black, and the tempest raging, he lifts the voice of faith above the war of the storm, and thus sings: "Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life!"

"YET the Lord!" The believer, even in his deepest and darkest season of trouble, has always this alternative word—"YET the Lord will!" I am sunk in sore trial—"Yet the Lord" will be faithful to His promises! I have been bereaved of those near and dear to me—"Yet the Lord" will be to me a name better than that of son or daughter! I have been laid for long years on this couch of suffering—"Yet the Lord" has converted this lonely sick-chamber into the vestibule of heaven. I have been tossed and harassed with countless spiritual temptations—"Yet the Lord" will not allow these temptations to go further than I am able to bear. I am soon to walk through the dark valley—"Yet" will "I fear no evil, for You are with me!"

The Psalmist's assurance of deliverance was indeed the test of no meager faith. We know well, how apt we are to be influenced and affected by present circumstances. When all is bright, and genial, and prosperous—amid a happy home and kind friends—in the midst of robust health and flourishing worldly schemes, the buoyant heart is full of elasticity. The joy without, imparts an inner sunshine. A man is happy and hopeful in spite



of himself. But if all at once he is plunged into a vortex of trouble, if clouds gather and thicken around—the mind not only becomes the prey of its own trials, but it populates the future with numberless imaginary evils, and its very remaining joys and blessings become tinged and sicklied over with the predominating sadness! It could as little be expected, on natural principles, that the heart could in such circumstances be hopeful and rejoicing, as to expect that the outer landscape of nature would glow and sparkle with beauty, if the clouds of heaven obscured the great fountain of light.

But faith, strong in God's word, can triumph over natural obstacles. It did so in the case of this afflicted exile. He remembered how his God had given past deliverances, even when he least expected them—"They looked unto Him and were lightened" (Psalm 34:5.) [literally, "their countenances were made bright."] He feels assured that the same loving-kindness will be "commanded" still. He sees God's covenant faithfulness resting calmly and beautifully, like the rainbow-tints in the spray of the cataract! "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." (Isa. 50:10.)

This experience we have been considering is that of Christ's people only. But there is an experience sadder still: that of those who are living "without God," and therefore "without hope"—the billows heaving, and yet they knowing not of them—"deep calling to deep," yet they ignorant alike of their guilt and danger! There is nothing more sad or touching in the midst of a storm—when the vessel is reeling on the waves, and little expectation of safety is left—than to see, amid the settled gloom of despair, the little child playing on the deck, all unaware of what is impending—or, at a time of heart-rending bereavement, when every face of the household is muffled in sadness and suffused with tears, to hear the joyous laugh and playful prattle of unconscious infancy. Ah! of how many is this the position with regard to eternity—living heedless of their danger—the waves of destruction ready to close over them! Sadder far, surely, is their case, than all the troubles and trials of God's most afflicted people. Their waves and billows are crested with hope—"songs in the night" come floating along the darkened surges; but the future to the

others has no ray of hope, no midnight star, no divine song! There is a time coming when, in a more dreadful sense, the cry will be heard, "Deep calls unto deep: all Your waves and Your billows have gone over me!" But there will be no after-strain—no joyous anthem of anticipated deliverance—"Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness!" In vain will the cry ascend, "My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

But, blessed be God, that cry may ascend now—that Rock may be fled to as a shelter now. Sinner! these waves swept over the Rock of Ages, that they might not sweep over you! Sheltered in these crevices, you will be eternally safe. Not one blast of the storm, not one drop of the rain-shower of vengeance, can overtake you. When the billows of wrath—the deluge of fire—shall roll over this earth, safe in these everlasting clefts, you may utter the challenge, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?"

## LESSONS

"When darkness long has veiled my mind,  
And smiling day once more appears,  
Then, my Redeemer, then I find,  
The folly of my doubts and fears:  
Straight I upbraid my wandering heart,  
And blush that I should ever be  
Thus prone to act so base a part,  
Or harbor one hard thought of Thee!"

"Here deep calls to deep. Yet in the midst of those deeps faith is not drowned. You see it lifts its head above water."—Hall.

"We perceive the Psalmist full of perplexed thought, and that between strong desires and griefs, and yet in the midst of them intermixing strains of hope with his sad complaints. . . What is the whole thread of our life

but a chequered twist, black and white, of delights and dangers interwoven? And the happiest passing of it is, constantly to enjoy and to observe the experiences of God's goodness, and to praise Him for them."—Leighton, 1649.

"Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life." Psalm 42:7-8

In the previous chapter we spoke of the two verses which form the turning-point in the psalm—the climax of the conflict therein so strikingly described between belief and unbelief. We referred to the boldness and expressiveness of the figure: the troubles of the believer, like the billows of the ocean calling on one another to unite their strength that they might effect his overthrow, but faith rising triumphant above them all. At times, when all human comfort gives way, God himself appears. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters." (Psalm 29:3.) He not only "commands His loving-kindness in the daytime," but "in THE NIGHT His song is with us." Our heavenly Parent comes in earth's darkest, most tempestuous hours, sits by our side, sings His night-song—His own lullaby—"PEACE, BE STILL!" "So gives He His beloved sleep!" (Psalm 127:2.) God's "songs" sound always sweetest "by night"—the deep, dark night of affliction. The nightingale's notes are nothing by day—they would be lost in the chorus of other birds; but when these have retired to their nests, she prolongs her tuneful descant, and serenades, with her warblings, the silent earth. The world can only give its song by day. It can speak only in the sunshine of prosperity. But "God our Maker gives songs in the night!" (Job 35:10.) His promises, like the nightingale, sound most joyously, and, like the glow-worm, shine most brightly, in the dark!

Let us pause before proceeding with the sequel of the Psalm, and ponder the great lesson to be derived from this experience of David.

It is, to TRUST GOD in the darkest, gloomiest night of earthly trial! To wait His own time, and to say when the billows are highest, "Yet the Lord will." This is one great end and design of trial, to exercise the grace of patience. There is nothing God loves better than a waiting soul. "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him." (Lam. 3:25.) "I waited patiently," says

David, in another Psalm, (or, as it is literally, "I waited, waited,") "for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry." (Psalm 40:1.) "I know your works," says Jesus, speaking of old, in the language of commendation, to His church at Ephesus: "how you have BORNE, and have patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and have not FAINTED." (Rev. 2:3.) How often has our way appeared to be hedged up with thorns—as if there were no possibility of departure! In sailing among some of our own Highland lakes and inland seas, where the mountains, in a thousand fantastic forms, rise abrupt from the shore, we frequently seem to be landlocked, and able to get no farther. Yet the vessel pursues its serpentine course; and as we double the first jutting promontory, the lake again expands; the same waters appear beyond, gleaming like a mirror of molten gold. We find what we imagined to be an impassable barrier, is only a strait, opening into new combinations of mountain majesty and beauty.

So is it in the Voyage of life. Often, in its fitful turnings and windings, do we seem to be arrested in our way—"Hill Difficulties" rising before us, and appearing to impede our vessel's course—but as faith steers onwards, impediments vanish, new vistas and experiences of loving-kindness open up. Where we expected to be stopped by walls of frowning rock and barren mountains, lo! limpid waves are seen laving the shore, and joyful cascades are heard singing their way to the silver strand!

And not only does God thus "command His loving-kindness" in disappointing our fears, but "in the night His song shall be with us." He will turn the very midnights of our sorrow into occasions of grateful praise! Yes! if not now, we shall come yet to see the "needs be" of every trial. We have only a partial view here of God's dealings—His half-completed, half-developed plan; but all will stand out in fair and graceful proportions in the great finished Temple of Eternity!

Go, in the reign of Israel's greatest King, to the heights of the forest of Lebanon. See that noble Cedar, the pride of its compeers, an old wrestler with the northern blasts of Palestine! Summer loves to smile upon it—night spangles its feathery foliage with dew-drops—the birds nestle on its branches—the wild deer slumber under its shadow—the weary pilgrim, or wandering shepherd, repose under its curtaining boughs from the midday

heat or from the furious storm; but all at once it is marked out to fall—the old inhabitant of that primeval forest is doomed to succumb to the woodman's stroke! As we see the unsparing axe making its first gash on its gnarled trunk—then the noble limbs stripped of their branches—and at last the proud "Tree of God" coming with a crash to the ground; we exclaim against the wanton destruction—the demolition of this noblest of pillars in the temple of nature—and we are tempted to cry with the prophet, as if inviting the sympathy of every lowlier stem—invoking inanimate things to resent the affront—"Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!"

But wait a little!—follow that gigantic trunk as the workmen of Hiram launch it down the mountain side—thence conveyed in giant rafts along the blue waters of the Mediterranean—and last of all, behold it set a glorious polished beam in the Temple of God—and then, as you see its destination—gazing down on the very Holy of Holies, set in the diadem of the Great King—say, can you grudge that the crown of Lebanon was despoiled, in order that this jewel might have so noble a setting? That cedar stood as a stately beam and pillar in nature's temple, but the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former. How many of our souls are like these cedars of God! His axes of trial have stripped and bared them—we see no reason for dealings so dark and mysterious; but He has a noble end and object in view—to set them as everlasting pillars and rafters in His heavenly temple, to make them "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God!"

Or take another illustration. Go to one of our repair-docks, where the weather-beaten vessel has been weeks or months in the carpenter's hands. Her shaken timbers are replaced, her shattered keel renewed, the temporary props and scaffoldings have been removed, and with her gay streamers afloat, and her crew on deck, she stands ready and equipped for sea. What is needed? Nothing but the opening of the sluices, to reunite her to her old watery element. She lies a helpless, decrepit thing, until these dock-gates be opened, and the buoyant waves rush to clasp her anew in their embrace. It is done! But at first all is noise, and wrath, and tumult. These gurgling waters, discolored with mud and sediment, convert the noble granite basin into an inky, turgid whirlpool. Before

long, however, the strife ceases; the great wooden wall raises itself like a child that has been awoke in its cradle by the voice of the storm—the waters gradually calm and subside—higher and still higher is the vessel lifted, until, amid the cheers of the crew, she passes by the opened gates, and, with every sail spread to the breeze, is off to new voyages in her ocean-home.

Child of trial! "vessel of mercy!" your God sees fit at times to bring you into the repair-dock, that He may put His tools upon you, and refit and prepare you for the great voyage of immortality. When He opens the sluices of trial, you may see no mercy in His dealings. It may be "deep calling to deep"—the roar and heaving of antagonist waters; they may at first, too, stir up nothing but the dregs and sediment of sin—expose the muddy pools, the deep corruptions of the heart. But be still! He will yet vindicate the rectitude and wisdom of His own procedure. Before long, these surging waves will settle peacefully around you, the shadows of heaven reflected in their glassy surface; and better still, strengthened and renovated by that season of trial, you will go forth from the Repairer's hands more ready to brave the billows, grapple with the tempest, and reach at last the haven where you would be!

It is hard discipline—the undowny pillow, the trench-work and midnight vigils—which makes the better soldier. The type of strength in the kingdom of inanimate nature, is not the sickly plant of the hot-house, or the tree or bush choked in the dark jungle; but the pine rocked by Alpine or Norwegian tempests, or the oak mooring its roots in the rifted rock! David would neither have been the King or the Saint he was, but for the caves of Adullam and Engedi, the rocks of the wild goats, the forest exile of Hermon and Gilead. He had to thank affliction for his best spiritual graces. The redeemed in glory are ready to tell the same. "We would never have been here but for these storms of 'great tribulation.' But for the loss of that child—that worldly calamity—that protracted sickness—that cutting disappointment—that wounding of my heart's affection—that annihilation of earthly pride and ambition—that 'deep calling to deep'—I would not now have been wearing this crown!" Trials have been well compared to the winds God employs to fill our sails and fetch us home to the harbor of everlasting peace!

One word of caution before we close this chapter. From all we have said of "deeps" and "floods," storms and waterfalls, and midnight darkness—are any to leave these pages with the feeling that Religion is a gloomy, repulsive thing—that the believer's life is one of darkness and despair—that better far is the world's gaiety and folly—the merry laugh of its light-hearted votaries—than a life of sadness like this? Mistake us not! We repeat what we have already said. The experience we have been now considering is, in many respects, peculiar; one of those dark passages which stand alone in the diary of the spiritual life. Religion gloomy! Who says so? Shall we take Paul as our oracle? What is his testimony? In all his letters he tries to crowd as much as he can into little space. In one of these, he has room for only two injunctions. But instead of giving two that are different, he prefers to repeat the one. It is the emphatic tautology, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and AGAIN I say, REJOICE." (Phil. 4:4.)

Or shall we seek a different tribunal? Go gather together all the philosophers of antiquity—Plato, Socrates, Aristotle. Bring together the wise men of Greece—the philosophers of Alexandria—the sages of Rome. Ask if their combined and collected wisdom ever solved the doubts of one awakened soul, as have done these leaves of this Holy Book? Which of them ever dried the tear of widowhood as these? Which of them ever smoothed the cheek of the fatherless as these? Which of them ever lighted the torch of hope and peace at the dying bed as these, and flashed upon the departing soul visions of unearthly joy? O Pagan darkness! where was your song in the night? In the region and shadow of death, where did your light arise?

But WE have a "more sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place." The Christian is the man who alone can wear the sunny countenance. The peace of God, keeping the heart within, cannot fail to be mirrored in the look and life without! And if (as often is the case) he has his appointed seasons of trial—the sea of life swept with storms of great tribulation—it is with him as with yonder ocean. To the eye of the young voyager, gazing on its mountain billows, it would seem as if its lowest caverns were stirred, and the world were rocking to its foundations; while, after all, it is only a surface-heaving! There are deeps, unfathomed deeps, of calm rest and peace,

down in that ocean's undisturbed recesses.

Believer in Jesus! with all your trials, you are a happy man. Go on your way rejoicing. Tribulation may fret and ruffle the calm of your outer life, but nothing can touch the deeps of your nobler being. Troubles may rise, and "terrors may frown," and "days of darkness" may fall around you, but "You will keep him, O God, IN PERFECT PEACE whose mind is stayed on YOU!"

## **FAITH AND PRAYER**

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

"The soul of man serves the purpose, as it were, of a workshop to Satan, in which to forge a thousand methods of despair. And therefore it is not without reason that David, after a severe conflict with himself, has recourse to prayer, and calls upon God as the witness of his sorrow."—  
Calvin on the Psalms.

I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Psalm 42:9-10

Touching was that scene which occurred three thousand years ago on the borders of Palestine: aged Naomi, in returning to the land of her own kindred from her sojourn in Moab, pausing to take a last farewell of her two loving daughters-in-law! One of these refuses to part from her. Strong may be the inducement to Ruth to return to the home of her childhood, and, above all, to the spot where hallowed dust reposes (the buried treasure of her young affections). But ties stronger than death link her soul to the one who had shared for ten years her joys and sorrows. With impassioned tears, she announces her determination! Her resolve may entail upon her manifold sacrifices. She may be going to an alien



people—to a home of poverty—to bleak and barren wilds, compared with her own fertile valleys. But she is ready for any toil, any self-denial, if only permitted to retain the companionship of that living, loving heart, which had been to her all that earthly tenderness could be.

Such, if we may compare an earthly with a heavenly affection, were the feelings of the banished King of Judah, at this time, towards his God. All the temptations that have been assailing him, have not repressed the ardor of his faith, or diminished the fervor of his love. Unbelief had done its best to sever the holy bond which linked him to his Heavenly Friend; but, like the tender-hearted Moabiteess from whom he sprung, he will submit to any privation rather than be parted from Him whose favor is life. "Entreat me not to leave You," is the spirit at least of his fervid aspiration; "nor to return from following after You. Where You go I will go, and where You dwell I will dwell; and death itself shall not separate between You and me." As Peter, in a future age, rushed to the feet of that Savior he had again and again wounded, so these many waters (the "deep calling to deep") cannot quench the Psalmist's love, nor many floods drown it. The voice of malignant taunt and scorn, "Where is now your God?" might have driven others to despair; but it only rouses him up, in the midnight of his struggle, to the exercise of new spiritual graces. "I shall not," he seems to say, "surrender my holy trust; I know the graciousness of the God with whom I have to deal. Nothing will tempt me to abandon my interest in the covenant. I shall take a new weapon from the Divine armory; with it I shall seek to decide the conflict. No jibes of the scoffer, no rebellious son, no crafty Ahithophel, can rob me of the privilege of PRAYER." I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

It is, then, a combined exercise of faith and prayer, on the part of David, we are now called to consider. Out of weakness he is made strong, waxes valiant in fight, and turns to flight the armies of the aliens. Let us advert to each in their order. FAITH regards God here under a twofold aspect.

1. It looks to Him as an IMMUTABLE GOD. Amid the fitfulness of his own feelings, this was the Psalmist's consolation—"God my ROCK!"

What a source of comfort is there here in the immutability of Jehovah. All

else around us is unstable. External nature bears on every page of its volume the traces of mutation. Earth has the folds already on its vesture—the wrinkles of age on its brow. The ocean murmurs of change, as its billows chafe on altered landmarks. Human friendships and human associations are all fluctuating. So are our habits, and tastes, and employments. The old man, looking back from some hoary pinnacle on the past, almost questions his personal identity. And these emptied chairs!—these faces, once glowing at our firesides, now greeting our gaze only in mute and silent portraits on the wall! "Here we have no continuing city," is the oracle of all time.

"But YOU are the same, and Your years shall have no end." (Psalm 102:27.) "Heaven and earth may pass away," but there is no change, and can be none, in an all-perfect God! "The wheel turns round, but the axle is immutable." The clouds which obscure the sun do not descend from heaven—they are exhaled from earth. It is the soul's own darkening vapors, generated by unbelief and sin, which at times taint and obscure the moral atmosphere. Behind every such murky haze He shines brightly as ever. "Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary?" (Isa. 40:28.) "Young sailors," says Rutherford, "imagine the shore and land moving, while it is they themselves all the while. So we often think that God is changing, when the change is all with ourselves!"

2. Faith regards this immutable God as a God in COVENANT.

"MY Rock!" Believer! you have the same immoveable ground of confidence! Look to YOUR God in Christ, who has made with you "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure!" He, "willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb. 6:17, 18.) The torch may flicker in your hand, the flame may be the sport of every passing gust of temptation and trial, but He who lighted it will not allow it to be quenched. "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." (Luke 22:31.) The Great Adversary may attempt to rob you of

your peace, but that peace is imperishably secured. He must first destroy THE ROCK, before he can touch one trembling soul that has fled there for refuge! He must first uncrown Christ, before he can touch one jewel in the purchased diadems of His people! Your life is "hidden with Christ in God;" because He lives, "you shall live also!" God himself must become mutable, and cease to be God, before your eternal safety can be imperilled or impaired. "If we perish," says Luther, "Christ perishes with us."

Let us turn now to the Psalmist's PRAYER.

If Faith be called the eye, Prayer may be called the wings of the soul. No sooner does Faith observe God his "Rock," than forthwith Prayer spreads out her pinions for flight. In the close of the preceding verse, (when in the extremity of his agony,) David had announced his determination to betake himself to supplication—"In the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." He follows up his resolution now with material for petition. He puts on record a solemn and beautiful liturgy—I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

How wonderfully does God thus overrule His darkest dispensations for the exercise and discipline of His people's spiritual graces! In their overflowing prosperity they are apt to forget Him. He sends them afflictions. Trial elicits faith—faith drives to prayer—prayer obtains the spiritual blessing! It was the sense of neediness and wretchedness which drove the prodigal to cry, "Father, I have sinned!" It was the "buffeting" thorn which sent Paul thrice to his knees in the agony of supplication, and brought down on his soul a rich heritage of spiritual blessing. It was these surging waves—the "deep calling to deep"—which elicited the cry from this sinking castaway, "My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!" "BEHOLD HE PRAYS!" That announcement seems in a moment to turn the tide of battle, and change the storm into a calm. Well has a Christian poet written—

"Frail are you, O man, as a bubble on the breaker;  
Weak, and governed by externals, like a poor bird caught in the storm:

Yet your momentary breath can still the raging waters;  
Your hand can touch a lever that may move the world."

The struggle until now may have seemed doubtful; "but those who WAIT upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles." (Isa. 40:31.) It is said, the beautiful plumage of the Bird of Paradise not only impedes its flight when flying against the wind, but often in the ineffectual effort it is brought helpless and exhausted to the ground—its golden hues soiled and ruffled. When, however, a gentle breeze springs up, it spreads out its feathers in a fan-like shape, and is borne joyously along! So with the believer. When he is called to do battle with unbelief, the wings of faith are often soiled, and mutilated, and broken; he falls a helpless thing to the earth. But when God's own south wind blows, he spreads out his glorious plumage, and, rising on the pinions of prayer, is borne onwards and upwards to the region of heavenly peace and joy!

There are one or two characteristics in David's prayer worthy of note, with which we shall sum up this chapter.

1. Observe his INSTANT resort to the "God of his life!"

No sooner does the thought of prayer suggest itself, than he proceeds to the sacred exercise. Like the prodigal, not only does he say, "I will arise and go," but the next record in his history is, "And he arose, and came to his father." (Luke 15:20.) Oh, how much spiritual benefit we miss by procrastination! The cloud of blessing floats over our heads, but we fail to stretch forth the electric rod of prayer to fetch it down! We determine on embarking, but, by guilty delay, we allow the vessel to weigh anchor, and we are left behind. Many an afflictive dispensation thus loses its sanctifying design. When the heart is crushed and broken, the heavenly voice sounds startling and solemn! What a season, if timely improved, for enrichment at the mercy-seat! When "things present" are disenchanting of their spell—when time is brought to hold its relative insignificance to eternity, what a season for the self-emptied one, to go to the all-fullness of Jesus, and receive from Him every needful supply! But, alas! we often know not "the day of our merciful visitation."

The heart, when the hammer might be falling on it, and welding it to the Divine will, is too often allowed to cool. Solemn impressions are allowed to wear away—the blessing is lost by guilty postponement. David might now have been so absorbed in his trials, as to have lost the opportunity of prayer. He might have invented some vain excuses for procrastination, and missed the blessing; just as the disciples, by their sluggish indifference and guilty slumber, drew down the thrice-repeated rebuke from injured Goodness, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" But the golden moment is not allowed by him thus to pass. No sooner does he get a glimpse of the path of prayer, than he proceeds to tread it. The very fact of the fire being so low, is the most powerful reason for stirring it. Her Lord being lost, is the strongest argument for the Spouse seeking Him without delay—"I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loves." (Song 3:2.)

2. Observe David's importunity. He waxes into a holy boldness. He seeks to know from "the God of his life" the reasons of this apparent desertion—"Why have You forgotten me? I cannot see or understand, as Your covenant servant, the reason of all this depression—why, with all those promises of Yours, these hands should be hanging down, and these knees be so feeble."

The mother does not cast off her sick or feeble child. Its very weakness and weariness is an additional argument for her care and love, and draws her heart closer than ever to the bed of the tiny sufferer! David knew well that God, who had ever dealt with him "as one whom his mother comforts," would not (unless for some wise reason) leave him to despondency. Looking to this immutable Covenant-Jehovah, and lifting his voice high above the water-floods, he thus, in impassioned prayer, pleads "the causes of his soul"—"O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be put to shame. Rescue me, for you always do what is right. Bend down and listen to me; rescue me quickly. Be for me a great rock of safety, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me. You are my rock and my fortress. For the honor of your name, lead me out of this peril. Pull me from the trap my enemies set for me, for I find protection in you alone. I entrust my spirit into your hand. You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." (Psalm 31:1-5.)

3. The Psalmist takes his SPECIAL TROUBLE to God, and makes it the subject of prayer. He names in the Divine presence the cause of his deepest perplexity. My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Verse 10.)

"Generalities," says a good man, "are the death of prayer." The loftiest privilege the believer can enjoy is the confidential unburdening of his needs into the ear of a Father. Just as a child can freely unbosom to a parent what he can do to no one else, so are we permitted to tell into the ear of our Father in heaven whatever may be the heart-sorrow with which a stranger (often a friend) dare not intermeddle. See the speciality in the Psalmist's confession of his sin. It is not the general acknowledgment of a sinner. It is rather a humbled penitent carrying one deep crimson-stain to the mercy-seat; bringing it, and it alone, as if for the moment he had to deal respecting it only with the great Heart-searcher. "My sin is ever before me." "I have done this evil in Your sight." "Wash me from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." "I said, I will confess my transgressions, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalms 51 and 32.)

Let us not think that we can ever have comfort in merging individual sins in a general confession. This is the great and pre-eminent advantage of secret closet-prayer. Social prayer and public prayer are eminently means of securing the Divine blessing; but it is in the quiet of the chamber, when no eye and ear are on us but that of "our Father who sees in secret," that we can bring our secret burdens to His altar—crucify our secret sins, acknowledge the peculiar sources of our weakness and temptation, and get special grace to help us in our times of need.

But we may here ask, Have we any assurance that the prayers of David, at this critical emergency, were indeed answered? Or, (as we are often tempted in seasons of guilty unbelief to argue regarding our prayers still,) did they ascend unheard and unresponded to?—did the cries of the supplicant die away in empty echoes amid these glens of Gilead? We have his own testimony, in a magnificent ode of his old age (Psalm 18), one of the last, and one of the noblest his lips ever sung, that Jehovah had heard him in the day of his trouble. It is a Psalm, as we are told in the title, written by him on his return to his capital, when victory had crowned his

arms, and his kingdom was once more in peace. The aged Minstrel takes in it a retrospective survey of his eventful pilgrimage. Many a Mizar-hill in the long vista rises conspicuously into view. He climbs in thought their steeps, and erects his Ebenezer! As his flight and sojourn beyond Jordan formed the last occurrence in that chequered life, we may well believe that in uttering these inspired numbers, the remembrance of his memorable soul-struggle there must have been especially present to his mind. Let us listen to his own words: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and THE FLOODS OF UNGODLY MEN made me afraid. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto MY GOD: HE HEARD my voice out of His temple, and MY CRY CAME BEFORE HIM, EVEN INTO HIS EARS."

In the most sublime poetical figures of all his Psalms, Jehovah is further represented in this hymn of thanksgiving as hastening with rapid flight, in magnificent symbols of majesty, to the relief and support of His servant—"bowing the heavens"—"the darkness under His feet"—"riding upon a cherub"—"flying upon the wings of the wind"—"sending out His arrows, and scattering His foes"—"shooting out lightnings"—and "overthrowing them." And with the writer's mind still resting on the same emblems which he uses in his Exile-Psalm—the "deep calling to deep"—the "noise of the waterfalls"—the "waves and billows,"—he interweaves other references and experiences with this unequivocal testimony to God his "Rock," as the HEARER OF PRAYER—"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. Who is God save the Lord? or who is a ROCK but our God? The Lord lives; and blessed be my ROCK; and let the God of my salvation be exalted!" (Psalm 18:16, 31, 46.)

Reader! let me ask, in conclusion, do you know in your experience the combined triumphs of faith and prayer—these two heavenly spies that fetch back Eschol-clusters of blessing to the true Israel of God? Do you know what it is, in the hour of adversity, to repair to "the Rock of your strength?" Do you believe in His willingness to hear, and in His power to save? How sad the case of those who, in their seasons of trial, have no refuge to which they can betake themselves, but some fluctuating, perishing, earthly one—who, when they lose the world, lose their all! The miser plundered of his gold, cleaving to the empty coffers—the pleasure-

hunter seeking to drain the empty chalice, or to extract honey out of the empty comb—the bereaved grasping with broken hearts their withered gourd, and refusing to be comforted! The worldling is like the bird building its nest on the topmost bough of the tree. There it weaves its wicker dwelling, and feels as if nothing can invade its security and peace. By and by the woodman comes—lays down his axe by the root. The chips fly off swiftly. The pine tree rocks and shivers; in a few moments it lies prone on the forest-sward. The tiny bird hovers over its dismantled home—the scene of desolation and havoc—and then goes screaming through the wood with the tale of her woes!

The Christian, again, is like the sea-bird, building its nest in the niches of the ocean cliff, which bids defiance at once to the axe and the hand of the plunderer. Far below, the waves are lifting their crested tops, and eddying pools are boiling in fury. The tempest may be sighing overhead, and the wild shriek of danger and death rising from some helpless bark that is borne like a weed on the maddened waters. But the spent spray can only touch these rocky heights—no more; and the eagle, sitting with folded wings on her young, can look calm and undismayed on the elemental war. "What is the best grounds of a philosopher's constancy," says Bishop Hall, "but as moving sands, in comparison of the Rock that we may build upon!"

Yes! build in the clefts of that immoveable Rock, and you are safe. Safe in Christ, you can contemplate undismayed all the tossings and heavings of life's fretful sea! So long as the Psalmist looked to God, he was all secure. When he looked to himself he was all despondency. Peter, when his eye was on his Lord, walked boldly on the limpid waves of Gennesaret; when he diverted it on himself, and thought on the dangers around him, and the unstable element beneath him, "he began to sink!"

Believer! is your heart overwhelmed? Are you undergoing a similar experience with the Psalmist? Your friends (perhaps your nearest and best) misunderstanding your trial, unable to probe the severity of your wound, mocking your tears with unsympathizing reflections and cruel jests—"a sword in your bones!" Turn your season of sorrow into a season of prayer. Look up to the God-man Mediator, the tender Kinsman within the veil! He knows your frame. When He sees your frail bark struggling in



the storm, and hears the cry of prayer rising from your lips, He will say, as He said of old, "I KNOW their sorrows, and I will go down to deliver them! O wounded Deer! panting after the water-brooks, I was once wounded for you. O smitten soul! scorched and scarred with the lightning and tempest, see how I myself, the Rock of Ages, was smitten and afflicted!" Yes, and you can say, too, "God MY Rock!" You can individually repose in that sheltering Refuge, as if it were intended for you alone. The loving eye of that Savior is upon you, as if you were the solitary object of His gaze—as if no other struggling castaway breasted the billows but yourself!

Blessed security, who would not prize it! Blessed shelter, who would not repair to it! Oh that the Psalmist's creed and resolution might be ours—"I will say of the Lord, He is MY ROCK and MY Fortress, and MY Deliverer."—"O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the ROCK OF OUR SALVATION!"

## THE QUIET HAVEN

"Ah, if our souls but poise and swing,  
Like the compass in its brazen ring,  
Ever level and ever true,  
To the toil and the task we have to do;  
We shall sail securely, and safely reach  
The heavenly Isle, on whose shining beach  
The sights we love and the sounds we hear  
Will be those of joy, and not of fear."

"David utters again strains of hope; not that faint and common hope of possibility or probability, that after stormy days it may be better with him, but a certain hope that shall never make ashamed; such a Hope as springs from Faith, yes, in effect, is one with it. Faith rests upon the goodness and truth of Him that has promised; and Hope, raising itself

upon Faith so established, stands up, and looks out to the future accomplishment of the promise."—Leighton.

"On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime--a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light." Zech. 14:6-7

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."—Verse 11.

We have now reached the close of this instructive Psalm—the last entry in the experience of the Royal Exile. Here is the grand summing up—"the conclusion of the whole matter." The curtain falls over the scene of conflict, leaving the believer triumphant. As he began with prayer, he now ends with praise; as he began with weeping, he now ends with rejoicing; as he began mourning over the loss of his God, he ends exulting in Him as "the health of his countenance." We are reminded of the Great Apostle reaching, by successive steps in his high argument, new altitudes of faith and hope—beginning with "no condemnation," until he ends with "no separation;" mounting with loftier sweep and bolder pinion, until far above the mists and clouds of the lower valley, he can utter the challenge, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8.)

Joyful is it when a protracted war, which has been draining a nation's resources and rifling its homes, is drawing to a close—when an army, amid hostile tribes, and the more fatal ravages of a hostile climate, has succeeded in trampling out the ashes of rebellion, and is returning triumphant from hard-contested fields of valor. Joyful is it when a noble vessel, that has for long been wrestling with the storm, enters at last the desired haven, when the voyagers, who for hours of anxiety and terror have been hanging with bated breath between life and death, can now pass the gladdening watchword from mouth to mouth—"Thank God, we are safe!" Joyful, too, when the tried believer, as described in this Psalm—"persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed,"—has surmounted wave after wave, that has been threatening to sweep him from his footing on the Rock, and, is made "more than conqueror through Him that loved him!" The wounded Deer we found in the opening verse

bounding through the forest glades, hit by the archers, with glazed eye and panting sides, has now reached the coveted Water-brooks—the fainting soul is now drinking at the great fountainhead of consolation and joy. We have elsewhere an appropriate inspired comment on the whole Psalm, with its successive experiences: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Psalm 34:19.)

This concluding verse is so far a repetition of the fifth; and yet, as we cursorily noted in the introductory chapter, there is an important difference between them, to which we may again for a moment advert. In the former, it is on the part of the speaker the language of faith in the midst of despondency, expressing assurance that something will be his, which he has not yet attained: "Hope in God; for I shall YET praise Him for the help of His countenance." In the latter, he summons his soul to the exercise of the same hope and confidence; but he now can exult in the realized possession of God's favor and love—"WHO IS the health of my countenance." No more, in the fifth verse he stops with the words, "my countenance;" but in the closing verse, he adds the expression of appropriating faith and triumphant assurance. It is the Key-stone of the arch. Two little words, which, like the ciphers following the unit, give an augmented value to all that goes before!—"MY GOD!" The two last divine expedients to which he had resorted, (faith and prayer), have not been in vain. They have loaded the cloud of mercy, and it bursts upon the suppliant in a shower of blessing!

The 22nd Psalm has been referred by commentators to this same period of exile among the mountains of Gilead. There is much to confirm this supposition in the general tone of the Psalm, as well as in its incidental references. There is the same deep, anguished depression of spirit—words, indeed, denoting such an intensity of sorrow, that, though primarily applicable to David, we must look for their true exponent in the case of a Greater Sufferer. The challenge, "Where is your God?" of the 42nd, seems echoed back in the 22nd by the mournful appeal, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

But in the latter, as in the former, (before it closes,) light breaks through the thick darkness. By a similar exercise of faith and prayer, the Royal Mourner triumphs. "Deliver my soul," says he, "from the sword; my

darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth." (Ver. 20, 21.) The prayer is heard while he is yet speaking! At this point of the Psalm, the language all at once passes from complaint into exultation—from prayer into praise; and the voice of victory rises higher and higher, until it reaches the close. God has taken off his sackcloth, and girded him with gladness. He already anticipates the happy time when again he shall be the leader of the festal throng on the heights of Zion. "You have heard me," is his opening burst of triumph, "I will declare Your name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise You. My praise shall be of You in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before those who fear Him." (Psalm 22:21, 22, 25.)

No, further; what Psalm succeeds the 22nd? Is it mere accidental arrangement which has given the beautiful 23rd (the best known and loved of all David's Psalms) the immediate sequence? Is it a mere devout imagination which leads us to regard it (from the place it occupies in the Psalter) as the next his hand penned and his lips sung, after these plaintive elegies? This Song of the chosen flock is not, as many think, the Psalm of his boyhood, written in the days of his innocence, with his shepherd's crook and harp, in the Valleys of Bethlehem. The imagery of the Psalm may indeed have been taken from this sunny season of his youth. But, as it has been suggested, the emblem may as likely have been borrowed from seeing a flock of sheep in these grassy regions reposing by "green pastures" and "still waters"—or, at other times, wending their way out of some "dark valley"—one, perhaps a timid wanderer, clenched in the arms of the Shepherd, on his way with it back to the fold!

We have witnessed, after a day of gloomy fog and rain and thunder, the dense curtain that overhung the landscape rolling away—the clouds break, gleaming vistas appear through their golden linings; and the rays of the long-imprisoned sun shine down upon ten thousand sparkling pearls on grass and flower. The choristers of wood and grove had until then been silent; but now are they seen brushing the rain-drops from the branches, and filling the air with their music, and all nature is glad again. So it is with the Great Singer of Israel; so long as God's face is withdrawn, his wings are folded—his melody hushed—his harp unstrung. But when the thundercloud has passed—when, as the clear shining after rain, the

longed-for countenance again breaks forth—when, in answer to those prayers that were mightier than the armies of Joab close by, his enemies are dispersed, and the way again open to a peaceful return to his capital—may we not imagine the triumphant conqueror—strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might—making the Gilead valleys resound with the hymn of praise?—"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters!" (Psalm 23:1, 2.)

As he thought of all the trying discipline to which he had been subjected to test his faith, drive him to prayer, and lead him to thirst more ardently for "the living God," he could say in the retrospect, what he was unable to do at the time—"He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." (Psalm 23:3.) That path was a rugged one—that trial a severe one—when he was found setting out barefoot, and dim with tears, across Mount Olivet, compelled to take refuge beyond Jordan amid the wilds of Bashan. But he acknowledges now that these were "paths of righteousness." They were well and wisely ordered—the hand of his God had appointed them. He can repeat with greater assurance his forbearing retort to the curses of Shimei—"let him curse on, for the Lord has bidden him."

Moreover, all this wilderness-experience not only sustained him in the present—it nerved him for the future. God's renewed faithfulness in this trying hour was a pledge for all time to come. He had added another Mizar-hill to former memorials of the Divine goodness. With the prospect, at his advanced age, of the last and terminating trial of his pilgrimage, (the descent to the deepest and gloomiest ravine of all,) he could, with his eye on the guiding Shepherd, exclaim—"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff comfort me." (Psalm 23:4.) Even temporal mercies had been largely and bountifully supplied him in the place of his exile. The powerful chiefs of the Trans-jordanic tribes, as we previously observed—"Shobi of Ammon, and Machir, and Barzillai of Manasseh,"—brought the rich produce of their fields and pastures for the supply of himself and his army. He could say—"You have prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies: You anoint my head with oil;

my cup runs over." (Psalm 23:5.)

And now, with the prospect before him of a joyful return to his throne, and the still more joyous prospect of being a worshiper in God's house on earth—the type of the better Temple in the skies—he can sing, as the closing strain of his exile—"Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6.)

Reader! is this your experience? Is this the result of your temporal afflictions, the end of your spiritual conflicts—to lead you to the same Shepherd of Israel, and to exult in Him as "the health of your countenance, and your God?" Elimelech, of old, was compelled by famine to leave Bethlehem, but his name signified, "My God is King!" When we are pressed with straits, and troubles, and perplexities, let us make that name our strong tower! "MY GOD IS KING," is a glorious motto. Is it the heavings and convulsions of the world's nations—"kings of the earth setting themselves, and rulers taking counsel together," from motives of personal ambition, or political jealousy, or lust of conquest? Write upon all their schemes, ELIMELECH—"My God is King!" Is it the apparently mysterious discipline through which some may be passing—bereavements threatening your dwelling, or the hand of death already on your loved ones? Write on the darkened threshold, ELIMELECH—"My God is King!" Is it the prospect of your own death that is filling you with apprehension? Remember in whose hands, under whose sovereign control, that messenger is. Go to the vacant Sepulcher at Golgotha, and read that writing and superscription which the "Abolisher of death" has left for the comfort of all His people—"I have the keys of the grave and of death." Christian! even here, in these gloomy regions, "your God is King!"

How blessed thus to be able, both in temporal and spiritual things, to lie in the arms of His mercy, saying, "God, undertake for us!"—to feel that every thread in the web of life is woven by the Great Craftsman—that not one movement in these swiftly darting shuttles is chance; but all is by His direction, and all is to result in good! In having Himself as our portion, we are independent of every other—we have the pledge of all other blessings. "Let the moveables go, the inheritance is ours!" Let the streams fail, we have the inexhaustible fountain! "Drop millions of gold," says

good Bishop Hopkins, "boundless revenues, ample territories, crowns and scepters, and a poor contemptible worm lays his One God against them all." "Our all," says Lady Powerscourt, "is but two mites (soul and body). His all—Heaven, Earth, Eternity, Himself."

We have said in a previous chapter that the loftiest archangel can tell of no mightier prerogative than looking up to the Great Being before whom he casts his crown, and saying, "My God!" WE can utter them in a sense higher than he. He is OUR God in Christ. The words to us are written (which to the unredeemed angels they are not) in the blood of atonement! Imagine, for a moment, a conversation between a bright angel in heaven and a ransomed sinner from earth. The angel can point to a past eternity; he can tell of a glorious pedigree; he can point up to his Almighty Maker, and say, "He has been my God for ages and ages past. I have been kept, supported, gladdened by His amazing mercy, long before the birth of time or your world!" "True," we may imagine the redeemed and glorified sinner to reply—"but I can tell of something more wondrous still. He is my God in covenant! You are His by creation, but I am His also by adoption and sonship. Though grace has kept you through these countless ages, during which you have cast your crown at His feet, what is the grace manifested to you, in comparison with the grace manifested to me! Grace made you holy, and kept you holy; but grace found me on the brink of despair, plucked me as a brand from the burning, brought me from the depths of woe and degradation, to a throne and a crown! Your God has loved you. My God has 'loved me' and GIVEN HIMSELF for me!"

And now we close our meditations on this beautiful and instructive Psalm—a Psalm which, even since we have begun to write on it, we have seen clung to as a treasured solace in hours of sickness—its sublime utterances soothing the departing soul, just as it was pluming its wings for flight to the spirit-world! Reader! in any future dark and troubled passages in your life, you may well with comfort turn to this diary of an old and tried saint, remembering that it records the experiences of "the man after God's own heart." Tracing his footsteps and tear-drops along "the sands of time," you shall cease to "think it strange concerning the fiery trials that may be trying you, as though some strange thing happened." You will find that "the same afflictions are accomplished in you," which have been

"accomplished" in the case of God's most favored servants in every age of the Church. Do not expect now the unclouded day. That is not for earth, but for heaven. God indeed, had He seen fit, might have ordained that your pathway was to be without cloud or darkness, trial or tear—no poisoned darts, no taunts, no ridicule, no cross, no "deep calling to deep,"—nothing but calm seas unfretted by a ripple, sunny slopes and verdant valleys, and bright Mizar-hills of love and faithfulness!

But to keep you humble, to teach you your dependence on Himself—to make your present existence a state of discipline and probation, He has ordered it otherwise. Your journey as travelers is through mist and cloud-land—your voyage as seamen through alternate calm and storm.

"Sometimes I can rejoice in the Mount with my Redeemer. Sometimes I lie in the Valley, dead, barren, unprofitable. I am frequently wounded in the battle. Blessed be God that the Physician, the Castle, and the Fortress, are ever at hand."—Eickersteth

And much of that discipline, too, is mysterious. You cannot discern its "why" and "wherefore." To employ a former symbol, you are now like the vessel being built in the dockyard. The unskilled and uninitiated can hear nothing but clanging hammers—they can see nothing but unshapely timbers and glare of torches. It is a scene of din and noise, dust and confusion. But all will at last be acknowledged as needed portions in the spiritual workmanship—when the soul, released from its earthly fastenings, is launched on the summer seas of eternity—

"Give to the winds your fears,  
Hope and be undismayed.  
God hears your sighs and counts your tears,  
God shall lift up your head!  
Through waves, and clouds, and storms,  
He gently clears the way;  
Wait on His time—so shall this night  
Soon end in joyous day."

"David might have gone a thousand times to the tabernacle and never found a thousandth part of the blessing he found in this wilderness. It was in the absence of all that was dear to him as man, he found his special



solace in God." —Harington Evans.

Above all, let this Psalm teach you that your spiritual interests are in safe keeping. No wounded Deer seeking the water-brooks ever sought them in vain. When drooping, downcast, disconsolate yourself, remember "God is faithful." "He cannot deny Himself." "He satisfies the longing soul with goodness." None is "able to pluck you out of His hand." There may be fluctuations—ebbings and flowings—in the tides of the soul; but "He that has begun a good work in you, will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus." You may reach the heavenly fold with bleating cries—with torn fleece and bleeding feet—but you will reach it, if you have learned to sing, "The Lord is my shepherd!" You may reach the water-brooks with languid eye and panting sides—but you will reach them, if you can truthfully say, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!" You may begin your song in the minor-key, but if "My GOD" be its keynote, you will finish it with the angels and among ministering seraphim!

Go then, Christians! and, as you see what FAITH, and HOPE, and PRAYER did for the Exile of Gilead, try what they can and will do for you. With all your varied trials, with all your manifold sorrowful experiences, who, after all (this Psalm seems to say) so favored as you? Who possess your present exalted privileges?—who your elevating hopes?—"the consciousness, even in your trials, that each billow is wafting you nearer the haven of eternal rest?

"They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven." Psalm 107:24-30

"Soul, then know your full salvation,  
Rise over sin, and fear, and care,  
Joy to find in every station  
Something still to do or bear.

Think what Spirit dwells within you,  
Think what Father's smiles are thine,  
Think that Jesus died to save thee—  
Child of heaven! can you repine?  
"Haste you on from grace to glory—  
Armed by FAITH and winged by PRAYER;  
Heaven's eternal days before thee,  
God's own hand shall guide you there!  
Soon shall close your earthly mission,  
Soon shall pass your pilgrim days;  
Hopes shall change to glad fruition,  
FAITH to sight, and PRAYER to praise!"



# **THE PROPHET OF FIRE**

## **The life and times of Elijah, with their lessons**

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, "Behold, I will make my words in your mouth FIRE." Jer. 5:14

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## **1. BIRTHPLACE—APPEARANCE— CHARACTER**

Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives--the God whom I worship and serve--there will be no dew or rain during the next few years unless I give the word!" 1 Kings 17:1

"Who makes his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire."--Psalm 104:4

The life of Elijah is, in the truest sense of the word, a poem--an inspired epic. It is surrounded throughout with a blended halo of heroism and saintliness. Though neither angel nor demi-god, but "a man of like passions," intensely human in all the varied incidents and episodes of his picturesque history--he yet seems as if he held converse more with heaven than earth. His name, which literally means "My God the Lord," or "Jehovah is my God," introduces us to one who had delegated to him superhuman powers; not only an ambassador from above, but the very

viceroys and representatives of Omnipotence. He announces himself as standing before the Lord of hosts, as if he were an servant in the heavenly palace, rather than a citizen of the lower world; coming forth from time to time from his mysterious seclusion to deliver his message, and then retiring again into solitude to wait fresh communications from on high.

No one in Scripture story possesses a more thorough individuality; and this is all the more remarkable, as we have only a few broad touches descriptive of his personal appearance, and of his mental and moral character. But these are so bold and impressive, that there is no mistaking him. He stands out in immense clarity from the sacred canvas. Others of illustrious name, who occupy a far larger share of the inspired page, appear shadowy and undefined in comparison with this illustrious product of nature and grace.

He is presented to our view without a note of premonition--ushered at once on the stage of stirring action fully armored--in the colossal manhood and maturity of his being. This is all our introduction to him, as he confronts the guilty monarch of northern Palestine: "Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, 'As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives--the God whom I worship and serve--there will be no dew or rain during the next few years unless I give the word!'" We have no predecessors in his history. No reference to ancestry, home, education, father, mother, companion, or friend; and this, also, throughout all the rest of his career, until near its close. He appears before us--the Melchizedek of his age--nursed in the wilds of nature for his great and momentous calling.

There is a marked contrast in this respect between him and other well-known names in the roll of Hebrew writers. Pilgrim and wayfarer as he was, with his moveable dwellings and altar, we are familiar with Abraham as "the Father"--the patriarchal chief or sheik, surrounded with the hum of living voices and desert tents--with wife and sister's son and children, slaves and herdsmen--ever ready, when occasion requires, to dispense the rites of Eastern hospitality. In the life of Moses, we come in contact at every turn with the same human relationships and sympathies. We can think of his own mother singing Hebrew lullabies by his cradle. We are allowed to picture him in his boyhood, disciplined under the strange

influence of the court of Pharaoh, instructed in the sacred schools of Heliopolis "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Even in his wilderness exile, the loneliest period of his life, we find him associated, as a family man, with the household and flocks of Jethro.

Samuel, kindred in many respects as he was with the Tishbite in his prophetic calling, was surrounded with the sanctities of a double home and parentage. We see, on the one hand, the mother who, from his lisping infancy, "lent him to the Lord," year by year bringing him his "little coat" to the sanctuary at Shiloh. On the other, the venerated foster-father on whom he duteously waited in that curtained tabernacle where "the lamp of God was burning," instilling into his susceptible soul his earliest lessons of heavenly wisdom. David's whole life is domestic, full of tender delineations of strong human sympathies and clinging friendships, manifested alike in the family homestead, the military camp, and the palace of Zion. Even Elisha, as a writer has remarked, "had his yoke of oxen, parents to bid adieu to, a servant, Gehazi, in attendance on him, the sons of prophets in converse with him. But the mention of Elijah is at intervals, as one appearing in peopled neighborhoods--no one knew from whence--in the desert, on the hill-tops--seen and recognized as by surprise, in the hairy garment of the prophet--the solitary of God--as one without bag or purse--even, it may be, as He who had not 'where to lay His head'--having food to eat which man know not of."

Among the many influences which are known to mold and develop individual character, external nature must not be overlooked. The grand and sublime has always proved a "fit nurse" for heroic spirits; and, were this the place, we might illustrate the statement by examples. Gilead--Elijah's birthplace, the cradle of his youth, and where he remained until the time of his showing unto Israel--as that wild, rugged, in many parts picturesque country, lying east of the Jordan--the "rocky" region, as the word implies, with its deep ravines and water-courses, its sheepfolds and herds of wild cattle, in contradistinction to Bashan, "the level or fertile land." It was a region uncultured in more than its physical aspect. "Galilee of the Gentiles," on the western side of the border river, was proverbially a crude province compared with the civilized tribes of the south of Palestine. But this was, in a still greater measure, the character

of those secluded uplands of Gilead. Contiguous as they were to the roving tribes of Arabia, subject to continual invasions or forays of Bedouin freebooters, the walled towns and villages, common on the western side of Jordan, were here unknown. With the exception of a few mountain strongholds, the inhabitants were obliged, in their nomad existence, to be satisfied with the tent of canvas or goats' hair. And this primitive patriarchal life survived the advancing civilization of other parts of the country. "To an Israelite of the tribes west of Jordan," says a recent writer, "the title 'Gileadite' must have conveyed a similar impression, though in a far stronger degree, to that which the title 'Celt' does to us. What the Highlands were, a century ago, to the towns in the lowlands of Scotland, that, and more than that, must Gilead have been to Samaria or Jerusalem."

In this very country had been reared some of the warriors of a former age. "Because Machir was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan" (Joshua 17:1). Jephthah the Gileadite, the wild, lawless hero of his time, issued from these "mountains of prey," and his hapless daughter, with her group of maidens, awoke the echoes of their savage gorges with pathetic wailings. And now, He who had, in a still remoter age, nursed Moses His servant for his great exploits amid the solitudes of the Sinai desert, trains up a worthy successor in the same great Temple. The soul of Elijah was tutored for his prophetic mission amid the rushing streams, "the pipings of flocks," the dreadful solitudes, and the rough freebooter-life of the most distant territory of the sacred tribes.

Jehovah, in the selection of the human instrument for a great revival in Israel, would magnify the sovereignty of His own grace--He brings balm from half-heathen Gilead to heal the hurt of the daughter of His people--He chooses no Rabbi nor learned doctor of the schools--no Hierarch with the prestige of hereditary office or outward form of consecration--but a lay preacher from the Highlands of Palestine--a man who had graduated in no school but nature--who had been taught, but taught only of Heaven. Forth he comes, A PROPHET OF FIRE, a burning and a shining light, in one of the darkest periods of Hebrew history--and "many were to rejoice in his light."

Some, indeed have supposed that Elijah was not Hebrew in his origin at



all--that the blood of roving Ishmael was in his veins--that he sprang from a tribe of Gentiles who inherited from the patriarch Abraham the knowledge of the one true God, and retained it longer than the heathen around, owing to their proximity to the land of Canaan; that such a selection, moreover, was purposely made by God to rebuke the wayward apostasy of His chosen Israel, and show those who even from strangers and foreigners He could raise up honored men for the vindication of His truth and the accomplishment of His purposes. Be this as it may, if we draw a portraiture of Elijah even from the materials afforded us in Scripture, we recognize in his outward bearing more of the Bedouin than the son of the chosen race. There stands before us a muscular figure, well-tanned with the burning suns of Palestine, with long, shaggy raven hair hanging loose over his shoulders.

A modern writer, in speaking of Samson's unshorn locks, compares him to the Merovingian kings, "whose long tresses were the sign of their royal race, which to lose was to lose royalty itself." We cannot pronounce in the case of the prophet of Gilead of what these flowing tresses were the symbol--whether they were the badge of his Divine mission, or as, with the son of Manoah, the token of his strength--or that, like him, he had taken the vow of the Nazarite. In any case, they form a marked feature in his outward appearance. He is specially spoken of, in a subsequent period, by Ahaziah's messengers as "a hairy man," (lit., "a lord of hair.") The children of Bethel, when they came forth and mocked Elisha as "the bald head," did so because struck with the contrast between him and the familiar appearance of his shaggy predecessor.

Around his shoulders he had flung a loose cape or striped blanket, made either of rough sheep or camel hide, fastened at his waist with a leathern belt. Whatever may have been the case with his unshaven head, this MANTLE appears to have had some singular significance attached to it. It was to him what the rod was to Moses. It seemed at once the outward badge of his prophetic office, and the instrument by which his miracles were performed. It screened him at one time when he held communion with God in the entrance of the desert cave--he wrapped it round his face: at another, he would roll it up like a staff, as we shall find him doing at the close of his history, when at its magic touch Jordan was driven back.

It was the legacy which dropped on the shoulders of his successor from the fiery chariot when the whirlwind bore him to heaven.

Nor must his physical strength and powers of physical endurance be forgotten in this rapid portraiture. That must have been no ordinary man, surely, who, before the coming night-storm, and after the toils of an exhausting day, could accomplish such a feat of pedestrianism as to run sixteen miles, and withal outstrip the fleet coursers in Ahab's chariot in reaching the gate of Jezreel. That must have been no average strength that could sustain the hardships and privations of Cherith, and the long forty days' fast of Horeb.

Such, then; in personal aspect seems to have been THE GREAT ELIJAH--with no priestly vestment but that hairy tunic of the desert--lacking in courtly attire and perhaps courtly manners and etiquette, but with regal demeanor and bearing too--a glorious champion of truth and righteousness. His name must have been a household word in every home of Israel and beyond it. Something dreadful must have been the terror inspired by the man who had the elements of nature delegated to his control; who could seal up the heavens at one time--lock up from a whole nation for years the treasures of the clouds--at another, draw fire from these clouds like a sword from its scabbard, and strew the earth with a hundred dead!

Even the suddenness of his appearances and disappearances are startling and dramatic. He towers--like one of the sons of Anak--morally as well as physically high above those around him. He reminds us of the brave heroes--though with nobler elements of grandeur in his case--who came across Jordan in high flood to join a former exiled king of Israel--"whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the gazelles upon the mountains." In one word, he was an incarnation of Power. If early Greece or Rome (not Palestine) had been the theater of his deeds, he would have had his place amid the gods of Olympus. As it was, there was no name (that of Abraham and perhaps Moses excepted) more venerated in subsequent ages among his countrymen.

But yet, with all his moral and physical superiority, with all his mortifications, his strange ascetic life, Elijah is spoken of, for our

encouragement, as "a man of like passions" (James 5:17). And it is this which makes his biography so interesting and instructive. With all his greatness, he had his weaknesses and failings--and failings, also, just in the points of character we would least have expected. The reprover of Ahab--the bold, bearded son of the desert who feared God, and knew apparently no other fear--so elevated above the foibles, weaknesses, caprices of his fellows--so indifferent to human opinion, whether in the shape of commendation or censure--can become a craven and coward on hearing the threats of an intriguing woman. Champion as he was--a shaggy lion from the coverts of Gilead, who can challenge single-handed a multitude of idolatrous priests--he cowers away in moping despondency from work and duty.

We shall see in all this--when we come to dwell minutely on these varied incidents--a reflex of our fluctuating selves, which we may take, not to foster or encourage similar collapses, but to prevent us being needlessly disconcerted by the experience of kindred changeful moods in the spiritual life. "There was but a step," it has been remarked, in the case of Paul, "between the third heavens and the thorn in the flesh;" there was but a step in the case of Elijah between the heights of Carmel and the cave of Horeb.

This Peter of the Old Testament was, like all characters of strong, fervid, vehement temperament, easily elated, easily depressed. He reminds us of the engine careering along our own railways--a very Hercules in strength--the type and impersonation of grandeur and power--but laid on its side, amid the mangled wrecks it has dragged along with it, nothing is more helpless.

Elijah's life, however, as that of "a man of like passions," is instructive in more than this. Not only was there in his character a union of weakness with greatness, but, despite of all his apparent solitariness, unworldliness, asceticism, isolation from his fellows, there were not lacking elements of tenderness. The earthquake, the whirlwind, the fire, which he saw in the Sinai desert, and after all these "the still small voice," formed the reflection of his own inner nature--a union of the terrible with the gentle. The denouncer of Ahab, the rebuker of kingly iniquity, the slayer at the Kishon, the slaughterer who, in one day, with his own hands,

purpled its waters with the blood of four hundred and fifty priests--we shall yet see with what considerate tenderness he ministers to the distress of the lonely widow of Zarephath, and with what loving affection he clings at the last to the friendship of the faithful Elisha.

Stern characters are often misunderstood. There is frequently a union of opposites in the same nature--the stern may appear to predominate, when gentleness and goodness are there, if the world would but believe it. The official severity of the homeless Prophet was tempered and softened with these latter qualities; while his every action, with the one solitary exception, was governed and pervaded by sterling principle, uncompromising rectitude, unflinching adherence to the will of God. Much as Ahab hated his truthful denunciations, he could not disguise his respect for his candor, boldness, and devotion to Him he so faithfully served. These lofty attributes doubtless Elijah owed not to himself. It was God's training and grace, the power of His Spirit working within him, that made him the man and the hero that he was. The classic fable regarding Hesiod, the unlettered herdsman, but who became the Father of poetry, was a reality in the case of THE PROPHET OF FIRE--a heavenly flame coming suddenly down and resting on his head, he became the greatest of his age. The Lord had said to him, as to the prophet of Chebar, "Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint, have I made your forehead--fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house."

Indeed we often think of the Tishbite as an example of a character surcharged with elements of great power, which, if misdirected, must have been terrible for evil. Left to his own wayward, impetuous, fiery nature, his strong impulses and iron will, the bold Bedouin of Gilead might have grown up to be the scourge and destroyer, the tempter and corrupter of Israel--not its Restorer, Reformer, and Savior--a vessel of wrath instead of a vessel of mercy. An angel in might, he might have turned a demon in depravity--a "Prophet of Fire," not to illumine, but to scathe. His was a temperament in which evil impulses, had they once obtained sway, would have swept him down rapidly to ruin, and hurried thousands along with him, spreading his evil and baneful influence

through a whole generation. But he had been enabled to consecrate all this latent power to the cause of righteousness. Perhaps, after many a silent soul-struggle, of which the world knows nothing, in the solitudes of his Fatherland, the devil in his nature had been expelled and exorcized; and he had adopted as his life-motto--"the God of Israel whom I serve, and before whom I stand."

As a closing practical thought, let us remember how little it often takes to divert elements of character towards good or towards evil. How many, with downward, depraved propensities, have, by godly training, or by dint of moral courage and determination, combined with the grace of God, struggled manfully against the stream, and are now firm on the side of religious principle. How many, on the other hand, with, it may be, nobler natural elements of character--full of hope and promise, have, in an evil hour, by one false step, initiated the backward and the downward course to ruin! By one false turn of the helm, they have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience.

And, though we must not anticipate, we shall find that God did not leave His servant--this "light of Israel," whom He had kindled "for a FIRE"--without high recompense. He made a stormy life close with a glorious setting--when the cloudy, fitful, changeful moods of his own spirit had, by varied discipline, subsided into calm faith, and obedience, and trust--he was borne upwards to that rest for the storm-tossed, where "earthquake, and whirlwind, and fire" are known no more, to listen through eternal ages to the "still small voice." Enoch-like, he "was taken up to heaven without dying--suddenly he disappeared because God took him. But before he was taken up, he was approved as pleasing to God."

## **2. NATIONAL APOSTASY**

Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives--the God whom I worship and serve--

there will be no dew or rain during the next few years unless I give the word!" 1 Kings 17:1

"The land is blackened by the fury of the Lord Almighty. The people are fuel for the fire, and no one spares anyone else." Isaiah 9:19

"Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great flaming star fell out of the sky, burning like a torch. It fell upon one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water." Revelation 8:10

Ahab was at this time on the throne of Israel--his residence was at Jezreel, and the windows of his ivory palace looked along the vast plain of Esdraelon, one of the most fertile and exuberant portions of Palestine. His was a gloomy reign. His predecessor, Jeroboam, by setting up golden calves at Dan and Bethel, had paved the way for the shameless idolatry which now disgraced the land and provoked the Divine judgments. Compared with Ahab's apostasy, however, that of Jeroboam was a trivial and modified departure from the true worship. The latter may be regarded rather as a desperate, and, in the circumstances, a world-wise stroke of state policy. On the revolt of the ten tribes and their formation into a northern kingdom, the first sovereign was naturally jealous of the effect which attendance at the old festal gatherings in Jerusalem might have on new subjects. These might revive, in the separated tribes, the ancient love of unity, and attachment to the time-honored capital. "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together--where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." If he is to perpetuate his dynasty and save the dismemberment of his infant kingdom, he too must meet the religious needs and aspirations of his people, by having a "city" or "cities of solemnities"--he must have sacred shrines and sacred rites to vie in splendor with the ceremonies of Mount Zion. For this purpose he made selection of the two extreme border towns--Dan in the north, and Bethel in the south. Both were already invested with sacred recollections in connection with the earlier history of the chosen race, and in them he erected two temples, with rites of corresponding magnificence. "His long stay in Egypt had familiarized him with the outward forms under which the Divinity was there represented; and now, for the first time since the Exodus, was an Egyptian element introduced into the national worship of

Palestine. A golden figure of Mnevis, the sacred calf of Heliopolis, was set up at each sanctuary, with the address, 'Behold your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.'"

Guilty as Jeroboam was in introducing so flagrant a violation of the Divine command--erecting "a similitude like to a calf which eats hay," he seems to have had no intention of superseding the national religion by pagan worship. It was different, however, with his weak and servile successor. Ahab's "abominable idolatries" owed, if not their origin, at all events their chief instigation, to a guilty matrimonial alliance he had formed with Jezebel, daughter of Athbaal, King of Tyre. Little could be expected from the antecedents of this Tyrian princess; her own father having himself originally been a heathen priest, and having afterwards mounted the throne of his brother as a usurper. Greatly Ahab's intellectual superior--crafty, bold, designing, unscrupulous, cruel--she wielded from the first a fatal influence over her weak and pliant partner. He soon forgot the solemn inheritance that had been transmitted to him in that sacred land. Shrines and temples sacred to Baal and Astarte, the tutelary deities of Phoenicia, covered the hilltops and valleys, "marked by the grove of olive round the sacred rock or stone on which the altar was erected."

This false worship, indeed, was no novelty in Hebrew history. We find it had struck its roots deep--even so early as the time of the Judges. Gideon's thrashing-floor at Ophrah, was close by a rock, surmounted by a spreading Terebinth, and under its branches the altar and image of Baal. One part of his mission, as his new name of Jerubbaal imported, was to overthrow the worship of the Phoenician idol, and reassert the supremacy of the God of Israel. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him, at his wine-press, with a message of "peace." That same night of the Divine appearance, he cut down the consecrated grove on the rock, and converted the long-defiled altar into a place of sacrifice for Jehovah, using the felled trees as fuel for his burnt-offering. The citizens of the little town, enraged at the sacrilege, demanded of Joash to give up his son to instant death. Joash, however, the Gamaliel of his age, stood on his defense by appealing to the reason of his hearers, and boldly asserting, that if Baal were indeed a god, he needed no puny human arm to

vindicate his sovereignty, or inflict his vengeance. "Will you plead for Baal? Will you save him? If he be a God, let him plead for himself" (Judges 6:31). Who knows but the remembrance of this advice of the old Abiezrite may have suggested and shaped Elijah's subsequent appeal on the heights of Carmel.

Be this as it may, the land, during the reign of Ahab, with which we are now concerned, swarmed with priests of the heathen deity imported from pagan Tyre. Four hundred of them sat at the royal table, and stimulated their royal patrons to deeds of vengeance. The worship of Jehovah of Israel came to be denounced as disaffection to the government--a slight on the court religion. The torch of persecution was lighted. The prophets of the Lord were hunted down--driven into caves, and saved from utter extermination only by the merciful interposition of Obadiah, a saint in the 'household of the Nero' of his day.

What a guilty and presumptuous attempt to thwart the Divine purpose in portioning off the chosen people from the rest of the world! The Hebrew nation had been appointed as a perpetual protest against the polytheism of the surrounding kingdoms. By one dastardly act of the new monarch of Israel, the wall of separation was thrown down. The modified calf-worship of Jeroboam now lapsed into unblushing idolatry. God was dethroned; and Baal, (a plurality of Lords), was set up in His place. The one living, self-existent, all-pervading JEHOVAH was superseded by a divinity of good or evil, (as might be,) presiding over the several elements of nature. One mountain summit would have its altar to the sun--another to the moon--another to the stars. One grove would have its temple, or shrine, or image dedicated to the brooks and rivulets--another to the rain of heaven--another to the falling dew--another to the seasons. The summer would have its shrine to a propitious Baal; the winter with its storms would have its altar and libations of blood to the malevolent Being whose wrath needed to be appeased. The worshiper's main conception of this hundred-headed god was connected with the attribute of power. The Phoenician Baal was called by the Greeks the Hercules of Tyre--the embodiment of might, if not of cruelty. They lost sight of the God of holiness, and rectitude, and love. They were awed by the wrath and judgment which was the habitation of Baal's throne--they knew nothing



of the mercy and righteousness and truth which went before the face of the true God of their fathers.

The time had arrived for judgment. The cup of the iniquity of Ahab and Israel was full. The cloud was charged. It is about to burst on the devoted land. Is there no gleam of light to relieve this thick darkness? Is there no trumpet-tongued messenger, no "minister of FLAMING FIRE," to vindicate the rights and prerogatives of Israel and Israel's Jehovah--to witness for the great essential truth--the unity of God--taking up the old watchword--"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is ONE Lord?" Yes! God has "come to send fire on the earth;" and, in the person of Elijah, "it is already kindled." He has in him a champion ready harnessed for the battle, who will be bold to speak His word before kings, and not be moved. The fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor--hurl "Beelzebub, the prince of devils," from his seat, and quench the fire on his defiled and defiling altars. "It is time you work, Lord, for they have made void your law." "Let not the heathen say, Where is now their God?"

It was, then, in the midst of this scene of darkness, apostasy, and blood, that forth came the great Tishbite. The Jewish prophets were compared to vigilant watch-dogs. But Elijah was no "dumb dog that cannot bark;" "sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." His was not the trumpet to give forth a wavering or uncertain sound. Standing face to face with guilty Ahab, he startles him with the avowal--"My God--the God of Israel--the God of your Fathers--and he who ought to be your God--JEHOVAH lives!" "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." To understand aright the force of this assertion, we must view it in the same light as the subsequent scene on Mount Carmel, that is, as a challenge made by the Prophet to settle the question by a solemn appeal to the great power or powers (be who they may) who rule the universe, and who have the elements of nature under their control. It was as if he had said to his royal master--"I shall prove that your base idolatries cannot aid you in the hour of need. I shall undertake to demonstrate that a plurality of gods is but a plurality of nonentities. Here is the test. In the name of my God I utter it. You have invested the Baal you worship with lordship over the processes of outer nature--you have your pretended Baal or lord who has

the clouds of heaven in his hand--who can unseal or close their watery treasures at his will. You have your pretended deity--who spangles morning by morning the pastures on the hills of Israel with dew-drops, or leaves them dry like the fleece of Gideon. I shall disprove your polytheism--I shall unmask the lie of these Phoenician priests whom you feed at the royal table--I shall solve the momentous problem, not by word, but by dreadful deed. I shall prove that this dew and these rain-clouds are not Baal's giving; that his priests might rend the sky from morn to even with importunate supplication, and there would be no response. But I shall demonstrate that they are in the hands of that "living God," whose servant I am, and "before whom," though unseen, "I stand." And here will be the proof. I assert, in the name and by the authority of Him whom I worship, and whose unworthy servant I am, that neither Dew nor Rain shall fall on the parched plains and valleys of Israel except at my bidding. From this day henceforth these skies shall be as brass, and this earth as iron. Let your Baal throng disprove it if they can. Let them, if they can, thwart this act of delegated omnipotence. Let them, if they can, force open the bolted doors of heaven, and exude dew-drops from the gasping earth. Let them, if they can, bribe the miser fountains to unlock their hoarded treasures. Then, but not until then, will I listen to the tale of your dumb idols, and renounce my belief in that Great Being who makes the clouds His chariot--who gives rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and with gladness. I know my God lives. From this day forth, trees and grass scorched and blighted--the arrested growth of the vegetable world--waterless channels and cattle lowing on hungry pastures, during "these years," shall prove the truth of my solemn declaration.'

We are told of no reply on the part of Ahab. He may have been struck dumb--quailing under the withering words--or perhaps the sequel may rather intimate that his brow darkened with vengeance, and that he turned to his palace to take summary means of avenging and rebuking "the madness of the prophet." Be this as it may, it is enough for us to know that as months rolled on, it became terribly evident that nature all around--the heavens above and the earth beneath--confirmed the utterances of the man of God. The blossoms of the fig-tree drooped--the shoutings of the vintage in the fruitful valleys of Ephraim and Zebulun

ceased--no oil was distilled from the olive-tree--the flocks pined and languished in field and stall--a fearful famine overspread the land--while the feeble remnant of the faithful, in their cave-retreats, sang together that song of Zion--"By terrible things in righteousness will you answer us, O God of our salvation."

We shall close the chapter with a few practical lessons from this opening portion of the Prophet's history.

Let us learn **THE INSIDIOUS POWER OF ERROR, AND GUARD AGAINST IT.** With regard to nothing had God fenced around His law more solemnly than the introduction of idolatry. The protest, sounded amid the blazing accompaniments of terror on Sinai, was repeated and reiterated in the written Oracles. The most rigid injunctions were given for the extirpation of the Canaanites, lest an intermixture with a pagan race might corrupt the primitive worship; and not only were the idolatrous nations themselves to be expelled and exterminated, but all vestiges of the idols and idol-altars and groves were to be swept away. "You shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which you shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree. And you shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and you shall hew down the engraved images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place." After such a stringent admonition as this, who can estimate the daring presumption and impiety of a whole covenanted nation, from king to peasant and vine-dresser, trampling in the dust the most sacred article in the charter of their religious liberties--forgetting the strong hand and stretched-out arm of Him who led them through the depths of the sea--selling themselves as votaries to bloodthirsty idols--worshipping Remphan and the host of heaven!

There is not much danger, in this our land and day, of a relapse into idolatry--of a cultured intellectual age making all at once a rebound of a thousand years into the darkness of heathen and pagan delusion; although the histories of Greece and Rome tell us too plainly, how the most exquisite intellectual refinement may be in lamentable conjunction with degrading superstition. Neither do we share in the dread entertained by some, in this era of broad common sense, of a relapse into the

ridiculous, hypocritical, and pretentious ceremonies of Popish superstition. Protestantism--love of intellectual, moral, and spiritual freedom--is too deeply-rooted for that.

But we are not proof against other more insidious and specious forms of religious error. The next phase which infidelity will assume, and indeed has assumed, is that of false philosophy, whose principle and lurking element of danger is the exalting proud reason in the place of childlike faith; sitting in arbitrary and high-handed judgment on the declarations of God's Word; undermining the foundation-truth of the atonement; stripping the cross of Christ of its chief glory; and regarding the Bible--the precious casket in which these truths are contained--not as of fine gold, more precious than Ophir, but rather like the image of Nebuchadnezzar, partly of gold and partly of iron and clay.

Unbelief, varying in its phases and developments, is the same in every age. The monitory word can never be out of place or season, even when we think a rampart of impregnable strength and defense is girdling Church and nation and religious privileges--"Beware, lest you also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Let us learn, as a second lesson, that DIVINE JUDGMENT FOLLOWS NATIONAL APOSTASY. It has been often remarked that individuals may, in this world, escape punishment for personal crime--but nations never. Retribution, in the case of individuals, may be reserved for a future condition of reward and punishment, where the present unequal distribution of good and evil will be corrected and adjusted. But the case of nations is different. With them, in their aggregate capacity, there is no such after state of dealing; and therefore their reward or their doom is meted out and accomplished here. What is history? what is prophecy? but a commentary on this. Look at these "oracles," pronounced one after another by the ancient seers--the oracle concerning Egypt, the oracle concerning Tyre, the oracle concerning Nineveh, the oracle concerning Babylon, and, most affecting and significant of all, the oracle concerning Jerusalem--what are these, but God's own solemn indictments, as apostate nation after apostate nation is cited at His bar? In the case of

each nation or city, the bestowed vengeance is in proportion to their crimes. As they have sowed the wind, so do they reap the whirlwind. When the body politic becomes morally diseased, like the putrid corpse or carcass cast out on the street, the winged messengers of retribution are at hand to prey upon it, in accordance with the Jewish proverbial saying, which was so literally fulfilled in their own signal doom--"Whosoever the carcass is, there shall the eagles be gathered together."

Ahab and his whole people, with the exception of a feeble remnant, had been guilty of glaring national delinquency. They had dishonored the God of their fathers--they had adopted and nationalized the mythological creed of the heathen nations--they had deified nature, and given to the separate Baals, lordship over the elements--they had made fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind, each to fulfill the word of a presiding divinity--disowning the one God who sat enthroned behind the elements He had formed; and who had declared that "while the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and day and night, and summer and winter, should not cease." Jehovah resolves to mete out judgment in accordance with their guilt. He makes those very gifts of nature the instruments of their punishment which had been the means of their sin. They had undeified Him in nature; He will make nature wield the lash of retribution. They had given to others a sovereignty over the "rain" and the "dew;" He makes these arrows in His own quiver to be the weapons of vengeance--with what measure they have meted out, it was to be measured to them again. "I opened my arms to my own people all day long, but they have rebelled. They follow their own evil paths and thoughts. All day long they insult me to my face by worshiping idols in their sacred gardens. They burn incense on the rooftops of their homes. Look, my decree is written out in front of me: I will not stand silent; I will repay them in full! Yes, I will repay them--both for their own sins and for those of their ancestors," says the Lord. "For they also burned incense on the mountains and insulted me on the hills. I will pay them back in full!" (Isaiah 65:2, 3, 6, 7).

Let us remember that the Great Lord and Governor of nations acts upon fixed and unchanging principles still. We may not undeify Him by the worship of engraved images--by bowing the knee to stocks and stones.

But there are other national idols which may provoke righteous retribution. The eager thirst for gold--the hastening to be rich--and, worse than this, when riches, given as a great trust, are either selfishly hoarded or guiltily squandered. Ah! as the jealous eye of that God who will not give His glory to another, sees this modern Baal--hundred-headed Mammon--claiming the homage of his million votaries, let us not wonder if ever He should speak in accents of rebuke and judgment through the great national sin--put a sudden arrest on our perishable, material, unsanctified prosperity; and, in the midst of shut markets and excluded supplies abroad--closed factory doors, quenched furnaces, and silent shuttles at home--utter the great truth which, whether individually or nationally, we are so slow to hear--that Life, true greatness and true glory, consists not in the abundance of the things which we possess.

If the silver and the gold of modern times be taken as symbols of the dew and rain of Israel--that which is most valued, clung to, depended on--can we wonder should some Prophet of Fire--some burning messenger of wrath and retribution--stand in the midst of our mighty marts, and, with a voice of thunder, proclaim--"As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!"

A third lesson we may here learn is, that **GOD INVARIABLY RAISES UP SUITABLE INSTRUMENTS IN EVERY GREAT CRISIS OF HIS CHURCH'S HISTORY.**

The Church life--the spiritual life of Israel--could not have been at a lower ebb than at this period under the reign of Ahab. His own faithful people were counted by single units. Thousands were bowing the knee to Baal, and kissing his impious shrine. But Jehovah has His hero prepared for the times. It was one, moreover, as we have already noted, very specially gifted that was needed. It was no Jeremiah--sorrowful, tender-hearted, crushed himself with the national woes, the tear standing on his cheek. It was no John of Apostolic times, or Melancthon of Reformation times--gentle, devout, contemplative, sensitive--a heart overflowing with benignity and love. It was no Thomas of Apostolic times, or Erasmus of Reformation times--calm, speculative, philosophical; and, in the case of the latter, the man of learning, yet the timid, cautious time-server. It was

not even a man of the stamp of Paul of Tarsus--bold, brave, unflinching; with the culture and refinement needed to grapple with the sages of Athens, the courtiers of imperial Rome, and the sharp-witted merchants of Corinth; but deficient in powers of physical endurance--weak, and uncommanding in bodily presence.

It was one in type and mold like John the Baptist, or like Luther--a goliath in mind and body--one who could fearlessly confront Pharisee and Sadducee--Herod and Herodias--king, priest, and soldier--who could stand unmoved, as the great German Reformer did, amid the crowned heads and priestly potentates in the Diet at Worms, and fearlessly declare that though it were crowded with devils, he would face them all.

Such was emphatically the Tishbite--bold, brave, trained to habits of endurance. The gigantic evils of the times needed a giant to grapple with them--one who could confront wickedness in high places--be the scourger of court vices, and dare anything and everything for the sake of truth. God has ever His star ready to come forth in the midnight of gloom and despair; when the sword drops from the hand of Moses, He has His Joshua ready to take it up; when the Philistine champion defies the armies of Israel, He has ready the stripling youth with the sling and the pebble-stones to smite him to the dust; when His people are led captive, He has Daniel and Cyrus, Joshua and Zerubbabel, ready at His word to turn again the captivity of Zion "as streams in the south." He has only to "give the word," and "great is the company of those who publish it." Should seasons of gloom, and darkness, and apostasy, again overtake the Church; should rampant infidelity threaten to rise to a perilous ascendancy, and to trample out the fires on God's holy altar; trust Him!--a thunder-voice will be ready. A man of might will be sent to break the impious spell. The Church historian of the future, as he closes one chapter of terror and dismay, will open the next with the words--"And ELIJAH said . . ."

Learn, once more, THE POWER OF INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE. We shall not at present speak of Elijah's influence. To this we shall have occasion, in a future chapter, more particularly to advert; how, under God, this one man rallied an apostate nation--saved his country by saving its religion, and made thousands and tens of thousands in after ages,

when he himself was gone, rise up and call him blessed--"He stood in the breach, and the plague was stayed!" Let us rather, at this point, mark what a corrupt, debased, sensual, and selfish life can do. Let us see what may be the dreadful consequences of one guilty act--of what a progeny of vice and ruin it may be the prolific parent. Ahab, in himself, appeared to have some naturally good and amiable qualities. But he is one of those of whom it is said he "sold himself to work iniquity." The stream which might have been flowing through his land dispensing endless blessings in its course, became a stagnant pool, breeding and diffusing corruption. The defect of his natural character seems to have been indolence, sloth, selfishness, love of ease. Wavering and fickle, he was an easy tool for the intrigues and artifices of others. And then came the fatal crisis--the act of which we have, a little ago spoken, which consummated his own ruin and his people's apostasy--his marriage with an unprincipled and bigoted idolatress. He paid the penalty which multitudes have done who have in an evil hour scorned the Divine monition--"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers--for what communion has light with darkness? and what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he that believes with an infidel?"

Doubtless, Ahab's marriage was spoken of and chronicled in its day as a splendid union. Tyre was at this time in its glory--the sovereign of that queenly city could enrich the palace and park of Jezreel with a golden endowment. The ornate ceilings of the ivory palace may have been his royal gift--the cunning work of renowned Phoenician craftsmen. Israel's king may have been lauded and congratulated by the neighboring princes as a favored man. Alas! dearly bought was that gilded pageantry--the pomp and pride of having his servants dressed in purple wrought on Tyrian looms! "Ichabod, the glory has departed"--the ark is gone--the god of Ekron is hailed as the god of Israel--and all through the instrumentality of this unhappy--this ungodly alliance of Jehovah's covenanted king with an uncovenanted heathen.

Ahab's whole life is a mournful illustration of resisted and scorned warnings--slighted messages of remonstrance and mercy. The God he rejected strove with him to the last. But the guilty partner of his throne and of his crimes, made him spurn at once the messenger and the



message; and over that bloody grave into which their mangled bones were at last consigned, is inscribed the epitaph--"Ahab, who made Israel to sin."

Would that in this age of "trust in uncertain riches" it were borne more sacredly in mind, that it is not gold, but moral worth that is the amplest marriage-dowry. Rank, position, wealth, accomplishments, may be but the gaudy veneering underneath which lurk moral debasement and ruin. Do not think of Ahab alone, for his was a miserable, characterless, soulless life. But look at LOT. See that man of God--that "righteous man." He made the guilty venture of contracting an irreligious marriage. Mark the result! See it in his "vexed soul," his weeping eyes, his laughed-at pleadings; his wife a monument of vengeance, his blackened home, his blackened name, his unknown and unhonored grave. "A brand plucked from the burning." "Saved; yet so as by fire!"

### **3. THE RETREAT**

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook at a place east of where it enters the Jordan River. Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food." So Elijah did as the Lord had told him and camped beside Kerith Brook. The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. 1 Kings 17:2-6

"So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." Ezekiel 3:14

One of the striking dramatic incidents here occurs, which we shall often have occasion to note in the course of the Prophet's life.

WHERE he met the king of Israel, and delivered the abrupt communication considered in last chapter, we know not. It may have been at some unexpected moment; as when Isaiah met King Ahaz "in the highway of the fuller's field;" or when the monarch was seated on some state-day in regal magnificence, with Jezebel at his side, amid a blaze of courtiers, in the palace of Jezreel; or on some religious festal occasion, when the six hundred priests of Baal, clad in their official vestments, were doing homage to the Phoenician idol, and rending the air with the cry--"O Baal, hear us!" All this, however, is left to conjecture.

But the message having been delivered, the God, whose behest it was, proceeds to secure the safety of His faithful servant--alike from court vengeance and from being involved in the national calamity. He directs him to flee to a lonely spot--probably amid the wilds of his own native Gilead--and there to wait further intimation of the Divine will. In prompt obedience to the monition, "So Elijah did as the Lord had told him and camped beside Kerith Brook."

We can picture to ourselves his strange solitude. Some narrow gorge, uninvaded by human footstep, fenced in by nature to form a prophet's chamber--the awning of this "pilgrim-tent" constructed of the interlacing boughs of fig, oak, and oleander; the blue vault of heaven overhead, leading him by day to consoling thoughts on the Great Universal Presence; the sun shining with tempered luster, answering to the deeper sunshine of a quiet conscience within; the stars by night, like the wakeful eyes of ministering angels, keeping watch over his lonely couch as he pillowed his head on the dewless leaves--with that better pillow still for the weary--the sublime consciousness of having done his duty, and subordinated his own will to that of the Highest.

What a contrast--his evening meal and chamber of repose, with those of the monarch in whose guilty ear he had recently proclaimed the judgment of God!--the ivory palace, filled with imported luxury--the servants, gorgeous with Tyrian purple and dust of gold--the royal couch, curtained with Phoenician draperies and redolent of Phoenician perfumes. A stranger was the rough Bedouin Prophet to all such dainties. His table, the green grass--his servants, the winged fowls of heaven--his bed, the hollow of the rock--his coverlet, his rough hairy mantle--his lullaby, the

music of the rippling stream, which, as it babbled by--the one tuneful brook of a silent land--sang morning and evening a hymn of God's faithfulness.

But, as we picture him, with thankful, contented heart, strengthening in summer's drought the stakes of his hut; or in winter's cold, gathering, like the apostle of Melita, the scattered leaves and dry wood to kindle and feed his lonely fire--as we imagine him thus, night by night composing himself to rest, have we not a living commentary on words with which he may have filled his waking and sleeping thoughts--"A little that a just man has is better than the riches of many wicked." "When you lie down you shall not be afraid; yes, you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet." "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesses the habitation of the just."

Let us pause here, and ponder, as a first lesson, THE POWER OF PRAYER. The whole land was pining under the most fearful of judgments. Every brook, except that lonely rill of Cherith, had failed. No dewdrops spangled the forests with their crystal jewels--no rain-torrents answered the silent inarticulate cry of the gasping earth. The ground upturned by the ploughshare had become rigid furrows of iron--the dust lay thick on the highways--the heavens above were a blazing furnace. All day long, from the chariot of the sun, there seemed to be discharged bolts of scorching fire. Nature lay prostrate and helpless under the withering curse. And how was this? James tells us, "Elijah prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." Oh, wondrous power!--a mortal pleading with God!--Omnipotence being moved by weakness! The seasons arrested in their course--nature's processes curbed--the windows of heaven closed, and the fields and granaries of earth emptied and spoiled--all--all owing to the voice of one man!

And does not the example of the Tishbite refute the often-repeated objection to prayer--'What need is there to try to move God? He has all things "foreordained, whatever comes to pass.'" It can only be a bold, presumptuous dreamer who can think of altering or modifying the Divine decrees. If He has resolved to send judgment, He needs not the pleadings of a mortal to remind him of His purposes.' Not so did our Prophet

reason--his was a truer and nobler philosophy. Well did he know that Ahab's wickedness had provoked the Divine displeasure; and if God himself had not announced to His faithful servant the specific form of retribution, He had, at all events, doubtless, given him to understand that judgment was prepared and ready to descend. But this does not release or exonerate Elijah from what he felt to be alike his duty and his privilege. We find him on his knees--praying--and "praying earnestly;" just as if the dreadful lesson about to be read to Israel depended on these feeble petitions.

God, had He seen fit, without any human intervention, might have "thundered in the heavens," and the Highest given His voice, "hailstones and coals of fire;" He might have "sent out His arrows and scattered them--shot out lightnings and confounded them." But "the Prophet of Fire," knowing the appointed medium through which the Being he served fulfills His behests, employs the conducting-rod of prayer to fetch down the lightning from His treasuries. It reminds us of the Apostles--the "Prophets of Fire" of a later age. The promise of a fiery baptism of a different kind had been given them. But, nevertheless, they continued, we read, "with one accord, in prayer and supplication;" and it was while thus engaged--assembled "with one accord in one place"--that there came the descent "as of a rushing mighty wind," and "cloven tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them."

How constantly are similar illustrations of this prevailing "power," brought before us in the case of believers of old. It was by prayer Jacob wrestled and prevailed. It was by prayer Joshua arrested the fiery wheels of the sun's chariot. It was by prayer Daniel shut the lions' mouths, and cheated death of its prey. It was prayer--the prayer of good King Hezekiah and the pious remnant among those who owned his scepter--that saved Jerusalem from utter destruction, and the people from captivity. He carried his desperate case and cause--he spread the railing letter of the Assyrian invader before God in an agony of prayer. Next morning, the hushed tents of Sennacherib--the ground strewn with his dead--was the divinely-renewed testimony that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

And we have the same blessed refuge--the same strong consolation--in

our hours, whether of impending national or individual sorrow. Whatever be the cloud that may be gathering, this is our sheet-anchor--our polar-star in the day of trouble--"The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear!"

Let us learn, further, from this incident in Elijah's life, THE TRIUMPH AND SURE RECOMPENSE OF FAITH. It was a bold and brave thing, surely, to utter such a prayer, and confront Ahab with such an announcement. Indeed, independently of the wrath of the Israelitish monarch, the anathema Elijah had pronounced could not fail to rouse the indignation of the whole kingdom. That savage-looking prophet of Gilead would be hated and denounced by the starving thousands on whom his imprecation had fallen, as a "troubler in Israel." But, bold as a lion, he fulfils his mission as the ambassador and spokesman of Heaven. He knows that he has been divinely called to vindicate the cause of truth and righteousness. Ahab may load him with chains--he may seize and torture him in hopes of coercing a revocation of the hateful utterance. Famishing with hunger, the people may also be hounded on to vengeful cruel acts against this prophet of evil tidings. But in tranquil composure he waits the result. He is like the daring soldier who has fired the cannonade, and who, with the consciousness of having bravely done his duty, is prepared for the worst, even should he be involved in the dreadful havoc--buried under the blood-stained ruins.

We cannot, indeed, claim for Elijah, as "a man of like passions," exemption from all doubt or misgiving in the present emergency. Unquestionably he had, as all have, a weaker side, even in what we suppose the least assailable part of his nature. It was no common heroism which was needed to outbrave the vengeance of an infamous court, a debased and infuriated priesthood, a people stung to madness by drought. The very blight and prostration of the external world, also, must have been a touching spectacle to a feeling heart. The trees draped in ashen leaves--the cattle lowing on arid pastures--innocent children making a vain appeal for food to parents miserable and helpless as themselves!

But a higher impulse than his own had prompted the prophetic woe. He knows that it was no selfish, wayward caprice on his part, but the will--

the righteous decree--of the God and King whose servant he was. He will not retract the retributive utterance; he will allow no debate or parlanche between duty and expediency. Others may have sought to deter him; his own heart at times may have prompted more timorous counsels. Under the same feeling of oppressive solitariness which impelled him subsequently with cowardly spirit to take flight to Horeb, he might now have purchased immunity from danger by refusing to deliver his message, and fleeing, like another Jonah, for shelter amid the mountains of his native Gilead. But he will obey God rather than be deterred by the frowns, and fears, and even sufferings of men. With the calm confidence and resolve of a kindred spirit, he can say--"In the Lord put I my trust; how say you to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?"

Nor is he left without the sure reward and recompense which follow simple trust and bold action. As the angel was sent to Peter in his dungeon, or to Paul in the storm, just at the crisis-hour when help was most needed so does the same God provide now a refuge for His Prophet. When he had no earthly home or friend--when king and people were confederate against him--One who was better than home, and friend, and king--the "El-Shaddai," the "All-Sufficient," comes with the cheering word--"Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan."

Moreover, not only does He furnish him with a refuge, but He makes provision for the supply of his daily needs; and in order to manifest His power and boundless resources, employs for this purpose the unlikeliest means and agencies. He makes the ravenous birds of the forest have their instincts in suspension, in order that they may minister to His servant. "And it shall be that you shall drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there!"

The Lord God of Elijah is still to this hour faithful to His promise--"Those who honor me, I will honor." "The young lions may lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing." Manly work done in His service--sacrifices made in His cause--will sooner or later be repaid with interest. It is because the presence and power of a personal God are so little felt and realized that our faith is so weak, and our ventures in His cause and service are so small. When the

soldiers of Gustavus Adolphus, the greatest king of Sweden, wished to dissuade him from risking his life by exposure in battle, it is said his grand reply was--"God Almighty lives." The motto of the Gilead Prophet was the same--"The Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand!" With his faith anchored on that simple but sublime assurance, he hastened to his rocky, sterile abode, knowing that his "bread would be given him, and his water would be sure." And all that his "God had spoken came to pass." On reaching his secluded retreat, lo! the joyous, remarkable sound of the brook broke upon his ear. The ravens, also, were there waiting their strange mission. When the gates of the morning opened, they flocked with the miraculous bread; when the gates of evening closed, down they flew, bearing the promised sustenance. Night by night, as the curtain of darkness fell around, wrapping himself in his mantle, and composing his head on his leafy pillow, he could exultingly say--"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

It may have seemed at first sight indeed strange, this long period of suspension from busy life, this seclusion from the scene of action where his voice and presence were so needed. It was enough for him, however, that his God willed it to be so, and patiently to wait the disclosure and development of the Divine purposes. Moreover, can we doubt that this season and place of deep solitude proved to Elijah a fit and needed training-school to prepare and qualify him for the grander achievements that were before him? It was so in the history of the most illustrious saints, both in Old and New Testament times. Moses had forty years' separation from the world in the Sinai desert, before entering on his unparalleled mission as the liberator and leader of the many thousands of Israel. John had his loving spirit fed and refreshed and disciplined in the solitudes of Patmos. John's loving Master had His days and nights of sacred seclusion on the mountains of Judea and Galilee, where His holy human soul was strengthened for arduous conflict. Paul, in training for the great work of the apostolate, had three years of retirement amid the deserts of Arabia. Luther--the Elijah of his age--had his spirit braced for hero-deeds during an uninterrupted season of prayer and the study of the sacred oracles, in the lone castle of Wartburg in the forest of Thuringia. In the same way would the "Prophet of Fire" carry with him his torch to

this vestibule of nature's temple--not to quench it, but rather, by holding more intimate fellowship with the great Source of Light, to get it kindled with a purer flame from the inner sanctuary.

We are told nothing regarding his occupations during these months of loneliness. But may we not think of him truthfully as "alone, yet not alone;" seated under the rock-clefts, with the music of the brook in his ear--his heroic soul, filled with mighty thoughts, musing devoutly on his great work, and earnestly seeking to be braced for his momentous life-struggle? May not nobler winged attendants than the birds of heaven have brought down messages of comfort to refresh and invigorate his spirit? Yes, by mystic and hallowed communings with the Lord of angels, may he not have been enabled to perfect the self-surrender and self-consecration of his whole nature, getting his will more and more merged and absorbed in the will of the great Being he delighted to serve? He would ever after, in all probability, cherish the remembrance of Cherith as a place and occasion of calm and elevated joy; and can we doubt that, when he emerges from his obscurity, he will come forth more fully harnessed for the battle--the fire of his earnest soul burning with a purer, intenser, and more tempered luster?

And is it not so with God's people still? When He has for a time secluded them from a busy world, sent them away from life's thoroughfares to hold pensive communings with their own hearts in the lonely wilderness of trial, have they not been led to feel and to recognize, not only a gracious needs-be in the Divine dealings, but, following in Elijah's spirit the teachings and directions of the great Disposer, have they not found that they come forth from their season of affliction better fitted for their work and disciplined for their warfare--moreover, that in their very hours of sadness, He opens up for them unimagined sources of solace and consolation? In taking them to Cherith, He does not permit them to go unbefriended or alone. What Patmos was to John, or Cherith to his great prototype, so can He make the gloomiest of seasons bright with the manifestations of His own grace and love. He will not allow the Cherith of sorrow to be without its brook of comfort and its winged messengers of peace. He provides streams of consolation specially suited for His people in all their seasons of trial.



Sickness is such a Cherith; when secluded from life's active duties--health withdrawn--strength prostrated--body and mind enfeebled--pain extracting the cry, "In the morning you will say, 'If only it were night!' And in the evening you will say, 'If only it were morning!'" Yet how many can look back on such seasons and tell of their brooks of solace? Bible promises welling up with new beauty like streams in the desert--a nobler and truer estimate of life imparted--nearer and more realizing views of God and heaven.

Bereavement is such a Cherith. When the scorching sun of sorrow has withered up life's choicest flowers, and dried its sweetest sources of pleasure, "the wilderness and the solitary place are made glad." He who has taken away, comes in the place of "the loved and lost." Our very sorrows, like the sable-plumaged ravens, are transformed into messengers of comfort. God fulfils His own promise by the bestowment of "the hidden manna." We may come forth from the severe soul-conflict, like Jacob, wrestling, but it is like him also, with "a new name."

And even in the prospect of Death itself--though called like Elijah to "Cherith which is before Jordan"--the All-Sufficient--the living God--is there, amid the turgid waters of "the border river," to cheer and support us, saying, "Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God." Whatever be our circumstances; our discouragements, disappointments, sorrows--"fightings without, and fears within"--worldly calamities, temporal losses; let us not utter the misgiving word, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Let us rather take as our motto, under all the varying conditions of life, "Jehovah-jireh"--The Lord will provide. Let us do our duty, and God will fulfill His word. Let us go to our Cheriths, and God will have ready His promised brook and ravens and manna. Let us prepare the fire and the wood, and God will provide His own lamb for the burnt-offering.

## 4. CHERITH AND ZAREPHATH

1 Kings 17:7-16

But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.

Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. There is a widow there who will feed you. I have given her my instructions."

So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a cup of water?" As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too."

But she said, "I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."

But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and cook that 'last meal,' but bake me a little loaf of bread first. Afterward there will still be enough food for you and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be plenty of flour and oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!"

So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat from her supply of flour and oil for many days. For no matter how much they used, there was always enough left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah.

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known--I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them"--Isaiah 42:16

The Prophet of Israel had now been nearly a year in his desert retreat. There he remained passive regarding his future plans, leaving the evolution of events in the hands of Him who had given His angels charge over him to keep him in all his ways. He knew that he was under good

and gracious guidance. So long as the brook murmured by his side, and the winged servants supplied his table, he took no unnecessary thought for the morrow, assured that the needed strength would be apportioned for each day.

But as this period was expiring, the brook began to sing less cheerily; once a full cascade, which, night by night, was used to lull him asleep, it became gradually attenuated into a silver thread. In a few days it is seen only to trickle drop by drop from the barren rock--until, where pools of refreshing water were before, there is nothing now left but sand and stones. So long as the rivulet flowed, it was a pledge and guarantee of God's watchful providence and continued care. True to His word, the Lord had hitherto, in this "Valley of Baca," made for His servant "a well." But now, as each new morning recalls a diminished supply, until at last song of bird and song of stream are alike silenced, it seems as if the Divine promise had failed, and He who "sends the springs into the valleys which run among the hills," had "altered the word which had gone forth out of His mouth!"

To one, indeed, like Elijah, with his naturally impetuous, and, it may be, impatient temperament, no trial could have more thoroughly tested the strength and reality of his faith than this. Though he could brace himself for great difficulties and dilemmas--though he could face Ahab undaunted, and hurl his malediction in the face of angry courtiers and idolatrous priests--he was not so well fitted to bear with serenity this slow wearing-out ordeal--watching the brook--the sign and token of Jehovah's faithfulness--gradually decreasing and filtering away--marking day by day the subsidence of the water in the little pools around, until his cherished shelter turned out no better than all other earthly refuges--a refuge of lies.

May we not imagine injured pride and unbelief doing their best to whisper in his ear, "Prophet of Fire! the pledge of the Divine presence has failed you; the altar-flame has forsaken your rocky shrine; you have lost your Protector now. Go, God-deserted one!--take your staff and mantle--find out for yourself some safe retreat from this burning drought--the Lord has forgotten to be gracious, and in anger He has shut up His tender mercies!" But "he staggered not through unbelief." "The man of like

passions" successfully combated his own weakest point--his natural hastiness and irritability. During these last solitary musings at Cherith, he clings only the more ardently to his life-motto and watchword-- "Jehovah lives;" and waits in calmness and submission an answer to the silent prayer--"What will You have me to do?" Nor does he wait in vain. The old well-known voice, in due season--breaks upon his solitude with a new communication of grace and mercy.

And has not this been often God's way and method of dealing? It was when the disciples were in their hour of extremity, during the storm on lake Gennesaret, giving themselves up to the hopelessness of despair, that, "in the fourth watch of the night," when darkness was deepest and danger greatest, the great Deliverer appeared on the crested wave--"Jesus went unto them walking on the sea." It was when the bereft of Bethany had, as they imagined, consigned the fond treasure of their affections to everlasting silence; and as they were sitting in their pillaged home, wondering at the mysterious delay on the part of the one Being who could alone have arrested that winged arrow which had laid low the love of their hearts--at that crisis-hour, the great Conqueror of death appears, to revive the smouldering ashes of their faith, and reanimate the joy and prop of their existence!

Yes, how often, in the experience of His people still, does God thus delay His succouring mercy to the very last, that they may see His hand, and His hand alone, in the gracious intervention or deliverance, and be brought to say, with grateful, adoring thankfulness--"Unless the Lord had been my help; my soul had almost dwelt in silence." And even when He does not appear visibly to support--when some fond brook of earthly comfort is left to dry in its channel--or when deliverance from some threatened earthly trial or threatened evil is not given, it is in order that we may, the more significantly and submissively, listen to His own voice saying to us, as He did to Elijah--"Arise."

For, observe the difference between the failing of the world's consolations and refuges; and joys and those of the true Christian--when the worldly man mourns his dried-up brooks, he has lost his all--he has nowhere else to turn--there is nothing left him but the tear of despair--the broken heart--the grave. But in the case of the Believer, when one comfort is

withdrawn, his God has other spiritual comforts for him in store. Miserable indeed are those who have nothing but the poor earthly rill to look lo! For, sooner or later, this must be its history, (as multitudes, in their Cheriths of sorrow, can bear testimony,) "And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up!"

But even with the new provision God has made for His Prophet, there comes a fresh trial of faith. The new arrangement made for his safety and sustenance is the last which, in his meditative moments, Elijah would have imagined. He is commanded to go to Zarephath, a distant city in the territory of Phoenicia. Had he been told to take temporary refuge in some of the Trans-Jordanic kingdoms, amid the tribes of the Amorite mountains, or amid the plunderers of Arabia--the roving hordes of the desert--it would not have been so startling nor so strange to him. But in order to reach this distant Sarepta, he must, in the first instance, traverse nearly a hundred miles of the blighted famine-stricken land of Israel; subjecting himself to need and peril among a people to whom his name was hateful and terrible, as identified with their sufferings. And, it might seem more unaccountable still--that the selected place of his refuge should be in the very kingdom which was responsible for the evils which had overtaken his unhappy country--Phoenicia, the land of Baal--the old home of Jezebel--itself at that moment suffering under the judgment of God; for over it also the dark wings of the Angel of Famine were brooding, as well as over the adjoining territory of the Hebrews.

The very directions regarding his sustenance might have been humiliating to a proud heart. There was something romantic and prophet-like about the appointments of Cherith--the rocky chamber with its crystal brook and sable-plumaged attendants. Elijah was there a privileged individual of the nation, getting, as his forefathers in the Sinai wilderness of old, day by day the divinely-appointed manna and the running stream. He would perhaps have learned to love his brook as much as Jonah did his gourd and his refuge, and be "exceeding glad" for it. But now he has to go as a beggar, an exiled pilgrim, to seek his food and home at the hands of a Gentile stranger--a heathen of a strange country, an impoverished widow.

But there is no hesitancy on his part--"The word of the Lord," (the living

Jehovah,) had come unto him, saying--"Arise! Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." The voice is no sooner heard than obeyed. Casting his mantle around him, forth he goes on the long and perilous journey--traveling probably by night to elude observation and avoid danger. Depressed, indeed, he could not fail at times to be, during that long and trying route, were it from nothing else than seeing the visible traces of God's judgment on every side, among the people to whom he was linked by imperishable ties. For himself, he knew that the Lord was his keeper. His long and faithful guardianship of him at Cherith, with all the encouraging memories of that secluded home, would brace his faith and inspire confidence for the future. He had there learned that all things are possible to him that believes. We may imagine the girded traveler--lonely, yet confident--"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"--"cast down, but not destroyed"--cheering his spirit as he pursues his way with the words of the great minstrel of his nation--"O my God, my soul is cast down within me--therefore will I remember you from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

Let us, like Elijah, be prepared for the Divine will, whatever it be. It may be mysterious. The summons in our case, as in his, may be to get us from some cool shady retreat--some brook of refreshing--to a Zarephath (lit., "a place of crucibles" or "furnaces" for melting metal). But there is some wise and gracious necessity in all God's dealings. We shall come to understand and adore their yet undiscovered, undeveloped meaning. Let us, meanwhile, hear the voice addressed to us, which was addressed to a loving disciple of a future age--"Did I not say unto you, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

There is surely no small comfort in the thought, suggested alike by Cherith and Zarephath, that the bounds of our habitation are divinely appointed. Our lots in life--our occupations, our positions, our dwellings--what the fatalist calls our destinies--what heathen mythology attributed to the Fates--all this is marked out by Him who "sees the end from the beginning." "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." It is He who takes us to Cherith--a place of solitude--a distant dwelling--it may be a distant land. It is He who takes us from

solitude--from grove and woodland and murmuring brook--from the green fields of childhood and youth, and brings us to some busy Zarephath--some thronged city with its "stunning tide of human care and crime." It is He who takes us to our sweet shelters of prosperity with their sparkling brooks of joy. It is He who, when He sees fit, hurries us into the "house of crucibles"--"the melting furnaces." He gives the gourd--He sends the worm. Oh, it is our comfort to know, in this mysterious, raveled, manifold life of ours, that the Great Craftsman has the threads of existence in His own hands--weaving the complex pattern, evolving good out of evil and order out of confusion. He who sent Elijah alike to Cherith and Sarepta for his own good, as well as the good of others--sent Onesimus, the runaway slave, to Rome--and Lydia, the seller of purple, to Philippi--and Zaccheus, the tax-gatherer, to Jericho. But one and all of these, and other notable examples, were brought there for their souls' everlasting welfare; and the new song was put into their lips--" Blessed be the Lord, for he has showed us his marvelous kindness in a strong city!" How many still can tell the same. Their choice of abode seemed to them something purely arbitrary and capricious. A mere trifle seemed, as they thought, to have determined or altered their whole future. But the finger of God had, unknown, been pointing. The inarticulate voice of God had been saying, as to Elijah, "Arise." "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men."

At last the Prophet has crossed the border territory, descending the mountain slope towards the southern entrance of the town. Sarepta or Zarephath, the modern Surafend, occupied a long ridge, overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean on one side, while its view northwards was bounded by the snow-capped summit of Hermon. Its streets were hallowed by the footsteps of the prophet of Israel; and, in after times, by the Presence of a Greater than he. For the probability is that in this same city, the Syrophenician who pleaded so earnestly for her daughter, had her faith commended, and her child restored.

Close by the city gate, Elijah beheld a woman, with sunken cheek and pallid eye, busied in gathering a few broken branches dried and withered

by the long-continued drought. The wearied traveler approached her. He solicits what in the circumstances was no ordinary favor, "Fetch me," said he, "a little water in a vessel that I may drink." Probably no drop of the refreshing element has crossed his lips since he drained the last mouthful from the cleft at Cherith. From the peculiarity of his clothing, this Gentile stranger seems at once to recognize him as a prophet--not of Baal, but of the God of Israel, and the adjoining kingdom. She speaks of Jehovah as his God--probably cognizant, also, of the fact that it was the God of the Hebrews who had sent the famine.

She at once assents to the request he had made. When on her way, however, for the draught of water, he recalls her by requesting a more startling kindness, that she bring along with it "a morsel of bread." The demand unlocks and unseals the hidden story of her woe. With the tear in her eye, she avows her inability. She is preparing for a sad and solemn future. That sunset in the western wave, is among the last her eye is to see! And had it been her own fate alone that was then engrossing her thoughts, these hot tears would not flow so fast. But there was another fond life in her home. One child had been left to cheer her widowhood. Why is he not here with her now, to help that last gathering for the evening meal? We can dimly surmise the reason. The parent had been able to buffet hitherto these long months of wasting famine; but the youthful sufferer, we may imagine, had sunk prostrate on the couch, from which, the heart that fondly doted upon him, feared he was never to rise. The few remaining crumbs in the empty barrel are barely sufficient to make one last meal. In the cruse of olive oil, there are but a few drops left to spread on the cakes. She is preparing to dole out the last pitiful morsel. Her emaciated hands are now engaged in gathering a little fuel to bake the scanty remains of her exhausted cupboard; then, casting herself by the side of her boy, she will calmly wait the slow lingering death.

The Prophet turns to her, and says--"Fear not; go and do as you have said." He tells her, however, to bake first a cake for him with the remains of the flour--"Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for you and your son--for thus says the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." With alacrity she obeys the



voice of the Hebrew stranger. She hurries to her lowly abode, little dreaming of the blessing in store for her from that dust-covered prophet of Israel; and that she was yet to experience the truth of the gospel saying, "Whoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Let us now proceed to gather a few special lessons from this new chapter in the Prophet's history, both in connection with the conduct of the widow; and also in connection with the dealings of the widow's God.

Mark, in the case of the widow, HER UNSELFISH KINDNESS. Place ourselves for a moment in her position. A starving, dying woman, reduced to earth's last morsel, with her own and only child sinking fast in her desolate cottage under the grip of biting famine. What rare unselfishness! when this stranger prophet (an alien in both nationality and in religion) comes and reveals himself a fellow-sufferer--the tear of sympathy steals to her wan cheek and sunken eye. No miserable exclusive feelings of difference in creed and country are allowed to interfere with the outflowings of tender compassion. Great was the sacrifice, in that season of burning drought, to part with a cup of water; and far more to surrender some of the crumbs of that rapidly-exhausting barrel. But with a combination of faith and unselfishness which have few parallels in Scripture, she hastens, in obedience to Elijah's request, to relieve his distress, and permit him to share the last pittance of her cupboard.

How lovely, in this selfish world, are such pictures of unselfish consideration for the needs, and sufferings and woes of others! How many there are who, if it be well with themselves, have no care for the necessities of their neighbors--who, if their own families are prospering, and their own cup filling, and their own circle uninvaded by poverty and sickness, listen with apathetic ear to the appeal of the helpless--turn with averted look from the pleading claim of 'tattered rags and bleak homes'! This woman's generosity was a freewill-offering, in the midst of her own intense sufferings; when pinching poverty was blanching her lips and ploughing deep furrows in her cheek. Alas! is it not to be feared--is it not to be confessed with shame (I speak regarding cases of 'virtuous poverty', of well authenticated need and suffering)--that a similar generosity and

kindness is often withheld, even where the giving involves no sacrifice--no diminishing of daily comforts? How frequent is the miserable spectacle, of men becoming more hardened and enclosed in selfishness with the very increase of their worldly substance--God storing their granaries with plenty, speeding their wheels of industry, wafting their ships with propitious gales, while they only pile up more greedily the gilded heap. And even if, in some such cases, there be entertained an undefined purpose of 'posthumous liberality'; they miss the present blessedness of being almoners of the Divine bounty, and of lighting up the bosoms of the wretched and outcast with a sunshine of joy.

Selfishness is the irreconcilable antagonist of Christianity. He cannot be a Christian who lives for self. "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his affections of compassion from him; how dwells the love of God in him?"

Let us learn, from the case of the widow of Zarephath, THE POWER OF FEEBLE INFLUENCES. She was a poor, lowly, depressed, hunger-stricken woman--unknown, perhaps, beyond the doors of her neighbors in the Phoenician town. Yet see exemplified that great power in moral dynamics--"the power of littles." It was but a little incident this, in a little-known life--the giving a little morsel of bread--and a small cup of water--a single word, and no more, of strengthening and comfort. But how manifold and important the results of that one little act! To herself--the prolongation of her own natural life, and that of her son--the commencement, as we believe, in both, of a nobler spiritual existence--God blessing her household, like that of Obed-edom of old. To the Prophet--introducing him in that time of drought and famine to a congenial home--perhaps his wavering faith revived and confirmed, not only by witnessing the unselfish love and kindness of this heathen woman--but by hearing, in that heathen land, and from heathen lips, what he had not listened to for a whole year until now--his own life--motto falling like heavenly music on his ear--"The Lord your God, Jehovah, lives!" To the Church of God--in having on record this beautiful example of simple faith and unselfish deed. How many, in the extremity of need, have learned a lesson of trust and hope from reading of the widow of Sarepta! How many a bereft child of poverty, in the depth of her agony, with a blank future before her and her little ones, has risen from this page

blotted with her tears, thanking God, and taking courage! Wherever this Bible is read, or this gospel is preached, there what this woman has done, shall be told as a memorial of her.

Never despise the power of feeble influences. Often when the giant's spear, the armor of brass, and the panoply of iron could do nothing, God has made use of the sling and brook-pebbles; the "broken pitchers," and "trumpets of rams' horns." It is worthy of note that this 'power of littles' is specially illustrated in Holy Writ, in connection with two widows--the one in the Old Testament and the other in the New. The widow of Sarepta, giving the last handful of her drained barrel--the widow at the temple-treasury, casting in her two mites. Never let any one say, 'I am of no use in the world--I can do no good--I can exercise no influence--God has clipped my wings--I am like a chained bird--I would soar, but I cannot!--this cage of poverty or of sickness keeps me shut up from the elements of activity and usefulness.'

Imprisoned one, "if you cannot soar, you can sing." If yours is the cage and not the wide blue sky, you can warble your song of cheerfulness and submission to the will of God. Remember, the song of the caged and captive bird has put music and high resolves into the patriot's heart. No, no, the widow who, it may be in the midst of poverty and wretchedness, exercises faith in God--the stricken sick one, laid for years on years on a couch of languishing, yet making that couch a radiating center of holy influences, can preach a silent sermon which will arrest and convince, when all the eloquence of press and pulpit may be but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

The domestic servant preserving intact her own honesty in the midst of purloining associates--the schoolboy defending purity and virtue, and frowning on vice in the midst of his playmates--the shopkeeper foregoing the tempting bribe or gain, in which sterling honor might be tainted or compromised--the Sabbath-School teacher gathering the waifs of poverty, and vice, and neglect, week after week, under his kindly eye--the district-visitor leaving the kindly word and kindly advice in the homes of the poor, or giving the kindly smile or kindly grasp when the timid word cannot come--the lowly working man gathering his children on his knee, and imbuing their young hearts with the never-to-be-forgotten lessons of

early piety--these are but illustrations and exemplifications of those countless little efforts--feeble influences--which have made the world greater and wiser and happier.

Mechanical science has to make the confession that she has lost the secret of those great powers which of old poised in mid-air the blocks of huge stone we still gaze upon with wonder in the pyramids of Cairo, and in the gigantic temples of Memphis and Thebes. But in moral dynamics the power of littles still remains. That lever is in every one's possession. If relics are disowned and repudiated in our Protestant Church, there are relics, better than material ones, to which we love to cling. That Barrel of meal and that Cruse of oil have been handed down for 3000 years as moral relics--heirlooms to the Church--lowly but significant trophies of faith, and love, and humble trust, which she delights to suspend on the walls of her temple! Go back in thought to that widow of Sarepta, and take courage from her example in doing little things for God and for His people. Hear her song of praise and thankfulness--"Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed. Commit your way unto the Lord. Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass--And he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday."

But to pass from the widow to the widow's God. The first and most prominent reflection suggested is, THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GRACE. This was the great lesson the Savior himself drew from the incident, on the occasion of His preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. "In the days of Elijah," He says, "when the heavens were shut up, and when great famine was throughout all the land, there were many widows in Israel." God could have hidden His prophet in the home of one of these. It might have been the cupboard of a Hebrew widow He replenished--her home He rescued from famine--her heart He made to sing for joy--the story of her faith and kindness He selected to go down in enduring memorial to the Church of the future. But He who acts how and when and as He pleases, directs His servant across the boundaries of the chosen kingdom, to the unlikeliest spot and home on the shores of the Great sea. He sends him amid one of the heathen races--to Baal's land, and to an idolatrous worshiper of Baal's shrines. He takes the children's bread and casts it to

Gentile dogs!

Let us adore the freeness of His mercy. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. Man has generally some reason for conferring his favors--some claim arising from person or pedigree, from character or attainments. But God's sole motive in conferring favors is His own free and gracious purpose. "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." He takes a Manasseh filling Jerusalem with blood, and makes him a monument of forgiveness. He takes a Saul breathing out his blasphemies, and converts him into the great Apostle. He takes a Samaritan leper and fills his tongue with gospel praise, while the nine of Jewish birth and privilege go thankless and ungrateful to their homes. He takes a crude heathen jailer, or an unprincipled tax-gatherer of Jericho, or a profligate woman of Capernaum, or a felon in his last agonies, while many encircled with the halo of natural virtues or with the prestige of religious education and training, are left to perish in their ungodliness and unbelief and pride!

He took as the founders of His Church and the ambassadors of His cause--not philosophers of Rome, nor polished Greeks, nor learned Rabbis--but a handful of unlettered fishermen from the villages of half-heathen Galilee. And it is the same principle we recognize still in His dealings. He often passes by the great, the powerful, the rich, the learned, the educated--yes, even the virtuous and the amiable; and He crowds the marriage-supper of the King--from the highways and hedges--with the poor and the illiterate, the outcast and prodigal. He often leaves palace and castle and stately mansion and lettered hall, and enters the humble cottage and the poor man's garret. He leaves the nominal British Christian, the polished European, and He takes the poor native of Africa, or the cannibal of the South Seas, and converts these children of darkness into children of light. He leaves noble vessels to lie on the sands on which they have been stranded, and He takes the lowly unsightly craft around them and sets them floating on the waters.

May not this be the solemn reflection of some whose eyes fall on these pages? My old companions--those at one time better and more promising than I--have been long ago scattered as wrecks on life's ocean, entangled in the swirling vortex, and hurried down into nameless depths of infamy.

And how is it that I am made to differ?--that that tale of misery and ruin--that which, in the case of others, has broken a parent's heart, whitened his hairs with the snows of premature age, and sent him sobbing and halting to the grave--how is it that I have escaped these dread temptations; and that, while others have broken loose with a worse than maniac's madness, I am this day sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in my right mind? Not unto me, O God! not unto me, but unto Your name be all the glory! I read the reason, written in gleaming letters, in the heights and depths of Your own Infinite love. By Your grace (Your free, sovereign, unmerited grace alone) I am what I am!

Let us farther learn GOD'S RECOMPENSE OF UNSELFISH KINDNESS. So far as we can infer, this poor woman assented to the appeal of the famished, fainting Prophet, without any hope of recompense or reward. Those who are themselves suffering calamity are generally most ready in their straitened circumstances to lend a kindly ear to the woes of others. Just as we may have seen that the mother, with naked feet and hungry children, singing her mournful song on the streets, is most willingly and generously relieved by those who have known, by sad personal experience, what similar exigencies are.

The widow of Zarephath went back for the vessel of water to assuage the Prophet's thirst with the heavy thought and certainty burdening her heart, that the hours of her own life and that of her boy were numbered. But God is not unmindful of her work of faith and her labor of love in that she ministered to one of His saints. Hers was the "scattering and yet increasing." She had paid her little mite into the bank of Heaven--in lending to His servant, she had lent to the Lord; and back comes the hundredfold interest--the payment with a divine munificent repayment. She experienced, temporally and spiritually, the reality of a gospel promise, afterwards uttered by the lips of Truth itself--"Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest." The barrel and cruse are replenished; the shadows of death are warded off from her home--and Heaven's blessing descends, better than all. In giving of her earthly pittance, this idolatress learned, that the God of Israel was not like Baal, but a living Being in whom the lowly, the poor, and helpless might trust.

In exchange for the "daily bread which perishes," she received the nobler recompense of the heavenly. Her lone heart was taught a truth which no Baal could utter--"Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and your Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." "She and he and her house did eat many days--and the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by Elijah."

The old economy dealt largely in temporal blessings. Good deeds then, were generally acknowledged by temporal recompense. It is different under the new economy. Its recompenses and rewards point rather to the future. But this does not lessen or impair the truth and certainty of the Divine promises--"Those who honor me, I will honor"--"Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over"--"If you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noonday. And the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought." If not now, there is a time of recompense at hand for all pure, lofty, beneficent, unselfish kindness done in Christ's name, and out of love for Him and His people. On the Great Day of God, what is to be the test and evidence of a saving personal interest in Jesus? What is the touchstone which the great Savior-Judge Himself is to apply in the case of the myriad crowd sisted at His bar?--"I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in. Inasmuch as you did it" to the greatest, such as that Prophet; or to the least, such as that famishing Lazarus at the gate, "you did it unto ME!"

And if there be one other thought yet suggested to us, it is this--GOD'S TENDER CARE OF THE WIDOW. How specially was the Widow's case provided for under the Old Testament economy--"You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry." "When you cut down your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it--it shall be for the stranger, and for the fatherless, and for the widow...When you beat your olive-tree, you shall not go over the boughs again--it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the

widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward--it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."

Who can fail to remember, in New Testament story, the scene outside the gate of Nain? How kindly and beneficently the great Sympathizer approaches the chief mourner, and utters first the gentle "Weep not;" and then the word of power which brings back her loved one to her side! There were, we may well believe, other homes and other parents in Galilee similarly bereft at that moment and needing support. What took the Savior's steps to the city of Nain? Why select that funeral crowd amid the many wending their way at that doleful sunset hour to the 'long home'? Are we wrong in surmising that, had any disciple asked the question--had they ventured to probe His heart of love--He would have given, in all probability, the touching reason assigned by the Evangelist, when his enumeration of the elements and ingredients in that bereft one's sorrow rises to this climax--"And she was a widow?"

That Divine love and sympathy remain unchanged. God is to this hour, as He ever was, "a judge of the widow in His holy habitation." The name of that Savior who stood at the gates of Nain, and mingled His own tears with the widow's there, is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." God's promises are the same to all--irrespective of rank, or age, or country. Around this Treasury of comfort for the lone sufferer and sorrower, rich and poor may meet together. The cottager's widow in her lone hut, and the widowed monarch in her sackclothed halls, are heirs to one and the same promise of the widow's God--"Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me."

## **5. LIGHTS AND SHADOWS**

1 Kings 17:17-24

Some time later, the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. She then said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you



done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son?" But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the boy's body from her, carried him up to the upper room, where he lived, and laid the body on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, why have you brought tragedy on this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?"

And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, please let this child's life return to him." The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he came back to life! Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look, your son is alive!" he said.

Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you."

"Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction."--Isaiah 48:10

In our last chapter we left Elijah under the roof of the widow of Zarephath. The famine was still raging amid the thousands around. But as each morning's sun rose on the inhabitants of this tranquil home, lo, the barrel and the cruse which the evening meal seemed to have exhausted were again replenished. God's mercies were "new to them every morning, and His faithfulness every night."

We can only venture to surmise how the Prophet's hours, in this secluded dwelling, would be spent. We can follow him in thought, as at times, perhaps, he wandered up the rocky ridges which flanked the town, gazing now on the everlasting snows of Hermon, now on the wood-crowned top of Tabor--thus beholding both "Tabor and Hermon" "rejoicing in God's name." Or, as at other times, he would wander along the shores of "the great and wide sea," in adoring contemplation of Him who takes up the waters in the hollow of His hand, and who "gives the sea His decree." Yet again, when the barrel had yielded its evening supply, and the lamp had been lighted from the unfailing oil-cruse, we can picture him unfolding to these two children of Pagan Phoenicia, the name and works and divine character of the God of Israel--dwelling on the glorious promise spoken to the fathers, but in the blessings of which all the families of the earth were to participate. We can picture him narrating to them the eventful

scenes in his national annals--Egypt--the exodus--the wilderness--the conquest of Canaan--the wonders of the old prophetic age--the splendor of the reigns of David and Solomon. We can think, perhaps, of Prophet and widow and child joining their voices together in the psalms of the great Hebrew minstrel--many of them so applicable to their own circumstances and experience--"Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; who keeps truth forever; who executes judgment for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord preserves the strangers; he relieves the fatherless and widow." Or, more appropriate still in that heathen Tyrian home--"And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat your favor. Instead of your fathers shall be your children, whom you may make princes in all the earth. I will make your name to be remembered in all generations--therefore shall the people praise you forever and ever!"

We have every reason to believe that these two heathen-born Phoenicians--mother and child--would, under the training of the Hebrew stranger, be brought to a saving knowledge of divine truth. While led to see that Baal was a mute, insensible idol, they would be taught also to love and reverence that God who had given deliverance in the hour of their extremity, and for soul as well as body, learn to offer the prayer--"Give us this day our daily bread."

Moreover, "that church in the house" forms a significant incident in sacred story, prefigurative of gospel times. Suggestive surely was the fact of a messenger of Heaven, a prophet of Israel, being sent to a home in distant Phoenicia to unfold to heathen hearts the way of salvation. In this sense Elijah occupies the illustrious position of a first missionary to the Gentiles--bequeathing, by his example to the Church of the future--the Church of our own age--a lesson of the duty which we owe to our benighted brethren in pagan lands--when, in obedience to the commission of its Great Head, the heralds of the cross go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

But a dark season is at hand for that lowly home at Zarephath. Perhaps it was with this widow, as with many among us still--in her state of

comparative prosperity--of exemption, at all events, from the pressure of famine so severely felt all around--she may have been beginning to forget the hand which was filling her empty cupboard, and warding off poverty from her dwelling. Miraculously fed from day to day--seeing the barrel and the cruse each morning recruited with the needed supply--she may have begun to feel too confidently secure--that her "mountain was standing strong"--and that she might safely calculate on a permanent immunity from the inroads of trial.

How apt are we, after a season of long-continued blessing--unbroken prosperity--to indulge in this spirit of boastful independence--taking our daily comforts--food--health--friends--children, as matters of course. We may see in the case of others--these strong pillars--these "beautiful rods"--bowed and broken--but our inmost thought and feeling is, "I am all secure--I need not fear!" So may have meditated the Sarepta widow. And the last trial she would ever have anticipated, would probably be the very one that was in store for her. With appalling suddenness, the little life--the light of her dwelling--is extinguished! "There is no breath left in him."

Since this beloved and only child had been given back to her from the gates of famine and death, we may imagine her heart-strings had entwined more tenderly than ever around him; he was every day growing up more of a companion and solace to her--a pledge of unspeakable blessing in her latter years--when his arms would toil for her, and his prayers would comfort her, and his hands at last would close her eyes in death. Sad, indeed, that that one lone star which twinkled in her skies should be quenched! Better it had been if, two years ago, his sun had gone down in opening day, than have so mournful a setting now. His being spared only to be taken, seemed a cruel mocking of her grief and tears. All her hopes and joys perished in that hour of woe. She could bear to see the barrel of meal yielding a diminished supply--she could endure to look on an empty, unreplenished cruse--but to gaze on that withered flower, lying cold and lifeless in her bosom--to lose HIM, this was death indeed!

We cannot, perhaps, wonder that for a time, faith, and patience, and submission, were tempted to give way. In the bitterness of her bereft soul, she thus upbraids the Prophet, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son?" The

words were a cutting reflection on Elijah, as well as an insinuation against Elijah's God. It was as if she had said, "What have I done to provoke at your hands so terrible a calamity? Is this your recompense and requital for my sheltering your defenseless head? In pity, I gave you welcome to my humble roof. Have these been your answered prayers for your benefactress? Has your God come, in this fearful retributive sense, to be the 'Judge of the widow?' Have you come, a wolf in sheep's clothing, to slay my son?"

How striking is the contrast between this agony of her impassioned grief and the calm composure manifested when she first met Elijah. Then, her child's death was equally imminent, and threatened, also, under a more terrible form. Her words on that occasion, in speaking of partaking with him of her last morsel, were these, "That we may eat it and die." She had familiarized herself with the approach of the last enemy--it was the passive, silent, submission of blank despair.

Now, however, it was "sudden death"--death unexpected--death when she was handling the full cup. It was her gourd withering, not by a process of slow, gradual decay--drooping leaf by leaf; but it was, as with Jonah, the luxuriant plant--entwined fresh and beauteous around her evening bower--becoming, in a night, a mass of blighted, withered leaves. In the words of the patriarch of Ur, "The morning was even as the shadow of death."

Nor can we fail to admire Elijah's conduct in the trying circumstances. We know to what course his natural character would have impelled him. Hurt at the unkind and unjust accusation--his fiery nature might have prompted him to retaliate. He might, with an angry word, have answered the ungenerous suspicion breathed by that broken heart. But there is no syllable of recrimination or resentment. He says nothing (as he might have done) about the blessing he had been, and brought, to her household. He makes no reference to the barrel and the cruse beside them, the silent witnesses of God's mercy and goodness. Deeply touched at the impressive sight of death--and, perhaps, with a tender love for the youthful victim--he makes kind allowance for the anguish of the childless widow.

Saying, "Give me your son," he takes the cold marble statue, the dead body, in his arms, and carries it to his own couch. In Eastern dwellings in these times--as at the present day, there was generally a room higher than the rest of the building, called "alliyeh," or, as it is here translated, "loft," where strangers and guests were accommodated. In the better class of houses, it was regarded as the place of honor. To this upper room, Elijah bears the lifeless child. That quiet chamber echoes to the voice of impassioned prayer. The Prophet, though he had hid and controlled his feelings before the sorrowing mother, evidently felt keenly the severity of the blow. He dreaded lest the dealings of his God might be misjudged by that crushed mourner, and "he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, have You also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?"

Laying the corpse upon the bed, he stretched himself upon it--not for the purpose of imparting, as some have thought, natural warmth to revive and quicken the dormant physical energies--but rather, it would seem, to communicate the quickening power of God. He knew that He who had "brought the evil" could alone remove it. Three times, as he overlaid the dead body, did the importunate cry ascend, "O Lord, my God, I beg you let this child's life come into him again!"

The prayer is heard--the limbs begin to move--the eye dilates--the pulse beats. Back comes the departed spirit. "The Prophet of Fire" has rekindled the cold ashes on this desolated hearth; and carrying in his arms the living trophy of God's goodness, he hushes the sobs of the mother with the joyful announcement--"See, your son lives!" Her tears are dried. Her murmurings cease. Her faith in Israel's Jehovah is confirmed. "Now"--is the utterance of her bounding heart--"by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

From this touching and suggestive episode in the Prophet's history, we may gather, as one out of many PRACTICAL LESSONS, that bereavement is not necessarily a Divine judgment on account of any special sin. The widow, in the first moments of her grief, as she sat with her dead son upon her lap--the hot tears coursing down her cheek--was led to form the hasty conclusion, that God had sent her this heavy chastisement as a

rebuke and retribution for some previous transgression. "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son?"

Many, we know, in the season of bereavement are apt to draw a similar unwarranted deduction--saying to themselves what Job's unfeeling friends reproachfully addressed to him, as they pointed to the miserable bed of dust and ashes on which he lay--"Such, surely, are the dwellings of the wicked; and this is the place of him that knows not God." But we may thus often misinterpret the reason and motive of the Divine dealings. Our Lord, in one of His great miracles--curing the blind man at the temple gate--declared emphatically, in opposition to the false and gratuitous assumption of the Pharisees, that it was in consequence of no sin either of the sufferer or his parents that he had been doomed to grope his way in darkness at noontide, but "that the works of God might be made manifest in him." Let us not, therefore, hastily surmise when God at times sees fit to empty the chairs and hush the loved voices of our households, that some specific sin must have evoked that special judgment and drawn forth the arrow from the Almighty's quiver. At the very moment when the darkness of death was shadowing the home of Bethany, "Jesus," we read, "loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus."

We may farther learn from the incident we have been considering, that no amount of good works, or of active service in the cause of God, will exempt us from trial. This widow had rendered the greatest benefit which the Church of Christ at that age could receive, by affording shelter to its most valued servant and defender, the great Prophet of Heaven. Yet she was smitten. Her generous pity and kindness to God's ambassador could not shield her from the assaults of trial! It becomes us, whatever be the Divine dealings, never to ask with the voice of complaint and querulous upbraiding, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?"

No good deeds or lofty virtues or self-denying services, will purchase for us immunity from His righteous ordination, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom. Whatever be our lot or portion, be it ours to "rejoice with trembling." The vessel best manned and equipped may strike on the sunken rock, as well as the crudest and most unseaworthy craft. No, God's most favored saints are often put in

the foremost ranks of chastisement. Upon the most fruit-bearing trees of His garden He often uses His pruning-knife. Trial, in its varied forms, has ever been employed by Him as a powerful means of leading to deeper convictions of sin, as well as a salutary quickener of spiritual graces. He knows what discipline is best fitted to draw the soul to Himself; and often does He show that none is so effectual as that which was employed in this home at Zarephath--snapping the ties which bind us to the creature--disuniting us from earthly to bind us to heavenly things. How many can tell--"I date my first deep sense of sin--my first lively apprehension of Christ and of Divine realities--to the hour when my dwelling was rifled of its cherished treasures. I would have been to this moment sunk in the sleep of death, had He not roused me from my perilous dream, and taken husband or wife, brother or sister or child!"

This, however, reminds us of the deep mystery there is in many of God's providential dispensations. Amid all the homes of that region, who would have expected that the one to be so terribly smitten, was that which had, for two years, kindly screened the head of the exiled Prophet of Israel. Surely, we might think, if there be one dwelling more than another secure from the assaults of the dread invader, it will be that of the widow of Sarepta, and of the hope and solace of her declining years, who, if spared, might be spared to be an honored instrument in the defense and maintenance of the true religion. And yet, behold, the desire of her eyes and the delight of her heart taken away by a stroke!

How often are we baffled and confounded by similar dealings--useless lives spared, and useful lives taken. Decayed scaffoldings, crumbling props remaining--and the strong and vigorous, the virtuous and useful, swept down in a moment! There is no present 'key' to these dark dispensations. Many a weeping eye cannot read them through blinding tears. But the day is coming when we shall read them--when they shall be luminous with love. Earth may not, as in the case of the widow of Phoenicia, give us back our dead--no prophet's voice can reanimate the silent ashes--no anguish of prayer recall the winged spirit. But we joyfully believe the day is coming when we shall write under every mystic providence, "He has done all things well."

Yes, bereaved ones, you shall no more weep over early graves, when you

yourselves pass upwards to the realms of glory, and hear from your loved ones as they are waiting to greet you at the door of heaven, that by an early death they were "taken away from the evil to come." Meanwhile let us rejoice, like Elijah, in the assurance, that "the Lord reigns"--that all bereavements and chastisements are His appointments--"You" (the Prophet says, addressing his God in prayer)--"YOU" (the living Jehovah) "have brought this evil." Oh comforting thought! enough to dry all tears and silence all murmurings--"Is there evil in the city," in the cottage, in the palace--is there evil which blights some unknown poor man's dwelling--is there evil which clothes a nation in mourning, "and the Lord has not done it?"

The narrative farther exhibits, what we have already had occasion to note in the Prophet's life, and to which we shall have frequent cause to revert--the energy and power of prayer. Not when he supplicates that Heaven should seal up its rains and dews from a whole nation--not when on Carmel, as we shall find him before long, invoking judgement on Baal and his priests--is his prayer more earnest than now, in this lowly dwelling, when not the lives of thousands, but the life of one little child, is the subject of his intercession.

He seems, indeed, to have felt personally deeply moved under this sudden bereavement. The strong, heroic, brave man could bear with equanimity any ills affecting himself, but he was stung to the quick under the imputation of his benefactress. He could not brook the allegation of bringing evil on the home of one who had opened her door to a friendless stranger. His prayer is an urgent appeal to God--(we had almost said a bold remonstrance)--as a just and merciful and righteous Being. "It cannot be, Lord," he seems to say; "You can not allow this reproach to descend on me and on Your great Name! You, who have made the widow's cause Your own, oh, do not thus recompense her kindness to me! Let not this heathen woman say, as she points to her childless home and buried treasure, 'Where is now your God?'"

We can imagine the Tishbite pacing up and down his little chamber in importunate, impassioned prayer--but yet with no doubt as to the result of his intercession. It was a mighty demand, indeed, for a mortal to make, a request that had no previous parallel in praying lips. It was nothing



short of this, that unassailable Death be stormed in his own strongholds--that the iron crown be plucked from the head of the King of terrors. When Elijah does manifest faith, it is always of the noblest type. He would doubtless now revert to his life-motto--the first utterance of his prophetic mission--"Jehovah lives." Confiding in the "El Shaddai," he feels confident that He who gave him his brook at Cherith, will restore this more sacred living brook which had been so suddenly dried in its earthly channel. Strong in faith, giving glory to God, he proceeds to the couch where the lifeless child lay, and to the act of awakening. Once more he stands before us as delineated by James, "the righteous man," bearing the glorious testimony as to the "availing"--the "much availing power"--of "effectual fervent prayer!"

Finally, we have here a glimpse given us of the doctrine of the Resurrection. This was a truth dimly unfolded in Old Testament times. Its full revelation was reserved for Him who, under a more glorious economy, "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." As the gladdening words sounded in the mother's ears, "See, your son lives!" not only was that widow herself taught that the God of Elijah had a power which no Baal ever had, in imparting life to the still ashes--reanimating the cold clay, and putting light into the rayless eyes; but it was a parable to the Jewish Church of that great gospel disclosure, that there is a day coming "when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live."

No, more--from the fact which is expressly recorded in the inspired narrative, that Elijah brought down the living child from the upper chamber into the house, "and delivered him to his mother," we have the precious thought suggested, under a significant figure, that in that glorious resurrection-morning friends will be reunited to friends--there will be undying reunions of the departed in the Church of the glorified--mothers restored to the embrace of children, and lost little ones given back to their parents! How will the happiness of that day of complete triumph be augmented and enhanced, as death-divided relatives, re-linked in bonds of purified earthly affection and love, will be able to exclaim to one another, See, my son! my parent! my brother! my long-lost one!--see, HE LIVES!

## 6. OBADIAH AND THE SEARCH FOR PROVENDER

1 Kings 18:1-6

After many months passed, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!" So Elijah went to appear before Ahab.

Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria. So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Now Obadiah was a devoted follower of the Lord. Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had hidden one hundred of them in two caves. He had put fifty prophets in each cave and had supplied them with food and water.) Ahab said to Obadiah, "We must check every spring and valley to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules." So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

"Your silver and gold will be of no use to you on that day of the Lord's anger. For the whole land will be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. He will make a terrifying end of all the people on earth. Beg the Lord to save you—all you who are humble, all you who uphold justice. Walk humbly and do what is right. Perhaps even yet the Lord will protect you from his anger on that day of destruction." Zeph. 2:3

Elijah had come to the lowly dwelling where still he tarries--a homeless Jewish prophet--an unbefriended stranger. Now, we have good reason to suppose, he was regarded, alike by mother and son, as an angel of God--a Heaven-sent messenger of mercy--who had "delivered their souls from death, their eyes from tears, and their feet from falling."

We know not how long he continued at his adopted home after the miraculous raising of the child. But be the time long or short, he quietly waits the Divine will regarding his departure. As we have already noted, in speaking of the place of his former seclusion at Cherith, so still more

on the present occasion might he have been disposed, with his ardent impulsive spirit, to fret under this long withdrawal from active public work. Three of the best years of his life spent in inaction! He who could exercise (as we shall find afterwards) an almost magic power over multitudes--why should he be pent up for this protracted period in a cottage of Gentile Phoenicia, when he might have been doing mighty deeds amid the many thousands of Israel? Why should so noble a vessel be left lazily sleeping on its shadows in the harbor, when, it might have been out wrestling with the storm, conveying priceless stores to needy hearts?

But it was enough for Elijah, now as formerly, to feel assured that it was part of the Divine plan. He felt that he was glorifying his God, just because he was occupying his assigned and appointed place for the time, as much in that humble habitation as he did on the heights of Carmel. The Christian poet represents those angels in heaven who "only stand and wait," as "serving"--doing their Lord's will--as truly as the swift-winged messengers who carry to and fro the behests of His pleasure--and of the Church militant on earth, "Thus says Jehovah," by the mouth of His prophet, "In returning and rest shall you be saved--in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

We can serve God in rest and in quietness--in the noiseless tenor of an uneventful existence--as well as in the feverish bustle or prominent position of an active one. Let this be the comfort of those whose lot may be lowly, obscure, uninfluential. They are accepted according to what they have, not according to what they have not. The domestic servant in her kitchen; the mechanic with his begrimed hands at his daily toil; the weaver at his shuttle, the cobbler at his stall; the ploughman at his team, the lonely sick one on his or her couch of languishing--these being each in the way of duty, or necessity, may, in their peculiar sphere and work, as truly glorify their Maker and Redeemer, as the philanthropist at his desk solving great social problems, or the minister of the gospel in his pulpit; swaying thousands by his words!

Elijah, however, did not love for its own sake inglorious ease. So long as it was his Lord's will, he remained seated under this pleasant vine and fig-tree. But, like a true soldier, he was prepared at the bugle note to jump

from his pillow, assume his armor, and rush into the fight. That summons in due time was heard. "After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show yourself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." He did not hesitate. With cheerful alacrity he grasps his pilgrim staff, flings the prophet mantle once more around his shoulders, and crosses into the valleys of Samaria.

How his spirit must have been bowed with sadness as he traversed the famine-stricken land! Wherever he looked, the scourge of God--the scourge of sin met his eye. The green pastures and the still waters, of which the great Hebrew poet sang, gleamed no longer under the joyous sunshine. Hushed were the notes of the shepherd's pipe, and the bleatings of the flocks. The sickles hang rusting on the closed granary doors. A hundred skeleton forms flitted with glazed eyes across his path--the vintage shoutings had ceased--the fig-tree no longer blossomed--there was no fruit in the vine--the labor of the olive tree had failed--the fields yielded no food. Oh, what a comfort, amid these scenes of misery, to repose on the word of the living Jehovah, "I will send rain upon the earth;" knowing that what the Lord had spoken he would faithfully perform; that perhaps but a few brief days would elapse, before the funeral pall should be rolled aside.

But a new character here reveals himself in the sacred narrative in the person of Obadiah, the prime minister or steward of Ahab's palace. We are called to witness in him another wondrous instance of God's sovereign grace. We have had occasion, in a recent chapter, to refer to a signal example of that sovereignty in the case of a heathen widow--a votary of Phoenician Baal. We have now a miracle and monument of divine mercy in the court of a wicked and licentious king of Israel--for "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly."

How, we may ask, could a worshiper of Jehovah reside in the midst of so much degeneracy, idolatry, and crime? How could the lily rear its head amid these thorns--this sheep of the fold survive in the midst of ravening wolves? We answer--just in the same way as divine grace, in the earlier part of this century, molded and quickened and sustained such men as Wilberforce, Fowell Buxton, and others, in the midst of the lax, irreligious society, and the dissolute, licentious court-life of England. Yes, and just

as, in the midst of much ridicule and derision in the present day, there are those in the high places of the land, who are able boldly to take up their cross, and who count this the brightest gem in their coronets--"We serve the Lord Jesus."

The natural influence of the corrupt moral atmosphere of Ahab's court, would be to rear, in the person of the chief officer, a cruel, unscrupulous tyrant--the creature and myrmidon of Ahab and Jezebel--who would climb to power and favor by his severity against the prophets of the God of Israel. If Obadiah had been a base time-server, his life aim would have been to assist and instigate the diabolical designs of the royal persecutors. But the grace of God and the fear of God were in his heart, and he knew no other fear. Under the insolence of oriental rule, he might well have dreaded the combined influence of the queen and the idolatrous priests on the despot's will, in compassing his degradation and ruin; but, sustained by the power of religious principle, this righteous man was bold as a lion. He gave one specially unmistakable proof of his heroism and true moral chivalry--for when Jezebel was involving the prophets of Jehovah in an indiscriminate massacre, Obadiah hid and sheltered them by fifties in a cave, and fed them on bread and water.

It is easy for us, in an age of fashionable profession, to espouse the Christian name, and subscribe the Christian creed, and call ourselves worshipers of the Lord God of Elijah. But it was no ordinary test of spiritual courage to stand alone, a witness for Jehovah in the midst of a godless palace--to raise a solitary altar--a solitary protest on the side of insulted Goodness--when polluted incense was rising from Baal's shrines all around, and the very people of the land were in guilty accord with their monarch, ignoring their great heritage--the truth bequeathed to them in sacred trust--"Jehovah lives!"

Obadiah, moreover, is a remarkable testimony to that singular respect which sterling character and worth command, even from irreligious men. Uprightness, purity, consistency, honesty of purpose, have always an irresistible influence and charm even to base natures. Bloated vice stands rebuked and abashed in the presence of virtue. The wretched slave of sin and pollution respects the purity which degrading habit forbids himself to practice. Herod--the parallel of Ahab in the gospel history--hated John's

religion and that of his Master; but he could not help admiring and respecting his honesty, self-sacrifice, self-denial, and boldness. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes his very enemies to be at peace with him." As it was with Joseph in the court of heathen Pharaoh, or Daniel in the palace of heathen Babylon, Obadiah's piety, worth, and goodness exalted him to the highest honors which his sovereign had in his power to bestow. Ahab may have hated from his heart the Jehovah-worshiper--but he revered and revered the faithful counselor, with his stainless honor and unblemished life.

But Obadiah is brought before us in connection with a mission in which he was engaged in conjunction with his royal master--a mission which, oriental writers tell us, is frequently still undertaken in seasons of temporary drought by chiefs and petty kings in Syria, Persia, and Hindostan. Fountains of water--so precious in pastoral districts, and specially in the desert--are spoken of in the figurative language of the East as "eyes;" and when these eyes--these fountains--in a season of great scarcity are closed, it seems to be considered a sort of royal prerogative to visit them in person; as if some charm or magical power were possessed by the chiefs of the land to reach or bribe their locked-up treasures. It was in accordance with this immemorial usage that Ahab said unto Obadiah, "Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks--peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

We shall conclude this chapter by drawing TWO LESSONS from the conduct of Ahab as here presented to us.

Let us note the lowliness and cruelty of a selfish nature. How terrible--how appalling must have been the scenes which presented themselves to the eye of the king in this strange journey! But what are we told was his object in thus traversing his dominions, either all alone or probably with his staff of followers? Noble would it have been to minister consolation to the dead and dying, even by his presence and sympathy, or to devise means in the desperate circumstances to ameliorate the condition of his famishing subjects. But he has no higher, no other object than to save his

animals--his mules and horses! Let the horses and mules--let the royal herds browsing in the park of Jezreel--let them be saved. Let the coursers be fed and kept alive which grace his cavalcade or draw his chariot--let fountains and brooks and patches of verdure be diligently sought for them; but let the people be left to their miserable fate!

Has this intense selfishness, this guilty squandering on personal pleasure, to the exclusion of the claims of human misery and woe, been confined to Ahab or his age? Alas! may not the conduct of Ahab be seen in many still, who lavish a fortune on the animals which perish, while they withhold the humblest mite from the starving orphan or the perishing brother or sister? Do we then condemn these or kindred luxuries? By no means. In this mighty country, wealth was given to be enjoyed, as well as employed. Whatever a man's tastes may be, if innocent and ennobling, let these, within due limitation, be cultivated and gratified. Only, (and here is the qualification,) the pampering of self must not be at the expense of the prior and pre-eminent claims of the destitute and needy. A man is entitled to turn, like Ahab, to his stables; to his horses and mules--his carriages and equipages; only after he has resolved this question in the sight of God, and of his own conscience, "Have I done my duty to the poor? Have I answered, according to my means, the calls of distress? Have I given my proportion to that languishing mission cause? Have I helped as I ought that starving charity?" Yes! Then, have your luxuries as you like, and enjoy them with satisfaction.

When one goes--shall we say, to see some country residence with its lordly manor--some modern park of Jezreel with its antlered children of the forest feeding in picturesque groups, or bounding through the glades--or when, leaving the park, you enter the ancestral halls which wealth has been permitted to enrich with rare works of art--walls glowing with lavish decoration, hung with the priceless creations of genius--how is the pleasure of gazing on all enhanced, when you are told that the owner scatters with princely liberality the gifts of fortune; that he is known for miles around as the benefactor of the poor; and that missions abroad and charities at home would feel terribly the blank of his name and generosity!

Or, how a new sunshine seems to light up hall and corridor within, and

landscape outside--as, from some oriel window, you gaze on school and church amid the village trees, which Christian munificence has reared, or on smiling cottages, which the open hand and the large heart have built for the aged and infirm to spend the evening of life!

But take another case. How the dream of delight and satisfaction vanishes, when you enter the drawing-room which wealth has furnished with lavish costliness--enter it with the pledge-paper in your hand--headed with the urgent claim of a starving neighborhood, or, it may be, a starving empire--and from the jeweled hand to which you consigned it, you have it returned with the answer, "I cannot afford it!" Cannot afford it!! The grotesque figures on wall and tapestry, on slab and pedestal, silently refute the lie. The mute creations of genius smile blushing and incredulously from their gilded heights. The pampered dog on his velvet couch glances up with reproachful look. The horses standing at the door, fling the foam from their polished bits in sympathetic sarcasm and scorn! This is not an overdrawn picture. Such extreme instances may be rare; but such could be photographed from real life.

There are such houses with this grotesque, selfish misery--gilded dungeons with cold icicles for their tenants; frigid themselves, and freezing all around; who have abundance to lavish on self, but nothing to spare for their brother man--or the cause of the Divine Brother-man who died for them! Wealth is an dreadful trust! How solemnly will the thought of mis-spent wealth confront many on a death-bed--What would Ahab, if time for reflection had been allowed him at the hour of his death--what would he then have thought of this saying of his manhood--manhood in its prime and glory?--"Go into the land, unto all fountains of waters, and unto all brooks peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the animals."

We may learn yet farther, the terribleness of unimproved warnings. What a mournful picture have we here. For three years God had tried this monarch with sore judgments. He had shut up heaven, closed the fountains of the land, decimated his people with famine. The voice seemed too loud, too solemn and dreadful to be disregarded. We might have expected to see Ahab, like the heathen king of Nineveh, put sackcloth on his loins and dust on his head, calling his people to



humiliation and repentance. But, alas! the Divine monition seems utterly disregarded. God has emptied His quiver upon him--but arrow after arrow has bounced back from that heart of adamant. He has neither tear for his own guilt, nor tear for his suffering subjects. So far as we are told, the one miserable, petty thought which fills that narrow soul is, to get provender for his stable, and save his mules and horses. Ah, terrible, indeed, it is, when judgments thus lead to an open defiance and resistance of the Divine will; a mocking of His hand, a laughing to scorn of His righteous reproofs--no penitence, no remorse; but rather a more intense selfishness. This miserable king fought against his trial--fought against God--rushing against the Almighty's shield!

Let those on whom chastisement has been laid remember that affliction itself is no blessing unless it be improved. It is the reverse. An unsanctified trial becomes a curse. It hardens if it does not soften. It is like the heat of the sun, which melts the wax, but hardens the clay. Affliction never leaves us as it finds us. If it does not bring the soul nearer to God, it sends it farther from Him. If the result is not improvement, it is deterioration. And what then? When the Divine patience has been wearied and exhausted, the irrevocable doom must go forth--"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone!"

For the space of three years God had spoken to Ahab by severe judgment; for three years He had blighted his land, and arrested the fall of rain and dew. It was for the same period, the husbandman, in the Gospel parable, waited for fruit on his cumbering fig-tree--"Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none; cut it down, why cumberest it the ground?" Three years! Far, far longer than this, may He have been dealing with many of us! dealing by mercies--dealing by chastisements. What has been the result? Has it been, as in the case of Ahab, only a stouter-hearted rebellion--an intenser selfishness--a deeper love of the world--a life of pleasure, which is a life of death? the guilty cumberer--a cumberer still; robbing the ground of space which others would more worthily occupy--drinking in dews and sunshine for its own useless existence, which might load other boughs with plenteous fruit, and make the world better and happier. Can such expect always to be borne with? Can such dream of continuing to presume on the Divine

forbearance? The voice of the Intercessor, in the case of such, may even now be heard, for the last time, pleading with despised and injured Mercy--"Lord, let it alone this year also--and if it bears fruit, well--and if not, then, after that, you shall cut it down!"

## 7. THE CONVOCATION ON MOUNT CARMEL

1 Kings 18:7-22

As Obadiah was walking along, he saw Elijah coming toward him. Obadiah recognized him at once and fell to the ground before him. "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" he asked.

"Yes, it is," Elijah replied. "Now go and tell your master I am here."

"Oh, sir," Obadiah protested, "what harm have I done to you that you are sending me to my death at the hands of Ahab? For I swear by the Lord your God that the king has searched every nation and kingdom on earth from end to end to find you. And each time when he was told, 'Elijah isn't here,' King Ahab forced the king of that nation to swear to the truth of his claim. And now you say, 'Go and tell your master that Elijah is here'! But as soon as I leave you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you away to who knows where. When Ahab comes and cannot find you, he will kill me. Yet I have been a true servant of the Lord all my life. Has no one told you, my lord, about the time when Jezebel was trying to kill the Lord's prophets? I hid a hundred of them in two caves and supplied them with food and water. And now you say, 'Go and tell your master that Elijah is here'! Sir, if I do that, I'm as good as dead!"

But Elijah said, "I swear by the Lord Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab today."

So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet him. "So it's you, is it—Israel's troublemaker?" Ahab asked when he saw him.

"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the

Lord and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. Now bring all the people of Israel to Mount Carmel, with all 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who are supported by Jezebel."

So Ahab summoned all the people and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent. Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets."

"And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those who saw them."--Rev. 11:11

For three and a half years, a price had been set on the head of Elijah. The bloodhounds of Ahab had been on his track, but had failed to discover his lurking-place. Obadiah, in search of provender for the cattle belonging to his royal master, had taken the westerly direction from Jezreel, along the great plain of Esdraelon. At some turn of the highway, on this great battle-ground of Hebrew history, all at once he confronts the strange figure of the missing prophet, with his mantle and staff. The royal Chamberlain, startled at the unexpected apparition, prostrates himself to the earth, and exclaims, in half-doubting bewilderment, "Are you my lord Elijah?" He had perhaps supposed, like many, that with the announcement of the drought, Elijah's prophetic work and mission had been finished; and that he had either retired to his native Gilead, or had possibly been taken to heaven to receive a prophet's reward. High in rank and position as Obadiah was, it shows the blended reverence and awe with which he regarded the prophet, when he falls down "on his face before him," addressing him as "my lord," and speaking of himself as "your servant"--the subservient language of a slave to his master.

Elijah's command is to go forthwith to Ahab--"Go, tell your master, Behold, Elijah is here." Obadiah, at first, with what in the circumstances, perhaps, was not altogether, as has been supposed, a blameworthy or cowardly hesitation, remonstrates. He knows the dark purposes of hate and revenge in his master's bosom towards the Prophet; that the people, also, maddened with the horrors of famine, would be eager to support the

vengeance of their king. If Elijah fell into their hands, his head would to a certainty be hung that night on the gate of Jezreel. If, therefore, in obedience to the prophet's wish, he proceeded to inform the king that the troubler is found; he concludes either that Elijah will forfeit his life, or else that the God of Elijah, to defeat the king's purpose, will transport his servant miraculously to some other Cherith or Sarepta, and shelter him there. On the latter supposition, Obadiah dreads the consequences to his own person. The monarch would wreak upon him his disappointed revenge. He would charge him as being in secret league with his enemy, and deal with him as a traitor to the throne. The Tishbite relieves his apprehension. He gives him the promise, that that very day, before the sun set over the brow of Carmel, he would show himself to his royal master. Obadiah is reassured, and assents to Elijah's directions.

The message is delivered. The king in hot haste sets out from his palace, and soon the prophet and he stand face to face. How strangely diverse the two characters! The prophet of Jehovah, and the champion of Baal; the upholder of the true religion, and the abettor of lies--Light confronting darkness--Truth confronting error. They meet like two charged thunderclouds, and we watch, with bated breath, the bursting of the storm.

When the impetuous monarch finds that the prey he has been seeking for years, is at last within his grasp--could we wonder should the instigations of the queen and his own uncontrollable passion drive him to cruel extremities, and the dust of the highway be stained with the Tishbite's blood? When Ahab reins up his horse, he is the first to speak. But the very sight of that commanding figure--the brave heroic prophet--seems at once to unman him. His narrow soul shrivels in his presence. Instead of summary vengeance--instead of the order we expected to hear given to his armed soldiers, "Let the traitor die!" and their swords at the summons leaping from their sheathes--his rage expends itself in the feeble challenge--"Are you he that troubles Israel?"

The God of Elijah has the heart of that king in his hand, and turns it "even as He turns the rivers of water;" He has said to the proud waves, "Thus far shall you go, and no farther." "Are you he that troubles Israel?" How does Elijah meet the charge? He imagines himself alone loyal to the God of his fathers, amid the thousands of an apostate kingdom; with the full

consciousness that monarch, queen, princes, courtiers, priests, people, were leagued against him. Do we find him cowering in abject terror at Ahab's feet, imploring on any terms for life; or else, endeavoring to disarm the king's wrath, by telling him that the occasion of it is now at an end--that he has Divine authority for commanding that the windows of heaven be opened, and for unbarring the long-closed gates of famine; so that, if the accusation has been hitherto correct as to his being a 'troubler in Israel,' he will prove to be so no more? No! his are no such coward lips. The eye of 'the Prophet of Fire' flashes--and he returns in a voice of thunder--"I have not troubled Israel; but you and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed the Baals."

Brave, undaunted man!--noble type of every faithful minister of God--boldly speaking out the truth; uninfluenced either by fear or by flattery--scorning all compromise, all unworthy servility, and taking as a guiding principle the words of the great Apostle--"If I please men, I am not the servant of Christ." Many there are who will listen long enough, and patiently enough, to general discourses on the truth--to general denunciations of sin, or eloquent expositions of virtue and holiness--but who resent closer personal remonstrance--the faithful charging home of the darling sin. Herod bore with the stern Preacher of the desert, so long as he kept to his general theme--Repentance. But when he came to speak plainly of Herodias, "It is not lawful for you to have her"--then the frown gathered on his countenance, and the outspoken reprovener was sent in chains from his presence. Would that we had more Elijahs among us--fearless rebukers of all vice and wrongdoing--who, unmoved and undeterred by the world's fashion and opinion, would unsparingly lash the conventional follies and sins of the times, whatever these may be.

But to return--What is to be done? Elijah, as master of the occasion, dictates to his sovereign what the urgent nature of the crisis imperiously demands. In the name of his God, he proposes to gather together "all Israel" to Mount Carmel. A mighty throng it is to be, and the place selected is befitting convocation-ground. Such was the theater for "a conflict more momentous than any which their ancestors had fought in the plain below."

It was a momentous question which was to be decided--"Who is the Lord? Jehovah or Baal?" Is the God of the Patriarchs to be re-enthroned on His altars and in the hearts of the children of Abraham? Are the silver trumpets to gather a willing people in the day of His power? Or are these heirs of the old covenant to barter their birthright for a base superstition? By a worse than Philistine invasion, is the bitter cry of "Ichabod!" to ascend from the broken heart of the solitary Prophet, the last ray and relic of the departing glory?

Imagine the vast concourse gathering. The flanks of the mountain teem with the living mass. As they are assembling, perhaps at sunset, and pitching their tents on the varied slopes of the elongated hill, so as to be ready for the great scenes of the morrow, let us note the three parties of which the multitude is composed--for that crowd on Carmel is a typical picture of the Church and the world to this hour.

Our eye first falls on the ROYAL TENT, with the spear in the ground and the rich Tyrian banners floating overhead. An hour ago, deafening plaudits rose from the throng, as the prancing coursers swept past, bearing there the monarch with his courtiers. Close by them are those most deeply concerned in the issues of the day--rank on rank of Phoenician priests, flaming in gorgeous vestments of purple bespangled with gold. There are eight hundred and fifty of them altogether; four hundred and fifty of these are Baal's ministers; you may know them by the sun-symbol on their embroidered dress; and these four hundred with the symbol of the crescent moon, are the priests of the goddess Astarte, who have been housed in the royal palaces of Israel, and have places assigned them at Jezebel's table; these again, supported by thousands around, who, in blindfold ignorance, had followed the creed of their atheist king. Such constitute one of the companies in that heterogeneous crowd. They have that adjunct which impiety and irreligion often have upon their side--human power and influence. They have sold themselves to work iniquity. They have publicly dethroned Jehovah, and espoused idols, saying, 'Who is the Lord Jehovah, that he should reign over us?'

The second class or company was small indeed. For anything we can tell, there may have been several composing it. Obadiah's faithful hundreds may have come out from their caves, those rocky caverns which are still

shown in the gorges of Carmel as their supposed hiding-places. But ELIJAH is the only representative of this second group who is mentioned in the sacred narrative. Though there is nothing imposing about him externally--though he wears the roughest garb--though he has been living for years in cave or lowly hamlet, dependent for his daily meals, now on the birds of the forest, now on the charity of a poor Gentile widow; yet there is something truly royal about that solitary man as he stands like a lone rock towering amid the chafing waves! He has One on his side (and he is conscious of it) 'mightier than the mightiest.' He knows that as a prince he has power with God, and is about to prevail. He is there the delegate of true, believing, loyal-hearted Israelites, worshipers of the living Jehovah--those who are still steadfast in their allegiance to their fathers' God--uninfluenced by court-intrigues or by the fear of man--who had wept many a secret tear over the grievous national apostasy--and in cave and lonely forest, "faithful among the faithless," had often breathed the ancestral prayer, "Arise, O God, and let your enemies be scattered."

But there was still a third, and by far the most numerous class, to which adhered the bulk of the people. It was made up of those who were swayed between opposing views--divided in opinion, hesitating upon which side to declare; conscience, perhaps, pointing one way, and self-interest another--a false feeling of deference to the king--blind, slavishly loyalty, leading them to adopt the idolatrous court-faith--on the other hand, all the sacred memories of their history, and the recorded kindness of the God of Israel, rebuking them for the baseness of their apostasy. It was for them--this fickle, undecided rabble, but who really constituted the numerical strength of the kingdom--it was for their sakes Elijah demanded the convocation--"Gather to me," he says, all Israel." Again, it is "the people" whom he addresses with the startling words, "How long halt you between two opinions?" He saw they were laboring under a ruinous delusion--ruinous to themselves, and most insulting to the God he served.

They evidently imagined they could compromise matters; that they could amalgamate the worship of Jehovah and Baal. They were not willing to forget that they were the historical descendants of those who had seen the Divine Majesty shining gloriously on Teman and Paran--for whose sakes

the waves of the Red Sea had been rebuked, and Jordan driven back. They were not disposed altogether to discard their ancestral traditional creed; but they desired to incorporate it with the licentious rites of the idols of Tyre. If persecution threatened to descend against those who refused thus to blend the Phoenician with the Hebrew ritual, they were not so wedded to the latter in its integrity, as to be ready to suffer or to die for it. They could not dream of undergoing the martyr-life of those who were hiding in the mountain-caves of Samaria, fed on bread and water. They would appease Ahab, and absolve their own consciences, by espousing both creeds. They would retain that of their fathers, but blend with it the impurities of the Phoenician worship.

Have we not here a vivid and truthful picture of the professing Christian world in every age? It, also, has ever had its three distinct classes. The BAAL-WORSHIPERS--the atheist class--whose virtual religious creed is "no God." Speak to them of the God of Elijah, and their secret retort is, "Who is the Lord, that he should reign over us?"--"Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of your ways." Such are the slaves of custom in religion as in everything else--who have no conscience of their own--no settled convictions of duty. They do as Ahab does. Their miserable religious theory is, that all creeds are alike; or rather, if their feelings were analyzed, that all religion is a pretense and delusion--the lie which superstition has palmed off, and which ignorance has perpetuated. Having overthrown the altar of God, they are sacrificing daily incense at the Baal-shrines of self, pleasure, lust, and sin!

A second class are the TRUE WORSHIPERS of God--(and, blessed be His name, there has never yet been an age, and never shall be, when these are not found.) The thousands, or the ten thousands; or, it may be, only the units, who have "not bowed the knee to Baal." His true Israel--the salt of the earth--pillars which prevent the fabric of society from tottering to its base. Those who love His name, and do His commandments, and seek to promote His glory. Those who, like Elijah, would sooner die than be unfaithful to Him, or do homage at an unhallowed shrine. The Enochs and Noahs of patriarchal times. The Lots amid the iniquity and worldliness of Sodom. The Daniels amid the snares of Babylon. The "few names," even amid the grievous indifference of Sardis, who have "not



defiled their garments." The hundreds around us, who, amid manifold temptations--the ridicule of evil companions--the power of degrading worldliness--the enticing snares of vice--are faithful to their God and Savior. In one word, those who are Christians indeed--who know holiness to be happiness, who have confessed the Lord to be their God, and would not barter the joys of true religion for all the gains and gold of earth, and all the painted baubles of worldly ambition.

One other class still remains; and we fear, as in Elijah's time, by far the most numerous. It is the mass--the vast mass of the vast of UNDECIDED. Those who are half-hearted Christians--"borderers"--hovering on the confines of light and darkness--of truth and error--who have not repudiated religion--no, who nominally profess to be on God's side; but who, in reality, are on the side of Satan. Waverers, like the waves of the unstable sea, "driven by the wind and tossed!" They have the wish to die happy and go to heaven at last; but they cannot make up their minds, as yet, to renounce their favorite sins. They wish to flee to Christ as their Savior--but not yet. They wish to give up the world's follies and sins--but not yet. They wish to shake themselves free of their enslaving lusts--but not yet.

Their immortal interests are all this while trembling in the balance. They have had their convictions, their impressions, their serious thoughts, their hours of penitence; the tear of remorse has stood in their eye, and a trembling prayer has faltered on their tongue--but they have never yet had courage or resolution to make the great decision, to cast in their lot unmistakably on the side of God. They are living for both worlds, and losing both. They have enough of religion to make them unhappy, but not enough to save their souls! A little religion is the most miserable of all states. It becomes an accuser, not a comforter. It is the thorn in the flesh--the lash of the scorpion. Better remain at Jezebel's table, than come feeble, irresolute, half-hearted, to Carmel--to hear the thunder tones of the Prophet--to see the fire of God descending. Yet scorning it all.

Look at the effect of Elijah's bold remonstrance. The people were awestruck. He had touched their consciences. They felt his appeal and rebuke to be only too true. They stood silent and self-condemned! And the same feeling of self-condemnation must come home to multitudes

still--that they have for years, and that, also, while enjoying many religious privileges, been living on in guilty uncertainty as to their soul's everlasting salvation--attempting to unite impossibilities--attempting to join what Heaven has divorced--to serve God and Mammon--Jehovah and Baal--holiness and sin!

Nothing is so displeasing to God as this divided heart--this attempting to blend and incorporate what can as little be blended, as oil can commingle with water, or darkness with light. "I would," he says, "that you were either cold or hot." He demands the whole heart or nothing. There can be no middle ground and no intermediate ground. The saying is solemnly explicit, "He that is not with me is against me."

Are there some among us, who, like the multitudes on Carmel, are silent under the question?--who feel that theirs has been worse than indecision--the hollow name to live, while they are spiritually dead? God is not willing that you should perish. He is ready to meet you on Cannel with His overtures of mercy--the remonstrances of His own unwearying love! Listen to His voice and admonition, 'O you sons of men, how long will you love vanity? How long barter the finite for the infinite, the temporal for the imperishable? O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help found!' He sets before you life and death, salvation or destruction, heaven or hell. Listen to the great gospel declaration--the alternative is for you to select--"If you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake, Him, He will cast you off forever!"

## **8. THE ANSWER BY FIRE**

1 Kings 18:21-40

Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal

may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood."

So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal all morning, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced wildly around the altar they had made.

About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!"

So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no reply, no voice, no answer.

Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, and he used the stones to rebuild the Lord's altar. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood." After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said, and the water ran around the altar and even overflowed the trench.

At the customary time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are

God and that you have brought them back to yourself."

Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch! And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"

Then Elijah commanded, "Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one escape!" So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

"Thus has the Lord God showed unto me; and, behold the Lord God called to contend by fire."--Amos 7:4

In the previous chapter, we found the appeal of Elijah to the people on Mount Carmel responded to by "mute expressive silence;" they "answered not a word." This may probably have been the result of conflicting emotions. In the case of some, who in their hearts were Jehovah-worshippers, it may have been the silence of guilty fear or cringing expediency. They may have been stifling their deep-felt convictions of truth in presence of the king and priesthood. With others, (the fawning, servile creatures of Ahab,) it may have arisen from dread of incurring the vengeance of the Prophet of Cherith; lest he who had manifested such power in material nature might visit them with sudden and deserved retribution, should they dare openly to avow themselves the abettors of idolatry.

Let us hasten at once to the sublime sequel. There is no picture in all history, sacred or profane, more thrilling or impressive. No wonder that poetry, painting, and music have conjointly seized on this memorable day and scene as fit theme and subject for their grandest efforts. Elijah feels, and feels deeply, that before the clouds of heaven break, and the curse of famine be rolled away from the land, the people, in the aggregate, must be brought back from their wretched apostasy, and that, also, by some great public acknowledgment of their sin. As theirs had been a national alienation from their fathers' God, so must theirs be a public renunciation of their abominable idolatries, and a renewed recognition of the one living Jehovah.

The mighty throng are still hushed, as the Prophet--God's consecrated

minister between the living and the dead--prepares yet farther to speak. Before we listen to his address, we may in a few words recall, how very peculiarly he himself was situated in the midst of that vast concourse.

Other hearts, as we have already seen, true and loyal to Jehovah, were beating responsive with his at that moment throughout the land. But they were witnessing in sackcloth; they were languishing in dungeons, or hidden in caves and secluded places. On this consecrated mountain-height--this high altar of nature--the Tishbite stood alone--a sheep amid wolves--an isolated beacon-light amid the floods of ungodly men--a solitary cedar of God wrestling with the storm. It is difficult for us thoroughly to realize the strain on his faith and courage when thus deprived of human sympathy and support. The Waldenses of the Middle Ages, or the hero-martyrs of our own land, were in as imminent peril as he; but they were sustained in their endurance and privations by the words and deeds of fellow-sufferers. Cave and forest, alpine fastness, mountain, moor, and dungeon, were cheered by sympathetic hands and hearts.

That assemblage on Carmel, also, be it remembered, was no despicable multitude--no vulgar rabble. The political influence and strength of the nation were there. Elijah was coming into collision and hostility with the throne and the altar--with a debased king and priesthood--the court religion--the fashionable creed of the hour. With what intense emotion must he have uttered the opening words, "I, even I, only, remain a prophet of the Lord." His proposal is, that the Deity, which either party professes to worship, should decide the great question which has convened them on that high arena; that each should take a bullock, cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood on a separate altar of burnt-offering. The usual way of consuming the sacrifice was by applying a lighted torch to the fuel or faggots underneath. But the Prophet suggests, on this occasion, an appeal to miraculous intervention; that the Baal-worshippers and the Jehovah-worshippers should each invoke an "answer by fire;" and that whichever offering was miraculously ignited, should be regarded as conclusively determining the point at issue.

The crowd at once assented to the reasonableness of the test. Their unanimous response was--"What you say is good." An appeal which had

thus commended itself to the spectators, could not well be resisted by the Baal priests. Indeed, the fairness of the proposal was unanswerable; for Baal being the reputed god of Light or Fire; it was a virtual appeal to his own element--a defiant challenge and reference to his own sacred emblem. Nor was the proposed method of arbitration strange or unfamiliar to the Jehovah-worshippers--the true Israel of God. Their sacred records and national annals furnished many examples of answers by fire, from the earliest, in the case of Abel's sacrifice, to the latest, within the memory of that generation, at the magnificent scene of the temple consecration under Solomon.

The moment has come. Elijah concedes the precedence to his 850 antagonists. "Rise, you priests of Baal; choose one of the oxen, and lay it on your altar!" Forth they come in their gorgeous Tyrian purple and gold. The bullock was prepared, and laid on the wood. It was still early morning when they began their wild orgies. The excitement increased with advancing day. The cry, "O Baal, hear us," again and again ascended to the bronze sky. Mountain height responded to mountain height, "but there was no voice, nor any that answered." Amid their frenzied dances, they look up wistfully to the heavens for the appearance of the descending symbol. Louder and still louder rises the vehement imprecation, 'O Baal, hear us!--you lords many, hear us!--you forest gods!--you mountain deities!--gods of rivers!--and, above all, you blazing Sun--Baal's burning throne and sacred shrine--send down a lighted torch, burning coals from your altar fires!'

Louder and louder, deeper and deeper, waxes the hoarse-voiced chorus! Until noon it continues--the maddened priests leaping upon the altar. But there is no answer. The heavens are still--the altar is silent--Baal's oracle is mute--the appeal is in vain! And now, as the sun has reached its meridian, Elijah interposes. He has been, hitherto, like the rest, a silent spectator. But at the height of noon, as the orb the others worshiped is pouring his fierce rays on their heads, he calls out, in words of cutting irony, "Cry aloud; for he is a god--either he is talking, or he is busy, or he is in a journey, or perhaps he sleeps, and must be awaked." But the biting sarcasm only increases the mad and frantic ravings and incantations of the ministers of Baal. When noon is past, they begin to "prophesy." They

have wrought themselves now into a state of desperation. Drawing their knives and lancets, they inflict gashes on their bodies, and cover themselves with blood. Still, all is in vain. Their god will not arise. On the heights of the mountain, the unkindled wood and the untouched altar remain, during the long afternoon of that momentous day, just as they were erected at early morn. The perplexed priests retire bleeding and exhausted to their tents. Their cause is lost. Baal is not God!

Here, however, in passing, may we not well pause and gather for ourselves a lesson of humbling rebuke? How devoted were these abettors of a blinding superstition! We cannot read the passage, and pronounce their part in the gigantic conflict, a heartless formality--a dumb show--the pantomime of hypocrites. No! Self-deceived, as they were, they were, at least, men in earnest. Elijah--himself all earnestness--must have honored their zeal, though mourning that it was so misguided and misapplied. What a reproof to our oftentimes lagging faith; our lifeless prayers; our cold, unsatisfactory zeal in God's service. These heathen devotees of Carmel, worshipers of a figment--a dumb idol--with their knives and lancets, and self-inflicted tortures--how will they rise up in the judgment against many lukewarm professing Christians, and condemn them!

But now the time of the evening sacrifice--Israel's own sacred hour--has come. Elijah had allowed his opponents full time and scope for the required proof. He now comes forward and challenges personally the flagging attention of the crowd. Close by were the ruins of an altar, which had once been erected to Jehovah, but which, probably with many others in the land, had been demolished by one of the exterminating edicts of Jezebel. Summoning the people to draw near, he repaired the ruined place of sacrifice.

There is something impressive in the calm dignity of the Prophet, after these long hours of demonstrative vehemence and delirious excitement. We can picture him, with his sheepskin cloak, and shaggy hair, and stately figure--with no noisy clamor, or extravagant gesticulations, but rather with dignified self-reliance, standing amid the fevered multitude, and beginning with reverend hands to upraise the dismantled altar. There is always a quiet majesty about truth. How calmly stood Paul before Felix

and Agrippa. With what meek, unruffled, expressive silence stood Incarnate Truth Himself before Pilate and Herod--the Lamb "silent before His shearers"--it was the same dignified calmness of demeanor which had previously unmanned the assassin band at the gate of Gethsemane--"As soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground!" It was so now, on Mount Carmel.

Ahab was agitated with conflicting fears. The people were in a frenzy of excitement. The priests were filled with delirium and rage. Elijah alone was unmoved--confident in the righteousness of his cause. He had everything periled on the next sunset hour. Failure!--and his own body, like that of the offered sacrifice, would be cut in pieces, and the Kishon be stained with his blood. Failure!--and the power and glory of his God would be compromised--every altar of Israel would be profaned, and Baal would sit triumphant in his impious shrines. But "Jehovah lives"--his first utterance--was his motto still; and he felt confident that that watchword would be caught up, before these night-shadows fell, and be repeated from lip to lip by the congregated thousands of Israel.

Of the dilapidated altar, he took twelve stones, "according to the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be your name!" There was much significance in the act. It was a rebuke he read, not to the Baalites; but to the true Israel of God. By this 'parable in stone,' he would tell them that the disrupted monarchy--the breaking asunder of the ten tribes from the twelve--was unrecognized by God--that it was a sinful breach in their unity as the covenant nation--that they were still essentially one in the sight of Jehovah--having one common altar, though partitioned and dismembered by reason of their own guilty jealousies and strifes. No, he would point them on to the time when God's own purpose would be fulfilled regarding them, "And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all--and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all--neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions--but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them--so they shall be my people, and I will be their God,"



(Ezekiel 37:22, 23.)

Would that we had more Elijahs in the midst of us; ever and anon to bear their protest against the improper schisms and divisions which mar the strength and beauty and fair proportions of the Church of Christ! Blessed will that time be, when divided churches and divided nations shall become one in heart and one in worship; one in undivided aim for the good of men and the glory of a common Lord. When the distinctions of sect and party, which are now like the separate pools on the rocky shore, shall be swept over by the ocean-tide of Divine love; all united and mingled into one; and the old heathen exclamation become the testimony of an admiring world, "See how these Christians love one another!"

And now the wood is laid in order on Elijah's altar. The bullock is cut in pieces, and a deep trench is formed all around; moreover, in order to prevent any possible suspicion of imposture--such as would throw discredit on the reality of the miracle--the Prophet gives orders to the people to go down, either to the adjoining well, or to the Kishon--some have even surmised, though this is inadmissible, to the sea, and fill four barrels of water to be poured over bullock, wood, and altar. This is done four times in succession, until the trench is filled. He was cognizant of the fact, that the idolatrous priests of surrounding nations stooped at times to unworthy fraud and artifice in the case of similar answers by fire; sometimes by concealing torches, sometimes by kindling the subjacent wood, through excavations under the altar. In order that no such base arts might be attributed to him, he soaks the whole pile with the antagonistic element of water. While the altar is thus dripping and saturated, he proceeds to take his turn in the great testing struggle.

The period of the day was known to the whole Hebrew nation as "the hour of prayer." The priests in the Temple at Jerusalem, were at that same moment offering their evening oblation as the sun was sinking behind Mount Olivet, as now it was going down over Carmel, or hanging like a golden lamp over the burnished waters within sight. Behold the Prophet of Fire, wrapped in his mantle, on his knees in supplication! A breathless stillness--like the portentous quiet which reigns in nature before the bursting of the thunder-cloud--pervades the heterogeneous throng. With bated breath, king, priests, people, look on, while thus he

addresses his God--"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word."

The first utterance in his prayer is "JEHOVAH!" There was but a moment of solemn pause. The prayer ascends--the FIRE falls. Bullock, wood, dust, stones, earth, all are consumed by the devouring element. The flame of Heaven has incontrovertibly, in the face of all spectators, authenticated the Prophet's word and mission, and flashed condemnation on his opponents. The people, on seeing it, fell on their faces; and a mighty shout rends the air, ringing from the mountain-summits, along the plain of Esdraelon, mingling with the rippling waves on the adjoining shores--"Jehovah he is God! Jehovah he is God!"

Sudden is the next step in the drama. Jehovah being re-enthroned; the priesthood of Baal must at once be crushed--extirpated root and branch--from the land they had so long cursed with their shadow. The recent general reverence of the people for this false worship now turns into rage. Catching up the malediction of their great national minstrel, "Confounded be all those who worship engraved images"--they drag, (at Elijah's command) the ringleaders down the side of the mountain, and the Kishon carries to the sea, in its crimsoned stream, the tidings of righteous vengeance. Elijah, in this apparently harsh and cruel act, only performed what Ahab as theocratic Regent had failed to do. It was not the vindictive massacre of a barbarous conqueror; but the faithful servant and viceregent of God fulfilling a stringent Divine command--a command, indeed, which admitted of no evasion--for the extermination of idolaters.

The Tishbite has now attained the fulfillment of his heart's ardent longing--the glory of God and the good of Israel. All his personal privations had been nothing, to his sorrow of heart on account of the people he was commissioned to teach, and warn, and instruct, being held spell-bound by an evil power. His life-prayer, his life-adjuration, if they only had had ears to hear it, was this--"O Israel, return unto Jehovah your God, for you have fallen by your iniquity;" and in his earnest, fervent supplication at this hour on Carmel, he tells the reason of his urgency, (v. 37,) "Hear me, O Lord, hear me! that this people may know that You are

the Lord God, and that you have turned their heart back again." His prayer was heard. As they saw the forked flames descending on the Prophet's sacrifice--conscience-stricken at the remembrance of their apostasy, and inwardly marveling at the Divine patience and forbearance--the grateful thought must have passed through many hearts in that crowd, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed!"

"Take heed, brethren," says the apostle, "lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The tendency of the corrupt heart is the same in all ages--though modified by peculiar circumstances--to "forsake the Fountain of living waters, and to hew out broken [leaky] cisterns, that can hold no water." Let us no longer act the part of traitor Israel, by calling to our Baal--whatever the form of the seducer be--"O Baal, hear us." There will be no answer. There can be none--if our cry be for anything else than the infinite Jehovah, to fill the aching voids and necessities of our natures. May it be ours rather to make the confident appeal, "Our God is in the heavens. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. Those who make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusts in them. O Israel, trust in the Lord."

We cannot now expect such miraculous answers to prayer for the confirmation of our languishing faith as were given to the mighty pleader of Carmel. But in another spiritual sense, the God of Elijah still "answers by fire." Fire! It is the emblem of the work and agency of His blessed Spirit. He still "baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and with fire." Moreover, that highest of boons is procured in the same way as was the fire of Carmel--in answer to prayer. Our Father who is in heaven, gives his Holy Spirit "unto those who ask him." Spirit of God! descend upon us in Your enlightening, quickening, refining, purifying influences. In order to insure Your coming, we have not, like Elijah, to slay any bullock; we need prepare no burnt-offering. Our great Propitiation has already been made. The Son of Man and Son of God, has already offered Himself a bleeding victim. On this priceless sacrifice the fire of Divine wrath has descended. He, our true Elijah, has upbuilt the altar of ruined humanity. His ransomed people are its living stones. Through everlasting ages it will continue, the peerless monument and memorial of the Divine faithfulness, holiness, and love. "Unto principalities and powers in

heavenly places will be made known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God."

And finally, in closing the chapter, let the eye once more rest with admiration on the prime actor in this magnificent drama. Mark his firmness and self-reliance--his meek spirit of dependence on Divine aid. Hating expediency--resolved to stand or fall with truth--superior to the world's censure--heedless that the majority is against him--with the consciousness of God being upon his side, he boldly confronts the floods of ungodly men, and alone he triumphs.

Some who read these pages may possibly be placed in similar circumstances. Standing solitary in the midst of scoffers--stigmatized as "peculiar:" surrounded by those who ridicule Elijah's God, and who sneer at their blind, credulous reverence for some obsolete Jewish Scriptures. Fear not. "Be courageous, like men. Be strong." You may be in the minority--all good men always have been so. The "broad way" is the crowded way. The true way is the one with the narrow gate. But "those who honor me," says God, "I will honor." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

To any who may be guilty of scorning Divine mercy, we cannot say, "Fear not." No, rather, remember you, also, the God of Carmel answers still "by fire." Yes, by fire, shall be His dreadful answer on that day when there can be for you "no more sacrifice for sin!" The Bible speaks of those who are "reserved unto fire." It speaks of a time when "God shall not keep silence, when a fire shall go before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." When "the Lord Jesus, whom you now despise, shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God." Forbid, that when the discovery is too late--when all our refuges of lies crumble into dust, and all the gods we have worshiped are proved to have been dumb idols--forbid that then, we should for the first time, be awakened up to the conviction, which, during a whole life of sin and apostasy, we have disowned and denied, "That the Lord he is God--the Lord he is God;" and that our only personal interest in this 'living Jehovah,' through an endless eternity, is this--"Our God is a CONSUMING FIRE!"

"Seek the Lord, and you shall live; lest he break out like FIRE in the house of Joseph, and devour it; and there be none to quench it in Bethel."  
"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near--let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts--and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

## 9. THE SOUND OF RAIN

1 Kings 18:41-46

Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go and enjoy a good meal! For I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!"

So Ahab prepared a feast. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and fell to the ground and prayed. Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the sea."

The servant went and looked, but he returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything." Seven times Elijah told him to go and look, and seven times he went. Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a hand rising from the sea."

Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!'"

And sure enough, the sky was soon black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel. Now the Lord gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.

"You sent abundant rain, O God, to refresh the weary Promised Land."

Psalm 68:9

From the hills of Galilee; from the plains and valleys of Zebulon and Issachar, and the mountains of Ephraim--thousands on thousands, we found in last chapter, were gathered on the heights of Carmel, to decide the great question whether Baal or Jehovah were God. The afternoon had closed with the signal defeat of the Phoenician priests; and Jehovah, by the loud shouts of the awe-struck multitude, had been owned and acknowledged as the God of Israel. In consequence of this public renunciation of Baal-worship, and this equally solemn and public recognition of the God of their fathers, Elijah feels that he can now with confidence expect the removal of the drought which for three years and a half had cursed the land, and the return of blessings to the famine-stricken people.

The bodies of the false prophets are lying in ghastly heaps unburied on the margin of the Kishon. The king has gone up, amid the wooded slopes of the mountain, with his nobles and retinue, to feast themselves after these exciting hours. The multitudes are seen dispersing; some for repose and refreshment, others wending their way towards their distant homes. But the Prophet feels that his mission is not yet fulfilled--one grand sequel is still required to complete the most memorable day of his life. Leaving the terrible Aceldama on the river's banks, and again casting his sheepskin cloak over his shoulders, he ascends to a higher and remoter portion of Carmel, removed from the din alike of the multitudes and of the royal tents below. From his elevation, the old familiar scene of barrenness and desolation met his eye--waterless channels at his feet; the noted verdure of Carmel turned into ashes--no living blade to relieve the dull monotony for miles and miles--so far as his vision could extend, the earth gasping at every pore. Rest and refreshment he greatly requires, alike for his weary body and jaded spirit. He had tasted nothing since morning; and now the setting sun had gone down behind the western ridges of the mountain. But, like his great Antitype, "his food is to do the will of Him that sent him, and to finish His work."

In company with a young attendant, he resorts to this secluded spot in order that he may plead with Jehovah, (now that he had showed himself unto Ahab,) to make good His faithful promise, "I will send rain upon the earth." He might well have urged the excuse of an over wrought and overtasked frame for postponement until the following morning; but if--like many earthly conquerors--he had failed to follow up his victory, it would have marred the completeness and grandeur of the day's transaction. Both king and people might have left the scene, and missed the great closing lesson. Elijah, however, never hesitates. Whether it were by some intimation made by special revelation to his inner sense--or whether, more probably, by some outward token, such as the gentle rustling on the tops of the forest-trees premonitory of storm, we cannot pronounce. But it was on hearing "the sound of abundance of rain" that he himself ascended to his sequestered sanctuary; instructing his servant at the same time to proceed to a yet higher promontory or spur of the mountain, from which he could command a full view of the waters of the Mediterranean to the remote horizon.

The sun of that long day had already set; but, as is the case in Eastern evenings, a bright radiance lingered on mountain, plain, and ocean. The sky still preserved the same monotonous aspect it had worn during the years of drought. Its azure depths were undimmed with a cloud. The great sea beneath it, slept in quiet serenity.

Let us pause for a moment at this impressive point in the narrative. What a place of hallowed calm after the exciting scenes and turmoil of that day of days! You who are engaged in the busy thoroughfares of life--fevered and fretted with its anxieties--from morning to evening your ears and your spirits stunned with the loud, never-ebbing tide; do you know what it is, when night is gathering its shadows as at Carmel, to ascend to some quiet oratory to be alone with God, and get your spirits calmed and refreshed amid this "Sabbath of the soul?" Or you, who, like Elijah, may have experienced, during the day, some eminent tokens of blessing in your worldly undertakings--the fire coming down on your sacrifice--your fears disappointed--your fondest hopes and wishes realized--some successful stroke in business--some unexpected deliverance from harassing anxiety and vexation--the occurrence of some prosperous and joyful event in your family circles--do you deem it alike your hallowed privilege and duty, to take the first opportunity of owning the hand of the gracious Restorer of all good, and the gracious Deliverer from all evil; ascending the silent, lonely Carmel-height, that you may, like the Prophet, pour out your soul in fervent gratitude--record your vow, and offer your oblation of thanksgiving?

Beautiful, indeed, is Elijah's HUMILITY. He was undoubtedly the hero of the hour. He was more truly King in the sight of Israel than Ahab. As a prince he had power with God, and had prevailed. The keys of Providence seemed to hang at his belt--his voice had rent the heavens--at his summons the flames had descended--the fiery sword had leapt from its cloudy scabbard, flashing vengeance on his enemies. Had he sought it--a triumphal procession might have borne him laurel-crowned and garlanded to Jezreel. The chivalrous songs and minstrelsy that welcomed the illustrious sovereign of the preceding age, might have been accorded to him also. But no vainglorious thought tarnished the splendor of the moral victory. Never is he greater, on this illustrious occasion, than when,



the shouts of the multitude over--he retires with his servant to a isolated spot on the mountain; proclaiming, that, for all the deeds of that day of renown, he arrogates no praise, no glory to himself, but gives it all to the God whose servant he felt honored to be. He cast himself down upon the earth, and "put his face between his knees."

We scarcely recognize the man; he seems for the moment to have lost his personal identity. A few hours before, he was "the Prophet of Fire;" the lightning flashing from his eye; or, standing by the Kishon, a girded homicide, the sword gleaming in his hands. Now he is "clothed with humility." Bold and strong as a sturdy oak of Bashan in the presence of the dense human crowd--he bows his head like a bulrush in the presence of the Lord of hosts. 'Lord,' he seems to say, 'I am but sinful dust and ashes. I am but a man of like passions with that fickle multitude below. I am but a vessel, a lump of clay in the hand of the potter. Not unto me, not unto me, but unto You, the living Jehovah, before whom I stand, be all the glory!'

If we may imagine him, in these first moments of prayer, glancing back at the long hours of conflict which had terminated in the miraculous symbol--and seeking, moreover, in the retrospect, to give utterance to a full heart of thanksgiving--would it not be, if not in the words, at least in the spirit of the sacred bard of his nation--"Sing unto God, O kingdoms of the earth--O sing praises unto the Lord; to him that rides upon the heaven of heavens, which were of old; lo, he does send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe strength unto God--his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, you are terrible out of your holy places--the God of Israel is he that gives strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God."

But it was for purposes of PRAYER, rather than praise, that the Prophet had ascended the slopes of the mountain. While he himself remains in rapt supplication; his servant seven successive times hastens to the upper height to bring news of the visible answer. "Go up now," was the command; "look toward the sea." But six times did he return with the strange and disappointing tidings, "There is nothing." Noble, however, was the Tishbite's undaunted faith--unswerving his confidence in a prayer-hearing God. He staggered not for a moment through unbelief. He

knew that Jehovah was not, like Baal, "asleep or on a journey." That what He had shortly before spoken--not only was He "able also to perform," but He would also perform. Though, therefore, the vision tarried, he patiently waited for it. He knew that "at the end it would speak, and not lie." As his attendant comes back, time after time, with the dispiriting announcement, it only seems to quicken his faith, and to strengthen within him the resolve of the old wrestler of Jabbok, "I will not let you go except you bless me."

Moreover, he would not allow either this promise of God or the precursive indications of the storm--"the sound of abundance of rain"--to supersede the duty of supplication. When he heard the rustling in the tops of the trees--the low moaning sound--the harbinger of rain and tempest, he might have reasoned with himself, as many are still inclined to do, 'What need is there to cry to Jehovah, when I already hear the mutterings of His voice? Why need I call for rain, when every tree-top is already countersigning the faithful word given at Zarephath?' But how differently does he act! These waving trees have poetically been spoken of, as so many bells summoning this lone worshiper to prayer. Nor was it in vain that Elijah sped him to his mountain oratory. His servant observes, hovering in the western horizon, a tiny cloud, like a man's hand--to an Eastern, habituated to the signs of the sky, a trustworthy token of approaching storm and rain. He speeds down to the pleading Prophet with the longed-for news. It is enough. The Lord has given the word--He is about to send "a plentiful rain," to refresh His inheritance "when it was weary."

An urgent message is conveyed to Ahab to spare his chariot and hasten to his distant palace, before the Kishon is flooded with the waterfalls, and the dusty roads have been softened into moist, tenacious clay, rendering them impassable. Meanwhile, cloud after cloud rises, until the sky becomes a frowning battlement; and before Elijah can reach the royal pavilion, every tree on Mount Carmel is wrestling with the storm! The monarch has already started, amid pelting rain and howling wind; but, fleeter than his swift coursers, are the feet of the Bedouin Prophet. Strange close to the chivalrous proceedings of this high convocation; to witness Elijah, with pilgrim staff and girded loins--weary in body, but

with unchafed and unsubdued spirit--running in front of the royal chariot until he gets in sight of the gate of Jezreel!

As the stern reprover of Ahab's guilt, he had been brought until now into unwilling antagonism with his sovereign. But, in consequence of the king's public renunciation of idolatry, and the overthrow of Baal-worship; he takes the earliest opportunity of displaying his deference and loyalty as a subject. Perhaps there were joyous thoughts--alas! never to be realized--which were then filling his soul, regarding his sovereign, which imparted fresh fleetness to his limbs, and energy to his spirit. It would have been to him the noblest of the day's triumphs, if Ahab had become, from that hour, an altered man--consecrating the remainder of his life and reign in undoing the fatal influences of an unhappy past; and, by the overthrow of abominable idolatries, inaugurating a new era of blessings for Israel. Indeed, from the king's pliable, impressible nature, we may fairly surmise, that the marvels of this day in Carmel had, for the time, spoken to him with irresistible power--that the Prophet had heard the sovereign's voice, mingling with that of the people, in renouncing the impostures by which he had been so long spell-bound, and in reasserting the supremacy of Israel's Jehovah.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the buffetings of the storm--the wind sweeping along the plain, and the torrents falling on his head, and drenching his shaggy locks--on, with elastic step and kindling eye, sped the prophet, never pausing for breath until the charioteer drew rein in front of the royal palace. True Arab, however, in extraction, though he probably was, and with all the marvelous physical endurance of his tribe, it is almost impossible to suppose that, after the unremitting toils of the long day, Elijah should have been equal to such an undertaking, had he not been endowed with supernatural strength. But we read that "the hand of the Lord was upon him." That same God who had braced him with moral courage from morn to even, gifted him physically for the closing duties of that great occasion. He could emphatically echo the words uttered aforetime by joyous lips, after a similar season of deliverance and triumph--"We went through FIRE and through WATER, but you brought us out into a wealthy place." Never perhaps, before or since, was the unfailing Divine promise fulfilled on so vast a scale--"As your day is, so

shall your strength be."

If, in speaking of this day's transaction in the preceding chapter, we beheld, in the fire coming down from heaven and devouring the sacrifice, a dim but suggestive picture of the Divine acceptance of a nobler Propitiation--may we not still farther, in these water-floods which followed--the sky sending down its refreshing showers--see an impressive symbol of the great sequel in the gospel dispensation, the descent of the Holy Spirit; and more especially on the Church of the latter day, when "the dry land shall become springs of water;" while in Elijah himself, prostrate in supplication, we have the representative of the Church herself, "asking of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"--the God of Elijah, moreover, uttering the challenge--"Prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Other symbolic teaching, also, may be gathered from this scene, with reference to God's dealings with individual believers. Is it their conversion? It is first the fire of conviction; then the healing, comforting, refreshing influences of the Spirit--bringing home the blessed sense of pardon and forgiveness through the blood of the cross. Is it His method of procedure with them in their times of trial? Comfort and solace follow affliction. First the fire, then the rain; first the wounding, then the healing; first the flames of the fiery furnace, then the refreshing comforts of the Holy Spirit. First the mown grass laid low by the scythe, then the promised fulfilled--"He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth."

Let us, in closing, listen to the cheering word--"Get up, for there is the sound of abundance of rain." Glad and grateful must that moment have been to the many thousands of Israel--when the gasping earth, that had for three long years suffered in mute agony, drank in the refreshing full flood of God--when the true Church, who had beheld in that sky of brass and these furrows of iron, the visible tokens of the Divine curse--now witnessed the heavens unfolding their black, inky scroll, with the joyful tidings that the curse was removed. Can we participate in this joy in a loftier spiritual sense? Do we see the curse of sin taken away--God propitiated? and from the "rain" with which He is "filling the pools," are

we drawing all needful supplies for our parched souls? Can we say with the Prophet--"O Lord, I will praise you--though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away, and you comforted me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid--for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation."

If we are drooping and desponding--if our cry is, "My flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where no water is," we again echo Elijah's words--"Get up, for there is the sound of abundance of rain." Our privileges are many. The Spirit of God is ever and always moving "on the tops of the mulberry trees." The small clouds have been rising, and copious showers have fallen. Go, like Elijah--get to the oratory!--pray that the cloud may spread, that it may stretch across the heavens. At present we may have only the drops before the shower. But there shall be "abundance of rain"--"showers of blessing," for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

But let there be a word of solemn warning to us also. There is deep responsibility in that "sound of the abundance of rain." If at any time in our individual experience we should hear the "rustling on the tree-tops," let us not reject or neglect the monitory voice--"Arise, get up!" There is no one but can tell of such solemn seasons, when this rustling was heard--"the voice of the Lord God walking amid the trees of the garden."

Think of the past! That sick bed was a rustling sound of the coming rain--when, from the long slumber of unbroken health, conscience woke up to a sense of the uncertainty of life, and the possible certainty and suddenness of death. That solemn bereavement was a rustling amid the tree-tops--the moaning and wailing of earth's night-blast--the sudden blackening and overcasting of the azure sky--oh, how solemnly did the warning voice sound amid the stillness of the death-chamber, or standing by the grave--"Get up!"--leave the din of the world behind you--Get up--prepare your chariot--the deluge of wrath may be ready to overtake you--"Escape for your life!"--there may verily be but a step between you and death.

That solemn sermon was a rustling on the tree-tops--do you remember it? When the word came home with irresistible power--when the message (perhaps delivered with stammering lips) was like an arrow in the hand

of the mighty, and went direct to your heart of hearts? Up--at the sound of the abundance of rain--go, like that importunate intercessor for Israel, and rest not until the little cloud have overspread the whole horizon of your being, and showers of heavenly blessing descend on your soul. Yes, and amid your own vacillating feebleness, like that of the wavering crowd on Carmel, look above, to Him--the true Elijah--who is pleading your cause on the mount of God; and in the gathering rain-cloud is fulfilling His own precious promise--"And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever."

## **10. THE FLIGHT TO THE WILDERNESS**

1 Kings 19:1-4

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed."

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the desert, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary juniper tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

"Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are." James 5:17

We left Elijah in last chapter a hero--accomplishing deeds of unparalleled prowess and faith. The words employed at a future time by the Redeemer regarding his great follower, seem equally applicable to him--"Among those born of women there is none greater." As the stars in their courses, near this same river Kishon, had fought against Sisera--so were the very elements of nature made subservient to the Prophet's will--"fire and hail," and "stormy wind" authenticating his divine mission. After such remarkable and encouraging tokens of the Divine presence and power, we expect to find him more the champion of truth than ever; in his

undaunted career, going "from strength to strength"--the torch kindled on the altar of Carmel, burning with increasing brightness as he bears its radiance among the homes and cities of Israel. As we see the bold, lion-hearted man, running amid the rain-torrents along the Esdraelon highway, in front of the royal chariot--his mind filled with the day's wonders, we almost fancy we can hear him exultingly exclaiming, "It is God that girds me with strength, and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places. JEHOVAH lives; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted," (Ps. 18:32, 33, 46.)

As he halts at the gate of Jezreel, we doubt not it is with a noble resolution to follow up his triumph on the morrow. We expect to see the leader of God's armies rush, like another Jonah, through the metropolis of revolt, with the message of Divine rebuke and mercy, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help found"--confirming the capricious monarch and the wavering people; and if there be frowns still lingering on brows, which yesterday's defeat has clouded and humbled, what of that? Will not his answer be ready, "The Lord [the living Jehovah] is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me!" "Now know I that the Lord saves his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand," (Ps. 20:6.)

Alas! a new dramatic, we may rather call it a new tragic, turn, unexpectedly occurs. This Asahel--swift of foot, and mighty of soul--degenerates into a craven and coward. We almost fail to recognize the Elijah of yesterday in the unworthy renegade of today. On Carmel, he had willingly and without one misgiving or hesitation, staked his life on the answer by fire. These knives and lancets, which his bold irony had whetted, would, in the event of failure, have inflicted on him a terrible retaliation. Yet, with all this certainty before him, he went fearless, in the strength of the Lord, against the mighty. Now, how different! Poor human nature reveals itself. "The tower of David, built for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand shields and all manner of weapons of mighty men," becomes in a moment a humiliating ruin. Come and see what the best and bravest of God's saints are when left to themselves. "O Lucifer, son of the morning, how are you fallen!"

Let us briefly rehearse the narrative.

Ahab, on reaching Jezreel, without delay conveys to his queen the astounding news of the day's conflict and victory--that Elijah, by the most irrefragable proof, has vindicated his authority and established the supremacy of JEHOVAH; that her idol-god is dethroned, her priests massacred--and that the solemn amen and shout of the people had ratified the proceedings. The monarch's own fickle spirit, as we have remarked in last chapter, could not fail to have been impressed by all he had witnessed; and doubtless he would cherish the hope that Jezebel, if she did not acquiesce in the popular enthusiasm, would, at all events, deem it a matter of political expediency, to waive her own prejudices and biases for the public benefit. He had mistaken the temper and will of his overbearing consort. The storm that had burst over Carmel gathered afresh over her brow. Her rage is irrepressible. "What! to have the cherished dream of years dissolved thus rudely in a moment! To have her ancestral faith dishonored and degraded; her priestly confessors stripped of their sacred garments, and their blood spilt like water. To have her husband and his whole subjects duped and hoodwinked, and all this by a half Hebrew, half Arab fanatic--the upholder of a worn-out debilitated system of old-world belief! No! it cannot be endured!"

And if Ahab ventures to interpose in this fit of frenzy, and speak of the double miraculous attestation; she has her reply ready. The so-called fire-answer was only the crowning successful trick of the wily old impostor; the rain falling at his prayer was the merest accident of weather--a freak of capricious nature--No, no! the shouts and vows of Carmel--so far as her influence is concerned--shall never be ratified within the palace of Jezreel; the heavens may again be shut up; the famine may drain the life of the nation--but on no account shall Baal's altars be overthrown. By all the gods of Tyre, the insult perpetrated by this Gilead Prophet shall not pass with impunity. The blood of her priests shall not be borne unavenged to the shores of Phoenicia! That hour a messenger is sent to Elijah to confirm the threat--that before the shadows of tomorrow's evening gather over the hills of Samaria, his life should be as the life of the ghastly corpses strewing the banks of the Kishon.

And though not precisely stated, we are left too plainly to infer from the



sequel, the effect which this outburst produced on the mind of wavering, cowardly Ahab. By the time the whirlwind of his consort's passion had expended itself--alas! his goodness, also, had become that of the morning cloud and early dew. The deep impression of the Fire and Rain answers, was already obliterated from his abject soul--his voice is now loud as that of Jezebel in denouncing the whole day of miracle and triumph as a gigantic imposture; and Elijah more than ever, "a troubler in Israel"--a fanatic slaughterer--whose deed of recent blood can only be expiated by his life.

What was the result of this threatening message and sudden reverse of feeling on the conduct of the Prophet? We might well have expected, from his precedents, that he would maintain either a dignified silence, or send to the haughty idolatress a dignified answer and reproof, worthy of the ambassador of the living Jehovah--a message, in the spirit of that sent by a later champion of the faith, to the Jezebel of her age--"Go," said Chrysostom to the person sent by the Empress Eudoxia, with a threat of vengeance, "Go, tell her I fear nothing but sin."

Or if this base appeal to natural fears and to induce an unworthy flight, were for a moment entertained by him, that he would immediately exorcize the 'coward thought' with worthier resolves. He who had not winced or quailed, when he stood, in single-handed combat, against six hundred antagonists--who had braved, for years, summer's drought and winter's cold--could it be supposed that for a moment, he would stagger under the impotent threat of a woman? Impossible! And yet so it is. Paralyzed with terror--overpowered and overmastered as if by some sudden temptation--Elijah resolves on escape. "He arose and went for his life."

Mournful transition! We look in vain for the dauntless vessel which, a few hours before, we beheld holding on its triumphant course amid buffeting storms. All we can now discern is a forlorn castaway, in the midst of a dark sea, without sails or oars or rudder--drifting on, he knows not where--with no star to guide him, and no voice to cheer him in the waste wilderness of waters! Accompanied by his servant, and probably under the cover of night, he hurries across the mountains of Samaria; onwards thence, to the extreme south of Judah in the direction of the Arabian

desert. We can follow him in thought, far away from the hills of Judea--in the wide upland valley, or rather undulating plain, sprinkled with shrubs and with the wild flowers which indicate the transition from the pastures of Palestine to the desert, marked also by the ancient wells dug far into the rocky soil, and bearing on their stone or marble margins the traces of the long ages during which the water has been drawn up from their deep recesses. At last he seeks shelter in the town of Beersheba--'the well of the oath'--the last point reached by the patriarchs--the last center of their wandering flocks and herds, where Abraham planted the grove of light feathery tamarisk, and called on 'the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.'

How the memories of the great Father of his nation--so fragrant around that sacred spot--must have rebuked his coward flight! He must have read on every crumbling altar-stone the record of the patriarch's faith, and the reproof of his own degenerate spirit. Nor is he satisfied with the refuge which the walls of Beersheba afford him. One of the best kings of Judah (Jehoshaphat) then swayed the scepter of David's house; and as Beersheba was situated within his territory, the fugitive Prophet--with such a guarantee for his security and safety--might well have been contented there to remain. But his whole nature seems demoralized and panic-stricken. He had lost, alike all confidence in God and trust in man. He cannot endure even the company of his servant, or allow him to share his heavy secret.

Leaving his attendant to his fate in the city, he himself plunges into the depths of the wilderness--the wild arid wasteland terminated in the far south by the tremendous gorges and precipices of Sinai. On, on, on, he plods, during a long weary day, until the sun sets over the burning sands. No ravens of Cherith are there to minister to him--no sympathizing voices of Sarepta to cheer him. The journey, even for his iron bodily frame, seems too much. Footsore, travel-worn--with aching head and fevered brain--he casts himself at the foot of a bush of desert juniper--one of those shrubs with white blossoms, familiar to travelers in these cheerless wadys, and under which the Arabian to this day shelters himself, alike from the sun's heat and the night winds.

There, on a hard pillow lies the forlorn pilgrim--muttering, with faint lips,

a prayer, (how different from the recent one of Carmel!) "He requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." "It is enough!"--that is, 'I need go no farther, I feel I can get no comfort--my life is embittered with cruel failure; what can I hope for, if the trumpet-tongued miracles of Carmel fail to convince? My sun has set behind these distant waves of the great sea. I had hoped to have a grave in Israel--But 'It is enough.' Let me die, uncoffined, unsepulchred! Let the desert sand be my winding-sheet--let the desert winds sigh and chant my requiem!'

In the deep, dreadful silence of that night-season, what visions must have clustered around his pillow, as he laid down his weary head to sleep. The crowd and the shouts of Carmel--the descending fire--the blackening heavens--the refreshing rain--the impressed king--the exulting people--his own prayer! And then, these phantoms, as they troop before him, chasing one another in succession through his fevered brain, leave, in this chaos of thought, the altar and sacrifice on which the fire descended, standing by itself, lonely, desolate, forsaken--the monument of his triumph--the memorial of his guilt and shame; and, worse than all--would not the reflection goad him like a scorpion-sting, the thought of the joyful thousands of penitent Israel who had woke up at his bidding to hope and faith--deserted all at once by their leader; some relapsing into the old idolatrous worship; others, if true to their convictions, given over unshielded to the fiendish vengeance of Jezebel--their blood flowing like water in the streets of Jezreel--calling, in vain, for aid and support from the crouching coward of the wilderness--the creed of the palace, "Baal he is the Lord!" effacing the nobler confession of Carmel, like the writing on the sand obliterated by the rising tide! Oh, who would covet that uneasy head in the Beersheba desert? Every star in the sky at Cherith used to look down upon him like an angel of light. But now these heavens are a dark inky scroll, written in letters of lamentation, and mourning, and woe--sorrow, anguish of spirit, wounded pride--were that night his bitter portion. The torch of "The Prophet of Fire" lay quenched and blackened at his feet. A prince and a great man in Israel had ignominiously fallen. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth--he returns to his earth--in that very day his thoughts perish!"

We may well learn, from this sad crisis in Elijah's history, the lesson of our own weakness, and our dependence on God's grace. In the divine life, often the most dangerous and perilous time for the believer, is after a season of great enlargement; when he is saying to himself, "My mountain stands strong." The spiritual armor is loosely worn--he gets drowsy after the flush of victory--the bold, bounding river, that we have just witnessed taking leap after leap in successive cataracts, loses itself in the low, marshy swamps of self-confidence. In prosperity, moreover, whether that prosperity be outward or inward, worldly prosperity or soul prosperity, or both combined--the Lord often puts His favored servants at such seasons to the proof; to test the strength and reality of their faith.

He did so with Abraham. After a season of signal and unexampled blessing, "God tested Abraham"--the death of an only son and covenant-heir was the fiery ordeal. But the patriarch stood the trial. He came forth purified from the furnace, the possessor of a richer heritage of covenanted promises! He did so with Paul. Lest he should be exalted above measure, He brought him from the third heavens to endure the misery of some earthly thorn. But he also came forth unscathed. His "buffeting" led him to prayer. He leaves the furnace, glorying in his infirmities; exulting in the power of Christ, and in a deeper personal interest in the blessings of His grace. Elijah had been thus "exalted." In his elation, he had too confidently calculated on success. His naturally impetuous spirit, in the hour of triumph, would be in no mood to brook courtly opposition or to receive the threat and affront of an insulting message. His strength gives way just where we would have least expected--under an appeal to the lowest emotion of a man's nature--fear.

We are often exhorted to "beware of besetting sins;" but a different lesson is brought home to us from Elijah's experience. It is rather to beware of sins that are least besetting--loopholes in the citadel of the heart through which we have least dread of being successfully assailed. If there was one sin, judging from the Prophet's previous history, by which he was less likely to be overtaken than another, it was the sin of weakness or a craven spirit. God often allows His people thus to lapse, in order to show what broken, bruised, fragile reeds in themselves they are. Ah! "when you think you stand, take heed lest you fall." "Be not high minded, but fear."

When even a Samson, when shorn of his locks--becomes weak as other men--what need is there for those of inferior moral and spiritual stature--the "Feeble Minds," and "Little Faiths," and "Ready to Halts" to remember, that it is by grace they stand! When a mighty inhabitant of the forest succumbs to the blast of temptation; what need is there for the saplings to tremble in grappling with the storm!--"Howl fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen."

Beware of taking any step without the Divine sanction. If Elijah, on hearing of Jezebel's rage, had made prayer still his resort; and asked in simple faith, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" it would have saved him many a bitter hour and tear. But he constituted himself judge of what was right, took his own resolution, and abandoned himself to flight. "He fled for his life;" but, in doing so, he lost sight of this golden thread of comfort and joy--that life is in the hand of God. He ignored, for the time, his glorious old watchword--flung aside the glowing lamp which had hitherto guided his path--"Jehovah lives, before whom I stand!" Hitherto, with the docility and confidence of a child, he had followed God's leadings alone. Cherith, Zarephath, Carmel, were like so many finger-posts on life's journey, bearing the inscription, "This is the way, walk in it." But now, he followed the dictate of his own cowardly fears, and wounded, fretted pride. Dearly did he pay the penalty of his folly! "There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Let us be careful not to follow our own paths; not to take any solemn and important step unless it be divinely owned and recognized. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are Your ways." Lot followed his own way--it was to the well-watered plain--the luxurious capital in the valley of Siddim. He rushed blindfold into evil. Carnal reasons alone lured him there. It was the result of no prayer--no divine impulse. Jonah followed his own way; but not with impunity, did the fugitive rush, in blind madness, from God and from duty. He was tossed into a raging sea--left an outcast on a desert shore--carrying, moreover, the brand of a wounded conscience--a fostered spirit of peevishness and discontent with him through life--we fear to the grave.

So long as Elijah did his God-appointed work earnestly, unflinchingly, all

went well with him. When he paused, hesitated, faltered--or rather, when, in an impetuous moment, he cast away the noblest opportunity ever prophet had--shut himself up in a wilderness--settled down into inaction--shedding ignoble tears under a bush in the desert--then the great soul and its magnanimous purposes is gone. He has become a fretful, petulant child, morbidly brooding over his disappointed hopes. He flings away the oars of duty and obedience--his strong brawny arms have ceased to pull the bark in which his God had bid him struggle--and now he is at the mercy of winds and waves.

Beware of murmuring under trial. Elijah's desert prayer was one of pride, presumption, irritability, impatience, peevishness--"It is enough, take away my life." Even had his success on Carmel been marred and counteracted by the evil influences at work in Ahab's court, and a new era of persecution had in consequence been initiated in Israel--his duty was patient submission to the Divine will, cherishing the humble confidence and assurance that light would sooner or later arise out of darkness. Instead of this, he breathes the prayer, of all others least warrantable for any creature of God to utter, "Let me die." There are circumstances, indeed, when such a prayer is permissible--when it becomes a noble expression of believing faith and hope. Such was the case when the great Apostle, in subordination to the Higher will which was ever his guiding principle, made the avowal of "a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better"--making, however, the reservation, that so long as his Lord had work for him in the Church on earth, he would cheerfully remain. Elijah's prayer was altogether different. It was the feverish outbreak of a moment of passion. How forbearing and gracious was God in not taking him at his word! Had he done so, the Prophet would have died under a cloud--his name would have been associated with cowardice--his character would have been a mournful example of greatness ending in disgrace. He would have lost the glorious closing scene of all--the chariot of fire, and the deathless victory.

Each of us has, or may yet have, his day of trial--sickness, bereavement, crushed hopes, bitter disappointments, crossed wishes--stings and arrows from quarters least expected. How are we to meet them? Are we to give way to peevish, fretful repining? Are we to say, 'I am wearied of life. I

would I were done with all this wretchedness. What pleasure is existence to this wounded, harassed, smitten spirit?' No, take courage. It is not "enough." The Lord has work for you still to do. It is not for you, but for Him, to say, at His own appointed time, as He said to Hezekiah, "You shall die, and not live." If we have ever been guilty of uttering such a rash prayer as that of Elijah--"Take away my life"--let us be thankful God has not given us the fulfillment of our own wish--the ratification of our own desire--and allowed us to die, unfit and unprepared!

But we must not close this chapter, picturing the Prophet in his desert divested of all hope or faith--with no relic remaining of his own former self. His spiritual life for the moment may have been reduced to a spark; but the spark was there, and his God will yet fan it into a flame. Even in his peevish, petulant utterance, as he lies under that juniper tree, he prays. Even in the far desert he has not forgotten (oh, how could he forget!) the ONE who, for years, had been his almighty Protector, Guide, Friend! "It is enough, O Lord"--"O Lord!" "My flesh," he seems to say, "longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." "As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God." "It is enough!" 'Man has deceived me--earthly hopes and expectations have proved like this desert's mirage--"It is enough, O Lord," I turn to You.'

Yes, let us leave Elijah on that prostrate couch of unworthy exile, yet still, mingling accents of fretfulness with accents of prayer. This poor, battered-down flower seems, in the moment of its humiliation, to turn towards the Great Sun. Arise, Prophet of the desert! your God has still for you a noble, unfulfilled destiny. Your future is in His hands. Say not, in your blind, disappointed pride, "It is enough!" Let Him work out His own plan of infinite wisdom. Arise! you have much yet to do and dare and suffer for His sake. He will yet turn your mourning into dancing, take off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness. Arise! take your torch with its expiring flame--The God who gave it to you, is yet to revive it, and make thousands bless both Him and you for its undying radiance. The day is coming when you shall say, "It is enough"--but not, until, your work finished, the chariot and horses of fire are waiting ready to bear you to your eternal reward!

## 11. THE ANGEL'S VISIT

1 Kings 19:5-9

Then he lay down and slept under the juniper tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, for there is a long journey ahead of you."

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you--is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? And the angel of the Lord stood by."--Zechariah 3:2, 5

"Man ate angels' food."--Psalm 78:25

We return to the lonely prophet, sitting sullen and dejected under the bush of the desert. "Lo," he had said in his despondency, "I will wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I will hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." Jaded in body and racked in spirit, sleep--nature's great restorer--"the chief nourisher in life's feast"--overtakes him. He had prayed that he might die; and as his eyes were now closing, he might have wished it were the last long slumber that knows no waking. But God's thoughts are not man's thoughts. "He gives his beloved sleep." He rocks this petulant child to rest in his desert cradle; but he is to wake with tearless eyes, refreshed, invigorated, gladdened. "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning."

Leaving the Prophet wrapped in slumber, let us pause and note God's



tender interest in His people. And this especially in seasons, when we might have imagined they had forfeited all claim on His care and compassion. "He considers their soul in adversity." As this fugitive from duty is stretched under the juniper tree, with his sheepskin mantle for a covering, lo, a bright angelic being, probably during the darkness of night--is seen approaching the sleeper's couch, bending over his sun-browned face, furrowed with fatigue and sorrow. It is one of those spirits to whom has been assigned the lofty mission of 'ministering to those who are heirs of salvation.' It may have been one of the very throng who had encamped around the hero-prophet in the day of his triumph. With what mournful sympathy and interest would he now steal to his side, in the hour of his humiliation!

The personal and visible ministry of angels was no strange occurrence in Hebrew history. In this same wilderness, a thousand years before, Ishmael's cries and Hagar's tears, were answered by an angel's directing voice and presence. A century later, another houseless fugitive from Beersheba had laid himself down, like the prophet, amid heaps of rough stones, to sleep. Angelic beings were sent to guard the pillow of the wanderer, and convert the crudest of couches into the gate of heaven. Generations after Elijah had been borne to heaven in his flaming chariot of victory, a lowlier chariot was seen moving along the neighboring desert of Gaza. A dejected but earnest soul was seated in it reading his Bible, and longing to know "the better way." An angel from heaven comes to the city of Samaria, and instructs Philip the Evangelist to interrupt his work and hasten far off to the wilderness to minister comfort to that one solitary traveler.

Yet again--in the sea of Adria, an Alexandrian vessel has been overtaken by storm. For days the crew seem abandoned to their fate, drifting along the waves of the maddened sea. God has one loved, treasured soul in that ship, and for his sake, lo, an angel from the upper sanctuary is commissioned to speed at midnight; to whisper a word of peace and comfort to the apostle-prisoner. "There stood by me that night," said Paul, "the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve."

Did the Church need these celestial protectors and guardians only during the period of her infancy and childhood; and did the ministry of angels

lapse with the Old Testament dispensation? No; we believe, though unseen to mortal eye--though we cannot trace their footsteps nor hear the rustling of their wings--it is a thoroughly scriptural and comforting truth, (and never more so than in our seasons of trouble,) that we are still environed by these bright sentinels from the spirit-land--hovering, now, over a sick-bed, now, smoothing a pillow of suffering, now, gathered amid the hush of our solemn assemblies, now, mingling with the weeping mourners at a couch of death, and bearing the ransomed soul in its arrowy flight to the upper sanctuary. It is interesting to think, that no sooner are the gates of the morning opened, than these glorified "ministering ones" are abroad on earth on their errands of love and mercy to its waiting crowds. Here is a sorrowing spirit to heal; there is a body of pain to soothe; here is an aged pilgrim struggling in the Jordan, they go to help him through; there is an infant on its tiny couch of death, they hasten to pluck the bud, to gather the lily, and carry it to the garden above.

But to return to the sleeper. A gentle hand touches him, a gentle voice speaks to him, "Arise and eat." Partially roused, yet almost unconscious of the angel's presence, the Prophet raises himself from his pillow, and sees placed at his head--(all the provisions which to this day a Bedouin needs)--"a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water." He seems scarcely to have partaken of the provided food when sleep again overtakes him; and then a second time--probably when morning dawned--the gentle touch and heavenly voice are heard and felt, accompanied by the additional words--"because the journey is too great for you." Now fully awake, the strange celestial form appears before him; and, more impressive and touching to his spirit, the celestial voice falls on his ear. It must have been like a ray of light breaking through a storm-wreathed sky, this bright messenger giving him the assurance that his God still cherished him; took a tender, loving interest in his well-being--and, notwithstanding his miserable coward flight, had delegated a special envoy from heaven to spread a table for him in the wilderness, and whisper to him accents of comfort!

His soul, like that of aged Jacob, revives. 'God cares for me,' is the simple thought which rekindles the smouldering fires on his heart-altar. It is to

him better than all the miraculous provision. He envies not the prophets of the groves, with their dainties at Jezebel's table. He has food to eat which the world knows not of. The living Jehovah of Cherith and Sarepta is still his. He has "found him also in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness," keeping him "as the apple of His eye." The Prophet can make his waking song that of the sweet psalmist of Israel--"If I take the wings of the morning and flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

It is the goodness of God which still leads to repentance. Let every trembling backslider, whose eye may fall on these pages, know the unwearying love with which that God follows you, even when, sadder far than in the case of Elijah, you can tell of weeks and months and years of guilty alienation. He finds you in the deep slumber of spiritual indifference under your juniper-tree--some miserable, false, delusive, worldly shelter which you have deliberately preferred to "the shadow of the Almighty." How righteously might He have left you to be a mark for the poisoned arrows of the tempter, and to have slept the sleep of death! But He sent His angel of mercy--some solemn providence, shall we say--that with angel-touch woke you, and with angel-whisper bade you 'arise.' The warning voice was heard; but the warning was but for a moment. The old drowsiness supervened--you were locked, as ever, in the dream of spiritual callousness and unconcern. Has He abandoned you to your fate? Has He given His angel the commission, 'Let him alone; let him sleep on now and take the final rest of despair?' No, that angel of the Lord, whether wearing the bright shining wings of prosperity, or the sable wings of sorrow, has come, like the messenger sent to Elijah, the second time, and "touched you"--assured you of the loving interest your God has in your restoration--addressed the monitory word, reminding you of the solemn journey before you, but pointing you to the blessed gospel provision He has made, if you will only awake and arise! Yes, "believe, only believe" in the reality of God's compassion and tenderness towards the erring--that no father ever loved his prodigal and desired his return more, than your Heavenly Father desires yours. The divine Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, that He may search out the one, truant, wandering sheep; and He goes after it "until He finds it."

Mark farther, not only God's interest in Elijah, but His considerate method of dealing with His servant. He gives him first food for the body. He recruits his wasted, shattered, hunger-stricken frame, before He offers spiritual guidance or counsel. The angel stands by in silence, until the restorative refreshment had been partaken of; and then, but not until then, he speaks to him; gives him directions as to his journey, work, and duty. There is nothing more striking, did we carefully observe it, than God's wise and appropriate adaptation of His dealings to the peculiar state, circumstances, and necessities of His people. He knows the journey that is before each of them; He knows what storm, in leaving the harbor, the vessel will encounter. And as Matthew Henry, the best of commentators, says on this passage, "He that appoints what the voyage shall be, will supply the ship accordingly." Reader, take no thought, no overanxious, fretting, disquieting thought for the future. God will lead you by "the right way." If the journey be great, the strength needed will be given--"Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your day is, so shall your strength be."

Conscious of Jehovah's kindly and beneficent care, and rejoicing in it, Elijah is himself again! He springs from his couch--and as we behold him, with pilgrim staff in hand, strong in body, and brave in soul, once more speeding along the dreary wastelands--do we not seem to hear the solemn stillness of the desert air broken by the inspired melody of his fatherland? --"The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear him and delivers them. O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusts in him."

It was, observe, his at once partaking of the God-given food, which enabled him to set out on his journey. To us there is a spiritual lesson in this. Many sit at the foot of their juniper-trees, moping and in despondency--musing on their weakness, fretting themselves over their past sins--the difficulties and trials of the spiritual journey--and in this presumptuous despair, settle down in their old sleep of indifference, and perish miserably--the victims of their own unreasonable doubts. Their inward disquieting thought is, 'How can we possibly live out these desert privations--that storm by day, these drenching dews by night? Where can we get food in these dreary leagues of arid sand, or drink amid these

barren rocks and waterless channels?' The angel message to all such is, "Arise! take the provided food; accept the offered gospel-terms, and trust God for all the rest. He who has provided food, will provide strength for the journey. Arise! Do the will of God, and you shall know of the teaching."

This is true Christian philosophy. Act up to God's directions--seek to fulfill His will, and in the very doing of that will, unbelieving torturing doubts shall take flight, and by the most convincing of all evidences--the inward, subjective, experimental, you will be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. "Why are you lying on your face?" said the Divine voice to Moses, when he crouched a sceptic at God's feet, pointing to the barrier mountains behind and the raging sea in front--"Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward!"--'Up, do my bidding; and you shall see how I can make my way in the sea, and my path in the mighty waters.' Forward! said the rebuked hero, clasping the rod of faith which had been lying forgotten at his side, and rising in the might of Jehovah. Forward they did go; and what was their confession and anthem on the opposite shore?--"Your right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy." "At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep." "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong God like unto you? You rule the raging of the sea--when the waves thereof arise, you still them."

On the Prophet journeys for a long hundred and eighty miles; forty suns rise and set on the desert sands, before he fixes on any resting-place. Various and conflicting motives, doubtless, had induced him to undertake this lengthened pilgrimage, and ultimately to select the spot where he now takes up his abode. While unquestionably guilty of a lamentable dereliction of duty in thus prolonging his flight; and while fear--unworthy fear and distrust, as we shall presently see--still clung to him and mingled with the better convictions of his newly-awakened soul--yet he betrays also, in the very selection of his place of retreat, evidence of the recent revival of his faith in God, and of the depth and reality of his religious feelings. His predominating motive, we are inclined to believe, in directing his footsteps to Horeb, was to secure an opportunity of uninterrupted repose, meditation, and prayer; and thereby recruit alike

his physical and spiritual strength. Where could he have discovered a more befitting temple?--where, (with the exception of the sacred city of solemnities--Mount Zion itself,)--could he find a nobler oracle of holy thought, than among the hallowed solitudes of Sinai?--those mysterious cliffs which, ages before the Exodus, the wandering shepherds--the Amalekite Arabs--had invested with dreadful sanctity as "The Mount of God," and, according to Josephus, forbade their flocks to trespass on its luxuriant pastures.

But subsequent ages and events had made these haunts more consecrated still. The vivid emotions which we in modern days experience in visiting the Holy Land, must have been shared by the Israelites of Elijah's time with reference to the Sinai desert. It was the Holy Land of that age. The Exodus and forty years' wandering formed the grandest epoch of their historical annals. The miraculous passage of the Red Sea had been sung and celebrated by inspired minstrels in their psalms, and by inspired seers in their prophetic rolls. Elim, Marah, Rephidim, and, above all, Sinai and Horeb, (Gebel-Mousa and Gebel-Attaka,) were names and scenes of imperishable interest. Imagine the Prophet's feelings, as he approached, in evening light, the majestic summits of "the mount of God," reddened with the fiery glow of the descending sun--each peak a hoary rugged giant, compared with the old familiar mountains of northern Palestine--in themselves not devoid of grandeur--Ebal and Gerizim, Tabor and Hermon, Carmel and Lebanon. He wends his way, up the frowning steep, to the cave which to this day bears his name--probably the same from which his great predecessor saw the "glory of God." He enters the cavern--spreads his mantle on the rocky floor, with the determination, probably, to make it for some considerable time his place of abode. He may have uttered in spirit the plaintive prayer of Jeremiah, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a hiding-place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people and go from them, for they are an assembly of treacherous men." And if such were his longing wish, it is now fulfilled--he has reached the sacred spot hallowed by the footsteps of Moses and the voice of God. He would be well content to say, "This is my rest; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." But his God will not leave him long undisturbed in his lonely grotto and in his willful flight. The silent echoes of his retreat are awoke as with the voice of thunder, "What

are you doing here, Elijah?"

## **12. THE DRAMA OF THE DESERT**

1 Kings 19:9-13

There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence--a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people...Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against you--I am God, even your God."--Psalm 50:3, 4, 7

The wanderer was alone, yet not alone. A voice he could neither mistake nor misinterpret had sounded in his ears the thrilling question—"What are you doing here, Elijah?" Every syllable was pregnant with meaning and rebuke. Life (and none should know better than you) is a great doing; not hermit inaction, inglorious repose, guilty idolatry. "What are you

doing here, Elijah?"--you my viceregent in these degenerate days, you whom I have honored above your fellows, and who have had proof upon proof of my faithfulness? "What are you doing here, Elijah?"--here in this desolate spot--away from duty--the Baal-altars rebuilding--my own altar in ruins--the sword of persecution unsheathed, and the bleating flock left by you (coward Shepherd!) to the ravening wolf? "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Your very name rebukes you! Where is God, your 'strength?' Where are the prayers and vows of Carmel? Child of weakness, belying your name and destiny, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

That voice is responded to by an answer in which are still mournfully blended selfish mortification, wounded pride, sceptic faithlessness--"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I, only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." The question is repeated. But before this is done, God opens the volume of nature with all its grand and terrible, yet soothing influences. "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!" Let us take our stand with Elijah on the mount, and listen to the sublime utterances.

Let us endeavor to picture the manifestation itself--the HISTORICAL SCENE here described.

Elijah is commissioned to leave the cave, and to stand in the mount before the Lord. "And behold," we read, "the Lord passed by." But the majestic Presence is preceded by a threefold manifestation--three successive couriers or harbingers of the Divine Majesty--storm, earthquake, fire--three terrific voices crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." First, "a great and strong wind splits the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord." A tumultuous storm swept by; the winged tempests of heaven are let loose from their chambers to wrestle with the old granite peaks--they rush from cliff to cliff with a sound like the crash of armies in a shock of battle--the splintered rocks lie scattered in the valleys beneath, driven to and fro as chaff in the summer thrashing-floor. Jehovah had arisen in the glory of His majesty to shake terribly the earth. "BUT," it is added, "the Lord was not in the wind." The Prophet, in



trembling amazement, marvels what next was to follow. He may have expected, after this exhibition of Power, some audible expression of the Divine will; and that the "wind" was the trumpet-voice heralding its proclamation. But there was none! The hurricane has passed, the tempest is lulled, all is for a moment hushed in silence. It has left nothing but the memorials of its fury in the fragments which strew the scene of desolation.

Again, however, a murmuring, muffled, hollow sound, reaches his ear. The sky is darkened, the earth is convulsed, the everlasting hills rock and tremble; fresh masses of stone come thundering down from the mountain summits, the leaves in the great volume of nature are again torn in tatters--tossed in the wild elemental war; "but the Lord is not in the earthquake." What next? Is there still to be no manifestation of Love and Mercy in conjunction with Power? The Prophet gazes, but the reeling of the earth, the last symbol of terror in this sublime panorama, is only to give place to a third. "After the earthquake, a fire." In that dim twilight hour, the sky was red with flame; a lurid glow converts every mountain summit into a ruby battlement; the valley at his feet blazes like a smelting furnace. Flash, it may be, succeeds flash, of brilliant Eastern lightning. This was the most terrible of all.

FIRE! It was the recognized emblem of Divine wrath. It was fire that was hurled down from heaven on the cities of the plain. It was fire that came forth from the Lord and consumed Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron. It was fire that burned on the top of that same Sinai when Jehovah proclaimed the decalogue. Elijah had recently seen his burnt-offering on Carmel, consumed by fire--the symbol of that righteous vengeance, which must fall either on the sinner or on his vicarious sacrifice. There was nothing, therefore, in this last manifestation, to calm the fears of the lonely spectator. He must have bowed himself down in crouching terror in the mountain cave. There was no lullaby to his soul in this new flaming harbinger. "The Lord was not in the fire."

But this mighty parable of nature is yet incomplete. After the fire there was "a still small voice"--a "still soft whisper," as the words may be rendered, like the tremulous cadence of sweet music falling on the entranced ear. The Lord was THERE! Strange contrast to the hurricane

and earthquake symbols which preceded it. It is a "voice"--a "still voice"--a "small voice." The chafed, riotous elements have rocked themselves to rest. All nature is hushed; the sky is clear; the soft evening shadows fall gently on the mountain-sides; and the Prophet's own perturbed spirit partakes of the repose. Nature's vast volume opens to a page on which is inscribed in gleaming letters--"God is love!" It is enough. The Prophet reads!--he adores!--he rejoices! Wrapping himself in his mantle, he comes forth and stands at the entrance of his cave. God has set him, as He set Moses, in the cleft of a rock, and made "all His glory to pass before him." He has proclaimed His name and ever-during memorial. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." And Israel's illustrious prophet, like Israel's sweet singer, can now give thanks unto the living Jehovah, for He is good--for His mercy endures forever!

Let us proceed, however, more especially, to consider the object of this manifestation and its designed lessons. We may warrantably regard it as a great acted parable, containing important truths, alike for the Prophet and for the Church in all ages.

We may look briefly, in the first instance, at the DESIGN of these parabolic utterances as regarded Elijah. His despondency, as we have previously noted, had manifestly arisen from a sinful and unworthy distrust of God's power. "I alone," said he, "am left." He had forgotten that even though his erroneous conclusions had been correct--though ten thousand knees had been bowing to Baal, and the merest wreck of true-hearted Israelites had been left; still there was ONE above, who could in a moment hurl every idol from its impious shrine, and quench every flame on the apostate altars. How, then, does Jehovah recall the Prophet's better convictions? He gives him a dreadful exhibition of His might and majesty. He makes speechless nature the preacher to revive the convictions of His servant in the great truth--that the "Lord God omnipotent reigns." He manifests Himself in the hurricane and the earthquake and the fire, so that the Tishbite could say with a deeper emphasis than the Psalmist, God has spoken once, yes, thrice have I heard this, that "POWER belongs unto God."

These majestic symbols spoke to him with dreadful eloquence--"Poor craven-hearted Prophet! will you distrust Me after this? Can I, who have

the elements in my grasp, who thresh the mountains and beat the hills as chaff--I, who direct the volleyed lightning and give wings to the tempest--can I not be trusted to protect your life? Why are you afraid of the threats of a mortal, when you have the God of your Fathers to stand by you? Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker, that has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? I am the Lord your God, who divided the sea, whose waves roared--the Lord of hosts is my name. And I have put my words in your mouth, and I have covered you in the shadow of my hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, You are my people!"

But more than this. Although these tremendous natural phenomena preceded the Divine manifestation, it is expressly said, that the Lord himself was not in either wind or earthquake or fire. We must regard them, therefore, as conveying to the Prophet additional symbolic meaning. They were the reflected moods of his own mind--his own impetuous turbulent self was mirrored in these agents and elements of nature.--Earthquake and tempest and flame were the fit types of his past prophetic mission and character. He was denounced by his royal master as a "troubler in Israel;" and even in the eyes of the people he could not be regarded otherwise than as a minister of dread and terror--an incarnation of righteous vengeance, passionate zeal, fiery courage--at whose bidding both the natural and political horizon was black with cloud and ominous with storm. And as he had begun, so doubtless perhaps might Elijah expect that with famine and FIRE and blood, he would complete his mission, and inaugurate the regeneration of Israel. God wished to show him that all this stormy zeal--this flaming retribution--was not the customary method of the Divine dealing--that judgment was His strange work--and that a mission begun thus in terror was to end in peace--"a mission begun with John the Baptist's boldness was to terminate with John the Evangelist's love."

'Enough,' He seems to say, 'Prophet of Fire. You have awoke the people

hitherto with the earthquake and tempest and flame--your battle hitherto has been that of the warrior, with confused noise and garments rolled in blood. These dreadful demonstrations may for the moment awe Jezebel's priests, and inspire the apostate nation with a salutary dread. But I wish with living power to speak to my covenant Israel. I wish to induce them to seek me in penitence and tears. This can only be effected by the ministry of love--the still small voice!' Elijah bowed in reverence! The gentle, silent symbol has opened to him a new volume. It is as a Being of Love that 'Jehovah lives.' It invests His old motto with a new meaning. God has taught him that weak things can confound the things that are mighty. This vision and parable of Horeb might thus be translated into inspired words--"Not by might nor by power, but my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

But leaving the primary object of the manifestation in its reference to Elijah, let us regard it in its practical bearings, as an Old Testament parable of God's method of dealing with individual believers in every age. First unfolding to them the terrors of the law--convincing of sin--then this heraldry of vengeance, followed by the gracious offer of gospel mercy--the "still small voice" of Redeeming love. He takes first to Sinai; displays its thunders and lightnings and curses--manifests Himself as "the consuming fire," "who will by no means clear the guilty." Then as "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself"--desiring not the death of the sinner--"waiting to be gracious."

Cannot many, in a spiritual sense, endorse from their own experience, the truth of this great Parable of nature? Do you remember the time when God laid you on a bed of sickness--broke up, in a moment, your dream of earthly happiness, brought you to the brink of the tomb--and you felt that, all unfit and unprepared to die, you were standing on the verge of eternity? As you lay tossing on that fevered couch--the dim lamp of life burning to its socket--your mind filled with blank despair--the past, with its ghostly visions of unrepented, unforgiven sin, rising up behind and before you in terrible memorial--do you remember how conscience became to you a Horeb? God's Righteousness, and Justice, and Holiness, like the tempest and earthquake and fire, swept by you in terrible procession--apparently heralding with trumpet voice, "vengeance and

fiery indignation."

But He spared you--in mercy spared you! And, as the ebbing pulses of life began to quicken, and the gleam of glad hope irradiated your silent chamber--do you remember that gracious ray of peace--that "still small voice" which whispered the glad, never-to-be-forgotten accents in your ear, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life?" What wonders does that simple, sublime disclosure of the love of God in Christ effect, when once it breaks through the thick blinding darkness of the soul! How it sweeps every barrier down; and brings the maddened maniac--who snapped his fetters and chains like thread, and whom no other power could bind--to sit in lamb-like gentleness at the feet of his Divine Savior!

When did Elijah wrap his face in his mantle and come forth from the cave? Not when the hurricane was sweeping by, or the earthquake heaving, or the fire lighting up the wilderness with lurid grandeur. It was when he listened to "the still small voice." So it is with all who have experienced the transforming power of gospel truth. It is not the overawing majesty, but the goodness of God, that leads to repentance--not all the thunders of Sinai, not all the curses of Ebal, can melt and overpower and constrain like the believing sight of the Savior of Calvary. Here is the gospel's great principle of gravitation--"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." As the sun of heaven with his silent heat can bend and deflect the iron which defies the power of hammer and anvil, so with the Sun of Righteousness--He can bend and subdue, when every other moral appliance fails--when all other moral dynamics are powerless. Miracles, in themselves, will never convince. The most stupendous array of supernatural wonders will never melt the obdurate heart. Pentecostal marvels failed to do so; the resurrection of Lazarus and Lazarus's Lord failed to do so; just as the terrific manifestations of fire and tempest and earthquake now failed to bring the moping Prophet from his cave. But "the still small voice" was omnipotent. Yes, we need not mourn, in this age of the Church, the absence of miraculous teaching and miraculous symbols; the heavens above us no longer break silence--the earthquake and storm are no longer employed as evangelists to teach us as they taught Elijah. But we have still, what taught him better far, the

sweet tones of this gospel voice--"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation to every one that believes."

And as it is the gospel's "still small voice" that whispers peace and hope to the individual believer, so is it this same silent agency, which is to form the mightiest lever in the world's regeneration. Power was the symbol of old imperial Rome. Her military emblem was the eagle--the bird of prey--with keen eye and strong talons. The empire of the Caesars rose in vision to the Prophet of Babylon, as "a beast dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; having great iron teeth which devoured and broke in pieces." But what has Rome, with her sister kingdom, Greece, the two old-world representatives of power, alike physical and intellectual--what have they done in solving the urgent problems of aching humanity? Nothing. Even in the higher domain of intellect, they only give, in one dreadful sense, the demonstration of knowledge being "power;" by showing how mere intellectual greatness may be allied with moral weakness, mental capacity with spiritual degradation. Christianity introduced a new element of power, after tempest, earthquake, and fire had proved insufficient.

"Caesar and Alexander," said one of the sceptic great ones of modern ages, "conquered by arms--Jesus Christ conquered by love." In the Roman catacombs, above which had thundered the tramp of these same victorious armies of martial Rome, there is carved, here and there, an image of the good Shepherd, carrying in His loving embrace the sheep that had wandered--underneath is the Latin inscription--"By this I conquer!" The legions just referred to and their garlanded victors have left behind them no movement of enduring goodness--nothing did they, to dry the tears, or soothe the sorrows, or tame and curb the passions of mankind. But the gospel of that good Shepherd "who gave His life for the sheep," has not uttered thus in vain its blessed words of peace and goodwill to men. There is no speech nor language where that silent voice has not been heard; its line has gone through all the earth, and its words unto the end of the world; purifying, soothing, comforting, elevating, regenerating, wherever its blessed principles have been diffused, and its healing influences have penetrated--the true panacea for the evils of fevered, sin-stricken humanity--the winged messenger of mercy, carrying the olive-branch of peace around the globe! That day shall come, blessed

be God, to our earth--the din of earthquake-war and whirlwind-passion is not to last for ever. The fitful moanings of the night-blast are the precursors of a brighter morning than has ever yet arisen upon the nations. And, what is dearer to us, as members of the Church of Christ, all her fierce contentions and fiery trials shall yet issue in rest and deliverance.

Emblem after emblem of trouble and wrath and vengeance passed before the eye of the Prophet. At length came the whisperings of the voice of peace! He was thereby taught, that though manifold troubles were coming upon the Israelitish nation, there should be deliverance at last. So shall it also be with the Church in her militant state, now rocked in storms, cradled in tempests, cast into a furnace of fire--there is a day of tranquillity at hand. Her Lord is soon to let His voice of love be heard; then these elements of wrath shall be hushed forever, and "the days of her mourning shall be ended."

While the scene in this passage of Elijah's life is full of lessons to the believer, are there no lessons of admonition and warning for the sinner? Yes, God is thereby telling each one, who may now be resisting Him, how manifold are the means He employs to bring to Himself--the terrors of the law, the sweet and melting tones of the gospel; rousing providences, startling dispensations, sick-beds and death-beds. The King of terrors in tempest-form passes by, sweeping down the treasured memory of years, and leaving behind him a blighted and blackened wilderness. At other times, the Lord speaks by the gentle voice of prosperity--by the blessings He pours into your cup--by the tender voice of His own Word and Spirit--calling upon you as weary and heavy-laden to come and find rest for your souls. What could He have done more for you than He has done? Look back on the past! Is not the picture presented, in this passage of the Prophet's life, the expressive symbol of the many ways Elijah's God has taken to arrest your souls and lead you to repentance? Can it be that all have failed? that judgments and warnings, love and mercy, have all been powerless to bring you to the Tishbite's place, with the mantle of humility around you, owning the combined greatness, and glory, and tenderness of a forbearing God?

Solemn is the word in these text; ponder it and remember it--"The Lord

passed by!" God is "passing;" soon He will be "passed" altogether--your means and privileges at an end, the day of grace fled, and fled forever. It is a dreadful thought, that there is a time coming, when this wondrous contrivance of power, and warning; and love, with some, will be irrecoverably gone; and they--self-destroyers and self-destroyed--left to brood over lost and forfeited opportunities, in the dark, gloomy Horeb-cave of irremediable despair! "What are you doing here?" is the question God puts to every careless sinner. "What are you doing here?"--still in your sins, stall unawakened, unconverted, unsanctified, unsaved. He has "passed by" you again and again--awaking earnest thoughts of repentance; but where are they? Fleeting impressions; like the voice of the retiring thunder, growing fainter and fainter; or, like the wake of the vessel, leaving no trace behind it of its course. "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord!" Go! remembering that "there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared." "With the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption!" Go! remembering that but for the bleeding, dying love of the great Surety, there could have been nothing for you, but the earthquake and tempest and fire, the winged symbols of vengeance. "For you have not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. But you are come--to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel."

Blessed be God for this secure refuge-cave--this glorious "shelter"--where we can flee from the sweep of the descending storm! Wrapping ourselves in the mantle of Redeeming righteousness, we can gaze on the symbols of blended power and mercy, of terror and love. Yes, safe in our trust on the Rock of Ages, we can go forth and 'stand on the mount'--exulting in the sublime assurance--"A Man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of waters in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

### **13. THE SEVEN THOUSAND**



## 1 Kings 19:13-18

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied again, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Then the Lord told him, "Go back the way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! Yet I will preserve seven thousand others in Israel who have never bowed to Baal or kissed him!"

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."--Exodus 3:2

"For I, says the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."--Zech. 2:5

There is a striking analogy between God's proclamation to Moses in a former age, when He spoke to him out of the cloud on the top of Sinai, and that made to Elijah now, in this sequel to the manifestation in Horeb. In the former, the revelation of the Divine attributes, as "merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth," was followed by the solemn averment of Jehovah's unsullied rectitude and holiness, as "the Punisher of Sin"--"and who will by no means clear the guilty." The similar revelation of "the still small voice," made to Elijah from the same stupendous Rocky Oracle, is succeeded by a like declaration; only, not enunciated, in his case, as a general truth or principle; but in the form of a commission, as "the Prophet of Fire," to prepare the two human instruments for the infliction of Divine vengeance on a guilty people and their reigning monarch. He was commanded to anoint one of these to chastise the nation by the sword; the other, to be

the uprooter of Ahab and Jezebel's iniquitous throne, and the exterminator of their gross idolatries. "Anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel; and it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay." God is a God of love--the utterer of "the still small voice"--but it is a love tempered by justice and unswerving hatred of iniquity. While "mercy and truth go continually before His face," "justice and judgment are the foundation of His throne."

We shall, however, in the present chapter, confine ourselves to the comforting assurance given to the Prophet regarding the present, which accompanies the message of wrath; reserving the assurance regarding the future, for a separate chapter. His own sorrowful plaint respecting that present was, "I, even I only, am left." "No--not so!" says the living Jehovah, before whom he stands--"Yet I have left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him." Erroneous as Elijah's conclusions were, let us, nevertheless, try to realize his emotions at this moment of his history, as he is still but half-awake from his dream--only partially as yet roused from his fit of self-pity.

He was haunted by that depressing feeling, which hundreds know so well, of utter loneliness and isolation in entertaining heart-convictions of truth--misapprehended, misunderstood, vilified, with no kindly human voice to cheer him in his hopeless task. It was this, among other things, which made the pillow under his juniper tree, a few weeks before, moist with bitter tears--that there was no eye to weep with him and no heart to comfort him--"I, even I only, am left," a solitary pillar amid the crumbling ruins--a solitary bird, wailing in the desert with plaintive note, without one responsive echo!

There is a yearning, in every human heart, for sympathy. This is specially the case in the prosecution of a great cause or arduous work; and all the more so if it be a holy work. How Paul in the midst of his gigantic labors longed for it, and how he valued it when received! How he mourns the absence of Titus, and how, until he finds this young brother, "his spirit had no rest!" How he welcomes the sympathizing convoy at Appii forum--how the gloom of his prison hours is cheered and lightened by the loving

presence and loving words of Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, and, above all, Timothy!

No, see how a Greater than Paul yearned for human companionship in his unsoled hour. See, in Gethsemane's Garden, with what earnest tones the Divine Redeemer charges the disciples--"Tarry here and watch with me!" If we read the annals of many a missionary in pagan lands, we shall be able to estimate somewhat of Elijah's heavy burden at this time. Again and again, in their instructive diaries, do these self-denying soldiers of the cross tell us how oppressive--no, (the word is not too strong,) how agonizing often to their spirits is the thought of feeling and standing alone amid these millions of benighted heathen; no one to share the crushing load of anxiety, to cheer their faith and help their prayers--"I, even I only, am left!"

In the case of our Prophet, God tells him his conclusions were false. Seven thousand holy spirits were in Israel, linked with him in bonds of hallowed sympathy--seven thousand who were sighing and crying in secret, over the abominations of imported heathenism--ready, as he was, to die a martyr's death, rather than do homage at the shrine of the Sidonian God.

We may learn from this declaration of God to Elijah, in reply to his complaint, never to take too gloomy or desponding a view of the position and prospects of the Church. However reduced in number and influence and piety the Church of God apparently may become--however feeble the spark, it cannot be quenched--it cannot die. The true Israel often and again have been reduced to the lowest ebb--the bush burning with fire ready to be consumed; but the living God was in the bush, and defied the destroying flames.

Witness, in the days of Noah, when all "the remnant according to the election of grace," was contained in an ark of Gopher-wood--eight souls were all that linked the antediluvian and patriarchal believers. Yet that ark (true symbol of the living Church within) rode triumphant through tempest and storm. Witness the Church in the apostolic days, when a handful of trembling hearts met for prayer in an upper chamber in Jerusalem--their influence nothing--their Master gone--the world against

them. Yet the stone "cut from the mountain," gathered strength as it bounded along, crushing in its course the venerated idolatries of centuries, and establishing itself into a kingdom that shall never be destroyed! Witness the Church of the middle ages--hunted down, persecuted, "destitute, afflicted, tormented," driven to one small asylum amid munitions of rocks, in the Alpine Valleys of the Vaudois. Or in a later century, when the darkness was deeper still, and when one brave, outspoken man, previously alluded to as "the Elijah of his times"--denounced with trumpet-voice the abounding corruptions, and awoke Europe from the slumber of death into new and glorious life!

In these ages, as in our own, and in every age that is to come, however sad the degeneracy, and apostate the faith--there was, and there will ever be, a pious remnant, a blessed leaven that will preserve the mass from corruption and decay. Elijah, in his moody, moping melancholy, had no memory to recall Obadiah and the fifties he had been hiding in the caves of Israel; pious, lowly, humble ones, who were weeping in secret over the abominations of the land. Besides, he had been judging of the power and progress of true religion by a false standard. He had been taking his estimate from the jubilee of Carmel; just as many now do, from loud Shibboleths--flaming zeal--display of party. God forms His, from the lowly faith and love of His own hidden ones--those seven thousand whose hearts are open and known only to Him who sees in secret.

Let us not, then, be among the number of those who, like Elijah, would take too gloomy a view of the times; who can see nothing but the exterminating sword of Hazael and Jehu--the disastrous demolition of all churches, and the breaking up of all creeds; who, anticipating such lawless times, would leave in despair churches to decay and perish, just as they would leave a wrecked vessel to go to pieces on the sands or rocks where it has drifted--instead of using every effort to get it disentangled--restore its shattered hull--replace its shattered timbers, and set it once more afloat on the waters. "Uproot!--destroy!"--that is too often man's gloomy, destructive policy--man's cure and panacea for evil--"fling the reins on the courser's neck--abandon the engine of war to its mad, unchecked career--to carry terror and destruction in its course." 'No,' says God, 'mine is a nobler conservative philosophy--"be watchful and

strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die!"

Despite of all ominous and threatening signs of the times--though infidelity with flaunting banners, and philosophy with skeptic pride, and profligacy with bronze brow, and crime with stained dagger, and Mammon with his hydra-head, holding all classes spell-bound with imperial sway; though all these singly and combined should bode evil and disaster--threaten to bring our altars into jeopardy, and cause many an Eli to be seated on the wayside trembling for the ark of God--yet, fear not; that ark is in safe custody. There are ever, and there are now, faithful hands to guard it--a holy leaven permeating the mass of society--the true gold, indiscernible in the dross, but which will come to light in the time of refining--true filings of steel, which, from the bed of dust, will leap to the attracting magnet. Even though witnessing in sackcloth, God will have His witnesses still.

Oh, amid the sickening, harrowing tale of the world's corruptions and miseries, and the Church's lukewarmness and apostasy--let us ever think of the loyal seven thousand who are keeping the fires of judgment in check--arresting the angels in the outpouring of the prophetic vials. And even should darker days come, as come they shall--when iniquity shall abound, and the love of many wax cold--there will ever be a breakwater of "living stones," that will prevent an utter overflow of the destroying flood and subversion of the old landmarks. The Church of Christ, ransomed with His blood, cannot die. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, the Lord shall help her, and that right early." "I have reserved for Myself," says He--that is the guarantee of the Church's indestructibility--He will not allow His own work to perish.

And to individual ministers of Christ there is a comforting and encouraging lesson, also, in all this--in their relation to their individual flocks, as well as to the Church universal--never to despond in their work. It may be growing, when they know it not. They may be mourning in secret that all they do is vain and ineffectual. They may go home from their pulpits with aching and saddened hearts; feeling that their words are powerless--their success marred, their usefulness impeded--their congregations pulseless--lifeless--dead.

Not so! There may be work, unseen and unknown to them, going on in many a heart. Souls arrested, stricken, comforted--humble hidden ones wrestling for them and their work in secret; characters molded through their teaching--noble resolves made and registered in the sanctuary under the words of eternal life. The sermon they thought least powerful--(perhaps aimless and purposeless)--lo! some dying lip whispers with its latest breath--"These words were the first that went like an arrow to my heart, and taught me to think and to pray." They may have no Carmel heights, with their pomps and splendors. It matters not. Give them rather the lowly seven thousand scattered in the caves of Israel--holy hearts--simple faith--obedient lives. "Who has despised the day of small things?"

Arising from the lesson just drawn, and suggested by it--we may farther learn to beware of harsh judgments on our fellow-men and fellow-Christians. There was unwarrantable self-sufficiency in Elijah--so boldly averring, "I, even I only, am left!" It was not for him, ("the man of like passions,") to make so sweeping and unqualified an assertion--repudiating the faith of others, and feeling so confident of his own. The worst phase which self-righteousness can assume, is when we constitute ourselves religious censors; and on the ground of some supposed superior sanctity say, with haughty air, "Stand back, for I am holier than you." Elijah's feeling has developed itself in modern times in denominational exclusiveness--sect unchurched sect. One saying--"I alone am left." I alone am "the Church," because of apostolic descent and sacramental efficacy. Another, "I only am left," because I am joined in a holy and scriptural alliance with the State, and Caesar is my friend. Another, "I only am left," because I am independent of all State control, and have no friend in Caesar. Another, "I only am left," for congregations around me are asleep, and mine alone has undergone revival and awakening. No, no; hush these censorious thoughts and hasty party-judgments. "Who are you that judge another?" Who are you so ready to spy out the mote in your brother's eye, and see not the beam in your own?

We believe the judgment of God in this, as in other things, is in accordance with truth. He penetrates beneath all this narrow sectarianism. He sees His seven thousand clustering in the varied caves throughout Israel. He sees them in the cave Episcopalian, and the cave

Presbyterian, and the cave Independent; the High Church cave, and the Low Church cave. He sees some of these seven thousand in places visited by outward and visible signs of awakening. He sees some in the calm, unexcited throng of ordinary worshipers. He sees some under the ornamented aisle of cathedrals. He sees others in the lowliest and least adorned of village sanctuaries. He sees some carrying the music of heaven in their souls, "amid dusky lane and wrangling mart." He sees others in cottage homes of lowly obscurity, or on beds of lingering pain and sickness. He sees one in the hoary-headed saint, waiting for his crown. He sees another in the little child lisping its evening prayer by its mother's knee!

There has ever been, and ever shall be, "a hidden Church." "The kingdom of God comes not with observation." There is often pure gold in the coarsest-looking ore; there is often the rarest gem in the most rugged rock--there are often the loveliest flowers in the most tangled thorn-brake or remotest dell. We have the less ground for pronouncing harsh, and severe judgments, when we think of the variety in mental temperament and constitutional character--this diversity prompting, in some cases, to loud expression on the subject of Christian experience; others, with undemonstrative reticence, keeping, like the lowly virgin mother of Nazareth, all these things locked up in their hearts. In a garden, we cannot refuse the epithet of "beauty and fragrance" to the violet, because it buries its head in its own lowly leaves; while the flamboyant rose or lily at its side, is standing upright, and flinging a less delicate perfume on the passing winds. We cannot unchristianise a man, because he prays when others talk; and because, when he gives, he charges the left hand to keep the right in ignorance of its doings--while others are tossing their ostentatious gift into the treasury.

The dark murky clouds and weeping skies, muffle and obscure many a bright and beauteous star. So the dingy clouds and mists of our own censorious and false judgments lead us often to think dimly and darkly of many a true Christian. "When we come to heaven," says good Matthew Henry, in commenting on this passage, "as we shall miss a great many whom we thought to have met there; so we shall meet many whom we little thought to have met there. God's love often proves larger than man's

charity, and more extensive."

Doubtless, when Elijah, leaving Horeb, went forth on his return journey--he did so with bitter reproach for his own self-sufficient ignoring of others as faithful as himself. God had assured him that he was not the solitary hero he imagined himself to be. He had brought him down from his pedestal of pride, and shown him seven thousand pillars supporting the roof, of which he had thought he was the single column and monolith. The time was when he might have been offended by such plain speaking. He would have been so, perhaps, had the fact been told him as he slept on his pillow of self-sufficiency under the juniper tree. But he is now a humble, softened, altered man. The "still small voice" has taught him to hear and to bear anything. If his God only be glorified and Israel bettered, he cares not whether he be alone, or his faith be shared by thousands. Would that all of us could imbibe the meek spirit infused by the "still small voice" of gospel love--"In lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves!"

Let us gather yet another lesson from this comforting assurance of God to Elijah--it is the first time we have drawn it from the Prophet's past history--the influential power of a great example. Elijah's feeling was, that he was alone; that he had toiled, and witnessed, and suffered in vain; that in vain he had uttered his high behests; borne publicly his testimony to the living Jehovah; lived his life of faith, and self-denial, and prayer. His saddening thought was, that he was now going to end a useless, fruitless, purposeless existence; that, for all he had done in the cause of Divine truth, he might still have been roaming free, or pasturing his flocks as a shepherd in his native Gilead. 'No,' says God, to this mighty harvest-man--'seven thousand souls have been reaped mainly by your sickle.' His silent prayers had not ascended from his rocky oratory at Cherith in vain. The bold protest uttered by "the Prophet of Fire," before Ahab, denouncing the court idolatry, had kindled the smouldering embers of hope, and courage, and piety, in many a Hebrew household. His heroic example had put fortitude into many a faint heart. Ah! how many amid the thousands of Israel, could have repaired to his Horeb cave, to give the lie to his saying, "I, even I only, am left!"

Wherever there are brave, bold, honest, upright, God-loving hearts in this



world, there is sure to emanate (there must emanate) a silent, it may be-- but yet a vast influence for good. "No man lives to himself." What may not a word do!--a solemn advice!--a needed caution! That youth, coming for the first time into town, fresh from the hallowed precincts of home, and from the incense of the domestic sanctuary, to grapple with unknown temptations--what may not a kindly word, a kindly deed, a kindly interest effect, in snatching him from the edge of the precipice, and confirming his moral and religious principles for life! And here too, lies one of the vast powers of the pulpit. There are words sown there (little seeds wafted to many a heart-plot,) which take root and grow forever. Talk of the great painters! God's ministers are these--mighty artists of the truth, decorating the halls and walls of the immortal spirit with frescoes for eternity.

Yes, and this page in Elijah's history tells us that there is no such thing in the case of the Great and the Good as failure! Great heroic deeds may, for the time, be eclipsed, overborne; but, like the river of Egypt, lost in the sands, they will emerge, in due season, to roll on in an augmented volume to the ocean. That was apparently a grand failure at Carmel--that bold hero-deed. It ended in crushing disappointment. The bronze gates of Jezreel were ignominiously shut on the champion Prophet; an insulting message was hurled at his honored head; he fled discomfited, panic-stricken, weary of life, to the bleak desert!--No, not a failure--cheer you, O Prophet of Fire! for seven thousand brave, and good, and true, are in these distant hills of Samaria, thanking God for your bold heart and example!

That was apparently a grand failure, as we see a prisoner in the Mammertine dungeon of the world's old capital--his limbs cramped with the chain--his body shivering in the winter's cold--his lips sealed in silence! That was apparently a grand failure at the Colline gate of Rome, as we see this feeble, decrepit missionary, led along to the place of execution; and, with one stroke of the fatal axe, the head of the hapless victim rolling dishonored in the dust!--No, not a failure--cheer you, O Paul of Tarsus! Your glorious life has stirred the pulses of the world--these footmarks on the sands of time, no wave of oblivion can ever obliterate--the echoes of your mighty voice shall circulate and reverberate

to time's latest day!

Let us each strive to do our duty in our varied spheres, nobly, usefully--with an eye to God's glory and the good of others--and then, though life should seem at times to be a failure--our plans crossed, our purposes thwarted, the bright sunset of vermilion and gold all at once blurred and obscured in drizzling mist and rain--we shall not, we cannot have lived to no purpose! Some of the seven thousand we have aided by our counsels, or prayers, or example, will gather round our grave, and let fall the unbidden tear. One of the great and the good of modern Elijahs--an illustrious minister--who was used to declare the truth with all Elijah's power; but who, with Elijah's temperament, as life's shadows were closing around him, was bewailing lack of success--glad to leave the scene where his work seemed discouraged--motives misapprehended--all a failure--would that he had seen the sequel; when the skeptic and the infidel of the town, who had trembled under his faithful words, came forth to bear his coffin on their shoulders to the tomb!

"I, even I only, am left." Hush, hush the thought. You may not have even seven, of the seven thousand. But, O man of God! that one converted skeptic, in humble attire, wiping the drops of labor from his brow, and the tear from his eye, as he bears you to your last long home! Oh, this--this forbids the word "failure" among your dying utterances. The presence of that one mourner proves--you have not lived, you did not die in vain!

## **14. RETURN TO DUTY**

Then the Lord told him, "Go back the way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha!" 1 Kings 19:15-17

Then one of the seraphim flew over to the altar, and he picked up a burning coal with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." Isaiah 6:6-7

"Is not my word like as a fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" Jeremiah 23:29

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

In the previous chapter we considered the comforting assurance regarding the present, which the Lord God of Elijah addressed to His servant before leaving the solitudes of Horeb. But there was a communication of mingled judgment and mercy given him also regarding the future. And, as an illustration of the minute, tender, sympathizing interest God takes in the case of all His people, it may be well, in a single sentence, to mark how He therein meets and answers, one by one in succession, the complaints of the Prophet.

The first subject of Elijah's grievance was, "The children of Israel have forsaken your covenant;" the second, "They have thrown down your altars and slain your people with the sword;" the third, "I, even I only, am left."

'Go,' says Jehovah, in reply to the first, 'pour the consecrating oil on the head of Hazeal. He is to be the rod of my anger against apostate Israel. He will teach them, "by terrible things in righteousness," that it is not with impunity my covenant is forsaken.' And accordingly it was so. Some years after Elijah had been removed from the troubled scenes of earth to his glorious reward, the coasts and villages of the northern kingdom were ravaged and scourged by the Syrian armies under this victorious captain--the footprints of his desolating host, telling amid ruin and pillage and blood, that God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.

'Go!' says Jehovah, in reply to the second complaint, 'anoint Jehu the son

of Nimshi--he too is to be the minister of my vengeance against the royal house of Ahab and his unscrupulous queen.' And though this announced judgment was not accomplished in the days of Elijah, in due time the terrible doom was consummated by a work of extermination unparalleled in Hebrew history. Every relative, including the remotest kinsfolk of Ahab, was put to the sword, and Jezebel herself subjected to the most ignominious of deaths. A similar work of destruction was at the same time carried out regarding the Baal-worship. A vast temple, reared by Ahab in Samaria for idolatrous service, was crowded with votaries. At a prearranged signal, eighty trusted soldiers rushed in on the crowd as they were engaged in offering sacrifice before the great stone statue of the Syrian idol. The smaller divinities were torn from their niches and pedestals; and, with indiscriminate slaughter, as described by Josephus, the doom uttered amid the solitudes of Sinai was fulfilled to the letter.

In answer to these two first complaints, we have Elijah's God coming forth as a God of judgment--responding in the wind and the earthquake and the fire. But there is yet a third comforting assurance to be added, in answer to his concluding complaint. It is the God of "the still small voice" who speaks now. It is a word of peace. 'Go,' says Jehovah, 'anoint Elisha to be prophet in your stead. When your voice is silent, I shall not lack a faithful messenger, and the Church shall not lack a faithful guide. Go, and say no longer, "I am left alone;" for this elect Israelite will be a sympathizing friend to you during the remainder of your years, and shall take your place at your departure. And it shall come to pass, that him who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.'

Thus did the Prophet of Fire prepare to leave his retreat with three swords gleaming before him--Hazael's sword of war, Jehu's sword of justice, Elisha's sword of truth--the sword that wounds only to heal. How this threefold assurance must have calmed his misgivings! He was seasonably reminded, of what should ever be a source of comfort to ourselves--God's sovereignty alike in the Church and the world. By Him kings reign and princes decree justice; He has manifold arrows in His quiver; He can carry on His work, at one time, by a Hazael or a Jehu--fierce, unrelenting, unsparing soldiers; at another, by Elisha, a man of

love and peace--making the wrath of man to praise Him, and restraining the remainder of His wrath.

Elijah's memorable visit to Horeb was now over. The symbolic vision was past. He found himself once more by the mouth of his cave alone. No, not alone! While standing there--the noise of the whirlwind in his ear--the glow of the fire yet dazzling his eyes--and, what was more, the blessed tones of the still small voice echoing through his heart of hearts--a second time is the question addressed to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And after an answer similar to that previously made, but uttered in far different spirit--the Divine command was given--"And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus;" and it is further added, "So he departed thence."

Though, as regards the Prophet's outer life, the scene on Mount Carmel stands forth in pre-eminent grandeur and importance--the manifestation on Mount Horeb, and more especially this its closing hour, was in many respects the most momentous crisis in his inner life. We may well, therefore, interrupt the thread of the narrative, and pause for a little on so solemn an incident in the Tishbite's history; making the direction addressed to him, afford subject-matter for a few practical thoughts of a more personal kind regarding ourselves. With these, we shall occupy the remainder of the chapter.

We believe that there are analogous Horeb experiences in the case of every Christian. Sacred spiritual epochs--memorable turning-points--associated with some peculiar revelation of God, either in His Word or providence; these resulting, as in the case of Elijah, if not in an entire alteration of thought and feeling, at least in a new impulse being imparted to the heavenly life. Such a solemn hour occurs with some at the crisis of an alarming illness, or during recovery from severe sickness; when "the still small voice" breaks the silence of the long night-watches and of the darkened chamber; and when life, given back from the gates of death, is devoutly consecrated to the great Restorer. Such a solemn season occurs, in the case of others, at a time of bereavement; when what we most fondly love has perished from our sight; and when, as "the still small voice" of heavenly comfort falls upon the ear--the broken, bleeding tendrils of the heart, wrenched from creature-props, turn to the great

unfailing Support and Refuge, and fix themselves there forever!

Such a solemn hour occurs, with others, at a sacramental season; when the God of the "still small voice" has "passed by;" and when, having partaken of the sacred symbols, and enjoyed near and blessed experience of the Savior's presence and mercy, we have vowed a deeper love, and purposes of more devoted and earnest obedience. Reader, are any of these sacred and peculiar experiences now, or have they been recently, your own? and have you received, like Elijah, the summons to speed you back from your period of silence and seclusion, of awe and adoration, to the needful duties of life?

Let us picture to ourselves some of the feelings with which the Prophet left his Horeb grotto, for "the wilderness of Damascus." We may find in them a reflection of what ours may possibly now be, in returning to engage once more in the calls and cares of a busy world.

As Elijah journeyed back through the desert, one of his feelings doubtless would be this--Deep sorrow on account of his past faithlessness, and a salutary sense of his weakness for the time to come. Every step of that backward journey must have recalled, with sorrow and shame, the remembrance of his unworthy flight and unworthy unbelief. Every weary league he retraversed--every rock, and bush, and arid wady--must have read to him a bitter rebuke and reproach; yes, and reminded him, that, "strong" as his name imported him to be, he was strong only in God. Perhaps, in his fit of sullen, morbid despondency, he had no time before, to ponder and realize the amount of his ingratitude and guilt. But now, after all he had seen and experienced in the mount, with what different feelings must he have bewailed the past--that cowardly retreat from the gates of Israel--that rash, impassioned prayer under the desert juniper tree--the vain, proud, self-righteous excuse, he had dared to utter in answer to God's remonstrance. How must all these have come home to him, as he hastens back, an altered man, to his God-appointed work.

Could he ever forget the tremendous sermon on sin, preached in that great cathedral of nature--Sinai the pulpit--lightning and whirlwind and thunder the ambassadors of Heaven? Could he think of his heroic deeds and vows on Carmel, and the degenerate spirit he afterwards evinced--

and not hear the voice of impressive warning, "When you think stand, take heed lest you fall?" Is this one of our feelings, in pursuing, after some recent solemn experience or 'manifestation,' our pilgrimage journey--a deep, heartfelt, realizing view of past guilt and unworthiness? Perhaps our besetting sins may not be of the same type as Elijah's--peevishness, fretfulness, discontent, pride, unworthy distrust of God's ability and willingness to help. But be they what they may, do we set out anew, like him, feeling their vileness, deeply humbled, softened, saddened at the retrospect? Under the Divine teaching, have we seen sin, and our own sin, as that dreadful thing which, before the still small voice of mercy could be heard, required that the tremendous heralds of wrath and vengeance should burst over the heads of a sinless Surety? And, farther, as we hear God's voice now saying, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness"--do we go, under a salutary consciousness of our own utter weakness and inability, in our own strength, "to pay the vows which our lips have uttered and our mouth has spoken when we were in trouble?"--Do we go, uttering the fervent prayer, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe?"

Another feeling Elijah had, in leaving his cave, must have been a lively sense and apprehension of God's great mercy. What, in the retrospect of the recent wondrous manifestation, would more especially linger in the Prophet's recollection? Not the wind, not the earthquake, not the fire; but "the still small voice." He would abundantly utter to himself the memory of God's great goodness. His heart would overflow with gratitude when he thought (despite of his coward flight) of Jehovah's varied ministry of kindness--the bread and the cruse of water of the juniper tree--the angel sent specially to spread a table for him in the wilderness; and, more than all, the Lord of angels--the very Being he had offended and provoked--meeting him in the cave of his despondency--making heaven and earth--the vastest agencies of nature--to bring before him a magnificent series of sacred signs--ending the glorious display with love--yes! love to his guilty soul--hushing and calming his storm tossed spirit, with that "still small voice!"

Are our feelings, in this respect also, akin to those of Elijah? If God has accorded to us some signal providential interposition, delivering our souls from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling--or if He

has given some special and peculiar manifestation of His grace-- spreading, it may be, for us also, as for his servant, some spiritual feast-- giving us manna from His own banqueting table--angels' food--the bread of life; and, by means of these sacred symbols, in the still small voice, sealing and ratifying to us, all the blessings and benefits of the new covenant--may we not well "return on our way" with our hearts pervaded and penetrated with a profound sense of His infinite mercy and loving-kindness; our lips attuned, like those of the Tishbite, as we picture him, once more, with girt loins and pilgrim staff speeding along the desert sands--our lips attuned to the song, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

We may suppose another feeling entertained by Elijah in departing from his cave and returning through the wilderness, would be, a fixed purpose and resolution of new and more devoted obedience. Mourning an unworthy past--penetrated by a lively sense of Jehovah's love--he would go onward and forward, resolved more than ever on a life of grateful love and of active and unwavering service, until God saw fit to take him up in His chariot of fire. He would go, not only mourning his besetting sins, but seeking henceforth to watch against their occurrence.

And it is worthy of note, that, from this time henceforward, we never again meet with the craven-hearted, petulant, impetuous Prophet. We may hear indeed no more, (with perhaps one exception,) of any great chivalrous doings--heroic contests, or Carmel feats of superhuman strength, like the race before the chariot to Jezreel--but neither do we read any more of hesitancy, despondency, cowardice. If the torch of the Prophet of Fire has less of the brilliant blaze of former ecstatic exploits, it burns, at least, with a purer, steadier luster. He may have less henceforward of the meteor, but he shines with more of the steady luster of the true constellation. From this date he seems to enter on the calm, mellowed evening of life, following a troubled tempestuous day.

Reader, if in some similar momentous crisis of your history, Elijah's God may be saying to you, as to him, "Go, return on your way"--is it in your case also with purposes of new and earnest obedience? Are you to leave your cave, whatever that may be, with the firm determination, in a strength greater than your own, that, whatever others do, as for you, you



will serve the Lord? saying, "Other lords, in time past, have had dominion over us, but this God shall be our God forever and ever?" And, while you go, like him, with the resolve to be holier, humbler, more meek, more gentle, more loving, more trusting--go also, like him, feeling, that you have a great mission on hand--a life of solemn work and duty--preparation for eternity!

God pointed out to Elijah special work to perform--"Go, anoint Hazael--Go, anoint Jehu;" and he did his Lord's bidding. He has work for each of us also, in our different spheres--work for Him; work in our own hearts, work in our own families--work in the Church, work in the world. "Go," says He; "return on your way;" not to sleep under the juniper tree, but to active life--to glorify me in your daily walk, and business, and station, and character. With this as our solemn purpose and resolution, may it be said of us, as of Elijah--may God thus write down in His Book of Remembrance--"So he departed thence."

Bereaved! we have specially spoken of your experience, as being possibly similar to that of Elijah, in this eventful moment of his history. We may revert, therefore, yet once more, to God's monitory words addressed to him, as suggestive of thoughts more peculiarly applicable to your case and circumstances. "Go, return on your way to the wilderness." Yes! "the wilderness." This earth, to you, is a blighted world; "a land of drought, a desert not inhabited." As Elijah passed the old juniper tree, even the very angel's footsteps could not be traced--no fragment was left of his shining robes--no echo of his voice. And as you return too, to the old familiar haunts; this voice and that voice are silent. Those who sat with you at your feasts in the wilderness, are gone--nothing is left but the black patch of smouldering ashes, where the banquet was once spread, and the mutual vow recorded. Gone! no, not 'gone.' Many are like Elijah's angel--only away to do higher behests of love and mercy in brighter worlds, and beckon you to follow after them! If you be left behind a little longer to tread the wilderness--oh, let it be with you, as with the prophet--let all God's dealings only quicken your footsteps to the true land of promise; meanwhile seeking to do your duty in your earthly sphere, with patience and faith, meekness and submission--until God prepares your fiery chariot to descend and bear you up amid reunions that are to know no

dissolution.

And if, perhaps, some youthful eyes may fall on these pages, let such suffer a word of exhortation. You are unlike Elijah, as he now stands before us at the mouth of his cave, girded for his journey; unlike this stern, rough man, who had fought for years the Lord's battles, amid famine and judgment--and who was now drawing near to the close of his mission. The world is still all before you--its Cheriths, and Carmels, and Zarephaths, and wilderness sojournings. And be thankful for this--that you have yet time, and strength, and sphere, to serve God in your day and generation. Be thankful that you have yet, unforfeited opportunities--that, with God's grace, you have the grand opportunity, which others have missed, of making that life and that mission a glorious one--not by great Carmel-deeds of power and ostentation; but by faith, and love, and active lowly service.

What would Elijah have given to live over again the past irrevocable days? What would he have given to stand again at Jezreel's gate, amid the rushing of the storm, when the tempter first came and assailed him, and led him captive? You have that future before you--you have the unblotted pages of life's book yet to write. It depends much on your resolutions now, how they are to be written. To you, God does not say, as to Elijah--"Go, return." It is, 'Go, set out--the journey is all yet to be trodden.' Is it to be the faith and lowly submission of brook Cherith? the bold, devoted, heroic testimony of Mount Carmel? or, is it to be the sullen, peevish discontent, the unworthy inactivity of the wilderness of Beersheba? Is it to be a life for God and for heaven; or a life for earth and self?

Many an old care-worn, travel-worn Elijah envies you--envies you this chance of a pure, godly, unselfish, elevated existence, which can be theirs no more! In entering the great world, you must expect to encounter its whirlwind, and earthquake, and fire. But let "the still small voice" be ever heard, amid every hurricane of temptation. Go in the might of the Prophet's God. Let your name be "ELIJAH!"--God's strength. "I write unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one." With pilgrim staff and girded loins, and "the still small voice" echoing in your ear, be it yours to say--"We will go in the STRENGTH of the Lord God!"

## 15. THE CALL OF ELISHA

1 Kings 19:19-21

So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field with a team of oxen. There were eleven teams of oxen ahead of him, and he was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and walked away again. Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"

Elijah replied, "Go on back! But consider what I have done to you."

Elisha then returned to his oxen, killed them, and used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the other plowmen, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me."--Isaiah 6:8

"Rise, He calls you."--Mark 10:49

Of the three divine declarations, referred to in the commencement of the previous chapter, regarding "the throne and the altar of Israel," the last must have been especially cheering to the Prophet. After his recent experience of weakness and temptation, he may have sighed, as he never did before, for the friendship and sympathy of some kindred spirit. God had graciously provided a true "brother born for adversity." Accordingly, guided either by his own impulse and inclination, or by express authority, he inverts the order of the threefold direction, and hurries first to find out the son of Shaphat. We have, in this new incident in his history, another of those rapid dramatic changes with which we are now familiar.

There is not a word said in the narrative about the long journey, by which, all alone, he retraced his steps to the north-east of Palestine. From

gazing in thought on the dreadful solitudes of the Sinai desert--the whirlwind and tempest and fire still blinding us with their terror, and the voice of God, more solemn than all, sounding in that magnificent sanctuary of nature--we are transported, in a moment, to a quiet pastoral scene--a peaceful home--by the banks or on the plain of the Jordan. It is a picture of domestic sunshine--twelve ploughs and teams of oxen are busy in early spring preparing the ground for the reception of the seed--and the last of the twelve is guided by the hand probably of an only son--doted on by fond parents, and he not slow in returning their love. It must have been, also, a joyous spring-time. With elastic step, must these eleven ploughmen, with their young master, have gone forth to the fields.

For three years and a half had the oxen been "pining in empty stalls"--the implements of husbandry unused--and the sickles of harvest rusting in the desolate barns. But the sky had at last opened its windows. Man and beast, emancipated from their tedious thralldom, go forth to their appointed task. The furrows, once more moist with gracious rain and dew, invite the seed. The ploughshare drives its way through the stubborn clods; nature is about to spring from her grave, and rejoice in her new resurrection attire.

In the midst of this busy rustic scene, the toil-worn Prophet of Carmel and Horeb presents himself. We cannot point to the spot. It must, however, have been somewhere not far from the old familiar Cherith; or from the town of Pella, now hallowed to us through the remembrances of a later age. The presence of the Prophet could not be other than a startling apparition. With no ordinary feelings must the son of Shaphat and his eleven husbandmen--when pursuing their quiet avocations--have seen all at once at their side, the stalwart figure of God's illustrious ambassador--one whose name had been for years a household word, associated with mingled feelings of reverence and terror, awe and wonder! And the whole occurrence, or interview, if we may call it so, was equally strange, unique, dramatic. In silence--without uttering a word, Elijah takes off his well-known prophet's mantle--casts it on the shoulders of the young farmer--and then passes on.

How soon and how faithfully has Jehovah's promise been ratified. Before the Prophet reaches the skirts of the wilderness of Damascus, his own

longings for human companionship are fulfilled. God has given him the first pledge of "the hidden church." He has discovered one family at least, of the reserved "thousands," still faithful to Him. A ray of new sunshine must at that moment have suffused itself over his soul. He must have felt as if an oppressive load were lifted off his spirit, and as if his own special mission of wind and earthquake and fire were now to be superseded by a gentler task. Here was the promised messenger of "the still small voice"--the finisher of the work of which he had himself laid the rugged foundations. In the spirit of his great antitype, he would be willing to say, in joyful self-renunciation, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

Elisha, in his turn, sudden and startling as the whole transaction was, seems in a moment to have understood the symbol. He knew well, when he felt the garment touching his shoulders, that it formed the token alike of investiture in the sacred office, and of his adoption as son of the Tishbite. There may have been, (there must have been,) a rush of conflicting emotions impelling him to cast the vestment aside, and reject summarily the offered honor. "What! I the successor of the great Elijah! I, who know nothing but of the sowing of perishable seed, to go forth scattering the imperishable!" But, under the human symbol, he saw the divine hand--the indubitable commission of Heaven. "The still small voice" spoke too articulately to be mistaken or misinterpreted. To him, as to thousands since, that gracious promise may have come home as a balm-word of comfort--"He who goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

Leaving his team of oxen, he hastens after the great Prophet. Without one syllable of remonstrance regarding his acceptance of the divine call, he offers the request--"Let me, I ask you, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." With similar brevity, without the interchange of any words of courtesy--all silent as to the momentous future--Elijah simply says--"Go (or return) back again--for what have I done to you?" 'Go!' as if he said--'But speedily return; for you understand well the token--you are from this hour the accredited messenger of God--the consecrated prophet of Israel.'

Again, without venturing to reply, Elisha hastens to his home near by,

and communicates to his parents the startling tidings. In a brief moment, the destiny of a whole life is changed. In accordance with true patriarchal manner, the Prophet-elect assembles for the last time, around the domestic hearth, the faithful associates in his daily toils! A farewell meal must be partaken of by all. Father, mother, son, servants, seat themselves around the homely table; each heart, we can readily believe, filled with profound emotion.

In connection with the feast, there occurs, in that dispensation of symbolism, another significant typical act. Elisha's agricultural labors are to be renounced forever; he is to put his hand to a different plough, and never more to "look back." There must be some expressive outward token of that abandonment. The animals which he had driven before him in plough and harrow, are slain. The implements of husbandry are used as fuel to prepare their flesh for the meal. The very harness and other plowing equipment are thrown into the fire, to complete the symbol of entire and unqualified renunciation.

The feast is over. The long parting kiss is given to affectionate parents--the father's blessing is received and returned--and then, forth goes the ordained Prophet on his predestined mission. On overtaking his master, he immediately begins his lowly offices of ministration. We may picture in thought the two, journeying on in company to the cities of Samaria, encouraging one another in the Lord their God.

Among other practical lessons suggested by the calling of Elisha, let us note, the variety of character among God's servants. Never were there two individuals more opposite than these two beacons of this age in Israel--antithetical both in training and in mental temperament. The one--as we have more fully delineated him in the opening chapter--was the rough child of the desert, without recorded parentage or lineage. His congenial and appropriate home the wilds of Cherith--the thunder-gloom of Carmel--the shade of the wilderness juniper--the dreadful cliffs of Sinai--a direct messenger of wrath from heaven--THE PROPHET OF FIRE! The other, is trained and nurtured under the roof of a gracious home--mingling daily in the interchange of domestic affection--loving and beloved. No ambitious thought had he beyond his patrimonial acres--tending his parents in their old age; ministering to their needs; and, when

the time came, laying their dust in the sepulcher of his fathers.

Even his physical appearance is in striking contrast with that of the other. In the future glimpses we have of his outer life, we look in vain for the stately demeanor and shaggy raven locks and rough hairy dress of the Bedouin. If we are most familiar with the one in rocky wilds, caves--deserts--mountain solitudes; we are so, with the other, among the homesteads of Israel, or leading a city-life, as a foster-father, among the schools of the prophets. If the one has been likened to the sun--the other has the softened luster of the moon, or of the quiet evening star. If the one be like his great future successor, "laying the axe to the root of the tree"--making the thronging crowds tremble and cower under words of doom--the other is surely a faint but lovely reflection of the Baptist's greater Lord, who would not "break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax;" loving ever to deal, in the case of sensitive consciences, with the utmost tenderness; as we see exemplified in his treatment of Naaman's scruples to bow with his master in the temple of Rimmon.

Their very names stand in emphatic contrast. The one meaning either, as we have previously noted "My God, the Lord," or else, perhaps, "The strength of God," or "The strong Lord"--strength, the lion-symbol, being specially associated with the deeds of Elijah. The other, Eli-sha, "God is my Savior," or, "God my salvation." If the Tishbite's motto was "Jehovah, the strong Lord lives"--Elisha's might appropriately be that of a lowly saint of coming days, "My soul does magnify the Lord, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

The two, moreover, were raised up for different objects, and each possessed special qualifications for his appointed work. The one was a destroyer--Baal, the reputed "lord of force" or "power," had, as we have seen, usurped the place and prerogative of Jehovah. Elijah's task was to overturn this false deity of force, and show, by startling miracle and judgment, that "POWER belongs unto God." Elisha was the healer--beneficence tracked his path. As his master's career was inaugurated with a miracle of drought and famine--his, on the contrary, was inaugurated by the healing of the waters at Jericho, and the warding off the curse of barrenness! In a word, the one was the "Boanerges" of his time--a "Son of Thunder!" the other was Barnabas, "the Son of Consolation." The one

stands before us "the man of like passions." The other, the man of like sensibilities.

And there are the same remarkable, the same beautiful diversities, to this hour, in the Church of Christ. As in external nature, a forest is not made up of the same trees--or if the same in kind, each individual tree assumes its own peculiar shape; as every garden has its diversity of flower and shrub; as each field has its varied crop--all different, yet all ministering to the common necessities of man; as each face has its varied features, with countless varieties of expression; and each body its varied organs--yet all necessary for the completeness of the frame--so, we trace the same singular yet beautiful diversity in the moral and intellectual and spiritual character of God's servants.

Moreover, He adapts them for their varied positions and posts of usefulness in His Church. To every man his work. Luther and Knox--the Elijahs of their times--had their vocation in preparing the way for the Zwingles and Melancthons--the gentler messengers of peace--blasting the rocks--digging out the rough, unshapely, unhewn block--to put it into the hands of these more refined sculptors to polish into shape and beauty. He has men whose province it is to carry the assault into the enemies' works by bold word and deed--those distinguished for organization--ingenious in design for the outward lengthening of the cords and strengthening of the stakes of Zion.

He has others, whose vocation is neither pulpit nor platform--synod nor council--ecclesiastical debate nor stern polemics--but the quiet duties of the study or the closet--men who are thinking while others are acting--doing in their own way a secret work, without noise or ostentation--who could not stand the shouts and clamor of Carmel--thankful that there are Elijahs who can--but who love rather to carry their influence amid the homes of Israel, and amid the schools of the prophets. Thank God for this unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. The division of labor, so needful in social and economic life, is illustrated with equal beauty in the diversity of gifts and operations in the Church of Christ--each, in his own way and sphere, laboring for one common end. In the building of the temple of old, the rough mountaineers of Lebanon were as much needed to hew down the cedar trees, as Hiram of Tyre's skillful workmen to



prepare and cast the mouldings of brass, and carve the delicate interlacings of gold. Let us never depreciate one spiritual workman's avocation at the expense of another. Every "hammer, and axe, and tool of iron" is required to shape, and cast, and mold the varied parts; but all are tending to one ultimate object--the bringing forth of the "topstone with shouting," when the cry shall be made--"Grace, grace unto it!"

Although, however, we have spoken of the contrast in the mental temperaments of these two great Prophets, let us not therefore regard them as unkindred, uncongenial, antagonistic. We know how much the reverse was the case; how tender the sympathetic bond which united them. Opposite in character, they knew that they were embarked in one great and glorious work. As months rolled on, the golden link of friendship became stronger--and when the last parting of all arrived, it is manifest how fondly the man of rough visage and iron will, clung to the loving heart from which he was about to be parted. See how these brethren love one another!

We may gather, as a second lesson, the honor God puts on the ordinary secular occupations of life. Elisha is found--not engaged in temple worship in Jerusalem or Samaria, not even in meditation and prayer in the retirement of his father's dwelling, but at his plough--driving before him his team of oxen. This is another of the reiterated lessons in Scripture as to the dignity and sacredness of labor, and the divine recognition of it. MOSES was called to his high commission while in charge of the flocks of Jethro his father-in-law. GIDEON, the great champion of his age, was called to be the instrument in overthrowing the gigantic power of Midian, while threshing wheat with his father's bullocks at the wine-press of Ophrah. The announcement of the Savior's birth was made to the SHEPHERDS of Bethlehem while tending their flocks; and to the sages of Arabia while gazing on their eastern stars. MATTHEW, the apostle and evangelist, was summoned to attend his great Master while collecting the harbor dues at the port of Capernaum. PETER, and JOHN, and ANDREW, while busied with their boats and nets, were called to become fishers of men.

Never let us imagine honorable employment in this work-day world to be incompatible with religious duty. God, in all these and other instances,

sanctifies daily avocation and toil. Our worldly callings need not, and ought not, to interfere with the paramount claims of religion in the heart and life. The one rather should assist, stimulate, dignify, and elevate the other. Such secular pursuits indeed, are not to be confounded with an unreasonable and unseasonable entanglement with "the cares of this life"--when religion is chased--hunted out of every chamber of the soul--with the lash of engrossing worldliness--when business or pleasure is allowed so to monopolize, that nothing but the merest crumbs and sweepings of existence can be spared for the claims of God and eternity.

But if work and duty be faithfully and honestly intermingled--diligence in worldly business, the faithful discharge of worldly claims, the engagement in active earthly pursuits and callings, ought to prove, and will prove, rather a stimulus to fervency in spirit, serving the Lord.

Once more--observe, in the case of Elisha and his parents, the spirit of joyful self-sacrifice manifested at the call of duty. Great, undoubtedly, as was the honor of becoming the consecrated prophet of God--we cannot think of his acceptance of the high office, without, at the same time, having suggested the idea of self-renunciation. Judging from the brief narrative, he was no candidate for such honors. He had all which the world could give to make him happy. In his case the prayer of Agur had been fulfilled to the letter. He seemed to be in the enjoyment of an ample--a more than ample--competency. The heir of a small patrimonial inheritance in one of the rich plains of Gilead--twelve pair of oxen and servants at his command--a home, with the most hallowed of ties to bind him to his haven--the parents from whose lips he had been taught to fear and reverence that God to whom his public life was now to be consecrated. Then add to all this, not only did the severance and relinquishment of these dear family ties involve a struggle, but, in accepting the call of the great Prophet, he was placing himself in circumstances of formidable peril. He was abandoning a sphere of quiet, uninvaded seclusion, for the arena of public life--exposing himself to the implacable resentment of Jezebel and her minions, whose fury had become more ungovernable than ever, since the recent embarrassment at Carmel.

But there is not so much as one hesitating thought--no converse with

flesh and blood--no tampering with 'expediency'. The call was from God. There was no opposing it. In a moment, the most cherished objects, thoughts, hopes of life are surrendered; and he prepares to set out on his arduous calling. Nor does he even manifest, in this last hour spent under the home of his childhood and youth, the natural struggle which, in a heart like his, must have taken place. He keeps all sentimental feelings in abeyance. There is no moping sadness. He makes it even a joyous occasion. He hastily assembles parents, neighbors, friends, servants, around the social table, and bids an affectionate farewell.

We have already noted the pledge of entire self-surrender, lest his heart might be tempted to yield to home influences in that trying hour. He not only kills the oxen; but ropes and tackle, plough and harrow, are cast into the flames. Like his true apostolic successors, he leaves all to consecrate himself to God. In a noble sense, he "denies himself, takes up his cross, and follows." But to him, as to all who have imbibed his spirit and copied his example, the great promise was fulfilled--"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time; and in the world to come, life everlasting."

Nor is it Elisha's conduct only that is worthy of note. That aged pair, who for years had fondly doted on a son all worthy of their affection, manifest an equally beautiful spirit of willing self-surrender. We have every reason to think of him as the prop and pride of their old age. Among the last thoughts that aged man and his wife entertained, was that of being severed from this 'inspiration' of their dwelling--the nourisher of their old age! With what fond interest would he daily be followed as he left the household. How would his footfall be joyfully welcomed, as he returned in the gray twilight to stall his oxen, and pen his flocks. Sad would be the day when either duty or death should render vacant his chair at the family hearth. That day has come. In a moment--in the twinkling of an eye--the parents are informed that the unexpected blow is impending--that one plough less is hereafter to be seen in the field--that another voice has called him for a son; and that, henceforth, the quiet scenes of the Jordan valley are to be exchanged for the toil and anxiety of an exalted station.

Do they remonstrate? Do they lay an arresting hand on him as he now stands before them, probably in the pride of full manhood, and plead, with tears--their age--home claims--filial and parental love? No! Whatever may have been felt, not a tear is shed. It is the voice of God calling their loved one to a glorious, honored work. If one misgiving comes over them, as at that farewell feast they think of a happy past, and glance forward to the blank of the future--their eyes rest on the hairy cloak of the man of God--mute but expressive symbol! 'Go, go, my son,' would be the words stammered forth from trembling lips, 'for the Lord has called you. "His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever!"'

What a lesson for us, this abnegation of self for God and duty. What have we surrendered of our worldly ease, our pleasures, our money, our children, our advantages, for Him and His cause? What have we done to disarm the power of besetting sins--by cutting off, like Elisha, all circumstances to return to them--saying, 'Let oxen, implements, equipment, all go, and perish in the flames, if they rob our hearts of Christ, or Christ of our hearts?' Matthew locked the door of his toll-house behind him--he would never enter it again. The magicians of Ephesus burnt their magical books that they might never more incur the risk of being involved in their sorceries. And, if we be Christians indeed--the disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus--if a greater than Elijah has "passed by," and thrown the cloak of consecration around us--as "priests unto God"--conscious of our high calling and destiny--be it ours, with some feeble measure of the apostle's lofty spirit of self-surrender, to say, "Yes, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

## **16. NABOTH'S VINEYARD**

1 Kings 21:17-20

But the Lord said to Elijah, who was from Tishbe, "Go down to meet King Ahab, who rules in Samaria. He will be at Naboth's vineyard in Jezreel,

taking possession of it. Give him this message: 'This is what the Lord says: Isn't killing Naboth bad enough? Must you rob him, too? Because you have done this, dogs will lick your blood outside the city just as they licked the blood of Naboth!'"

"So my enemy has found me!" Ahab exclaimed to Elijah.

"Yes," Elijah answered, "I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the Lord's sight.

They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance. Therefore, the Lord says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity." Micah 2:2-3

Our narrative once more brings us in contact with Ahab, king of Israel, whom we now find in his palace of Samaria. How changed since last we beheld him. Now he lies on a bed in one of the royal chambers in helpless dejection--moaning and tossing in feverish and restless misery. What catastrophe has overtaken that regal mourner?--why that settled gloom on these regal brows? Has the hand of death been in the palace halls?--has one of the princes of the blood royal been borne to the sepulcher of the kings of Israel--and left the aching void of bereavement in that smitten heart? Or, has it been some sudden overwhelming national disaster? Have the billows of war swept over his territories?--is the tramp of Benhadad's conquering armies heard at his gates, threatening to desolate his valleys, and carry the choice of his subjects captive to Damascus? No, no. His family circle is unbroken; and the trophies of recent victory adorn his walls. It is a far more insignificant cause which has led the weak and unworthy monarch to wrap himself in that coverlet, and to pout and fret like a petulant child.

This lordly possessor of palaces cannot obtain a little vineyard he has coveted--and life is, forsooth, for the moment, embittered to him. Lamentable, but too truthful picture of human nature! Here is a King--a man at the proud pinnacles of human ambition, the owner of vast territories--the possessor of one of the most princely of estates--his ivory palace perched on the wooded slopes of Gilboa--looking across the wide fertile plain of Esdraelon. What our own Windsor is to Britain, or

Versailles to France, so was this Jezreel, with its noble undulating grounds, to the kingdom of Israel. Even amid the miserable mud-huts of the modern Zerih, the traveler can picture, from the unchanged features of the site, what the beauty of that summer park and palace must have been. But on the outskirts of this regal domain, there happened to be one small patch of ground, the hereditary possession of a Jezreelite of the name of Naboth--and on the occasion of one of the royal visits to this favorite hunting-place, the eye of the king has settled upon it. Its acquisition seems so desirable, that he resolves to have it at any cost, either by purchase or excambion. In the true spirit of an Israelite, however, Naboth rejects the royal proposal to alienate his patrimonial acres.

Without palliating Ahab's infantile conduct, we may, at first sight indeed, deem that Naboth was an uncourteous, if not a disloyal subject, in thus thwarting the royal wishes--that it would, at all events, have been no more than a becoming and graceful deference to the will of his sovereign, at once to surrender the desired possession. A little consideration, however, not only justifies Naboth's determined refusal, but greatly aggravates Ahab's guilt in urging the transaction. The soil of Israel belonged neither to Ahab nor Naboth, but to JEHOVAH. By the law of Moses, the owner of that vineyard at Jezreel was rigidly prohibited from parting with his paternal inheritance. Even in the case where debt necessitated a temporary transfer of property, that transfer was always coupled with the condition that the land could be redeemed at any time by the original and inalienable possessor; and, moreover, even without money redemption, it again reverted to him on the arrival of the year of jubilee. When Naboth therefore rejected Ahab's offer, it was not on the ground of personal disinclination, far less in a fit of dogged obstinacy. There was nothing of churlish rudeness--no boorish discourtesy in his reply. With the calm self-possession of one who acted from high religious principle, he thus grounds his refusal, "The Lord forbid it that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto you."

We may not indeed altogether exclude the influence of personal considerations on Naboth's conduct. Like other Jews, he was doubtless deeply attached to the heritage of his ancestors. His vineyard would be a

spot endeared by sacred associations. It had been the hallowed home of childhood; the cradle of his earliest recollections. On these mountains of Gilead and Samaria, childhood's eye had gazed. Childhood's ear had drunk delight from the murmurs of the still existing fountain. Seated under the purple clusters of its trellised vines, he may have listened to instruction from revered lips. More than all--the honored dust of his sires doubtless reposed in some adjoining rocky cave; and holy memories would endear his "inheritance" beyond the compensation of all Ahab's gold.

But this, we repeat, was not his main motive in refusal; it was the resolve of a high-minded patriot Israelite, to fear his God, even though in doing so he should incur the displeasure of his king. That little ancestral plot of ground he felt to be his by a divine tenure. Obligated by Jehovah himself, and loyal to a Greater than Ahab, he had no alternative left him in dealing with the regal bribe. All honor to this noble-minded citizen, who resisted the talents and the royal smiles that would tamper with his conscience and his duty. We shall think of him as one of the seven thousand who loved, from his inmost soul, the God of his fathers, and refused to kiss the shrine of Baal. A pattern is he, to the many in every age, who would too often sacrifice principle and right on the altar of worldly policy; and, by base expediency, truckle to power and patronage. In these days, when we collect photographs of the great and good among our contemporaries, we may well find room for this bold sturdy peasant or vine-dresser of Jezreel--enrol him among the number of our moral heroes, and write under his name the motto--"I must obey God rather than man."

But what is conscientious scruple? It is a myth and delusion to a mind blinded and debased like that of Ahab. He leaps in a tantrum into his chariot. As he drives back that long twenty-five miles to Samaria, it is with his countenance fallen. His wishes have been thwarted--his royalty insulted--his dignity compromised--his will gainsaid--his pride injured--by a petty subordinate. The result is, he is miserable--all his magnificent possessions appear nothing, because he cannot call that patch of ground his own. Unworthy of a king--unworthy of a man--he flings himself on his bed, and sobs out to himself the tale of this most miserable disappointed ambition!

Is there no way by which these unroyal tears may be wiped away, and the coveted possession be yet obtained? If Ahab himself lacks the moral courage to reach the wish by some foul and dastard deed, is there no one in the courtly circle who can gratify him, by means which imperious wills have often adopted before--cutting in two that conscientious scruple with the sword? One there was, able and willing for the task. Jezebel, who, as we already know, had inherited all the bold passions and oriental vices of her father, was the very heroine for the emergency. Quick as thought, she devises her accursed plot. By a series of easily planned perjuries, the royal equanimity will soon be restored; the royal park and pleasure-grounds soon have the desired appendage; and, what was better to her vindictive nature, Naboth shall learn at what cost he spurns the royal wish, and questions the royal prerogative. Getting into her possession the king's signet-ring, to give the appearance of a regal mandate to her proclamation, she causes letters to be written to the nobles and elders of Jezreel, to proclaim a fast; accusing Naboth at the same time of high treason--the charge to be supported by two perjured witnesses. Never was queen-craft more apparently triumphant and successful. Once get that incomplicant citizen accused of blasphemy, and, by a divine law, the property of the blasphemer and rebel reverts to the crown. Ahab, by an old statute, would become at once lawful lord of this petty vineyard.

Two depraved men are induced without difficulty to perjure themselves, in order to compass the destruction of an innocent man. A fast is proclaimed. It is a hideous mockery in the name of religion. "A fast!" as if some dire disaster, in the shape of famine, pestilence, or war, impended over the city, or some dire sin needed expiation. The two "sons of Belial"--the bribed witnesses who charged Naboth with the fictitious crime--demand from the people summary vengeance on his head. He had "blasphemed God and the king"--the King as the visible representative of God. He had incurred the terrible penalties annexed to the boldest of transgressions, "You shall not curse God, nor revile a prince among your people."

O Justice! under your sacred name how many crimes have been perpetrated--how many traitors to sacred truth have dragged the innocent to destruction! It does give a terrible picture of the moral



debasement at this period of Israel's history, that so many were to be found among nobles and elders--(the privileged classes--the aristocracy of their day)--to aid and abet in so foul a deed. Not even one voice was raised in protest against the enormous wickedness. No wonder, after weaving such a network of deceit as this, that Jezebel's name should have been handed down from generation to generation as the symbol and by-word of all that is execrable--that it should be used in the last book of the inspired volume, by lips which cannot lie, as the emblem of wild fanaticism and licentiousness.

The deed is done. The exasperated rabble have dragged Naboth out of the city, and "stoned him with stones;" and, as we learn subsequently, his innocent family were simultaneously involved in the cold-blooded massacre. The king loses no time in forthwith claiming the wages of unrighteousness. He confiscates Naboth's goods; the coveted vineyard has lapsed into his hands. "And Ahab," we read, "rose up to go down (that is, from Samaria to Jezreel) to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it."

Yes, the plot had succeeded to a wish--a triumph of female sagacity. Not one noble or elder had divulged the terrible secret, which had given the semblance of legality to atrocious villainy. The bones of the murdered were heaped out of sight in some forgotten grave; and what was perhaps more than anything else to Ahab, Elijah was now, as he imagined, out of the way. He had heard nothing lately of his old troubler and tormentor. Perhaps some confused story had reached him of the wilderness flight--that in a fit of cynical temper, the Prophet had turned at once coward and hermit, and was spending the dregs of a fanatic life in the untrodden wilds of the Arabian desert. The king's fleet horses bear him along the highway to take formal possession of his dearly-bought possession. He enters the gates, and is already planning how this aceldama--this "field of blood"--can be turned to the greatest advantage. Ah, he hears it not! The dulled ear of conscience is closed; but the voice of Naboth's blood is crying from the ground, "O God, to whom vengeance belongs, show yourself."

Soon is the prayer heard. There was one close by, whose presence he little dreamt of--one who had last conducted him in triumph, after a day of

miracle and grace, to these same gates of Jezreel. Now he stands before him the messenger of wrath--the "Prophet of Fire"--an incarnate spirit of evil tidings. It is ELIJAH?--his own great, bold, brave self again no longer daunted and panic-stricken by Jezebel, and ready, when his malediction is delivered, to gird himself for flight. The prediction of Ahab's dreadful end might indeed well have struck fresh terror into his heart as he uttered it. But he is another man since we recently met him in the Sinai desert. The frenzied queen may again vow vengeance as she pleases; he will not shrink from duty. The old visions of Horeb--the wind, and earthquake, and fire--proclaim in his ears that "Jehovah lives."

A career of unblushing impiety, on the part of Ahab, had now culminated in the most hideous of crimes, and the Herald of vengeance delivers unabashed his message. It is one of his former rapid, sudden, meteor-like appearances. Without warning or premonition, he confronts Ahab, like the ghostly shadow of the monarch's own guilty conscience; and, with a tongue of FIRE, flashes upon him the accusation--"Have you killed, and also taken possession?" We know not a grander subject for a great picture than this--the hero-prophet standing erect before the ghastly, terror-stricken king; breaking through the barriers of court etiquette, and caring only for the glory of the God he served and the good of Israel, charging him with the murderer's guilt, and pronouncing upon him the murderer's dreadful doom. The trembling monarch, awaking in a moment from his dream of iniquity to a sense of the presence which confronted him, shrieks aloud--"Have you found me, O my enemy." "I have found you," is the reply, "because you have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." And then he proceeds to deliver the terrible sentence--The sword was to avenge the blood of the innocent. His family, root and branch, were to be extirpated--the wild dogs of the city and the winged vultures of heaven should banquet on the flesh of his sons!

The king cowered in despair. He tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his flesh, and in bitter misery bewailed, when it was too late, his aggravated sin. So heartfelt, however, was this agony of remorse, that the God he had insulted graciously respites his sentence. For three years, opportunity was given him, though in vain, for a fuller repentance and amendment, before the weapon of deferred retribution descends. But the day of

vengeance comes at last. At the end of that period, in going up to battle, to Ramoth-Gilead, he is mortally wounded. In a crimson pool, at the foot of the chariot, he lies in the last convulsions of ebbing life--"The chariot was washed in the fountain of Samaria, and the dogs licked his blood!"

Jezebel's end was more signal and appalling still. At that moment, which we have described, when Ahab entered to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, two attendants were seated at the back of his chariot, who overheard the stormy interview between him and the Prophet. The words Elijah then uttered, sank deep into the heart and memory of one of these. It was Jehu the son of Nimshi. And when, from the position of an attendant he rose to the dignity of a conqueror, and entered with a triumphant army the streets of Jezreel--though twenty long years had elapsed, he seems neither to have forgotten nor misunderstood his commission, as the scourge of God, and the avenger of innocent blood.

When the Queen, savage and debased as ever, tried first by pretentious arts, and then by insult, to conquer or defy her invader, the blood of the incensed warrior rose in his veins; by his orders, she was thrown from her window outside the city wall--trampled under feet of the horses, and torn to pieces by the dogs.

2 Kings 9:30-36-- When Jezebel, the queen mother, heard that Jehu had come to Jezreel, she painted her eyelids and fixed her hair and sat at a window. When Jehu entered the gate of the palace, she shouted at him, "Have you come in peace, you murderer? You are just like Zimri, who murdered his master!"

Jehu looked up and saw her at the window and shouted, "Who is on my side?" And two or three eunuchs looked out at him. "Throw her down!" Jehu yelled. So they threw her out the window, and some of her blood spattered against the wall and on the horses. And Jehu trampled her body under his horses' hooves.

Then Jehu went into the palace and ate and drank. Afterward he said, "Someone go and bury this cursed woman, for she is the daughter of a king." But when they went out to bury her, they found only her skull, her feet, and her hands.

When they returned and told Jehu, he stated, "This fulfills the message from the Lord, which he spoke through his servant Elijah from Tishbe: 'At the plot of land in Jezreel, dogs will eat Jezebel's flesh.

There are many voices addressed to us from Naboth's vineyard.

One of these is— Beware of covetousness! That vineyard has its counterpart in the case and conduct of many still. Covetousness may assume a thousand chameleon hues and phases, but these all resolve themselves into a sinful craving after something other than what we have. Covetousness of fortune--a grasping after more material wealth, the race for riches. Covetousness of place--aspiring after other positions in life than those which Providence has assigned us--not because they are better--but because they are other than our present God-appointed lot--invested with an imaginary superiority.

And the singular and sad thing is, that such inordinate longings are most frequently manifested, as with Ahab, in the case of those who have least cause to indulge them. The covetous eye cast on the neighbor's vineyard is, (strange to say;) more the sin of the affluent than of the needy--of the owner of the lordly mansion than of the humble cottage. The man with his clay floor, and thatched roof, and crude wooden rafters, though standing far more in need of increase to his comfort, is often (is generally) more contented and satisfied by far than he whose cup is full. The old story, which every schoolboy knows, is a faithful picture of human nature. It was Alexander, not defeated, but victorious--Alexander, not the lord of one kingdom, but the sovereign of the world, who wept unsatisfied tears.

Ahab had everything that human ambition could desire. The cities of Israel his father had lost, had been all restored--peace was within his walls, and--prosperity within his palaces. His residences were unparalleled for beauty. His lordly park, and territories, and gardens at Jezreel--stretching for miles on every side of the city--had every rare tree and plant and flower to adorn them. But what pride or pleasure has he now in all these? Plants bloom, and birds sing, and fountains sparkle, in vain. So long as that one patch of vineyard-ground belonging to Naboth is denied him, his whole pleasure is blighted. He cannot brook that insult of

refusal. It has stung him to the quick, and sends him to pout and fret, in unroyal tears, on his couch in Samaria!

How many there are, surrounded with all possible affluence and comfort, who put a life-thorn in their side by some similar chase after a denied good, some similar fretting about a denied trifle. They have abundance; the horn of plenty has poured its contents into their lap. But a neighbor possesses something which they imagine they might have also. Like Haman, though their history has been a golden dream of prosperity-- advancement and honor such as the brightest visions of youth could never have pictured--yet all this avails them nothing, so long as they see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate!

Seek to suppress these unworthy envious longings. "For which things' sake," says the apostle, (and among these things is covetousness,) "the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience." Covetousness, God makes a synonym for idolatry. He classes the covetous in the same category with the worshipers of stocks and stones. "Be content with such things as you have." Paul was ever sound in philosophy as in religion--his ethical, as well as his theological system, is one worthy of our profoundest study and imitation. Here is one of his maxims--"I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where, and in all things; I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

The secret of his contentment was, that he was possessor of those "true riches," which made him independent of all worldly honors and gains and distinctions. "I have coveted," says he, "no man's silver or gold or apparel." Why? because he had nobler treasures than the mines of the earth could yield or its looms fabricate. Having Christ for his portion, he could say--"I have ALL and abound." The vineyard which he coveted, was that which "God's own right hand had planted, and the Branch he had made strong for Himself!" Be assured that nagging discontent will grow, if you feed it, until it comes to eat out the kernel of life's happiness--a discontented manhood or womanhood culminating in that saddest of conditions, a peevish old age.

In other sorrows, (the real trials of life,) the heart is upheld and solaced by sympathy, and by the nobler consolations of God's truth. But who or what could minister to a mind thus diseased? Who could pity the soul whining and murmuring in the midst of plenty? Who could throw away balm-words of comfort on those piercing themselves through with many sorrows, when these sorrows are imaginary--ghosts of their own discontented brain? As you value your peace, exorcize the foul fiend. Let Naboth alone in his vineyard, and enjoy yours just as it is. Impose not self-inflicted torture by longing for what you are better without. When shall we be taught in this grasping, avaricious, unsatisfied age, that a man's life, (his true being--his manhood--his glory,) consists not "in the abundance of the things which he possesses!"

Another of the voices from Naboth's vineyard is-- Keep out of the way of temptation! If AHAB, knowing his own weakness and besetting sin, had put a restraint on his covetous eye, and not allowed it to stray on his neighbor's forbidden property, it would have saved a black page in his history, and the responsibilities of a heinous crime. Let us beware of tampering with evil. "If your right eye offends you, pluck it out, and cast it from you." "Avoid it," says the wise man, speaking of this path of temptation, "pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

If ACHAN had not cast his eye on the goodly Babylonish garment, the shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold, he would have saved Israel a bloody debacle and himself a fearful end. But he saw them; and the sight fed and fostered and stimulated the covetous master-passion--the latent avarice of his greedy heart. It was DAVID'S wandering eye that led to the twin crime of adultery and murder. He, also, ventured to the place of temptation. He had become an idler when he should have been a worker. The old, heroic, chivalrous days were over, when he would have despised luxurious ease, and been away rather to share the hardships of his brave army than in the field. Instead of this, he was basking in inglorious unsolderlike fashion, after his noontide meal, on the roof of his palace. He was out of the way of duty, and in the way of temptation; and one fatal look, and one fatal thought, entailed a heritage of bitter sorrow on himself and on his children's children.

Each has his own strong temptation--the fragile part of his nature--his

besetting sin. That sin should be specially watched, muzzled, curbed--that gate of temptation specially padlocked and sentineled. One guilty neglect of duty--one unhappy abandonment of principle--one inconsistent, thoughtless word or deed--may be the progenitor of unnumbered evils. How many have bartered their peace of conscience for worthless trifles--sold a richer inheritance than Esau's birthright for a mess of earthly pottage! And once the first fatal step is taken, it cannot be so easily undone. Once the blot on fair character is made, the stain is not so easily erased.

Ahab's first and irretrievable blunder, was dated long anterior to the coveting of the vineyard. We have before noted that his thoughtless, unlawful, unprincipled union with a heathen princess, whose father's name and throne were blackened with infamy, was the commencement of his downward career--the first instalment of that price, by which, we read, "he sold himself to work iniquity." He would never, in any circumstance, have been a great man; he had no native vigor or independence of character for that; but, under better fostering influences, he might have been molded into a useful one. His facile, vacillating nature, might, by a better adaptable power, have been brought to incline to the side of virtue. But Jezebel was his evil genius. He was a mere puppet in her hands. She took anything that was noble and generous from him--instigating him only to execrable deeds. His better self surrendered to her base artifices, he became a depraved, effeminate weakling.

What we have already said, in a previous chapter, regarding the marriage union, is equally applicable to all business and social connections. How many, in the formation of these, by looking merely to worldly advantages, make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience! How many a young man has been lured, by the prospect of monetary recompense, where his religious principles will be tampered with, or where he will be in danger of scheming at dishonest gains! The high sense of honor and integrity once lost or compromised, he becomes an easy prey to base arts--underhand, dishonorable ways, and double dealings. No worldly gains or position can make up for the absence of true wealth of character and principle. All that Phoenician riches could secure or lavish, followed the

Sidonian princess to her Hebrew home in Samaria. But what of this? Under that Tyrian purple there lurked a heart, which turned all she had into counterfeit and base alloy. Oh, rather far, the poorest, lowliest, most unostentatious lot, with character unsoiled, than gilded ceilings and array of servants, plate, and equipage, where the nobler element of moral riches is lacking. Rather the crust of bread and the crippled means, with unsullied principle and priceless virtue, than all that boundless wealth can procure without them.

Another voice from Naboth's vineyard is— Be sure your sin will find you out! Ahab and Jezebel, as we have seen, had managed to a wish, their accursed plot. The wheels of crime had moved softly along without one rut or impediment in the way. The two murderers paced their blood-stained inheritance without fear of challenge or discovery. Naboth was in that silent land where no voice of protest can be heard against high-handed iniquity. But there was a God in heaven who makes inquisition for blood, and who "remembered them." Their time for retribution did come at last, although years of gracious forbearance were allowed to intervene. As we behold the mutilated remains of that once proud, unscrupulous queen, lying in the common receptacle of filth and carrion outside the city of her iniquities, her blood sprinkling the walls--or, in the case of the partner of her guilt, as we see the arrow from the Syrian bow piercing through "the jointed armor"--or as he lies weltering in his blood--his eyes closing in agony--the wild dogs, by the pool of Samaria, lick the crimson drops from the wheels of his chariot and the plates of his armor--have we not before us a solemn and dreadful comment on the words of Him who "judges righteous judgment"--"These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such a one as yourself--but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes. Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." "He that, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

And are the principles of God's moral government different now? It is true, indeed, that the present economy deals not so exclusively as the old in temporal retribution. Sinners now have before them the surer and more terrible recompense and vengeance of a world to come. But not



infrequently here also, retribution still follows, and sooner or later overtakes, the defiant transgressor. They who "sow to the wind" are made to "reap the whirlwind;" the solemn assertion of a righteous God is not uttered in vain--"I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to find and punish those who sit contented in their sins, indifferent to the Lord, thinking he will do nothing at all to them."

Yes, and moreover, even should crime and wrongdoing be successfully hidden from the eye of man, CONSCIENCE, like another stern Elijah in the vineyard of Naboth, will confront the transgressor and utter a withering doom. How many such an Elijah stands a rebuker within the gates of modern vineyards, purchased by the reward of iniquity! How many such an Elijah stands a ghostly sentinel by the door of that house whose stones have been hewn and polished and piled by illicit gain! How many an Elijah mounts on the back of the modern chariot, horsed and harnessed, pillowed and cushioned and liveried with the amassings of successful roguery! How many an Elijah stands in the midst of banquet-hall and drawing-room scowling down on some murderer of domestic peace and innocence, who has intruded into vineyards more sacred than Naboth's--trampled VIRTUE under foot, and left the broken, bleeding vine, to trail its shattered tendrils unpitied on the ground!

And even should Conscience itself, in this world be defied and overborne; at all events in the world to come, sin must be discovered; retribution (long evaded here) will at last exact its uttermost farthing. The most dreadful picture of a state of eternal punishment, is that of sinners surrendered to the mastery of their own special transgression; these sins, like the fabled furies, following them, in unrelenting pursuit, from hall to hall and from cavern to cavern in the regions of unending woe--and they, at last, hunted down, wearied, breathless, with the unavailing effort to escape the tormentors, crouching in wild despair, and exclaiming, like Ahab to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

We may appropriately close this chapter with the impressive words and prayer of the Psalmist--

O God, surely you will destroy the wicked!

Get out of my life, you murderers!

They blaspheme you;

your enemies take your name in vain.  
O Lord, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?  
Shouldn't I despise those who resist you?  
Yes, I hate them with complete hatred,  
for your enemies are my enemies.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
Point out anything in me that offends you,  
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.  
Psalm 139:19-24

## **17. AHAZIAH AND THE GOD OF EKRON**

2 Kings 1:2-8

One day Israel's new king, Ahaziah, fell through the latticework of an upper room at his palace in Samaria, and he was seriously injured. So he sent messengers to the temple of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether he would recover.

But the angel of the Lord told Elijah, who was from Tishbe, "Go and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Why are you going to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether the king will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, therefore, this is what the Lord says: You will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die.' " So Elijah went to deliver the message.

When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you returned so soon?"

They replied, "A man came up to us and told us to go back to the king with a message from the Lord. He said, 'Why are you going to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether the king will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, since you have done this, you will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die.' "

"Who was this man?" the king demanded. "What did he look like?"

They replied, "He was a hairy man, and he wore a leather belt around his waist."

"It was Elijah from Tishbe!" the king exclaimed.

Can the ax boast greater power than the person who uses it? Is the saw greater than the person who saws? Can a whip strike unless a hand is moving it? Can a cane walk by itself?

Listen now, king of Assyria! Because of all your evil boasting, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a plague among your proud troops, and a flaming fire will ignite your glory. The Lord, the Light of Israel and the Holy One, will be a flaming fire that will destroy them. In a single night he will burn those thorns and briars, the Assyrians. Isaiah 10:15-17

The events which are to occupy our attention in this chapter have a peculiar interest, connected as they are with the last exercise of Elijah's prophetic office. As he had begun, so he terminates his career--the messenger of wrath--the rebuker of iniquity--"the Prophet of Fire." Three or four years have elapsed since last we followed his lightning-track--traced his fiery footsteps in Naboth's vineyard, speaking God's word before kings, and not being moved. We are again to find him standing by a kingly couch--bold as a lion--discharging the last arrows in his quiver at the same presumptuous idolatries against which he had uttered a lifelong testimony.

Ahaziah, (son and successor of Ahab,) had inherited the heathen vices and followed the idolatrous practices of his parents. Iniquity and irreligion are not always hereditary. But yet how often, by a righteous principle in the divine administration, are moral corruption and impiety, with their bitter fruits, transmitted to children's children--penalties of that great natural and divine law enforced and exemplified--"Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." Troubled was the two years' reign of this unworthy king of Israel, and unhappy and inglorious his sudden and premature death. From the brief passing notice in the historical narrative, we are not warranted perhaps to stigmatize him as a coward. But we are led to surmise that dread of a violent death similar to his father's, had led him to shrink from the perils and calamities of war--allowing as he did, a daring revolt of long subject Moab to pass without an effort to repair the disaster. Exemption, however, from the dangers of battle could not

purchase immunity from the smaller ills of life. He had now shown him that God has other, and less glorious instruments of death than "the spears of the mighty," and that, after all, the post of duty (not that of coward self-preservation) is the real post of safety.

Let us pause for a moment, and read, from the case of Ahaziah, the impressive lesson, that all our care, forethought, and caution, cannot ward off accident, calamity, and inexorable death. He who escaped the Syrian's venturous aim, was laid low by an accidental fall from the flat roof of his palace in Samaria. He had probably been leaning against the screen or railing common on the tops of Eastern dwellings--when, overbalancing himself, the slender rail or lattice-work had given way. He fell on the tessellated floor below, stunned and mangled, and he was carried to a couch from which he was never to rise.

Age, character, rank, position, station can afford no exemption from such casualties, and from the last terminating event of all, the universal doom of dust. These royal robes encircled a body perishable as that of the lowest subject of his realm. The hand grasping that ivory scepter, as well as the brawny arm of the strongest menial in his palace, must moulder to decay. "Trust not in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth. He returns to his earth. In that very day his thoughts perish." Poor and rich--the beggar and the prince--the slave and his master--Dives with his purple and gold, and Lazarus with his crumbs and rags, are on a level here. The path of glory and royalty, of greatness and power, "leads but to the grave." The lattice on which the strong man leans--the iron balustrade of full health and unbroken energy--may in a moment give way. Sudden accident or fever may in a few hours write Ichabod on a giant's strength. The touch of the old slave in the conqueror's triumphal chariot is never more needful than when we are moving through life charioted in comforts--wreathed with garlands--regaled with music--"Remember you are mortal!" None dare boast presumptuously of strong arm, and healthy cheek, and undimmed eye. It is by the mercy of God each one of us is preserved from the "the terrors of the night, and the dangers of the day, and the plague that stalks in darkness, and the disaster that strikes at midday!"

And when accident or affliction does overtake us, it is our comfort to

know that it is by His permission. It is He who puts the arrow on the bowman's string. It is He who loosens the railing in its sockets. It is He who makes the lightning leap from the clouds on its lethal errand. It is He who commissions the coral builders to rear the fatal reef. It is He who guides the roll of that destroying billow, that has swept a loved one from the deck into a watery grave. It is He who says, (and who can oppose!) "You shall die, and not live." "As your soul lives, verily there may be but a step between you and death."

Saddest of all is it, when accident and "sudden death" overtakes, without due preparation for the great change. Ah, yes, it is easy for us in health--when the world goes well; when life's cup is brimming--when the white sails are gleaming on its summer seas, and the music of its high holiday is resounding in our ears--it is easy then to repress from thought the urgency of more solemn verities. But wait until the pillow of pain receives the aching, recumbent head--wait until the curtains are drawn, and the room darkened, and that music is exchanged for the muffled bell, and the suppressed whisper, and noiseless footfall--wait until the solemn apprehension for the first time steals over the spirit, that the sand-glass is running out, life's grains diminishing, and that dreadful hour which we have evaded, dreaded, tampered with, shrunk from, has come at last--how solemn the mockery to try then to give to God the dregs and remnants of a worn existence and a withered love! How sad then to begin for the first time to utter the lamentation, "He weakened my strength in the way, He shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days!"

How much nobler, wiser, happier to anticipate the necessities of that inevitable hour, that whether our summons shall come by the fall from the lattice, or the gradual sinking and wasting of strength--whether by sudden accident, or by the gradual crumbling of the earthly framework--we may be ready, in calm composure, to breathe the saving of the dying patriarch, "I have waited for your salvation, O God."

Ahaziah was thus suddenly prostrated in the very midst of life--while manhood was yet in its glory. We are not indeed led to infer from the narrative, that there were at first any dangerous symptoms in his illness. It was sent and intended as a timely warning--a seasonable

remonstrance. Had he listened to the Divine voice--or, like Manasseh in his affliction, had he "besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers"--or, like Hezekiah in his severe sickness, turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord--he might have been raised up to prove for years a blessing to his people, and a monument of saving mercy. We almost expect and hope indeed, in reading the opening words of the story, to find a royal penitent, in the extremity of his mental anguish, recognizing the chastisement of the God he had long despised--sending messengers to summon the great Tishbite prophet to his sick-bed, that he might put forth on his behalf his "effectual, fervent prayers."

Elijah's name and person and achievements must have been thoroughly familiar to him when he was yet a boy in the palace of Jezreel. He could not fail often and again to have seen, or, at all events, to have heard of that wild, rugged, stern Prophet; nor, despite of his parents' hatred and scorn, could he be unimpressed with the story of his startling miracles and hero-deeds--how he had restored a poor woman's son at Zarephath--brought him back, not from sickness, but from the chambers of death--how, on the heights of that very Carmel on which he had gazed from his youth, he had brought down fire from heaven, and defeated the Baal-priests--and, last of all, he could not have forgotten how awfully verified had been the uttered judgments of this Herald of omnipotence regarding his own hapless father! Every time his eye fell on the now blighted and cursed vineyard of Naboth, would not the figure and demeanor of the Tishbite be before him--his trumpet-voice sounding in his ears the solemn lesson, "Who has hardened himself against God, and prospered?"

Alas! how difficult it is, even in the midst of weightiest judgment, to overcome unbelief and prejudice! Nursed in the abominable idolatries of Jezebel, he clings to the last to the lie of heathenism. Messengers are summoned to his bed-side, with instructions to hasten to a well-known temple of Baal, to ascertain the outcome of his trouble--whether he would recover of his disease. This oracle was situated in Ekron, the most northerly of five cities of Philistia. The Sidonian god was here, under one of his manifold forms, worshiped as Baal-zebub--literally, "The God of Flies;" the supposed averter of the plague, common in the east, of

swarming insects or gnats. This temple at Ekron was the great rendezvous of heathen devotees. It was the Delphic oracle, or the Mecca of the Baal-worshippers. Thousands from the surrounding provinces and countries congregated at the shrine of the guardian god, to get cured of diseases, otherwise supposed to be incurable. He was the Phoenician Aesculapius--the god of medicine--reputed to have power over demoniacs as well as bodily diseases. Hence the reference in the Pharisees' accusation regarding Christ, "He casts out devils by Beelzebub."

In a literal sense, the parallel to Ahaziah's folly can in vain be sought now, in the changed aspects of the Church and the world. The heathen oracles are mute. The prince of darkness, who seems in former ages to have wielded, by means of these incantations, a mysterious power, has now changed his tactics. But yet how many, in another form, have their Ekron still?--in life as well as in death trusting to some miserable, false confidences; instead of reposing in simple faith on the Lord God of Elijah, and on the work finished and consummated on the cross of Calvary. Is it asked, "What are these?"

There is the Ekron of self-righteousness--the pride of what they themselves have done--grounding their peace and confidence, alike for a living and a dying hour, on some miserable fragmentary virtues of their own--their charities and alms-deeds and moral lives--the beggar proud of wearing some tinsel on his rags, the bankrupt proud of paying by farthings a debt which is accumulating by pounds and talents.

There is the Ekron of proud reason. Men will not trust the simple word of the living God. The Bible doctrines, or, it may be, subordinate facts, do not square with their judgments and presuppositions--their preconceived opinions and prejudices, and they send their imperious intellectual messengers to this haughty oracle. Instead of coming to the divinely-authenticated page with the humble spirit of inquiry, "What do the Scriptures say?" their preliminary question is--'Science, what do you think? Philosophy, what do you think?' They come to the well of Sychar, not with the question, "Give me to drink;" but they must subject the water to chemical analysis; they must cast the Bible into their own earthly crucible, and subject it to their own earthly tests. Happy they who stoop down like the beggar at the running stream and quench their thirst;

asking no vain questions; feeling nothing, and caring for nothing, but the precious adaptation of the water of life to their panting, needy souls. Happy they, who, spiritually enlightened, are not curious to know the process of surgery or medicine, but who, gazing on the glorious uncurtained beauties of the moral world, before hidden from their view, can tell, in the utterance of a simple faith, "This one thing I know, that whereas once I was blind, now I see."

Moreover, are there not many who make shipwreck of their peace and comfort by involving themselves needlessly in speculative questions--profound transcendental doctrinal enigmas--with which they have no concern? As Ahaziah seems not to inquire how he was to recover, but if he was to recover, so how many there are who, like him, perplex themselves with the same question, in a spiritual sense; 'Am I ordained to be raised from the death of trespasses and sins? Am I among the number of the elect? Has God, by a predestined decree, placed me among the saved? Have I His seal on my forehead?' Vain dreamers! seeking to penetrate into the mysteries of heaven--"the secret things which belong only to the Lord our God"--instead of giving themselves to the great practical work of applying the sovereign remedy of the gospel, already provided and already offered to them, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

But to return to the narrative. The messengers of Ahaziah are now on their way--speeding along the plain of Esdraelon--charged to hasten with fleet foot to relieve the feverish anxieties of their lord. Laden, doubtless, with golden bribes and offerings, they expect to retrace their steps with a propitious response from the flattering oracle. But who is this, when the king's message demands such haste, that dares to thwart them in their mission, and to cross their path? What living oracle can this be, who seems to arrest in a moment that band of royal delegates, and send them back trembling and panic-stricken to the couch of their dying king? At that couch they stand--and the monarch, with startled looks, seeing probably their trepidation, interrogates them as to the cause of this strange and speedy return. With the old smouldering passion kindling up in his languid eye, he demands, as if half guessing the dreaded truth, "Why have you now come back?" The reason was soon told--a wild,



strange, unearthly being--with hairy cloak, and flowing beard, and leathern belt, had stood in their way; and, with a voice of thunder, in the name of Jehovah, had exclaimed--"Why are you going to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether the king will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, since you have done this, you will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die."

We gather from the narrative, that these messengers had either never personally seen 'the evil genius' of Ahab's house; or, at all events, they had not recognized the Prophet-messenger of the God of Israel, in that singular personage, who had met them on their way, like a lion from the dens of Carmel. But the king does not for a moment hesitate in recognizing their description. He exclaims, "It is Elijah the Tishbite!" In his inmost soul, though he may try to conceal his guilty fears, we almost hear him echoing his father's words, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

It is yet another of the Prophet's sudden appearances. He comes upon them like a flash of lightning; utters with thrilling brevity his solemn message, and then retires; for the description of the dramatic scene closes with the words, "And Elijah departed." Bold, brave man! Here he was once more, "jealous for the Lord of hosts." Deeper affront could not have been offered to the Jehovah before whom he stood, than was perpetrated by the reigning monarch--in ignoring the God of the Hebrew nation in the eyes of the heathen--and going down to Egypt for help. It was a base violation of the fundamental law of the theocracy, "You shall have no other gods before me." "In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion." "Confounded be all those who worship engraved images."

As certainly as Saul's wild, heathenish, debasing mission to the cave of the enchantress at Endor sealed his doom, so does this impious insult of the son of Ahab seal his. It was doing sinful homage to an idol-god, in the face of almost unparalleled proofs of Jehovah's supremacy. Never, since the epoch of the exodus, had wonders and miracles been more profusely displayed than now, through the instrumentality of Elijah; and yet this apostate from the faith of his fathers, who had witnessed God's arm thus made bare, sends, in the very hour of righteous judgment and rebuke, the officers of his court to consult in his behalf with the miserable fly-god of

Ekron, in Philistia. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." "If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god, shall not God search this out?"

There is yet one other incident worthy of note in this passage, before we close the present chapter. It is the appearance of the majestic messenger--One mightier than Elijah--"Stronger" than "THE STRONG"--who sends him to meet the servants of the king of Samaria. He is called here "the Angel of the Lord," or rather, "the Angel, THE LORD;" "the Angel JEHOVAH." None other can he be than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself--the great covenant Angel; the same Divine Personage, who, anticipating as it were the period of His incarnation, had appeared to Abraham at Mamre, to Jacob at Peniel, and to Gideon at Ophrah. This idolatrous king of covenant Israel was sending to solicit the intercessions of heathen Baal--defiling Jehovah's throne--desecrating his country's altars--like Nadab and Abihu, seeking to offer strange fire. The great future Intercessor of His Church arrests the messengers on their insulting errand; and shows, that if He is rejected as strong to save, He will manifest, in righteous severity, that He is strong to smite!

Terrible thought! to forfeit, by our own incorrigible sins, the intercessions of Him who alone can save us--to have His rejected blood pleading, not for us, but against us--oh, while we see the life of Israel's monarch fast ebbing, as he lies on his royal couch at Samaria--when we think, moreover, of his own daring impiety, as that which sealed his doom and hurried him to an early grave--how solemnly do we seem to listen to the words of that insulted covenant Angel--"Their sorrows shall be multiplied, who hasten after another god. Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."

Yet, may we not, also, in this very sentence of death uttered by the angel Jehovah, derive a comforting reflection? Is it no solace to think that life and death are in the hands of that Angel-God; that what appears to us to be the most wayward and capricious of occurrences--the departure of a human being from this world--is directly under His sovereign control; that He gives the lease of life; and, when He sees fit, revokes the grant?

He speaks indeed, in the case of Ahaziah, in righteous wrath; but, to each of His own people, as the divine Savior--the Brother-man--He says, not in anger or judgment, but in love and faithfulness--"You shall not come down from that bed on which you are gone up, but shall surely die."

Death has no terrors when it comes thus as a message from death's great Conqueror. As He sent Elijah--the minister of flaming fire--with the tidings of doom to the chamber of the wicked; so does He send angels--glorious beings, who delight to do His pleasure--to the death-beds of His saints, to bear their disembodied spirits upward on wings of light and love to heavenly mansions. "Father, I will," (is His last and closing intercessory prayer in behalf of every member of the Church on earth,) "that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory!"

## **18. THE SECOND ANSWER BY FIRE**

2 Kings 1:9-18

Then the king sent an army captain with fifty soldiers to arrest Elijah. They found him sitting on top of a hill. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king has commanded you to come along with us."

But Elijah replied to the captain, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and killed them all.

So the king sent another captain with fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king says that you must come down right away."

Elijah replied, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!" And again the fire of God fell from heaven and killed them all.

Once more the king sent a captain with fifty men. But this time the captain fell to his knees before Elijah. He pleaded with him, "O man of God, please spare my life and the lives of these, your fifty servants. See how the fire from heaven has destroyed the first two groups. But now please spare my life!"

Then the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Don't be afraid. Go with him." So Elijah got up and went to the king.

And Elijah said to the king, "This is what the Lord says: Why did you send messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether you will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, since you have done this, you will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die."

So Ahaziah died, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah.

"For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." Isaiah 66:15

"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will be clothed in sackcloth and will prophesy during those 1,260 days. If anyone tries to harm them, fire flashes from the mouths of the prophets and consumes their enemies. This is how anyone who tries to harm them must die." Rev.

11:5

In last chapter, we considered the account given of the messengers who were sent by Ahaziah, from his sick-bed, to consult the oracle of Baalzebub, the fly-god at the Philistine city of Ekron. While hastening on their journey, we found them suddenly arrested by none other than Elijah himself. We followed them as they returned to the chamber of their sovereign, bearing to him the Prophet's doom of death--the merited retribution for so impious a deference to an idol of the heathen, and so insulting a rejection of the God of Israel. We shall now pursue the narrative, and note how the message of these heralds of evil tidings was received by the prostrate king.

The unexpected intervention of Elijah was calculated to fill Ahaziah with dismay. The king knew that the words and threatenings of the stern Prophet carried with them a frightening significance. That never-to-be-forgotten day on Carmel--the fire, the slaughter, the blood--must have engraven itself deep in his young memory. He might well have deemed it the height of madness to trifle with the sayings of one who could unlock the armory of Heaven, and inflict dreadful vengeance on the adversaries of the God he served. Therefore, as a doomed man, we half expect, half hope, to see the tear of penitence trembling in his eye, and messengers forthwith despatched along the plain of Esdraelon, to endeavor to avert or modify the dreadful denunciation. But the blood of his mother Jezebel flows in this sick man's veins. The message of the Prophet rouses him only to wild and frenzied exasperation. He resolves that the Tishbite shall forfeit his liberty or his life for his bold presumption.

How sad when affliction, in whatever shape it comes to us, whether it be sickness, or bereavement, or worldly loss, is not accompanied with the humbling effects of resignation, penitence, submission! Outward trials, as we have remarked before, in speaking of Ahab, if they be not sanctified for softening the heart, must have the opposite result of leading to a deeper hardening and impenitency. So it was now with Ahaziah. We might have expected that his sickness would have proved a salutary warning--a rousing messenger of rebuke and alarm to his soul, humbling him in godly sorrow and tears, and leading him to cry for mercy. But instead of being like oil poured on the troubled waters--calming their

fretfulness--that sickness proved rather like oil thrown into the flames, feeding their fury. The dying man presents a picture of what, alas! is not infrequently seen, though the saddest of all spectacles--a scorner and spurner of the most solemn providential warnings at the very last gasp of life--contending with his Maker--lifting his soul in proud defiance against God.

It is evident, from the troop of soldiers the king summons, that he deems the Tishbite no insignificant prey. An officer, with fifty men, is sent in hot haste to bring him dead or alive to the palace of Samaria. Elijah has meanwhile retired to "the top of a hill"--"the top of the mount"--supposed with every probability to be Mount Carmel. There he once more manifests in all its integrity, his old hero-spirit--the truest of all bravery--that of unflinching faith and trust in his God. Seated on the summit, watching the armed band approaching, he would at once conjecture their hostile intent.

Had he been the panic-stricken Prophet we so lately found wandering in the desert of Beersheba, he would have girded up his loins, and with the fleet foot which, on a previous occasion, near this same place, had outstripped the steeds of Ahab's chariot, he would have evaded the vengeance of his pursuers, either by distant flight, or by taking refuge in one of the many caves of Carmel with which he was familiar. But his old watchword and motto again rises to the ascendant. No, under the consciousness of the presence and nearness of the Covenant Angel--the Divine, mysterious Personage, whose voice had a few brief hours before addressed him--he could say, with a special emphasis, "The Angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the Lord is good--blessed is the man who trusts in him." If one wavering unworthy thought might for a moment have obtruded itself, we may imagine him rebuking it in the words of the Psalmist King--"The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God--my strength in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Indeed, the lessons of Horeb were now too indelibly written on his inmost soul to be forgotten. The time was when he might have been tempted to succumb before the storm, and in coward unbelief to utter the desponding plaint, "My heart and my flesh fails." But since the

Lord had "passed by," and spoken in "the still small voice," he had been taught that "Jehovah was the strength of his heart and his portion forever." Though a host therefore should now encamp against him, his heart does not fear.

The officer or captain of the troop approaches within speaking distance, and exclaims, "O man of God, the king has said, Come down!" "Man of God." This appellation may have been uttered in profane irony--as if this godless captain of a godless king, would make stern proof of how useless was the name, when fifty gleaming swords were ready to leap from their scabbards should resistance be attempted. But even had no such arrogant sarcasm been implied, it was crime and presumption enough to order thus summarily a prophet of Israel, who had done nothing but deliver a message on his Master's authority, to surrender himself captive at the bidding of a treacherous and apostate monarch. It was not so much contempt of Elijah, as insult to Him whose messenger and servant he was. Woe to the earthly power that would dare dishonor an ambassador of the Most High!

Elijah, resolute and unmoved, majestically answered, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Grandly does the Tishbite appear at this moment--not in anger, but with the calm dignity of conscious POWER, as the divinely-appointed minister of vengeance. He vindicates his mission and magnifies his office. He remembers that his own name signifies "God the Lord"--to rise up therefore against him, was to insult and desecrate the noble character he bore, as the representative and viceregent of Heaven. That captain and his fifty, as the delegates of an earthly sovereign, had dared to defy and outbrave the warning of the King of kings--"Touch not my anointed, and do my prophets no harm." As the Prophet of Fire, Elijah gives the word. The lightning leaps from the cloud. At one flash, the captain and his fifty men lie scattered on the green sward of Carmel--a mass of smouldering ashes--a silent, terrible testimony to the truth, "Jehovah lxives!" "The Lord reigns; let the people tremble." "A FIRE goes before him and burns up all his enemies round about; the heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory."

The king, meanwhile, has been waiting in the vain expectation of the

return of his soldiers with the captured Prophet. He cannot brook delay. Another captain with fifty are commissioned to go forth on the same embassy; and bearing a still more urgent and imperious message. Unappalled by the spectacle of his smitten comrades, the leader of this second band delivers the summons, "O man of God, thus has the king said, Come down at once!" But vain is the arrogant demand. Again the artillery of heaven opens--the volleyed lightning speeds--and the second fifty men share the terrible fate of their predecessors. "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yes, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and routed them," (Ps. 18:13, 14.)

Ahaziah could not fail, by this time, to be fully cognizant of these appalling judgments. He might possibly have ventured to put an atheistic construction on the death of the first fifty--that they had been the victims of unhappy and untoward accident--that the lightnings--the capricious shafts from the quiver of 'nature'--had, by sad mishap, fallen on the slopes of Carmel where his soldiers were. But now that the very same catastrophe had overtaken the second group, there could surely be little debate that a 'Higher hand' had put the bow on the string and made ready the arrows. Blinded indeed must that dying monarch be, if he still refuses to desist from his mad, impotent rage.

If there be no reprieve from the merited doom pronounced on his own head, surely, one must think, at all events, before the retributive sentence is executed, he will with his dying breath do homage to the Almighty Being he has insulted and provoked, and confess that the Jehovah of Elijah is the only true God. Alas! how much it takes to humble the proud heart. Apart from divine grace no outward trial can do it. Impending death itself, that hour when, we might suppose, all false confidences and illusions might well be shaken, finds the hardened and impenitent impervious as ever to conviction. Hence the miserable delusion of those who trust that they will have penitential feelings in their last hours. It is too often a vain unrealized dream. "As men live, so do men die!" The scorner in life, is a scorner at the last--the blasphemer in life, is often a wilder blasphemer at the last. The unjust remain "unjust still" and the filthy remain "filthy still." Oh, it is the saddest picture of moral apostasy--



the saddest exponent of the enmity of the unregenerate when even DEATH, the 'king of terrors' brings no terror to the seared conscience and the unfeeling, stubborn, and obdurate soul--the banner of proud defiance against Christ waved, even when the dreadful gloom of mortal darkness is closing in all around!

The king's passion is still roused--the fever of vengeance burns hot as ever; and the last miserable dregs of his life are spent in the renewed attempt to baffle Omnipotence, but only to squander afresh the blood of his innocent soldiers. A third troop of fifty are equipped and sent forth on the same luckless errand. Wise, however, at all events on this latter occasion, is their leader. On reaching Carmel, he sees from the dreadful memorials of rejected warning in the blackened skeletons around, how vain it would be, again contemptuously to summon Elijah to surrender; how vain rather, by assaulting the person of God's ambassador, to rush with madness against the bosses of Jehovah's shield. He falls down a suppliant at the Prophet's feet, begs for his own life and that of his followers. He besought him, and pleaded with him, "O man of God, please spare my life and the lives of these, your fifty servants. See how the fire from heaven has destroyed the first two groups. But now please spare my life!"

Be it ours to imitate the example of this soldier, and take timely warning by the fearful fate of the despisers of divine vengeance. Every narrative of punishment in the olden time, is a parable--the foreshadow of sadder eternal realities, written for our admonition on whom the ends of the world have come. The present incident is one of these Old Testament prefigurations, of the certain doom that will overtake all who dare to fight against God. "Hand" here is "joined in hand"--fifty by fifty league themselves against the Almighty; but their "swift destruction" leads to us the solemn lesson, that "the wicked shall not escape unpunished."

Yes, let all who make light of divine warnings and venture on high-handed resistance to God's word and will, gather around these heaps of smouldering ashes and splintered armor on the slopes of Carmel, and hear the silent voice of the silent dead proclaim the sterner verities of a world to come--"Upon the wicked he shall rain fire and brimstone and an horrible tempest; this is the portion of their cup"--"The chaff he shall

burn with unquenchable fire!"

Before we leave the scene of flaming retribution, let us connect it and contrast it, for a moment, with that other "answer by fire," which, ten years before, had descended on this same mountain. The two may not inaptly be taken as symbolic illustrations of the law and the gospel. The GOSPEL lesson and picture is conveyed in the older narrative. The fire from heaven, invoked by Elijah, fell on the sacrifice as an atonement for the sins of the people. The thousands of Israel were gathered around, gazing in expectant silence, while the lone Prophet laid the bullock in pieces on the altar. As the fire at his intercession came down; not an Israelite was touched, not a hair of their head was singed; the visible emblem of God's wrath consumed the vicarious sacrifice--then followed the rain clouds of blessing, and the multitudes dispersed with the praises of Jehovah on their lips--"God is the Lord who has kindled for us the flame. Oh give thanks unto Jehovah; for he is good--for his mercy endures forever," (Ps. 118:27, 29.)

In our present narrative, we behold the emblem of the LAW. That previous, ever-memorable day of sacrifice, seems to be guiltily forgotten and ignored alike by king and soldiers. The altar erected by Elijah is desecrated--the shrine of Baal-zebub at Ekron is madly preferred to it. And now, when above the same hallowed ground, the clouds of heaven again part--the winged lightning--emblem of righteous vengeance--falls on the defiant sinners themselves. The rejected Deity manifests Himself under the dreadful revelation of "a consuming fire."

Do we know the reality of this solemn alternative? "The Lord answers by fire!" Fire--the wrath due to sin--must come down, either on the sinner or on the provided Sacrifice. Reject the Savior and His great atonement, and however splendid or imposing may be our own moralities and boasted righteousness, "fire" must come forth from His presence and "mingle our blood with our sacrifices." Blessed are they who have been enabled to lay hold by faith on the glorious gospel declaration--"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." We may devoutly say, in the words of the captain of the third fifty, as we address the true "Man of God"--the "Man of His right hand"--the God-man Mediator--"O man of God, I pray you, let my life be precious in your sight!" 'I have

given you,' may He not reply, 'the best proof which, (Omnipotent though I be) I could give, that your life is thus precious in my sight, in not sparing my own, that you might have the gracious offer of a free salvation! The precious blood I shed, is the evidence and exponent of the preciousness of your souls to Me! "I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

But to return. The supplication of the third captain is graciously heard. As it was with Elijah's Lord in Horeb, so is it with himself now; the voice of mercy follows the earthquake and the fire. The lives of the troop are spared. The Angel Jehovah of the preceding context, again addressing his servant, bids him fearlessly join himself to the armed band, accompany them back to the city, and confront in person the dying king. The Prophet accordingly descends from the summit of the hill, and, unaccoutred with human arms or armor, joins the cavalcade.

We may imagine them entering the gates of Samaria. There is an unusual stir in the royal city. A monarch, whose life is fast ebbing in the palace, would be theme enough of absorbing interest and excitement. But to this was added the strange tale, or rather the startling reality, of the holocaust on Carmel, and the terrible revival of Elijah's power. How the eager crowd would rush to the city-gates to catch a glimpse of the wonder-working Prophet--the captured hero--loved and revered by many--dreaded by all!

And, if such were the feelings of the general population, what must have been those of the king, when, in a few moments, the rough hair-clad man stands at the bedside of the monarch he has doomed! It was the sparrow cowering in the presence of the hawk! We are again forcibly struck, indeed, with the calm dignity of Elijah's demeanor. There is no reference to the miraculous vengeance--the fire-smiting of the earlier part of the day--no boasting or parade of delegated omnipotence. As the minister of the Most High he simply utters his message, and then retires. He solemnly repeats, without comment, "the word of the Lord"--"This is what the Lord says: Why did you send messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether you will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, since you have done this, you will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die."

The delivery of this doom ends the remarkable interview. The king is silent. He is too much appalled in the presence of the man of God, or else his bodily strength is sinking too rapidly, to permit him to entertain the thought either of remonstrance or of vengeance. The pallor of death slowly gathers over his countenance--for the solemn statement immediately follows, "So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken." It was the Tishbite's last meeting with the house of Ahab; his last message of wrath--his last protest against Baal. The hours of his own earthly existence were now nearly spent--already the sentence was framing in the upper sanctuary, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

It is pleasing to think of him in this, his closing public act, true as ever to his great life-work and calling, as the unflinching Reformer of his day--denouncing the degradations of the Baal worship, quenching the strange fires on the defiled altars of his country, and rekindling the sacred flames--the same heroic spirit we found him when first presented to us on the sacred page; like Moses, not fearing the wrath of the king, but enduring, as seeing Him who is invisible. "Go down with him, be not afraid," said the Angel-Jehovah to the Prophet. It is the same encouraging word Jesus speaks to us, in all time of our tribulation. He will Himself descend with us from our Carmels, to the battle of life--from our hill-tops of prosperity to the valley of humiliation and trouble. He says to us, as He said to His church in Philadelphia, "I also will keep you from" (yes, in) "the hour of temptation." "At my first answer," says Paul, "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

The reference to the incident which has occupied our attention in this chapter would not be complete, without taking in connection with it that parallel passage in the Gospels, where two Apostles, in the blindness of a false zeal, sought to draw, from Elijah's conduct on this occasion, a vindication of their own unworthy desire of retaliation. When our blessed Lord and His disciples were journeying together in this very district, on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem--James and John were stung to the quick by the churlish inhospitality of some Samaritan villagers. These villagers had refused, to the Jewish strangers, the customary courtesies

accorded to travelers--and in their passionate misguided zeal, the two "sons of thunder," (as the Lord had well named them,)--perhaps a distant view of Carmel suggesting the precedent, asked permission of their Master, that, in imitation of the old Prophet, they might call down fire from heaven--"Lord, do you us to command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?" The proposal was sharply rebuked and silenced. "You know not," said He, "what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Jesus does not vindicate the conduct of the boorish, sectarian villagers; but He bids the imprecators of vengeance remember that they had grievously mistaken and misapprehended the character of the dispensation under which they lived. The days of Elijah were past. It was now no longer the economy of terror, judgments, visible retribution; but the gentle, peaceful era of the Gospel. The calling down of fire from heaven on the part of the Tishbite, was no more than the visible expression of the character of that severe, rigid dispensation, whose prophet and interpreter he was. It was different altogether under the dispensation of the Spirit--the newly inaugurated era of peace and love.

"The Son of man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them!" How this declaration rebukes the spirit of intolerance which has marked for centuries the career of persecuting churches, and more especially the apostate Church of Rome--that Church which has sought to maintain its own supremacy, and to crush truth and freedom, by means of fire, prison, and the sword--and this under the spurious name of "religious zeal." Whatever be the strength of our own convictions, we dare not, as the children of the new dispensation of light and love and charity, attempt to lord it over the consciences of others. Corrupt worship and practice are not to be uprooted and extirpated by violence and penal laws. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Those who use the sword must perish by the sword. All acts of resentment, vindictiveness, revenge--either on the part of Christians as individuals, or in their corporate capacity as a church--are inimical to the spirit and character of Him, who was meek and lowly in heart, and whose dying utterances were words of forgiveness.

And if we may draw yet another lesson from this same passage, and one more specially applicable to the times in which we live, it is, that the present tendency to inflame and foster "the war-spirit" is in every way opposed to the economy of the Gospel. Let us not be mistaken or misapprehended. All honor to the brave men who (noble examples of self-sacrifice) are willing to shed their blood and surrender their lives for their country's good--the guardians of our homes, our liberties, and all that are dear to us! Moreover, as society at least now exists, we pronounce those to be the wildest dreamers, who, on spurious "peace-at-any-price" principles, would disband our armies--convert our swords into ploughshares, and pave with cannon our iron highways. But neither can we coincide with those who would draw from the stern conflicts and bloody exploits recorded in the pages of Old Testament story, argument and defense, if not encouragement, for the savage realities of modern war--and for the reason already assigned, that the character of the dispensation is completely changed. As little dare we take the fierce campaigns of Joshua, Gideon, David, and others, with their cruel accompaniments, to justify the modern war-spirit--as we can take the fact of Elijah's slaughter of the apostate priesthood, or Elijah's invoking the fire to descend on Ahaziah's soldiers, as a vindication of the minister or priest who now would gird himself for the work of slaying--or venture, with his own hands, to take bloody retaliation on the enemies of Him to whom vengeance belongs.

Elijah's age (symbolized in Horeb by the earthquake, the hurricane, and the fire) has passed away, and has been succeeded by that of "the still small voice." We maintain, therefore, that War--meaning by that, either the unbridled letting loose of the fierce passions of human nature, or the frantic lust of conquest and aggression--is not more a blot on humanity, than a presumptuous violation and desecration of the spirit of the New Testament--that kingdom which "is righteousness and peace." May God, in His mercy, hasten the time, when the spirit of the new economy shall be more widely recognized and acknowledged--when nations, as nations, shall listen to and obey the great law of the Gospel dispensation, enunciated by the lips of the Prince of Peace, its author and representative--"This is my commandment, that you love one another!"

## 19. FAREWELL VISITS TO THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS

2 Kings 2:1-7

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Bethel."

But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!" So they went on together to Bethel.

The group of prophets from Bethel came to Elisha and asked him, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Quiet!" Elisha answered. "Of course I know it."

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Jericho."

But Elisha replied again, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you." So they went on together to Jericho.

Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Quiet!" he answered again. "Of course I know it."

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to the Jordan River."

But again Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you." So they went on together.

Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River.

"As you know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his children." 1 Thess. 2:11

"They wept aloud as they embraced him in farewell, sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship." Acts 20:37-38

The eventful time has at length arrived, when, from his changeful and

chequered life-experience, the pilgrim prophet is to be upborne in a fiery chariot to his heavenly rest and crown. And yet, notwithstanding the divine premonition he had evidently received of the honor in store for him, we never could guess from his bearing and demeanor that anything extraordinary was impending. Another day, and he would be soaring, in his magnificent flight, amid angels--kindred spirits in the upper sanctuary--ministers of flaming fire--communing with the sainted fathers and patriarchs of his nation--yes, gazing on the ineffable glories of God Himself. How such an anticipation would have overpowered most men, and made the repression of exultant feeling an impossibility!

But it was different with this moral hero. He betrays no apparent emotion. We meet him on the way from Gilgal, walking side by side with Elisha--calm, unmoved, unagitated. He appears more like a father, making farewell visits to his scattered family, before undertaking some long pilgrimage. Even when he meets his friends in this his last journey, he makes no reference to the peerless honor awaiting him. He sounds no trumpet before him. He could easily have gathered all Israel to the heights of the Jordan valley, to witness the wondrous spectacle of his departure. But with the humility of true greatness he keeps the secret locked in his bosom--perhaps the one dominant thought in his great soul, with the vision of that fiery rapture before him, was--'What have I done, after all, to merit such an ovation as this?'

"O you noble Tishbite," says Krummacher, "how does your noble appearance cast us all into the shade! You desire to be nothing that God may be everything, and tremble lest you should be taken for more than a dark shadow to set off the divine glory. Concealing the secret of your approaching triumph, you fly the eye of witnesses, and you seek a veil for your glory, afraid lest any one should admire and praise, instead of the Sun, the little dew-drop that reflects his beams. And yet you had not seen Him who spoke, 'I am meek and lowly in heart;' 'I seek not my own honor, but him who sent me.' We have seen Him--the Beloved of the Father--and yet how clearly does His image shine in you, compared with us! Yes, we penetrate your motive--we understand your wishes, and are covered with shame!"

As in the case of Naomi's remonstrance with Ruth in a former age, it is



probable that Elijah, with the view of testing the fidelity and attachment of Elisha, thus addressed his trusted brother-prophet at Gilgal, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Bethel." He repeats the same at Bethel; and yet again at Jericho. But Elisha's constancy was unshaken. He was no summer friend, forsaking the prop on which he had long leaned when it was about to be removed. No importunities would deter him from discharging the last offices of hallowed earthly attachment. Dissimilar as we have seen the two in many ways were, in feelings and character, Elisha had been taught too tenderly to love and revere that once rough, stern spirit, to whom he owed so much, to desert him in the closing scene. And he solemnly protests, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!"

We are introduced, in this concluding portion of Elijah's history, to some new localities--Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. In the previous passages of his life, with the exception of the one incident of his flight to the Sinai wilderness, our interest was concentrated in the northern kingdom around Samaria, Jezreel, and Carmel. In this closing chapter, it is transferred to the border cities of the two nations, the valley of the Jordan, and the giant mountain range on its eastern banks. Let us pause to say a word in passing, regarding Gilgal, the place from which the two prophets are represented as starting together in company, and where Elijah had purposely gone to make the first of these his farewell visits. It is only recent explorers who have solved satisfactorily the topographical difficulties which surround this place of their departure. The old, immemorial Gilgal, which formed Joshua's first encamping ground after entering Canaan, was situated in the lower valley of the Jordan in front of Jericho. By a glance at any map of Palestine, it will at once be observed that it would have been a strange circuitous route for Elijah to have taken in order to reach the ford of the Jordan, had he traveled, (as has been generally taken for granted,) from the Gilgal of Joshua north to Bethel, and thence from Bethel back to Jericho. Moreover, the peculiarity of the expression in ver. 2, "So they went down to Bethel," would be manifestly inappropriate with reference to the city of Israel's encampment. No one could be said to "descend" from it to "the holy city," seeing that the way from the Gilgal of the Jordan valley to Bethel, is a gradual ascent of twelve hundred feet. We must seek its locality, therefore, somewhere

among the mountains towards the north. The remains of a city or village, Jiljilia, on a steep, flat-topped hill, in the borders of Ephraim, north-west of Bethel, from which Ebal and Gerizim and the distant Hermon are seen northwards, and the mountains of Gilead towards the east, seems conclusively to point to the real locality of Elijah's present sojourn. Indeed, this "mountain-Gilgal" is incidentally mentioned long previously by Moses in connection with the old Canaanitish kingdom--"Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goes down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?" (Deut. 11:30.)

But leaving this point of mere geographical interest, let us proceed to note the object of Elijah's farewell visits to these three favored cities.

There was an unusual and unmistakable stir and excitement in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho that day. Companies of young men--called here "Sons of the Prophets"--are seen gathering in earnest and arrested groups--and when the two reverend men of God are welcomed in their midst, they beckon Elisha aside, and the secret is with trembling lips whispered by the surrounding youth in his ears--"Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?" To this query, the reply was given with bated breath--"Yes, I know it indeed--hush! be silent!"

This introduces us to a new and most interesting phase in Elijah's history. We have hitherto been contemplating him in his public aggressive character, as the bold reformer--the defender of the old faith--the unsparing "iconoclast"--the uncompromising antagonist of the Baal worshippers--God's ordained minister of fire and judgment against the workers of iniquity--the vindicator of the Divine righteousness--the avenger alike of Israel's defiled scepter and polluted altars. But here we have him under a new representation--no longer engaged on the outward bulwarks he had so nobly strengthened and defended, but occupied with an equally momentous work. Directed, doubtless, mainly by the Spirit of God, but inspired also by his own apprehension for the decay of true religion throughout the land in this period of degeneracy, he had spent his closing years in providing for the spiritual well-being of the generation to come by establishing three, if not more, "Schools"--the Universities--or, if we might be allowed the modern term, the "Divinity

halls," or Missionary seminaries of the age. By instructing in these, the flower of the Hebrew youth, in the great principles of the theocracy and the religion of their ancestors, he ensured the existence of a seed to serve his God, when he would be gathered to his fathers in the Church above. We must regard these Colleges--these repositories of sacred truth and learning, specially as the institutes of Elijah.

True, indeed, we read of similar "schools of the Prophets" in the age and under the venerable presidency of Samuel, in Gibeah and Ramah. Interesting, however, as these earlier institutions were, they were temporary in their character, compared with those of the age of Elijah. They seem to have had no fixed external constitution or organization--to have partaken more of the character of voluntary associations or combinations of youth, whose object was very much the cultivation of sacred poetry and music, and which were discontinued and superseded in the reign of David, by the new era he inaugurated in the services of the sanctuary and in sacred song.

Moreover, the people in the age of Samuel, mainly through their reverence and love for his exalted character, and their gratitude for deliverance by his prayers from Philistine oppression, were imbued with his pious spirit. Though the priesthood had degenerated, the heart of the nation was sound. Samuel's influence, were it nothing else, had secured their loyalty to the God he so faithfully served. In Elijah's age all was different. A withering blight had passed over the old theocratic devotion. The people were woefully demoralized. Seduced by court influence, and by their own corruptions, they had lapsed into abominable idolatries. So lamentable indeed was the general apostasy, that, as we have seen, he who was best conversant with the gangrened condition of the body politic, had uttered the desponding plaint, "I am left alone!" May it not have been one of the many sacred lessons Elijah was taught at Horeb--or rather, may it not have been one of the practical results of the assurance given him there, that there were yet seven thousand loyal-hearted in the land, his being led thus to adopt means permanently to secure some of this residuary "leaven," for the benefit of succeeding ages? What better method could he devise, for protecting and perpetuating the purity of truth and worship, than founding a number godly Schools--nurseries of

devotion and sacred literature. What more hallowed or befitting occupation for the evening of his own life, when silvered locks had now displaced the raven hair of former days, and the giant strength of Cherith and Carmel had to bow to the inexorable demands of advancing years, than to be engaged in rearing up and indoctrinating a noble band of young Israelites in the principles of the old theocracy? He seems to have made the words and the prayer of the Psalmist his own--"O God, you have taught me from my youth--and hitherto have I declared your wondrous works. Now, also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have showed your strength unto this generation, and your power to every one that is to come."

We can only form a dim conjecture and conception of these closing eight years of hallowed occupation in the southern cities of Israel. If the Tishbite's bodily frame was more fragile than in the chivalrous days of earlier manhood; his soul, at least, burned, as ever, with inextinguishable fire. We can think of him gathering these children of the corrupt faith around him--expounding the great principles of the Levitical and Moral Law--making them minutely conversant with the details of their sacred books--the design (so far as was then revealed) of the complicated typical and ceremonial dispensation--alternating these several pursuits, as in the earlier schools, with the study of sacred poetry and music--above all, exhorting his hearers to holy boldness and steadfastness in the faith, in the midst of an infidel and apostate age; and to transmit the great doctrines of the faith unblemished to posterity, that the people who would be created might praise the Lord.

We may only further add, that these schools, in the kingdom of Israel, so far compensated for the lack of the Temple services and Levitical priesthood, instituted in the metropolis of the kingdom of Judah. If it be a new light, therefore, it is surely an interesting one, to regard Elijah as the founder, in one sense, of Ecclesiastical Colleges--the first head and principal of a Religious University--gathering around him a band of unstudied youth and imbuing them with the truth set forth in his own great life motto--"The Lord lives before whom I stand!"

Indeed, if he had done nothing else, he would ever have been honored, in this connection, as a benefactor of his people--the CONSERVATOR, as he

had already proved himself the DEFENDER of the faith. What a joy to the aged man to see these altar fires kindled in the Temple of God before his own lamp was put out--these stars lighting up the theocratic skies, before he vanished like the sun from their sight, to shine in a brighter hemisphere! How he would now feel rebuked for his old saying, "I only am left!" How unreasonable and unwarrantable would his gloomy anticipations now appear, when he beheld these "arrows in the hand of the mighty!" Happy would he be who had thus "his quiver full of them;" and who, in looking round on such "nourishers of his old age," could say, with a grateful heart, to the God he served, "Behold I and the children whom you have given me."

We may cease to wonder, then, at these eager groups, gathered on that memorable day, around the city gates, at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. The Spirit of God--whose influence, we have reason to believe, was specially poured out on these Prophetical students, had communicated to them the fact that their revered head and father was about to be taken up to his glorious reward.

Let us endeavor to realize the scene. Let us picture the youths assembled at one of the college-gates here mentioned--say that of Bethel. 'Shall we ever see him again? Shall we get his farewell benediction and blessing?' Thus we may imagine them interchanging their hopes and fears; when, all at once, they observe in the distance the well-known figure, in company with Elisha. With hearts bursting with fond, yet mingled emotions, they go forth to meet him! They have gathered lovingly around the object of their veneration, outside the gates of the city, somewhere in the moorish track still scattered with the stones, out of which Jacob, ages before, made his crude pillow. With delicate reticence, they make no allusion to their Spiritual Father of the approaching event. He has said nothing of his severance from them--and they, with fitting deference, do not introduce the theme uppermost in all their minds. To Elisha alone they confide the eager question, 'Is it indeed the case? Is it true? Can it be?' "Yes, indeed, it is," is the reply, "I know it--be silent!" As if he said, 'It is too tender a theme to be mooted. Let there be no parting scene--give and receive the parting farewell, in mute expressive silence!'

Let us just listen, in passing, to the grand philosophy of death, contained

in these simple words of the sons of the prophets--(what a comfort to those mourning the loss of beloved relatives)--"Do you know that the Lord will take" your master--your friend--your husband--your wife--your child "away today." They are taken; but do you know it is "the Lord." Oh rejoice, it is not until He calls they can be "taken." "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken." "HE turns man to destruction, and says, Return, you children of men."

From Bethel, the two men of God start on another stage of this last journey. They pursue the old well-known valley--"the long narrow passage, or gorge"--leading from Ai to Jericho, "which, in other times, formed the route of invading armies into Palestine." On reaching Jericho, the same touching scene, in an interview with the sons of the prophets residing there, is repeated. Last parting counsels and blessings may have been given by Elijah; but, if so, they are not detailed in the simple record. But surely, with reference to himself, it is a touching farewell memory, that his closing earthly thoughts and deeds are in connection with those beloved sons in the faith, whom he had, for the last decade of his life, watched and tended with such paternal interest and solicitude. The old helmsman is about to resign his post; but his last thought is for those, who, after he is gone, are to steer the shattered vessel through the surging sea.

We may with reverence put into his lips, the farewell words which a Mightier far employed in leaving His college of disciples--"Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me!" Elijah makes one last effort to test the attachment of Elisha. "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he receives the same reply--"As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you," and it is briefly added, "they two went on together." They are seen descending the slopes from Jericho, and having crossed the hot undulating sands, they are now approaching by the shelving banks of the "arrowy river." But there is a last touching and significant incident presented in this picture of the old Prophet's collegiate life. As they are thus standing by the brink of the Jordan--high up on the terraces--the steep, abrupt ridge behind--there are ranged fifty of his old Students--fifty Sons of the prophets. If

forbidden the gratification of giving him a personal convoy, they have come out to the most conspicuous of the heights around to follow their master with loving eye, which they could do for a long distance, in that clear Eastern atmosphere, until he be lost from their sight in the gorges on the farther side of the river; sorrowing, like the elders of Ephesus, when, on the shore at Miletus, they bid Paul farewell, that they would see his face no more.

We may, surely, gather from this affecting scene, the tenderness of the tie which knit together the old Master and his young disciples--the sternness of manner of his earlier years being now mellowed and softened by age; or rather, by the grace that was ripening him for immortality. We see in it the realization of his old vision at Horeb--his own character reflected in that sublime diorama of nature. The earthquake and whirlwind and fire were now past--the close of his life had its befitting symbol in the "still small voice." "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

## **20. THE CHARIOT OF FIRE**

2 Kings 2:8-18

Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "What can I do for you before I am taken away?"

And Elisha replied, "Please let me become your rightful successor."

"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah replied. "If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won't."

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and charioteers of Israel!" And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his robe in two.

Then Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak and returned to the bank of the Jordan River. He struck the water with the cloak and cried out, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" Then the river divided, and Elisha went across.

When the group of prophets from Jericho saw what happened, they exclaimed, "Elisha has become Elijah's successor!" And they went to meet him and bowed down before him. "Sir," they said, "just say the word and fifty of our strongest men will search the wilderness for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has left him on some mountain or in some valley."

"No," Elisha said, "don't send them." But they kept urging him until he was embarrassed, and he finally said, "All right, send them." So fifty men searched for three days but did not find Elijah. Elisha was still at Jericho when they returned. "Didn't I tell you not to go?" he asked.

"And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up here. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them."--Rev. 11:12

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and those who had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God."--Rev. 15:2

The loving attachment of the "sons of the prophets" to the person of Elijah, is rewarded by the sight of the closing miracle of his life, the recollection of which could not fail ever afterwards to embolden and strengthen them in the midst of their labors and trials. He is to pass over Jordan. The old Gileadite, with that instinctive love of country and birthplace so common at life's close, seems desirous to get across the border-river, that the scene of his mysterious departure might be amid the secluded valleys and ravines of his Fatherland. There was a ford or ferry then, as now, across the Jordan. But as the public life of the Prophet began, so it would terminate, by an exhibition of divine power. The God he served would certify to him, by an outward visible sign, the truth of that promise, which others apprehend only by faith, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."



Elijah unties his well-known mantle or cape; wraps it tightly round and round (as the word means), in the form of a staff--and, like Moses of old with his shepherd's rod, he violently smites the waters of the river. These were divided to the right and to the left, and the two prophets cross through the dry channel. On reaching the opposite bank, they quietly resume their lofty converse. Elijah feels that his moments are numbered--he must bid his best and truest earthly friend farewell--"What shall I do for you before I be taken away from you?" is the interrogatory with which he breaks silence. It was a startling, perplexing question. Elisha well knew how much the departing prophet had in his power. But as we may well imagine, earthly ambition had no share in dictating his answer--the wealth, and honors, and prizes of the world had no fascination in the eyes of one, who had already given such noble proof of self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice. His thoughts are not on himself but on the Church which is so soon to be orphaned--his one solitary wish and ambition is, that he might be enabled to follow the footsteps of his great predecessor, by glorifying God in his day and generation. To him, nothing was half so enviable or desirable, as to inherit a portion of that noble spirit--to have his own soul enkindled with some sparks of that hallowed fire which is now to be borne from the altar of earth to that of heaven! "And Elisha said, I beg you, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

What did he mean by this request? We never for a moment can entertain the supposition, which some have ventured to advance, that Elisha's humble nature could have prompted him to crave that he might be doubly endowed in comparison with Elijah, by the possession of superior gifts and graces. The expression he used was one well understood among the Hebrews. A double portion of goods always descended to the eldest son of an Israelite--this bringing along with it the special birthright blessing. Elisha's request, therefore, was no more than this--that he would have the double portion of the first-born, and thus be served heir and successor to his illustrious master. Elijah, indeed, in reply, allows that he had asked "a hard thing"--he refers the granting of it to the Divine decision; informing his companion that if he is permitted to see with his bodily eyes the miraculous ascension, he may accept this as a pledge and assurance, on God's part, that the farewell request is not denied.

The two holy men are now lost to the sight of the fifty spectators among the recesses of Gilead. "They still went on," we read, "and talked." What that talk was, we know not; although we almost wish we could lift the veil and listen to the interchange of thought at that solemn moment, when one of the two was standing on the threshold of eternity.

It may have been about Israel--the completion of the overthrow of idolatry--the continued revival of the olden faith, and the nurturing of a manly piety through the instrumentality of the schools of the prophets.

It may have been about themselves--Elijah may have been presenting some last faithful lessons to his successor, from his own failures and shortcomings--by a mutual rehearsal of the divine dealings, they may have been "encouraging one another in the Lord their God."

It may have been about the mysterious, unseen realities of that glorious spirit-world, on which the honored Tishbite was about to enter. Be this as it may; a tempest--a desert whirlwind--would seem to have swept over them. We are reminded of Ezekiel's vision--"And I looked, and behold a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself--and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof, as the color of amber out of the midst of the fire." The mountains in a moment glow with lurid light. The unearthly splendor has resolved itself by their side--into a Chariot of FIRE, and horses of FIRE. Seated in this flaming equipage--the burning axles revolved by the fierce hurricane--the Prophet is swept upwards to the clouds.

Who can follow that chariot of mysterious flame? Imagination feebly tries to realize the feelings of the enraptured and astonished occupant. He who is now borne aloft--not as a Prophet, but as a Conqueror--must, in his upward journey, have undergone some marvelous transformation, alike in bodily and spiritual organism, the nature of which we can only dimly conjecture. He left earth, "the man of like passions," with the body of corruption and death--but mortality is now swallowed up of life, and the corruptible has put on incorruption.

Nor can we attempt to comprehend the magnificence of that flight, as he passes, through suns, and stars, and worlds, into the presence of the

Infinite. We can but faintly picture in thought, the bands of Angels--the Seraphim (the burning or fiery ones) welcoming their kindred spirit within the heavenly gates. We can think of another illustrious member of the covenant people welcomed by Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God--or, as he bends before the throne--uttering, as his first words, the old motto of earth, now the song and rejoicing of eternity-- "JEHOVAH LIVES BEFORE WHOM I STAND!" Prophet of FIRE, you have reached the source of your brightness! "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the SUN in the kingdom of their Father."

Such may have been the scene in heaven. What was it on earth? The solitary companion of his pilgrimage stands awestruck, trembling, confounded--his eye scorched with the blaze of the dazzling retinue. He can only give vent through his tears to the unavailing lament--"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" He speaks like a bereft fatherless child. It is another proof of the change which had taken place in the naturally rough, stern spirit of Elijah--making him the object, not of dread or terror, but of affection and filial love. At a former period of his history he would more probably have been addressed as "Prophet of fire," "Herald of wrath;" but now, it is "My father, my father."

Moreover, in the loss to the Church on earth of that one man, Elisha saw a sadder calamity than if the hosts of Jehoram--fifty thousand strong--had been swept away. HE had been the true army of Israel--its bulwark of defense--its infantry of strength--its head and shield in the day of battle. The chariots and charioteers on which earthly kings depend for victory, had been concentrated, in the case of Israel, in him. His word had at one time closed the loopholes of heaven; at another, it had unmasked its batteries, and brought the lightning from the clouds. Rending his own clothes in customary token of grief, Elisha catches up the mantle that had dropped from the ascending chariot. It was a precious memorial of departed worth--the old well-known companion of many wanderings--associated with the performance of many chivalrous deeds.

More than this, it was the priceless badge of his own investiture with the prophetic office, the guarantee that his parting request had really been granted, as well as a visible sign to others that the spirit of Elijah rested upon him. The weeping, solitary prophet must not abandon himself to

fruitless tears or disconsolate grief. With that cloak as a treasured keepsake, and a pledge of reunion in a better country where no chariot of fire could part them, he hastens back to work and duty.

Standing again by the Jordan, he folds up the mantle, and smites the water, saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"--(lit., "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah, even He?") Elisha knew that he had received for his heritage not only Elijah's mantle and Elijah's spirit, but, what was better, the guidance and support of Elijah's GOD. His best earthly friend and protector was gone--severed from him for all time; but he had an unchanging portion and refuge in his Heavenly Friend--the living JEHOVAH, the strength of his heart and his portion forever. The smitten waters obeyed his summons. The sons of the prophets, who were still gazing from the Jericho terraces, had their faith still further confirmed by this renewed miracle. It afforded them additional assurance that Elisha was divinely invested with the spirit and office of their beloved father. They came to meet him, and "bowed themselves to the ground, doing homage before him."

With a natural incredulity, however, they could hardly be convinced that Elijah's translation had been real. He was used often, in the same way, suddenly to disappear from the haunts of men, and as suddenly to show himself when duty demanded. Might he not possibly still be found dead or alive amid these savage mountains? Might not that fierce whirlwind have only taken him up a little way in its wings, and dashed him down on some mountain or valley? He had disappeared near the same spot, where, in an earlier age, his great predecessor in work and spirit had withdrawn from mortal view; and then, if it had been true that God had taken the soul of His servant to Himself--could they not rescue his remains, at least, from the oblivion and mystery which had rested for centuries around the burial of the old Hebrew lawgiver? It was a labor of love at all events--a befitting and gratifying homage to his memory, to send fifty bold mountaineers to search these cliffs and precipices. This they did for three days without success--"He was not, for GOD TOOK HIM."

Let us occupy the remainder of the chapter, in seeking to discover some reasons for the peculiar method of Elijah's departure in his chariot of flame--carried soul and body to heaven without tasting the pangs of

dissolution.

In the symbolic teaching of the Old Testament, the Chariot of fire could not have been without its significancy, as a befitting close to a life of flaming zeal. We cannot avoid comparing and contrasting it with a greater and yet kindred event in a later age. A mightier than Elijah ascended also to heaven from one of the mountains of Palestine. But His triumphal chariot--appropriate to His divine character and person as Immanuel, was a cloud, the chariot of God--the invariable emblem of Deity--which bore Him majestically from the gaze of the engrossed disciples--that same "cloud" on which, as Judge, He is to come again--"Behold, He comes with clouds!"

But as Elijah was the flaming minister of vengeance in an apostate age--the successive acts in whose life drama were the fiery flashes of divine judgment--what more appropriate, than that in a chariot of Fire--(the symbolic emblem of God's judicial righteousness and wrath against sin)--he should ascend to his crown! "Elijah," says Matthew Henry, "had burned with holy zeal for God and His honor, and now with a heavenly fire he was refined and translated."

Nor have we to go far to discover the special end and design which God had in view, in vouchsafing to him this strange anomalous exemption from the universal doom of mortality--revoking in his case the sentence of dissolution. He wished, by a startling outward visible sign, to give evidence to these degenerate times of the existence and reality of another life. Three great beacon-lights of hope and comfort on the subject of the body's Resurrection and a separate state, were set up to illumine each of the three grand eras or dispensations of the Church. The patriarchal era had this "blessed hope" unfolded in the translation of ENOCH; the Mosaic era in the departure of ELIJAH; and the crowning and triumphant pledge of it was reserved for the Christian era, in the Resurrection of our LORD--"Christ the first fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming." Let us stand with Elisha in these dreadful solitudes of Gilead; and as we see the Prophet-hero, in a moment, wrapped in his chariot of flame, and soul and body together borne upwards to heaven--let us regard the mysterious scene as a grand prophecy by symbol and vision of our own glorious future as believers in

Jesus--"children of the resurrection." Let us accept it as the foreshadow and pledge of what will happen to all the saints, both those whose bodies shall, at that solemn hour, be slumbering in their graves, as well as those who shall be alive at Christ's second coming. "We shall not all sleep," says the apostle, "but we shall all be changed, in a moment." The world itself shall then be resolved into a fiery chariot--"the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." But, far above this tremendous conflagration, shall be heard the song of the glorified, as they are upborne in the cloudy whirlwind to meet the Lord in the air--"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness."

And is there not comfort and encouragement, also, for every desponding believer, in this final dealing of God with His servant--ministering to him such an "abundant entrance" into a world of glory? Who was this transfigured conqueror? Was it not the same coward-prophet, who once sat moping under the wilderness juniper-tree--peevish--fretful--abandoning himself to iniquitous despair? Yet out of weakness he had been made strong--he had risen "like a giant refreshed"--and for this "man of like passions," who had, once and again, too painfully manifested the infirmities of a fallen nature, there was decreed at last the most glorious of triumphs!

In the prospect of the same hour of departure, there may be some reading these pages, who, by reason of present corruptions and infirmities, and the saddening memory of past unworthiness and sin, may, through fear of death, be all their life-time subject to bondage. Let not these recollections of past shortcomings and backslidings, and the consciousness of present infirmities, needlessly depress you. If, like Elijah, you have listened to the still small voice--if you have resolved, like him, to rise from your posture of despondency, to grapple with duty, to face trial, and to make a renewed consecration of yourselves to God--He will not deny to you the chariot of final triumph--and give you, in Jesus, victory over death.

Are we fit for the chariot of fire? Is our work done? Are we girded for the glorious dismissal? Can we say, as the New Testament Elijah could say, "I am now ready?" Could we meet the fiery whirlwind bravely, calmly, as the

Prophet did? We can, if we have made his life-motto our own, "Jehovah lives." Or rather, if we have heard the voice of Him who has taken the sting from death, and robbed the grave of its victory--"Fear not, I am he that LIVES, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of the grave and of death!"

Laying hold by an appropriating faith of these words--the chariots of death become the chariots of salvation, the gate of the grave and the gate of heaven become one. Elijah, by his symbolic act, tells us how the last enemy may be truly conquered. It was when, with his mantle, he smote the Jordan, that the chafed waters receded and opened for him a safe passage. We have a mantle, also, by which we can smite the Jordan of death. It is the mantle of Christ's finished work and righteousness. It divides the darksome waves, and enables us to sing with the Psalmist, "We went through the flood on foot, there did we rejoice in him."

Even now, as we are journeying on towards Jordan, some of us, it may be, near it--Jesus asks each of His true servants, as Elijah did his of old, "What shall I do for you?" "Whatever you ask in my name, that will I give unto you." What shall our request be? Shall it not be that of Elisha, that, as heirs of God, we may have the portion of His First-born--that we be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ"--that even now we may be enrolled as members of "the general assembly and Church of the First-born who are written in heaven!" God keep us all from any poorer request; from bartering, like Esau, our heavenly birthright for any mere mess of earthly pottage.

Again, to pass to the other closing incident; as we see the mantle of Elijah falling on Elisha, let us ask ourselves, 'Has his mantle fallen on us?' What mantle? His true cloak was not that rough coverlet of sheepskin; that was the mere outer badge and symbol peculiar to his age and office. But the mantle in which we may all more or less be arrayed, is the mantle of his virtues--the beautiful spirit of consecration to the God he served; active, self-denying, single-eyed, bold, unflinching, uncompromising. O Prophet of the Highest, whose work, in these degenerate days, could stand the fiery test and ordeal like yours? "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"

One other thought. It was in a chariot of FIRE, Elijah was taken to heaven. Is it not in a similar chariot, in a figurative sense, He takes many of his people still? He brings them, as He did Elijah, to the brink of Jordan; keeps them for years hovering amid the rough, rugged glens and gorges of trial--seats them in a flaming carriage--reins in the fiery horses, until, in the fire, they are refined and purified as gold, and fitted for their radiant crowns!

Many are making it their life-long effort to mount some worldly chariot--the chariot of riches, or the chariot of fame. God often appoints far other for His loved ones. It is the chariot of FIRE! He whispers in their ears as they enter it, "Through much tribulation you shall enter into the kingdom!" Oh, how many can bless Him with their dying lips, for that chariot--and can say, on the retrospect of years on years, it may be, of burning trial, 'But for that chariot of fire, and these horses of fire, we would never have reached the throne and the crown!' and whose eternal ascription, as they cast that crown at the feet of a Redeeming Savior, is this, "we are saved, yet so as by FIRE!" If God from time to time may be taking some of us out amid Jordan valleys, to witness glorious departures, let us bless His name as we see the chariots ascending, that far humbler saints than Elijah are still left in the Church to strengthen the faith of the beholders; to magnify the power of sovereign grace, and to cast down upon mourning survivors a priceless mantle of Christian faith and love and triumph.

Further, if any be like Elisha, mourning the loss of departed relatives, let these follow his example, by smiting the waters of death with the noble question, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Elijah has gone--but the Lord God he served still remains--the creature has perished, but the Creator perishes not. The chariot of flame has borne my loved ones out of sight; I have to return to life-duties like the Prophet of Gilgal--all solitary and alone--the companionship I most prized and cherished, gone forever! But where is Elijah's Lord God? He ever lives, He ever loves. Yes, I will go back to my stricken home--from these ravines of sorrow, these waters of death--exulting and saying, "The LORD LIVES, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." "They shall perish; but YOU remain." And when the Lord shall conduct me down to these same



ravines, and dark Jordan-floods--I will take courage, from seeing the dying grace manifested by them, to go boldly through the gloom--"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." I will sing as they sang, with trembling lip and faltering utterance, just as they were stepping into the chariot of victory--the horses of fire impatient for flight--

"Raise the eye, Christian, just as it closeth,  
Lift the heart, Christian, before it reposes;  
You from the love of Christ nothing shall sever;  
Mount when your work is done--praise Him forever."

## **21. THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION**

Luke 9:28-36

About eight days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. Then two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking of how he was about to fulfill God's plan by dying in Jerusalem.

Peter and the others were very drowsy and had fallen asleep. Now they woke up and saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, this is wonderful! We will make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But even as he was saying this, a cloud came over them; and terror gripped them as it covered them.

Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." When the voice died away, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone what they had seen until long after this happened.

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a

cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."--Rev. 10:1

In the former chapter we found the gates of glory closing on Elijah and his triumphal chariot of fire. He had entered that silent land, from whose boundaries no traveler ever returns to this nether world. It was now a thousand years since he had taken his place among its redeemed multitudes--a fixed star in the unchanging heavenly skies. For many centuries, however, the whole Jewish nation had entertained a confident expectation of his reappearance somewhere on the old scene of his labors--an expectation founded on the remarkable, though mysterious words of Malachi--all the more remarkable and memorable from being the last announcement of the last of their prophets--"Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." That utterance (partially and typically fulfilled perhaps in the ministry of the Baptist, but whose true and literal accomplishment may yet be future) had as shadowy fulfillment also in the sublime scene we are now to consider.

In perfect keeping with the sudden dramatic changes of his older history, like some blazing meteor, the "Prophet of Fire" wanders back again to earth; or rather, as the satellite follows its parent sun, he appears in transfigured glory, by the side of the same "Living Jehovah," before whom it was his boast formerly to stand. But it was now JEHOVAH-JESUS--"God manifest in the flesh!" The mysterious humiliation of that adorable Being was about to terminate in a darker night of suffering. In the prospect of undergoing the agonies of the garden and the cross, His divine Father had decreed a preliminary hour of glory and triumph. On the height of one of the mountains of the covenant land, delegates from the redeemed Church in earth and heaven met to do Him homage--sustaining His soul in the prospect of treading the wine-press of the wrath of Almighty God. Out of the glorious throng of ransomed worshipers in the upper sanctuary, from Abel downwards, two appeared as representatives of the Church triumphant. Whether they were specially chosen for this high charge by God Himself, or whether they volunteered their lofty services, we cannot tell. If the latter, we may imagine, how, as the adorable Father announced His purpose of delegating messengers to

glorify the Son of His love; and as He asked the question, amid the hushed stillness of the glorified throng--"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"--One bright spirit, glowing amid the ranks of Seraphim, and still burning with the old unabated ardor of earth, is heard to respond, "Here am I, send me!"

It was a magnificent spectacle, indeed, which last occupied our attention--the ascent of the Prophet-conqueror in his chariot of flame. But he himself tells the disciples, in the topic which engages their talk and thoughts on the Mount, that there is One theme infinitely more glorious than translation--that is, that mighty deed of dying love--atoning suffering--without which no horses of fire could ever have been yoked to the ascending chariot, nor any enterings made within the gate into the heavenly city.

The contrast is striking and worthy of note, between the Old and New Testament delineations of the character of Elijah. In the one he is almost from first to last presented to us as the Minister of vengeance, the Herald of wrath--severe, vigorous, stern; while, if left to glean our estimate from the few incidental notices contained in the gospel, we meet him as the minister of kindness to the widow of Sarepta--an example of the power of effectual fervent prayer--"turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." "This remarkably illustrates," as a recent writer well observes, "the great differences which may exist between the popular and contemporary view of an eminent character, and the real settled judgment formed in the progress of time, when the excitement of his more brilliant but more evanescent deeds has passed away. Precious, indeed, are the scattered hints and faint touches which enable us thus to soften the harsh outlines or the discordant coloring of the earlier picture. In the present instance, they are peculiarly so. That wild figure, that stern voice, those deeds of blood which stand out in such startling relief from the pages of the old records of Elijah, are seen by us, all silvered over with the white and glistening light of the mountain of Transfiguration. Under that heavenly light, Ahab and Jezebel, Baal and Ashtaroth, are forgotten, as we listen to the Prophet talking to our Lord of that event which was to be the consummation of all that He had suffered and striven for." (Smith's Biblical Dictionary)

Let us then approach this pavilion of glory, and catch our last sight of the Prophet on earth, until we meet Him on a better Transfiguration mount, where we shall have the brightness of the earthly scene without any of its transience. We shall endeavor to depict the circumstantial of the Transfiguration-scene itself--leaving for the concluding chapter the more special objects it was designed to subserve, particularly in its connection with the appearance of Elijah.

It was after a season of unremitting labor in the great work of His ministry, that the Redeemer ascended this "high mountain" for rest and prayer. We know that "the evening" was the season He usually selected for these "Sabbaths of His soul." Moreover, as the same evangelist informs us that the three disciples who accompanied Him were "heavy with sleep," and finishes his account of the transaction by stating that "on the next day they came down from the hill"--are we not abundantly warranted in supposing that the Transfiguration took place during night? If this conclusion be correct, what an additional pictorial interest does it impart to the scene! The sun has already set, far to the west, over the great sea--all nature is hushed to repose--nothing is heard but the rippling of the mountain streams--nothing is seen but the pale silvery moonlight, falling on the everlasting snows of the mountain--or, high above, myriad stars, like temple lamps lit in the outer court of some magnificent sanctuary--these, however, about to be quenched, for the time, by the seraphic radiance which is presently to stream forth from the Holiest of all.

We cannot resist pausing for a moment on the threshold of this consecrated shrine, in order to mark the grand prelude to the manifestation of the excellent glory--Jesus PRAYS. On that lonely hill top, or ridge, the Son of Man and Lord of all, pours out His soul, as a strong wrestler, in the ear of His Father in heaven. The moon and stars listen to their Maker's voice; and that voice, the voice of Prayer--pleadings for Himself--intercessions for the world--the Church--for His disciples--for us! It is well worthy of note, though the remark be a trite one, that all the great events and crises of the Savior's incarnation-life are hallowed by prayer. He prays at His baptism, and lo! the heavens are opened. He prays in the garden--"Father, if it be possible, let this cup

pass;" and "being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly." At the cross He prays, "Father forgive"--"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." His very cry in the hour of His God-desertion--"My God, my God"--was an impassioned prayer!

We have all in our diverse human experiences, though separated by an untraveled distance from those of the Divine Redeemer, our crises-hours--solemn emergencies--terrible moments of temptation--sore suffering--crushing disappointment--poignant bereavement. Shall we not learn, from the Prince of sufferers, our true preparation against the dark and cloudy day? If Almighty strength and Infinite purity needed to be thus girded for the struggle-hour, how can such weaklings as we are, dispense with the sacred privilege?

Oh, that in all time of our wealth, when climbing the giddy heights of prosperity--led out by Satan to "the exceeding high mountain"--tempted to surrender or compromise principle in order to propitiate the world's maxims and fashions, and barter a good conscience for its perishable baubles--disloyal and unfaithful to God; or, in all time of our tribulation, when called to climb the mount of trial--we would listen in thought for our protection and safety, our encouragement and example, to the voice of Him "who, when He was on earth, made supplication with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death; and was heard in that He feared."

The three disciples selected from the apostolic company to be the representatives of the Church on earth, at their Lord's Transfiguration, are Peter and the two sons of thunder. Peter "the Rock"--James, the first of the twelve who was to suffer death for his Master's sake--John, the favored disciple, whose head afterwards leaned on the bosom of incarnate Love. Wearied with the fatigues of the day, these infirm watchers fall asleep. They continue locked in slumber until a strange unearthly light is felt playing on their eyelids. Is it a dream? a trance? They wake up; and lo! a spectacle of overpowering glory bursts upon them. The Lord they left praying, is now seen before them, arrayed in garments woven as with sunbeams--His clothing emitting light, vying in whiteness with the virgin snow; or as Mark, in his own graphic way of delineation adds, "So as no launderer on earth can whiten them."

A bright fleecy cloud surrounds Him with a halo of glory; and on either side of the transfigured Savior there is a glorified form. The apostles gaze in mute wonder. As their adorable Master is engaged in converse with these mysterious visitants from another world the question must have passed from lip to lip--"Who are these arrayed in white robes and whence came they?" They do not require, however, to wait a reply. Either by revelation, or more probably from hearing their Lord addressing the two glorified ones by name, they know that they are in the presence of none other than MOSES and ELIJAH. With what profound interest--with what trembling transport--would they gaze on the two Fathers of the Nation, whose names must have been embalmed in their holiest memories since the dawn of earliest childhood. "What!" we may imagine them exclaiming, as they fixed their eyes first on the older saint--"Is this indeed the great Shepherd who led Israel like a flock; who did marvelous things in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan? Is this he whose rod smote the waves of the Red Sea--whose feet trod the steeps of Sinai, who spoke amid its lightnings and thunders face to face with God? What! is this indeed the great Elijah--the old prophet of Gilead--the faithful witness for Jehovah in Israel's most degenerate age--the mighty wrestler on Carmel--the slaughterer at the Kishon--the fiery minister of vengeance--the herald of righteousness, whose earlier life of tempest and earthquake and fire merged at last into the still small voice of love--he who was taken to heaven alive in a whirlwind, and who was prophesied of by Malachi as the precursor of the great and dreadful day of the Lord?

The earthly character and mission of both, presented a lowly yet striking reflection of Him they had now come to honor. Their messages, had been received like His with scornful indifference. One had, in a noble spirit of self-sacrifice, surrendered his bright prospects as heir to the throne of Egypt; the other, with fearless devotion to truth, had confronted royal frowns, and offered a heroic protest against the nation's guilt, in the name of his dishonored Master. No more befitting attendants surely could have been selected to do homage to Him, who "made Himself of no reputation"--left His throne and crown for a manger and a cross; "the faithful and true Witness," who came "not to do His own will, but the will

of the Father who sent Him."

The eyes of the earthly and the heavenly delegates are alike fixed on the great central figure of the group--the toil-worn sorrow-stricken Man, who, a few hours before, had climbed the steep ascent with weary limb and burdened soul, but who is now radiant with superhuman glory, the true Apocalyptic Angel "standing in the sun." The face of one of these heavenly attendants, fifteen hundred years before, had been seen resplendent by the camp of assembled Israel, but it was a borrowed luster. He had come forth from the presence-chamber of God on Sinai, and the ineffable brightness still lingered by reflection on his countenance. In the case of the Redeemer on the Transfiguration-mount, that glory was inherent. The rays of indwelling Deity, imprisoned in His body of humiliation, burst through the casement of flesh--the luster of eternity streamed through the veil of His humanity. "Moses," it has been observed, "only showed the brightness of the Father's glory, He was that brightness." No wonder that Peter, in an ecstasy of impulsive joy, exclaims, "Lord, it is good for us to be here;" and that he even proposed the erection of three tabernacles, where their Lord and His glorified attendants might take up a permanent abode, and, enthroned on these majestic peaks of Hermon, reign over regenerated Israel.

But gaze we yet a little longer, and there is a new phase in this panorama of heavenly splendor. A cloud of yet more transcendent brightness descends on the head of the Savior and His two celestial companions. It is nothing less than the Shekinah, or Divine glory, the symbol and emblem of a present Deity--the same cloud which of old preceded in a pillar-form the march through the wilderness; which hovered over the ark in the tabernacle, and over the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. The three disciples seem, at this juncture, to have been shut out and excluded by the new cloudy canopy. They became greatly afraid; the appearance of the cloud struck them with awe. This feeling, moreover, increased as they felt themselves thus dissociated and dis severed from their Lord, whose presence a moment before, radiant though it was with almost intolerable brightness, had yet been to them the blessed pledge of security and safety. A voice issues from the cloud. A message comes to them from the midst of the excellent glory--"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased; hear him." It is the sublime attestation of God the Father. "He installs the Son as sovereign of the kingdom." He consecrates Him as Prophet, Priest, and King for evermore.

If such be the utterance of the Eternal Father in this seraphic scene, let us return for a moment to Elijah, and inquire what part he takes in the august conference. Are his lips sealed? Does he appear as a mere speechless witness, a passive spectator, mutely doing homage to his great Lord, and then silently winging his arrowy flight back among the ministering Seraphim? No, he does speak, and we listen with profound interest to the theme with which he breaks silence. He and Moses are the first messengers from the spirit-land who have visited our earth--the first voyagers who have ever come back with tidings from the undiscovered shores! What then, we curiously inquire, is the theme which engrosses their thoughts--what is the subject of their heavenly converse--what communications have they brought down with them from the realms of light, with which to gladden their Lord in His hour of glorification?

When we last parted from Elijah it was when he was taken to heaven in his fiery chariot. Does he talk of this? or, now that the scenes of his old labors are faintly revealed under the star-lit heavens, do these suggest to him the rehearsal of his own life-marvels, or those of his sainted companion? or does he commune of the nobler inheritance on which he had since entered--the thousand years--the millennium of bliss, since last he trod the earth?--does he speak of the last song in which he had joined with the celestial worshipers, or of the last embassy of love on which he had sped, or of his lofty association with the brotherhood of Seraphim--the ministers of flaming fire, who keep the lamps of the heavenly temple continually burning? No, none of these.

His topic of converse, and that of his illustrious compeer is the last we should have dreamt of as being selected for ecstatic triumph. It is DEATH!--"Death," that dreadful anomaly in God's universe--"Death," the theme of all others undwelt on in heaven, because there unknown. Death too--the King of Terrors, lording it over the Prince of Life--for it was Death about to vanquish none other than the Majestic Being who was now glorified under that canopy of dazzling splendor. Moreover, it was death in peculiar and abnormal form--not the gentle dismissal of the soul



to the unseen world--not the tranquil sleep of His "beloved" which God gave to one of these saints, nor the holy beatific rapture he given to the other--but death specifically spoken about as occurring at "Jerusalem"--a death mysteriously associated, at all events to the Omniscient Son of God, with a thorn-crown, and bitter anguish, and an accursed tree--a fearful baptism of blood! Nor would it appear that the strange converse was limited to the glorified attendants--the transfigured Savior Himself joined in that wondrous talk. 'Speak not,' He seems to say, 'of my crown; speak to me rather of my cross; speak to me, even at this moment of my glorification, of that bitter humiliation which awaits me. It is by being "lifted up," not as now in glory, but lifted up in suffering and anguish, that I am to "draw all men unto myself!"'

But the hour of triumph is at an end, the dazzling luster has faded from the Redeemer's clothing, the celestial voices are hushed, the vision has passed away. Emerging from the cloud and returning to the three still terrified disciples, their Lord finds them, in the extremity of their fears, to have lost all consciousness. They are still "heavy with sleep." Alas! for weak, fragile human nature, even in seasons when it might well be expected to rise above its weakness. These disciples slept now in the hour of their Master's rapture, as they slept afterwards in the hour of His sorrow. Ah, men "of like passions!" If Elijah saw them then from his cloudy canopy, he would remember the juniper-tree, and be silent. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" What! my own disciples, "could you not watch with me one hour?" Blessed for us who may be mourning over our dull, lethargic frames, losing by our slothfulness many bright transfiguration-experiences--the blessings of the mount--happy for us that there is a day and a world coming, when the gentle rebuke of an injured Savior shall nevermore be needed--"Why are you sleeping?" For "there shall be no night there!"

But He is faithful that promised--"I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The hour of manifested glory has made no change in the sympathizing tenderness of the Brother-man. He is still "that same Jesus"--He comes to the disciples, as He had done often before, in their weakness and terror; touches them, and with gentle voice says, "Arise, be not afraid." They lifted up their eyes--the cloud--the glory--the celestial visitants--the voice,

were gone; "they saw no man—except Jesus only." The morning light was again tipping the eastern hills--and they must hasten down the slopes of the mount, once more to encounter stern duty, temptation and trial.

## **22. LESSONS OF THE MOUNT, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Matthew 17:3-11

Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter blurted out, "Lord, this is wonderful! If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

But even as he said it, a bright cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him. Listen to him." The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.

Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," he said, "don't be afraid." And when they looked, they saw only Jesus with them. As they descended the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until I, the Son of Man, have been raised from the dead."

His disciples asked, "Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?"

Jesus replied, "Elijah is indeed coming first to set everything in order.

You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai when God gave them his laws. For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice with a message so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. Hebrews 12:18-19

No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to thousands of angels in joyful assembly. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are

written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge of all people. And you have come to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven who have now been made perfect. Hebrews 12:22-23

Having in the previous chapter endeavored to describe, as minutely as the details furnished by the three separate Evangelists enable us, the scene and significant incidents of the Transfiguration, we shall proceed, in these closing pages, to speak of the objects which this beautiful New Testament sequel to the life of Elijah seems mainly intended to serve.

These were various. We shall restrict ourselves to the one which, while in itself most prominent, has also a more special connection with our Prophet--that is, the intimation thus given by visible symbol, that the legal and prophetic dispensations were superseded by the gospel.

Moses and Elijah were the representatives of the two former. Moses, the great lawgiver, who had received the ten commandments, amid the thunders of Sinai, from the hands of God Himself; and Elijah, as we now well know, the most distinguished in his own age, or perhaps in any age, among the Prophets of Israel. Both appear to do homage to Jesus; confessing their subserviency to Him, of whom both the law and the Prophets bore witness. They lay down, as it were, the seals of office, the warrants for their temporary ministrations, at His feet--Moses his rod--Elijah his prophetic-mantle--acknowledging that neither they nor the dispensations of which they were the representatives, had any glory by reason of "the glory that excels."

The LAW seemed to say, through its representative, 'O Lamb of God, all my bleating sacrifices pointed to You.' PROPHECY seemed to say through its representative--'O Prophet of the Highest, all my picturings and prefigurations centered in You.' The shadow is transformed into the substance. 'In You,' says Moses as he gazes on his transfigured Lord, 'I see the end, and meaning, and reality of the Passover--the blood-sprinkled lintels--the smitten rock, the serpent of brass--the blood-stained mercy-seat.' 'It was You,' says Elijah, 'I saw in the sacrifice on Carmel--You, I heard in "the still small voice" of Horeb.'

And when Peter, in the customary ardor of his spirit, suggested the

erection of three tabernacles--one to each of the glorified people--God gave a very significant intimation, that both of the other ministers were to give place to "the minister of the sanctuary, and the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man." For "while he thus spoke, there came a cloud and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered the cloud; and there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; HEAR HIM." "Hear HIM." 'You have been accustomed to hear, and to regard with profound veneration, Moses and Elijah and the other Prophets--but a greater than these is here. This is the illustrious personage of whom your great lawgiver himself predicted, that "a Prophet would the Lord God raise up unto you of your brethren"--this is He "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth"--this is the true Elijah ("the strong Lord") who shall "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." "This is my beloved Son; hear him."

And then, when the glorious vision departed, Moses and Elijah disappear, and leave "Jesus only"--a beautiful emblem, designed to intimate that the former dispensations were now done away! Elijah and Moses, two names which the disciples, in common with their countrymen, regarded almost with religious awe, were to give place to a greater. The work of the servants is done--merged in the glory of their Master; the rod of Moses is broken--the mantle of Elijah falls on the true Elisha--JESUS was to be hailed as "King of the Jews." By Him the moral law was obeyed--the prophecies accomplished--the types fulfilled. And now, in accordance with God's customary dealings with His subordinate ministers, a solemn investiture takes place of the Great Antitypical-Priest, Lawgiver, and Prophet--the glorious company of the apostles--the goodly fellowship of the Prophets--the noble army of martyrs--praise Him! Adoring Him as Redeemer, they proclaim through these, their two sainted representatives, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The accompaniments of that scene of glory, also, were such as to vindicate the superiority of the gospel over any of the previous dispensations. The legal dispensation was ushered upon the world from the blazing summit of a mountain, amid a fearful canopy of cloud and

darkness, thunderings, and lightnings, and tempest. The other, from the summit of a mountain, too; but now the thunders are hushed--the blackness has passed away--and in its stead a cloud of surpassing brightness overshadows. We behold Moses on the one--his language is, "I exceedingly fear and quake"--Peter on the other, "Lord, it is good for me to be here." On the one, we listen to a voice which shakes the earth; and "they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more"--on the other, we hear a voice--but it is the still small voice of love, pointing us to Christ, saying, "Hear Him!" Elijah, on the same Horeb-mount, comes forth from his cave, muffling his face in his mantle, gazing with trembling awe on the winged symbols of vengeance that passed in succession before him. Now, with open face, he beholds, as in a glass, the glory of his transfigured Lord, and is "changed into the same image from glory to glory!"

As a further reason why Moses and Elijah were employed on this occasion in preference to other ransomed saints, we may infer that they were sent to bear attestation to the great plan of the Redemption which is by Christ Jesus--"that neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Of those who had entered on the inheritance of the promises, if any there were, who could have attained heaven on the ground of their own good works and meritorious deeds, it would doubtless have been the two who are here with the Lord on the mount. We know well the history of the one--how in his life of exalted purity, there is but one solitary recorded blemish--discovering him to be a "man of like passions." A similar intimacy with the other, would unfold a marvelous display of faith, humility, devotedness, heroic endurance, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness. So that if any of the human race could have laid claim, so to speak, to the kingdom above, on the footing of personal merit, we would have pointed to these two illustrious representatives of the two earlier dispensations--these two heads of the sainted hierarchy. But we could not have been more powerfully or impressively told, that every redeemed worshiper before the Throne, from the least to the greatest in the kingdom, owes his place there to another righteousness than his own.

These mightiest of glorified mortals talk of nothing but "the death that

was to be accomplished at Jerusalem!" They appear in shining clothing--but they proclaim that these robes owe all their brightness, these crowns all their luster, to the Savior of Calvary. We may regard them, therefore, not only as the representatives of bygone dispensations of types and figures on earth, but as the representatives of a higher dispensation of glory in heaven--sent down from the ransomed multitude above, to tell to the world that not a robe is there from Abel's downwards, but what is washed in the blood of the Lamb--that every jewel that sparkles in their crown they owe to His cross and passion.

We may regard them as commissioned to tell of the intense interest with which that approaching "decease" was contemplated by the companies of the upper sanctuary. In this view of it, while the scene on the mount would greatly strengthen the faith of the disciples in the hour of trial, it would also tend, and was doubtless designed, to impart courage and consolation and support to the great Redeemer Himself, in the prospect of coming anguish. Oh! would He not be cheered and strengthened for His approaching conflict, when He descended the hill with the approving smile of His heavenly Father resting upon Him--conscious that He carried with Him to the garden and the cross, the awakened interest and sympathies of a Redeemed multitude which no man can number, who waited in profound suspense for the moment of Victory, when He should cry, "It is finished," and bow His head and give up the spirit!

Let us try to imagine the wondrous converse. "They spoke of His death!" They would strengthen His soul, by telling of the mighty results that decease was to accomplish--the transcendent luster it would pour around the throne of God--magnifying every attribute of His nature--securing peace on earth, and glory in the highest. They would tell of the august lesson it would read to a wondering universe--what an attestation to God's unbending holiness--His spotless truth--His hatred of sin, and yet His love to the sinner! They would tell of the countless multitudes who had died in the faith of this "decease," and were now rejoicing above in the prospect of its accomplishment--of the myriads, in unborn ages, who were to reap its fruits, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

Yes! we may conceive that the eye of the Transfigured Savior (as of old

from mount Pisgah did that of the lawgiver of Israel, who now stood by His side) would, from the top of this northern height, survey the land of covenant promise. Stretching far beyond the plains of Galilee, He would see, in majestic perspective, the nations of the earth confessing Him as Lord, and rejoicing in that very decease He was about to accomplish. Amid the stillness of that midnight scene, He would direct His own eyes, as He had done those of the Father of the Faithful ages before, to the starry skies, and behold there an emblem of His unnumbered spiritual seed. Thus seeing of the travail of His soul, He would be satisfied. The thought that He would thus turn many to righteousness, who would shine as the stars forever and ever, would mightily nerve Him for the hour and power of darkness.

Oh! when, from this holy converse, the past, and present, and future, all seemed to combine in proclaiming the results which were suspended on His death--when He saw the tide of glory that would thereby roll in to the Throne of God--when He thought of the mighty moral influence of His death, not on the family of earth only, but on unknown worlds--varied orders of intelligence throughout the universe--in the dispensation of the fullness of time gathering together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and in earth--He would descend to the conflict rejoicing to think, that, though His own garments were to be rolled in blood, the garments of a myriad multitude should by that blood be made white--contemplating such results as these, not only would He willingly enter the garden, and drink the cup, and endure the cross; but, as if longing for the hour of victory, He could exclaim, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!"

In addition to this more special design of the Transfiguration, there are many other interesting and comforting truths which may warrantably be deduced from the consideration of the hallowed scene. Among these is the testimony borne to the state of immediate bliss into which the souls of believers pass at the hour of death--that the moment the spirit leaves the walls of its crumbling earthly prison, it soars into the presence of God, and engages forthwith in active errands of love and duty. The appearance of Moses and Elijah surely affords a conclusive refutation of the cold, cheerless theory, which is not without its modern advocates, that, after

death, the disembodied soul passes into an intermediate state of torpor and inactivity--a condition of lethargic slumber; that there is an arrest put on its spiritual activities, until the Resurrection morning welcomes it back from its sojourn in this dream-land, and reunites it to the raised and glorified body. If the case of Elijah be deemed peculiar, he having been translated, soul and body together, without dying, it is not so, at all events, regarding his brother delegate. The body of Moses was mysteriously entombed amid the solitudes of the Moab mountains, over against Baal-peor--his limbs composed by angels--his grave dug by God Himself, (for "God buried him,") though sedulously secreted from the eye of man. But we see the Hebrew Prophet on the Transfiguration-mount--a visible, living, speaking, recognized representative of the family of the ransomed. He comes forth, along with a kindred spirit, from the brotherhood of the redeemed; and as if the theme, also, in which they had been just engaged with the adoring multitudes around the throne, were still thrilling on their tongues. His body slumbers amid the ravines of Pisgah--it has long ago crumbled away in insensate dust, but the true MAN is a conscious, thinking, living being--a ministering angel before God--embarked in the ceaseless energies of holy service.

Behold, also, in visible symbol, the blessed bond of union which links together the Church on earth and the Church in heaven--Moses and Elijah, from the bright-robed company above--the three disciples from the Church in the wilderness, have their eye centered on ONE peerless Object of adoration and love. The note which the two glorified ones last struck on their golden harps within the veil, is taken up on the earthly mount--"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain," It was for Him--in order that they might testify to His sufferings and their resultant glory--that these two immortal ones left their thrones and their bliss for that hour of earthly rapture, and it is in active embassies of love for "that same Jesus," that the redeemed are now delighting, and will delight to exercise the noblest energies of their natures through all eternity.

Yes! as we leave the history of the great Prophet, whose life of marvel has so long occupied us, it is surely delightful and interesting to bear away the recollection that the last glimpse we get of him, as he is hidden from our sight by the enveloping Shekinah on the mountain summit, is adoring the



Redeemer of the world--casting all his mighty deeds, his zeal, his humility, his heroic endurance, his untiring self-consecration--all at the feet of the Lord who died for him! Yes, more--we believe, were we to draw aside the mysterious curtain which hides the invisible, we should behold him still in his old attitude--rejoicing in a living Savior-God, before whom he stands. And as others among the company of the redeemed, who revered his hero-deeds on earth, might still love to rehearse them in his presence; we may imagine him, with the tongue of fire, now burning only with love, exclaiming in self-renouncing lowliness, 'Perish the memories of Cherith, Sarepta, Carmel, Jezreel, Jericho, the chariot-rapture--God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!'

Blessed thought--Christ the all in all of heaven! The saints may be lustrous, radiant points of light--hallowed luminaries, emitting rays of sacred glory--"But the city had no NEED of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb was the light thereof." We can think, indeed, of the Redeemed, bound to one another by the same mental and moral affinities and idiosyncrasies which affiliate them on earth--bands of the white-robed multitude gathered around some favored spiritual father--embarked with him in congenial occupation, whether that be worship, or contemplation, or active service and ministry of love. We can think of Elijah, for example--"Prophet of Fire," as ever gathering his band of Seraphim around him, enkindling them with his own unquenchable ardor--yoking still his chariot with its fiery steeds, to speed himself and them together in whirlwind embassies of flaming zeal, to comfort distant saints, or form distant worlds; or we can suppose him collecting together contemplative spirits among the ranks of the ransomed, as he did of old the sons of the prophets, and pursuing in concert with them the deep studies of eternity. But all revolve around a more glorious center. They--their persons, their deeds, their studies--have no glory by reason of the glory which excels.

In the great astral system in the skies above us, while dependent planets circle around their different suns, astronomers tell us these aggregate suns themselves own a mightier influence--wheel in stupendous revolution around Alcyone, the supposed great common center of the material universe. So, whatever may be the separate groupings among the

Redeemed--whatever their minor revolutions--there is one peerless, sovereign Sun, around whom they all lovingly revolve--one sublime song--the music of these "heavenly spheres"--which circulates to the remotest circumference of the celestial glory--"Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father--to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!" Thus the loftiest idea of a future heaven--the true "hill of God"--is that of an eternal Transfiguration, the concentric circles of saints and adoring angels gazing with unquenchable rapture on the glorified Son of God, and exclaiming, "It is good for us to be here!"

If such were the lofty themes of converse which occupied the delegates from heaven on the heights of the Holy Mount, let us take a parting glance outside the cloud, when all is over, on the disciples--the representatives of the earthly Church. The heavenly messengers have come and gone; the cloud, the radiance, the lofty converse, the majestic voice of paternal love--all have vanished. The cold, chill, morning air, the drenching dews of early dawn, the fleecy clouds in the valley, the smoke in the distant hamlet--all denote that they are back to the dull world again--that soon they shall once more be involved in the rough contacts of daily life. What a contrast with the past night of seraphic bliss!

"Alone!"--yes, "yet not alone!" "When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Bereft they are of their celestial companions; but they have one compensating solace for all they have lost. The stars and satellites and moons have waxed and waned and departed--the candle-lights have been extinguished; but the great Sun still remains to illuminate their path, and perpetuate the bliss of that glorious Sabbath hour and scene--"they saw no man, except Jesus only." JESUS ONLY--it is enough--they ask no more. With His love and presence to cheer them, they pursue their path, ready for duty, for trial, for suffering--animated by the sight of the crown, they descend more willing to bear the cross.

"Jesus only"--what a motto and watchword for us! Many of the most loving and beloved of human friends come only, like Moses and Elijah, on 'angel visits'--illuminating the night of earth with a transient, yet blessed radiance--then leaving us, like the disciples, amid the chill, gray mists of solitude--our path moist with dewy tears, as we hurry back once more to

a cold, unsympathizing world. But blessed be God, to His true disciples, as to the favored three on Hermon, their best Friend is still left--"JESUS ONLY." "Fear not," he said on another occasion to these same disciples, "I AM; be not afraid." "I AM"--then perish every desponding thought. "I AM"--faithful among the faithless, changeless among the changeable! Oh, blessed antidote to all cares! blessed balm for all wounds! blessed compensation for all losses! blessed solace in all sorrows!--to descend from the mountain-heights of worldly bliss to the deepest valleys of humiliation and trial--with JESUS ONLY!

"PROPHET OF FIRE," farewell! We shall long for your return--if not in person, at least in spirit--to rekindle the watch-fires on the walls of Zion! Let the last glimpse we have of you on the inspired page direct every wavering eye to the source and secret of all your greatness and power--the Transfigured ONE, who alone can "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with FIRE!"

"He was not the light; he was only a witness to the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world."

# **PAUL'S SONG OF SONGS**

## **A Practical Exposition of the Eighth Chapter of Romans**

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## **Introduction**

The following pages were specially composed during hours of leisure in the quiet of the study. Their design is to unfold and illustrate, however inadequately, one of the most precious portions of Holy Scripture. The writer fulfills a long cherished desire to awake a few slumbering chords of this New Testament "SONG OF SONGS."

In entering on the exposition of the eighth chapter of Romans, we listen to the music of the greatest of the Church's prose-minstrels. It is a Gospel enshrined in the most precious of the Epistles--an epitome of divine truth. Though blended with other chords, let it be noted at the outset, that the Love of God, and the Security of the Believer, constitute the special dual strain intoned by our Apostle in his sublime Canticle.

"The Eighth Chapter of Romans is the Masterpiece of the New Testament."--Luther.

## **1. THE KEY-NOTE OF THE SONG**

Let us listen to it--"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1).

The remarkable opening and ending of our chapter have often been observed; what, in accordance with the name of this Book, I may call the Antiphon. The Voice or Harp-note begins with "NO CONDEMNATION." It is answered in the close of the chapter with "NO SEPARATION." The key is struck by the inspired musician. This is followed by an ever-augmenting volume of melody, until it culminates in an anthem "like the voice of a great multitude and the sound of many waters." It reminds us of another Master of sacred Song (Haydn)--with his "Let there be Light!"--and the Light broadens and deepens into the perfect day of heaven.

"No condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." This first proposition is ushered in with "Therefore." It is the summing up--the great inference from the preliminary thesis of the earliest and best of Christian Apologists. And this initial thought of consolation and peace, like a golden thread, is interweaved throughout the chapter.

"In Christ Jesus." We cannot now pause to expound and illustrate all which these pregnant words imply. They set forth, in a flash of thought, the personal, vital union or incorporation of the Believer with his living, loving Lord; transforming the old into "the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The expression is explained and unfolded in the sixth chapter (4-11). It is a favorite and often recurring formula which permeates the writings of him who specifically calls himself "A man in Christ" (2 Cor. 12;2). "In Christ"--safely immured in Him who is "the refuge from the storm and the covert from the tempest." I have read, in the terrible story of the Crimean War, when rampart after rampart, bastion after bastion of the doomed city were being stormed and battered into shapeless ruin--deep down in the foundations of one of the grim fortresses was a hold, where the wounded

were conducted safe from the iron hail--away too from the din and roar of artillery which in that battle of giants made night as hideous as day. There they were, for the time, safe and sheltered--"The weary to sleep and the wounded to die."

Christ is that sheltering Covert. He is "the Stronghold in the day of trouble" (Nahum 1;7). "In Him"--in the clefts of this Rock of Ages--within this Citadel of faith I am safe. The law and its avenging thunders crash against me in vain. Crippled and wounded in the stern struggle hours of life--sin-stricken and sorrow-stricken--assailed with temptation and legion foes--principalities and powers--spiritual wickedness in high places; I can listen to the voice of the Great Rest-giver as amid the shot and shell of battle He thus speaks--"Come unto Me!" "Come, My people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you, and hide yourself for a little moment until the indignation be overpast." "The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep (as the word means in a citadel or garrison) your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4;7).

"In Christ." It was the vital truth so beautifully enforced by the Divine Master Himself in His valedictory Parable of the vine and its branches--"Without Me"; out of Me; severed from Me, you are nothing, and can do nothing. Out of Christ, apart from Him, each soul is like a stranded vessel--mastless, sailless, rudderless, the sport of ocean forces--lying high and dry on the sands, away from its buoyant element. But the tidal wave flows--the rocky inlets and creeks are one by one filled--the "abandoned" is set once more a living thing on the waters--anew "compassed by the inviolate sea."

That is the man "in Christ." Environed with this new element--life in his living Lord with its ocean fullness and unsounded depths--he is safe, joyous, happy. No cyclone above, no submerged rocks beneath; a halcyon calm around. "In Me you shall have peace." Not in vain did the early Christians--even in the midst of their great fight of afflictions--"the sea and the waves roaring and their hearts failing them for fear"--write on the slabs of their catacombs--IN CHRISTO--IN PEACE.

Enough now farther to say, that grasping thoroughly the phrase in its full

evangelical meaning, all the varied succeeding affirmations of our chapter become at once comprehensible and luminous. It is the "Basket of Silver" in which "Apples of Gold" are inserted. Let us keep this in mind all through our exposition, as affording the guarantee of every covenant blessing--specially the two already distinctively indicated. It forms Paul's security and the security of all believers as he utters the closing challenge and "persuasion" --"Shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is IN CHRIST JESUS our Lord."

"No condemnation in Christ Jesus!" How blessed the thought, if we are participants in what Dean Alford calls "the bringing in of life by Him, and the absolute union in time, and after time, of every believer with Him!" "Condemn" or "Not condemn;" "Condemnation" or "No condemnation" are no longer open questions--indeterminate and unsettled. He the Great Redeemer and Lord--the Brother in my nature has taken me into living membership and fellowship with Himself. In Him the debt is cancelled--liquidated. In Him I am pardoned and accepted. These are the words of the divine Pardoner (none more precious in all Holy Scripture)--"I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more." Paul, we must bear in mind, was now writing to Romans; who were familiarized with the forensic terms he uses. They knew well what was the significance of the proclamation "Condemno," or "Non condemno," as it rang through their pillared basilicas. Happy for those who have listened, as here, to the Great Absolution from the lips of the Just, yet the Justifier. Happy for me if, feeling my new covenant position in Christ, I can go forth to the world--to my daily work and business--amid "the loud stunning tide of human care and crime," and hear this chime of heavenly music ringing through it all--"No condemnation."

And to have the full comfort of this opening strain of the song, let me think of it, too, as denoting a present discharge--a present immunity. Not the limited and partial thought of being one day called to the tribunal of a Judge to receive the sentence and assurance of remission; but "There is therefore, NOW, no condemnation." The absolution is already pronounced from which there is no appeal. "I AM pacified towards you" (Ezek. 16;63). "We who have believed do enter into rest" (Heb. 4;3). "He



that believes shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5;24). "Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3;2).

The Prodigal in the parable is not ordered to undergo probation--to tarry outside as a dependent among the menials of his father's house and halls, before restoration is accorded. The robe, the ring, the sandals, the welcome, are his at once. Let me accept the same lofty consolation, that the blessedness is even now mine of those whose iniquities are thus forgiven and their sin covered--that I am now a chartered citizen of that heaven of which the subsequent portions of this "Song of Songs" tell me I am to be a glorified inhabitant.

Yes, in beginning these successive cadences of Paul's sacred Cantata, I can appropriately take up the words of other and older singers--"O Lord, I will praise You; for though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away and You comfortest me" (Isa. 12;1).

"He has put a new Song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Ps. 40;3).

## **2. SONG OF VICTORY**

I do not break up the clauses which follow. I group them as one prolonged strain, and call it "The Song of Victory, or Song of Redemption." For it is a Song unique in itself, complete, all-comprehensive--an anthem as of a multitude of the Heavenly host over the night-plains, not of Bethlehem, but of the world, praising God and saying--

(V. 3, 4.) "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

[Let no Reader (may I here premise in a word), be repelled by the somewhat doctrinal tone of this and the earlier chapters. We must enter by the outer courts before reaching the innermost shrine. The foundations must be laid before the crowning super-structure be reared.]

The theme of this portion of the SONG, epitomized, is this. The demands of the law, in themselves impossible of fulfillment, have been satisfied through the atoning work of Christ; and those alone can take up the triumphal notes continued to the end of the chapter, who have thus absolutely renounced all legal ground of justification in the sight of God, and have accepted the gratuitous offers of pardon provided by the Divine Surety--"Christ the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes."

The first clause of these verses--the first strain of this opening Redemption-Hymn is "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

What are we to understand by this? It may have other latent side-meanings, but we may take it, in its simplest acceptation, as an equivalent term for the Gospel method of salvation; forgiveness, peace, eternal life, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ. It is the glorious provision of the Life-giver--"In Him was life;"--Him--alike the Author of Redemption and the Bestower of the new principle of life in the heart of the believer.

The remaining assertion of the verse is in contrast, or contradistinction--"Has made me free from the law of sin and death." It speaks of the old decalogue of Sinai with its rigid, inflexible demand, "Do this and live." The two statements are brought together elsewhere in the concise epigrammatic sentence--"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Then follows (verse 3) a remarkable epitome of the Redemption-work; "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh." "Weak." There was no weakness, no inherent defect or feebleness in the law itself. As the expression of the mind and will of the Great Lawgiver, it resembled one of the pillars of the ancient Temple ("Jachin")--STRENGTH. It had the Divine Holiness and Justice, Omnipotence and Immutability to rest upon. But its high, uncompromising demands were beyond the perfect obedience of the fallen creature. This alone

constituted its "weakness." In its own majestic requirements it was potent. As a ground of human merit and a procuring cause of salvation, it was impotent. Amid the thunders and lightnings of the Mount comes the dread deliverance from which there is no escape or appeal--"by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified." Moreover, let it be noted, in connection with the present argument of the Apostle, that this impossibility extended beyond what (to use a forensic term) I may call the major count of the indictment. There was the great outstanding fact of original sin--the human nature fallen and under condemnation; the depravity and corruption of the heart. That heart and its experience we have found faithfully portrayed--photographed--in the immediately preceding chapter. The holiness and sanctification of the believer even at the best are an unrealized and unrealizable ideal--no more. The most saintly image comes out blurred--the fight--the life-long encounter between the lower and the higher nature, as we have also seen, leaves behind the inevitable scars of battle. "For in me," says this noblest of spiritual combatants, "that is, in my flesh, [my weak flesh] dwells no good thing." He feels, that while one moment he may be the soaring eagle, the next he may be the groveling worm. Paul may in this be thought to take a pessimistic view of human nature generally. Yet who that knows his own heart and life experience can demur to the stern reality?

Here then, in this opening proposition, he reasserts what had been logically expanded in the previous lengthened context, the powerlessness and inefficacy, alike on the ground of nature and practice, of the law to give "LIFE."

He proceeds to unfold the great remedial measure of God's own sovereign devising--"God sent His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

We have spoken of the "Weakness;" now comes the contrasted "Strength;" "Christ the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." A law, powerless either to justify or to sanctify, becomes both in Him. As the Apostle elsewhere with singular force and brevity, yet fullness, expresses it--"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law. But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal. 3;21, 22). "GOD

sending." The purpose of Love was His own--one undreamt of by human reason; beyond the conception and device either of man or of Angel.

And there is a farther notable emphasis in the appended word. "The stress," says Dean Alford, "is on 'His own,' and the word is pregnant with meaning." His own Son, spotless in His holiness; in Nature and Person immaculate as the law whose debts He came to discharge and its precepts to fulfill. This sinless Son is in marked antithesis to "the sinful flesh" in whose likeness He came. "Likeness;" for though in all respects tempted and tried as the Brother in our nature, it was "yet without sin." One single spot or stain in the Incarnate humanity would have vitiated the efficacy of His atonement. But He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He could make the unanswerable challenge to His adversaries-- "Which of you convinces me of sin?"

"And for sin" (marg., "by a sacrifice for sin;" R.V., "as an offering for sin") "condemned sin in the flesh."

Much of the true meaning of this important clause must be determined by what is implied in the word "condemned." It seems to us capable of but one interpretation--the vicarious sufferings and death of the Son of God for us men and for our salvation. In case of any verbal misapprehension, we reject the harsh and unwarrantable rendering given by an otherwise admirable commentator (Haldane), when he ventures to translate it by the term "punished." We cannot for a moment accept the word, if in the remotest form it suggests or embodies the thought of the loving Father of heaven punishing "the Son in whom He declares Himself well pleased." Such be it said at once would be altogether unworthy, abhorrent, blasphemous; distinctly at variance, it may, moreover, well be added, with the creed of so distinguished and reliable a student of Scripture.

And yet we dare not eliminate the implied truth of an Expiatory Offering.

Another commentator to whom the Church of Christ owes much (Barnes), suggests an alternative rendering, probably the nearest to the truth, while evading the objectionable punitive term--"God passed a judicial sentence on sin in the person of Christ." He condemned sin in the

flesh, that is, in His own assumed, human, fleshly nature, Incarnate God.

Should we retain the accepted rendering in both Authorised and Revised Versions ("condemned"), there may possibly be implied another antithesis between this and the word of the first verse, for they are in the Greek the same, "condemnation." There is condemnation by the law. There is no condemnation by the substitution of the immaculate Redeemer.

Then comes the grand result (v. 4). "That the righteousness" (or, marginal, requirements) "of the law" (that which the law demands) "might be fulfilled in us;" fulfilled by the meritorious life and death of the Son of God, and through our mystical union with Him.

Reader, are you and I able to accept, and accepting to repose on this great truth, what the old Divines call "THE SATISFACTION." We know how in modern days it is a doctrine slighted and discredited. In the language of Reuss, who may be taken as a leader in the so-called "advanced school," "there is not a word of all this weighing and calculating scheme to be found in the writings of Paul." While refusing to accept the German's depreciatory definition of our Apostle's "systematic theology," I conclude far otherwise. I feel I must reject the teachings of this Epistle and of all his other Epistles--as well as the teachings of his inspired contemporaries; I must reject my Bible itself, before I can repudiate so cardinal an article of the faith. That there is mystery, profound mystery, in this dogma of Divine Substitution and Suretyship none can deny. But I would ask those who discard it, calmly to read without cavil or prejudice the following among many assertions (not by any means exclusively Pauline)--and say if their plain, unambiguous meaning can be evaded?

To begin with Christ's own testimony, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20;28). Omitting for the present the prophetic writings, His Apostles and other inspired penmen repeat and rehearse the assertions of their Lord. "He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5;21). "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal, 3;13). "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb.

9;28). "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2;24). "Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2;20). "Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3;18). "It became Him" (that word "became" is solemnly emphatic; there was a necessity laid on God, arising out of His own nature--than which we can conceive no stronger necessity) "of whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2;10). "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1;5).

You may strive, by a forced exegesis, to get rid of the meaning wrapped up in these and kindred passages on the Suretyship of Christ; but a literal acceptance can alone give explanation and consistency to the reasoning of the Apostle in this verse on which we are now meditating. God, in the Person, and work, and atoning death of His dear Son, has thrown the luster of a glorious vindication around every requirement of His law and every attribute of His nature. Christ, by a holy life, obeyed the law's precepts, and by a holy death of self-surrender and sacrifice endured its penalty. The law says, "Do this and live." I cannot do it. But I listen to the words of Him who can do it--who has done it. "Lo, I come, I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Ps. 40;7, 8). "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 5;4).

O blessed Savior, I desire with simple unwavering faith to look to You thus--to You only--wholly, and forever. I desire to behold You as the great Antitype of the Jewish Scapegoat, bearing away the load of transgression into a land of oblivion and forgetfulness, so that "as far as the East is distant from the West," so far have You "removed our transgressions from us." I look to You, indeed, also in the beauty of Your Character and Work, as the perfect Example, the great Ideal of Humanity. In this acceptance of the word, I know that You did oppose and overcome the forces of evil. I know in a similar manner, too, You may be said to have "condemned sin in the flesh;" overcome it, and conquered it in Your own pure, stainless human nature. You could say in a real, what our Apostle could only utter in a qualified sense, "I have fought the good fight; I have

vanquished, and thereby have I given a pledge of sin's final subjugation." But this is not all I need. I must look to You as the Atoning Sacrifice--the Sin-offering. "O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us!" "O Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, grant us Your peace!" I shall not go to the Temple without the Altar, or to the Altar without the Sacrifice. Thanks be to the dying, ever living love of the divine Surety, if I am enabled with the heavenly harpers spoken of in Revelation (5;8, 9) to "sing the new song"--the Song whose strains gave them their golden harps and golden vials and crowns of victory--"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation!"

I close with one verse from an earlier chapter of this same Epistle. It has been purposely kept by itself and to the last. It is culled from the midst of Paul's cogent argument. But it seems to express, in a brief sentence, the peerless truth on which we have now been dwelling. Olshausen, by a metaphor not less truthful than happy, calls it "The Acropolis of the Christian faith," "Whom God has set forth to be a Propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. 3;25).

Propitiation (margin, RV., "Propitiatory"). The reference, as is well known, is to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, in the Tabernacle or Temple--the Mercy-Seat. The tables of the law, the two tables of stone were deposited within that Sacred Ark--the eternal decalogue with its unrepealed, unabrogated demands, and solemn requirements. It spoke condemnation--"The soul that sins, it shall die." But the blood besprinkled "Shield" resplendent with gold and fragrant with acacia wood (significant type and emblem of the divine Surety), interposed between it and the officiating High Priest--the Representative of Covenant Israel in all ages. Christ--the true "Propitiatory" stands between the living and the dead, that the great plague of sin might be stayed. Or, to give a different illustration, we recall the host of Assyrian warriors in ancient Jewish story, "their cohorts gleaming with purple and gold"--their banners "floating proudly at sunset"--

"Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn has blown,  
That host of the morrow lay withered and strewn;

For the Angel of death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed."

Each hand grasped a sword, but was impotent to wield it. Even so; the law retains, in all their force, the deadly weapons of condemnation. But a mightier than created Angel has come down and paralyzed its arm-- "stilled the enemy and the avenger." The sharp, keen-edged swords slumber powerless in their scabbards. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

These remarks ought appropriately to close this section. But one practical thought dare not be omitted--one note is needed for the full cadence and harmony of this Redemption-Song. If the law is impotent to save--if its claims have to be fulfilled and its penalties borne by Another, are we to disregard it as a rule of life?

This is answered in the closing saying of the passage. It is a brief but necessary restatement of the Apostle's preceding and fully discussed question; "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (v. 4). We cannot enter on the wide subject here. It will come in course, and be amplified in next chapter. Enough to say, that the love of God, in the gift of His Son, has, as its result, in the case of the believer, the imparting of a new life of love. To quote the words of a Brother Apostle (1 John 4;9)--"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent His only Begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Or Paul's own equally cogent saying (Rom. 6;18)--"Being then made free from sin, you become the servants of righteousness." (Ver. 22)--"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." The Gospel message of free pardon through the merits and righteousness of Christ, acts as a dominating influence--a new pervading principle of action, permeating and energizing the whole being. The hospices which crowd the pilgrim way lead up to the pure and serene atmosphere of the everlasting hills. The Temple-stairs, not of the Law but of Grace, conduct to the Holy of Holies. A stray note from the Savior's greatest "Song of Songs"--His own Beatitude-chapter, is on the lips of every worshiper, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."





### 3. DUAL STRAINS.

It is common in Paul's writings--in none more so than in this Epistle to the Romans, for one subject to suggest what follows. As with the musical Composer one note suggests another--as with the skilled and practiced Orator one topic or idea suggests another--so it is here. The last strain of our inspired Harmonist was--"Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The theme is now amplified--the note is prolonged. Retaining our song-metaphor, the identical terms of the couplet "flesh and Spirit" are over and over antithetically intoned.

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" Romans 8;5-9, 12-13

I shall not attempt expounding, clause by clause, in consecutive order, but rather group these together, combining and interchanging; the better thus to grasp what is the scope and meaning of the writer.

Taking it generally, the entire passage is a plea for the higher spiritual life, as contrasted with the lower. It is a step in advance of our Apostle's thesis already adverted to in ch. 7. To use a familiar figure, the latter may be likened to the swing of the pendulum; while the present may rather be compared to the magnetic needle, which despite of tremulous vibrations is pointing true to its pole. The animal nature--"the flesh with its affections and lusts" (the disturbing cause)--is deflecting from God and holiness. But its normal condition is, notwithstanding, strictly under the

influence of diviner principles, renewed motives and affections.

The two first, and we may regard them as leading clauses in these couplet verses, are rendered in the margin--"Minding of the flesh" and "Minding of the Spirit" (v. 5). The former opens up not an inviting subject. But for the sake of the contrasted theme we must for a few moments dwell upon it. It is the picture of mankind in their natural unregenerate state--the 'Harp with its thousand strings' out of tune, the song with its marred and discordant melodies; the soul "alienated from the life of God;"--under vassalage to sin. The desires, inclinations, tastes--have not only a downward tendency; but, as we know too well, there is a dynamic force in the carnal nature corresponding to the momentum of the material law. That moral momentum is ever on the increase. Indulged and permitted evil--the despot rule of the flesh--leads to an ever sadder bondage, and deadens the sense of right and wrong. In the simile of our Lord's Gospel Parable, the house "swept and garnished," yet unsundered to the Spirit, becomes more and more devil-haunted; so that "the last state of that man is worse than the first." Hear another Apostle's description of the terrible progression or decadence in this "minding of the flesh;"--"Earthly, sensual, DEVILISH" (James 3;15). The sirens in league with the fallen and corrupt nature, lure with the charm of their voluptuous song, only to surer destruction.

And the saddest feature in the delineation--the saddest taint in this fleshly nature is here specially noted. The head and front of its offending is--"The carnal mind is enmity against God" (v. 7). God--the God of unspotted holiness, purity, and righteousness is distasteful and abhorrent to the "mind of the flesh." "It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." This, in the truest sense, is "Atheism." "The fool" (that is, the impersonation of the carnal mind) "has said in his heart, 'No God for me'" (Ps. 14;1); for such is the energy and emphasis of the original. There are undoubtedly times when the most callous and indifferent--those of the earth earthy, cannot--dare not, thus utter the scoffer's creed, "No God!" All nature in its majestic sequences, its exquisite mechanisms, its intricate yet simple laws, repudiates the disavowal. It has its own "Song of Songs" chanted day and night in endless chorus, sublime refrain--"The Lord reigns." Yes, and this is still more emphatically and solemnly

countersigned by conscience within, the authoritative viceregent--conscience asserting its own cadences, despite of all inner discord that would attempt to mar divine, godlike harmonies.

Yet alas! the recognition of God--the God of the Gospel and of Revelation is incompatible with the "desires of the flesh and of the mind." Hence the altar is erected, not with the old Athenian inscription "To the Unknown God," but "No God FOR ME." The votary of the flesh can without scruple give his adhesion to the creed of Pantheist or Materialist. But a great moral Lawgiver and Governor to whom he is responsible, and to whose Will his whole principles and actions are antagonistic, he cannot tolerate. His state may be summed up in the one expressive word--"Ungodliness."

And what a picture is this, of those who are unrenewed in the spirit of their minds! "The natural man (the flesh) receives not the things of the Spirit of God." "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7;5).

"Unto death." In the verses we are now considering the same sad climax is reached. "To be carnally minded is death" (v. 6). "If you live after the flesh you shall die" (v. 13). The original meaning is here, too, emphatic. It is not that this fleshly tendency leads to death; but it is death. Death, gloomy-visaged, spiritual death sways its iron scepter over the moribund soul. It is dead to the only true life--the life of God--"Without God and without hope in the world!"

Turn now for a little to the opposite pole--from muffled peals to spiritual life-chords. Listen to Paul's series of counterpart statements.

(V. 10) "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (V. 12) "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors." "If you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." (V. 6) "To be spiritually minded is life and peace."

"We are debtors." The key-note of the song considered at the beginning of these meditations (v. 1) interprets this assertion for us. Once in "condemnation;" bankrupt, nothing to pay--sin-condemned and law-

condemned. But Christ the Law fulfiller has paid all and remitted all, granting to the insolvent a full discharge; "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors;" debtors to Him who has Himself furnished the ransom--opened the prison doors and set us free. Hence the infinite obligation under which we are laid to Redeeming love. Hence the supreme incentive to sanctification of heart and life. As He died for sin, so must we die to sin.

At this point of the Apostle's argument, a new divine Influence or Factor is revealed; a new slumbering chord of the Song is made to vibrate. God has made gracious provision to secure, on the part of His ransomed people, a holy walk and obedience; and that, not through their own strength, but through the strength and power of His indwelling Spirit. By that Spirit we are not only renewed, but "led" (v. 14)--sweetly constrained to walk in harmony with the divine will, and the impulses of our regenerated natures. We have here what Chalmers happily calls "the expulsive power of a new affection." It is a plant which our Heavenly Father plants. Not indigenous to the natural soil of the human heart; it is of supernatural growth.

Christ Himself in His interview with Nicodemus expressly speaks of a "new birth"--a being "born of the Spirit"--"born from above. ABOVE; "translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son." ABOVE--we breathe a purer atmosphere. Away from the mists and clouds of the nether valley, faith takes us to its own rocky heights; and bathed in its own bright paradise, puts one of its new songs into our lips--"He shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." The life originally forfeited in the first Adam is more than restored. "I came," says the great federal Head of the New Covenant, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10;10).

In all this, however, let us specially note, at the risk of repetition, the divine Agent and Agency. For while the expression "the Spirit," may be more than once descriptive of the new moral condition of the soul, in contradistinction to "the flesh;" it undoubtedly has a preponderating reference to the Holy Spirit--the Third Person in the adorable Trinity--the Author, Inspirer, Energizer of divine life; in accordance with Christ's own valedictory promise to His Church--"For He dwells with you and shall be in you" (John 14;17). "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so

be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (v. 9).

If we have seen that the state of those "minding the things of the flesh" may be expressed by one word--ungodliness; this new, heaven-born life may similarly be described by the one word "spiritual mindedness." This spiritual mindedness--the Holy Spirit's work in the heart--like all the processes in God's material and moral government, is step by step and progressive. The power of sin becomes slowly weaker and weaker. The power of grace, slowly--it may be imperceptibly, becomes stronger and stronger. Paul's own word (v. 13) implies not a sudden and instantaneous, but a gradual transformation; "If you through the Spirit, do MORTIFY the deeds of the body, you shall live." It is in accordance with a similar and equally expressive simile of our Apostle elsewhere--"Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." Crucified--it is a slow, lingering death--a "striving against sin" (Heb. 12;4); though the strife and conflict are not dubious, but lead ultimately to assured victory.

Reader, have you and I, in any feeble measure, been able to realize the presence and power of this "Indwelling Spirit"? conscious of the surrender of heart and life to Christ? implying the gradual conquest of sin; the expulsion of whatever is base and impure, corrupt and selfish, grasping and covetous, unloving and unholy--our wills blending in greater harmony with the divine? Is this our happy history; can we endorse this testimony as our own experience--"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world?" (Titus 2;11, 12). Not, moreover, as a hard rule of compulsion--a reluctant concession to stern duty and obligation, but saying with a cheerful feeling of self-surrender--"I delight in the law of God after the inward man"?

There is no description truer than that asserted in one of the antithetical clauses already quoted--"to be spiritually minded is life and peace." PEACE! that holy tranquility--that "fruit of the Spirit," specially noted in Gal. 5;22. Like God's own metaphor of it, the river may not be always untroubled. The stream may at times flow amid rough boulders and environing rocks, fretted and broken into foam by the cataract. But gradually it resumes its customary calm, reflecting the serene heavens,

and at last sleeping with waveless tranquility in the bosom of the lake where it has sped its way.

Nor let this phrase, "the Indwelling Spirit," be taken by us as a mere theological expression. No; it is a deeply solemn reality. "Don't you know that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3;16). O, what a constant preservative against sin--what an ever-present incentive to holiness were this conviction more habitually present with us--"My soul is a shrine tenanted and consecrated by the Holy Spirit!" How the thought evokes the blush of conscious shortcoming and unworthiness, in recalling the past! How it demands self scrutiny for the present and watchfulness for the future! How crowded becomes the memory with the remembrance of impure imaginations, unamiable tempers, vain aspirations, "winged ambitions,"--selfish ways, passionate words, unloving deeds! Humbled, softened, saddened at the retrospect, be this our prayer--the prayer of one who, far more than Paul, realized the terrible combat between flesh and spirit--one who fell sorely wounded in the battle--but yet as God's accredited and honored soldier rose from his fall--though carrying the scar of ignoble defeat and failure to the last--"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joys of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit " (Ps. 51;10, 11, 12).

Let me listen, daily, hourly, to the divine admonition--"Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." How many venture to walk--but it is to walk dangerously near the precipice straying on doubtful or forbidden ground; with a faltering will; holding parley with sin; tampering with the sensitiveness of conscience and with the treacherous allurements and base compliances of the world; thus "grieving the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

Lord, bring me to live more and more constantly under the sovereignty of that lofty motive to walk and act so as to please You; to exercise a jealous scrutiny over my truant, treacherous, deceitful heart. Specially in my daily business and daily duties and daily temptations and daily perplexities, may I seek to be led by Your Spirit. Let me keep free of whatever influences would deflect the needle from its pole, and prevent the love of God from being shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit

given unto me. Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, may I be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3;18). Free from the bondage of the law--the law of sin and death, let me become a willing slave to the new bondage of Christ's service.

Recognizing the ultimate end of Redemption to be Sanctification, may I yield myself and my members servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom. 6;19).

Here is our Apostle's main incentive to the leading of this higher spiritual life and this diviner spiritual walk--"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Cor. 5;14, 15). "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth. For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3;1-3). "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" may be taken as the summary of this passage and chapter. As a responsive and appropriate chord to Paul's Song of the renewed mind, let us close with an old prophetic strain, celebrating the City of Salvation with the Gates of righteousness and peace we have just been surveying--"In that day, everyone in the land of Judah will sing this song: Our city is now strong! We are surrounded by the walls of God's salvation. Open the gates to all who are righteous; allow the faithful to enter. You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!" Isaiah 26:1-3

#### **4. I SHALL RISE AGAIN.**

In the verses now to claim our thoughts, we have again two antithetical clauses; or, repeating our figure, antiphonal strains.



"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it."

Romans 8:11-12

"The body is dead because of sin;"--"Shall also quicken your mortal bodies." Other topics already touched upon, are embraced in the passage. We shall therefore confine ourselves to these contrasted words--answering chords--"dead" and "quicken." It is Death in conjunction with Life--or rather with Life as its sequel and triumph. It recalls the burial sentences so familiar to many, when standing by the grave--"Man that is born of a woman has but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He comes up and is cut down like a flower; he flees as it were a shadow, and never continues in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death." Followed by the inspiring words--"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life...Our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Your eternal everlasting glory."

Or there may be brought before the mental vision of some of us, the impressive and never to be forgotten spectacle of a soldier's--a Christian soldier's funeral. The procession slowly pacing the streets, amid the wailing of the "Dead-march"--with the accompaniment of muffled drum--"the body is dead." But when the concluding volley is fired--the ordinary tribute borne by the brave to the brave; the dirge-notes are merged into some jubilant strains, possibly dear to the departed as he was passing through the last mortal strife.

The same antithesis as that of our present verses, often occurs throughout Sacred Scripture--"The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry? all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field" (Isa. 40;6). The voice said Cry--"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour comes, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live" (John 5;25).

Let us briefly meditate on the two themes.

"The body is dead." Some have considered this expression figurative or

symbolic. It is in every respect more in harmony with the Apostle's meaning and argument, to take it in its simple and natural acceptation. His reference is to the dissolution of the mortal framework (2 Cor. 5;1). Indeed any other interpretation we think is inadmissible. The "body"--were we by that to understand "the flesh"--the animal nature, is not thus "dead because of sin." Such would unsay and contradict the repeated assertions of the seventh chapter--negative the writer's humbling lamentations over his own dual experiences. Even when most subdued, the fires of corruption and evil smoulder to the last; and death alone puts the extinguisher upon them.

It is then, as may be strongly asserted, this human body of flesh and blood, which sooner or later undergoes the doom of dissolution, of which he speaks. And this, too, even though "Christ be in you" (v. 10). There is no exemption from the universal law. Christianity and Paganism are on the same footing here. It is the testimony of wide humanity, "We must needs die." Believer and unbeliever--the children of light and the children of darkness are served heirs alike to the "covenant with death."

And, "the body is dead because of sin." "Death has passed over all men for that all have sinned!" It is sin which wrote that primal sentence from which there is no appeal--involved in that warfare from which there is no discharge--"Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return." DEATH!--we dare not mock our deepest, holiest feelings by attempting to soften your terrors. Death!--which so often, like an avalanche, comes crashing down in the midst of summer skies and smiling fields. You are indeed the great Destroyer--the disrupter of closest bonds, the unsparing implacable foe of human happiness; leaving behind you weeping eyes and broken hearts. If there were not other inspiring music, of which we shall presently speak, there could be no "Song of Songs" to wake into life and hope these hushed and gloomy corridors--nothing but unstrung harps. We could only be mute in such bewildering moments, as we wail out the dirge-notes of the insoluble mystery--"How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!"--the severance, the void, the blank, the silence! In the words of the Laureate--

"Our lives are put so far apart,  
We cannot hear each other speak."

O Death, here IS your sting; O Grave, here IS your victory!

But I willingly leave the shadows of this picture, and pass to its glorious lights--from the sob in the darkness to the "Song in the night."

(V. 11) "Shall also QUICKEN your mortal bodies." It is the first introduction--the first faint warbling, in the inspired Canticle, of the believer's future triumph--the first pencilled ray, which, as the chapter closes, "breaks and broadens into glorious day."

"Our vile body" (lit., the body of our humiliation, Phil. 3;21), is to assume an incorruptible form--quicken from the dust of mortality into everlasting life. "Life in Paul's writings," says Dean Howson, "is scarcely represented adequately by 'Life.' It generally means more than this, that is, Life triumphant over death." And let us note very specially with what, in the mind of the Apostle, that quickening is associated. It is with the Resurrection of the believer's Lord--"He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies." Paul had discoursed to the Athenians at Mars Hill, on "Jesus and the Resurrection." He does so now with his Roman converts. He brings before their minds that great Resurrection day, on which the buried Conqueror had met His first followers with the "all hail" (Matt. 28;9); and when the glad tidings were afterwards borne from lip to lip--"The Lord is risen!" This, indeed, is the chief note of our Apostle's present Golden Song, and of all the after Songs of Christendom, including the greatest uninspired Song of the ages--"When you had overcome the sharpness of death, You did open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." "If Christ be not risen," he elsewhere affirms, "your faith is vain, and you are yet in your sins." "But now has Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of those who slept" (1 Cor. 15;17, 20). "It is a faithful saying. For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him" (2 Tim. 2;11).

Am I able to appropriate this transcendent truth, that in a partial sense now, and in a full sense hereafter, I am sharer in the Resurrection-life of my divine Redeemer? The great problem of all time has been--"If a man die shall he live again?" Paganism with its elysium, mingling with a dim land of shadows (Tartarus and Acheron)--gave a feeble, trembling response, like,

"An infant crying in the night,  
An infant crying for the light,  
And with no language but a cry."

The noblest intellect of the olden world says, hypothetically--"If there be a life beyond?" Even Athens, with all her boasted enlightenment, had one of her favorite altars in the Temple of Minerva Polias dedicated to 'Oblivion'. Nature presents, in her great parable-book, some significant guesses and types, but nothing more--of "the secret hidden from ages and generations." In the upspringing of the seed buried under the clods and snows of winter; or the bursting of the insect from its cocoon prison-house, soaring to heaven on wings of purple and gold. But all these oracles were unsatisfactory and ambiguous, until Christ came. Rolling back the stone from the sepulcher of Golgotha, He proclaimed Himself--"I am the Resurrection and the life;"--coupling with this a guarantee for the life and resurrection of His people--"Because I live, you shall live also." He, the first fruits, was presented before the Heavenly Altar, the pledge of the vast harvest that was to follow--"Afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." We need not wonder at the Apostle's emphatic words in a subsequent strain which we shall come to consider--"It is Christ that died, yes rather, that is risen again."

Blessed Savior! may I be enabled to "know You, and the power of Your resurrection" (Phil. 3;10). I would enter by faith Your vacant tomb, and hear the angel-announcement--"He is not here, He is risen as He said; come, see the place where the Lord lay." No, more; I would see in all this, what disarms the sting in the first clause of the passage now before us--"the body is dead because of SIN;"--for I see, in You, death and sin alike doomed. In You the grave has become the robing-room for immortality. So completely has Your dying vanquished the last enemy and his dominion, that You are said to have "abolished death," and to have "brought life and immortality to light." I can understand now the meaning of Paul elsewhere, when, in enumerating the contents of the Christian's charter--the roll and record of the believer's privileges, he includes the startling entry--"All things are yours...DEATH" (1 Cor. 3;22). He was writing to the world's Metropolis--to those familiar with their Appian Way--the long street of tombs, ending in the Via Sacra with the

Forum and Capitol. Earth in a wider sense is one long Appian Way--a vista and avenue of sepulchers, with the universal inscription--"Sin has reigned unto death." But, through Him who has raised up Christ from the dead, it resolves itself into a "Sacred Approach," leading to the City whose walls are salvation and its gates praise--on whose entrance--its triumphal arch--the words are emblazoned--"And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21;4).

Meanwhile, in the prospect of that glorious quickening, when His people will be changed into "the body of His glory,"--may it be my longing and aspiration, that "the spirit"--the renewed, quickened, and regenerated spirit--may be "life because of righteousness." May I be imbued with a spirit instinct with holiness. Above all, desiring to be "like" my risen Lord. The exhortation of the Apostle of love seems the appropriate one in this longing after purity and consecration of heart and life--"And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure" ( 1 John 3;3). It is a solemn test and touchstone which ushers in our present verses--"IF Christ be in you!" Is my life now "hidden with Christ in God"? Is His love enthroned in my heart, and is it expelling all less worthy aspirations? Partaker of this Resurrection-life of Jesus, let me so rise above the fear of natural death, that seen in the morning light of the great coming Easter it may appear like a "going home."

And may not all this be deepened and intensified, when I think of it in connection with the beloved dead? Those rayless eyes will be lighted again. The music of that hushed voice will be awakened again. In the certainty of that quickening, we are lifted far above the poor Xaipe (the farewell) on Pagan tombs. As we pace these dark and doleful realms of death, the sound as of the silver trumpet is heard. It is a Song of Songs in long antecedent years, sung by no Apostle but by the Lord of life Himself; as looking down the vista of ages, He exclaims--"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be your plague; O grave, I will be your destruction" (Hos. 13;14). "Your dead shall live;...awake and sing, you that dwell in dust" (Isa. 26;19).

Hear how, in other beautiful words of comfort, our Apostle connects the Resurrection of Christ with the glorious awaking of His sleeping saints. It

is not the poet's "Sleep, the sleep that knows no waking." "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thess. 4;13-17). "Together with them;" and "forever with the Lord!" Death is the transmuting and transforming of human relations into a life which is impossible in the earthly sphere. It is, with reverence we call it--a Transfiguration on the Mount of Heaven.

This meditation cannot be more appropriately closed, than by quoting two passages which seem written as if an express comment on the verses which have claimed our attention--two sweet melodies in full harmony with our Song of Songs;

"All honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead." 1 Peter 1:3

For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. When this happens—when our perishable earthly bodies have been transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die—then at last the Scriptures will come true:

"Death is swallowed up in victory.  
O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?"

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord! 1 Cor. 15:53-57

## 5. THE CHILD-SONG AND ITS LULLABY.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him "Father, dear Father." For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering." Romans 8:14-17

Another prolonged note of the divine music; and again suggested by one preceding.

The Apostle had just been dwelling on the Holy Spirit and His operations as the active Force in the regenerated nature; awaking, inspiring, invigorating, perpetuating "life" (vers. 9, 10, 11, 13). This leads, by a natural transition, to a yet higher strain in the symphony. The subject, in itself entirely new, forms a distinct advance in the argument of the chapter. To use a different figure, we may regard it as a golden gate, like that on the eastern wall of Zion, leading to the privileges of the true Spiritual Temple. All the benefits of the New Covenant with which the chapter closes, which have their crown and culmination in the triumph of divine love, spring out of the relationship here disclosed--Sons of God.

Among the Bible truths which owe their fuller development and acceptance to these later decades, prominently is the divine Fatherhood and sonship. They form the essential doctrine--the dual "Song" of New Testament times and Gospel story. God, under the Old Covenant, was revealed as Jehovah--the Almighty, the Shepherd, the Stone (or Rock) of Israel (Gen. 17;1, 49;24). It was reserved to the Author and Finisher of the faith--Himself the divine Son, to be the revealer of the more endearing name of Father. How He loves to dwell upon it, and to enshrine it in discourse, and parable, and miracle! It is breathed by Him in His own mountain Oratories, whether by the shores of Gennesaret or on the green

slopes of Olivet. It forms the opening word and key-note of His own appointed prayer, "Our Father in heaven!" It is repeated in His great Valedictory and in His great Intercessory prayer; in the hour of superhuman conflict in Gethsemane--the hour of superhuman darkness on the Cross. It is consecrated in the first Easter words--a possession for His Church in all time--"I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God!" (John 20;17).

Who can wonder that Paul here catches up a strain that had so divine a warrant? We may well call the verses now to be considered, "the Song of the adopted children." No loftier cadence can rise from the lips of the holy Church throughout all the world-- "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family--calling him "Father, dear Father." For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we will share his treasures--for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering." Romans 8:14-17

In this singularly beautiful passage, the Apostle's object seems, to show the highest ground on which believers may rest their spiritual privileges and eternal safety. Not merely, as he had already pointed out, by being invested with a new spiritual life infused and quickened by the Holy Spirit, but as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty--God's own children by adoption. As such, their rights are inalienable. "Why you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4;7).

He begins with the customary antithesis; contrasting the spirit of bondage and the spirit of sonship. "The spirit of bondage again to fear." The law and its inexorable demands generates this apprehension--"it genders to bondage." It is Sinai with its "blackness and darkness and tempest; the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words;" and whose natural expression is--"I exceedingly fear and quake." Is not this servile dread, even in the case of God's own children, at times unhappily nurtured and strengthened by a repellent theology--unwise and unscriptural teaching; inspiring, of necessity, a joyless faith; while with



morbid or sensitive natures, self-introspection deepens the gloom, "And conscience does make cowards of us all."

Paul's belief was very different. It was the echo of his great Master's utterances; the unfolding of a tender, sympathetic FATHER--the human tie which binds child to parent, having its archetype in this higher relationship. As the earthly child in the hour of fear and danger rushes to its parent's arms and (in the expressive Greek word of our present passage) "cries" "Father;"--feeling its need of guardianship and protection, and knowing that that loving protection is assured; so is it with the believer and his Father-God. Away with all harsh theories; all the misconceptions which had their gloomy origin in the mythology of those Romans to whom this Epistle was written--whose dominant thought was deity to be propitiated--not deity to be revered and trusted and loved.

"God," says Bernard; and he is the interpreter of the earlier, in contrast with the mediaeval centuries--"God is not called the Father of Vengeance, but the Father of Mercies." We do not thus set aside or minimize the Law and its demands. It must ever occupy its own important place in the divine economy. It demonstrates the deficiency and defilement of our best obedience, the hopelessness of any effort of ours to meet its requirements, satisfy its exactions and pay its penalties. But in the Gospel system, as unfolded in all its length and breadth in this eighth of Romans, we are taught to regard it as "a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3;24). It is not the great motive principle in the renewed nature. That new dominating motive is the sweet constraint of filial love, by which we are drawn to the Father. The "You shall" of Sinai, with its stern impossibilities, is changed for the words echoed from Calvary--"We love Him because He first loved us."

O wondrous privilege! O marvelous sonship! Prodigals by nature--bondaged slaves--now, to use the expression of an old writer, "within the house." In accordance with the New Covenant, the deed of release is signed and sealed by the divine Ransomer--"Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2;19). This is what the Apostle here calls in the corresponding antithetical clause, "the spirit of adoption." Even the freed slave in ancient times dared not address his master as a son. But

Christ's ransomed freeman can. "If the Son makes you free, then you shall be free indeed." Yes, "free," as Paul here adds--free to address the mightiest and holiest of all Beings by the endearing name, "ABBA!" "Abba" is the Syro-Chaldaic form of the Hebrew word for Father. It was more familiar to Paul, as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, than the foreign Greek [word], and would be the more genuine expression of his newborn filial devotion and consecration. Perhaps, too, in harmony with Luther's rendering of it--as "dear Father," it might be the avowal of familiarity and loving trust. Or, add to this, may it not have been like the superscription on the Cross, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin--to bring the sacred name by an emphatic conjunction, home to Jew and Greek; the Father-Head of one vast united family? No strain in this Song of Songs is sweeter or more divinely musical. It is like a serenade of Angels--no rather, a lullaby from Him who is spoken of "as one whom his mother comforts" (Isa. 66;13)

But then comes, with solemn urgency, the all-important, all-momentous question--"How do I know that this sonship is mine? How can I establish my claim to these lofty privileges and immunities."

The Apostle proceeds to reply. There is, first, the "leading" of the Spirit. In the solemn emphasis of the original Greek in v. 14--"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they" (these and these only,) "are the sons of God." Then, secondly, there is the witness of the Spirit--the inward evidencing power of this divine Agent in the soul. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (v. 16).

How does the Spirit thus bear witness? Here we tread on difficult and delicate ground, the borderland of mysticism and faith. One thing we know, "The Spirit of God is not straitened." He can act how, and where, and when, and as He pleases. Moreover, the means He employs vary with the individual feelings and idiosyncrasies of those who are the subject of His divine operations. We must take special care, however, not to mistake the character of these. Especially should we be jealous of the demand which not a few make, of pronounced outward manifestations--the display of vehement emotion--"sensationalism." Such tests are often unsafe and unreliable; the hallucination of excited feeling and overwrought temperament. Far less are we to look for the witness of the Spirit in mere mechanical rites; the alleged efficacy of sacramental

symbol. His normal operations are rather thus beautifully described by lips of sacred authority--"The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it comes, and where it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3;8). Or again, He is likened to the dew--silently distilling on the earth; hanging its pearl-drops on leaf of tree or spire of grass--without noise or premonition. "The kingdom of God comes not with observation." Yes; "not with observation;" and yet, in a very real sense, with observation--subjective, yet at the same time objective. His witness may be most safely described as evidenced in daily life--"known by its fruits." These fruits are not left for our conjecture. They are specially enumerated; they are specially called "the fruits of the Spirit,"--"love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5;22, 23). The indwelling of the Spirit is authenticated and countersigned by a holy, pure, consistent, heavenly character. These are evidences patent to every honest "seeker after God;" that, too, despite of many mournful alienations and deflections--the ever-present painful consciousness of coming so far short of the divine ideal.

O God--my Father-God!--have I been enabled in any feeble measure to realize this my sonship, and to have the inward, divine, responsive witness of the Spirit? Have I been able to dismiss the old slavish fear of You? Am I among the number of those of whom the Savior speaks, who "will" (desire) "to do Your will?"--saying, "Your Spirit, O God, is good, lead me to the land of uprightness?" Can I stand such simple tests as these--do I love the Word? do I prize the privilege of prayer? When affliction comes, and the divine hand is heavy upon me, am I "led" by this Spirit of Yours to own the rectitude of Your dispensations; and just because of conscious sonship am I able to say, it may be through tears, "Even so, FATHER! for so it seemed good in Your sight; and, as Your son, I shall not permit it to be evil or unrighteous in mine!" There are few tokens of the Spirit's "leadings" more frequently or more beautifully evidenced than this latter; when He is visibly seen to come down, as predicted, "like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth." The human soul, mowed by the scythe of affliction, humble, stricken, lies withered and faded. But the heavenly Agent descends--faith and love and devout resignation go up like a cloud of fragrant incense to the Father's throne and the Father's heart.

"As many as are led." It was the Savior's own promise--"He will guide you into all truth...He will show you things to come" (John 16;13). Just as some of us may recall, in early days, the guide over Alpine glaciers and crevasses, terrains and boulders; then up the jagged precipices that conducted above mist and cloud to "the blue skies," with boundless prospect of "everlasting hills." That experienced conductor, of strong muscle, and eagle eye, and unerring footstep, is a feeble type of the Infallible GUIDE of His Church, alike individually and collectively.

Blessed Spirit! whose office and mission was thus announced by the departing Christ, do lead me! Let me strive to do nothing that would grieve the gracious Agent, by whom I am "sealed unto the day of redemption." Enable me to curb passion, restrain temper, subdue and mortify pride and vainglory. Attune my life and heart to an Old Testament Song, which has its sweetest cadence in the New--"He LEADS me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Nor let me be satisfied with negative results; but rising to the dignity and glory and responsibility of sonship, give me increase of holiness--gradual conformity to the divine mind. Waking up from spiritual sloth and ease, help me to rebuild the collapsed purpose, and consecrate fresh energy in the heavenly service, aiming to live and walk so as to please You. Specially enable me to follow the footsteps of the Great Example. When, from His divine lips comes still, as of old, the solemn heart-searching question--"Do you love Me?" may it be mine to reply, even though under a trembling apprehension of my own vacillation and instability--"Lord, You know all things, You know it is my desire to love You!"

And it may be a help to those who are most feelingly alive to this fitfulness of their love and the inefficacy of their obedience, that that sonship is not dependent on their capricious frames and feelings. Like all else in the everlasting covenant, it is divinely secured, ratified, sealed. For thus runs their charter deed--"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1;5, 6). The glory of that sonship, with all its concomitant blessings, is rendered sure by a God that cannot lie--"I

have called you by your name; you are Mine!" (Isa. 43;1). "But I said, How shall I put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, You shall call me, My Father; and shall not turn away from me" (Jer. 3;19). "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. 8;10).

It is to this the Apostle now leads us in the present verses; "And, if children, then heirs." It is a heritage from which nothing can cut us out or cut us off.

What is the heritage thus spoken of and promised? His words are remarkable. They can be best left to their own mystic, divine interpretation. The ideas they embody are untransferable by the poor vehicle of human language. They are among those he elsewhere describes as being "impossible for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12;4)--"Heirs of God!"--"partakers of the divine nature." We have recalled the like symbol in the Book of Revelation describing the indescribable glories of the Redeemed; "And I saw no Temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it" (Rev. 21;22). "And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22;5 ). "Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev. 3;12).

"Heirs of God!" In these three words are comprehended all the blessings Omnipotence can bestow. Every attribute of the divine nature is embarked on my side and pledged for my salvation--Power, Wisdom, Faithfulness. ABBA!--a Father's house--a Father's halls--a Father's love--a Father's welcome--a Father's presence forever and ever! "This," says Luther, "far passes all man's capacity, that God should call us heirs, not of some rich and mighty Prince, not of the Emperor, not of the whole world merely, but of Himself, the Almighty Creator of all things. If a man could comprehend the great excellency of this, that he is indeed a son and heir of God, and with a constant faith believe the same, he would abhor all the pomp and glory of the world in comparison of the eternal inheritance."

(Watchwords from Luther," p. 334.)

Nor is this all. These peerless blessings are confirmed and ratified by the farther guarantee--"joint-heirs with Christ." Christ, as the Brother in my nature, has made the heritage doubly sure "for us miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death, that He might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life." He, indeed, in His divine essence, occupies a place and realm all His own. He is "Heir," by virtue of His essential dignity; what the old writers call His "Crown rights." He is "the First-born among many brethren"--a name is given Him which is above every name. "He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19;16). We, on the other hand, are heirs by adoption and grace, by virtue of our living union with our living Head. This heritage is ours, first and partially in possession--"Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Its full blessings are ours in future possession, when Christ's own words, uttered, not in the days of His humiliation, but in His exaltation at the right hand of power, will be fulfilled"--To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me (a fellow heir) on My throne" (Rev. 3;21).

Oh wondrous endowment!--and as free and gracious as it is wondrous! Under the Hebrew code, the law of first-born was rigidly observed. The, eldest-born received the inheritance. Isaac was Abraham's heir; and while the other children of the patriarch had their limited portions meted out to them, he, as the recognized son of the promise, entered on his father's goods and possessions. It is different with the spiritual Israel. There is no law of first-born in the Church of God's first-born. All are on divine equality here. All are warranted and welcome to enter on the purchased heritage--to claim the adoption of sons and the co-heirship with Christ. There is but one condition--"And IF CHRIST'S--then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3;29).

The remaining clause of the verse is needed to complete this Adoption-Song, though we shall reserve its fuller consideration for the kindred one which follows, and which will demand a separate treatment. (V. 17) "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." Observe it is not only, that suffering is the law of the kingdom, but that we SUFFER WITH HIM.

Elevating and inspiring surely is the thought to all sufferers whatever the diverse causes of affliction may be, that they and their great Lord pass through the same ordeal; that He has drunk of every sorrow-brook by the way (Ps. 110;7). "Perfect through suffering" is the characteristic alike of the Head and the members. In all their afflictions He was afflicted; in all their tears "Jesus wept." "With Him!" How the assurance disarms trial of its sting--"I am undergoing the experience of the Son, who 'learned obedience by the things which He suffered.'" Who knew better than Paul the boon, and blessing of this identity of suffering with his suffering Master? Hear his testimony in the Mamertine dungeon, with certain death hanging over him, "All men forsook me; notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4;16, 17).

This suffering culminates in glory--"That we may be also glorified together" (v. 17). "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2;12). "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4;12, 13). No words in the Redeemer's intercessory prayer are more elevating and comforting than those, in which the Father's name is linked with the bliss of His ransomed people--"FATHER, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory" (John 17;24). Following their Lord's example, and echoing His utterance, the inspired writers seem to love thus to repeat the filial name and recount the adoption privileges. In selecting from one of these, let us, in closing, put emphasis on the words of John's apostrophe, and make them the refrain of this Redemption Song--"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." 1 John 3:1

## 6. A SONG IN THE NIGHT.

Here we have another Antiphon; suggested, moreover, as we have found in the case of other strains, by the one immediately preceding.

The Apostle's new theme is that chief of forces fetched from a distant future, by which Christianity sustains the soul in its great fight of present afflictions. (V. 18) "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

We found, in the previous verses, the inspired writer expatiating on the name and character of believers, as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." But as he contemplates this wealth of privilege--a difficulty--a mystery--presents itself. How can the Fatherhood of God be reconciled with the existence of present suffering? And, be it observed, the sufferings and sorrows of which he speaks are not those to which all flesh is heir; but the afflictions of His own dear children. If the Father welcomes His prodigals home--calls them "sons"--gifts them with best robe and ring and sandal--making His halls resonant with music; how can we account, alongside of this, for the many "songs of a heavy heart"? How can we account for beds of pain and tearful eyes; for the badges--pictures of dead ones surmounting the household porticoes of those who cling most lovingly to the paternal name and relationship? He had just revealed to us in elevating words the glow of a summer sky. How can it be permitted or ordained that dark clouds should dim its azure? Why in a valley flushed with flowers of heavenly beauty and fragrance, allow these chill avalanches to descend, blighting all loveliness? Why permit these grating 'life-discords' into the believer's Song of Songs? That Song here moans and sobs itself away in a dirge.

In our last meditation, we had one answer given--or at all events had stated one glorious compensation; that, as heirs of the kingdom, His people are honored and privileged to be fellow sufferers with their great suffering Head--"If so be that we suffer with Him." Christians in their deepest experiences of sorrow and trial are identified with the King of Sorrows--"Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe



on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1;29). Truly, when He is seen rejected, despised, homeless--forsaken of trusted friends--bowed in anguish; scourged, spit upon--nailed to the cruel Cross; what are His servants' severest trials?--dust in the balance compared with His. In one dreadful sense can He exclusively use and appropriate the words--"I have trodden the wine-press alone." Yet, too, in a very real manner, are they called and permitted to enter as He did, within the portals of sorrow, and to listen to His own words--"Tarry here (under the shadow of these gloomy olive-trees) and watch with Me!"

Yes, tried believer, may it not well disarm suffering (your suffering) of its sting, to know that the same afflictions appointed for you, were appointed to Him before you? In your deepest Gethsemanes of trial there is consecration in the thought "He suffered!" "Christ also has suffered for us (yes, suffered with us), leaving us an example that you should follow His steps." Those called, in v. 14, "sons of God," and led by the Spirit to cry Abba, Father, have, as their transcendent solace--"the fellowship of His sufferings;" while words, elsewhere recorded for the special encouragement of God's children, may well repress all rebellion and hush all murmurs--"Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12;3).

But in the verse now before us the Apostle proceeds to state another reason for accepting affliction and trial. He makes these the subject, so to speak, of divine arithmetic--a question of heavenly proportion. Or, as implied in the other figurative expression of the verse, he weighs the two opposites in his balance. In the one scale he puts "the sufferings of the present time." And it is noteworthy that, different from the other verses of our chapter, he seems to detail here his own personal, individual experience. It is, if I may so venture to call it, a Solo in this inspired Song, "I reckon." Few so well qualified to make the calculation. Few so able to load that scale as he! "What great things he must suffer for My sake," were the terms of his commission--his "marching orders" at the outset of his apostolic campaign. How bravely he accepted them; and how faithfully he discharged them--from the first hour of midnight flight; through storms of land and sea--the outer types of far fiercer moral hurricanes that swept over his sensitive yet dauntless spirit--on to the

close of all, when from dreary dungeon he was hurried outside the Ostian Gate to encounter the executioner's axe and undergo a martyr's death! Yes, I repeat, few were in a position to put down, as he could, one portion of the figures in this summation--"the sufferings of the present time!"

If we may surmise that he had others also of the family of affliction in his eye, none could well be more conspicuous than those to whom he now wrote. They knew already, and they were before long to know in more terrible form, what suffering was. If we are correct in assigning A.D. 57, or spring of 58, as the date of the writing of this Epistle, it was the fourth year of the reign of Nero--a name suggestive of horrors and ferocities in their most revolting shape. Though the worst of these cruelties associated with his "reign of terror" were not yet reached (the circus and garden-fires occurring a few years later), he was already beginning to develop the barbarous instincts of "the lion" in its savagery (2 Tim. 4;17). The martyr era, at all events, was at hand--so that by anticipation Paul could call on his Roman converts and their infant church to prepare for a speedy reckoning of "the sufferings of this present time."

With us the age of martyrdom is over. Bigotry has meanwhile closed her iron dungeons. But sorrow, trial, in their thousand forms and phases, still remain as they ever were, to load the Apostle's scale and give point to his question of proportion. "All that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer," if not persecution, at all events affliction. Suffering has ever been, and ever will be, God's appointed discipline. The King's highway is paved with trial. "We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14;22).

We now turn to the other scale in the balance--"the glory that is to be revealed in us." Or, reverting to his other figure as a question of divine calculation; he puts down a unit--that unit represents present suffering. But he adds countless ciphers, to represent the contrast. The two are not to be compared. They are incomparable--out of proportion. This apostolic reckoner had obtained, through "visions and revelations," a glimpse of the inner glory. Darkness gives place to the brightness of eternal day.

This, then, is the second explanation of the otherwise baffling mystery of suffering; that, as he otherwise expresses it--compared with "the ages of

the ages," it is "our light affliction, which is but for a moment" (2 Cor. 4;17). He sees, close by, a few Marah-drops of earth's bitter pool. He looks onward, and beholds "a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." It is "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "A far more exceeding;"--the expression in the original Greek is difficult to render with sufficient intensity--"More and more exceedingly" is the R.V. The Apostle sees glory rising on glory. The weight of the Cross may be great, but it is nothing to the weight of the Crown.

Taking this, then, as his deliberate, truthful summation, "Not worthy to be compared;" let us, aided by Paul's few suggestive words, farther analyze his "reckoning."

Sorrowing believer--

(1) "Reckon" that your sufferings are LIMITED to "this present time;"--"After you have suffered awhile." They are finite; and as such, cannot be compared with their corresponding glory, which is infinite. The sorrows of earth thus restricted in duration, when seen from "the glory revealed," will be but as the visions of a troubled dream in the night, which the morrow's dawn has dispelled. And yet, be it remarked in passing, let us not from this, and through any unworthy, morbid feeling, diminish the importance of time and of the present time. In this great question of divine arithmetic, if it be but a unit, it is the significant unit which gives the figures which follow all their value. It is standing on the all-momentous platform of the present, that we can say of the outlook on the Great Beyond--"The world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2;17).

(2) "Reckon," that your afflictions and sorrows are METED OUT, appointed, controlled by your Father in heaven. Affliction springs not from the dust nor trouble from the ground. He does not conceal His hand--"I bring a cloud over the earth" (Gen. 9;14). It is no capricious dealing of fate, or accident, or cruel misfortune. They are the words of our "Abba, Father"--"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." "Wearisome nights" are "appointed." "I will afflict you in measure."

(3) "Reckon," that this divine Chastener--this Father-God--will not allow His afflictions to go TOO FAR. He would not permit the Adversary to

touch the life of His servant Job (Job 2;6). He held him as in a chain, saying, "Thus far shall you go, and no farther." He "stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind;"--"tempering the wind to the shorn lamb." There is no such thing as superfluous or unnecessary suffering. In quaint Hebrew symbolism, "He puts my tears into His bottle" (Ps. 56;8). He metes out drop by drop--tear by tear. "If need be, you are in heaviness" (1 Pet. 1;6).

(4) "Reckon," that in sufferings here there are always SOLACES--sweet drops in the bitter cup, lulls in the fiercest storm--silver linings in the darkest cloud--gracious alleviations and mitigations. This, too, carrying out the figure of the Apostle, is another question of proportion--"As you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you be also of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1;7). When God allures us into the wilderness, it is not to abandon us there; but it is to "speak comfortably unto us," and to "make the valley of Achor a door of hope" (Hos. 2;14, 15). He takes Jacob to the wild uplands of Bethel and gives him a hard stone for his night-pillow; but He makes the solitary place glad, He peoples his dreams with a ladder of angels and visions of glory. "I will sing," says the Psalmist, "of mercy and judgment; and he puts the mercy first. God's judgments may be "a great deep." But Your mercy, O God, is vaster still; for it is "in the heavens; and Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds" (Ps. 36;5, 6).

(5) "Reckon," yet once more, and, chiefly, that suffering is the pledge of a Heavenly Father's love. This is the point dominating all, and to which the previous verses, descriptive of the believer's heritage, lead up. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." "What son is he whom the Father chastens not?" "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."

O strange, yet true! Suffering--a covenant privilege, a covenant badge; one of the insignia of sonship--a turn in the believer's "Song of Songs!" O gracious triumph in this divine reckoning, that we can fall submissive at the feet of the great Chastener and say--"Even so, FATHER; for so it seems good in Your sight;" "I know that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." He is ever employing His angels of affliction "to minister to them that are heirs of salvation." He will not permit His people to settle on their lees. Rather does He see fit ever and anon to "empty from vessel to vessel." He puts a thorn in the

nest to drive to the wing. When, at times, a Father's footsteps fail to be traced and a Father's love fails to be apparent--when the hands hang down and the knees grow feeble and the weights of sorrow burden and oppress the spirit, let us try to place in the other scale the wealth of glory to be revealed in that sinless, sorrowless, tearless world, where there are no fiery trials, no debasing corruptions or overmastering temptations--no baffled schemes or thwarted plans, or divided friends or carking cares, or unsolved mysteries or sceptic doubts.

The two antithetical words of our verse--"suffering" and "glory"--seem specially to remind us of an element peculiar to the bliss of the redeemed in heaven--a joy which the unfallen angels cannot share. It is the glory and the joy of contrast. "What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" The answer points to the contrasted earthly condition. The brightness is all the greater from its background of gloom. "These are they which came out of great tribulation" (Rev. 7;14). And may there not, here too, have been an implied word of encouragement and heart-cheer to Paul's Roman converts--the revelation of the true, in comparison and contrast with the false and spurious glory? Glory was a word familiar to the Romans--they boasted of their proud roll of heroes, their imperial triumphs, above all of their eternal city. But he now reveals "glory" in its best, highest, only real sense. Not the tinsel of earth--the flash of an hour, the tinted bubble dancing its little moment on the stream then vanishing forever--but the glory whose birthright is in the divine counsels and its duration eternity--the purchased inherited glory of God's own sons! He pointed those to whom he wrote, away from the Ichabod that was soon to be written on their fallen military colossus--the ruin of earth's greatest capital, to "the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God."

And in order to leave nothing untouched in the verse forming the theme of our present meditation, note, once more, its brief remaining words, "the glory which shall be revealed IN US;" not only "to us," but "in us." It is thus a glory which will be manifested also to others. In the skies of an endless future it is to be a reflected radiance. The satellite or satellites are to reflect the brightness of the great central Sun! "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by

the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3;10).

Who can tell how much affliction--"the sufferings of this present time" like the facet cuttings of the diamond, will have to do with the superlative glories described in the words--"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

There is a legend of the nightingale that it "sings" loudest when a thorn pierces its breast. May it not be so with the glorified, and their great "SONG OF SONGS" in heaven? The memory of earth's piercing thorns (for it can be no more then), will most sweetly attune ransomed lips to the Music of Eternity!

## **7. THE DIRGE OF CREATION.**

This new strain in our Song, as it stands in the A.V., is, to say the least of it, perplexing, if not unintelligible. The authors of the R.V. have endorsed the much preferable translation of other scholars. The perplexity is caused by giving the Greek word (Ktisis) the double rendering of "creation" and "creature." If we adopt the former alone, and slightly alter the termination and punctuation of the 20th verse--putting the full stop after "same;" moreover, if we link the "in hope" with the verse following, all is at once made perspicuous. Any discordant sound is brought into harmony. It becomes then a unique creation-anthem, consisting of two parts. The first is dirge over Paradise Lost--the second, a paeon over Paradise Regained. It resolves itself, moreover, again into an Antiphon. The wail of nature is answered by a hymn of deliverance; tears are turned into songs.

Let us now quote the passage in full, availing ourselves of the R.V.  
"For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it. In hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans

and travails in pain together until now" (v. 19-22).

1st. It is the "PARADISE LOST" which here takes precedence in his description--creation "made subject to vanity;"--under "the bondage of corruption;"--"groaning and travailing in pain."

Strange statements at first sight are these--grim chorus this in the Apostle's Canticle--surely, we are apt to think, an exaggerated symbolism as applied to the beautiful world surrounding us; with its pastures clothed with flocks, and its valleys covered with corn! Here the verdure of spring, there the mellowed stores of autumn. Here are its groves resonant with melody; there the silvery ripple of its brooks. Here is its sapphire skies; there the deep calm of its lakes reduplicating the drapery of rock and fern and birchen tresses. Here are the mountains and their crowns of snow--flushed alternately with morning gold and evening crimson--there is the great temple of night burning ten thousand altar-fires! How can "lost," or "vanity," or "bondage," be inscribed on the portico of such a sanctuary as this? How can there be dirge or discord in this its own ever-varying Song of Songs?

He who wrote thus of material nature could himself speak as he conjured up image on image from life's retrospect. The loveliness of creation had been familiar to him, ever since, as a boy, he had roamed by the banks of the Cydnus, and gazed upon the vine-clad heights and tapering cypresses which encircled his native Tarsus. He had been for many years of youth spectator of the mountains round about Jerusalem. He had watched often the gleam of evening light on the Moab precipices, as on a long bastion of ruby and amethyst. He had traversed the valleys of Samaria and Naphtali, with their streams rushing through tangled thickets of olive and oleander. He was familiar with all that was most picturesque about "the roots of Hermon." He had crossed that great barrier mountain of northern Palestine, and gazed at a distance on the wealth of groves and gardens of Damascus--he had witnessed--never to be forgotten by any who have been privileged to contemplate them--the glorious sunsets on the Isles of the Archipelago. He had stood on Acro-corinthus--with its wide outlook east and west. He had wandered among its pine-groves, from which were gathered the corruptible crowns for the athletes in the plain below. He had stood on the Areopagus, under the charm of an Atticus sky, and there

beheld nature and are in their most wonderful combination. In one sense, to him it must have seemed a travesty and misnomer to speak of all that diversified creation as "bondaged"--a slave with the doom of "vanity" branded on its fair brow!

And we too, who have been in any measure taught to admire its beauty and note its harmonies, may well at first refuse to see such widespread evidences of corruption, or listen to the wail of thralldom or travail pang. We behold in this great "building of God"--this Temple of His glory--the "gold and silver and precious stones." We look in vain for "the wood and hay and stubble."

No, not in vain. The superficial listening to this dirge of the Apostle, is soon recognized to be in sad keeping with the reality. The gilded frame encloses an only too truthful picture of "lamentation and mourning and woe." Like the shifting scenes in a panorama, the one, bathed in summer sunshine we have just been gazing upon, changes into the chill and darkness of winter night. We need look no farther than on its outer physical conditions. That azure sky is at times swept with tempest or turned into battlements of thundercloud. The pestilence walks in darkness--the destruction wastes at noonday. Ever and anon, its fairest climates are desolated with earthquake--the sirocco careers in wild havoc over its deserts, the tornado lays its cities in ruins and "discovers its forests." The volcanic fires slumbering beneath its crust demand safety-valves for their lava and flame, accompanied with widespread destruction. Look at her seas--the highway of the nations; yet how often roused to madness--their surface heaving with demon rage--strewn with wrecks, and deaf to the shrieks of perishing crews. Think of the myriads that lie sleeping unshrouded, uncoffined, unepitaphed in their depths--the hapless owners and tenants of "a wandering grave!" Look at her fields, abandoned to blight and curse; and which but for the unceasing toil of man would make perpetual surrender to the dominion of thorn and thistle, and noxious weed! Think how her productions have been prostituted to every foul and debasing purpose. The iron dug for weapons of war--the ploughshare defrauded of its benignant use, that its material may be fabricated into instruments of mutual destruction. Corn and wine, too, graciously and beneficently designed, if employed in moderation--



one of these "the chalice of God"--His own selected sacramental symbol, alienated to ruin soul and body, dethroning reason and degrading to the brute-level--the cup of blessing turned into the cup of devils!

Then ponder, further, the universal reign of "change and decay." The very vegetation--a conspicuous source of creation's beauty--bursting into perfection only to wither. We see spring and summer breaking out into a leafy and floral resurrection. But these, before long, have to succumb to the iron grasp of winter, or are bound in its frosty chains. The lowlier tribes bow to the same inexorable law; while superadded in their case is the startling anomaly of mutual destruction--the stronger preying on the weaker; Nature in ceaseless rapine, "red with beak and claw;"--the suffering of the brute-tribes often aggravated by the neglect or cruelty of man. Then, conspicuous above all, is the mystery of human pain and sorrow--the cry of slavery--so well known by those to whom Paul now wrote, ever ascending from the outraged and despairing--the pangs of martyrs at the stake--the shrieks of those "butchered to make a Roman holiday" in circus and amphitheater. And apart from this--where there is no trace of human tyranny--there is the suffering of sick beds, the agony of bereavement, the sudden close of lives of promise--bright suns going down before they have reached the meridian--human ties formed only to be sundered, births succeeded by deaths, marriage chimes followed by the funeral-bell. The wailing lamentation has risen for six millenniums--"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there!" Yes, say as we will--earth--while a home of beauty--the vestibule of heaven, may be described, with equal truth, as a vast hospital of anguish--a cemetery and receptacle for the dead!

There is a special emphasis in the closing word of the Apostle in our present passage--"The whole creation groans and travails in pain together." TOGETHER. It is a united, universal pang--one long lamentation, in which the human wail is perhaps the loudest, and with no favored exceptions to the doom of mortality. That orator who held captive the ear of listening senates--his tongue is silenced! That monarch who gathered around him at his bidding vassal princes, has himself to own a sterner vassalage! That warrior who made the world to tremble--the terror of kings--has himself to bow to the King of Terrors! "Vanity"--is the

one loud agonizing miserere--waking responsive echoes all around--  
"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity."

And what, in a word, is the true history and explanation of it all! Let those call it myth and legend who please; it is the only rational interpretation of the oracle, otherwise so baffling and ambiguous--"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death has passed over all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5;12).

II. We now turn from the dirge to the SONG--from the wail of bondage, "the still, sad music of humanity"--to the strain of anticipated emancipation. Let us merge the pessimistic in the optimistic.

"The earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God...In hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21).

Note, in passing, that this bondage of creation is here described as involuntary. It is expressly said that the degradation is borne "not willingly." It was "subjected to the same." The Apostle employs one of these bold but beautiful figures of frequent occurrence in Scripture, by which inanimate nature--God's outer materialism, is represented waking up from her silent thralldom. As if unable to remain mute under the insult she has been constrained to bear, she would utter a loud protest at being fettered. She sighs for deliverance, like the Israelites of old in their bondage, crying for freedom from the hand of the Egyptians.

In our opening verse the creation is spoken of as in "earnest expectation." The Greek word is there remarkable and significant. It implies bending forward with outstretched neck, like the runners in the Isthmian games--the head in advance, as they pressed on to the mark for the prize. Unwillingly chained and hampered, she is in eager expectation of her own deliverance; the crown and consummating glory of that deliverance being the "manifestation of the sons of God" and the coming of the Christ. Her cry, could her stifled voice put the invocation into words, would be--"Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"--"Make haste, my Beloved, be as a young roe or a young deer on the mountains of Bether!"

Yes, let us take comfort in the thought that the present condition of our world was never designed to be final. There is a second Genesis--a golden age in store--"the restitution of all things," "the times of refreshing," when present evil will be exterminated from her tribes, every trace of dislocation and catastrophe removed; the old saying and promise fulfilled--"You shall be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you" (Job 5;23). Above all--when the last enemy shall be vanquished; when this long dismal tolling of funeral bells shall cease; when there shall be no longer the pathetic announcement, that God's own creature, fashioned after His own likeness, has passed away into the "great silences" of death--claiming strange brotherhood and sisterhood with corruption. Death shall be swallowed up in victory, and the Creator's own final, as was His primal aim completed, when He pronounced all that He had made "very good."

Into speculations regarding the future of the new creation, we shall not now enter--avoiding the ranks of too confident soothsayers. With some, indeed, it is a favorite picture--and not one assuredly to be rashly dismissed, that this very world in which we live--re-beautified and re-adorned--with sin and sorrow purged from its borders, may become the future heaven of the glorified. Dr. Chalmers has said all that can be said on such a subject, and said as no other could say it, in his great sermon. While there is no ground for positive affirmation, there is certainly, I repeat, nothing to negative this "physical theory of another life." If these two gloomy factors just mentioned, sin and sorrow (and we may add death), were eliminated, there is nothing to prevent associating our present material world with "the new heavens and the new earth" whose characteristic is "righteousness." Untie from our globe these three swaddling-bands, and there is nothing to hinder her going forth from the couch of her degradation--"the bondage of corruption"--walking and leaping and praising God!

But meanwhile, we prefer leaving in its own undefined golden haze the Apostle's declaration. It is enough for us to know that there is a "new world" in store for our terrestrial abode, the nature and extent of which we can only feebly surmise. Earth is being furnished and prepared as a reception-hall for God's children. It is meanwhile "waiting for their

manifestation"--"the liberty of their glory."

Spirit of God! who brooded at first over creation, in its chaos--come and make all things new! Hasten the blessed era when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold!" Come! and let another bright picture by the same prophet have its full and perfect realization; when "the present evil world," with all her wrongs rectified and redressed, will enter on her promised jubilee--"You shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isa. 55;12, 13). Then, no one SONG of a solitary inspired singer--but song upon song will spread their harmonies through a renovated creation, yes, through a rejoicing universe. The key-note may possibly be struck in this our planet where Redemption was won. Deepest in the center, it will circulate to the circumference of being. The morning stars will, once more, sing together, and all the sons of God shout for joy!

## **8. AN ELEGY; OR THE HARP ON THE WILLOWS.**

The subject dwelt upon by the Apostle in the preceding passage, not unnaturally leads him to a prolongation of the same theme. The wailing and travail-pangs of material nature and of the irrational creation, have their climax in the groans of the human spirit and its cry for deliverance. Though these have already claimed our consideration, we shall so far pursue the topic, in connection with the "adoption" and "redemption" now brought before us--a new Antiphon, in the deeper, sadder music of which the voiceless material world can only very partially participate.

In the first part of the verse to which our thoughts are here invited, we

have, what may be called (carrying out the simile of our volume), "The Harp on the Willows." In the second, that Harp is taken down, and its broken strings renewed, in order to warble one fresh and superlatively glorious strain in the believer's Song.

(V. 23) "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

#### "THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT."

No ceremony of the Jewish nation was more imposing or picturesque than when (some time during the interval between the Feast of Pentecost and Tabernacles) groups of Israelites, from different parts of the land, were seen approaching the Temple with their offering of "first fruits." These were carried in baskets--from the golden basket of the prince or chief, to the wicker one of the peasant. A sacrificial ox with gilded horns and crowned with an olive branch, preceded by pipe and tabret, formed part of the procession. Each member of these little companies, with his basket on his shoulder, was met in the Temple area by Levites singing an appointed Psalm of welcome; while the officiating priest waved the offering before the altar, on the steps of which it was finally placed by the worshiper before returning to his home.

Such, in our present verse, is the typical reference to a custom whose occurrence, during his residence in Jerusalem, must have been familiar to the Apostle, as well as to many of those to whom he now wrote.

The spiritual life, begun on earth, is only the pledge of the far nobler, fuller life beyond; its first feeble pulsations. The basket of first fruits graciously bestowed by Him who is the divine Agent in their sanctification--"the Spirit who bears witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God"--is laid by them on the steps of the earthly altar, as the pledge of the great harvest and harvest-home of glory; that reaping-time of heavenly bliss, when the words of the evangelical prophet will obtain their true and everlasting fulfillment--"They rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil" (Isa. 9;3). Most commentators on the passage have been led to quote the Apostle's parallel one in the Epistle to the Ephesians--"And

now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God." (Eph. 1;13, 14). The one verse interprets the other.

From neither, however, are we to infer, that the believer's adoption is in itself, in the present state, partial and incomplete--a blessing only to be received in heaven. Not so. The words, in the immediately preceding context, distinctly assert--"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits, that we ARE the children of God." But, though complete in kind, it is partial in degree; and these first fruits--the graces and virtues of the new life (confessedly imperfect) which the Holy Spirit has wrought in the soul, are the pledges of a perfected state, when the bud of earth, liable to be nipped and blighted with hail and frost and storm, will expand into full flower; when the sips at the earthly fountain, will be followed by full draughts from "the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb." All the graces manifested in the present economy of being are only heralds and harbingers--voices crying in the wilderness--"When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor. 13;10).

It is under the acute--the terrible consciousness of this present shortcoming, that believers are here represented as "groaning within themselves." "Groaning;"--a word, in the original, expressive of deep anguish and depression. "We that are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened." And though, as we have seen in our last, there are manifold other causes for suffering and heart-pang, the deepest--most intense to God's children--are the pangs of conscious sin--the pangs of grieving that Holy Spirit of God whereby they are "sealed unto the day of Redemption;"--the pangs of daily offending the Father who has adopted them and the Son who has redeemed them. True, most true, the Christian--the member of the ransomed family--is the owner of a peace which passes understanding--a peace which the world with all its treasures cannot give, and which the world with all its tribulations cannot

take away.

The Apostle, near the close of this same Epistle to his Roman converts, speaks of them as being filled with "peace and joy in believing;" "abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15;13). But this can be said only relatively in a world of evil. We are encroaching on what has been already dwelt upon in previous pages, when we repeat that the new life of the spirit does not release or disentangle from the old temptations. The spell of these, the fascination of these, may be broken--but the demons of unbelief and passion still wield their iron weapons. You may refuse to bow to them, but you cannot hurl them from their pedestals. As little as the scientist can remove the disturbing forces in the planetary system--as little can you negative and neutralize existing moral perturbations. The voice of the siren call of sin may be, and is, sternly resisted, but it remains unstifled. It was not to defiant unbelievers, but to God's own children, the warning words were addressed--"Why, let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10;12).

The "groanings" of the Christian may, moreover, be intensified by the very keenness of his spiritual sensibilities. While he feels, on the one hand, that there is ever much remaining pollution in his own heart to be expelled--while in himself he has cause perpetually to mourn over the ungirded loins and the waning lamps, and the lack of vigilant watchfulness, it is equally true that the instincts of his new-born nature make him more alive to the turpitude of sin in general, and his own sins in particular--leading him, in familiar words, to confess that "the remembrance of them is grievous, the burden of them is intolerable." This spiritual probing and analysis becomes more acute with the advance of years. The figure, thank God, regarding the Christian, is generally as accurate as it is beautiful, when the close of life is spoken of as a golden sunset--"The path of the just is like the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day." But it is equally true that the shadows deepen and lengthen towards evening. Memory, dulled to other things, is quickened and energized as the tent-pegs are beginning to loosen and "the clouds return after the rain." In this and in many other ways, to dwell upon which would only be to reiterate--"Even we ourselves groan within ourselves."

But why prolong the gloomy strain, when it is the Apostle's present purpose to discard broken harp-strings and sing a true "Excelsior;"--to lead from pang and groaning, death and dissolution, to a perfection of bliss undreamt of, until HE came who revealed Himself as "the Resurrection and the Life." We must pass at once to the antithetical clause with which our verse closes--"Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

WAITING. It is the watcher on tower or mountain waiting in eager expectation of the morning dawn. It is the son, knowing that he is a son--the child knowing of his adoption and its privileges, waiting for the summons within the father's home, to be delivered all the blessings of the purchased inheritance--"to be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven."

It is at once apparent that "the redemption of the body" is here represented as the consummation of the Christian's adoption. It is not the mere revelation of heavenly happiness; it is not the echo of the Apostle's assertion elsewhere--the most often quoted perhaps of his epigrams--"to die is gain." That is indeed a glorious assurance. It is a blessed hope, whether for ourselves or our departed, that when the spirit takes its arrowy flight at the supreme hour of all, it is not to pass into dreary solitude--dim shadowy regions of silence--but "to be with Christ which is far better." Yes, and with more than mere surmise, we can think of spirit re-linked with spirit--the loved and lost mutually rejoined and restored; together embarked in that spirit-land on lofty ministrations--the activities of the glorified.

This mere continuity of existence, however, in the state beyond, is not the theme for contemplation now, and which absorbs our thoughts in the present chapter. It is the truth certified at the sepulcher of our risen Lord--the Resurrection, or "Redemption of the body;" that the day is coming when "those who are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth;" when earth shall be resolved into the prophet's wide valley of vision; when bone shall come to bone and sinew to sinew; when the same divine Spirit here spoken of shall "breathe upon the slain that they may live;" and when "they shall stand upon their feet an exceeding great army" (Ezek. 37.). Let us lay the emphasis, where the Apostle intended it,



upon the BODY. Without this miracle of miracles--a glorified material frame, there would not be a complete salvation. There would be elements of bliss lacking, which go so far to brim even the cup of earthly happiness. If no glorified body in heaven, how could I know or recognize, how could I hold converse and fellowship with the company of redeemed? It is the visible countenance, the tones of voice--the loving word or the loving deed, which here below reveal the personality.

"The Communion of Saints" is one of the cherished articles in the creed of the Church militant. Is it to be expunged the moment we enter the Church triumphant? No, rather, we believe that with that "redemption of the body" there will be the remolding, only in deathless shape and beauty, of the cherished lineaments of earth--the resumption of personal identity--the face of the resuscitated dead lighted by the familiar terrestrial smiles; brother linked again with brother; husband with wife, parent with child; friend with friend. And if the old skeptic question be mooted--"How can these things be?" If science--and never more than in the present day, affects to discard all as phantasy and legend palmed on human credulity and ignorance--a figment incompatible with the elementary principles of chemistry--at war with all needful conditions, whether of absorption, or transformation, or assimilation, in the physical economy; it is enough to reply, "With God all things are possible." This world of His, guided and governed as unquestionably it is by a reign of law, is nevertheless crossed and traversed with ten thousand mysteries which bring what otherwise might well be called anomalies within that region of the possible. With the subtle questions and sophistries of the schools, we have no concern. We accept the explicit testimony of God's Holy Word. We leave all difficulties, and perplexities, and conceded discrepancies with Him. And when the doubter, with sinister look and accent, advances the defiant query--"Son of man, can these bones live?"--Our safe answer--our only answer is--"O Lord God, YOU know!"

But leaving the mere dogma--let us rather look at its comfort and solace as an accepted truth of Revelation.

There is a twofold consolation which the Redemption of the body imparts. First, regarding ourselves; and secondly, regarding our beloved dead.

(1) Ourselves. Mortality is an dreadful fact--a stern reality--which not one of us can lightly dismiss. There is the natural fear of death which Christian valor at its best cannot altogether overcome. No human philosophy can transform the last enemy into an angel of light. We cannot gaze without awe on the inspired realistic picture--man going to his long home, and the mourners going about the streets--the silver cord loosed--the golden bowl broken, the dust returning to the earth as it was. It is not on Roman or Athenian tombs alone, on which gloomy emblems may be carved. The spirit is hushed into solemn silence as we tread even the fairest of "God's acres" with their inscriptions of elevating hope and promise. It is not the voice of poetry but of nature; it is not the voice of fallen humanity alone but redeemed humanity also--which utters the words--

"It is a dread and dreadful thing to die!"

Then, turning from individual anticipations and musings; who that has stood by the deathbed and grave of their loved ones; of those, too, whose present bliss was felt to be most assured, but must have realized the terribleness of disrupted ties--the hushed voice--the denied touch of "the vanished hand," nothing left but the silent photograph, or the portrait greeting with speechless inanimate smiles on the wall. Infinite gain to them. Yes, but infinite loss to us!

Oh, is that grave to refuse ever to give back its sacred treasure? It is not the soul of which we now speak. That is safe. We confidently believe--the reverse is not questioned, that it has entered into bliss--"crossed the bar" and reached the stormless haven. But what of the earthly framework? When Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, wrote a special page of comfort to some family of mourners in their midst, it was this he dwells on. He takes for granted the solace they have in the old doctrine which even their Pagan systems taught them--of the immortality of the soul. But he who analyzed human nature and human feelings so well, knew that the problem of all problems--that which would most exercise their bereaved and desolate spirits would be--"The Jewel itself is safe, but what of the dear and precious casket which enclosed it? what of that body so lately laid in the catacomb or rocky tomb; or whose dust is treasured in the

cinerary urn? Is it lost to sight forever? Can He who in Palestine reanimated the dead; who restored the son to the widowed mother at Nain, and the Bethany brother to his mourning sisters--can He not do for myriads what He did for individuals? Himself the Lord and Giver of life, can He not"--may we farther suppose that bereft Thessalonian to say--"draw near to me in this script Grecian home of mine, and dry my tears with the brief message of the old Hebrew prophet--Your dead shall live"?

Yes, in that pastoral message of comfort, our Apostle does so bind up those brokenhearted ones. He speaks of "those who are asleep" (laid asleep, as the word may mean) "by Jesus"--God "bringing them with Him." "The dead in Christ," he continues, "shall rise first." Then, "together with them." "Together." With this thought of eternal reunion and fellowship and "ever with the Lord" he winds up in a postscript--a postscript intended for all bleeding souls and vacant homes--"Therefore comfort one another with these words."

In closing, I would recur for a moment to a special clause in our present verse--that of "the first fruits." Some of the Jews in Rome who read the Apostle's letter to the city of the Caesars, may, in the significant type, have had the possibility, at all events, of the body's redemption whispered to them. The analogy, we know, did not escape the mind of the writer himself. Take the most familiar of these offerings--the first sheaf of corn reaped in the fields near Jerusalem. What a silent preacher and sermon in that early tribute borne to the Temple on Zion! Our blessed Lord Himself selected it--consecrated it. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit." We have here the most frequently repeated of all nature's parables, the death of the grain-seed. That inert--if you will, that unsightly particle, is deposited in the ground and if the eye could follow it to its burial-place, it would see it becoming more repulsive in its first vital struggles with the dark mold to which it was temporarily consigned. But the insignificant, deteriorating seed watered by the early and latter rains, and nurtured by the summer sun, bursts forth in due time in strange vitality, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear."

Paul, as we well know, caught up and expanded his Lord's parable in

perhaps the best known chapter of all his writings--that repertory of immeasurable comfort contained in the 15th of 1st Corinthians. "But someone will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? You fool, that which you sow is not quickened, except it dies. And that which you sow, you sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may be of wheat, or of some other grain; but God gives it a body as it has pleased Him, and to every seed his own body...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

In all this our Apostle shows, how, by an eternal sequence, life will spring, sooner or later, out of death. And if such be the great law of the universe, will it be departed from--will it have its only exception in the case of the fairest and noblest work of His hands? Shall golden ears and sheaves be reaped from the most insignificant grains, and shall the truest golden corn fail to fructify in heaven and fill immortal garner? No! impossible. It is with the body's resurrection in his thoughts that he closes with the challenge which is one day to wake the echoes of the universe--Christianity's special "Song of Songs"--the theme left unrevealed--the Song left unsung, until Christ Himself sounded the glorious note--"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" The cry of the Apostle and of the Church of the ransomed is not to ascend unheeded and unresponded to--"Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now He who has wrought us for this same thing is God" (2 Cor. 5;4, 5).

With these triumphant words in our ears, let us conclude this meditation--seeking to look forward with joyful heart and hope to the true "manifestation of the sons of God;" when He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." Thus shall I be enabled not only to triumph personally over the fear of death but with Paul's words in my ears, and feeling the elevating assurance that He who redeemed the soul redeemed the body too--in calm serenity and

confidence, I can draw near to the couch around which the herald symptoms of dissolution are gathering. I can follow the funeral crowd and stand by the grave, while I take the Harp from the Willows and sing the Lord's Song--the Song which the living Redeemer, the Conqueror of Hades, has warranted me to employ--"He that goes forth and weeps bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

"Sleep," says Luther, "is nothing else than a death, and death a sleep. For as through sleep all weariness and faintness pass away and cease, and the powers of the spirit come back again, so that in the morning we arise fresh and strong and joyous; so, at the Last Day, we shall rise again as if we had only slept a night, and shall be fresh and strong...It is best that the Potter should take the vessel, break it in pieces, make it clay again, and then make it altogether new...All that we lost in Paradise, we shall receive again far better and far more abundantly...There the saints shall keep eternal holiday, ever joyful, secure, and free from all suffering; ever satisfied in God."

## **9. A SONG OF HOPE.**

In treating the preceding portions of the chapter, we have had frequent occasion to note, how one prominent thought or idea leads to an expansion of the same; how one strain in the Song suggests a prolonged note. It is again so here. "Waiting for the adoption," formed the central theme in the former verse. That grace of "Waiting" is to be farther dwelt upon and developed. It is described by an equivalent word; a word which, in itself, represents one of the mightiest and most stimulating of spiritual forces, that word is HOPE.

(V. 24, 25) "For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope;

for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

We may venture in this passage to personify HOPE, and regard it as a beautiful Incarnation. Not an old Sybil (an ancient Greek prophetess) scattering the leaves, or weaving the web of destiny--but the Inspirer of all good thoughts--animating, strengthening, energizing.

Looking even to its every-day and material aspect, what would this world of ours have been, or be, without Hope? Milton sings of,  
"White-handed Hope,  
A hovering angel girt with golden wings."

Or a later minstrel,  
"Through the sunset of Hope.  
Like the shapes of a dream,  
What Paradise Islands of glory gleam?"

A hundred illustrations will readily occur. The author of "The Pleasures of Hope" has so far written before us. The mother bending over the cradle of her infant--her heart palpitating with new joy--has no eye for anything but a bright and gracious future. Hope admits of no cloud in her horizon. The same mother, in after years, follows her boy amid winter storms--"in cradle of the crude imperious surge." But Hope will allow her to see no stormy bird heralding tempest and disaster--but rather pictures the wilderness of waters as one vast "Pacific,"--the vessel borne on by propitious breezes, and "many ports exulting in the gleam of her mast."

Hope--the same guardian-angel, watches by the soldier at his camp fire; and in his broken dreams throws prismatic rainbows athwart coming battlefields and stormed stronghold. Hope is the true warder in the captive's cell, which opens iron doors, and restores to the sweets of liberty. Hope is the invisible companion that walks side by side with the Alpine climber, and keeps before his mental vision the lodging looming amid the blinding storm, whose opened gates he may never be destined to reach. Hope is the strength and inspiration of the ingenuous youth, as well as the spectacle of manhood in encountering life's sterner battles. Hope is the cheerer of old age; which puts bars of amber and gold in the

sunset sky.

"Hope whispers over the cradled child  
Fast locked in peaceful sleep,  
Before its pure soul is sin-beguiled,  
Before sorrow bids it weep.  
'Tis heard in manhood's risen day,  
And nerves the soul to might,  
When life shines forth with fullest ray  
Forewarning least of night.  
It falls upon the aged ear,  
Though deaf to human voice,  
And when man's evening closes drear,  
It bids him still rejoice."

But the HOPE the Apostle here speaks of is not the apotheosis of the secular poet. But "the Hope of the Gospel,"--"the Hope full of immortality"--"the Hope laid up for us in heaven." "The Hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began."

His train of thought seems to be this (if we may venture on a paraphrase)--  
-"I have recently spoken of the sufferings of the present time. These are mysterious--often utterly baffling to sight and sense--beyond our 'why and wherefore.' But be not discouraged. I have recently adverted to your rank in the heavenly hierarchy and household, as sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Sufferings, prolonged and severe, may seem to you strangely inconsistent with these exalted titles and so magnificent a heritage. But be not discouraged. I have just brought before your thoughts 'the first fruits of the Spirit.' Have these pledges failed to assure you? Can you, under these gloomy skies and battering storms of suffering, see no pledge of the promised golden harvest? Be not discouraged. No, rather, hope against hope. Seek to submit with calm acquiescence to the divine will. 'Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday.' We may be unable to see the needs be; 'but if we hope for what we see not, then (knowing the faithful promise and the Faithful Promiser) do we with patience wait for it.'"

Hope has well been defined by Tholuck as "Faith in its prospective attitude." Faith and Hope, in the Spiritual Temple, are twin pillars; they cannot be dissevered. Hence they are so frequently grouped together by the inspired writers. "Now faith is the confidence (or assurance) of things hoped for" (Heb. 11;1). They are spoken of elsewhere by Paul as the two wings which bear Love to the gate of heaven. They accompany her no farther; they are no longer needed, where faith is lost in sight, and hope in fruition (1 Cor. 13;13).

When Columbus was approaching his yet undiscovered "Treasure Trove"--the mighty continent he was destined in due time to claim as his own--stray branches, or fragments of branches with berries which here and there floated on the waves, and the land birds circling round his vessel, formed the earliest indications of unknown shores. These may be regarded as appeals to his faith. Hope--the Apostle's impersonation, had a different evidence to substantiate these expectations. She, seated as it were at the vessel's prow, could see nothing. "Hope that is seen is not hope." But she "hoped for that she saw not," and "with patience waited." She strained her eyes along the blue troughs of the ocean, for the evidence of things not seen, until, at last, faintly in the far distance was discerned the streak of shore, studded with dwarf-palm, and heard the music of the breakers. Faith and Hope could then sing together in concert their "eureka." "The shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country" (Acts 27;27).

So with the believer. In his case also, "Hope that is seen is not hope." The hope of the Christian deals with an unseen Lord and an invisible future. "He walks by faith, not by sight." That muffled future is nevertheless a verity. Despite of the haze and the darkness, he knows that the morning comes. The star of Hope is hovering over the eastern horizon. He has implicit reliance in the Bible chart, and steers with confidence through blinding fog and buffeting waves. He claims a heritage in his Lord's beatitude--"Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."

That same Hope, under a new and familiar symbol, is described as "an Anchor sure and steadfast--entering into that within the veil," and imparting "strong consolation to lay hold on the hope set before us." The



anchor (I speak of the earthly emblem) is unseen by the mariner. It grasps the rock or shingle far down out of view. But he knows how safe he is. While other ships--unmoored--may be plunging and heaving around him, he has no thought of danger. His vessel is as secure as if it were sleeping on its shadow in summer seas. That anchor, in the divinely spiritual sense, cast into the Rock of Ages will ride out all storms.

Thus then, as the Apostle here expresses it--"We are saved by hope." "Saved;"--that word must not be misleading. It has been preferably rendered by "kept," "preserved," "sustained" (Barnes). "Saved"--Salvation, in the true and only Gospel sense of the term, we have seen traced to a very different procuring cause, unfolded in the previous context, specially at the opening of the chapter. Let Peter testify in his words of simple grandeur--"Neither is there SALVATION in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4;12). No other Oracle but one can give us the response for which the soul craves. We might go to the Angel of Hope, as the weeping women did of old to the Angels of the Sepulcher, but like them we would be left weeping; until, like them too, we meet our risen Lord and get His benediction--the blissful assurance of a completed salvation, in His atoning work and sacrifice. In Him we have "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."

Perhaps some who trace these words may be unable to realize the strength and certainty and consolation of this hope. The anchor, "sure and steadfast," may not appear to be holding them. Theirs at least may be fitful alternations of doubt and despondency, with the agonizing quest, "Where is now my God?" This is exactly what we have previously seen the Apostle recognizing in the composite dual nature. It is exactly what he implies in our present verses, when he speaks of the need of "patience" and the need of "waiting." The people of God have, in every age, been subject to seasons of hopelessness and depression. We have dolorous strains mingling amid the strong and victorious accents of the ancient Patriarch of Uz. We hear the plaintive cry on the lips of the great Elijah as he lay feeble and panic-stricken in the desert. We hear David wailing out his dirge, now in the ascent of Olivet, now amid the glens of Gilead, now under the cedar-roof of his Zion palace. We hear tremulous accents from

the lips of the faithful Baptist within the walls of Machaerus prison, when his lips seemed mysteriously and prematurely silenced, and hope extinguished. We have heard Paul himself uttering a piteous miserere--as a "wretched man"--with the body of sin and death hampering and impeding his spiritual progress. And thousands since his age, and these, too, not Little Faiths, but Great Hearts, have had similar experience. The eagle eye of faith gets filmed, and the drooping wings refuse to soar. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disturbed within me?" There is but one answer--"Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God" (Ps. 42;11 ).

"And as in sparkling majesty a star  
Gilds the bright summit of some gloomy cloud,  
Brightening the half-veiled face of heaven afar;  
So, when dark thoughts my boding spirit shroud,  
Sweet HOPE! celestial influence, round me shed,  
Waving your silver pinions over my head."

Reader, should you now be undergoing a doleful experience--should the music and ripple of spiritual life for the time be gone--the haze of the skies blurring the splendors of the Great Sun--doubt and unbelief projecting their evil shadow--it may even be, materialistic views taking the prismatic colors out of Hope's rainbow; accept as the surest and best of antidotes, a more habitual, realizing view of Christ as a personal, all-sufficient Savior--"Christ in you, the hope of glory." The slabs taken from the Roman catacombs, seen in the Museum of the Vatican, show unmistakably what kept alive drooping faith in the hearts of the early Christians--"Hope in Christ-God".

"There, behold how radiantly  
Beams the Star of Hope divine,  
Yesterday it shone for thee,  
And today it still shall shine;  
Ask no aid the world can give,  
LOOKING UNTO JESUS--live!"

What are the hopes of the world compared with this? transient, illusory; beacons often changed into balefires; bubbles on life's ocean sparkling

their little moment--then vanishing forever! Even Wordsworth, who seldom indulges in the minor strain, thus takes up the parable on worldly hopes--

"Hopes, what are they? beads of morning  
Strung on tender blades of grass;  
Or a spider's web adorning."

Let it not be so with you. Having access into this grace wherein we stand, rejoice in hope of the glory of God--making Paul's motto and watch-word your own--"We look not at the things which are seen; but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." May that good and gracious Spirit who gives pledges and first fruits of the coming heavenly inheritance renew and quicken you with fresh ardor; enabling you to catch up, like the Isthmian runners in the night-race, the torch of hope which other beloved hands have dropped. Be it yours to say in the words of one of the sweetest singers of the far west--

"Wherever my path  
On earth may lead; I'll keep a nesting-bough  
For Hope the song-bird, and with cheerful step  
Hold on my pilgrimage."

There are many such nesting-boughs if we would only soar to them and make them our perch. The future, aye, even the future of the world, is replete with hope. Let others take a pessimistic view of things coming on the earth, there is much too to brighten and gladden. There is hope for the future of humanity--the deliverance of a groaning creation. He has hopes, too, nobler, better, more enduring, far-reaching. There is a description well-known to all, of Hope "lighting her torch at Nature's funeral pile," and shedding her beams through the eternal ages. The Valley of Achor, the valley of the shadow of death, thus becomes "a door of hope." Through faith in death's great Conqueror, "mortality is swallowed up of life." Then there is the hope--the delighted confidence, which we were led to refer to in the previous meditation, of meeting the departed--reunion with "the beloved long since and lost awhile." Add to this the culmination of all--the hope of assimilation to the divine image; the hope, amid present faults and defeats and failures, of complete

holiness--the realization of another Apostle's dearest wish and exhortation--"And let every one that hath this hope in Him purify himself even as He is pure" (1 John 3;3).

Thus does the Bell of Hope, in varying cadence, ring Paul's chime--"With patience wait for it." Weeping, in another similar beautiful personation, is represented by the Psalmist as a tearful angel-watcher. "Weeping may tarry for the night; but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30;5).

Lord! I shall seek, in calm expectancy, to tarry for that blessed hope and blessed day-dawn! I shall take down my harp from the willows and sing the midnight melody, "I wait for God, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope" (Ps. 130;5); listening to our Apostle's double prayer and benediction; "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thess. 2;16, 17). "Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15;13).

## **10. BROKEN HARMONIES, AND THE DIVINE AGENT IN THEIR RESTORATION.**

The Apostle, as he adds note after note in his inspired Song, and specially as the Song advances, seems desirous of proclaiming with deepening cadence the PRIVILEGES which belong to the believer in Christ.

In our last meditation he had described Hope and her sister-spirit Patience, as graces in the Christian's possession--invigorating, quickening influences--the one inspiring the other. He now speaks of a new sustaining power of religion--a superhuman element of strength,

consolation, and endurance, enjoyed by "the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." He introduces it by the word "Likewise" ("in addition"--"in the same way"), "also, the Spirit helps our infirmities."

This last word seems indeed, at first, rather to indicate a note of discord. But it is only a passing jar in the divine music, leading, as it does, to the contemplation of the special consolatory agency now to be unfolded. That agency was incidentally brought before us in more than one preceding verse; but it here rises to a climax. If we have for the moment suggested the Harp unstrung, it is only to be immediately assured of restored harmonies.

"And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress (or infirmities). For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will." Romans 8:26-27

"Infirmities"--these are not unfamiliar to us in the preceding portion of this volume. They are, so far at least, an equivalent for "the things of the flesh,"--"the carnal mind,"--"the deeds of the body,"--the outcome of the sin-tainted, unrenewed, unregenerate nature. "Infirmities"--"compassed with infirmities," we have previously seen, is the too truthful description of God's people in all ages--that the very heroes of sacred story bear sad attestation to the evil heart of unbelief--the fickleness of the noblest purposes. We have recorded episodes in their lives, of defeat, and cowardice--temporary, but at the time disastrous and humiliating. The warning bell sounds, in deepening tones, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3;12).

It is one of the most mournful memories of the ancient Christian Church--the age of all others when love and loyalty might be expected to have been strongest--that there was a traitor in the apostolic band, and two convicted liars and perjurers in the earliest membership. If these "pledge-sheaves" of the ripe grain--what are called in a preceding verse "the first fruits of the Spirit," were laid thus mildewed on the newly consecrated

altar, can we wonder that in the Church of later times (or, what is truer and sadder, in our own individual souls), there should be the taint and blight of often "infirmity,"--weariness, faint-heartedness--the successful power of besetting sins--worldly fascinations--overmastering temptations--all drags and hindrances in running the pilgrim race--not to speak of overt acts of fouler transgression and wrong-doing, that bring a tear to the eye and a pang to the heart.

Frequently these infirmities are the result of physical causes--the suffering body has its cruel revenge on the depressed soul. But the suffering is on that account none the less real. The prolonged gloom of the sick-chamber induces and aggravates the darkness of the mind--fostering morbid thoughts--injecting "devil-born doubts,"--murmurings at the divine dispensations--impeachments of the divine veracity and love--"If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?" Oh, who is there among us who fails to plead guilty?--Who, confronted with the past--each with his or her own dominant sin and frailty, is not ready to take up the words of Asaph in that Psalm of his, so true to the deeper consciousness of fallen humanity--"This is my infirmity!" (Ps. 73.).

There is a great--a divine Helper here disclosed. THE SPIRIT--the Comforter--the Paraclete--the Heavenly Agent whose coming and "power from on high" is represented by the divine Savior Himself, as more than compensating the Church for His own absence--"If I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." The Gospel age--the age of the Incarnation--was melted and merged into what is familiarly known as "the dispensation of the Spirit." Among the manifold blessings, of which He was to be the dispenser, one was conspicuous--that of being the Bearer of His Church's and His people's infirmities; imparting to burdened souls needed grace; and perfecting strength in weakness.

These infirmities are far beyond catalogue or enumeration. Paul in our present verses selects one, as a sample of the rest--one he knows to be of universal incidence and application--one that has been endorsed and countersigned by every child of God--from the struggle-hour of old by the brook Jabbok--the wrestling of spirit with spirit all through the gloom of that eastern night, until the sun broke on the desert horizon--on to his

own times and experience; for, champion as he was, his personal failings and frailties are here included. "OUR infirmities." "WE know not." "Intercession FOR US."

The illustrative instance adduced, is as applicable to the Christendom and Britain of today, as to patriarchal or apostolic age. Who has not felt it?--the weakness--the poverty--shall I call it the Paralysis of Prayer--the aimless wandering of thought, the frigidity of faith--the stammering sentences, the feeble nerveless grasp of the divine promises; the unrealized verities of heaven and the soul, of spiritual and eternal things! Not only so, but baffled and perplexed with the very subjects of prayer; petitions we know not whether they be wise or unwise--the fearfulness of asking what may not be in harmony with the mind of God; the mental reservations, when seeking, or professing, to resolve our wills into His--"The prayers (in accordance with an old writer) that would need to be prayed for; the confessions of sin that would need themselves to be confessed;"--"We know not what we should pray for as we ought."

What a comfort the assurance, that amid these frailties and perplexities there is a great, all-wise, omnipotent Helper at our side, who can enter into our infirmities--participate in them--make allowance for them--extricate us from them. "Helps;" the word literally applies to aiding and assisting one under a burden; taking part in giving support when the burden-bearer is too weak to carry his load alone--while the other expression, rendered here "makes intercession," occurs nowhere else in the Greek Testament. The Romans, to whom the Apostle now wrote, would understand well the reference to the "Advocate" at the Bar or in the Basilica-court--the Instructor of their clients in legal difficulties; making needful suggestions in the conduct of each case. It is indeed a wondrous picture that is here brought before us.

We are familiar with a kindred truth, the intercession of our divine Redeemer and Savior. "He ever lives to make intercession for us." Whether in the sanctuary or the closet, He lets down His censer full of much incense, that therein we may place our polluted and unworthy prayers, to be perfumed with the incense of His adorable merits. No, not only so. There is a peculiarly consolatory feature in His mediation at His Father's right hand; that being Himself the Brother-man, He can enter

with tenderness into the frailty and imperfection of our supplications, having been Himself "compassed with infirmity." As if, however, to complete this divine provision, we have here unfolded to us an Intercessor--not on the distant throne--the upper sanctuary of heaven--but "present"--"ever present with us," in the Temple--the Sanctuary of the soul on earth. It is an amazing boon, in accordance with the Savior's own word and promise, "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another (Advocate), who will abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14;16, 17). Whether we kneel at our bedside in the quiet of the chamber--or bow in the midst of "the Great Congregation"--there is an ineffable PRESENCE by us--close to us--dictating or guiding our thoughts, stimulating our desires, inspiring our lips, "helping our infirmities," fetching the live coal from off the heavenly altar--"the Spirit of light and the Spirit of burning." Thus have we--as frail petitioners--needy suppliants, a double advocacy--the Advocate passed into the heavens, and the Advocate in the lower Court of the Church below. Christ interceding above; and the Holy Spirit interceding within.

And note that His presence is here specially promised to His people in their exigencies. He makes intercession for them, when theirs are "groanings which cannot be uttered;" or rather, groanings that are "not uttered." When they are pleading with strong crying and tears--when the lip fails the heart--when all is speechless, inarticulate--then the needed aid is supplied, and He pleads for those who cannot plead for themselves!

The day would come, when at least the children of these Romans would comprehend and appreciate the reality of this supernatural support, in sufferings, which, with the exception of those at the fall of Jerusalem, have had no parallel since the world began. When the cry "to the lions!" would be heard bursting from ten thousand lips in the Amphitheater, a mighty unseen PRESENCE would be given to these hapless victims, and inspire them with heroism not their own. The great painters have introduced angels bending over the Colosseum martyrs with crowns of gold and wreaths of palm. But mightier would be the ministration of strength revealed in the words before us, when with filming eyes uplifted beyond the horrors of the present; to a painless, deathless world, they would be able to testify, "The Spirit helps our infirmities." "Your Spirit, O



God, is good; lead us to the land of uprightness!"

But we do not require to go to the arena and its martyrs to know and understand the realities of this divine support and sustaining force. Every subject of severe trial can bear corresponding witness; in the hour of overwhelming affliction, and specially that of lacerating bereavement. At other times, and in the ordinary circumstances of life, much of what we have just said might appear mystical, the devout phantasy of devotees and enthusiasts. We concede that the theme which has engaged us is undoubtedly a deep and mysterious one. It baffles interpretation, transcends comprehension. We cannot fully understand it. We must kneel and adore! But, I repeat, there is one occasion when it becomes a profound reality. It is the season of that deepest of trials when the spirit knows too well what is meant by inarticulate groanings of anguish. When life's dreams of joy have vanished like the flash of summer lightnings, and we are left to brood over a past, the memories of which are all that remain. Was there no mysterious Helper who at that hour, not with the often noisy babble and gush of earthly comforters, but like the quiet dew or gentle rain, in a mystery of divine silence, drew near to us, spoke to us, consoled, relieved us of the burden, sustained, strengthened us; aye, and in accordance with Paul's own word here, interceded for us; curbed despairing thoughts, invested God's promises with new meaning, brightened the future with glorious hope; put prayers and breathings of submission into dumb lips; forcing us to say in the divine human words of the mighty Sympathizer, "Somebody has touched me!" (Luke 8;46).

The Spirit of God has been brooding over us in our chaos of darkness. Oh, it is more than Jacob's vision of Bethel angels. There seems a new beauty and meaning in the utterance of the same patriarch, spoken figuratively in our case, with affliction's stony pillow and the sun of life setting--"This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

I can only add, in one sentence, that this "helping of individual infirmities" by the Holy Spirit, has often and again had its wider, more potent and startling illustration, in the Church collectively, from the early outpouring at Pentecost, to the aid, amid manifold infirmities, so conspicuously displayed at the era of the Reformation; when the groanings and travailings of burdened souls had their outcome in "the

liberty of the glory of the sons of God." The day of Pentecost presented alike the first and the most signal--an irresistible testimony to this "power of the Holy Spirit," as a Spirit of intercession. We see the effects of that divine influence on the whole company then met "for prayer and supplication." On none more so, than their acknowledged leader. Peter is not the same man after that hour that he was before. His vacillation, timidity, rashness, cowardice are gone. "Out of weakness he has been made strong." And if you ask himself the reason, he will be ready with the reply, "The Spirit also helps our infirmities."

The divine picture we have given is completed by a yet further revelation in the succeeding verse; "And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will." (verse 27). We have thus the divine Trinity in unity encompassing each believer as with a shield. We have spoken of the pleading Son and the interceding Spirit. Here we have the divine Father, the "Searcher of hearts," interpreting through the Spirit the longings and groanings of His praying and afflicted people. It is the Three in One in covenant for our redemption; all securing that the petitions of the human supplicant are accepted and answered, because they are "according to the will of God." Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seem to draw near to every child and every place of prayer saying--"I will be to them a little sanctuary."

O Interceding Spirit! come, in all the plenitude of Your gifts and graces! "Awake, O north wind; and come, O south wind; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Solomon's Song, 4;16). Breathe upon me and say, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" Strengthen me in feebleness! Endue me with power from on high! Fulfill the promise, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire." I feel Your potency in every prayer that ascends from my lips acknowledging the need of the Apostle's counsel and safeguard--"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto" (Eph. 6;18). "It is the Spirit who quickens." By Him I am "chosen to salvation" (1 Thess. 2;13). By Him I am "strengthened with might in the inner man" (Eph. 3;16). By Him my prayers and petitions are assimilated to the divine will. What is averred,

by the beloved disciple, of the Second Person in the Trinity may be equally applied to the Third--"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5;14).

To recur, in closing, to the thought with which we set out; If, at times, humbled and saddened at the imperfection of our approaches to the throne, be this our comfort, that the great Searcher will make allowance, "because of the infirmity of our flesh," for poverty of language, verbal shortcomings, inarticulate yearnings, sighs and groans. He says to us, as He said to His servant David--"Forasmuch as it was in your heart to build an house for My name, you did well in that it was in your heart" (2 Chron. 6;8). "You understand my thoughts afar off" (Ps. 139;2). "The work," says Archbishop Leighton in his "Exposition of the Lord's Prayer"--"The work of the Spirit is, in exciting the heart at times to prayer, to break forth in ardent desires to God, whatever the words be, whether new or old, yes possibly without words; and then most powerful when words are least, but vents in sighs and groans that cannot be expressed. Our Lord understands the language of these perfectly, and likes it best; He knows and approves the meaning of His own Spirit; He looks not to the outward appearance, the shell of words as men do."

May the gracious indwelling Spirit pardon my frequent infirmities, unseal my closed lips, attune my stammering tongue! My mouth is silent and my heart silent too, without His inspiration. I need His divine teachings in order to have revealed to me the beauties of holiness. A Sonata of Beethoven is unintelligible to the man destitute of the inner ear for music--the sweetest chords of harmony are to him a crash of discords. But You, Inspirer of all good thoughts, You can, You do awaken the soul to these higher, diviner melodies. Yes, if I am myself, through lack of words, speechless at the Mercy-Seat--Come, Dove of Peace! lift my poor petition on the wing of Your mighty intercession, and ensure a response to the Voiceless Prayer,  
"My Father! in Your mercy kind,  
You have redeemed those moods of mind  
Wherein no utterance I can find  
To bear my sigh;

For in my heart deep shades there be  
Where Your fair form I cannot see,  
Nor tell of anything that ails me—  
Save by a cry.

Moments there are wherein my soul  
Finds nameless billows round it roll,  
And sees no power that can control  
Their pathless way—  
It knows not what to ask; nor whom;  
It has no outward cause for gloom;  
It holds itself within its tomb;  
It cannot pray.

And yet, Your blessed Word doth teach  
That even its groanings without speech  
Into a Father's heart can reach  
And nestle there.  
You count my unspoken sighs;  
You hear all my wordless cries,  
And send Your divine replies--  
As answered prayer.

Like Him who in His human years  
Poured out with speechless cries and tears  
The record of His unnamed fears,  
And found release—  
Even so, the fainting of my heart  
That cannot its request impart,  
Has brought me near to where You art,  
And promised peace."  
(Matheson's "Sacred Songs.")

## 11. A LULLABY.

The Apostle, in the verse preceding, had unfolded a mighty--may we not rather say the mightiest agency in the spiritual life of the believer--the work and "intercession" of the Third Person in the blessed Trinity. We found the Spirit of truth specially revealed as the "Helper of infirmities,"--acting, not as we do often, blindly, erroneously, with wayward capricious impulses, but "according to the will of God."

In the present note of his Song, Paul prolongs and deepens the cadence. It is a Lullaby by which, with "mother-love," God hushes His children to rest. It is not in one thing but in "all things" we are called to own and recognize the gracious influence which the Searcher of hearts--who "knows what is the mind of the Spirit"--exercises on His Church and people.

"For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God; to those who are the called according to His purpose" (v. 28).

Though it be "all things," whether prosperous or adverse, joyous or sorrowful, which combine and co-operate for our present and everlasting well-being; it is doubtless the season and discipline of affliction which are here mainly adverted to. "All things,"--"all for good." It is a luminous rainbow set in the cloud with its full complement of prismatic colors. He had in a preceding verse spoken of sonship, and the wealth of glory associated with it. He would wish to assure his readers in every age, that afflictions were not incompatible with so lofty a heritage. He would enforce and strengthen his recent affirmation--"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." All events are under God's sovereign control, from the fall of the sparrow to the fall of an empire--but very specially does His supervision extend to the kingdom of grace and those who are its subjects and residents. We have already, more than once, mentioned the surmise, that at the very time these words were written--the gardens of the Quirinal may have been the scene of the infernal orgies of Nero. If so, whether the torments had already been undergone, or were only too surely in prospect, the utterance of our verse would prove a wonderful

key-note of comfort to the martyr's death-Song. We can only think of the possibility of anguished sufferers seeking to support and cheer each other with the strain.

Let us proceed now to speak of these suffering children of the Kingdom. Their special CHARACTER and their special PRIVILEGE are conjointly described.

(1) One notable and distinguishing characteristic is, that they "Love God." As Dean Alford remarks, "This is a stronger designation of believers than any yet used in the chapter." It is indeed a brief but most perfect portraiture of the divine family--we may add, a beautiful description of true religion.

How often is this latter travestied and misrepresented by selfish theories; as if it consisted in a life-long requirement to follow what is right, and to hate what is sinful. By doing so to escape future retribution, and be recompensed at last with some indefinite rewards in heaven. How much more blessed and elevating the Apostle's definition of believers in the present verse--"Those who love God." Loving Him for the sake of His own perfect and supreme loveliness; loving Him on account of the love He has lavished on the unworthy and undeserving; the love with which He loved me before I loved Him--the love which loved me when an enemy! What can stay the enmity, and evoke the responsive affection of the human spirit like this? The mother's heart may be found so dead to feeling as to thrill with no gratitude towards the man who at the risk of life plunged into the seething flood and laid her rescued child at her feet. The slave's heart may be found so dead to feeling as not to love the master who has struck off his fetters and set him free. But the soul to which has been revealed, in all its wondrous reality, the love of God in Christ, cannot, dare not, resist the impulse to love the Divine Being who has first loved, and so loved. Conscious in some feeble measure of its length and breadth and depth and height, in answer to the question, "Do you love Me?" the recipient of "Love so amazing, so divine," can say, amid felt frailties and mournful shortcomings--"Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You!" As the rays of the sun falling on a polished mirror are returned again to the fountain of light, so God's love falling on the soul takes the love it has enkindled back to the Great Fountain of Love. Religion is thus

restored to its proper place, as essentially a thing of the heart, inward, subjective. No outward church or organization can make a Christian, except in name. You may try, by external appliances or artificial devices, to induce a man to love God; just as it has been said, you may tie branches or fruit on a living tree and give for a while the semblance of life; but it is the semblance only. There is no vital union with the stem--the energizing principle, permeating every fiber, is lacking--"The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." His true children love Him, because His own ineffable love has vitalized, influenced, interpenetrated their whole being.

To use a different figure and illustration regarding them--we see in vigorous action, not the centrifugal force of many harsh theological creeds and systems, where Deity is fled from, evaded, dreaded; but rather the centripetal force, drawing souls to the Parent Orb, as the Sun does erratic planets and satellites, by the gravitation power of love. "God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him."

(2) The second characteristic of believers here described is, that they are "the called according to His Purpose."

On this, however, I shall not now enlarge, as it will come to be considered more appropriately and in order, where the theme is reverted to by the Apostle in the subsequent context; one of the links in a golden chain of blessings. Enough to remark that it is an additional reason--indeed the initiatory reason for believers' love to God, that they are the objects and recipients of His free, sovereign, unmerited goodness. "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." We might, moreover, write pages of comment, but nothing could be so pertinent and comprehensive as the words of Paul in the last of his pastoral epistles--"Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). Being thus "called according to His purpose," nothing can thwart or nullify that divine decree--nothing dispossess us of our patrimony as "joint-heirs with Christ." In one word--salvation is secure.

We pass now, from the twofold character and description of believers, to

the assurance of an inestimable PRIVILEGE. "And we know that all things work together for good."

The phraseology of this verse always strikes us as being alike natural and peculiar. It is one of the Apostle's personal avowals--an article in his own individual creed--at all events, he includes himself in the assertion. But how does he formulate the privilege so claimed? Specially observe, he does not say "we see," but "we know." Had he adopted the former expression, he would have averred what was not the case. He would have contradicted himself. Inasmuch as he elsewhere distinctly states--to take one of several similar assertions--"Now we see through a glass darkly." And in this he only anticipates the honest, heartfelt experience of every Christian. We often see things apparently not working for good--no, rather, working the opposite; startling irregularities in God's providential dealings--the saying of the Patriarch--the rash saying, but which to us seems at the time a true one--"All these things are against me." We discern no "bright light in the clouds." Often all is blurred and murky and fog-like, not infrequently in apparent infringement of goodness and wisdom and righteousness. We impeach the divine rectitude, and question the dealings of the Supreme Disposer. But how so? Simply because we are faithless, and blind ourselves to the ulterior purposes of the Almighty. We are hasty and premature in our judgments. We have not, to use the phrase of a preceding verse, "the patience to wait" the final outcome of the great drama, the "needs be," that will sooner or later be made manifest.

To take a purely secular illustration which occurs at random. Go back to ancient Greece or Italy. Take your stand under the slopes of Pentelicus, or the ridges of the Apennine Carrara. In both cases, why these unsightly gashes in the fair mountain forms? Why these blocks rudely dislodged from where they have rested undisturbed since the last upheaval long ages ago of earth's surface; yokes of patient oxen dragging them within city walls to the studios of Athenian and Tuscan sculptors? Suspend your verdict until after years of toil, Phidias has chiseled his Pentelican into the richly ornamented Parthenon--or until Michael Angelo has wrought out his Florentine "Night and Morning," or the Pieta of Peter's. The insensate blocks have been transfigured into breathing forms which have



educated the world and proved the pride and despair of the ages. The result was doubtless what few of their contemporaries or fellow-citizens could comprehend at the time. But the great artists themselves were confident. They saw, underneath these cumbrous masses of stone or marble, shapes of angels and heroes; and were content to wait until genius and its cunning tools had worked them out.

Or, take a Gospel memory. Go to the village on the slopes of Olivet which had for days been darkened by the shadow of death. A beloved brother has been mysteriously removed. Two lone sisters are left in a paroxysm of grief--and the saddest element in their trial is--that "the Master" is absent. That long descent to the Jordan, and farther still, some of the hills of Peraea, separate them from the only Being in the wide world who could have stemmed their pulsing tide of grief, and averted the terrible catastrophe to home and heart. The wild soliloquy during the long hours is ever on their lips--If HE had only been here, our brother would not have not died! Perhaps, stranger still, when they sent a messenger with speed down these Judean passes and across Jordan to acquaint the absent Savior with the bereavement; instead of, at once, in responsive sympathy obeying their summons and hastening to their support--the narrative gives this unexpected extinguisher to their hopes--"When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was!" Who could dare say, on the first reading of that poignant Gospel episode--that "all these things were for good"? They seemed the terrible reverse--a very mockery of their dearest hopes and prayers; "Why is He so long in coming?--Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?" Wait the sequel. "At evening time there shall be light." The hour, long delayed, arrives at last, when they rejoice over a restored brother, and a present Master and Friend. The Sun that had for days waded through clouds, sets in crimson and gold on that home of Bethany.

Do we duly consider, in rehearsing this touching narrative, what the Church--what individual believers--above all, what sorrowing ones would have lost, but for that episode of tarrying love--that strange frustration of hope during these two mysterious days, when the ear of mercy seemed heavy that it could not hear? What lessons of trust and patience and submission would have been forfeited, had there not been preserved to us

these shadows in the divine picture, all needed to bring out in bold relief its wonderful lights? If Martha--with her rash, outspoken, impulsive nature, ventured in the climax of her grief and despair to upbraid her Lord for His absence--so unlike Himself--His past kindnesses--when trial afterwards overtook her, as doubtless in many forms it did--we think these memories of the absence, and the lingering beyond Jordan, would put a different soliloquy in her lips--could it fail to be this--"And we know that all things work together for good!"

Yes, we may well trust our loving Father-God and gracious Savior, when we fail to trace their dealings with us. All things "work together." The Song is made up of separate parts, combined tones. It is a piece of "concerted music." The shuttles are here and there weaving their dark threads; but it will only be, by contrast of color, for the perfecting of the pattern. Each thread is needful--the black and somber as well as the bright.

Perhaps the time of all others when we most fail to understand the mysteries of the divine dealings with us, is that very hour we have just described in the experience of the family of Bethany--an hour sadly familiar to most, if not to all--the hour when lives that have made our own hearts glad and the world beautiful--angel-faces and angel-hearts have vanished--when the shuttles of life we have spoken of have been mysteriously arrested and stilled--leaving a blurred tapestry--an unfinished web. It is Heaven and the Great Beyond which can alone suggest and supply the true solution. The pattern left uncompleted here, will be finished there. "Good"--the good of our verse "will be the final goal of all apparent bad"--

"And now I will weave my web,' she said,  
As she turned to her loom before set of sun,  
And laid her hand on the shining threads  
To set them in order, one by one.  
She dropped the shuttle; the loom stood still;  
The weaver slept in the twilight grey;  
Dear heart--she will weave her beautiful web  
In the golden light of a longer day!"

Meanwhile, it is not death but life that concerns us. In its manifold and

complex phases--in all its changes and chances, let us feel that we are protected by "the wings of God." And even if it be the shadow of His wings--under these let us take our refuge, until earth's calamities be overpast.

"I have reared in shadow my flower of love,  
It has bloomed, O Father, by night to Thee;  
It has oped its petals to hopes above,  
To a day it could not see,

And in time to come I shall fear no foe,  
Though the sky be dark and the air be chill,  
For I know that the flower of love can glow  
When the sun has set on the hill."

There is a gracious discipline underlying what is outwardly adverse; and an enlarged and deepening experience will teach us so. Paul seems as if he could have written his present words with even greater confidence in a future year. He could emphasize them with the advance of his life. We all remember how, when his dearest aspirations seemed crossed and baffled--when chained to a soldier of the imperial barracks or within the gloomy walls of the State prison, he could say with buoyant confidence--"The things that have happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." If we may quote the words of one in many ways a contrast to our Apostle, yet who has left his name in the present age--"As to the very trial itself," says Newman, "there is nothing in any way to fear. 'All things work together for good to those who love God.' I am firmly and rootedly persuaded of this. Everything that happens to them is most certainly the very best, in every light, that could by any possibility have happened. God will give good...I have nothing to apprehend. This is indeed a privilege, for it takes away all care as to the future."

Can we, by anticipation--or rather with something of the faith that Paul had, feel the same, and say the same? Reverting to our sculpture illustration, can we adopt our Apostle's words elsewhere--"Now He who has wrought (chiseled, polished) us for the self-same thing is God" (2 Cor. 5:5). And if it be some very exceptional and mysterious trial, can we add

with him--continuing the same figure--"Our light affliction...WORKS for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"? Let us accept with un murmuring lips the dealings of the Divine Chastener, whatever these may be. He will not impose upon us burdens that we are unable to carry. It is His own gracious promise, "I will correct you in measure" (Jer. 30;11.) "For all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." The hour assuredly is coming, when whatever befalls us will be seen to be not only for the best, but the best; the retrospect of life a retrospect of love--every tongue of His ransomed Church brought to confess--"He has done ALL THINGS well." The remembrance of the crucible will only be the removal of the dross and alloy, and the transforming into pure gold.

In closing, let us emphasize the lesson of the present meditation--that of simple, unhesitating, unfaltering TRUST.

"Trust Him when dark doubts assail you;  
Trust Him when your strength is small;  
Trust Him, when to simply trust Him,  
Seems the hardest thing of all!"

Trust Him in great things, trust Him in little things. Trust Him in the battle of life, whether for yourself, or for those near and dear to you whom you have seen, it may be with tremulous misgivings, going down into the fray. Augustine's mother, that never-to-be-forgotten night, when, first in the chapel of the Martyr Cyprian, and then by the seashore, she made the lonely hours echo with her doleful lamentations, could never believe that God was making things combine for good, when her beloved but wayward son had eluded her watch, and, aided by prosperous breezes, taken ship to Rome. She could only conjure up the fierce temptations that would assail an impressionable and still vacillating nature, in the great Babylon. When nothing else could avail her, prayer remained. But these prayers were answered in a way undreamt of. The day came when mother and son together could take down the harp from the willows and adore the same Providence which, three centuries previously, had permitted a fanatic Pharisee to pass through the northern gate of Jerusalem and to "journey towards Damascus." In both cases, the fiery ardent souls--"the called according to God's purpose"--were translated, by reason of those very journeyings, out of the kingdom of

darkness, and flooded with "a light above the brightness of the sun."

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls  
Whatever you may fear;  
Round Him in calmest music rolls  
Whatever you may hear.

That cloud itself which now before you  
Lies dark in view,  
Shall with beams of light from the inner glory  
Be stricken through."

Trust Him in DEATH! As in life the promise of our present meditation has been again and again realized--so also and conspicuously so at life's close. It has formed the "Swan-Song"--the departing cadence of not a few, before joining the minstrelsy of the skies. The last words of Chrysostom were these--as if catching inspiration from the Apostle's saying--"Glory to God for ALL THINGS." The same occupied the closing thoughts of the Scottish Reformer John Knox. "When his sight failed him," his biographer relates, "he called for the large Bible; caused one of his family to put his finger on the 28th verse of the eighth chapter of Romans, and told those who not only he died in the faith of what was in the chapter, but firmly believed that all things, and death itself, should work together for his good; and in a little he slept in Jesus."

Shall it be so, reader, with you and me? Shall this sweet snatch of harmony in Paul's Song of Songs, ever consoling--ever precious as we have described it in seasons of mystery and darkness--an anodyne amid the present fret and fever of the world, be at last a soothing strain and monotone hushing to rest in the hour of departure?--"All things"...and "All things for good!"--"So He Gives His Beloved Sleep."

## 12. ANTHEM OF THE FIRST-BORN.

Another suggested and prolonged note of the great Choral Song.

In the preceding verse, the Apostle had spoken of a second privilege of God's redeemed family--that they are "the called according to His purpose." This thought--a new argument for their present and final salvation, he expands; linking it at the same time with one of the most sublime truths of redemption--their brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ--their exaltation in Him, the ever living head. No strain in the divine music, at all events up to this point, is more elevated and elevating. We may well give it the name at the head of this chapter, "The Anthem of the First-Born."

(V. 29) "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren."

In the opening clauses of the verse we have one of the unsounded depths alike of philosophy and theology. We have no desire--we have no ability to sink the plumb-line. "We have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." Such a theme would not even be incidentally adverted to, but for its prominent presentation in the chapter. There is a boundary between the knowable and the unknowable; and beyond it is presumption to cross. The attempt is, and ever has been, vain, to reconcile the decree of God with the freewill of man--predestination, with human responsibility. In the familiar words of the poet of "Paradise Lost," those who have--  
"reasoned high  
Of Providence, fore-knowledge, will and fate,  
Fixed fate, freewill, fore-knowledge absolute,  
Have found no end in wandering mazes lost."

Happy for us that all which is absolutely needful for our own salvation is revealed with such clarity, that he who runs may read. Man's part, alike objectively and subjectively, is plain. It is around God's part--the part with which we have no concern, there hovers the mist and the mystery.

The rebuke which the Savior gave of old to the presumptuous casuist is full of meaning and instruction to us--"Master, are there few that shall be saved?" Note, He neither directly answers nor evades the question. His reply is virtually this--"You have nothing to do with abstract truths and problems. Life is practical. Look to yourself--"YOU strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13;24).

That God's foreknowledge and foreordination--His unalterable plans and purposes are necessities of the divine nature, arising out of His own prescience and perfection, we dare not deny. To do so, would be to undeify the Supreme. With Him there are no successive, far less contingent events. The past, present, and future are one eternal now. Over all occurrences, alike in the natural and moral world, the words are written--"To do whatever Your hand and Your counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4;28). But we may be well content to leave alone metaphysical sophistries and speculative difficulties--or (recalling the figurative name of our volume) even apparent disharmonies. While baffling to reason on the one hand, there are, on the other, gracious lessons of comfort in this very thought of the absolute decrees of an absolute God--that nothing is independent of His control--His sovereign will and pleasure. Nothing is fortuitous--nothing the result of haphazard or chance. All is regulated by a "reign of law." He speaks and it is done. The sudden lightning-flash, the sunken reef, the assault of fever and pestilence, the iron missile of battle--each of these have their appointment and commission from the Great Ruler of men.

The writer of these lines can never forget in the most appalling bereavement of early youth--when accident--what seemed cruel and preventable accident--blighted in a moment hearth and home, and left an aching blank in many hearts--the first angel-message of consolation which rocked the wild waves to rest, came from the lips of an aged relative of rare gifts and piety. In solemn tones, without note or comment, he repeated the words so familiar at all events to Scottish ears--"The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His own will, whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained whatever comes to pass." I never read or heard these epigrammatic sentences, but the image occurs of a mighty river. Its source "the counsel of His own

will;"--the river itself--"whatever comes to pass"--the ocean where it flows "His own glory." "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." The sovereignty of divine grace in predestination is a doctrine continually presented to us in Holy Scripture, alike by prophets, and psalmists, and by diviner lips still. Even in the description of the final judgment in His own great parable-chapter, the Speaker brings out, prominently, "the election of God" in the ages of a bypast eternity--"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

If, however, these and kindred truths be beyond human grasp and range, there are others, which faith can unflinchingly accept. The latter, indeed, are wondrous and mysterious, only by reason of the blessing they confer on the guilty and undeserving. If we stagger through unbelief, it is only because, in the words of a sceptic of last century, "They are far too great, they are far too good to be true."

Let us pass then, from the fact of God's predestinating love, to its object as here set forth. It is "to be conformed to the image of His Son."

We are confronted at once with a practical test--an answer to the question which not a few with anxious and anguished hearts are seeking to propound--'Am I among the number of the predestinated?--am I among the favored election to eternal life?' Let it rather take the alternative form which the Apostle here gives it--'Am I conformed to the image of God's Son? Am I walking in His footsteps, imbibing His Spirit, reflecting His image? Is it at all events my heartfelt desire and aspiration to keep Him ever before me as my ideal--following Him in His humility, and kindness, and unselfishness, and purity? Am I feeling like the copyist of a great picture, how sad the shortcoming as compared with the matchless Original--yet undeterred by failure, endeavoring to add, by faithful assiduous toil, touch to touch, until the lineaments have been faithfully caught up and transferred to the canvas?' In accordance with the significant word employed by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3;1). "CONSIDER!" Literally "gaze upon Him," with the artist's intent mental vision--until something at least of the living personality be embodied in



the heart and life; the human soul, however inadequately, glowing with the features of the Divine Redeemer! We are reminded, in its practical application, of a reference by the Bishop of Durham to a great father of the early Church, who rebuked the well-meaning Christian females in Constantinople for embroidering on their dresses the mere outward form of the Savior; and not rather seeking to carry His divine image in their souls.

We know well, and these are not the times when this conviction should be dimmed or overlaid with any other views of the Savior's work on earth, that His pre-eminent mission, was to atone for sin. The sacrificial element, let it again be said, must not be deposed from its primary place in the plan of salvation. The leading strain, "no condemnation in Christ," cannot be displaced by other or minor cadences. But neither can we forget the great complementary object of the Incarnation--Jesus the Exemplar and Pattern of His Church and people. We are invited to study that peerless "Image" as revealed in the Gospel narratives, and obtain from it a touchstone whereby to try our own character and state before God. How varied are these pictures of divine-human kindness and love thus enshrined by the evangelists! Now, it is healing the sick; now, it is sympathizing with the bereaved; now, it is solving anxious doubts; now, it is feeding the hungry; now, it is sheltering the outcast--breaking not the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax; now, it is speaking peace and forgiveness to the troubled; now, it is returning injury with blessing; now, it is the merciful apology for unwatchfulness; now, it is pardoning the treachery of trusted friends; now, it is stooping to the most menial office, in order to inculcate the lesson of humility; now, it is folding little children in His arms! And in all this we are called to contemplate the most complete self-abnegation, the most perfect submission to His Father's will--unmurmuring acceptance of trial--heroism in duty, calmness in death--not so much as one faltering or deflection in His path, until He could utter at the close of all--"I have glorified You on the earth; I have finished the work which You gave me to do."

Do we not seem to hear our Apostle speaking, as he elsewhere does, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus;" "Be therefore followers (imitators) of God as dear children." We seem prepared, now,

with an answer to the query--'Is my name written in the Lamb's Book of life?' Yes, if you can appropriate the words of that same inspired Book-- "These are they who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14;4). It is the saying of the blessed Master and Teacher Himself--"He that does the will of My Father who is in Heaven, the same is My mother, and sister, and brother."

Then comes the concluding note in this Song-verse. Its final clause seems to put a crown on all that precedes--that He might be the First-born among many brethren.

We have here the exaltation of the Elder Brother of the ransomed brotherhood of humanity. The glorious and glorified family are invited to look to Him as their living Head--His mark on their foreheads--He their Leader and Forerunner showing them the path of life. The first-born among the Hebrews had many exceptional privileges, as we more particularly noted when speaking, in verse 17, of the joint-heirship of Christ and believers. Let me only recall, in passing, what was there said, that primogeniture, with the Jewish nation, had a fullness and meaning unknown among others. It was a dim reflection of the prerogatives of God's "First-born"--His eternal Son--"The Only Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth--"The Prince of the Kings of the Earth," who, as He surveys the fruit of the travail of His soul, can say now, and will say with deeper and more exultant triumph on the Great Day of His appearing-- "Behold, I, and the children which God has given Me."

And let us never forget that in this predestinating love and purpose of God, all is of grace. There is nothing in His people which led to their selection as "vessels of glory." "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace." "By grace you are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Salvation is a glorious rainbow--one limb of the arc resting on the divine decree; the other in the eternal bliss and happiness of the saved.

Reader, I close by repeating the practical observation--Do not on the one hand entangle yourself in the mazy labyrinth of foreordination and predestination. Do not attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. Neither, on the other hand, by a wild fatalism question your own personal interest in the benefits of the Gospel. Be very sure of this, that God wishes "all to be saved." "He is not willing that any should perish." In the infinite yearning of His heart He says, as if absolute decrees existed only in the systems of stern theologians--"Why will you die, O house of Israel?" In another view of the subject, you may well rejoice that His plans and purposes are thus immutable--that your final salvation depends on no human contingency or peradventure. It is the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Thus runs your title-deed--"God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." The First-born, in the glory of His Person and the all-sufficiency of His atoning work, is Surety for the "many brethren."

In the Syrian version, our verse is rendered--"From the beginning He knew them, and sealed them with the image of His Son." O how much more glorious is God's theory and ideal than that of Christian schools and apologists! These latter (as we have seen) often represent salvation as a gigantic scheme of deliverance from wrath; while His end and object is "conformity to the image of His Son." "According as He has chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1;4). "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5;25-27). Rejoice that in Him all penalties have been paid--all debts cancelled--and now nothing is left but the assurance and the welcome, "Him that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." Let not the opening doctrine of our verse lead to despairing and desponding views. Let the thought of that love of God, in election and foreordination, rather have a quickening and stimulating influence. "Why the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if you do these things you shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1;10, 11).

Seek after a gradual but very real conformation to the image of Christ. Individually, as single stars in the great heavenly skies, endeavor to reflect the glory of the Central Sun--and then rise to the realization, as given here, of the Church collectively--one of many brethren--one of a mighty planetary system moving in harmonious heavenly orbits, all owning relation and loyalty to the "First-born." There is unassailable safety in Him. He promises a life commensurate with His own--"Because I live, you shall live also;"--"Changed into the same image from glory to glory." The grandeur of the kingdom--"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun." Its numbers--"A multitude which no man can number." Its perpetuity--"As the stars forever and ever."

### **13. SONGS OF DEGREES.**

The familiar "Songs of degrees" contained in the Psalter from Psalms 120 to 134 inclusive, were probably the "national anthems" used by the Jewish pilgrims of old on the way to their feasts. We can imagine the highways and valleys of Palestine resounding with these jubilant melodies. On the occasion of the greatest annual celebration, the groups traveled by the Paschal moonlight to escape the heat of the sun (Isa. 30;29). "They go from strength to strength," or, as that may mean, "company added to company," until "every one of them in Zion appears before God" (Ps. 84;7). They left their distant homes among pine and olive groves on the spurs of Hermon, by the shores of Gennesaret or on the hills of Nazareth, and as they approached the end of the journey, they would with confidence sing (may it not have been their, as it still is our favorite "Song of degrees")--"I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help" (Ps. 121;1). Then, that loved Song of Hope and Trust, chanted to the music of pipe and tabret, was in due course followed by "the Psalm of realization," on reaching the city of solemnities (Ps. 122;1, 2)--"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem."

This picturesque and sacred memory of the covenant land suggests a befitting name for the present chapter, in connection with the verse

which now comes in course.

(V. 30) "Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

The God who conducts His spiritual Israel will never leave them until He brings them safe to the heavenly Zion. From predestination to glorification is a long and wondrous journey--"the path of life"--a true way of holiness. But He who has begun a good work will carry it on and "perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." There are, as it were, successive pausing-places here indicated--"Predestination" being the starting-point. "Called" is the first encampment of the Christian pilgrim. "Justified" is the next. The final one--the glorious end and consummation--is "Glorified." So that our Apostle might translate his verse of prose into the glowing poetry of the prophet--"But the people of God will sing a song of joy, like the songs at the holy festivals. You will be filled with joy, as when a flutist leads a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem--the mountain of the Lord --to the Rock of Israel." (Isa. 30;29).

There is no need of multiplying figure or illustration, but were we tempted to do so, we might add yet this, that here we have A PYRAMID OF GRACE. It recalls one of the pyramids in Egypt, rising from the sands of Sakkarah, called "the step pyramid," from its being built in six stages. Its foundation of primeval granite is predestination. But tier on tier is added, until the apex is reached of glorification. Yes, a pyramid of grace. For it is grace that is conspicuous throughout. Grace lays every stone. The immutable foundation-stones are of grace. Grace lays all the subsequent stones, and when the top stone is "brought forth with shouting," this great "Building of God" will claim the concluding ascription of Zechariah--"Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4;7).

Having already in the preceding meditation spoken of predestination--we shall pass at once to the second theme in the inspired sequences--the second strain in the Song--the second layer in the pyramid--"Them He also CALLED."

Almost every writer on this verse has distinguished between the two

"callings" spoken of in Scripture. The first is the OUTER call of the Gospel. That invitation is addressed to all indiscriminately. The personified true "Wisdom," is represented as standing on the steps of the Temple of Grace--the entrance of the pyramid--proclaiming with a voice of infinite compassion, "Unto you, O men, I call, and My voice is to the sons of man" (Prov. 8;4). Here there is no exclusiveness as there is no condition. "Whoever will" is the motto engraven on the entrance. You can make the sun your chariot and travel the wide expanse of earth--there is not the nation nor the solitary individual to whom that message of peace and reconciliation may not be addressed; so that "as far as the east is from the west," so far will God remove our transgressions from us. That is the outer call to which each one who traces these lines must again and again have listened. Millions are listening to it daily, hourly. The Church has echoed and re-echoed it, ever since, eighteen centuries ago, she received the authoritative commission from her great Head--"That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24;47). Never perhaps was that external call louder than at the present day. It is proclaimed from pulpit and platform, from press and book and magazine. It would almost seem as if the Angel of the Apocalypse were beheld flying through the midst of heaven, with this open book in his hand--"the everlasting Gospel;" while a Mightier than created angel exclaims with pleading importunate voice--"Now therefore hearken unto me, O you children, for blessed are those who keep My ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that hears Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors. For whoever finds Me finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord" (Prov. 8;32-35).

Such, we repeat, is the outward call, but it is worth nothing, unless it be accompanied with the inner response, "Behold, here am I!" "Lord, what will You have me to do?" To use the conventional language of theologians, that is "EFFECTUAL CALLING." By the vitalizing energy of the Spirit of God, the ear not only catches the external invitation, but the heart listens with sympathetic joy and accepts the offers of a free salvation; "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints."

It is vain for us to pry into the divine secrets, and by unlocking the archives of heaven endeavor to explore the mysteries of God's predestination and calling--why one selected and not another--why Zaccheus the grasping extortioner and not Judas the consecrated Apostle; why Lazarus the beggar and not Dives the rich; why Saul the persecutor and not Elymas the sorcerer; why Onesimus the slave and not the stoic philosophers on Mars' Hill; why, of the two robbers, one taken and the other left? God Himself--the Great Supreme--gives the sole reason; and all we can do is to fall down and reverentially adore--"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." "No but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9;20-23).

The Redeemer, in the course of His ministry, seems to avoid all needless disputations and superfluous questions. His one aim and desire appear ever to be the proclamation of the Gospel--the good news to sinners; that for the lost sheep wandering on the Dead Sea shores, there is the shepherd-love of God waiting and willing to rescue it--that for the prodigal who had deserted his home, squandered his substance and herded among the degraded and vile of a far country, there is ready the outstretched arms of unrequited parental affection--robe and ring and sandals, and the jubilee of the festal hall. But, at times, when force of circumstances, or the curiosity or presumption of His followers force Him to speak--almost compelling reference to the mystery behind the veil--He does not scruple to enunciate some such solemn reflection as the following--"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matt. 11;25, 26).

Does He call some, and there is no response? Here is the explanation--His own explanation--"You will not come unto Me that you may have

life." Happy those (are we among them?) to whom His own words apply-- "He CALLS His sheep by name and leads them out." Let us not be disobedient to the heavenly voice and vision, if He is addressing us, as He did the writer of this great Canticle when He put a new Song into His lips-- "Go your way, for you are a chosen vessel unto Me" (Acts 9;15).

But we are led to the third strain in this "Song of degrees"-- "Whom He called, them He also justified."

JUSTIFICATION is a Pauline term; or at all events an apostolic one. We do not hear it on the lips of Christ. It has no place or reference in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet it is in perfect keeping and harmony with His teachings. We need go no further than the "pearl of parables" just alluded to--that of the prodigal son; where we have set forth, in the liveliest terms and imagery, this "act of God's free grace." One reason, perhaps, for the difference in the formula of the Great Master and the greatest of His successors is, that the One spoke more immediately to Jews, who comprehended little of such forensic allusions, as compared to Romans. Roman law had a worldwide repute. Roman justice, equity, righteousness, survived in the kingdom of iron, when other signs of decadence and corruption marred its imperial splendor. Our Apostle in his theological system, as specially enunciated in the opening chapters of this Epistle, has helped us in our conceptions of the moral government of God. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. His throne has the pillars of immutability to rest upon. True, His uncontrolled omnipotence could do anything. His love and power combined could readily grant a free pardon and amnesty; but they must act in divine harmony with truth and rectitude. He can by no means clear the guilty. Here intervenes the work of the great Surety-substitute. Around His cross mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have embraced each other. "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5;21). And "being justified by faith," faith in this sin-bearing, sin-atonement Savior, "we have peace with God." Justification--acceptance with Him, thus becomes not only possible but assured. For in Christ, not only have the demands of the law been met and satisfied, but the law itself is magnified and made honorable; God the just God and yet the Savior--just, in the very act of



justifying the unjust.

Paul in saying this and much more to the same purpose, described his own personal experience. From the hour of justification, a new constraining influence and principle dominated his life, as it does that of all his faithful followers. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Not only did the citadel capitulate, but all the rare stores and treasures of his soul were freely surrendered to the Lord who died for him. "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Phil. 3;8, 9).

And note through the chords and concords of this varying music, the keynote of our Song of Songs is ever asserting itself in pure, lofty cadence. "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "Who has saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1;9).

We have now reached the top-stone of the Pyramid. The earthly Songs of degrees are merged in the triumphant hosannas of the ransomed. The predestinated, the called, the justified, are now the GLORIFIED. All has been tending to this, that "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9;15). The "Songs in the night" of God's true Israel, like those of the Palestine pilgrims, have reached their closing anthem--when, after hill and valley and highway have been trodden, the morning light breaks on the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with Songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35;10). Then shall be fulfilled the prayer of the Pilgrim of pilgrims--that dirgeful Song He sang in the deepest night of darkness, but whose strains of hope doubtless mitigated the gloom--"Father, I will that they also whom You have given me, be

with me where I am, that they may behold my glory" (John 17;24). It is the consummation of the believer's bliss, in the sinless, sorrowless, tearless, deathless land. "These," said a dying saint to the writer, "are but Your negatives--what, O God, will be Your positives?"

Let us leave them in the undefined grandeur of the words--"In Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures for evermore." Aye, perhaps even then (can we doubt it?) there will still be "Songs of degrees" deepening anthem-peals--swelling, from the sound of a great multitude to the voice of many waters, until they become as the voice of mighty thunderings. Tier on tier will be ever added to the pyramid--yet the apex will be ever unreached--the bliss of the redeemed, like that of the God they adore, being "unspeakable and full of glory"--Heaven a true and everlasting Excelsior! Shall we be among the number of the crowned and glorified? the possessors and wearers of that three-fold coronal--Paul's "crown of righteousness"--James's "crown of life"--Peter's "crown of glory"?

And now, in closing, let us, as the leading lesson from this elevating theme, exult in the assurance that all will come true. Indeed, this seems the connection of our present verse with those which precede. Paul would wish to certify to all his converts, that their salvation was sure--that nothing can thwart God's purpose so as to imperil their final safety. If predestination tells us anything it is this--that the Author of predestination cannot lie--that being the Author He will be the Finisher. He cannot deny Himself. He is the faithful, covenant-keeping, covenant-ratifying God. All is guaranteed.

There may be those who make light of what is called the Calvinistic doctrine of "the perseverance of the saints." It is a doctrine which dare not be allied with party names. It is no party shibboleth. It is one of the precious sayings of Christ, and dare not be eliminated from the Church's creed. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10;28). "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13;1). To use human language, He would never take all that pains--an expenditure of word and promise, if there were involved either contingency or failure--if predestination were to come short of

glorification. Paul seems to re-iterate and emphasize his own words elsewhere, "God is faithful by whom you were called" (1 Cor. 1;9). "THE CALLED OF GOD"; what a name, and honor, and destiny! We cease to wonder at another saying of Christ on earth, when, on the occasion of returning from their first missionary journey, the seventy disciples gave vent to a spirit of joy not unalloyed with vain glory, on account of casting out devils in the Master's name. His words were--"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10;17-20).

We have seen that God is faithful; but, on the other hand, we must remember--"He that shall endure (and persevere) unto the end, the same shall be saved." Let this be our coveted beatitude--"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22;14). No one link in the golden chain will be broken or give way. We may have, we must have our seasons of weakness, despondency and depression, when faith is apt to fail and hope to wither. But, like the river temporarily lost in the sands, all will emerge again in "the full flood of God." Predestinated, called, justified, adopted, sanctified, glorified. Let us grasp anew our pilgrim-staff, and with fresh heart and hope resume the pilgrim journey. Let us sing now our earthly "Song of degrees"--the Song of the faithful runners in the pilgrim-race, with the heavenly goal in view, and the certainty of reaching it at last--"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3;13, 14).

## **14. CRESCENDO.**

With the last verses, we might have been led to conclude, that the Apostle would terminate his theme. Farther, it would almost seem he could not go. He has attained with "glorification" the height of his high argument;

the gates of glory are reached, and his Master's words are ringing in his ear, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

But he appends to his dissertation a triumphant postscript; or, rather, he breaks forth into a lofty rhetorical speech. With the last of the successive links of the chain of salvation in his hands, the language of the hitherto logical reasoner expands into an oratorical conclusion. Calm, passionless, philosophic, his didactic prose blossoms into poetry, and that too in "the white heat of intensity." With four interrogations he winds up the long thesis--with four choral strains he terminates the sustained Song. That Song is now in its full flood--

"What shall we then say to these things?"

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

"Who is he that condemns?"

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

We shall now confine ourselves to the first three.

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (v. 31-34). Many of the truths here enumerated having been already considered at some length, we shall only lightly evoke the slumbering tones. We offer little more than a few suggestions to aid and stimulate reflection.

His first query is, "What shall we then say to these things?" "These things." He takes a hurried yet comprehensive retrospect of the preceding clauses of the chapter. The keynote "no condemnation;"--the deliverance in and from the law of sin and death--the provided righteousness of the Great Surety--the gift of the indwelling Spirit--the privilege of adoption,

and the consequent heritage of God's children--the needful discipline of suffering (that strange anomaly in the world)--the groans of a travailing creation--the mystery of pain and trouble--the "subjection to vanity," leading up to the final consummation in "the liberty of the glory of the sons of God." Meanwhile, believers are fenced and safeguarded by the assurance that all things are working together for their good.

"What shall we say" to that wondrous catalogue of covenant and covenanted blessings? Surely if that Omnipotent Father, the Head--the Originator of Redemption--pledges His own name and oath and promise that He is "with us and for us," we may well utter the challenge which our Apostle makes in the first of the present verses and expands in a succeeding one--Who in earth, in heaven, in hell, can be against us? He makes no concealment that there are many against us; yes, a battalion of spiritual foes, under the comprehensive trinity of forces, "the world, the flesh, and the devil." But if the enemy is legion, numerically strong and formidable, the believer has ONE on his side (One, alone--but though alone, Omnipotent). "God is for us." "This conclusion of the chapter," a writer well remarks, "is a recapitulation of all the Apostle's former arguments, or rather the reduction of them to one, which comprehends them all--"God is for us." (Dr. Hodge.)

"We have no might," he seems to say, "against this great multitude, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon You." "God is for us." It is this assurance which has formed the strength and inspiration of His most favored people in all ages of the Church. "God is for us" emblazoned on their shields, they could inscribe underneath, "Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

Take one or two examples.

"What am I?" was the exclamation of Moses, overpowered by the thought of the vast army of insubordinate slaves he had to lead through the desert, and feelingly alive to his own incapacity for the onerous task. Jehovah revealed Himself as the Great "I AM," with the all-sufficient guarantee, "Certainly I will be with you" (Ex. 3;12). Joshua stands faint and discouraged before the walls of the greatest of the Canaanite fenced

cities but the same Angel-Jehovah appears with "a sword drawn in his hand"--the assured emblem and pledge of victory; renewing a previous guarantee, "The Lord your God is with you wherever you go." The royal Psalmist, at a time of imminent peril--one of the many crisis-hours of his life, "when the Philistines took him in Gath," recorded, in the retrospect, the brief assurance--a star-gleam in the night of darkness--"This I know--that God is for me" (Ps. 56;9). Hezekiah trembled, as well he might, when the thundering legions of Sennacherib threatened his kingdom and capital; but there was One, mightier than that "Cedar of Lebanon," under whose divine shadow he took refuge. The central stanza in the battle-hymn of deliverance written on that momentous crisis was this--"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." When one of the cities of northern Palestine was hemmed in by the victorious army of the King of Syria, the eyes of the panic-stricken servant of Elisha were opened in the dawn of morning to behold the mountain near by, covered with horses and chariots of fire--a visible confirmation of the pacifying assurance already given him by his master--"Fear not; for those who be with us are more than those who be with them." A Greater Master, in a later age, came to His own tempest-tossed disciples, and hushed their misgivings with the reassuring word--"Fear not, it is I; be not afraid." Paul himself, in many a personal experience, could testify to the same truth, that with God for him, no one could be against him. Take his final testimony, though more than once already referred to, when as a lonely prisoner, deserted by the friends who had smiled on him in prosperity, he was immured in the Roman dungeon--"All men forsook me;" "Nevertheless the Lord stood with me and strengthened me,...and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

It would be easy to add corroborative testimony from eminent Christians in modern times. Let two be recalled. It was one of the three last memorable sayings of John Wesley on his deathbed, but it was repeated twice over, and is fittingly inscribed on his monument in Westminster Abbey--"The best of all is, that God is with us." They formed the favorite motto-words of Bersier, the most distinguished orator of the French Protestant Church. They may be seen accompanying his signature--"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

"If God is for us, who can be against us?  
Upon my lips He puts a conqueror's Song,  
Uplifts the veil between me and His glory,  
And bids me see a bright celestial throng.

"I can do all things" is the Song of triumph  
Of Faith's glad household in their service free;  
My feeble hands have clasped Omnipotence;  
I can do all in Christ which strengthens me."

We pass to the next clause. May we venture to trace or suggest its connection with the previous?

The thought might obtrude itself--May not God, despite of all these abstract assertions, backed and countersigned by so many attestations of His fidelity to His promises, grow weary of His people? May He not, absolute in power and volition, come in time to feel that those who resist His will--who attempt to baffle His purposes and distrust His Word, are unworthy of such lavish devotion and unceasing love? The surmise may occur, with other reference than to the Jewish race--"Will God cast off His people whom He has foreknown?" The Apostle cites one unanswerable reply; with it every reclaiming voice may well be stopped. "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Here, in order to give emphasis to his assertion, Paul employs a peculiar mode of expression. In several passages of the New Testament we find used the "a fortiori argument," a method well known in the schools; where one fact or conclusion is strengthened by a preliminary statement--a minor proposition or premiss establishes the major. In the case of our Apostle himself, we require not to go beyond the present Epistle. "For if through the offence of one many died, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one Man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many" (Rom. 5;15). "For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (v. 10). Take a similar example from the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews--"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh; How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal

Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9;13, 14). While a still more familiar employment of the same argument is furnished from the words of our Redeemer Himself; "If you then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?" (Matt. 7;11).

The process of reasoning in the present case is reversed. Though the Apostle takes the one clause to strengthen and enforce the other, he argues, not from the minor to the major, but from the greater to the less. He speaks of the mightiest gift which Omnipotence could bestow--the gift of His own dear Son, as the pledge of all other blessings. If we may paraphrase the words--although to do so is only to spoil their terse and pithy power and beauty--'Hush any such surmise regarding God's non-fulfillment or forgetfulness of His eternal decree with reference to the fallen. How dare the thought be entertained? He, who in the plenitude of His sovereign grace and boundless compassion spared not His own, His only Son, but gave Him up to a life of suffering and a death of shame, has in that unparalleled deed of sacrifice, given the indestructible assurance that He will, with Him also, carry on to its completion the stupendous plan of a world's redemption. We have, in Gethsemane's garden and Calvary's cross, the blessed impossibility of His withholding any lesser blessing. After the gift of Christ we can fear nothing; we can expect everything--all things which sovereign power can bestow. Redemption is unassailable. The tenderest earthly love may fail--brother may be estranged from brother--sister from sister--friend from friend. Even a mother's love, earth's tenderest type of yearning affection, may fail. "Yes--they may forget, yet will I not forget you" (Isa. 49;15). I have spared not my Son to die for sinners. With that one argument every mouth must be stopped. I, the Author, cannot fail to be the Finisher. I am unable to give you a greater or diviner proof that "I have loved you with an everlasting love." You may without fear or apprehension, risk your safety on this one peerless thought. Can I, could I, the Omnipotent Jehovah, possibly come short in purposes of mercy, after giving the most fearful summons which ever broke the trance of eternity--"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd and against the man who is my fellow; smite the Shepherd"?' (Zech. 13;7).



We come to the second challenge and interrogation. The preceding one was personal and relative. It was a question addressed to believers and in which Paul included himself--"What shall WE say then to these things?"--'We (if we may again expand his words), who have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious; we, who are the partakers of these present privileges and heirs of that heavenly heritage.' But in the succeeding query he challenges a different auditory, made up of legion foes. The first interrogation is that of a father gathering his family round him and asking them to unite in the glad attestation of a common experience--the conscious avowal of immunity from all real evil, and the possession of all real good. Now, he is like a man seated on a rock-summit, the wild waves surging at its base. Billow after billow rushes on. But they are beaten back confounded, and scattered in a shower of harmless spray. Paul sees an ocean of such moral and spiritual breakers, each, as it recoils, gathering afresh the spent forces for a new assault. He himself, personating the Church and believers in every age, reiterates the challenge--'Who among you, you spiritual powers of evil--mighty phalanx though you be, can "lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?"'

He prolongs the defiant challenge. "It is God who justifies; who is he that condemns?" The spiritual cast-away who has fled to the Rock may at times be the prey of unworthy fear, and tremble for his safety. But the Rock itself is immovable--it is the Rock of Ages.

There is a four-fold answer and rebuke to any such charges--a four-fold armor for the spiritual warrior in an otherwise unequal conflict--a four-fold ground of triumph and safety. "Who shall condemn?" "Who shall separate?" None. For

"Christ has died."

"Christ has risen."

"Christ is at the right hand of God."

"Christ makes intercession for us."

A famous historical "Quadrilateral" no longer exists--a single campaign demolished it--erased it from the map of Europe. But here is a defenced city "which lies four-square." Salvation, the salvation of God's dear Son, has He "appointed for walls and bulwarks." Or, adhering to our figure, it is a symphony in the midst of the Song, in four parts.

(1) None can condemn; for "it is Christ who DIED." He reverts to the foundation truth of all, without which not one of the privileges enumerated in the previous context could have been ours. Every spiritual blessing emanates from, and revolves around the Cross! Hear how the Apostle commences that other chapter which alone is parallel to the present in power, beauty, and comfort (1 Cor. 15;3). "For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." All that mystery of suffering connected with the typical sacrifices of the ancient dispensation has its explanation in Him, who is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." On that ever memorable evening when the orphaned disciples met in the twilight of the upper chamber, what was the special revelation which dispersed their fears, imparted peace and joy, and assured triumph? It was the sight of Him who DIED for them--the sight of the Crucified. For it was after He had pointed to the signs of death on His own glorified body; it was after He had "shown them His hands and His side," we read--"Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord;"--"Christ crucified, the power of God unto salvation."

(2) None can condemn--for Christ has RISEN. "Yes rather, that is, risen again." In one very emphatic sense no utterance that ever ascended from earth to heaven can compare in its momentousness with the one solitary cry--the shout of triumph waited for by all time, and which is to go echoing on through eternity--"It is finished!" But if I would have this great fact corroborated and confirmed, I must go in the dim dawn of that Jerusalem morning, to the empty sepulcher, and hear the angel-message, "He is not here, He is risen." If God the eternal Father had not accepted the work of His Son; or, had one sin laid to the charge of His elect been unatoned for, the overlying stone would still have been there--the weeping watchers would have been weeping still. Not the angels of hope, but gloomy warders would have wailed their dirge of despair over a world unredeemed. In the citadel of Christianity the Resurrection of Jesus is the key of the position--that lost, all is lost. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of those who slept. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15;17, 20, 22). He has burst the

bands of death, and triumphed over principalities and powers. Every true believer can respond to the beauty of the vision in the greatest poem of Germany, when the despondent hero awakes to life, hope, and joy, as he listens on Easter morn to the bells of the adjacent cathedral mingling their chimes with a choir of voices--"The Lord is risen!" "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4;25).

Note, yet once more the emphatic word, "Yes, rather, who is risen again." It was not a dead, but a living Christ that was the central article in the creed of the early Church. The dead Christ who has been made so familiar to us by the great mediaeval painters, was a thought repellent to the faith of these earlier ages. The crucifixion and its accessories which became so painfully realistic in future centuries, and perpetuated in revolting form in Continental way-side shrines, was absolutely unknown in the etchings and mosaics of the Catacombs. The Crucifix is unrecognized before the sixth century. Its more extended form in the delineation of the great hour of agony, had not existence before the ninth. Not "Jesus dead," but "Jesus lives," was the key-note of homily, creed, and Song. They celebrated, not the triumph of, but the glorious victory over, "the last enemy."

(3) None can condemn, for Christ "is even at THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD." Resurrection was the pledge on earth of completed atonement. Entrance within the gates of glory furnished the assurance that Jesus not only had "overcome the sharpness of death," but that He had "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." In the majesty of His ascension glory, the roll of Providence in which was inscribed the destinies of His Church is confided to His keeping. All power is committed unto Him, both in heaven and in earth. "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet." As in the case of His beloved Apostle in Patmos, He lays on each ransomed head His right hand--the hand of power--saying "fear not; I am He who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

(4) None can condemn. For as the concluding ground of confidence and joy, "He also MAKES INTERCESSION for us." The type of the old economy is complete. The great High Priest has entered into the Holiest of all--the Mighty Pleader in behalf of His Church, bearing on His breastplate the names of His Covenant people. The worshipers of Israel,

on the day of their greatest ceremonial, crowded the outer courts of the Temple, listening in profound reverence for the sound of the golden bells on the fringe of the High Priest's official garments. The chime of these formed the sure evidence that he was engaged ministering before the mercy-seat, proceeding with, and perfecting the great Oblation as the nation's Representative. We may spiritually do the same. The ear of faith may listen to the voice and intercession of Him who ever lives and ever loves--Who has "entered, not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9;24).

These are cursory thoughts that might well be expanded into a volume--for they are in truth an epitome of the work of Redemption. But to enlarge would be out of place here. They form a four-fold chain, whose links cannot be broken. They give the Apostle's triumphant answer to every doubt and cavil as to the fidelity of God to His promises. Every impeachment of His love is silenced. Heart and lip are attuned to the patriarch's Song, as he rushes into the divine Rock-cleft from the gathering storm--"Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him." For, be it observed, in closing, that in answer to suggested questionings, it is on the divine side, and the divine side alone, the believer in these verses takes his stand. He fetches his arguments for present peace and final safety from what God and Christ have done for him. He pleads not a word of his own; no weapons are taken from the armory of earth; they are all fetched from that of heaven; they are God's decrees, God's purposes, God's gift. It is Christ the Surety-substitute responsive to His Father's will. It is His doing, His dying, His rising, His session at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He is "the Prince who has power with God and prevails." Faith can rest with the greater confidence in her triple challenge--  
God justifies--who shall lay anything to our charge?  
Christ died--who shall condemn?  
Christ lives--who shall separate?

"Believe, O man," says Clement of Alexandria in one of his glowing utterances, "in Him who suffered and was adored, the living God. Believe and your soul shall receive life...in Him, the Bearer of peace, the Reconciler, the Word--our Savior; a Fountain giving life and peace

poured out over all the face of the earth; through whom, so to speak, the universe has become a seed of blessings." Jesus with us and for us! then perish every desponding thought! Heart and flesh may faint and fail, but He, a loving changeless Savior, is the strength of our heart and our portion forever.

Let these concluding cadences in this Song of Songs inspire us with the music of His own last words when about to ascend to His Father's presence, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Let us bow at His feet and exclaim--"This God shall be our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death."

## **15. PAEAN OF ASSURED VICTORY.**

Yes, "Paeon." The shout of victory, similar to what Israel raised of old amid the palms of the Arabian shore, when Miriam and her sisterhood of minstrels awoke timbrel and harp over the submerged hosts of Pharaoh, and they sang of Him who had triumphed gloriously, casting the horse and his rider into the depths of the sea. The believer, too, with the consciousness of every spiritual foe vanquished--the legion-hosts of Satan discomfited--death itself, the last enemy, left a discrowned and unseptried king--can exclaim, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (v. 35, 36, 37).

Moses, the ideal chief and legislator, was, after all, human--"compassed with infirmity." By reason of that infirmity neither he nor Aaron were permitted to conduct the pilgrim multitude into the land of promise. In both cases, in answer to the question, "Who shall separate?" Mount Nebo and Mount Hor were ready with a doleful reply. But Christ "is counted

worthy of more glory than Moses." "This Man, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood." Israel, in crossing the Jordan with their final burst of praise, had to mourn the withdrawal of both their venerated leaders. But the Christian, amid the manifold chequered scenes of his wilderness journey, yes, on the banks of the typical Jordan itself, can utter the challenge regarding his Lawgiver, Priest, and King--"Who shall separate from the love of Christ?"

With the special enumeration of trials and afflictions here given, in v. 36, we cannot doubt that the Apostle had again very specially his Roman converts in view. Too faithfully had coming events cast their shadows before. Already, if Nero's most ferocious edicts had not yet gone forth, there were abundant indications that the storm-cloud would before long burst. His unscrupulous tribunals and lying witnesses and flagrant miscarriage of justice were the tremors preceding the earthquake which was to wreck (if human daring or diabolical wilfulness could succeed in wrecking) the fortunes of the early church. But the imperial savage had to reckon with a stronger than he--"The Lion of the tribe of Judah." The terror inspired by the one had its triumphant counterpoise in the power and love of the other. In spite of of barbarous cruelties--hecatombs of dead and dying, there were those who, even in their dungeons of despair, could cheer themselves and their fellow victims with the words "Who shall separate?"

They knew full well that hidden to the human eye, yet cognizant to the eye of faith, there was a living Redeemer who would judge righteous judgment, and attune the lips of the doomed and incarcerated to "Songs in the night." A beautiful saying in the days of the Incarnation would carry its parable of comfort to not a few of these smitten hearts--"Behold Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not" (Luke 22;31). What a consolatory assurance for all ages, specially for the ages of martyrdom--Christ with His people in every season of affliction--the frail bark tempest-tossed in the angry sea, but an invisible chain of grace linking it within the veil; telling of an Omnipotent Savior "who makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."

"Sword"--"Sheep for the slaughter;" the words seem to indicate a terrific

forecast in the breast of this champion of the faith--himself one of the foredoomed. But how true also his prognostications of triumph--the victory of endurance--"more than conquerors." Scarcely another two centuries would pass before multitudes, unswerving in their loyalty to Christ and His truth, would be ready to confront persecution in its direst forms. No intensity of torture would be spared. Before long the sword would have done its cruel work on the Apostle's own aged frame. The forlorn hope, so nobly led, would see him fall mangled in the hour of victory. We may have read the testimony of Ignatius of Antioch, "That I may attain unto Jesus Christ--come fire, and iron, and grappling with wild beasts,...come cruel torture of the devil to assail me; only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ." Tens of thousands thus met unflinching the Lybian lions in the Roman amphitheater, and gave truth and inspiration to the familiar strain in the Church's best uninspired Song--"The noble army of martyrs praise You!"

It has been made a question, and there are not lacking names on either side--what the opening challenge of the verse imports. Is it "Who shall separate our love from Christ?" or "His love from us?"

The former is indeed a beautiful thought and in many cases as true as it is beautiful--the fidelity of the believer to his faithful Lord--that unswerving allegiance, never more conspicuous than in the case of Paul himself, who with self-renouncing lowliness, yet with fearless confidence and sincerity of heart could say, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He, and not a few who have attained to the same lofty standard, never loved father, mother, brother, sister, friend, as they did the Christ of Nazareth. But the whole drift of the chapter, the whole scope of the previous argumentative discussion, (add to this, the wording of the last verse of all) negate this first suggested meaning.

Each preceding proposition sets forth the believer's security, not arising out of his personal relationship to God, but from the relationship of the Divine Trinity to him--the relation of the Father in election, heirship, final glorification--the relation of the Son in His dying, rising, and ascending to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens--the relation of the Holy Spirit in making "intercession with groanings which cannot be

uttered." The theme of the chapter may be briefly summarized as "the grounds of the Christian's confidence in a triune God." It would be a comparatively poor buttress to the Apostle's argument were he to interrupt its continuity by describing the believer's love (fluctuating at the best) to his Redeemer. But when we read, as described in our chapters, of all that has been achieved by Christ for His people, it seems the most suitable of topics, in drawing to a close, to speak of the utter unchangeableness of that love--the love He bears to us--the love which had its agony and triumph on Calvary, and which now, on the mediatorial throne, is immutably pledged for our salvation. While, therefore, it is a cheering assurance that we shall never forsake Christ, much more cheering, exalting, comforting, strengthening, is the confidence that He will never forsake us.

And note, after the enumeration of existing or possible evils and antagonisms, the Apostle makes the strong affirmation, "No in all these things we are MORE THAN conquerors." This is a remarkable expression. By the use of hyperbole he emphasizes his assurance. It recalls words of his, already quoted, nearly allied though not exactly parallel (2 Cor. 4;17), where he speaks of "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The verse might be rendered "more exceeding," or, "still more surpassing conquerors." The dying utterance of an ever revered friend and Christian patriarch come appropriately to memory--"Sin abounded--grace super-abounded."

"More than conquerors."--It is a wonderful but faithful testimony to the influences and results of trial--not as some would naturally think to cool ardor, eclipse faith, and un-nerve heroism--like the children of Ephraim, who, carrying bows, turned faint in the day of battle. The whole history of the Church and its martyrology gives a distinctly different verdict. It represents faith, and love, and devotion, and soul-consecration, as being, on the contrary, inspired, developed, expanded, in the midst of adverse circumstances. We see this illustrated in the sufferings of the Roman Christians. Not only victims in the strength of manhood and in the feebleness and decrepitude of age, but the willing self-surrender even of tender youthful heroines, such as Blandina, Perpetua, and Felicitas. Their bravery had its counterpart in distant centuries, in the Vaudois Valleys of



Lucerna, Perosa, and San Martino, the dungeons by the Rhone and Danube, the martyr roll-call of Spain and France, Holland and Britain. We see it conspicuously in modern times. To take one out of many examples, from the soldiers of the cross who "foremost fighting fell" in Central Africa. Be it Bishop or Evangelist, no sooner is one struck down by fever or sword or spear, than another is ready to fill the gap and bear in true apostolic succession the honored banner. The trumpet in that stern battle seems never to sound retreat, but onward!--"Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." "Out of weakness they are made strong, wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens." They are divinely strengthened for superhuman endurance. The device on that banner tells the secret--"Made more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

Though we have just quoted the writer of our verse as a notable illustrative example, we may well linger on the singular corroborative testimony he bore to these twin-clauses; "more than conqueror"--"through Him that loved us." He had everything, humanly speaking, to quench his zeal, impair his ardor, undermine his constancy--nothing perhaps more so, than the loneliness of a life that so often showed its yearning need of human sympathy and genial companionship. There is much comprehended in the terse, bitter wail, "all men forsook me"! But the lessening of human friendships, the removal of human props, the discovery of the treachery and desertion of "summer friends" only seemed to strengthen his faith and deepen his love for One "who sticks closer than a brother." Man may fail me--man has failed me; but, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" And the conscious love for him of that Brother-man on the throne, quickened his sensibilities. Love beget love. His own weakness was perfected in Almighty strength. He gloried in his infirmities, for the power of Christ thereby rested more abundantly upon him. He felt its reality, its stability. "Such a one as Paul the aged" was "made more than conqueror," through the exalted sympathy of the once Prince of sufferers. Aye, and when he saw the gleam of the "sword"--the weapon with which he ends his enumeration in the passage we are considering, he could raise the Victor's Song--"I know whom" (not in whom, but WHOM--the living Person of his loving Lord)--"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep

that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

We shall close with two thoughts.

(1) Let us advert, once more, to the designation here given to Christ--it is "Him that loved us." We cannot fail to recall the parallel--indeed the identical words in the opening verses of the book of Revelation. John (himself the Apostle of love) appears to deem it needless to name which Person in the Holy Trinity it is to whom he refers in his dedication. "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1;5). Let us think of that name and title in its sacred relation to ourselves. "Him that loved us" would often be poorly descriptive of human friends and friendships. That may be a fitful affection, the memory of which is all that remains. In His case, loving once He loves forever. It is love incapable of diminishing or decay. The opening challenge will be prolonged and deepened through eternity--"Who shall separate?"

(2) Take it in another aspect? The noblest of earthly heroes may fail in their exploits; heroic efforts may be confronted and covered with defeat. Khartoum will always have its mournful associations and memories in British annals, where a noble soul--an ideal warrior, man, Christian, dared all and lost all. Like the mother of Sisera, it is at times vain and delusive counting up spoils and trophies never to be ours. Arbitrary and capricious often are the so-called "fortunes of war." So it may be under the noblest and ablest of human champions. But with Christ failure is impossible, triumph is assured. "Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (Isa. 63;1).

Let that name and the assurance it conveys stimulate us. Christ--He who thus loved us, might have made our wilderness journey one of triumphant and unchequered progress, without Red Sea, or Marah-pool, or fiery serpent--the way without a thorn--the sky without a cloud--no enemy to be seen or encountered. He has well and wisely ordered it otherwise. We are happily ignorant of, and exempt from, the stern and dreadful trials which belonged to the primitive Roman Church; though in other forms and modified shapes, distress, peril, tribulation still cast their

shadows. The apostolic words are unrescinded and unrevoked--"We are in heaviness through manifold temptations." The "tribulation"--the "tribulum" so well known in the Roman threshing-floor--the root-word, as Trench has pointed out, of the tribulation of our verse, has still, and ever will have, its reality, in connection with the divine dealings. Stroke after stroke is needed. But, as in the hands of the Roman husbandman, the "flail" was used to sift and separate the husk from the grain; so, that tribulum of God in His threshing-floor is designed for the same purpose in a higher sense, to remove moral husks and incrustations, to fit the grain of wheat for its place in the garner, or it may be to aid its germinating power in the earth for the better bringing forth of fruit to His glory. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom." If such be our present experience, let us meet all sufferings and trials as Paul met them, "more than conquerors." Tribulation, Distress, Persecution, Famine, Nakedness, Peril, Sword--that music of winds and waves, the deep bass of the Song, should only make us exult more in "the impregnable Rock."

Changing the figure, let us listen to the prolonged trumpet-peal in another place, summoning not to tent or camp, but to arms and battle--"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand" (Eph. 6;10-13).

And if he and they of whom he here speaks, counted not their lives dear unto them--if they have fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith, let us hear their voices gliding down from heaven in beautiful cadence--"Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." While we respond, in the paean of eternal victory, "thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in Christ."

## 16. HALLELUJAH CHORUS.

In the preceding strains of this Song of Songs, we have been listening to deep-sea music. Now the billows are resonant on the Eternal Shore!

"Christ Jesus our Lord." These are the four words which end our chapter, the closing note of Paul's Golden Canticle; a reigning Christ in the midst of His ransomed Church--"Hallelujah...He shall reign forever and ever."

"Christ Jesus our Lord!"--Befitting finale for the Song of the Redeemed on earth--befitting refrain for the Anthem of the Church glorified--  
"Strong Son of God, Immortal Love!"

The "No condemnation in Christ," has now reached its climax in "No separation from Christ." With these concluding strains, the outcome of all that have preceded, he defies the confederate forces of the material and spiritual Creation--the foes of "a present evil world,"--the principalities and powers of heaven and hell; the heights above, the depths beneath--all space, all time, all eternity, to hush that everlasting chorus and separate from that everlasting love!

"In Christ Jesus." "Is this," says Leighton, "he that so lately cried out, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?' who now triumphs 'O happy man, who shall separate me from the love of Christ?' Now he has found a deliverer to whom he is forever united. So vast a difference is there between a Christian taken in himself and in Christ." The author of The Christian Year--adopting the figure of our volume, thus appropriately sings of the Apostle ever after the hour of his conversion--  
"From then, each mild and winning note  
(Like pulses that round harp-strings float  
When the full strain is over),  
Left lingering in his inward ear  
Music that taught as death drew near,  
Love's lesson, more and more."

Let us give the words now to be considered in full.

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 38--39)

These successive clauses, to vary the metaphor, are like so many perches in the writer's upward flight, as with the eagle-wing of his brother Apostle of love he soars to the seventh heaven, and sinks into the clefts of the true Rock for ever!

"Christ Jesus our Lord." Yes, but neither may the terminating words be dissevered from those which precede them. It is the combination which makes a full Gospel-harmony. They form a divine epigram of comfort and consolation--"the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The love of the Father is here co-ordinated with the love of the Son. It is the apostolic echo of the Great Master's own saying--the saying which of all He uttered was most descriptive of His mission; the saying which perhaps of all He uttered we would be the most loath to part with--"God so loved the world, as to give His only Begotten Son."

We have presented to us in this brief sentence of our concluding meditation not only the stream of Salvation in Christ, but we are conducted to the fountainhead in the Infinite love and sovereign grace of the First Person in the Blessed Trinity. In the original that love is emphasized--the special love. In the previous portion of his Epistle, what we may call its forensic or dialectic chapters, Paul had of necessity to vindicate the character of God in His dealings with sinners, as the Righteous, the Holy, the Just--the Moral Governor, whose laws dare not be violated with impunity. But here, after the sublime unfolding of Redemption, he singles out, for his terminating note of triumph, the attribute which spans the life of every believer like a divine rainbow, from his predestination to his glorification. He had immediately before sounded the defiant note--"Who shall separate?" There seems to be a momentary hush. He waits, so to speak, to hear if a response be given. There is no reply. The silence is broken by an answer from his own lips. The answer declares separation to be impossible--that nothing can frustrate God's purpose, or alter His affection for His Church and people. With Him, in the outgoings of that love, "tomorrow will be as today, and

much more abundant." The flower of grace, here often battered with wind and rain, shall never cease to bloom in heaven. The great ocean-tide will then roll on without ebb "through the ages of the ages."

But let us enter the arena and listen to our Apostle-herald as he sounds his challenges, and utters his assertions, in succession.

"DEATH shall not separate." Alas, in one sense, too sadly, too truly, Death does separate. Too sadly, too truly, is Death the severer of bonds. The very name is allied and associated with pain, suffering, dissolution. There is one inscription common to all ages and generations--"They were not allowed to continue by reason of death." The world is full, day by day, of aching hearts. Long and loud is the wailing strain--the dirge over buried love! Those are not to be credited with sincerity, or with the tenderest instincts of humanity, who affect to speak lightly of such severances. The cold icy river seems to cut us off at once from the land of love--the love of earth and the love of heaven. But, in another and elevated sense, the sense inspired by gospel faith, there is no absolute separation in the case of those united to Christ. Our life is "hid with Christ in God." "It is He alone," says Pere Didon, at the close of the Introduction to his great Work, "who pours into the soul a divine life which no pain can overwhelm, which trial only strengthens, and which can despise death, because it permits us to face it with the fullness of immortal hope."

To the true Believer, the Gate of Death is the Gate to the second Paradise. It is the Exodus of the Soul from its bondage--the entrance into the beatific vision--the fullness of God. Death is pictured to our thoughts under the Bible figure of a lonely Valley. Nor is it strange that the idea of solitude and solitariness should be blended with the emblem. But there can be no real solitude to him who can sing at his death bed--"YOU are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me." In the words of a sainted and saintly writer "Death is a leap into the arms of Infinite love." So far from being the separator from God, it is the "Beautiful Angel" who leads home to Himself. Then shall come to pass the saying that is written--"Death is swallowed up in Victory." "Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116;15, Prayer Book Version).

"LIFE shall not separate." Life, with its vivid realities and engrossing interests, and enthralling fascinations on the one hand; Life with its depressing cares and anxious struggles--its gnawing heartaches and bitter bereavements on the other; Life with its April day of fitful alternation--cloud and sunshine, shall not blur the "Summer of the Soul" and dim the divine--the Eternal sunshine. The Christian engaged in its urgent duties--grappling with its stern difficulties and fiery trials, feeling that he is "appointed thereunto," has truly his citizenship in heaven. His heart and home are in one sense on earth; in an equally truthful, more exalted sense, he can sing as the chartered citizen of glory--"Who has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ."  
"Whether we live we live unto the Lord; or whether we die we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14;8).

"ANGELS, PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS shall not separate." Not Angels--the living creatures with whom alike poetry and Scripture have made this earth to teem "both while we sleep and while we wake." It is the most impossible of impossible things, that a loyal heaven shall conspire in strange league of hostility against the children of the kingdom. The Apostle here makes the unlikeliest of suppositions, simply to strengthen the believer's confidence. Not demons--not the host of heaven and hell combined in gigantic conspiracy against the believer's peace. Persecutors and persecutions--the base abettors of cruelty and wrong-doing who did their utmost in the Apostle's time, and would do their utmost still, to deflect from the path of allegiance to the Gospel; tempting to abjure faith, instilling doubts, and lording it over conscience. These are the "Spiritual 'wickednesses' in high places," led on by Apollyon "the Destroyer." But God's true people will be fortified against their combined assaults by the same Power that is pledged for their salvation. "I saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven" (Luke 10;18).

"THINGS PRESENT AND THINGS TO COME shall not separate." The Apostle comes down again from the ideal to the actual--from a hypothetical impossibility to life's realities. This world of change has its blighted hopes and frustrated schemes--"things present"; the future--that unrevealed future has, with many, its pale and ghastly shadows--the ghosts of dreaded evil--"the fear of the fearful"--"things to come." But one

divine assurance there is, beyond vacillation. No time with its ages and millenniums and cycles can affect or diminish the love in the heart of God. All else may and must change; but "He is faithful."

"NOR HEIGHT, NOR DEPTH, NOR ANY OTHER CREATURE can separate." As all time and all eternity are challenged, so is all space. The herald roams creation; he roams the universe. Mountain might be piled on mountain, planet might be added to planet, star conjoined to star, if a barrier could thus be reared between the soul and God. Or, take a different supposition. Our own earth, by some strange erratic impulse or some diabolical plot, might be sent wandering into the depths of the infinite to accomplish separation and isolation from its divine Creator. But each of its redeemed inhabitants, conscious of the same unchanging love, could utter the challenge--"If I ascend up into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Your hand lead me and Your right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139;8, 9, 10). I defy all time, all place, all space, all possible combinations and contingencies; all heights of prosperity, all depths of adversity; the giddy eminences of rank and power, the extremes of poverty and need--the roll and revolution of ages, when "time shall be no longer"--to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord!

"Led by paths we cannot see,  
Unto heights no guess can measure,  
Draw we nearer Thee!  
Nearer You through every aeon,  
Every universe of Thine;  
Man and seraph swell one paean,  
Harmonizing chords divine.

O, from You no power can sever;  
Through death's valley Your face to see;  
Saved, forever and forever,  
Drawing nearer Thee."

And all this of which we have now been speaking was no occasional confidence of Paul. (Latin Vulgate "I am certain"). Here is what



theologians call "the assurance of faith" in its noblest form. No wavering or incertitude. A triumphant testimony. It is as if, after the many gracious assertions of the chapter--the successive clauses, comprehensively setting forth the believer's creed--some had ventured to interpose and say--"All this is abstract truth cogently stated in logical and dogmatic shape. But it may be purely conjectural. Who can bear personal witness to the reality, the inner experiences?" "I," replies the Apostle, as if putting his own seal and endorsement to every foregoing proposition--"I am persuaded!" It recalls a similar personal attestation in the Old Testament Scriptures. We find this glowing delineation of the believer's happiness and peace--his abiding strength and joy, in one of the most beautiful of the Psalms--"The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright." But, as if some one, here too, had ventured the question--who can bear individual testimony that all this is true?--"I" replies the Psalmist, "He is MY Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Ps. 92;12-15). Both Old and New Testament saints, "chief musicians"--could say and sing with the assured confidence of another sacred writer--"We have known and believed the love which God has to us" (1 John 4;16).

Let us close with TWO PRACTICAL THOUGHTS.

(1) We are occasionally in these modern times confronted in print and in speech with the cynical query--"Is life worth living?" This Song of Songs, in its varied notes and harmonies, supplies surely an amply sufficient answer. Not indeed an answer to those whose hopes and aspirations are bounded by time--those who are of the earth, earthy. The chapter to such has but one solemn word in reply--"The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God." But to all who can, in some feeble measure, claim a saving interest in the Gospel Repertory of faith and love, hope and promise, which this Great Canticle so abundantly supplies--to all who have listened to the divine absolution--"no condemnation,"--to all who have been brought under the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, and quickened, through Him, to a life of

righteousness--to all who have the happy consciousness of being "heirs of God"--ushered into "the liberty of the glory of His children;"--who, it may be amid manifold outward trials, have been able to grasp the assurance, that all things are working together for their spiritual good; and that the sufferings of the present time are utterly insignificant compared with the glory yet to be revealed--put to them also the question, "Is life worth living?" Conscious of the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, the reply will be instantaneous--"He asked life of You, and You gave it to him, even length of days forever and ever" (Ps. 21;4).

(2) Seek, reader, as the final lesson of the chapter--the golden note of this Song of Songs--to live now under the influence of that changeless love of God manifested in Christ. Make it the dominating power--the impelling force of your new nature. Let these be your sacred mottoes and watchwords--"I am not my own, I am bought with a price." "The love of Christ constrains me." "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me...I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

There is a tradition regarding Ignatius of Antioch, that when the sword of the executioner had hewn his heart in pieces, each separate fragment had the name of "Jesus" upon it in glowing letters. The myth might well be a reality in the case of every true believer. We have spoken indeed in the earliest part of the volume, of faltering purposes and unreached ideals--the presence and power of two antagonistic principles. "These are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would." Jubilant songs are alternated with plaintive dirge-notes. But if it be your constant and growing aim to "keep yourself in the love of God,"--to have your will concurrent with the divine, setting Christ ever before you as your great Example and Pattern, you may rely on the promised aids of the Spirit to strengthen your purposes and help your infirmities. The prophetic strains of the dying Jacob regarding one of the Palestine tribes will, in a figurative sense, be true of every believing Israelite--"Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen. 49;19).

Afflictions you must have. Storm and cloud will appear suddenly in brightest skies; whatever else may be escaped, there is the terminating encounter of the pilgrimage--the last fight of all; and "there is no

discharge in that war." But above tempest and din of battle, that ancient Rock of Ages is still the same. A million of suns have risen and set on a world seething with change. But HE remains. The Immutable cannot alter. The deathless love of God in Christ is a wondrous crown to halo the brow of every pilgrim. It is told, if I may employ the words of a distinguished Divine, only substituting one quoted verse for another, "that when Bishop Butler drew near his end, he asked his chaplain if he also heard the music which filled his own heart. The music was not unreal, because the untrained ear could not catch its harmonies. And it may be that if our whole being is henceforth set heavenwards, we shall hear when we are crossing to waste places, as it seems in loneliness and sorrow and inward conflict, the great hosts by whom we are encompassed taking up our human psalm."--(our Song of Songs) and saying..."who shall separate from the love of Christ?" "HE has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Or, as these words have been paraphrased to impart the energy of the original--"Never, no NEVER, no NEVER!" That love is guaranteed by divine oath and promise. To the challenge "Shall anything separate?" the reply, the symphonies of the blest--will go echoing down the ages--"Never! no NEVER! no NEVER!" The Miserere is heard no more; the Te Deum is the Song and the ascription of Eternity.

Let, then, one mighty orchestra be summoned in--a fervent impassioned song; not in its pagan, but in its divine Christian sense--this closing Hallelujah--the Hosanna of Immortal love. In appropriate words from Dante "Let the earth for once hear the music of heaven." Let the myriads of Redeemed below, unite with the Ransomed above. Let ministering seraphim and burning cherubim combine with "the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world,"--and let this be the ever-deepening chorus--"WHO SHALL SEPARATE?" Let the notes ripple on forever.

"Hallelujahs, full and swelling,  
Rise around His throne of might,  
All our highest laud excelling,  
Holy and immortal, dwelling  
In the unapproached light.

As the sound of many waters  
Let the full Amen arise;  
Hallelujah! ceasing never,  
Sounding through the great forever,  
Linking all its harmonies."

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever, AMEN.

**THE GREAT JOURNEY**  
**A Pilgrimage through the Valley**  
**of Tears to Mount Zion, the city**  
**of the living God**

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## **Introduction**

As there are infinite varieties in Christian experience, so there is a propriety in narrating the great story of the Christian's pilgrimage in different forms. Those who have read Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" will find MacDuff's 50 page allegory no copy, but a spirited example of the same style.

## **CHAPTER 1**

As I was walking along the Highway of Time, I came to a new milestone; and being wearied with my journey, "I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream."--Pilgrim's Progress.

Methought I saw a dwelling, situated by itself in one of the world's secluded valleys. In front of its simple, rustic lintels stood an aged man, pale and agitated. His eyes were pensively fixed on the ground; or if they were occasionally lifted to take a hurried glance at some distant object, it seemed a relief when he could replace them on the green grass at his feet,

and resume his deep and expressive thoughtfulness. The tear which now and then involuntarily fell from his eye, read some unwonted tale of sadness, while the other inhabitants of the household, who were gathered around him, manifested, by word and look, how amply they shared his embittered feelings.

The appearance of their home itself, as well as what was around it, indicated nothing but happiness and enjoyment. The sunbeams, at the moment, were dancing and sparkling in a rivulet which murmured by. A cluster of rugged trees behind were casting fantastic shadows on the sward; while birds of varied plumage were responding to one another from bough to bough in joyous music.

When pondering the possible cause of these strange emotions, I observed some one fast disappearing in the distance, whose footsteps the group surrounding the cottage door were wistfully following. Their broken accents soon revealed his history. It was a member of their family, who had just bidden farewell to the home of his youth, and commenced, all alone, the world's great pilgrimage! His father had followed him, a few minutes before, to the threshold, with many benedictions. Warning him to "flee from the wrath to come", he had directed his footsteps to the Celestial City, whose shining gates terminated the Valley of Tears.

"My son," were his parting words, "if sinners entice you, consent you not. Walk not you in the way with them; refrain your foot from their path". Full of filial love, Pilgrim (for that was the name of the traveler) had promised a dutiful obedience, and set out, staff in hand, on his journey.

Before proceeding far, he arrived at the outskirts of a forest, through which his path had led. There he found himself in an open space, in sight of two diverse roads, at the entrances to which were gathered crowds of wayfarers, varying in outward appearance, but whom he at once concluded to be fellow-travelers.

As the footpath he had hitherto been following terminated here, and it was necessary to select one or other of the ways, methought I saw him seated on a stone, close by, hesitating between the two. There was no difficulty in discovering which was the favorite. It was a Broad way,

without any gate on it. It seemed, also, from its appearance, pleasanter than the other. Shady trees were planted on either side; and the multitudes which were crowding into it seemed light-hearted and happy, with little care on their countenances, and little sorrow in their hearts.

The adjoining way was very Narrow, and had a Strait Gate at its entrance; moreover, it was frequented only by a small number--a few straggling travelers--and many of these with tears in their eyes, and burdens on their backs.

"I never can think of joining these unhappy wayfarers," said Pilgrim to himself, as he rose and advanced in the direction of the Broad road. And yet, as he approached nearer the latter, he listened to sounds to which his ear had been hitherto unaccustomed, and which made him tremble. Travelers, whose several names were Drunkard, Liar, Swearer, Profligate, Infidel, Scoffer, he found were to be his companions. He called to mind words which had been impressed upon him by a father's prayers: "There is a way which seems right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death!"

Now I saw that, as he was preparing to retrace his steps, an individual from the crowd came up and accosted him. His name was Deceiver, a well-known character to all the Broad-way-men, and one of the most powerful vassals of the Prince of Darkness.

"How now, good traveler!" exclaimed he, with assumed gentleness. "I see you are faint-hearted, as many before you have been, in entering this Broad way. Tell me the cause of your fear."

"The way of the ungodly shall perish", replied Pilgrim, firmly. "I had almost resolved to select it; but I see abundant reason now for preferring the other, narrow and deserted though it be. I shall, at all events, make trial of that narrow entrance. If it disappoint my expectations, it will be no difficult matter to retrace my steps."

"You mistake it, ignorant youth," replied the other; "once enter that gate, and there is no possibility of turning back. The determination once taken can never be recalled. If you will only be persuaded to make trial of the



Broad way, there is no necessity to pursue it further than inclination leads you."

"But how can I possibly enter with such company?" said Pilgrim.

"Good friend," said Deceiver, still assuming a tone of kindness, "you see the worst of the way at its commencement--your companions will improve upon you as you advance. It is only because you are not accustomed to such company that you are averse to it. Moreover," continued he, "though there be one entrance to the Broad way, there are many footpaths in it. If you have a dislike to the openly profane and vicious, there is no necessity to walk in fellowship with them. I shall introduce you to others more adapted to your taste."

In an unguarded moment, Pilgrim forgot his resolutions; and, under the guidance of Deceiver, was conducted until he arrived at a wicket-gate, close under the wall which separated the two ways.

He thought he could not be wrong in attempting this pathway; and yet he could not forget, among the other warnings he had received, that "many Deceivers were gone out into the world". But there was no room left for hesitation. Before long he discovered that he and his guide had been insensibly advancing, leaving the entrance at a considerable distance behind. Deceiver, having thus accomplished his object, returned back to exercise upon others the same unscrupulous dissimulation. He felt he could with confidence leave the new traveler in the hands of those who, similarly duped as himself, had now become confirmed Broad-way-men. In one thing his conductor had not misled him. The further Pilgrim proceeded, the less did he feel the aversion, which he experienced so strongly at first, to mingle with his fellow-travelers. Their language, their manners, their tastes, became every day more in accordance with his own. He even began to wonder he could have made the selection of this road matter of hesitation. There were, indeed, some moments when a father's warnings were vividly recalled; particularly when he happened to be in the company of two noted individuals in the Broad way, with bloated faces and haggard looks, called Profligacy and Intemperance. Often then would living words, with which he had been familiar from his boyhood, sound in his ears: "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire

and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup". Or, again: "Come out from among them, and be you separate, and touch not the unclean thing". He would also, at such times, call to remembrance how his father used to speak of a day when the Lord Immanuel was to be seated on a Great White Throne; when before him were to be gathered all the way farers who had ever traversed the Valley of Tears, and when he was to say to every worker of iniquity: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire". He would remember how he was used to tell of the end of those who obeyed not the King of the Way; and particularly of a bottomless pit, at the termination of a dark and deceitful road, where thousands were continually perishing without any hope of mercy. The thought at times would flash across him: Could it be that he was treading this dreadful highway?--that, forgetful of a parent's counsels,

he was hurrying on to such certain and irretrievable ruin? The fearful possibility occasionally seemed utterly to overwhelm him--he would pause, and tremble, and weep; or, stealing away from the boisterous merriment of his fellows, watch some favorable opportunity, unseen to them, of retracing his steps. This, however, was not so easy a matter. He had already, as I have said, advanced far on the way. The road which had been so broad and spacious at first, was now, in many places, narrow and confined. Fresh travelers were coming in; he was unavoidably carried along with the press; and the attempt to return would only expose him to ridicule. His companions, moreover, found it was no difficult matter to laugh what they called his fits of moping melancholy away. And if, on some occasions, these proved more obstinate than at others, they had ever an easy remedy at hand, by enticing him into one of the many Arbors of Pleasure erected by the Prince of Darkness along the road. There, amid new fascinations, and carnal delights, they succeeded in dispelling his passing convictions and fears. Thus, day by day, was Pilgrim found hurrying along with the crowd--his heart growing less susceptible of impression with every resisted warning. The unhappy victim of a thousand base passions soon had no leisure to inquire where his footsteps were hurrying him. But, although he knew it not, the Pit of Destruction was at hand, and he was about to be summoned to take his stand on its confines.

I saw in my dream, that one night the shadows of evening were closing around, as, weak and exhausted, he found himself at the mouth of a valley. Precipitous rocks, on either side, frowned above his head, and cast an ominous gloom on the path below; while a foaming river, dark and troubled, was hemmed in between their narrow ledges. It was the Valley of Death!

As the traveler entered, a horror of great darkness came upon him. He recollected of being told of a star--the Star of Bethlehem--which gave light and peace to those passing through. He looked for it now in vain; and the further he advanced the more intense was the gloom. The ground began to heave under his feet. Peals of thunder echoed on every side. The lightning's momentary glare only served to disclose to him that he was on his way to Outer Darkness! On reaching the end of the valley, he witnessed, straight before him, columns of smoke and flame issuing from the mouth of a bottomless pit. Groans, too, resembling the cries of dying men, were carried to his ear. "Verily, there was but a step between him and death!"

"What shall I do to be saved? What shall I do to be saved?" exclaimed the agonized man, making a hopeless effort to retrace his footsteps; but, from his weakness, he sunk powerless to the ground. Dreadful was the spectacle which then presented itself. Hundreds around him were tumbling over the precipice, uttering wild imprecations; others, already in the gulf, sending up the vain entreaty for a single drop of water to cool their tongues. "O God, have mercy!" they cried; "save us from this place of torment! Our punishment is greater than we can bear." Pilgrim had no time to gaze on the scene. The crowds from behind were pressing him, every moment, nearer the brink; and he, also, would have been precipitated headlong into the flames, had there not been within his reach a ledge of projecting rock, which he grasped in the agonies of death. As he continued thus trembling by the side of the abyss, an individual approached, with a dark and gloomy countenance. His name was Despair, and a smile of fiendish triumph was seated on his lips.

"Well, good traveler," said he, addressing Pilgrim; "you have well-near reached the end of your journey. There is now but one step between you and perdition, and the quicker that step is made, the better for yourself!"

"O wretched man that I am!" said Pilgrim, uttering a shriek of agony; "is there no one who can deliver me from this abyss of death? Tell me, if you have any compassion on a miserable soul, is there no possible way of deliverance from such torments?"

"None! none!" replied Despair; "there never was a traveler before you who ventured to ask such a question; the moment you entered that valley your Eternity was lost!"

"No; but methinks," said Pilgrim, who was so stupefied with terror as to be scarce able to collect his thoughts to reply, "I once heard of one as undone as myself, called Malefactor, who stood where I now am, on this dread precipice; and just as he was about to plunge in, he cried out, in imploring accents, 'Lord, remember me!' Immediately a golden chain of grace was let down from heaven, and that day he was with Jesus in paradise."

"That is but some dream of your own, unhappy traveler," said Despair. "Had you thought of returning as you journeyed through the wilderness, or before you came in sight of the Valley of Death, some hope might have remained; but now all possibility of escape is at an end. Besides, had the King of the Narrow way desired your rescue, he would have stopped you long before now. But since he has suffered you to proceed so far, it shows that he has no wish for you to turn, but desires your death."

"Hold! hold!" exclaimed a stranger, arresting the arm of Despair, which had just grasped Pilgrim, to hurl him into the depths below; "I am sent by King Immanuel," said he; "his minister and messenger to perishing sinners like yourself. Hear, and your soul shall live!"

"The chief of sinners! the chief of sinners!" cried the agonized man, first smiting on his bosom, and then pointing to the gulf beneath; "there can be nothing for me but this same fearful looking for of vengeance and fiery indignation, which I see devouring the adversaries of God. What else can I expect, who have been treasuring up for myself wrath against the day of wrath?"

"There is yet hope," said the other; "I am an ambassador from the court of Immanuel. I carry with me a treaty of peace. Here are the articles of treaty," he continued, unfolding the gospel roll, which he carried under his arm. "And now, as an ambassador for Christ, I pray then, in his stead, be reconciled unto God."

"Alas! alas!" responded Pilgrim, in plaintive accents, "your scroll can contain nothing for me but 'lamentation, and mourning, and woe.' I am a sinner to the very uttermost; and my wages are eternal death."

"Listen," said the other, "to what the Lord Immanuel has to say to you." Now I saw upon this, that the messenger opened the roll of parchment, and read to Pilgrim as follows: "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies; but rather that he would turn from his wickedness, and live. Turn you, turn you, why will you die?" "Therefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost."

"Salvation to the uttermost!" cried the desponding man--the amazing accents sounding like music in his ear: "can it be that there is still 'forgiveness with God, that he may be feared?'"

"With the Lord," replied the other, "there is mercy, and plenteous redemption. It is, indeed of his mercies you are not consumed; for he might justly have sworn in his wrath, that you should never enter into his rest. But he sends me to bring you back from the gates of death, and to proclaim that it is still a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that the Lord Immanuel came into the world to save sinners, of whom you are the chief."

"The chief! the chief indeed!" again cried Pilgrim; "for mine iniquities have gone over my head'; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me. Am I not a brand plucked from the burning?"

Despair made one remaining effort to push Pilgrim off the rock, and plunge him into the gulf beneath. But the servant of the Lord Immanuel caught him; and led him to the only way of escape, called the Path of Life.

## CHAPTER 2

Afterward, in my dream, methought I saw Pilgrim standing before the gate of the Narrow way soliciting admission. Above its portals were inscribed, in large characters, the words, "KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED."

As he stood knocking, he observed near him two men, who evidently purposed to be the companions of his journey. There was, however, something about their manner and appearance very unlike what he would have expected from those who were waiting for the opening of the gate. The one, whose name was Procrastination, was lying on the grass, half asleep, with his bundle and all its contents carelessly scattered around him. The other, called Presumption, was seated at the foot of a tree, humming the words of a song. At first Pilgrim hesitated whether he would address them; but seeing no others with whom he could enter into converse, he accosted them thus--

"You are intending travelers to Zion, good friends, I presume?"

"We are," replied the strangers.

"Then it is probable we shall journey together," continued Pilgrim; "provided, that is, you have no objections I share your company."

"That depends very much," said Procrastination, elevating himself, "if your taste corresponds with ours. From our past experience, there are few of the Narrow way travelers who feel disposed to make our acquaintance; and, if I may judge from the way in which you were just now knocking at the gate, there is no great likelihood you will prove an exception."

"I suppose we are at one," replied Pilgrim, "in our desire to escape as fast

as possible from this place of danger, and get inside the gate."

"True," said Procrastination; "it is my firm purpose to be a Narrow way traveler, and at last to reach the New Jerusalem; but I am not inclined to commence the journey too abruptly. I have not recovered my former fatigues. Before leaving my present resting-place, I must have 'a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.'"

"I would have you consider well, fellow-traveler," answered Pilgrim, assuming an earnest tone, "if it be safe to trifle any more of that time away which is soon to come to an end. 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand.' 'He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.' If you resign yourself to slumber now, you may sleep the sleep of death. It is surely time, no, 'it is high time to awake out of sleep!'"

Procrastination made no reply--merely waving his hand and muttering, "Go your way for this time; at a more convenient season I will think on these things." He gradually sunk down, resumed the position from which he had raised himself, folded his arms, and once more was steeped in slumber.

"You need be under no apprehension of our safety," said his companion Presumption, addressing Pilgrim; "we have placed ourselves, as you see, close beside the gate. We are so near it that we can enter at any time. I shall take care to keep watch for the coming of the Herald of judgment; and there are but just a few paces between us and safety."

"Take care," said Pilgrim, "that you be not deceiving yourself. You seem to have little idea of your dreadful and imminent peril. If you wait until the Avenger of Blood be in sight, before the key be turned in the lock he may cut you down! Besides, by presuming on the patience of the King of the Way, he may leave you to your fate, and 'mock when your fear comes.'"

"Ah! but I know," replied Presumption, "that Free Grace keeps the keys of the gate; and he never yet was known to reject a traveler that applied for admission."

"Not, indeed," said Pilgrim, "a traveler who seeks entrance there from love to the Lord Immanuel; but to one like yourself, who desires merely to elude the Avenger's sword, and escape coming wrath, I question if he would attend to your knockings." "Hark!" continued he, as he heard the sound of footsteps from within, approaching the gate. They were accompanied by a voice, exclaiming, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" The bolts were drawn aside, and the bars unloosed. Pilgrim, with a heart throbbing with joy, as he saw the door about to be opened, once more urged the two indifferent travelers to cast in their lot with his; but they only repeated their former reply.

Seeing remonstrance was in vain, he eagerly ran up to the gate, exclaiming, "Whatever others do, as for me, I will serve the Lord!"

"Who stands without, knocking?" demanded a voice from within.

"A poor traveler," replied Pilgrim, "who received a warrant from the Lord Immanuel to apply at this gate for admission."

"What is your name?" asked Free Grace, the keeper of the gate.

"My hereditary name is Sinner," said the other; "my surname, Pilgrim."

"What righteousness have you?"

"My righteousness," was the reply, "is as filthy rags."

"What plea, then," inquired the Keeper, "have you to offer?"

"None," said Pilgrim, "but this, that I am 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:' but I have come here 'to buy of you gold tried in the fire, that I may be rich; and white clothing, that I may be clothed; and have my eyes, which are still scorched with the glare of the pit, anointed with eye-salve, that I may see.' Be pleased to 'open unto me this gate of righteousness', that I may enter into it and be safe."

"This way was made," replied the Keeper, "and this gate opened, just for such sinners as you. 'Come in, you weary, heavy-laden one, and the Lord Immanuel will give you rest.'"



So saying, the gateway turned on its hinges, and disclosed to Pilgrim an aged man, with a benignant and heavenly expression.

"For six thousand years," said he, "have I stood at this gate, and been authorized by the Lord of the Way to fling it open to weary travelers; and he is as willing now to welcome them in as when first it was opened. His love for sinners the lapse of ages cannot diminish. 'Come in, you blessed of the Lord, wherefore stands you without?'"

Now I saw that he conducted Pilgrim within the portico of the entrance. Immediately opposite the door of the lodge in which Free Grace dwelt, was a lake or fountain of water, surrounded with trees and shrubs crowned with verdure of surpassing beauty, and which were reflected in many hues of loveliness on the calm surface. Immediately behind rose a temple, on the pinnacle of which was a winged cherub, called Gospel, with a trumpet in his hand; with which, at intervals, he sounded the proclamation, "Ho! every one that thirsts, come you to the waters"; while a choir of youthful voices from below responded: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

"Can this," inquired Pilgrim of Free Grace, "be the fountain which, a little while ago, I heard celebrated in song by some travelers to Zion?"

"It is," said the Keeper; "and before you advance further on your journey, it will be needful for you to receive a suit of white clothing, washed in its waters."

So saying, he assisted Pilgrim in tearing off the remains of his ragged covering of self-righteousness. A robe of white linen, which was steeping in the pool, he dried in the rays of the sun, and clothed him in it.

Pilgrim stooped over the fountain, and seeing his image reflected in it, he exclaimed, in a transport of holy joy, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness!"

## CHAPTER 3

Now I saw that the Keeper, followed by Pilgrim, entered his dwelling by the side of the gate. They ascended together, by a winding stair, to a turret overlooking the rest of the buildings, and whose window commanded an extensive prospect of the whole Narrow way. The walls of this chamber were hung with pieces of armor and coats of mail, which, from their high polish, shone brilliantly in the morning sun. In the center of the apartment stood a table, with some rolls of parchment lying upon it, and writing materials.

"Here it is," said the Conductor, "that travelers receive the whole armor of God, that they may be able to stand in the evil day. See," continued he, pointing to the walls around him, "how amply the Lord of the Way has provided for the equipment of wayfarers; and, truly, this is not too much, considering what is before them."

"What!" said the other in astonishment, "methought, when once within this gate those enemies which infest the Broad way would annoy its travelers no more."

"Ah!" said Free Grace, "you will before long discover your mistake. Even he who has been allowed to be the boldest champion that ever trod this way, when he reached the gate of heaven, having fought the good fight of faith, was covered with the blood and dust of battle. Ofttimes was he heard, in the course of his journey, to exclaim: 'Let us labor, therefore, to enter into rest.' 'I fight not as one that beats the air, but I keep my body under, lest that by any means I myself should be a castaway.'"

Encouraging his fellow-soldiers, he used to say, "Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."

"But who are my enemies?" said Pilgrim; "so that when they come upon me I may be prepared to meet them."

"That I cannot tell," said the Keeper; "their name is Legion, for they are many. You will have to 'wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' Their wiles and stratagems will be numerous; sometimes they will contend with you in open warfare; sometimes they will try to decoy you from your path; sometimes they will use flattery; sometimes deceit; sometimes threatening. The great adversary, the devil, you may encounter, at one time, in the form of an angel of light, at another, as a roaring lion."

"Alas!" exclaimed Pilgrim, greatly alarmed at what he had just heard, "if our foes be thus numerous, which of us can stand? "I much fear," said he, with tremulous voice, "that I must resign the conflict."

"Yes, truly," said the Keeper, "if you went the warfare on your own charges; but I should have told you, that the great Captain of salvation, who has been made perfect through suffering, has himself trodden all the way. He has stopped the mouths of many ravenous lions; quenched with his own blood the violence of many fires; turned to flight the armies of many aliens; through death, he has destroyed him that had the power of death, and dragged him in triumph, covered with wounds, at the wheels of his chariot. And now, having thus paved the way, he assures every desponding traveler, that if he only 'put on the whole armor of God, he will be able to stand in the evil day.'"

So saying, Free Grace took down, one by one, the pieces of armor which hung round the walls of the Prospect Chamber, and assisted Pilgrim in girding them on. The first he presented to him was a large oval shield of burnished steel. On the front of it was inscribed a selection of the divine promises; and, in the inside, carved in larger characters, "FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU; BE NOT DISMAYED, FOR I AM YOUR GOD."

"This," said he, "is the Shield of Faith, burnished with the imputed righteousness of the Lord Immanuel. So hard is its metal, that the missiles of the adversary will rebound as they touch it, and be able to do

you no harm. Here, again," continued he, "is another part of your panoply;" and he put a massive bronze helmet on his head, whose plumes nodded over his brow. "This is called the Helmet of Salvation, with which to cover your head in the day of battle. And this," continued he, "is the Breastplate of Righteousness. With it you will protect your heart, against which (being most vulnerable) the fiery darts of the wicked will frequently be directed."

"And here, again," said he, reaching his hand to a higher part of the wall, "here is a weapon of-fensive as well as de-fensive. It is the Sword of the Spirit, without which the rest of the armor would prove ineffectual." The Keeper drew out the naked weapon from its sheath. It gleamed flashes of light on the other pieces of armor. "Take this," said he, "in your hand, and never let it go until you be safe within the walls of the New Jerusalem."

"Will you be pleased," said Pilgrim, "to fasten the sheath by the belt which surrounds my waist?"

"Not so," replied the other; "the sheath must remain with me; never can there be a moment in your journey when that sword can, with safety, be returned to its scabbard, and forsake the hand which grasps it."

"But how then," inquired Pilgrim, "can I retain its polish, and keep in their present brightness the rest of my armor? If they have no covering or preservative, a few hours will corrode them, and render them unfit for use."

"You are right," said Free Grace; "and I was about to supply you with what you desire." So I saw that he opened with a key, suspended by his side, an ancient oaken cupboard, from one of the shelves of which he brought down a box, carefully sealed. "Here," said he, "is a box of polish, which you must never omit morning and evening to use. It is called Prayer; and with it you will be able to keep bright and shining 'the whole armor of God.' Be careful, especially in seasons of peculiar danger and temptation, when the enemy is at hand, to keep rubbing your shield, so as to preserve its brilliancy, and not allow the rust to dim its luster, or obliterate the promises inscribed on it. These," he continued, "form the principal part of your attire. Here, too, is the golden Belt of Truth, to

fasten round your waist; to which I shall presently attach a drinking-cup, by which you may refresh yourself at the fountains in the way. Also, the Sandals of Gospel peace, which will preserve your feet from the rough and rugged stones scattered in your path. And this, last of all, is the Ring of Adoption," taking a richly-chased gem from his jewel-box, and putting it on the same hand with which Pilgrim held the shield; "this is the pledge of your sonship, the earnest of your admission into the royal family of heaven, and the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

"Behold," said Pilgrim, in a transport of adoring wonder, as he listened to the last words which fell from the lips of Free Grace; "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon me, that I should be called the son of God!"

"Yes," replied the other, "it is a glorious privilege; the highest seraph in the Celestial City knows no higher. But remember, that though an adopted son, you are yet a far way off from your heavenly Father's house, and it becomes you now to prepare well for the journey before you. But come with me," said his Conductor, "and before you proceed, I shall point out, by means of this large telescope, the country through which your road lies, and the different landmarks which may serve to guide you in safety to Mount Zion." So saying, he opened the window of the turret, which led out to a little balcony. It commanded an extensive prospect. Lofty mountains in the far distance, on the right and on the left, sparkled in the rays of the midday sun; their undulating slopes were studded here and there with towns, villages, and hamlets; the whole forming one great valley, terminated by the blaze of glory which hid from mortal vision the palaces of Zion. In the midst of this scene a mountain soared majestically above the rest of the landscape; and Pilgrim observed with the naked eye, and more distinctly with the telescope, that the Narrow way led directly up its steeps.

"This valley," said Free Grace, "through which your path lies, is still the Valley of Tears--a continuation of the same which was the place of your birth, bounded by those bright portals which no human eye has ever penetrated."

Pilgrim endeavored to direct the telescope to the Gate of Heaven. His

eyes, however, could not endure the brightness; but, from the momentary glance, he caught a view of countless myriads of blessed spirits, arrayed in vestures of white, with harps in their hands, and crowns on their heads.

"Who are these," said he, "arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

"These are they," answered the other, "who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the waters of this same fountain; therefore are they now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"And methinks," said Pilgrim, still looking through the telescope, "that I see, ranged on the turrets of its golden palaces, crowds of spectators, their eyes directed on this Valley of Tears, watching the travelers as they journey to Zion."

"These," replied the other, "are the redeemed from the earth--the patriarchs, and saints, and prophets of former generations, who, 'through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.' Their warfare is accomplished; but they still delight to follow the travelers they have left behind. 'Wherefore, seeing you also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset you, and run with patience the race that is set before you.'"

"After leaving this gate," said Free Grace, "continue to follow the strait and narrow path, without deviating to the right hand or to the left. Do not forsake it because of its becoming too narrow, or of its assuming a dreary and wilderness aspect. Was it not this which tempted you at first to stray down the Broad road, that there was no seeming beauty nor loveliness in the Narrow one to make it desirable?"

"True," replied Pilgrim; "I shall faithfully follow your directions."

"Well," continued the other, "prosecute this narrow path until it brings you to the Mount of Ordinances. There you will find a lodging-place, prepared by the Lord of the Way for the rest and refreshment of travelers, where you will receive further directions for prosecuting the journey."

On returning to the chamber, the Keeper took one of the rolls of parchment which lay on the table, and folding it carefully up, requested Pilgrim to deposit it in his bosom, underneath his breastplate. "This," said he, "is your Passport and Charter, written with blood, shed by Immanuel, the Son of the Highest, which will be demanded of you at the Gate of Heaven, and without which entrance cannot be obtained. Beware lest you lose it and perish by the way. Many who, like yourself, wish to arrive at the Celestial City by a short way from the Broad road, try to avoid the Narrow gate by climbing over the wall; but having no passport when they arrive at the portals of Mount Zion, their plea is rejected, and they are shut out at last."

Pilgrim, on unfolding this charter of his spiritual privileges, found it to contain these amazing words--"SON, BE OF GOOD CHEER; YOUR SINS BE FORGIVEN YOU." "BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE YOU A CROWN OF LIFE."

Being now fully equipped, and ready for his journey, he descended, in company with his Conductor, the stair which led from the armory. He was just about bidding Free Grace farewell, when the latter said: "Hark! hear you that distant music?"

Pilgrim listened, and a melodious sound came floating to his ear; but wafted from such a distance as to be scarcely audible.

"What anthem of triumph is that?" inquired Pilgrim.

"It is," replied the other, "the joy in heaven over another returning sinner. The first glimpse the heavenly watchmen, who crowd the battlements of Zion, caught of your burnished armor, was the signal for that burst of jubilee. Your entrance within the Narrow Gate will not suffer a harp, this day, there to be silent."

Pilgrim felt greatly strengthened by such a thought; and his Conductor, once more pressing his hand, committed him to the keeping of the King of the Way.

"The Lord be with you," said he, still keeping his arms extended as he pronounced his benediction on the departing traveler; "the Lord be with you, and keep you; the Lord cause his face to shine upon you; the Lord give you peace. The Lord be your stay on your right hand; the Lord suffer not the sun to smite you by day, nor the moon by night."

Then went Pilgrim on his way rejoicing, and saying: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man shall do unto me. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things I shall be more than conqueror. Thanks be to God, who gives me the victory!"

## CHAPTER 4

Now I saw in my dream that, in obedience to the injunctions of the Keeper of the gate, Pilgrim continued his journey. Lofty trees spread their foliage over his head, brooks of water flowed at his side, and, here and there, flowers, said to be transplanted from the gardens of the Celestial City by the Lord of the Way, filled the air with their fragrance.

As he proceeded, however, the aspect of the road began to change; the path he had hitherto been following became less defined. Sometimes it



lay through a narrow ravine, sometimes through marshy ground, or intersected with torrents of water; sometimes it led up steep places, in the ascent of which, had it not been for the sandals with which Free Grace had provided him, he would frequently have slipped. He was even, at times, tempted to forget the strict directions he had received, not to deviate from the straight road on account of its ruggedness; but whenever he did so, he had abundant reason for regret. I saw, indeed, on one occasion, in following a forbidden path, that he stumbled, and lost one of his sandals. The shock made him fall with violence to the ground. His shield, too, rolled into the mud. But he forthwith opened his box of polish to restore its brightness. This he did on his bended knees, confessing that "he stumbled, being disobedient;" entreating that the Lord of the Way would show him the path wherein he should walk, and "lead him in the way everlasting."

I observed that, after advancing a considerable way, he was walking, at nightfall, through a retired valley. As he paused, for a moment, to enjoy the quiet scene, his ear was arrested with plaintive cries, at no great distance from the path. They were accents of deep distress. He listened again, and heard the moanings as if of a dying man, accompanied with bitter lamentations. Pilgrim, being possessed of a feeling heart, forthwith proceeded to the spot whence the melancholy sounds were heard. He had not advanced many steps before perceiving an individual whose similarity of dress revealed him to be a fellow-traveler. He lay covered with dust, blood trickled from a wound in his side, his sword was flung away from him, and he was uttering doleful shrieks and cries. Pilgrim could only gather up, in the interval between his sobs, the burden of his lamentations; and the man seemed, for a long time, unconscious of his presence. "O!" exclaimed the melancholy sufferer, as he wrung his hands in agony, and then beat his breast; "O, that it were with me as in months past, when his candle shined upon my head, and when, by his light, I walked through darkness!"

"Alas! poor man," said Pilgrim, coming up and trying to comfort him, "what is the cause of your deep dejection?"

The stranger made no reply, but continued to groan more bitterly, and cry more loudly: "The Lord has forgotten to be gracious, and his tender

mercies are clean gone forever.

"What is your name?" again asked Pilgrim, the tear of heartfelt sympathy rolling down his own cheek.

"My name," said the other, startled by the unexpected feeling manifested by a stranger--"my name is Backslider; and rightly have I been so called."

"How came you," said Pilgrim, "to be here in this bed of dust? Where is your shield?"

"I have thrown it away," replied the other, "because it is of no more use to me. You will find it yonder," continued he, pointing to a place covered with mud, a few yards from his side.

Pilgrim lifted up a plate of rusted metal, which he never could have recognized to be a shield, once as brilliant and shining as that which he had in his own hand. The promises inscribed on it were either entirely effaced, or so covered with rust as to be illegible.

"How came you," said he, as he returned it to its firmer owner, "thus to throw away a weapon so indispensable to your safety, and suffer it to be thus corroded with rust? Did not Free Grace supply you at the Narrow Gate with Prayer-polish, to keep bright your whole coat of armor?"

"He did! he did!" replied the agonized man--the recollection of the fact extracting a deeper sigh from his bosom; "but last night, after I had climbed the steep rock you must have a little ago ascended, I felt so fatigued that I lay down to sleep, omitting to polish my armor; when I awoke in the morning, not only had the rust begun to cover it, but, lo! on examining my bag, I found that, during the night, the box of polish had dropped out, and had rolled down to the bottom of the precipice."

"But did you not return to recover it?" inquired Pilgrim.

"No," said Backslider. "I felt greatly disinclined again to descend the rock. Besides, there is here close by me a bed of sand, with which I tried to remove the rust; and it seemed to answer the purpose so well, that I thought I could manage to dispense with my lost polish."

"Foolish traveler!" said Pilgrim, "to forget so soon the injunctions of the Porter at the gate. But how is it that you do not turn and recover it without delay?"

"Alas!" replied he, in a tone of deep despondency, "I cannot. I am so weak from the loss of blood, that I am utterly unable to rise."

"How came you to receive that wound?" inquired Pilgrim.

"In an unguarded moment," said the other, "when I ventured to lay my armor aside, an adversary, called 'Besetting Sin,' took a deadly aim--a poisoned arrow sped from his bow, and pierced my heart. For many hours I have been lying here, stretched on this couch of tears and blood, listening to nothing but the echo of my own piteous cries, unable to go even the length of that little brook to moisten my parched tongue. Had the King of the road," continued he, "been intending to save me, he would, long before now, have given me support; but 'my way is surely hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.' He is justly weary of me, and leaves me to perish."

"No, no, poor sufferer!" replied Pilgrim, "Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' 'Wait on the Lord, then; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord.'"

Now I saw that Pilgrim ran and filled the silver drinking-cup which had been given him at the gate with the water of the adjoining brook. He put it to the man's pallid lips. He had no sooner tasted the refreshing draught than a glow of new life suffused his countenance. His sunken eye revived, and was lighted up with returning animation.

"Whoever," said the sufferer, as for the first time he spoke in a tone of calm composure, (the tear, not of sorrow, but of gratitude starting to his eye)--"whoever gives a cup of cold water to a fainting disciple, shall not lose his reward."

Pilgrim bathed his brow with the cooling draught, washed his wound, and stanchd it by applying some fresh linen, which had been given him by the Keeper of the Gate. He opened also his Bag, and shared, with the reviving man, a part of the Bread of Life. Producing his box of polish, they united together in endeavoring to restore the corroded shield to its former brightness. Having assisted him in buckling on his armor, and shaken off the remaining dust which adhered to it, he conducted him once more to the Narrow path from which he had wandered. Here they separated--Backslider to return to recover his lost polish; Pilgrim to prosecute, without delay, his journey Zionward.

## CHAPTER 5

Now I saw in my dream that Pilgrim had entered a richer and more fertile country. The mountains and valleys which for some time he had been traversing, and many of which were bleak and sterile, were exchanged for a region waving with crops of great luxuriance, relieved, at times, with verdant meadows and wooded slopes. He arrived at a place shadowed, on either side, with trees of enormous size, whose umbrageous tops formed a noble archway over his head; and the walls, which rose on either side, intimated that he was in the neighborhood of some princely residence. He had not advanced far when he observed the road was terminated by a gateway surmounted with the arms of royalty. The gate was flung open for the free passage of travelers; and on inquiring at the lodge to whom it belonged, he was informed it was the Palace of the Royal Psalmist of Israel, who had made provision, in his regal mansion, for the comfort and refreshment of wayfarers to Zion.

Pilgrim had now been for some days without sleep, and he rejoiced at the prospect of approaching rest. As he walked along the avenue which led to the Palace, his ear caught melodious sounds proceeding from the interior

of the building. He stood for many minutes entranced with delight, as he listened to the morning orison of praise, in which timbrel, and lute, and harp, and organ, seemed to have combined their richest harmonies in summoning all nature to rise and do homage to its Maker--

Praise you the Lord.

Praise you the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights.

Praise you him, all his angels: praise you him, all his hosts.

Praise you him, sun and moon: praise him, all you stars of light.

Praise him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters that be above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created.

He has also established them forever and ever: he has made a decree which shall not pass.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you dragons, and all deeps:

Fire and hail; snow and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word:

Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars:

Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:

Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth:

Both young men and maidens; old men and children:

Let them praise the name of the Lord:

For his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.

He also exalts the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints;

Even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him.

Praise you the Lord.

When the cadence of this anthem had died away, Pilgrim approached the door, and on knocking, a servant of the palace welcomed him in. On entering he found himself in the center of a hall, built of the choicest timber from the cedar forests of Lebanon, and hung all around with the trophies of battle. On one side were many gleaming coats of mail, which had been taken as spoil from the giants of Philistia, several of which measured six cubits in length. On the other he beheld the tawny hide of a lion, with the fleece of a little lamb by its side, the memorials of some hard-won encounter with this monarch of the forest. A few stones suspended in a sling, hung over an enormous javelin, whose staff was like a weaver's beam, and read the story of a bloody encounter, in which the prowess of some daring champion had been humbled by a few pebbles from the brook.

After gazing on these, Pilgrim was conducted by the attendant to the hall from which the music proceeded, and which still rolled on in solemn grandeur. When he entered, he beheld an aged monarch, his head silvered with years, seated on a golden throne, with a harp in his hand. Around him were collected groups of singers and choristers, performing on different instruments.

The Royal Psalmist cast a glance at the stranger; but without interrupting the sacred song, he beckoned on him to come and join their chorus: "O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." "Come, you that fear the Lord, and tell what he has done for your soul."

"I sought the Lord," said Pilgrim, unable any longer to keep silence, "and he heard me, and delivered me out of all my fears." "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

The Psalmist converted this into a new theme of thanksgiving, and again he awoke his harp-strings: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." "O, fear the Lord, you his saints;

for there is no want to those who fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but those who wait on the Lord shall not lack any good thing." And then, turning to the bands of youthful choristers below, he continued his song: "Come, you children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile; depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it."

Sometimes a more plaintive chord was struck; and the recollection of by-gone transgression coming before the mind of the aged monarch, would draw a tear to his eye. At other times, not himself, but the triumphs of the King of the Way formed the burden of his song: "You have ascended on high. You have led captivity captive. You have received gifts for men; yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." At others, his eye, glowing with prophetic fire, would make the chords tell of the glories of a millennial morning, when, instead of a few solitary travelers, the Narrow way would be crowded with Pilgrims to Zion, and the Lord Immanuel would be exalted on the throne of universal empire. "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish, and of the isles, shall bring presents. The kings of Seba and Sheba shall offer gifts. His name shall endure forever. It shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him. All nations shall call him blessed."

When these majestic notes had died away, Pilgrim was conducted by his attendant to a chamber in the Palace, where he had prepared for him water to wash his feet, and refresh himself.

"How often does your Royal Master," inquired he, engage in these exercises of devotion?"

"Seven times a day," answered the other, "does he praise God because of his righteous judgments. Often does he 'meditate upon him in the night-watches' and at midnight rises to give thanks to him for his mercies!"

On his return to the banqueting-hall, he shared with the aged king "a

feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Besides these, there was a plate of heavenly manna, gathered in the pleasure-grounds of the Palace; a jar full of pure water from the Fountain of Salvation, and honey from the rocky sides of Mount Pisgah, which, from the window, rose full in view. When the banquet was finished, the monarch poured some of the living water into the cup of salvation, saying, "Let us take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Let us now pay our vows together, in the presence of his people."

I saw that the guest and his entertainer, as they continued sitting together, encouraged one another with conversation touching the Lord of the Way, and the glories that were in keeping for his travelers.

"What shall we render," exclaimed Pilgrim, bursting into a transport of holy gratitude for the rich provision which was set before him--"what shall we render unto God for all his benefits toward us?" "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

"I will sing," exclaimed the other, "unto the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." "O how great is his goodness, which he has laid up for those who fear him; which he has wrought for those who trust in him before the sons of men!"

"The sorrows of death," said Pilgrim, again detailing the wonder God had done for him--"the sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord. O Lord! I beseech you, deliver my soul." "He delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling; and he has now set me in a large place, and delivered me, because he delighted in me. He has fed me also with the finest of the wheat; and with honey from the rock has he satisfied me." "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men!"

"I have been young," responded the aged monarch, detailing, in his turn, the experience of an eventful life--"I have been young, and now am old; yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.



Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help: whose hope is in the Lord his God."

With such themes of converse the Psalmist of Israel and the traveler to Zion regaled themselves at the close of the day. Night was beginning to close around them. Rock, and forest, and mountain, which were spread before them in the extensive prospect from the window of the banqueting chamber, began to be enveloped in its sable covering. Soon after, the sky was bespangled with stars, and the silvery moon rose behind the summit of Mount Pisgah. The Psalmist, with his harp in his hand, conducted Pilgrim out to a large balcony in front of the window. The harp-strings were once more awakened; and amid the stillness of night, the air was again vocal with praise.

"The heavens," commenced the aged king, joining his voice with the music; "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the skies shows forth his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge." "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers; the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; what is man, that you are mindful of him? and the son of man, that you visit him?"

Their evening ascription being ended, Pilgrim was again conducted to his sleeping apartment, where he mused in gratitude on all the goodness and mercy which had been made to pass before him; and having imparted a brighter than ordinary polish to his armor, he cast himself on his couch, and closed his eyes in slumber. His sleep was crowded with dreams of the preceding day; and he continued to enjoy his soothing rest undisturbed, until an early hour in the morning, when, once more, the soft cadence of the harp stole upon his ear. Raising himself from his pillow, he listened. It was the aged monarch already begun his orisons. The words reached him: "My voice shall you hear in the morning, O Lord! in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up." "I laid me down and slept; I awaked: for the Lord sustained me!" "My soul waits for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than those who do watch for the morning!" "When I awake, I am still with you!"

Pilgrim could joyfully have tarried many days on this spot of holy ground; but he saw it would be needful for him to prosecute his journey. He

resolved, therefore, to set out without delay, in hopes that the morrow's dawn would find him on the summit of Pisgah, across which his pathway led, and from whence he would obtain a nearer glimpse of the Land of Promise, and the Celestial City. Accordingly, having anew girded on his armor, he bade his royal entertainer an affectionate farewell. The aged Psalmist once more embraced his guest, and committing him to the keeping of the King of the Way, invoked on his harp a benediction on his departure: "The Lord hear you in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend you; send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion. Remember all your offerings, and accept your burnt-sacrifices. Grant you according to your own heart, and fulfill all your counsel." Pilgrim proceeded on his journey until the last faint sound of the melody died away on the morning breeze. He was soon once more outside the gate in the depths of the forest; but, full of faith and hope, "he went on his way rejoicing."

## CHAPTER 6

Now I saw in my dream that Pilgrim continued to pursue, for many days, his path unobstructed; his heart filled with "all peace and joy in believing." His way led through a rich undulating country, where quiet rivers wound their way through wooded knolls and verdant meads. Shepherds and their flocks were every here and there reposing on the meadows, or seeking shelter from the sultry heat amid the thickets which fringed the margin of the streams. Pilgrim delighted at times to enter into conversation with them; and often did they sing together words with which he had become familiar in the palace of the sweet Psalmist of Israel: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

But though now enjoying these periods of spiritual refreshment, he was soon to be reminded of the great truth of which he had been forewarned

by the Keeper of the Gate, that the pathway to the Celestial City is one of "much tribulation."

After advancing some days on his journey, he beheld in the distance, in the very center of the narrow way, a large fire, resembling a blazing furnace. It was called "The Furnace of Affliction." On reaching it he trembled with fear, his knees smote one against the other, the Shield of Faith fell with its face to the earth, and he wrung his hands in despair. Standing with his eyes fastened on the ground, they happened to glance on the inside of his shield, on which he read the inscription: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. When you pass through the fire, you shall not be burned." With this promise of the Lord of the Way, he tried to resume his courage, and made an effort to lift up the weapon, which, from its fall, was covered with the mire of the road. But his hand again fell powerless, and he himself sunk to the earth! Now I saw, as he thus lay, fainting under the heat of the fire, and terrified at the thought of being obliged to pass through its flames, a stranger was seen approaching. It was a female figure clothed in a sable robe, with a meek expression on her countenance. Her name was Resignation. She came up with slow and silent step, and addressed Pilgrim thus--

"Think it not strange, afflicted traveler, concerning this fiery trial that is to try you, as if some strange thing happened unto you; but rather rejoice."

"How can I rejoice," said Pilgrim, his voice quivering as he spoke, "to plunge into tormenting flames?"

"No, no," replied Resignation; "you might have known that the Lord Immanuel, whose nature and whose name is love, would never have placed that on the way which would destroy those he has bought with his own blood."

"Is it not the property of fire," replied Pilgrim, "to destroy?"

"Yes," said the other, "there are fires for destruction, but there are fires for purification also. The flames in the bottomless pit, which once you saw, are flames to consume; but these," continued she, pointing to the

furnace before her, "are flames to refine. And the light sufferings they inflict, which are 'but for a moment will work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'"

"But," said Pilgrim, "I have no strength of my own for passing through this dreadful furnace!"

"Fear not!" replied Resignation; "the Lord of the Way has promised to 'perfect his strength in weakness.' No," said she, pointing to the center of the flames, "see you not in the midst of that burning fiery furnace 'one like unto the Son of God?' Immanuel himself who was made perfect through a furnace of suffering, more scorching far than this, waits to conduct you through. Only be strong, and of a good courage; gird on your armor, walk boldly forward, and a hair of your head shall not be singed."

"But," continued Pilgrim, his faith still wavering, "is there no by-road which the King has provided, by which travelers may avoid this great and unnecessary evil?"

"Call it not unnecessary, faithless one," said the other; "had you not, in your trepidation, thrown away your shield among the mud of the way, you would have read, as one of the most comforting of all the promises, inscribed there: 'I afflict not willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' That fiery furnace would never have been there could it have been spared."

So saying, Resignation lifted up the shield from the mud. She applied to Pilgrim for the Prayer-polish to restore its brightness, and recover to view the many obliterated promises which covered its face. He sprung up from his posture of weakness, and once more assayed his armor. "It is deep ingratitude in me," said he, addressing the stranger, thus to distrust the Lord of the Way, when I remember what great things he has done for me in times past: and therefore, now I shall resolutely 'go in the strength of the Lord God.' 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'"

Now I saw that Pilgrim immediately rushed into the midst of the flames, Resignation following him. He uttered a few cries from their smartings; but He whose form he had seen in the midst of the fires, supported him

with his arm, divided the flames before him, and whispered words of peace in his ear. He gave him some ointment, called "Grace," to enable him to bear the pain, and put a bracelet on his arm, as another pledge of adoption; on which Pilgrim afterward found the inscription: "Whom the Lord loves he chastens."

Moreover, with a censer full of much incense which he held in his hand, he perfumed his person, and gave a perpetual efficacy to the Prayer-polish. And after pointing him upward to the top of the Mount of Ordinances, saying, "There I will meet with you and commune with you from off the Mercy-seat," he vanished out of his sight. No sooner had Pilgrim come forth from the furnace, than he broke out into a song of triumphant joy: "It was good for me that I was afflicted." "God has been my refuge and strength, a very present help in the time of trouble." "You have upheld me by your right hand." When I said, "My foot slips, your mercy, O Lord, held me up." "Heart and flesh fails; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

Looking to his armor, it shone with a greater luster; the plumes of his helmet, which had lost their original hues by being covered with the dust of the way, were purified; his sword, bedimmed by long exposure, gleamed with fresh brilliancy; the rust, contracted in the plates of his armor, was removed by the flames. He himself had acquired fresh ardor for his journey; and memory long continued to cherish the furnace as a place of "reviving and refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

It was now evening, and he was approaching the base of Mount Pisgah; the full moon had again risen on its rocky steeps, and vied with the fires he had just left behind him in lighting up his path. Resignation, before parting, directed him on the way; and though the mountain was lofty, and almost precipitous, he felt such enlargement of heart that, before long, he found himself in safety on the summit. The pale moon-beams just shed sufficient light to conduct him to a grotto hollowed out in the rock, where a natural couch was formed. On this, after covering himself carefully with his shield, he flung himself down to rest; and in a few minutes his eyes were closed in slumber, not without a longing expectation of the prospect awaiting him on the approaching morning.

Now I saw in my dream, that when the morning began to break, Pilgrim started from his couch; and having carefully polished his armor, and buckled it on, he came out of the grotto which had formed his nightly resting-place. The sun was pouring a flood of light on the valley at his feet, and which, in the far distance, was terminated by the glittering palaces of Mount Zion.

Behind him lay the long road he had lately traversed, with its varied landscape of forest and mountain. When he thought of the way by which the Lord had led him--of the difficulties he had overcome, the enemies he had vanquished, the seasons of refreshment he had enjoyed--he could not refrain from following the example of other travelers, by setting up a stone of remembrance at the mouth of his grotto, with this inscription: "Hitherto has the Lord helped me."

Never, as yet, during the course of his journey, did Pilgrim feel such enlargement as here. The previous night of weeping and affliction was well worth enduring, on account of the joy that now came in the morning. The pure atmosphere he breathed, far above the vapors which overhung the path below, gave him a buoyancy of spirit to which before he had been a stranger; nor could he forget that much of this holy joy he owed to the refining furnace, through which he had so lately passed, and which, at the time, had appeared so terrible.

Now I saw that he repaired to an eminence, which, being immediately adjoining, often gave its name to the entire mountain. It was called the Mount of Ordinances. Here he found an arbor erected for the refreshment of travelers, hollowed out of the living rock, blooming with flowers of varied loveliness, which had been transplanted by the King of the Way from the gardens of the Celestial City. On a little table in the center was placed some bread and wine, of which travelers were invited to partake, as memorials of His dying love, as well as for the nourishment of their own souls.

The words were chiseled on the rock, above the entrance: "Do this in remembrance of me."

On entering, he found himself welcomed by a servant of the Lord

Immanuel, with the Gospel Roll in his hand.

"Welcome," said the latter, "to this gracious feast the Lord of the Way has provided for you: 'Eat, drink! yes drink abundantly, Beloved!'"

Pilgrim gladly partook of the gracious provision. "Surely," exclaimed he, as he broke in his hands the heavenly manna, "surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not; this is none other than the house of God; this is the very gate of heaven!"

"The great Captain of your salvation," said the other, "delights to meet you on this holy ground of Communion; and in these emblems gives you tokens of his love, and pledges that that love shall never be withdrawn. Here thirsty travelers are refreshed, troubled ones comforted, the downcast revived, and the weary and heavy-laden obtain rest."

"Lord, evermore," exclaimed Pilgrim, as he continued to partake of the feast spread before him--"Lord, evermore give me this bread! I have more joy than the men of the world have, even when their corn, and their wine, and their oil, do most abound; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him!"

"The Lord Immanuel," continued the other, "desires to make this not only a place of Commemoration, but a place of Covenant. While he seeks that these memorials should remind you of his dying love, he desires you also to renew here your engagements to be his only, and his wholly, and his forever!"

Then did Pilgrim, rising from the table, and lifting up his hands, swear by Him who lives forever and ever, that "whatever others do, as for him he would serve the Lord!"

"I have sworn," said he, "and will perform. 'Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?' I will follow you, O great Captain of my salvation, wherever you see meet to lead me. 'Where you go I will go, and where you dwell I will dwell; your people shall be my people.' Yes, death itself shall not separate between you and you!"

"The Lord Immanuel," replied the other, "accepts the vows your lips have uttered, and by these outward tokens ratifies, on his part, all the blessings of the Covenant." So saying, methought I saw the ambassador of the King taking the charter which Pilgrim had received from Free Grace, and sealed it afresh with a golden seal, or signet; the motto on which was: "Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you the Crown of Life!"

Precious to Pilgrim were these moments of communion on the Mount of Ordinances. Often would he interrupt the conversation, and exclaim: "Lord, it is good for me to be here!" At last they began to descend the mountain path--the Lord's ambassador embracing him, and exhorting him to run with patience the race still set before him. "What time soever," said he, your heart is overwhelmed, and in perplexity, look back to this Mount of Ordinances, and remember the glorious things which you did there see and hear."

"What!" said Pilgrim, in astonishment, "do you speak of sorrow, and perplexity, and darkness, as yet awaiting me? Methinks this holy joy which now I feel can never be clouded. No man will ever be able to take it from me."

"Alas!" replied the other, "you know little of the pilgrimage in which then are engaged, if you do suppose your struggles and conflicts at an end. See you," continued he, pointing to the golden towers of the New Jerusalem, "see you yonder shining battlements? Never shall your spiritual joys be complete, never shall your conflicts cease, until you are safe within those gates!" This season you have now enjoyed is only a transient foretaste, to refresh your spirit. It would not be well were it otherwise. Were no cloud to disturb your present joys, it would lead you to forget your dependence on an arm stronger than your own, and to think you had strength when you have none. No, no; you must not yet speak of rest; that is not a word for earth. It is known only in heaven. Often still in this Valley of Tears will you be covered with the scars of battle. Can you not, even now," continued he, pointing to a remote part of the landscape, "discern that dense smoke? There lies the City of Carnality, the chief stronghold of the Prince of Darkness, wherein many a hapless traveler has perished. The Narrow way passes right through its streets; and its inhabitants, who are known by the name of 'Worldlings,' will lay wait for you, and try to sift



you as wheat. But fear not! The Lord of the Way will be with you. He has prayed for you, that your faith fail not. His grace will be made sufficient for you; only be strong, and of a good courage, and the rest that remains for you within the gates of Zion will be all the sweeter and more refreshing, by reason of the conflicts which have preceded it."

So saying, he pronounced his benediction of peace; and Pilgrim, with tears of mingled joy and sorrow, parted from him to prosecute his journey. He felt this season of communion an earnest of what was awaiting him within the gates of the Celestial City, when he would be "forever with the Lord." Full of thankfulness, he went on his way praising and blessing God for all the things which he had heard and seen, singing, as he went along, one of the loveliest of those songs which had been taught him by the sweet Psalmist of Israel--

O send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me--let them bring me unto your holy hill, and to your tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy. Yes, upon the harp will I praise you, O God, my God. Why are then cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God--for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

## CHAPTER 7

Now I saw in my dream that, as evening drew on, Pilgrim was desirous of pausing at the nearest resting-place to obtain lodging for the night. Wreaths of smoke ascending in the calm sky, directed him to a village in the distance, embosomed in wood. The last beams of the sun were falling on its humble abodes as he approached. Here and there the lights in the little oriel windows, blending with the lingering sunbeams, proclaimed the return of the peasant from his toil; while, at times, the simple notes of the evening hymn of praise were wafted to his ear.

Approaching the first cottage of the hamlet by a wicket-gate, he knocked

and solicited admission.

"Who stands without?" demanded a gentle voice from within.

"A traveler to Mount Zion," replied the other, "who is fleeing from the 'wrath to come,' and claims from a stranger that hospitality which was never denied by one humble follower of the Lord Immanuel to another."

"Neither shall it be so now," said the speaker, unbarring the door, and disclosing the figure of an aged female, simply attired. Her name was Poverty; and a little handmaid, called Contentment, shared with her the frugal comforts of her lot. On the entrance, above the doorway, he observed these words inscribed--

"A little that a just man has is better

Than the riches of many wicked."

Now I saw that, after assisting Pilgrim to wash his feet, and providing him with necessary refreshment, they entered into mutual converse about their respective history and condition.

"You seem," said Pilgrim, addressing the elder of the two, "to be strangers to many outward comforts; and yet, methinks, happier disciples of the Lord Immanuel I have not seen in the course of my journey."

"We are poor in this world," replied Poverty; "but God has made us to be rich in faith, and heirs together of the kingdom of heaven. I feel, that in this village of Godliness, with my handmaid Contentment, I have 'great gain.'"

"But methinks," said Pilgrim, "I remember one of your name, perhaps a kinsman of your own, a Broadway traveler, who seemed of all men the most miserable. He was accompanied by two associates, called Improvidence and Vice, and was an object of abhorrence even to the worst of the Broadway men.

"Alas!" replied the other, "if bereft of God, I would be bereft indeed; no condition is there more pitiable than godless poverty, none more blessed

than poverty when sanctified. 'The Lord is my portion,' and I feel I need no other."

"Enviably lot!" said Pilgrim. "You also seem to be blest with devout neighbors; but, if poor as yourself, I see not how, in the midst of their daily toil, they can find time for the service of the Lord Immanuel."

"Where there is a will there is a way," replied the other. "You will generally find the man who is most diligent in business to be most fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Besides, in our lowly estate, as there are fewer prizes which worldly ambition holds out to us, we have greater inducement to seek our treasure in heaven--we have fewer of the 'many things' about which to be 'careful and troubled;' and have more leisure to think of the 'one thing needful.'"

"Methinks, also, in that precious volume," continued Pilgrim, pointing to the sole occupant of the table--"methinks, in that great Guide-Book to Immanuel's land you will find much to make you rejoice that this lowly condition has been your."

"Yes, indeed," replied she, "our lot is a blessed one, inasmuch as in its very lowliness we are like our Divine Master. The Lord Immanuel was himself a Poor Man. For our sakes he became poor; so poor, that 'while the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of man had not where to lay his head.'"

"Most true," said Pilgrim. "Besides, I have always thought it one of the wonders of that sacred Volume," pointing to the book at their side, "that it is emphatically the poor man's."

"Yes, verily," replied Poverty; "while it contains truths the noblest and most sublime, it contains truths so plain and simple that the humblest can understand them. I feel, when reading of prophets and apostles, and of the Lord of apostles, that I am following the footsteps of the poor. Thus I see that poverty can have no disgrace, for it was honored and sanctified by the Lord Immanuel himself, who chose it as his only birthright."

Thus Pilgrim continued his conversation with these humble strangers,

until the fatigues of the day induced him to retire to rest. As morning dawned, he once more resumed his journey, leaving behind a memorial of gratitude for the kindness bestowed on him; and receiving, in recompense, the parting benediction of grateful hearts: "Blessed is he that considers the poor."

Now I saw in my dream that he pursued his journey without interruption until nightfall. His path led through a succession of wooded glades, intersected occasionally with marshy ground. As he proceeded, the country began to have few traces of human habitations, until even a shepherd and his flock were rarely seen to relieve the solitude; and the only refreshment he himself could obtain was at the streams of water which, now and then, crossed the way. As the shadows of evening began to fall, he arrived at a secluded place, in the center of a forest, where was a large building, called "The King's Hospital." There travelers who had grown weak or faint, or had been wounded by enemies, resorted for cure to the "Great Physician,"--by which name the Lord Immanuel was here known. Nor was it confined to Narrow-way-men only: occasionally some Broad way travelers, wounded by the arrows of conviction, or fainting under trial, sought shelter in it. But in their case the residence was brief; for, not submitting to the Physician's cure, and preferring false ones of their own, they soon returned to the way of destruction.

Now I saw that one of the servants of the Great Physician conducted Pilgrim to a large hall in the Hospital, filled with beds and couches, on which the sick and wounded were laid. Some of these were groaning heavily; others were lying with pallid lips and sunken eyes, scarce able to endure the feeble light admitted from above; others cast an imploring look of mercy toward the door as they saw the stranger enter.

"We shall go," said the conductor, "first to the ward where the more hopeless patients are laid. They are Broad-way-men, driven here by fear, or often by the stunning blow of trial, to take temporary refuge; but 'they endure only for a while.' Their hearts get hardened, and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning! But follow me," continued he, "perhaps the admonition of a Narrow way traveler, like yourself, may induce them to think of their dreadful peril and danger."

The first bedside at which they stood was that of a patient called Self-Righteousness. "This," said Pilgrim's guide, "is a man who now fancies himself 'rich, and having need of nothing;' whereas, you see he is wretched, and miserable, and naked."

On approaching his couch, the attendant offered him some white linen, which had been prescribed by the Great Physician, to stanch the blood flowing from a wound in his side; but the other tore it away, and persisted, instead, to bind it with some squalid rags scattered on his pillow.

In the same recess was a patient of the same name. He was not, like the other, laid on a couch, but was pacing, with haughty air, the floor of the hall in which he was confined. A hectic flush suffused his face--such as deceives the consumptive patient when he mistakes, for a sign of returning health, the token of death. His miserable dress was here and there relieved by a bright patch, or gaudy tinsel, which only made the rest appear more wretched. "There," said the conductor, "is a deluded maniac, who fancies himself the heir of a kingdom, while he is the most miserable of beggars."

Now I saw that Faithful, (for that was the name of the attendant.) approaching, invited Self-Righteousness to come to the opposite side of the apartment, where was a large mirror, called the "Mirror of the Law," into which he urged him, in vain, to look. "This," continued he, addressing Pilgrim, "is the grand means of disclosing to such patients their real condition. So long as they continue 'measuring themselves by themselves,' and comparing themselves among themselves', there is little hope of recovery. But by this Law Mirror they obtain a 'knowledge of sin', and become convinced, that unless they have another clothing of righteousness than their own, 'they will in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Passing on from these, Pilgrim and his conductor stood by an adjoining couch, where was a patient, whose name was Indifference. His countenance bore a still more ghastly appearance than those they had already witnessed. His pale cheek and languid eye revealed death to be at hand.

"You are madly trifling with your eternal all!" said Faithful, unwilling to pass the couch of the deluded man without a word of admonition. "You are hovering on the confines of two worlds! Do you not consider that the breath of your nostrils is all that is between you and the bar of God?" But, reckless of his situation, he smiled at the fears of his attendants, received with cold and heartless concern the warnings sent him by the Great Physician, and, turning himself on his pillow, pursued his idle song.

At his side lay a miserable man, named Despair; a painful contrast to the other. He was not, like him, insensible to his condition. On the contrary, his groans and cries wrung piteously through the hall. Pilgrim's attendant attempted, once and again, to mix a soothing draught, and present it to his lips, which would have ministered to him immediate relief; but he dashed it to the ground, wringing his hands, and exclaiming, "Undone! undone!" Faithful sought to remonstrate. He assured him that still there was hope: for in representing his case to the Great Physician, he had received the reply: "I have no pleasure in his death; but far rather that he would turn and live."

"No," replied the agonized sufferer, "the medicine which might heal others can be of no avail for me. Let the footsteps of Death approach when they may, my doom is sealed; to dream of recovery is vain."

"Neither your name nor your language, unhappy man," said Pilgrim, "should be heard here. Despair is not a word for earth. It is known only in the bottomless pit. Giant Despair is the gloomy warder of that place where hope never enters; and it is only when he turns his key, and leaves you in the blackness of eternal darkness, that you can disbelieve the efficacy of the Great Physician. He is now able to save 'even to the uttermost.' Where is the patient he has either failed or refused to cure?"

But the man would not listen to admonition. He wrapped himself in his bed-clothes, again wrung his hands, and cried louder than ever: "Lost! lost! lost!"

Now I saw that they next stood at the couch of a patient called Procrastination, a kinsman of the traveler Pilgrim met outside the Narrow way gate. He was laid on his back, breathing heavily, and the

symptoms of death were fast gathering round his pillow. "This," said the conductor, "is an example of the folly of delaying to adopt the prescribed remedy. Here is a man who received a wound in his hand, which he considered too trifling to demand attention. He urged one night's delay. But delay has only aggravated the suffering. The fatal symptoms increase, and now the venom has spread through the whole arm."

"Poor patient!" continued Faithful, addressing the sufferer, "will it not be better far for you, if your right hand offend you, to cut it off, and cast it from you, and to enter into life maimed, than that your whole body be cast into hell fire?"

"Yet one other night," feebly whispered the other, "and tomorrow I promise to submit."

"To-morrow," said the conductor, "may come; but come too late. Today if you will hear the voice of the Great Physician, harden not your heart. Behold! now is the accepted time; for, be assured, by another night your pulse will be still, and you will be beyond the reach alike of physician and cure."

"Well, perhaps," replied the other, unwilling to offend, and yet reluctant to submit, "perhaps, before evening comes, I may consent; but 'go your way at least for this time; at a more convenient season I will call for you.'" So saying he once more closed his eyes, and left Pilgrim and his guide to pursue their way.

## CHAPTER 8

Now I saw in my dream that Pilgrim was conducted by Faithful into an ante-chamber. "This," said his guide, "is a room appropriated for aged

and infirm travelers, who, on account of their years, are able to prosecute their journey no further."

On entering the apartment, he beheld an individual whose locks were whitened with age. The armor, too, which the veteran warrior had still girded on, though bearing the marks of many hard encounters, had lost none of its brightness. His sword, though exhibiting a blunted edge, yet gleamed with a brilliancy as dazzling as on the day when it was unsheathed in the armory at the Narrow Gate. Pilgrim just approached as the last tear he had to shed was standing in his eye. "It is enough!" said he. "Now, Lord, let you your servant depart in peace." A placid smile suffused his countenance--his eye was fixed on the gates of the Celestial City. While other objects around him were growing dim, this glorious vision seemed to be brightening. "Go on," said he addressing the stranger, "go on this Narrow way that leads unto life, and take the assurance of one who has trod it long, that it is a way of pleasantness, and a path of peace. 'I have fought a good fight,'" continued the departing saint, raising himself once more, and the last glow of life beaming on his face, "'I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.' We shall meet no more until we meet within the gates of yonder Celestial City. Farewell! farewell!" He muttered one parting groan, and next moment was sleeping sweetly in Jesus.

Now I saw that angels were waiting with a chariot ready to carry him to the gates of Mount Zion. Pilgrim followed the bright retinue until the last of the train was lost in the glories which encompassed the New Jerusalem.

Returning again to the chamber they had just left, Pilgrim and his conductor approached a patient whose name was Sorrow. She was arrayed in a sable mantle, with a tear on her cheek. At her side sat Resignation, the same benevolent and pious female whom Pilgrim met in passing through the Fiery Furnace. She had a book in her hand, from whose pages she was endeavoring to soothe her companion, who sat brooding, in silent dejection, over the wreck of some treasured joys.



"This is one," said Faithful, "who dwelt, not long since, in an arbor near the City of Carnality. It was once trellised and adorned with some of the loveliest plants which the Valley could supply. Shady gourds combined with flowers of various tints and fragrance to spread a covering over her head, and to form a defense from the noonday sun. But, in an unexpected moment, a canker worm preyed on the roots. One bud alone survived when the rest had perished; but this, too, has just been plucked by the hand of Death, and now, as you see, lies blighted and withered at her feet. Her earthly flowers having perished, she has come here seeking the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley, and to have her bosom soothed with the Balm of Gilead, which, she has heard, the Great Physician applies to bleeding hearts."

Now I saw that when Pilgrim approached, he heard Resignation singing, in plaintive strains, the following lines to her companion--

"Why weep for the beautiful flower,  
As if premature plucked away?  
Survived had its blossoms that hour,  
Would have lived, but have lived to decay!

"But now it has left this cold scene  
To blossom in regions above,  
Where no storm, where no clouds intervene  
To darken the sunshine of love!

"O happy, thrice happy, the time,  
When again you shall meet, never to sever,  
With that flower, in that happier clime,  
To bask in bright sunshine forever!"

"Yes," said Resignation, dwelling on the last words she had uttered; "wait until that day of cloudless sunshine, and in 'God's light you will see light.' Then will you be brought to confess that he was 'righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.'"

"'His way,' indeed, seems to be 'in the sea,'" replied the other, "'and his path in the deep waters, and his judgments unsearchable.' But I know 'the Lord of the Way does all things well.'"

"Yes," said Resignation; "he will himself be a richer portion than any earthly one. The Living Fountain will supply the broken cistern."

"I have found it! I have found it!" said the weeping mourner, rejoicing through her tears. "The Great Physician has cheered my solitary hours with his own blessed presence, and lighted up this heart with untold joy. I never knew the tenderness of his dealings until now. He seems to be 'touched with a feeling of all my infirmities.'"

"And methinks you can bear testimony," said Pilgrim, "that you did obtain no cordial to heal your aching breast until you received it from Him."

"None! none!" said the other: "every other earthly joy seemed but a mockery. Earthly refuges were refuges of lies. Earthly comforters in vain sought to soothe my woes. But when I came seeking the balm in Gilead, and the Physician there, he said to me, 'I will not leave you comfortless. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives.'"

"What else said he unto you?" continued Pilgrim.

"He told me," replied the other, "what his own precious name once was: THE MAN OF SORROWS'; that there was not a pang I could feel but his own holy bosom had been rent with the same; that 'in all my afflictions he had been afflicted.' And when I spoke to him of my crosses and losses, he answered me in tones of tender rebuke, 'Was there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?'"

"I see you feel," said Pilgrim, "as all his suffering people have felt, that the Lord of the Way makes up for the loss of earthly blessings."

"I do." said the other. "'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.' Many have been my trials; this Valley of Tears seems every day truer to its own name; but, God be thanked, amid the wreck of earthly blessings, I have still left the better Friend--Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

"Who the Lord loves," continued Resignation, reading still from the

volume she held in her hands, "he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.' 'He afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men.' 'We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' 'What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter.'"

"Even so!" replied the submissive sufferer, clasping her hands--"even so, Father; for so it seems good in your sight.' 'I will be dumb; I will open not my mouth, because you did it.' 'Not as I will, but as you will.' 'The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Having been refreshed and strengthened, before departing, by the Lord of the Way, and again warned of the dangers he would have to encounter in the city which had been pointed out to him from the Mount of Communion, Pilgrim commenced, with renewed ardor, the journey which yet remained, cheered with the prospect of the glorious crown which the Lord of the Way held out as the covenanted reward of the "faithful unto death."

Now I saw in my dream that, before he had advanced far, he was overtaken by a fellow-traveler, girded from head to foot with the Christian armor, whose eye was steadily directed to the gate of the Celestial City. So eagerly, indeed, did he pursue his way, that he would have passed Pilgrim unobserved, had not his attention been arrested by one of the Songs of Zion, with which the latter was cheering himself in a solitary part of the road.

"Where are you bound, my good traveler?" inquired the stranger, addressing Pilgrim. "Methinks, from your attire, as well as your song, you are a brother journeying to Immanuel's land."

"You have conjectured right," said Pilgrim; "and I was even now comforting myself with the thought, that so much of the wilderness is over, and that the time is so near at hand when these weapons of warfare will be needed no more. I am enfeebled with many wounds; but one hour within yonder gates will make me forget them all; therefore, 'though faint, I am still pursuing', and have the assurance of my heavenly Lord and Master that final victory will at length be mine."

"You speak well," replied the other, "and as if love to the Lord of the Way really burned in your bosom. So crowded is this Narrow way now-a-days with false professors, (ever since a powerful potentate, called Fashion, took down the wall of separation which formerly divided it from the Broad way,) that I cannot but regard with suspicion its reputed travelers, lest they should be Broad-way-men in disguise. But," continued he, "I am persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though I thus speak. Perhaps, if we pursue our journey together, we may prove, by the blessing of our common King, comforters in each other's sorrows, and helpers of each other's joys."

"Gladly," replied Pilgrim, "will I accept of your proffered friendship; for truly my spirit quails for fear as I behold the smoke of yonder City of Carnality darkening the plain, and when I think of the evils that may likely befall me there."

"Never fear," replied the stranger, "you have a stronger arm than that of a fellow-traveler to lean upon, and to conduct you safe through its dangers. But come, meanwhile, and as we pursue our journey let us recount our experiences of the Lord's kindness, that so we may be the better prepared for the trials which may there await us. Tell me, I pray you," continued he, "your history and fortunes--when it was the Lord of the Way in mercy first snatched you from destruction, and arrayed you in your present attire?"

Here Pilgrim minutely related the marvelous interposition of the Lord Immanuel, as well as the other manifestations of grace he had subsequently experienced. The stranger, at intervals, could not repress his feelings. Pilgrim felt his own gratitude heightened and increased in calling afresh to his recollection the wondrous things the King of the Way had done for him.

"Be pleased, kind friend," said Pilgrim, after he had concluded his own narration, "to recount to me, in turn, the adventures which have befallen you in your journey. What is your name? and what first induced you to turn your face Zionward?"

"My name," answered the other, "was once Neglecter; but it has been

changed by the King of the Way into Theophilus, which, by interpretation, is Lover of God. The place of my birth was adjoining your own, in a village hard by the Broad road. I was the familiar friend and companion of those very men you met with on the way, Formality, Church-goer, and Almost-persuaded, and induced, like yourself, to adopt their creed. I thought my own religion, on an average, far above my neighbors'; for I was not a despiser, as most of them were, but only a Forgetter. I was not an Enemy to salvation, but only neglected it; and hence my name."

"But were there none of your own household," said Pilgrim, "to remind you of your danger, and the consequences of such neglect?"

"Alas!" said Theophilus, "it was in my case too true that a man's foes are those of his own household. My awakened convictions would often have roused me from my sloth had they not been overborne by those who professed most to love me. They told me that I was as good as others; that I had apologies which other men had not, from press of business, for postponing the question; and that, if I would only have patience, the time was coming when they would all join me, and seek it in good earnest."

"And how, then," inquired Pilgrim, "were you at last roused to a sense of your dreadful danger?"

"Ah!" replied the other, "the Lord Immanuel would not suffer me to get rest by day, nor sleep by night, by reason of his loud and earnest remonstrances. The mingled severity and sweetness of his entreaties is still sounding in my ears."

"How did he speak with you?" said Pilgrim.

"So great was his love," answered the other, "and so resolved was he to effect my rescue, that he sent messenger after messenger to my door to plead for admission. He knocked by Providence, by Affliction, by Bereavement, by Prosperity, by Adversity; and each one of these, in a voice louder than the rest, sounded the question in my ears: 'How shall you escape if you neglect such great salvation?' That question allowed me no peace. It followed me in my solitary walks; it crowded my waking

hours by day, and disturbed my dreams by night. I tried to drown it in the cup of intemperance, and chase it away amid scenes of mirth; but if I succeeded in hushing it at night, it was sure to return upon me louder than ever in the morning!"

"And what said your family all this while?" said Pilgrim. "Did they observe your anxiety of mind, and make no effort to minister alleviation?"

"Miserable comforters they were", replied the other; "they called me madman and fool, laughed at my childish anxieties, and only invited new guests to banish what they called the fit of frenzy away."

"But I have only interrupted you. I long to hear the result."

"Well," continued Theophilus, "as I lay one night stretched on my couch, a messenger was once more sent by the Lord Immanuel to renew his accustomed knockings. Never before were they so long nor so loud: so much so, indeed, that even some of my own family were startled from their slumbers. Now, it so happened that I had two servants in the house; the name of the one was Conscience, and the name of the other was Will; both of whom were roused by the knockings, and ran to the door to inquire the errand of the stranger. Conscience no sooner listened to his words of tenderness and kind admonition, than she was desirous to grant him admittance; but Will, who was naturally of a depraved and obstinate disposition, stoutly remonstrated, and, being the stronger of the two, she put her back to the door, secured the lock, and refused to open."

"Well do I understand the struggle you describe," said Pilgrim. "But say on."

"You are acquainted, I presume," continued the other, "with one of the Lord Immanuel's servants in the Narrow way Hospital called Faithful."

"I am," was the reply; "and, methinks, you would find him as faithful by nature as he is by name."

"Faithful indeed," proceeded Theophilus; "for no sooner was he acquainted with my case, and the strange conflict in my bosom, than he

came to assist Affliction in her knockings. With a large hammer, called the hammer of the word, which he wielded in his hand, he broke open the door, stood by my couch with his hands and his lips full of messages of mercy from the Master he served, and never left me until he had brought me to the Narrow-way Gate."

"But," said Pilgrim, "were you suffered to leave without an effort being made for, your rescue?"

"Not so," replied Theophilus; "my companions, and neighbors, and friends, came running after me with imploring voice: some entreating me to return, some using threatening, others ridicule, others bribes. My wife and children, with tears in their eyes, upbraided me for my cruel desertion, and employed every persuasive to induce me to return. But the Lord of the Way sent his messenger to whisper in my ear: 'Whoever leaves father, and mother, and wife, and children, and houses, and lands, for my name's sake, and the gospel's, shall receive in this life a hundred-fold, and in the world to come, life everlasting.' 'But whoever loves father and mother, or wife and children, more than me, is not worthy of me.'"

"And had you long to wait at the entrance-gate?" inquired Pilgrim.

"No," replied the other; "Free Grace, the keeper, was in readiness for my reception. Only one other traveler was at the moment soliciting admission; for the crowd were all flocking down the opposite way to Destruction. The traveler's name was Waverer; he was a native of the border-country, lying between King Immanuel's territories and those of the Prince of Darkness. He had a bundle on his back, containing heart-lusts, heart-sins, and heart-idols, which he too much valued to be induced to part with, and yet he seemed equally reluctant to abandon the way of life. He would willingly have entered, provided he could have retained his bundle; but it was too large, the gate was too strait and narrow to admit it. So he turned down the Broad road, and I saw his face no more."

"Wretched man!" said Pilgrim; "I remember him well; and I verily think him more to be pitied than any of his fellow-Broad-way-men; for he knows just enough of the Narrow way to make him miserable, but not enough to give him peace. Let us learn from his sad fate the danger of

trifling with besetting sins."

"And you can, doubtless, add your experience to mine," said Pilgrim, "concerning the Lord of the Way, since the first hour you were enrolled in his service, that, however faithless you may have been to him, he has never been unfaithful to you."

"It is true, it is true," answered the other, the tear again starting to his eye; "often, often have I wounded His loving heart. Often have I fainted and been weary of him; but never has he fainted or been weary of me. It is my consolation, when called to mourn the fickleness of my own heart, that his heart changes never!"

Now I saw in my dream that, as the two fellow-travelers thus continued to encourage one another with mutual experiences of the Lord's past kindness to them, they gradually approached the walls of the Great Metropolis, whose smoke had been pointed out to Pilgrim from the Mount of Ordinances. It seemed to cast a temporary gloom over their spirits, as they thought how speedily their converse was to be interrupted by the din and bustle of a city of abounding iniquity. But with their eyes uplifted to the Everlasting Hills, whose summits were crowned with the glittering battlements of Zion, and with a confidence in the Lord of the Way, they boldly approached its walls.

## **CHAPTER 9**

Now I saw in my dream that the Narrow way conducted straight through the City of Carnality; for the Prince of Darkness, who, from the extent of his territories, was called the God of this World, had built many cities and villages close by, for the purpose, if possible, of enticing Zionward travelers. And this, at the time of Pilgrim's journey, he could accomplish



the more easily, as the walls which were used, in former times, to separate the Broad from the Narrow-way-men, had been in great part demolished. For long there had existed between there a deadly enmity. But the Prince of Darkness's viceregent, Fashion, had interposed as mediator between the contending parties. It was now counted no disgrace, as in former times, for a Broad-way-man to be ostensibly enlisted in Immanuel's ranks. But the others suffered by their guilty compromise; for their communion with the Broad way travelers had led them to imbibe many carnal maxims and principles, and to conform to the practices of a "world lying in wickedness."

Now I saw that the Prince of Darkness had erected his metropolis near the extremity of the Valley of Tears; and many who had given fair promise of making the journey to Zion, and that, too, with their faces there, were entangled by the snares laid for them in this city, and never advanced a step nearer the Celestial Gates.

The shadows of evening were beginning to fall as Pilgrim and his companion approached its walls. Even from the twilight glimpse they obtained, they were awed by its dimensions and magnificence. In the center, crowning the heights, they beheld a palace, with a royal banner waving from its towers, and many lights gleaming from the windows of its banqueting halls. This, as Pilgrim afterward learned, was the residence of Freethinker, a powerful vassal of the King of the Broad way, who had been rewarded with ample honors for the service he had rendered to his lord. It was kept by a porter called Mammon, who made it his business to exact as large a revenue as he could for the Prince of Darkness, whose servant he was. The two travelers trembled as they stood in the presence of this man, who was of a harsh and repulsive countenance. On attempting to pass, he rudely approached them, and, with rough voice, demanded payment of tribute for the King's Highway.

"We are travelers to Mount Zion," answered Theophilus; "and the Lord Immanuel, to secure our admittance there, has already paid costlier tribute-money than we have to offer. We have not been redeemed, and the Celestial City is not to be purchased, 'with corruptible things such as silver and gold.'"

If you have no tribute-money," replied the other, it will be at least needful to leave behind you, in pledge, some part of your armor, which, during your adjourn in the city, will only encumber you; and it will be restored to you on your return."

"Return we cannot--we dare not," said Pilgrim, "we have our faces Zionward; and woe be to us if we turn back."

Now Theophilus seemed inclined to further and useless disputation; but I saw that a mild and modest messenger beckoned Pilgrim to turn aside and follow her without delay. It was evident that they were about to enter the city by the wrong avenue.

Pilgrim, therefore, at once retraced a few of his steps, and went along, by a narrow path, to a lodge by the side of the city wall. He was conducted within by his guide, (whose name was Piety,) and who there resided with her sister Devotion. They assisted him in brightening his armor, wiped the dust from his sandals, and replenished his bag with some simple food. After which, being warned of the imminent dangers with which he would be beset, and exhorted to "consider Him" who, himself once a pilgrim in that same city, "had endured such contradiction of sinners against himself", they directed him up the street, named Watch and Pray, to the residence of the Christian Graces, at the opposite gate, where he would be again refreshed, and receive further directions regarding his journey.

Now I saw that Pilgrim proceeded boldly into the heart of the town; and had penetrated a considerable way before he encountered any serious molestation.

Before long, however, the citizens began to be attracted by the peculiarity of his traveling attire. A crowd followed: some mocking, some deriding; some even lifting the mud and filth off the streets, and besmearing his armor. He tried first to remonstrate with them; then to rebuke and threaten. With the Sword of the Spirit grasped firmly in his hand he succeeded in parrying off many of the blows aimed at him; their stones and missiles rebounded from the Shield of Faith, with which he covered his head; and he felt it no small encouragement when his eye fell on one of the verses inscribed underneath: "If you were of the world, the world

would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

I saw in my dream, that before he had been able to proceed half way through the city, night overtook him. He began to despair of being able to reach the mansion where he had been directed at the lodge, and which he had intended making his resting-place for the night. Besides, the broad and open street which he had been pursuing was now involved in devious windings, and frequently became so narrow as to create in his mind serious apprehensions that he must have missed his way. When he ventured to make inquiry of the citizens, and solicit their assistance in regaining it, he was treated with rudeness and incivility; for the Christian Graces, and their residence, were, with them, hated names, and their visitors invariably treated with discourtesy.

Now I observed that the Lord Immanuel had appointed spiritual Watchmen, with the Lamp of Truth in their hands, to guide the feet of his people in the way of peace, and to direct erring travelers who had "gone out of the way." Some of these Watchmen, indeed, were found unfaithful; some had no oil of grace in themselves; consequently, their lamps burned with a feeble and sickly luster, and the trumpet which hung at their side gave forth an uncertain sound. Others (during the age in which Pilgrim passed) had so covered their lanterns with painted glass and tinsel ornament, as greatly to obscure the pure light of truth. Others, however, were distinguished for their vigilant watchfulness; ever faithful at their posts, "holding not their peace day nor night." Their lamps, being liable to be dimmed by the smoke of the city, they kept constantly rubbing with the Prayer-polish; and when any of the Zionward travelers, through weariness, or exhaustion, or sleep, fell down on the street, these faithful ambassadors of the Lord Immanuel were heard sounding their trumpet of alarm, and exclaiming, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed." As they met the Narrow-way-men, hurrying up the streets, sometimes they would accompany them for a little, to whisper words of encouragement in their ears if they saw them faint-hearted; at other times they allowed them to proceed, with the passing watchword, "ALL IS WELL!"

Now I saw that Pilgrim observed an individual with a haggard look

running quickly up to one of these, and asking in great anxiety of mind: "Watchman! what of the night? Watchman! what of the night?" His name was Anxious Inquirer; he had been awakened from a slumber of self-security by the Trumpet of the Law, sounded by a watchman whose name was Boanerges. From that moment he had been hurrying, in a state of agitation, from street to street, and from watchman to watchman, with the question, "What shall I do to be saved?"

"Have you found no one, poor man," inquired the individual he now so importunately addressed; "have you found no one to soothe your troubled breast, and direct you to the Narrow way that leads unto life?"

"None! none!" was the reply; "the unfaithful watchmen that go about the city found me; they smote me, they wounded me. They tried to heal my hurt slightly, saying, 'Peace! peace! when there was no peace.' If you have any pity for a lost soul, tell me what time of night it is; for I am beginning to fear that 'the night is too far spent!' Methought, in hurrying along, I heard the tolling of the midnight bell, which seemed to say, as if with a living voice: 'Too late! too late!' and the gloomy warders who met me exchanged the same dismal watchword. Tell me, O, tell me, have I yet space to repent? Watchman! what of the night? Watchman! what of the night?"

"The morning comes!" was the answer. "It is not yet come, but it comes fast. Though you are at the eleventh hour, yet see you how the star of Hope still twinkles in the sky? But, haste you, and follow me. Truly the night is far spent! Yonder bell will before long peal its last, proclaiming that 'time shall be no longer,' and that the hour of repentance is fled!"

So I saw that Inquirer, under the guidance of this devoted ambassador, hurried through the crowd in the direction of the gate of the Narrow way. The eye of Pilgrim followed them until they were out of sight. The promises on his shield reminded him of the glorious recompense awaiting such faithful watchmen as he to whose guidance Inquirer had intrusted himself. "Those who turn many unto righteousness shall shine as the stars in the skies, forever and ever.

By this time Pilgrim had arrived at the termination of a narrow lane,

which diverged into two different paths; and it became matter of perplexity to know which to select. As he stood in indecision, he observed an individual coming up to him with a lamp at his side, similar to those he had seen in the hands of the Watchmen. It emitted a feeble light; sufficient, however, to show that the stranger was attired in armor, which appeared similar to his own; and the manner of his address gave him reason to suppose that he was once more to be cheered by the company of a Zionward traveler. But he was mistaken. This man had only a name to live.

His name was Professor; he had the Lamp of Profession in his hand, but no oil of grace to feed it; he had just enough of light to distinguish him from his fellow-citizens, but not enough to let him see the way to the Celestial City. Though he had never entered by the Narrow-way Gate, he had contrived, at one time, to traverse, like many others, a considerable part of the way, with his face Zionward; but he had never got further than the town of Carnality, where he had taken up a permanent residence, oftentimes inviting passing travelers to the Celestial City to visit him, and thus had acquired a name for his hospitality. He was one of those whom Pilgrim had already frequently met in his journey, for whom he felt deep commiseration, whose pretended love for the Narrow-way-men, and partiality for their King, made them hated by the Broad way travelers; while they themselves had neither part nor lot with the subjects of Immanuel, either in their present privileges, or in their future glorious reward.

Pilgrim, after listening to his conversation, availed himself of his proffered invitation; and deferring his journey to the extremity of the city until morning, accompanied him to his residence to spend the night.

On arriving at the house of his new entertainer, Pilgrim found two guests seated at his table; and who, like himself, professed to be travelers to Immanuel's land. The name of the one was Antinomian, and of the other, Lukewarm. Antinomian had not so much as a shred of armor; no, he seemed even to glory in his state of fancied freedom from the self-imposed burdens (as he called them) to which his fellow-travelers unnecessarily subjected themselves. Lukewarm, again, was arrayed in the semblance of armor; but it hung so loosely upon him, and he talked so

coldly of the Lord of the Way, and so slightly of his blood-bought privileges, that it seemed matter of indifference to him whether he entered the gates of the New Jerusalem or no.

Supper was concluded; and Pilgrim, being fatigued with the exertions of the day, retired to rest. He arose as soon as morning began to break; and though urged by Professor to prolong his stay, he dreaded remaining longer in the company of those whose sentiments so little accorded with his own. Bidding his entertainer farewell, and whispering in his ear, before they parted, some serious counsel about his imminent danger, and that of his guests, he hastened once more to run with patience the race set before him.

Now I saw that, in prosecuting the remainder of his journey through the city, he passed immediately under the walls of Freethinker's palace, which he had observed particularly on entering. He hurried by as quickly as he could. Above the massive archway which formed the entrance, he saw the words emblazoned: "No soul,"--"No judgment"--"No immortality"--"Death an eternal sleep"--"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." He shuddered on listening to the voices of the scoffers in the banqueting hall within. They were blaspheming the name of the Lord of the Way, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation!"

The porter, whose name was Ridicule, stood at the gate, as he was used, heaping derisions on all the travelers who passed. He called after Pilgrim, and invited him to partake of Freethinker's hospitality, denouncing all the promises inscribed on his shield as "cunningly devised fables"--the Celestial City, with its fancied glories, as a dream--and recommended him to return without delay, and resume his communion with the Broad-way-men. But Pilgrim only hastened his footsteps, and hurried more quickly past, replying to his solicitation: "Truly, if I had been mindful of the country whence I came out, I might have had opportunity to have returned; but now I desire a better country, that is, a heavenly."

Walking boldly onward, he at last attained the outer wall of the city, and, with joyful heart, left its din and bustle behind him. On proceeding a little

further, he found himself standing in front of a gateway leading to an elevated mansion in the suburbs whereon he read the inscription: "here abides these three--Faith, Hope, and Charity." This was the place to which he had been directed at the lodge, by Piety and Devotion. It was the residence of the Christian Graces, who made it their delight to receive toil-worn travelers after their passage through the city--to wash their stripes, bind up their wounds, and supply them with necessary refreshment for completing their journey.

Sweet were the hours of converse which Pilgrim enjoyed in this sacred resting-place. Sometimes their conversation turned on the Lord of the Way himself --sometimes on the experience of travelers who had now entered into their rest--sometimes on the glories of the Celestial City, whose shining gates, from the elevated situation which the mansion occupied, were full in view. On the top of the house was a balcony, where he often resorted in company with Faith and Hope, who directed his eye through telescopes, provided for the purpose, to the battlements of the New Jerusalem.

Being replenished, after a temporary sojourn, with what was needful for his journey, and having his shield and armor anew burnished with the Prayer-polish, which caused them to shine with dazzling brightness in the reflected beams from the Celestial Gate, Pilgrim once more found himself alone, a solitary traveler, hastening along the Narrow way, with his back to the City of Carnality, and his face to the City of Zion.

I saw that he continued to run with alacrity and joy the race which was still set before him, his path being like the "shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day." The season of trial and vicissitude, indeed, was not yet over. Difficulties and temptations, sorrows and discouragements, were still there, to remind him that the valley which he trod was, to the last, a Valley of Tears. But these only made him long more ardently for the day when every tear would be wiped away, every pang forgotten, every sorrow ended; when the weapons of earthly warfare would be exchanged for robes of glory; faith swallowed up in sight, hope in fruition, and death itself in eternal victory!

## CHAPTER 10

Now I saw in my dream that Pilgrim had approached near to the walls of the Celestial City; but there still intervened a dark valley, which formed the only access to its gates. This valley was called the Valley of the Shadow of Death, similar in name and appearance to that which he formerly traversed. As he found himself about to enter it, he stood trembling with terror.

"Be you faithful unto death," said a voice behind him, "and the Lord Immanuel will give you the crown of life!"

"Welcome! welcome!" replied Pilgrim, beholding by his side the Ambassador of the Lord Immanuel, who had so often appeared to him by the way; "welcome, you man of God! much do I need your salutary counsel and companionship in so dreadful an hour."

"A mightier than earthly counselor is with you," was the reply. "Though unseen, the only Friend that can avail you is by your side. He himself has trodden this very valley before you: never yet has one of his travelers found him to fail. A few brief moments more, and sorrow and sighing will forever have fled, and you shall be in the uncreated presence of the Great King."

"True! true!" replied the other; "the brief sufferings of this present hour are not worthy to be compared with the glory about to be revealed. One moment in yonder bright world will make me forget them all." And with this he sung to himself one of the sweet strains which he had heard in the Palace of the Psalmist of Israel: "Yes, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

"Yes," said Faithful; "no tear need bedim your eye. This hour which terminates your wanderings in a world of sorrow, is the commencement of a tearless immortality."

"Amen! even so!" exclaimed Pilgrim, as he seemed oppressed with the



increasing gloom, and longing for the closing scene--"Even so! come, Lord Jesus! come quickly! Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

Now I saw that they had arrived by the brink of a dark and turgid stream, which terminated the valley. A dense mist hovered all around, so as to obscure from their view, for a while, the glories of the Celestial City.

"I feel a haze gathering round my eyes," said Pilgrim; "tell me, can this be death?"

"Your warfare is just closing," said Faithful. "The gloom prevents you seeing the portals of glory, though you are on their very threshold. The passage through this river will be quickly over. Before you plunge in, let your eye rest, for the last time, on the shield of faith, and read there the promise of the Omnipotent One who will bear you through: 'When you pass through the waters I will be with you.'"

"The darkness yet grows deeper," said the other; "but though I cannot see, methinks I feel the support of arms underneath me. Is it so?"

"These," said Faithful, "are the Everlasting Arms, with which the Lord Immanuel upholds his own covenant people in their last struggle through the billows of death, so that to sink were impossible."

"But, hark!" said Pilgrim; "though mine eyes are failing, and mine ears can do no more than catch up the sound of your voice, methinks, hard by me, I hear the notes of celestial minstrelsy--the cadence of unearthly voices is falling on my spirit!"

"It is that of the angels of God," replied Faithful, "who are waiting on the other side of the river to carry you into the presence of the Great King; it is the signal that the Lord Immanuel's last intercessory prayer on your behalf has ascended and been heard: 'Father, I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory'; and that your name is now registered among the citizens of Zion!"

"Farewell, then! farewell!" said Pilgrim; the last faltering words of earth escaping from his tongue, and embracing in his arms the servant of his

Lord--"Farewell! we shall meet in yonder bright world, where the Master you serve will not suffer you to lose your reward. Farewell, earth! farewell, sorrow! farewell, tears! Welcome, death!--Jesus!--heaven!--glory!--victory!" With these words he plunged in, and the Ambassador of the Lord Immanuel saw his face in the Valley of Tears no more.

Now I saw that angels were waiting on the opposite side of the river to conduct him into the heavenly City. For a time he was lost sight of in the deep waters. Billow after billow swept over his head: at last he was borne in safety through, and thus welcomed by the angelic band: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord!"

Pilgrim found himself walking by the margin of a "river, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The golden palaces of Zion were reflected in its still waters; and trees, waving with eternal verdure, and distilling immortal fragrance, lined its banks. It was called the River of the Water of Life. Aged travelers and once toilworn warriors reclined on its margin, and drank its crystal streams. Many of these had been covered with dust, others with blood; but in this placid river every vestige of pollution was taken away; and having washed their wounds, and bathed their temples, they hastened to ascend the Hill of Zion. Death-divided relatives were seen crowding to meet them, wearing blood-bought crowns and harps of gold. Joyous were the reunions!

Pilgrim had now arrived in front of the entrance. The gate itself was of solid gold. The pillars which supported it were composed of jasper and onyx, and all manner of precious stones, which shone with a brightness dazzling to behold. On presenting the Charter, sprinkled with the blood of Immanuel, which he had received at the Narrow way Gate, they opened to him the everlasting portals, exclaiming: "You shall walk with the Lord Immanuel in white; for you are worthy!" On being admitted, Pilgrim was overwhelmed by the blaze of glory which surrounded him. As he stood entranced in amazement, another retinue of angels came rushing down from the throne, singing hallelujahs, bearing in their hands a crown of pure gold, which they placed on his head, saying: "You are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in heaven, to

God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect!"

Now I saw that he was borne away to the Third heavens, in company with these angels and saints, with shoutings and rejoicings. He passed along through prostrate ranks of angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim. As he got nearer and nearer the eternal throne, their ascriptions of praise waxed louder and louder. When he first entered the gates of glory, it seemed as the sound "of much people;" as he ascended, it became "as the voice of a great multitude;" higher still, "as the noise of many waters;" until, at last, as the glory brightened, it became "as the voice of mighty thunderings"; and so loud were the deepening anthem-peals, that it awoke me from MY DREAM!

**THOUGHTS FOR THE QUIET HOUR**

# **A treasury of godly wisdom, suitable for personal or family devotions**

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## **Building air-castle upon air-castle!**

He who goes about whining all day long about some imaginary drawbacks in the sphere which Providence has assigned him—when all the while he is situated so much better than thousands around—is a suicide of his own happiness! He is also impeaching the faithfulness of the Supreme Ordainer and Disposer.

One half of life's enjoyment is eaten out by this sinful craving after what cannot be obtained—the desire for something supposed to be better. Yes, but when "the better" is reached, there is the yearning for an imagined "better" still. This is building air-castle upon air-castle!

If in these days there be one household demon more than another which needs to be exorcized—it is the demon of discontent!

Oh, for the spirit of Paul—poor and lonely prisoner in Rome as he was—an apparent bankrupt in all that the world deems wealth and affluence—yet who could make this entry in his letter to his Philippian friends—"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. At the moment I have all I need—more than I need!"

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## **One throw of the dice and the great game of life is lost!**

How many there are with whom the labor of long years is a failure! They are engaged building some favorite edifice, material or mental, literally or figuratively. They dream not

that it rests on shifting sands, or on the edge of a muffled volcano!

A teacher bestows his fondest assiduous care on a pupil—a young life full of high intellectual promise. A sudden illness comes and sweeps him away!

A parent lavishes his tenderest love and affections, thought and time and money, in raising his child; but, by-and-by, the life of his prodigal son, is to the parent, worse than death.

Yes, often are fondest hopes, best laid plans, glad aspirations, thwarted; the glowing visions of success clouded with misfortune—calamity—ruin—the grave! One throw of the dice and the great game of life is lost!

Not so with imperishable riches—"the hope laid up for you in heaven"—bliss beyond the accidents of capricious fortune, bonds that can know no dissolution. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" Psalm 73:26

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## **The golden key that fits all locks!**

"If I have not love, I am nothing." 1 Cor. 13:2

What a magic spell there is in love!—the absolute devotion of a beautiful soul that loses itself in the hallowed mission of radiating peace and joy and sympathy all around.

Many dull, unsusceptible ears, when other charmers have failed to charm, have been arrested and won by the music of kindness. By it . . .  
old-age renews its youth,  
sick pillows are smoothed,

burdens are eased,  
tears are turned into smiles,  
dirges are turned into songs.

Love is, of all magical charms, the most irresistible.

Love is the golden key that fits all locks!

"If I have not love, I am nothing." 1 Cor. 13:2

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## **This most beautiful grace**

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility." 1 Peter 5:5

You who are young, with life's hopes and hazards, its risks and failures before you, let the possession of this most beautiful grace be your habitual aspiration. It is a garment beautiful for all, but whose folds droop with a special propriety and loveliness on the youthful pilgrim just entering on the great journey.

Beware of rash, self-assertive ways, petty jealousies, sinister dealings; above all, tampering with servile vices which may end in their tyrannical sway.

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## **Don't grumble!**

"Don't grumble against each other!" James 5:9

What an unhappy phase and condition of soul that of the chronic grumbler!—moping over petty troubles,

magnifying worries; to use the common but expressive figure, "making mountains of molehills"; seeing no sunshine in existence, while, in reality, there are only a few clouds floating on an otherwise clear horizon!

Poorly will such be able to grapple with life's real and sterner troubles when they come.

"Don't grumble as some of them did, for that is why God sent his angel of death to destroy them. 1 Cor. 10:10

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## **Over-sensitiveness**

Over-sensitiveness to supposed injury and wrong, has wrecked many a fair life, and doomed it to unsympathetic isolation.

"Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

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## **That heathen marksman**

In vain had Ahab disguised himself. He was borne in his chariot bleeding from the fray—for "an Aramean soldier randomly shot an arrow at the Israelite troops, and the arrow hit the king of Israel between the joints of his armor!" 1 Kings 22:34

No, not in the true sense of the word "randomly."

That heathen marksman was only an instrument in accomplishing the fulfillment of "the word of the Lord which He spoke by the mouth of Elijah the prophet." A Greater had feathered the fatal shaft, and sent it home!

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## **Grievously wounded in the spiritual battle**

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out." Matthew 12:20

Never deal too harshly with those who, in some unguarded, unsuspected moment, have fallen out of the ranks, or by their own folly or cowardice have been grievously wounded in the spiritual battle.

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## **Encircled in the consciousness of His love**

Eternal summer canopies the soul which is at peace with God. Happy those who are thus encircled in the consciousness of His love. Even when there are passing clouds and shadows, the sun is always behind them.

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## **A parent's lip kisses all fear away**

Trust—what is it?

Go to that child's couch when the storm is raging, moaning among the tree-tops and strewing branches on the lawn, the blackened sky echoing with the

artillery of heaven. A parent's hand draws the curtain and smoothes the ruffled pillow; a parent's lip kisses all fear away.

Such is the trust and confidence of His children inspired by their Heavenly Father in the hour of anxiety and dismay, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His children shall have a place of refuge." Proverbs 14:26

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## **As each part does its work**

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Ephes. 4:16

In a gigantic piece of machinery the small wheels have their place and purpose as well as the large ones. God gives His weak ones work to do, for which even His strong ones are unequal.

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## **Troubles and perplexities**

In the tumult and discord of human troubles and perplexities, how blessed are the balm-words of Christ, "Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things!" Matthew 6:32

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## **Vapid, superficial, selfish pleasure**

Thousands live their whole life for vapid, superficial,

selfish pleasure; a wanton and wasteful expenditure of available strength and purpose. How far better to work for God and for the good of men! Not the exacted toil of the fretted and fettered slave, but the consecration of the willing heart, the service which is perfect freedom—life, animated by the inspiring motto, "This world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever!" 1 John 2:17

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## **A dirge of superhuman anguish**

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." Hebrews 5:7

There are three distinct pictures given us of the tears of Jesus.

We see Him weeping in the family, with the sisters of Bethany. We see Him weeping on the mount of Olivet over a ruined city. We see Him, last of all, weeping in the moonlit shades of Gethsemane—but now it is "strong crying and tears"—a dirge of superhuman anguish, not over families or cities, but over mankind!

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## **But we see a more favored spot of grass**

As the sheep of His pasture, He has allotted our portion for us. But we see a more favored spot of grass on the opposite valley. The sunbeams are playing upon it. We imagine the herbage is greener and more luxuriant. We cross to the other valley. The sun gets behind a cloud.



The bright patch is found to be in reality no better than that which we had left!

What divine philosophy there is in the Apostle's injunction, "Be content with such things as you have; for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

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## **The father's halls, and heart, and home**

"The boy became so hungry that even the husks he was feeding the pigs looked good to him." Luke 15:16

Garbage could not stop the rage of hunger in the "far country." The father's halls, and heart, and home—the "bread enough and to spare"—alone could do that.

"I will go home to my father!" Luke 15:18

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## **The Infinite overcome by the finite**

"You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." I know not a more wondrous incident in Bible story—Omnipotence overcome with the pleadings of weakness; the Infinite overcome by the finite; a mortal man wrestling with Deity in prayer, and that prayer prevailing—"I will not let You go, unless You bless me!"

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## **Happiness**

Happiness is not dependent on place, or locality, or

social position—but on the state of the heart and its relation to God.

As the bleakest field is ennobled by the sunshine, so, in spite even of hampered circumstances and adverse surroundings, that soul must be radiant, which enjoys an habitual response to the prayer—"Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance!"

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## **There are no great things and small things with God**

"He made all the stars—the Bear, Orion, the Pleiades,  
and the constellations of the southern sky." Job 9:9

There are no great things and small things with God.  
He who guides the constellations in their magnificent  
marchings, watches the sparrow's fall.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of  
them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your  
Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all  
numbered." Matthew 10:29-30

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## **Morbid, sullen, panic-stricken**

"He will not break the bruised reed; He will not  
quench the smoking flax." Matthew 12:20

See the Prophet Elijah, so recently a hero of heroes,  
confronting, unabashed, the savage yells of Ahab's  
myrmidons and the crowd of Baal priests, now seated,  
with moping countenance, under the desert juniper-tree  
or amid the rocks of Horeb—away from duty; morbid,  
sullen, panic-stricken; oblivious of the encouragements  
of Carmel and the miracles of Cherith—indulging in the  
ungrateful soliloquy—"It is enough; take away my life;  
God has forgotten me; I am no better than my fathers."

Does Jehovah take him at his word? Does He leave or commission the desert whirlwind to extinguish the expiring flame of former consecration? No! "What are you doing here, Elijah? Go, anoint Jehu; go, anoint Hazael. Back to your appointed work and labor. I will yet make you a burning and shining light in Israel."

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## **The fall of a leaf—or the destruction of kingdoms**

Whether it be the fall of a leaf—or the destruction of kingdoms, it is "God over all."

"You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth." 2 Kings 19:15

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## **What a magic, magnetic power**

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness." Galatians 5:22

What a magic, magnetic power there is in kindness!

How it smooths furrows from the brow!

How it raises the soiled blossoms of the battered flower!

How it carries music to the heart of the lonely and sorrowful, and makes old age for the moment forget its infirmities!

Many a little child has thus proved a seraph in human form!

"Be kind and compassionate to one another." Ephes. 4:32

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## **Found in the shady nooks of the valley**

"Clothe yourselves with humility." 1 Peter 5:5

The greenest, tenderest, loveliest graces are  
found in the shady nooks of the valley.

"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,  
humility, gentleness and patience." Col. 3:12

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## **Past faintings and falterings and failures**

"But one thing I do: Forgetting the past, and  
straining toward what is ahead" Philippians 3:13

Let past faintings and falterings and failures  
only stimulate to increased ardor in the race.  
With the goal in view, press on!

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## **O dreamer of vain dreams**

"Be content with such things as you have." Heb. 13:5

"My own vineyard I have neglected." Song 1:6

Let us accept the allotments of Divine Providence—  
our varied spheres in life—at the hands of Him who

fixes the bounds of our habitation.

How many there are who have a strange, perverse satisfaction in looking out from their window, with longing eyes, on one or other of the varied modern shapes which Naboth's vineyard assumes! Their soliloquy is—'Were it mine, what a vintage I would have there! What oil and wine I would have from these grapes and olive trees; and what a prudent and bountiful use I would make of them, which their present possessor never does!'

God says to such—'No, O dreamer of vain dreams, remain no longer gazing through a false and distorted medium. Envy no longer your neighbor's choicer territory. Go cheerfully down to your own assigned, though more restricted, garden-plot. It may have neither vines nor olives. It may be devoid of floral wealth. It may be possessed of nothing but the commonest plants. But there is your place! It may be "little among the thousands of Judah." It is that, nevertheless, which I have staked and fenced out for you. I have not made you keeper of others' vineyards; see that your own vineyard you do keep. You can serve Me and glorify Me with the one entrusted talent, as well as with the ten. On the Great Day there will be as ample a recognition of faithfulness over the few things as over the many things.'

By Him the mite is accepted; and the heart—when there is no mite to give.

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**Beware of wasted moments!**

The marvels and triumphs of the printing-press have now made accessible to peasant and laborer, the wondrous blessing of Christian literature! Neither Croesus nor Plato—the two old-world representatives of wealth and thought—had a library to compare with what is readily available to us.

Let the young especially prize this splendid inheritance, making it alike a privilege and obligation to devote some hours to reading and garnering mental stores. Let them beware of wasted moments—golden ingots—too often mortgaged to . . .  
sloth,  
frivolity,  
idleness,  
voluptuous ease and  
degrading passion.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Eph. 5:16

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## **Eternal pleasures**

"You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand." Psalm 16:11

Why walk through life with an aspect of sadness, as if religion and gloom are identical? Every true believer should have in this world, his foretastes of coming bliss.

Sips, at the Fountain here.

There, "eternal pleasures."

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## **My creation!**

How the love of nature survives and lingers despite of the decrepitude of age, growing indeed stronger as years advance, and taking no heed of the dimming eye!

It recalls the testimony of a gentle poet—"It seems to me, the world was never so beautiful as now, when I am about to leave it."

"Be glad; rejoice forever in My creation!" Isaiah 65:18

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## **That demon scramble for riches!**

That demon scramble for riches! Generally speaking, "Meaningless! Meaningless!" is the disappointed confession when the hoarded wealth is secured!

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## **Little more than a creed of sanctified selfishness**

It is a poor religion—little more than a creed of sanctified selfishness—which regards salvation mainly as an escape from divine punishment, and the assured getting into heaven at last.

True religion is an active, transforming principle. Salvation is a present triumph over the forces of evil and powers of temptation. It aspires after obedience to the divine will—assimilation to the divine image and character in its truth



and purity and love.

Yes, that is a stunted utilitarian faith—the faith of the Koran rather than of the Gospel—whose hopes and prospective blessedness are all for an eternal sensual paradise.

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## **Flaws on the sculptor's white marble**

Listen to the bell, warning off submerged rocks and perilous whirlpools. Beware of tampering with the fine edge of conscience, and blunting moral perceptions. These are like the flaws on the sculptor's white marble—scars which cannot be easily erased.

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## **The irreparable past**

Do not mope with morbid spirit over the irreparable past, but gird yourself with heroic resolution for a future in which lost hours and lost opportunities may yet be redeemed.

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## **A November drizzle**

A November drizzle is often the cause of soul-depression. Do not treat spiritually what, in a thousand cases, is purely physical. Take the most brilliant of our flowers out of the sunshine and set them to confront the east wind. They will be certain to mope. There is an amazing harmony and analogy between the natural and the spiritual.

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## **Ignoble wounds in life's battle?**

"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more!" Hebrews 8:12

Who among us, in the retrospect of existence, have not the memories of unworthy thought and unworthy deed, it may even be of ignoble wounds, in life's battle? What of that? Are we for a moment to allow these sins, grievous as they may be, to create an insuperable, impassable gulf between us and the Great Forgiver? Thoughts, far more merciful than our own, are expressed and reiterated in the divine words, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more!"

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## **An instinctive love of the beautiful**

Happy those who have an instinctive love of the beautiful—the beautiful in nature, the beautiful in grace; and far transcending these, the beautiful in Him who was Himself incarnated Beauty—the chief among ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely one!

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## **A chequered life**

Each of our lives is a plan of God. Let us be thankful for the thought that our own plans—crude, faulty, mistaken, sometimes sinful—are not infrequently counteracted and

superseded by His. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" Jeremiah 29:11

Often in the retrospect of a chequered life is the glad and grateful avowal made, and the Psalmist's experience endorsed, "He led them forth also by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalm 107:7

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## **If the golden prize has eluded our grasp**

God is a God of equity. He will exact according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. He will not look for figs or grapes where He has only given common herbs. He will not expect pounds where He has only given pence—talents where He has only given mites. If we have little—limited and restricted means and opportunities—let us remember it is because He has withheld more. If the golden prize has eluded our grasp, it is because He saw we would be better without it. His gifts and benefactions are many and diversified. Let it be our endeavor to be "good stewards" to the extent of our responsibilities.

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## **The world's joys**

"Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again." John 4:13

The world's joys are fitful, uncertain, precarious—brooks which dry in their channels—their silver ripple ceases often just when they are most needed.

Gospel streams provided for the refreshment of God's

pilgrims, are, on the other hand, fed from the eternal glaciers—the hills of heaven. They are fullest when all others are emptiest.

"He will refresh her as a river in the desert and as the cool shadow of a large rock in a hot and weary land." Isaiah 32:2

"I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."  
Isaiah 41:18-19

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## **An Infinite Friend**

How it would, with us, hallow every season of prosperity; how it would take the sting from every season of sorrow, and the bitterness from every trial, to have at all times the sublime consciousness that an infinite Friend is with us who joys with us in all our joys, and metes out for us all our woes!

"Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

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## **The sweetest of life's curfew chimes**

The sweetest of life's curfew chimes is the closing one—"To depart and to be with Christ."

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## **It is a sad thing**

It is a sad thing when lives and friendships once in harmony become sundered—drifting from their old sacred moorings—the little breach gradually, but fatally, widening, until it is irreparable.

"Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

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## **The uncaging of the spirit**

At death there is no interruption in the continuity of life. It is simply the uncaging of the spirit to permit its free, unhampered soarings. There is a wonderful comfort and significance in the words of Christ, "I assure you, anyone who obeys My teaching will never die!" John 8:51

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## **The distinctive message of the Gospels**

God's love of the loveless is the distinctive message of the Gospels.

"When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Romans 5:6

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were

reconciled to him through the death of his Son."  
Romans 5:10

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## **Yes, you are in a mazy labyrinth**

"My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine." Matthew 26:39

Yes, you are in a mazy labyrinth. But keep fast hold of the thread—the golden thread of your Divine Father's love. Thus will you, in due time, come forth to breathe again the fresh air, and welcome the blue sky of heaven!

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## **He died fighting for His enemies!**

What a contrast between the unselfish consecration of Jesus in His great work and ministry on earth, and the selfishness and self-seeking so often characteristic of the race for whom He died!

There are many in this world, embarked in gigantic enterprises. Stand in one of our busiest thoroughfares; see the crowd hurrying past, each with deep-furrowed lines of care on his brow. These are builders; not builders in stone or steel, but figuratively rearing some huge pyramid with unremitting labor.

One is toiling at the Pyramid of Riches—tier on tier riveted with silver and golden clamps.

Another is engrossed with the Pyramid of Ambition—

heedless of the intervening work that he may reach more speedily the coveted summit, and crown it with Fame blowing her bronze trumpet.

Another is busy at some Intellectual Pyramid (choicest of all), raising piles of mental treasure—laborious thought.

How few among these could say with an honest heart, "I have no ulterior motive in all my labors. I have no selfish interests to subserve—I am doing it all, neither for the good of myself nor my family, but for others."

It would be a happier world if the use and design of our pyramids had not been like those of Egypt—built to glorify himself while living, and to cover his dust after death.

Different, how different, was the retrospect of Jesus! "Christ pleased not Himself." Unselfishness in its noblest type and form was the characteristic of His Redemption. >From the infancy in Bethlehem's cradle, to the expiring prayer on the bitter tree, all was the purest unselfishness of a loving heart. "He saved others, Himself He would not save!" On His cross was engraved, not the superscription of earth's boasted heroes—"He died fighting for His friends"; but, "He died fighting for His enemies!"

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## **Temptation**

Temptation may be biding its time for the unguarded moment. Do with it as you would do with the place you know to be haunted by ravenous beasts of prey—"Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way." Proverbs 4:15

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## **Absolute and flawless perfection!**

"One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Hebrews 7:26

When one sees, so often and so painfully, the shortcomings and imperfections of the best of people—how far they fall beneath even their own aspirations—irresolution and inconsistency, indolence, self-seeking, and vainglory in some; lack of patience, lack of courtesy, lack of zeal, lack of love and sympathy in others; in a word, the too evident traces of fallible and fallen human nature—how it magnifies the absolute and flawless perfection of the Great Master!

As we all thus mourn, too truly and self-consciously, our defects and deficiencies, our blots and failures—what a wonderfully inspiring thought is that given by John, that the day is coming when perfection shall be attained! "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when He comes we will be like Him!" 1 John 3:2

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## **Personal tastes**

How varied are the types and temperaments of the human family—from the nervous to the lethargic!

Let us make ample allowances for those not cast in the same mold as ourselves, and kindly recognize those who may not share our personal tastes and sympathies.

This lesson is embraced in the Apostle's widely inclusive exhortation, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love



as brothers, be compassionate and humble."  
1 Peter 3:8

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## **Fascinating dreams**

Many of the world's old religions and philosophies are fascinating dreams, brilliant coruscations, beautiful webs of thought, which the best intellect and purest devotion had laboriously spun. We dare not depreciate them. But there is only one philosophy that is from God. "The wisdom of God is wiser than men."

Greece had her Mysteries, with their esoteric doctrines. But these could shed no real ray of light on the awful problems of life and of the future. The longed-for "mystery hidden from ages and generations" was fully revealed and manifested in the person and words of Incarnate Wisdom—"I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.":

"Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ." Colossians 2:8

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## **Love-shafts**

God's words are not bolts of volcanic fire, but golden arrows—love-shafts from the quiver of His promises.

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## **What is the lesson?**

Unexpected calamity, sudden death, as we have seen this week within palace walls, comes often like an lightning-bolt from the calm blue of the heavens; or like the earthquake shock when all is lapsed in security, when birds are singing and fields are waving with plenty.

What is the lesson?

"Prepare to meet your God!" Amos 4:12

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## **I have no key to God's hieroglyphics**

"There are secret things that belong to the Lord our God." Deut. 29:29

You say, "Interpret the mystery." I have no key to God's hieroglyphics now. Eternity will read and decipher all.

"For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:9

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## **Wounds from a friend**

"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Proverbs 27:6

The true friend is not the honeyed flatterer. He

who possesses the hall-mark of that noblest of relationships is rather the confidential adviser, or, it may be, the faithful censor, who, with delicate tact and yet bold freedom, can point out the peril or shortcoming to which we ourselves are blind—the undiscovered weak joint in the armor.

Inestimable is the worth of such outspoken, unselfish, trusted sincerity; faithful the wounds of such friends.

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## **Serfdom and beggardom to Satan?**

You have often seen, in the sky of opening summer, the struggle between sun and cloud. One or other comes off at last victorious. Is it to be sun or cloud with you? Is the higher or lower nature to conquer? Is it to be the ground turned into a crop of noxious weed—the thorn and the thistle? or that which gives birth to fragrant flower and golden grain? Is the future to be purity or passion, loyalty to God or serfdom and beggardom to Satan?

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## **Child of sickness and pain!**

Child of sickness and pain! whose eyes for long weeks have been unable to endure the garish sunlight, by whose sleepless pillow the dim lamp has been flickering with weary monotony, be still!

God has His own methods of mysterious dealing

and discipline. He can make that chamber of suffering a Bethel. A ladder is ofttimes there set between earth and heaven, traversed by the angels Faith, Resignation, Hope, and Peace.

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## **A lurking assassin**

Envy is the basest of human passions. It might well be impersonated as a lurking assassin, dagger in hand, haunting the darkest chambers of the soul; disguised, too, with iron mask, to conceal, as best it may, its own vile features and malignant thoughts.

The Bible speaks of envy as one of a dastard, unlovely triad—"envyings, murders, drunkenness."

It is a miniature hell wherever the foul fiend of envy has been allowed to intrude. Hence no nobler moral victory, yet no more difficult one can there be, than exorcizing this demon of the abyss, tortured and maddened by the sight of goodness it cannot reach, its impotence to tear the wreath honorably won from brows better and worthier than its own, and turn it into ashes.

"From envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, Lord, deliver us!"

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## **Foul fiends or beneficent angels?**

Words are impalpable couriers of good or evil. They may be foul fiends or beneficent angels.

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## **The prayer of Agur**

There is a true and deep philosophy in the prayer of Agur—"Give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs." Proverbs 30:8

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## **The soul's best music**

"From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help." Psalm 130:1

It seems contradiction and paradox, but the soul's best music often comes from a broken harp, its best incense from the broken vase of alabaster.

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## **Every turn in the pilgrimage path!**

"Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord; point out the right road for me to follow." Ps. 25:4

Unfold and interpret for me every turn in the pilgrimage path!

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## **Running out like the grains in a sand-glass**

What! these hours of a limited, vanishing existence running out like the grains in a sand-glass, and nothing yet done for Christ or those for whom Christ died!

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## **There are many loveless things in the world**

There are many loveless things in the world, but few more so than that of unkindness—the gall and wormwood of injured and unrequited friendship, a cold cynicism the recompense of beneficent deed or generous gift.

How easy, how gracious, on the other hand, is "that most excellent gift of love!" While it "seeks not its own," it is a deposit paid back in compound interest. No other forces of the soul can compensate for the lack of love. Amiability and courtesy, benevolence and sympathy, outlive the more heroic virtues.

"In her tongue is the law of kindness." Proverbs 31:26

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## **The soul's hardest lesson**

"Not my will, but Your will," is the soul's hardest lesson; and, when learned, it is its highest achievement.

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## **Kind words and holy deeds**

I like to think of the perpetuity of moral and spiritual influences. Kind words and holy deeds cannot perish. Goodness is indestructible. That man you speak of died twenty years ago. No! he still lives in the hearts of those his character brightened and refined!

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## **Nothing but a gentle, sympathetic soul**

Let none say, "There is no work for me to do, in my limited and restricted sphere. I cannot aspire to a position of conspicuous usefulness. I am no Asahel, swift-footed in the race. I am dwarfed in means, destitute of all claims to intellect. I am but a common soldier in the great army—a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water."

Accept the assigned position. Never despise nor minimize "the power of littles." Do what you can. God asks no more, and expects no more. With Him, lowly work is worship. Only, what you do, do it heartily, cheerfully. Be not repelled by the smallness and insignificance of the mite you cast into the treasury.

You can teach a child its letters. You can read to a poor invalid. You can carry a ray of sunshine with you into the hospital ward. You can send a posy of violets or rosebuds to the bedside of the invalid. You can give a word of heart cheer to the struggling youth, and aid him in entering the stern battle of life. You can indite a letter of wise counsel and warning to the tempted child of poverty, and help to fetch back the prodigal from his or her wanderings.

You can do the most Godlike and Christlike thing in the world—that which needs neither purse nor learning—nothing but a gentle, sympathetic soul. In ministering to the broken and lacerated heart, torn, it may be, with bereavement too deep for tears, you can give "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness."

"Who has despised the day of small things?"

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## **True, genuine friendship**

"A friend loves at all times." Proverbs 17:17

You cannot force a half-hearted friendship into life. Where there is incongruity of character, feeling, and ways, let it simply lapse into acquaintanceship; and if even this be an effort, let it, without either violence or discourtesy, die a natural death.

True, genuine friendship must not only be spontaneous, but, to be lasting, it must be based on congeniality of tastes, pursuits, interests, as well as on affection.

"There is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother."  
Proverbs 18:24

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## **You hypocrites!**

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."  
Matthew 23:25-26

The Jerusalem Pharisee is not extinct. He has his true representative and descendant in our time. He still in spirit makes broad his phylactery. He has his trumpet sounded before him. He has his unctuous shibboleths. He is punctilious in creed and tradition. He refuses to speak to a Samaritan.



Yet that man's inner life and home, as was the case with his ancient prototype, confute and confound his pretensions. There, he is often cold, cynical, selfish, moody, morose, imperious. He would keep all the world right, but he is himself like the sepulchers he whitewashes. It is outer garnish and no more. God save the Church, from such a travesty as this! Oh for genuine, transparent, unmistakable reality!

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Matthew 23:27-28

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## **Truth that leads to godliness**

"The knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness."  
Titus 1:1

Doctrine is nothing, dissociated from deed.

Abstract truth is poor, compared to living principle.

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## **The tiny glowworm and the shining star**

The eye of the Almighty takes in at a glance—  
the tiny glowworm and the shining star,  
the blade of grass and the towering Alp.

"He covers the heavens with clouds, provides

rain for the earth, and makes the green grass  
grow in mountain pastures." Psalm 147:8

"He determines the number of the stars  
and calls them each by name." Psalm 147:4

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## **Remove the Bible from school and university**

God help this nation if it be drifting to secularism! Our  
people may be made giants in intellect; but severed  
from the religious element, divorced from religious training,  
the chances are they may become demons in depravity!

Where, moreover, are remedy and panacea to be found  
for the anguished heart in its time of sorrow?

Philosophy and science, noble factors as they are, can  
never heal the wounds of humanity, erase the furrows  
from the woe-worn brow, or light up the shadows of the  
final valley. They can never curb the madness of the  
nations, subjugate the demon of war, and "ring in the  
thousand years of peace."

Remove the Bible from school and university, and  
in that saddest of battles, the struggle of conflicting  
principles, where the godless and Christless creed is  
the triumphant one, there can be nothing but the  
death-knell.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **This spirit from the pit**

How SELF in its protean shapes—  
self-will,

self-seeking,  
self-elation,  
self-assertion,  
leaves its dents and stains on the shield of faith!  
Happy the day when this spirit from the pit shall  
be exorcized forever!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **Old Testament history**

Taking the Old Testament history alone, how suggestive are its names and memories of the Christian's varied and chequered experience!

Here is his Bethel—the rough, stony pillow of hardship and suffering; but it is at the base of a heavenly ladder, passing up and down which are angels of consolation.

Here is a Marah—the bitter pool of sorrow, but wherein the divine healing Tree is cast.

Here are Palms and Wells of Elim, symbolic both of shadow and refreshment in pursuing life's wilderness march.

Here he has reached Rephidim, also with its double emblem and significance; the combination of the two factors in the believer's life—the active and the passive—work and prayer—Joshua fighting in the valley; Moses, Aaron, and Hur in supplication on the mountain summit.

Here is the gloomy border-river; but through its flood the true Ark of the Covenant precedes the hosts of Israel, conducting in safety to the land of promise.

We can write over all, "They shall abundantly utter the

memory of Your great goodness." The last of these memories is sung in heaven—"They went through the flood on foot—there did we rejoice in Him!"

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## **Living sacrifices**

The Christian's heart should be a holy altar, and his life a living sacrifice.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

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## **The house collapsed, and all your children are dead!**

"Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the desert and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead!" Job 1:19

The wind is often contrary, and God means it to be so.

"He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by His power." Psalm 78:26

"He causes the clouds to rise over the earth. He sends the lightning with the rain and releases the wind from His storehouses." Psalm 135:7

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## **The grandest picture in the Gospels**

The grandest picture in the Gospels—let us hang it up on our deathbeds—is the father clasping the prodigal and welcoming him home.

"And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him." Luke 15:20

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## **The loveliest plants of the Gospel**

The loveliest plants of the Gospel grow in the valley of humility.

"Be completely humble and gentle." Ephesians 4:2

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## **Little sympathies and little kindnesses**

We need not always be on the outlook to do great services. Little sympathies and little kindnesses are always possible.

"Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Col. 3:12

"Finally, all of you should be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds." 1 Peter 3:8

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## **Amid the discords and disharmonies of life**

Amid the discords and disharmonies of life,  
the fitfulness of human friendships,  
the wreck of fond hopes,  
the havoc of death and the grave,  
we can cling with unfaltering confidence to  
the fidelity of God. Here is safe anchorage  
that defies all storms.

"All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful."  
Psalm 25:10

"Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the  
heavens; Your faithfulness reaches beyond  
the clouds." Psalm 36:5

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## **The gauntest of all gaunt spectres**

The gauntest of all gaunt spectres is that of cold  
ingratitude and unrequited love—sacred altars of  
friendship turned into a pile of dead ashes.

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## **A series of strange surprises**

"Why, you do not even know what will happen  
tomorrow!" James 4:14

Life consists of a series of strange surprises—a  
constantly shifting complex succession changes.  
Nothing so sure as the unexpected.

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## **What is earth's greatest joy and privilege?**

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned." Isaiah 40:1-2

What is earth's greatest joy and privilege? It is to bring a ray of comfort to the broken heart.

"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." 2 Cor. 1:4

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## **The old, the weak, the decrepit, the bedridden**

How prone we are presumptuously to calculate on the continuance of life! "My pulse is vigorous. My eye is undimmed. My natural strength is unabated. The race is to the swift—I am one of them. The battle is to the strong—I am one of them. The old, the weak, the decrepit, the bedridden, will and must before long be swept down like the seared leaves of autumn. But I am as a green fir tree. The spring's verdure is only now clothing me. The summer's zephyrs have yet to fan me. The autumn skies have yet to canopy me. The axe may be laid to the root of others, but I shall bring forth fruit in old age—I shall be fat and flourishing. The morrow shall be as today, and much more abundant!"

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business

and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes! James 4:13-14

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## **I will go home to my Father**

"I will go home to my Father." Luke 15:18

In your moments of deepest darkness and alienation, never lose sight of the truth that God is your Father. The prodigal, in his season of dejection and despair, speaks of his "Father" still.

"I will go home to my Father." Luke 15:18

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **Trust God in little things**

Those who trust God in little things are often answered by Him in great things. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

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## **Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!**

"Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!" Psalm 148:3

These myriad stars in their luster, have been spoken of in poetry as "sparks from God's anvil." There is a defect in the figure. Sparks, brilliant as they are, are



momentary, evanescent scintillations—a flash of atoms, which die in the darkness and are seen no more.

The starry host of heaven are glorious worlds, which move, not capriciously, but in obedience to great cosmic laws—tenants of a realm, not of confusion, but of design and order. Let science speak of this as "laws of nature." Call, rather, these thronged illimitable spaces—the domain of a thinking, living, intelligent Creator and Sustainer; replete with evidences of His sovereignty and omnipotence.

No modern speculations, be what they may, can ever dim the brilliancy of those gems in the Almighty's diadem!

"Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!" Psalm 148:3

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **And he went outside and wept bitterly!**

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!" Matthew 26:34-35

Look at Peter! Who stronger than he? the honored and trusted Companion of Incarnate Love, filled with sincere loyalty to the gracious Master. "What! others may deny You, but I—never! Never shall 'traitor' be branded on my brow, or the guilty denial tremble on my lips!"

See, before long, the presumptuous boaster in an anguish of remorseful tears, a moral and spiritual shipwreck. "How the mighty have fallen!"

"And he went outside and wept bitterly!" Luke 22:62

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **What will heaven be**

What will heaven be, but the development of present character? "He who is righteous let him be righteous still" Revelation 22:11

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## **Helping struggling souls in the battle of life**

We wish that ministers of Christ, who wield the marvelous power of the pulpit, instead of pursuing, Sunday after Sunday, the round of purely doctrinal sermons, would understand the necessity of sympathetically helping struggling souls in the battle of life; teaching them how to fight the good fight of faith when the hour of conflict comes. The Sunday discourse ought to impart strength and heart-cheer to the combatants, young and old, in the spiritual arena.

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## **Like a bird parting with its wings**

To neglect prayer is like a bird parting with its wings.

"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart." Colossians 4:2

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## **The gates of death**

To the true Christian, the gates of death

open up the magnificent vistas of eternity.

"Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from all their toils and trials!" Revelation 14:13

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## **Commonplace, everyday experiences**

"The Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him." Psalm 32:10

God is with His people, not only in the crisis-hours and great emergencies of life, but in its commonplace, everyday experiences.

"Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever." Psalm 125:2

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **It is not the cuckoo-cry of alarmists**

It is not the cuckoo-cry of alarmists when we say that our age seems to emphasize the warning words, "In the last days perilous times shall come."

We are walking on a muffled volcano—faint mutterings are heard in the hollow beneath our feet. Happy those patriots, philanthropists, governments, that can wisely read the signs of the times, help to open safety-valves to prevent the sudden and, when it comes, uncontrollable outburst—maddened forces direr than Nature's direst.

Strange that the jets of sulphurous smoke here and there polluting the moral atmosphere carry with them so little premonition. We seem to have no eye but for the green grass, the enamel of flowers; smothering prophecies of disaster. Other words of Scripture have a political as well

as a spiritual meaning—"When they are saying, Peace,  
peace—then sudden destruction comes!"

Helpless seafarers! indulging in mirth and song, when  
their ears should be open to the roar of the breakers!

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## **That man only begins to live**

That man only begins to live, in whom self dies.

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## **Orthodoxy "falsely so called"**

Let us beware of an orthodoxy "falsely so called";  
verbose and often pretentious—the orthodoxy of  
upturned eye, and conventional phrase, and dead  
dogma—the orthodoxy which is at no pains to be  
authenticated by . . .

living faith,  
loving word,  
gentle deed,  
generous service.

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## **Home and rest in the ocean of Infinite Love!**

That mountain rivulet, released from the iron shackles  
with which winter has bound it, goes onward, singing  
in concord of sweet sounds, to the sea—its final goal  
of rest. It owes its emancipation to the beams of the

sun of early spring.

Picture of the Sun of Righteousness, shining on frigid hearts, waking up slumbering forces, melting icy indifference, reviving generous impulses, transforming life into a joyous, beneficent stream, whose waters find at last their haven—home and rest in the ocean of Infinite Love!

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## **Undying music**

Posthumous influence! There can surely be nothing more solemnizing than this—that a man may continue to live on—no, does live on—asfter death, either as a curse or a blessing! Happy those who survive to make undying music in the world.

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## **Through the agonies of great trial**

"You, O God, have purified us like silver melted in a crucible." Psalm 66:10

As the olives must be crushed for the oil to flow; as the grapes must be bruised in the wine-press that the vats may be filled; as the gold comes out refined from the furnace—so, through the agonies of great trial, the best Christian graces are developed.

"I have refined you in the furnace of suffering."  
Isaiah 48:10

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

# **The Great Craftsman**

God is permitting us to work the shuttles of life apparently as we may. But He, the Great Craftsman, in His own calm world, is supervising all.

"He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth." Daniel 4:35

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## **The sob of universal humanity**

"I am the Lord who heals you." Exodus 15:26

Christ was the true Jehovah Rophi. What diverse crowds flocked to this Divine Physician of old, and "He healed them all"! No numbers baffled Him; no variety bewildered Him. The inquiring Nicodemus; the rash Peter, boisterous as the waves of the sea; the loving and meditative, yet impulsive John; the strong-willed, skeptic Thomas—each had a niche in the Great Living Temple.

Penitents crept abashed to His feet, and wept out their shame and sorrow. Blind men on the wayside called aloud for help. Lepers in piteous tones—outcasts, spurned and evaded by all others—claimed Him, and found in Him a brother. Hearts crushed and broken with bereavement were in His presence conscious of a combined sympathy and power which dried their tears and restored their "loved and lost."

There was thus response in His bosom to the sob of universal humanity. Every bird of weary wing and wailing cry, abroad on earth's waste wilderness of waters, "seeking rest and finding none," had shelter

and safety and peace in this Ark of God!

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## **A wonderful satisfaction**

There is a wonderful satisfaction in the consciousness of one good deed done. How happily do you close your eyes at night when you have helped during the day to lift a load of sorrow, calm a palpitating heart, or heal a wounded spirit! Such deeds are their own recompense and their own reward.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." Matthew 25:40

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## **The epitome of the Christian life**

"Enoch walked with God"—the epitome of the Christian life.

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## **Desolating bereavement**

At the first moment of desolating bereavement, the eye is too dimmed to see either God's wisdom or love in the chastening. But the ear of faith in due time is enabled to catch the word and to cleave to it—"Be still, and know that I am God!" Psalm 46:10

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## **The raft of God's promises**

Lashed, like the drowning mariner, to the raft of God's promises, you will ride out the storm.

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Ps. 119:117

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## **Gold, silver, jewels**

Now anyone who builds on that foundation may use gold, silver, jewels." 1 Cor. 3:12

There is a variety of work, and of capacity for work, in the Christian Church.

"Gold"—pure, noble-hearted and open-handed men, of position and influence, who use that influence for the highest ends; holy in thought, word, and deed.

"Silver"—True men, not so talented, or wealthy, or influential, but who do their part faithfully and unostentatiously.

"Jewels"—Those of special gifts, brilliant attainments, whose endowments of nature and grace are consecrated to their great Lord.

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## **The choicest of the Gospel's crown jewels!**

"My Father!" That is the choicest of the Gospel's crown jewels!

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## **The first deflection**

The first deflection from the path of virtue, or honor,  
or duty—how prophetic of further doom and disaster!

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## **What a temple for adoration and praise!**

Who does not esteem the manifold teachings of Nature?

Who does not love . . .  
her forest haunts, tremulous with music;  
her flowers, swinging their censers of incense;  
the brooks and streams and birds her choristers;  
the blue dome of heaven her magnificent canopy?

What a sanctuary of holy thought!

What a temple for adoration and praise!

"The heavens tell of the glory of God.  
The skies display His marvelous craftsmanship.  
Day after day they continue to speak;  
night after night they make Him known."  
Psalm 19:1-2

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## **The inheritance of the believer**

The inheritance of the believer—  
"All things are yours!" 1 Cor. 3:21

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **The angels of affliction**

From that dull, dead block of marble, there is evoked by the artist's tools a form radiant with beauty.

The angels of affliction are often God's best sculptors. By their sharp chiselings, stroke after stroke, loveless lives have been made lovely, common people have become great, dead lives have been quickened into the likeness of Christ—transformed into His image.

No! not, as we have said, "angels." The Lord of angels delegates this work to no subordinates. And when the shaping and molding and fashioning are completed, the legend is inscribed—"Made perfect through suffering!"

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **Our life-ministries**

"Each with his assigned task." Mark 13:34

Never let us quarrel at the lowliness of our tasks or the limitations of our life-ministries. The still pond does not complain because it has not the music and ripple of the stream or the swell and surge of ocean. It is content, in its simple way, to supply the needs of the cottage home, or refresh the weary toiler in the field, or give drink to the thirsty beggar.

The violet blushing unseen in the woods does not envy the cedar with its evergreen foliage or the oak with its giant limbs and mighty shadow. It is content to occupy its assigned place, away, it may be, amid

the loneliness of forest aisles.

God has given to each of us our positions and appointed our tasks—humble as well as conspicuous, lowly as well as mighty. Little-hearts as well as Great-hearts are "ministers of His to do His pleasure."

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## **Habitually to realize**

How it would soothe in trouble, nerve for duty, make difficulties easy and crosses light, elevate above the fretting anxieties of life and lead to calm uncomplaining submission, were we able habitually to realize, in all its fullness, the assurance, "God is my Father, and I am His child."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **War!**

Happy the nations who are exempt from "the grievousness of war"—its inherent cruelty, its often demon selfishness; who are delivered from the tyranny of those who make the crouching nations a perch for their ambition—dragging the innocent from their ploughs and vineyards, their peaceful employments of life, their intellectual avocations, their homes of affection, in order to reap a misnamed "glory" they seldom or never share, set in deadly array against those towards whom they feel no hostility.

Never is responsibility greater than that of rulers who, in wanton recklessness, nurture the war-spirit. "The roll of conquering drum" is no music in the ears of the widow and the orphan. Well may the cry ascend to heaven to exorcize the foul fiend—the direst curse that can visit a country or

afflict humanity.

"Give peace in our time, O Lord!" The day will surely come when, with sheathed sword and reversed spear, the prayer will no longer be heard, because no longer needed, "Scatter the nations who delight in war!" Psalm 68:30

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## **Demon or angel?**

We are all sculptors, with the soft, pliant, formative clay molding into shape our own futures—demon or angel.

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## **In the great game of existence**

Sad the case of those who had the possibilities of a good and useful existence, but have lived fatally and hopelessly given up to . . .  
sloth, or  
flippant pleasure, or  
engrossing selfishness.

Those fugitive, precious moments we are forgetting and wasting, cannot be recovered.

In the great game of existence many are staking all and losing all—drifting to hopeless, irremediable bankruptcy. That is a solemn word—a dreadful truth—the irreparable past!

Death will dissolve many a 'fairy vision' that has lured and charmed us. Death will sweep down many 'flimsy cobwebs of earth' that we have laboriously weaved—poor tawdry things we have so often clung to and

clutched!

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## **God's dealings**

God's dealings are . . .  
sometimes penal,  
sometimes disciplinary,  
most often remedial,  
always loving.

## **REVELATION (a devotional commentary) MEMORIES OF PATMOS**

(This book is not about prophetic theories and predictions. It is all about Jesus! It is encouraging and uplifting throughout.)

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## **PREFACE**

For many years has the writer desired to approach, and as often has he been deterred from approaching, this mysterious portion of the Word of God—"the Holy of Holies" of Sacred writ. Nor does he feel, that standing thus long in the outer vestibule has in any way better qualified or emboldened him, at the present hour, to withdraw the veil. If he ventures now to enter, it is not with daring or presumptuous footstep. It is not, assuredly, with the design of becoming a volunteer in the ranks of prognosticators and soothsayers—still less of claiming the ultimate solution and fulfillment of any part of the ambiguous symbolism of the Book, in those tragic events, which, while the present pages are passing through the press, have been convulsing the nations. By no bold divining of "the secret things" which belong only to God, would he seek to pander



to the credulous and the curious, "rushing in where angels fear to tread."

He does not undertake to expound or defend formally and systematically any one of the varied prophetic theories, which divide apocalyptic expositors. But independent of all such—independent even of any consecutive treatment of the Book itself—there are to be found within it manifold isolated passages of transcendent grandeur, beauty, and comfort, which may—with special edification, be selected as themes for sacred meditation—radiant stars in its skies, which can be seen by the naked eye of faith, without the aid of the prophetic lens or telescope—priceless gems, not in its deep mines, but lying on the surface, to which the visions which surround them may be used only as a setting—thus preserving a certain unity and continuity of treatment, without involving committal to any peculiar scheme of interpretation.

It has been well said by a devout and thoughtful master in Israel—"In order to derive much benefit from the Book of Revelation, it is not necessary to have an understanding of its prophetic signification. We shall not have missed the blessing, if, in the course of our perusal of it, we have caught glimpses, it may be dim and mysterious glimpses, of heavenly blessedness hereafter to be realized, and of that Divine Person, who opened the gates of Heaven to all believers—glimpses such as stir in us more fervent aspirations after spiritual good, and urge us forward on our pilgrimage with better hope and heartier energy. Even as the wayworn traveler catches, through tangled branches, the pinnacles and spires of the city to which he is bound, and, cheered by the momentary and disjointed vision, presses on towards it with elastic step and buoyant heart."

Mr. Arnold states, "We should bear in mind, that predictions have a lower historical sense, as well as a higher spiritual sense; that there may be one, or more than one, typical, imperfect, historical fulfillment of a prophecy, in each of which the higher spiritual fulfillment is shadowed forth more or less distinctly."

The pages, accordingly, which follow, purport to be "Memories"—no more; leading strains in the magnificent melody, omitting many subordinate ones. Moreover, this selection from 'some of the great words

and visions' is taken mainly from the opening and closing chapters.

A few preliminary words may not be out of place here, regarding the general plan and structure of the Apocalypse. It may be described as a record of the struggles and victories of the Church, viewed in connection with God's dealings with the nations. It consists of two parts or volumes. The First contains a prologue or introduction, followed by the seven epistles to the seven Churches of Asia. The Second may be described as a prophetic drama in three acts or sections; comprehending the vision of the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials. This second volume, which may be called the Revelation proper, begins also with a sublime prologue, and ends with an equally sublime and solemn epilogue or conclusion.

Of the events recorded in this Great prophecy, there is one, ever and always recurring, of pre-eminent and peerless grandeur—THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Indeed, the Apocalypse may emphatically be named "The Book of the coming One." Its key-note or weighty watchword is, "Maranatha" ("The Lord is coming"). This forms the culminating point of each separate portion of the sacred drama—seals, trumpets, vials. The curtain (if with reverence it may be so expressed) falls, at the end of each act, with the announcement in the ear of the waiting Church, of 'the Blessed hope.' To use another simile, as it is the opening, so is it the magnificent closing chime of all, "Behold He comes with clouds"—"Surely I come quickly."

The Author rises from the task, deeply impressed alike with the grandeur of the divine theme and the imperfection of the human treatment. Yet, while laying the golden key of interpretation which unlocks its profoundest mysteries, at the feet of Him whose name, in one of its most sublime visions, is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," saying—"You alone are worthy to take the Book and to open the Seals thereof;" both writer and reader may take courage, as the eye falls on the inscription above the Temple portico—"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." Rev. 1:3

GENERAL OUTLINE—

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." Revelation 1:19

Part 1. "The things seen;" or, The Opening Vision, with Christ's Charges to the Seven Churches. Revelation 1 through 3

Part 2. "The things which are now;" or, Christ with His Church Universal on Earth. Revelation 4 through 10

Part 4. "The things which will take place later;" or, Christ in Heaven ruling His Church Militant and Triumphant. Revelation 11 through 22

## **THE SCENE AND SPECTATOR**

Revelation 1:1-10

That evening in April can never be forgotten, when sailing through the Archipelago on the way from Palestine to Smyrna, and just as the sun was sinking in subdued splendor over its western rocky ridges, our eyes rested on the Isle of Patmos. Though privileged to enjoy, a few weeks before, the most hallowed associations of all connected with the Apostle of Love, while treading the streets of Jerusalem and the shores of the Lake of Galilee, we had expected to renew these in another form, as we were afterwards permitted to do, amid the desolate ruins of Ephesus, where his own saintly life mellowed by venerable age was closed, and where his Gospel in all probability was written. But sudden and unexpected was this new souvenir of the Gospel era, seeming to rise on the bosom of the deep like one of his own visions. The trail of golden light, brighter had it been seen half an hour before on the molten waters, was yet sufficient irresistibly to recall the description of "the Sea of Glass mingled with fire."

The Island itself was obscure, but it took its place thenceforward in the shrine of memory, among the world's holiest sanctuaries. Our emotions awakened at beholding the exile home of the Beloved Disciple—the very

spot where, before the eye of the rapt prophet, there passed the dream of all dreams—"the visions of God"—where the portals of heaven seemed as if they had descended and the gates of pearl had been flung open, while he heard unspeakable things which it is not possible for a man to utter!

More than half a century had elapsed since John had pillowed his head on his Lord's bosom at the Last Supper, gazed in tearful agony by the cross, and wistfully followed Him with the other bereaved men of Galilee gathered on the Mount of Ascension, until the cloud received Him out of their sight. John alone of all the Apostolic company still survived—the only living link connecting the Church of his day, with the ministry of the Great Master; and, like the last plank of a dismembered vessel, he was now driven by a storm of persecution to this solitary rock in the Aegean Sea.

We have no account whatever of the immediate cause of his banishment from his adopted home in the great capital of Asia. We can only surmise it to have been the faithful, unflinching proclamation of the divine Person and glory of his Lord—the reiterated sermon on the great opening and closing texts of his Gospel: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." "These things are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

It would almost seem indicated indeed, in this introduction to the Apocalypse, that that cardinal article in his former writings was the same for which he was still content to suffer: "who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." It was the "new power" on the earth—"the power of God unto salvation," which had come into antagonism with the power which, enthroned on the seven hills, would brook no rival even in name. It was the "another King, one Jesus," which had roused the susceptibilities—kindled the jealous fury—of the minions of Caesar throughout every province of the vast empire—Ephesus not excepted.

Be this as it may; from being the beloved Apostle, the most honored of men, he was now an exile and castaway on this inhospitable shore; his hoary locks appealing in vain to Roman clemency for exemption from galling servitude and drudgery in the mines of Patmos. But where cannot

God find His people and His people find their God? He who to the lonely Jacob converted the dreary waste and the crudest of pillows into the gate of heaven, could make the wilds of an island-prison bright with His glory—resplendent with His presence! He seems, indeed, in every age of the Church, to have given special proofs and assurances of His grace and love to His more favored servants, when called either to the endurance of trial, or tempted to lapse into despondency.

When the heart of Moses was ready to faint under Israel's repeated murmurings, God set him in the cleft of a rock and made all His glory to pass before him.

When Elijah, the most heroic of the Old Testament worthies, waxed weak as other men, when, in a moment of singular infirmity, leaving work and duty, he could see apparently nothing but godless altars blazing throughout the land—ten thousand knees bowing to Baal and kissing his impious shrine—God made all the elements of nature preach to him of the power he had disowned, and followed these by the 'still, small voice;' thus, by manifestations alike of omnipotence and love, rebuking his distrust and reviving his faith.

When Paul, in a later age, had the thorn in the flesh sent to buffet him—the time and occasion of his trial was made that of richer communications of divine grace. He was led most gladly, therefore, to glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him.

So it was with John. That aged sufferer, whose ninety years had furrowed his cheek with wrinkles, was now drinking the foretold cup and being baptized with the foretold baptism of his suffering Master and Lord. Exiled, forlorn, unbefriended by man, he was about to hold mystic communings with his Savior, shared by no mortal before or since. It was to be in the Isle of Patmos as he had before personally experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration—when the heavenly visitants had vanished, his best Friend was still left, to extract loneliness from his solitude and sorrow from his heart. He "saw no man but Jesus only!"

These storms of persecution might rage as they would around his unsheltered head; but he was about to know, as few have done before or

since, the truth of those grand prophetic words, "a MAN" (the Brother-man he had loved on earth—the glorified-Man now exalted on the Throne)—"a MAN shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The first five opening words indicate the design of the whole Book—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ." For while in their primary meaning it is a Revelation made to Christ by God the Father of things future; still, in no remote or accommodated sense is He the Revealed as well as the Revealer. As it was the adorable Redeemer in His Divine and human nature—the God-man whom John in his Gospel had delighted to honor—so now in his Apocalypse, the Gospel of his old age, it is still the same Great figure which fills the inspired canvas; not the Revelation of dogmas and doctrines, but of the glorified Person of his Living Lord—exhibiting Him as superintending all events in the future of His Church and the world—overruling all their conflicts for His own glory and the ultimate triumph of His cause and kingdom.

The Book in the truest sense is the Revelation, the Unveiling, the Disclosure, the Manifestation of Christ—the glorious Being in the midst of the golden candlesticks—the slain Lamb standing before the throne—the Lion of the tribe of Judah—the Conqueror on the white horse—the enthroned Judge. All the other elements and details of the visions, gorgeous as they are, are subordinate and subsidiary to this. The earthly cry is, "Come, Lord Jesus!" The heavenly cry is, "Worthy is the Lamb!" Christ is thus 'all in all' to the Church on earth and to the Church of the glorified.

The evolution of successive events in history and providence is represented as being in His hand as the Church's Great Head and Ruler. Over that grand scene of earth and its kingdoms—as picture after picture in magnificent unfolding passes before us—the sublime ascription seems to reverberate in undying echoes, "Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"

The prologue, which occupies the first three verses, is followed by John's own salutation or dedication. Affectingly simple is the introduction of his own name in contrast with the doxology with which it is conjoined.

"John, to the Seven Churches which are in Asia." 'John'—no enumeration of his ancestors—no arrogating of title or assumption of Apostolic dignity or prerogative—no assertion of his near and privileged communion with his beloved Lord. And again, when he repeats the name in verse 9, it is only with the touchingly simple addition of, "John, brother and companion in tribulation." Strong corroborative testimony, were that required, that he and no other was the author of the Book. He speaks as one needing no additional or special designation, further than being the bearer of the honored name known widely and well throughout infant Christendom.

He utters the opening benediction of "Grace and peace" from the thrice Holy Trinity (ver. 4). The FATHER is described as "Him who is, and who was, and who is to come;" the Great I AM in the eternity of His unchanging nature. The HOLY SPIRIT is described in the plenitude of His gifts and graces, under the sevenfold symbol of perfection—"like the seven prismatic colors in the one ray of light;" "the seven spirits who are before His throne." And inverting the customary order of enumeration, he closes with the more lengthened adoration of the Divine SON.

This embraces a beautiful description. "The Faithful Witness"—He who came to bear witness to the truth—the Revealer of the Father. "The First-begotten of the dead"—the conqueror of the last Enemy—the first-fruits of those who sleep. The Prince of the kings of the earth—the mighty Ruler seated on the throne of universal empire, and of whom it had been predicted, "I will make Him my First-born, higher than the kings of the earth," adding the yet more endearing delineation, which the Apostle of Love of all men was best qualified to give, (shall we say with a tear in his eye?) "Him who loved" (or rather, in the present tense "who loves") us;" (who loving His own at the beginning, loves with a deathless, unswerving love unto the end), "and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us a kingdom—priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!"

Having appropriately concluded his preface with this doxology, we expect he will now proceed to put in writing the magnificent messages, whether in the shape of letter or vision, which had been revealed to him. But as the succession of bright picturings pass before his mental eye, he

interrupts the narrative, in order that he may add one sentence—interject one preliminary reference to that Great event to which all theology—all history—all time points. His inmost burdened thoughts seem to find relief in the triumphant exclamation, "Behold, He Comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen!" (verse 7).

Owing to the important place the theme occupies in the Book, and in order more effectually to rivet upon it the attention of the reader, we may be forgiven so soon reiterating the assertion dwelt upon in the Preface, that this last topic takes its befitting place in the introduction, as the "Key-note" of all the divine music which seems to swell and circulate in the subsequent heavenly visions. We repeat, "the glorious appearing of the Great God our Savior," as it thus meets us on the threshold, so it is interwoven with the faithful counsels to the Seven Churches. It blends with the intermediate Revelations. It is the last utterance when the vision and the prophecy are sealed up—the last voice heard amid the roll of apocalyptic thunders—"I come quickly; surely I come quickly." While the Evangelist, just as he is awaking from his entranced dream, when the golden Temple-gates are closing, and the heavenly glories vanishing from his sight—breathes the fervent prayer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

One other point has still to be noted in these preliminary verses. It is the Day on which this Revelation was made (verse 10): "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." The Day whose morning sun, to the forlorn exile, rose bright with the remembrance of a completed redemption—when he loved in thought to enter afresh the vacant sepulcher, and listen in trembling transport to the words of the angels. The Day on which, ever since that Great Easter, he had been in the habit of meeting with the faithful to keep the simple commemorative feast, and which in spirit he sought, even in his present solitude, to keep still. The Lord's Day! The present may have possibly, probably, been one of special prayer. The aged Apostle, with all the fire of former love unquenched, may have been wrestling at the mercy-seat, breathing often and again his favorite supplication, "COME, Lord Jesus, COME quickly!" He is heard while yet speaking! That rising sun brings with it the glories of a Pentecostal Sabbath—"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." By this expression he would seem to denote that



he was in a state of holy rapture and ecstasy—withdrawn from earthly things, like Moses on Sinai, or Elijah on Carmel.

The material element, for the time being, was subordinated to the spiritual. The windows of the outer senses were closed, and the entranced and illuminated inner eye became cognizant of a higher world of divine realities. Whether it was in the darkness and silence of his dungeon-vault, or in the traditional cave on the southern rocks of Patmos—or when, engrossed in meditation, he wandered companionless on the shore, listening to the music of the Aegean waves, we know not. But of this we may feel assured, never had John seen such a Sabbath, and never could he see such again, until the pledge and emblem were exchanged for the full vision and fruition of the eternal Sabbath above! What sights! what sounds! what forms! what scenery!—fit recompense surely for years of conflict and toil. The solitary place was made glad.

What Christian Church was ever consecrated like this? Where the most magnificent Sanctuary made with hands that has ever witnessed such glory? The worshiper—one lonely exile. His temple—a rock in mid-ocean. The theme he listens to—the Church-militant—its sufferings—its triumphs—its eternal rewards. The Preacher, no earthly ambassador—but his adorable Lord, arrayed in the lusters of His exalted humanity. Oh! never did the tones of the Sabbath-bell fall so joyfully on the ear, as when the exiled and banished Pilgrim was startled from his bended knees by the trumpet-voice exclaiming, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last!"

At the moment, indeed, as we shall find, he is struck down trembling and astonished. He is unable to bear the uncreated brightness that unexpectedly burst upon him. But a gentle Hand raises him up, and well-remembered tones restore confidence and inspire love. The tears of banishment are dried. He is made to forget the absence of a beloved brotherhood of disciples and saints, in the presence of ONE who 'sticks closer than a brother.'

What Christ was to John, He is to His people still. How often does He convert their times of trial into seasons of special consolation! How often is the couch of sickness and the chamber of bereavement made a Patmos,

where the bereft and exiled soul, shut out from the world, holds sweet converse with its Redeeming Lord—an island in the world's heaving ocean of vicissitude, made resplendent with the glories of Jesus and eternity! Ofttimes, Jesus seems to lay low in the dust, our earthly hopes and refuges—desolating homes and friendships—making the world itself a Patmos, only to prepare, as He disciplined John, for an apocalypse of Himself. How many, thus driven by the windy storm and tempest to the crevices of the Rock of Ages, have had from its sheltering clefts such realizing views of a Savior's presence, and enjoyed such hallowed experiences of a Savior's love, as to make earth's darkest spots of sorrow radiant with the bliss of a foretasted heaven!

"Behold He Comes!" "Surely I come quickly!" Let these words, beginning and closing the "Memories of Patmos," ring in our ears (like a vesper bell) chimes of joy and hope; peals of warning and of solemn preparation. Nearly twenty centuries indeed have elapsed since they were uttered, and still the world holds on its course—the trance of the ages has not been broken by this assured manifestation of the Redeemer's glorified Person. We put our ear to the earth—there is heard no sound of His chariot-wheels. There is nothing in the unvarying sequences of the natural world—there is nothing in past history or in present experience, to indorse and countersign this predicted imminency of the Advent. Be it so—"For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay."

Some may indulge unseemly levity as to the apparent stultifying of the Divine declaration—the bridal lamps kept trimmed in hourly expectancy of the Bridegroom's approach, while no footfall for weary centuries has been heard. But of this we may be assured, that He to whom a thousand years are as one day, has some wise and sufficient reasons alike for the apparent delay, and for the urgent transmission from age to age of the stirring and ever-needful prophetic watchword. One of these reasons doubtless is, that "He is patient with us; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Yes, when we shall be at last permitted to take our stand on the shores of the true Glassy sea, with the Harps of God, and before us the unmeasured cycles of a limitless future, we shall then, by the use of a higher than earthly wisdom, be brought to see how brief after all was the period of

probation, and to vindicate the verity and truthfulness of the Divine utterance "Surely I come quickly!" "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when He comes."

## **THE TRUMPET-VOICE AND OPENING VISION**

Revelation 1:10-16

In the preceding chapter we considered the prologue and dedication of this great Book. He who is alike the Revealer and the Revealed is now to occupy our attention. It is a befitting sequence, to pass from the announcement of the subject, to a description of the adorable Person and character of Him whose tongue of living fire dictates the immediately succeeding letters to the Seven Churches—whose Presence fills every subsequent unfolding of the prophetic roll, and whose glorious Advent is the culminating event—the terminating act of the sacred drama.

But under what form is this description of the majestic Being, who dwells in inaccessible light, to be brought before His Church? How can even John (though 'the eagle' be his traditional symbol) soar upwards on his wings of love and devotion to catch a sight of the Invisible; endure the splendors of the unclouded Sun—and present the result in human words? It cannot be embodied in the usual forms of speech; and, therefore, in accordance with many antecedents in Hebrew history, this revelation of the Person of Christ is to be made, not in earthly language, but by heavenly vision. Ages before, the greatest of all historic revelations of Himself and His ways (in the Exodus and wanderings) was preceded by the "appearing" of the Covenant Angel to the Shepherd of Midian in the burning bush as the Great I AM. Now, in the greatest of all prophetic revelations, the same Almighty Being manifests forth His Person and resurrection glory, not in the desert's flaming bush nor from the cleft rock, but amid the scenery and furniture of Tabernacle and Temple—amid golden Candlesticks and other symbols and accessories most

familiar and hallowed to a Jew.

On the day commemorative of his Lord's rising from the dead, the aged Apostle of Patmos, as we have already seen, is startled with "a great voice as of a trumpet." Probably in this there was yet another Jewish memorial and association. A sound broke upon his ear similar to that with which the Israelite was so familiar, when the festal trumpet summoned to some great convocation—or rather, perhaps, recalling those ominous blasts heard in times of terror, and rebuke, and war. Never, at all events, was there a grander meaning than now, attached to the customary summons which accompanied these trumpet-tones—"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" John turns around, awe-struck and astonished. It was no phantasy—no imaginary voice, (such as, in the devout imagination of the Greek, haunted mountain and cave and waters), but the living presence of a Living Being, who announced Himself as the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last."

The direction, moreover, was added, that what was about to be uttered was not for the solitary one of Patmos only, but for "the Churches in Asia"—not for John the Prophet alone—but, through these seven congregations of that province, as a directory for the people of God, in every age, to the end of time. It was, therefore, to be written "in a Book"—engrossed in a Scroll—as dictated by the lips of the Church's adorable Head. Very possibly this 'voice like a trumpet', as we have just indicated, suggested not so much the silver trumpets of jubilee, as those which would prepare the listener for communications of retribution and judgment, such as were heard in a future vision—"Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth."

Let us turn then aside, like Moses of old, with reverent gaze, to see this great sight—it is a vision alike of sublimity and comfort. May the Holy Spirit, whose special office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto His people, enable us so to behold His glory, that we may be led to exclaim, "I have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"

Reserving for the present the consideration of the Seven golden Candlesticks and other accompanying symbols, we have here successively described to us the Garment, the Sash, the Hair, the Eyes, the Feet, the

Voice, the Sword, and Countenance of the Divine Redeemer. The First thing which seems to have arrested the attention of the Apostle was his Lord's GARMENT: He was "clothed with a garment down to the foot." The long flowing robe, partly priestly, partly regal—but more the former than the latter—suggests the first of many resemblances to the visions of Daniel, when on the banks of the river he saw the man clothed in the long linen garment. In both cases they pointed to the Royal Priest—"the Priest upon His throne"—the God-man Intercessor. The ungirded robe flowing down to the feet, further indicating perhaps, repose—absence of toil—release from labor—in other words, that He who was thus attired had finished His work, fought His great fight—His loins no longer girded for conflict, He had entered on His glorious rest.

There were other awful emblems of Divine majesty there, which we might rather have supposed would have first claimed John's attention. He fastens on the one which formed the badge of his Lord's mediatorial character and office, which enabled him to see God and live. "I saw," said he, "One like the Son of Man." SON OF MAN!—blessed title!—the name by which the adorable Person now revealed called Himself on earth—He loves it still, and wears it still in heaven!

In the glorified lips which were about to whisper, in mingled omnipotence and love, "Fear not!" the Evangelist recognizes the same lips, which in trembling accents from the cross, once called him "Son!" When we remember that John himself was now bowed down with a load of sorrows—a dark midnight of persecution at hand for himself and the Church of God, need we wonder that when the Church's living Head appears, John should have singled out first what reminded and assured him of his Beloved Master's undying manhood? It afforded the certain pledge and guarantee that, though the faithful in that and in other ages might be destined to pass through the severest ordeal of suffering, there was One at the right hand of the Throne (the same who had been disclosed to the dying eye of the martyr Stephen) who could say from dearly-bought experience, "I know your sorrows."

Again, he beheld His SASH: "And standing in the middle of the lampstands was the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a golden sash across his chest." This was the symbol alike of His Truth, His

Unchangeableness, and Love. The Apostle had just noted that which revealed his Lord to be "full of grace;" when he saw the golden sash it confirmed him in the assurance of whose glory it was he beheld—"the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father"—not only "full of Grace," but "full of Truth;" of whom the Prince of Prophets had predicted—"Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."

Moreover, it was the pledge and badge of His unaltered and unalterable Love. Since John had last held visible fellowship with his Redeemer, that Redeemer had been enthroned amid the Hosannahs of Angels, and the glories of Heaven. The question may possibly have often suggested itself—has He changed? Have sixty years of ascension glories dimmed His love, or alienated His affection? Can He be "that same Jesus" who, during His ministry on earth, called His disciples 'friends,' and whom, from the heights of Bethany, they had seen go into heaven? Has He still the Brother's eye, and the Brother's love, and the Brother's heart? That golden Sash afforded silent testimony that, though altered in His outward estate and condition, His name and memorial—His inviolable attachment to His people—knew no change. That name is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Unlike the similar sash of fine gold in Daniel's vision, which encircled the loins, this sash was girded around the Redeemer's chest—around His very Heart of love. Immutability must become mutable, before that Love be altered or that Affection die! But the glorified Humanity of Christ is not of itself enough for His Church. The arm that is to save a world, and wield the scepter of universal Empire, must have the omnipotence of Deity slumbering there—our God, yet our Brother; our Brother, yet our God! The beloved Disciple accordingly, having so far had his fears allayed by a revelation of his Lord's exalted manhood, proceeds to contemplate the symbols of His Godhead—His fourfold attributes of Eternity, Omniscience, Holiness, and Power.

His ETERNITY: "His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow." The Ancient of days who appeared to Daniel now stands before him. There is a remarkable identity here also in the two picturings, and in nothing more than in this significant emblem. It is the echo and response

in vision, of the spectator's own magnificent introduction to his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It is the translation into symbol of the preliminary announcement which had just accompanied the great trumpet: "I am Alpha and Omega." Wondrous theme of contemplation! Christ "set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth was." Before the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted their jubilant anthem over a new-born world—in the remote recesses of the past—before the trance of Eternity had been broken by any manifestation of Divine power—He was rejoicing in the presence of the Uncreated One, Himself the Uncreated Lord! Well did he who spoke of "the Child born, the Son given, the Prince of peace," celebrate Him also as "the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father," (or, as the words may be rendered, the Father of ETERNITY).

Again John gazes, and lo! His OMNISCIENCE: "His eyes were as a flame of fire," Penetrating in searching scrutiny every corner of creation—darting down the vista of the future, and bringing up from its remotest depths material for His servant to register in his prophetic roll, scanning with lightning speed the destinies of His Church, until the last shadow had been cast on earth's dial. And what Christ was to John, He is to His Church still. These flaming eyes are still abroad at this moment, through every remote avenue of the universe, roaming the tracts of immensity; and yet not more there than here—above us, around us, within us.

Comforting and yet fearful truth! Comforting—that there is not the lonely spot or desolate heart where the cognizance and sympathy of Christ are not—that these flaming Eyes—the same which once wept over human sorrow and bereavement, human impenitence and guilt—are watching the heaving of every burdened sigh, and the falling of every tear—that they reach the martyr in his cell, and the exile in his Patmos, and the sufferer on his sick-bed, and the saint at the threshold of the Dark Valley. But dread thought also! Christ's eye is upon me! All things naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! That eye a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart—no deed of darkness to be screened from His view—no sin, undetected by man, unnoted and unregistered by the Great Heart-Searcher! "If You, Lord, should mark

iniquities—O Lord, who shall stand?"

But if His Omniscience be such, what of His HOLINESS and PURITY. This is what the Apostle next beheld "His feet like unto fire" (or, as it has been translated, heated or glowing) "brass, as if they burned in a furnace." How unblemished! how spotless! Even the Seraphim "the burning ones" in the vision of Isaiah—with two of their wings covered their feet, in token of imperfection. But Christ's feet are here uncovered. Why? Because the purity of the holiest created intelligences is a derived purity—His is underived. The one is finite the other infinite. The one is the softened and borrowed luster of the satellite—the other the great central Luminary of Heaven—the Fountain of light and life and glory!

Let us not lose sight of this doctrine—the untainted holiness of the God-man Mediator. He was the true paschal Lamb, "without blemish." As one leak would sink the mightiest vessel that was ever borne on the waters, so never could the Church ride out the storm, had not her living Head—the true Ark—been "the Holy One of God." He rose "glorious in Holiness." He ascended with the song vibrating through the ranks of Heaven, "Holy, holy, holy!" "Sing unto the Lord, O you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness!"

One other attribute still remains: John heard His VOICE, (emblem of POWER.) It was "as the sound of many waters." Of no attribute did the Evangelist require to be more certified than this—that the Church whose destinies were about to be unfolded to him, should be able to claim as her King and Head, One boundless in His resources—strong to smite, strong to save. And accordingly, as if doubly to strengthen and confirm his confidence in the ability of his Lord, his attention is immediately arrested by another emblem of almightiness—the two-edged SWORD proceeding from His mouth. So that the Apostle in Patmos could take the Psalmist's language and say, "God has spoken once—yes, twice have I heard this, that POWER belongs unto God."

Believer! are you encompassed with trouble? Are the floods lifting up their waves, and making a mighty noise? Christ's Voice is "as the sound"—no, says the Psalmist, "it is mightier than the noise of many waters—yes, than the mighty waves of the sea." That Voice has only to



utter the mandate, "Peace, be still!" and immediately there will be a great calm. Whatever be your troubles, your fears, your misgivings—all power is committed unto Him in heaven and in earth. As a Prince, He has power with God and must prevail. The lowly prayer from a burdened saint ascends—the omnipotent "Father, I will," irrevocably secures the boon. "Son! you are ever with Me, and all that I have is Yours!"

The Apostle's closing description in the vision is the radiant COUNTEenance of Immanuel: "His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength." The Church in the Canticles is said to be "fair as the moon"—her luster is not inherent; like that of the Seraphim we have just spoken of, it is derived. But the Church's Lord and King is in the spiritual universe, what the sun of heaven is in the natural—nothing has any glory by reason of the glory that excels—Christ being all and in all. His countenance is like the cloudless splendor of the brightest noon! While blessed it is, to bask under the sunshine of that Countenance whose smile is heaven, whose favor is life—fearful is it to provoke that righteous wrath which is worse than death! The Countenance of Christ is like the two-edged sword. It has a double brightness—or rather, it is like the forked lightning—if it does not illumine, it must scathe. While we read of those who are to hail the bright and morning Star, we read of others who are to be "destroyed with the brightness of His coming."

May it be ours, like Israel of old with their guiding pillar, to walk in the light of His countenance. This is the Countenance which we are told, at the close of this Book, is in a world of glory to displace and supersede all material luminaries. No sun needed in heaven to walk the skies—no moon with her starry retinue to shed their radiance—"for there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever."

## **THE ACCESSORIES OF THE VISION**

## Revelation 1:12-20

We pass from the Vision of the Lord Jesus, to a brief consideration of its accompaniments or accessories. These are threefold—The seven Golden Candlesticks: the Stars He holds in His right Hand: and the Keys of Hell (Hades) and of Death.

**THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS.** This is the first of the many golden emblems we shall meet with in this Book. It unquestionably denotes the Church of Christ. The purest and rarest of the precious metals is taken to symbolize that, whose preciousness can best be estimated by the price paid for its redemption—"Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." The figure takes us at once back in thought, to the sacred furniture of a now waning, or rather, abrogated dispensation—to the one candlestick, with its branches or lamps, in the Tabernacle of the wilderness and the Holy place of the Temple—reminding us also of the similar beautiful and suggestive vision of the Prophet Zechariah, when he saw the candlestick "all of gold," with its seven lamps fed from the upper bowl (or reservoir) of olive oil.

There is a remarkable and most notable difference, however, in this vision of John, from these Old Testament figurations. It is not the one candlestick, the solid central shaft of gold, with its six dependent lamps, which is here represented; but it is among seven distinct and separate candlesticks, the Divine Personage is seen walking. Who can fail to discern and appreciate the beauty and appropriateness of the distinction? The Jewish Tabernacle and Temple-lamp which rose before the Prophet's eye, were symbolic of the Church of God in its relation to the kingdom and economy of Israel. That ancient Church for ages stood alone in the earth as the Divine 'light giver.' But no sooner did the Jewish dispensation cease, than the Temple-lamps were separated.

The Christian Church, though one in essence and spirit, is no longer one in outward or visible unity, but constituted of many parts; these, it may be, widely removed from each other. Jesus Himself, the alone Illuminator, is represented as moving in their midst, their common bond of union. It is no longer one planet, but a system, of which He is the glorious sun and center. John had in his opening Gospel, declared, "In

Him was life, and the Life was the light of men." No candlestick, no church shines of its own light—from Him its light emanates. And the Church in Heaven, as already noted, is in this respect only the grander complement and counterpart of the Church on earth. In her magnificent Temple, the same Divine Illumination is perpetuated through eternal ages, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light thereof."

But as no church can live by its own light—by sparks of its own kindling, so neither can it maintain its existence if it fails to scatter and diffuse its derived glory all around. Woe to any such, which professes to walk in the light of its Divine Head, and yet absorbs the God given rays—keeps with niggard hand that which was given it to disperse and radiate to earth's circumference. The parable which condemns the faithless servant who hid his master's money, condemns also by implication the traitor-church which refuses to be evangelistic—caring only for its own well-being, not for others. The absorber of spiritual light becomes in its turn the receptacle of darkness, and serves itself heir to the most solemn warning its rejected Lord ever uttered—"If, therefore, the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

But, further, the Christ of Patmos is seen in the vision having SEVEN STARS in His right hand: "And He had in His right hand seven stars"—holding them, as has been supposed, as a wreath or garland. These stars are the emblems of ecclesiastical and civil rulers. Christ holding these, and holding them in His right hand—the seat of power and strength—the hand which grasps the reins of empire, tells far more powerfully than words, that all the subsequent actors in this prophetic scroll are under His supervision and control—as much so as the stars and planets in the material heavens. In a spiritual and figurative sense it may be said, that He "binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades, looses the bands of Orion, and guides Arcturus with his sons."

Walking among the candlesticks and having the stars in His hand, together assure us that no church faithful to Him need fear destruction—no lamp can be extinguished, nor star plucked from that gemmed garland, which has the hand of Omnipotence to protect it. If one unfaithful star falls from its setting, He will have another ready to take its place. Seven—"the number of mystical completeness"—can suffer no

diminution. Individual churches may cease to shine and cease to be; but the Church itself is imperishable. God's Old Testament promise to His spiritual Zion is a motto for all time—"Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands, and your walls are continually before me."

The next accompanying symbols are THE KEYS OF HELL (or rather of Hades) AND DEATH, suspended by His side. Christ having Himself endured the sharpness of death, not only has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; but as that kingdom is entered through the dark gateway (with its gloomy portal) of dissolution and the grave, He is described here as the Keeper of these also. The whole region of Hades and the invisible spirit-land is under His sway. That 'undiscovered country' many a traveler has entered. Since our different lives began, millions on millions have passed through the mysterious shadows into darkness, and not so much as a single person of these has come back to throw one ray of light on the silent regions. No warrior, like David's three men of might, has burst through the interposing barriers and returned to tell the wished-for tale.

But the Lord of life has stormed the domain and citadel of Death—the 'Stronger than the strong' has assailed the otherwise impregnable ramparts—plucked the crown from the King of Terrors—taken from him the Keys—the badges of possession and power—and converted that somber portico into an arch of triumph, bearing the inscription, "Who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light!"

The Apostle, overwhelmed with the magnificence and glory of the Divine vision, had fallen at the feet of his Lord 'as though dead.' Yes! despite of all his old confidential communion and favored familiarity, he cowers like a terror-stricken child, beneath the unveiled majesty of the great Heart-Searcher—just as the loftiest archangel is said to feel profoundest humility, because permitted to be nearest the glorious Being before whom he casts his crown. But John listens to the brief reassuring words, "Fear not!"—words which may have recalled other occasions besides the Mount of Transfiguration and the night on the Sea of Tiberias.

And on what grounds is he told to dismiss his fears? Is the exhortation, 'Fear not: for you are in the presence of the same Lord who called you at

Bethsaida—who sat by you at the Last Supper—who confided to you the sacred charge from the cross—who met you at early morn on the lake shore, and left you with hands extended in blessing?' No! He quiets His servant's misgivings by a double revelation of Himself, as the Conqueror of Death, and as a living, Life-giving Redeemer: "I am the Living One; I was dead." "I am living" (as the words may be rendered) "unto the ages of the ages!" It is enough—the Apostle asks no more. Moreover, feeling the touch of the magnificent Personage (for He laid His right hand upon him), he rises from his posture of prostration and crouching awe. Death is divested of its fearfulness. The vision and its great words have nerved him for the task that is now to be assigned to him, of transcribing what is about to be unfolded. He seems to say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord!"

"Write," says the Divine voice to His now reassured servant, "write what you have now seen," as well as "the things that are, and the things that shall be." For behalf of my Church universal, record that which has now passed before your eyes, that all men may have some feeble apprehension of the glories of my Divine Person within the veil: what I have done—and what I am still doing, as the Great High Priest, the Vanquisher of death, the Ruler of the invisible world. "Write," not for yourself, but for the ages. Unknown to you, you will thereby soothe many a sorrow and dry many a tear!

The Reader cannot fail to observe the peculiar appropriateness and adaptation of the vision with its accompaniments, for the time at which it was given. John, as we have already noted, was now the sole remaining representative of the Apostolic Church. He alone had lived to see on the political horizon, wrathful storms brooding against the Christian name; and if he himself were soon to be permitted to close his eyes in death, and thank God that he was taken from the evil to come, well he knew that those on whom his mantle and spirit were to fall, would have a legacy of suffering bequeathed to them—that they would be called upon to bear, in its heaviest severity, the martyr's cross, before they obtained the martyr's crown!

If, then, the Apocalyptic Roll about to be unfolded to him, like that of Ezekiel, was to be written in characters of 'lamentation and mourning

and woe,' what more comforting vision could be given, than the Church's King and Head appearing in the midst of the Church itself, which was to be the theater of suffering—in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and with the stars in His right hand; wearing the garb of glorified humanity; and yet with all the symbols of regal might—the avenger of His saints, the conqueror of their foes?

The Vision speaks to us! The Lord has the same motto and watchword to give His Church too, in her collective capacity, in fighting her battles, as He had just given His servant personally. It is that HE IS HER LIVING REDEEMER! "Fear not; I am He that lives! Behold! I am alive forevermore!" The Children of Zion may well be joyful in their King: the thunders may awake the fury of the ungodly, the vials may descend, the tempests may sweep—for she can listen to the living voice of her living Head—"I am He that lives!" And because He lives, she shall live also. Yes, beautiful vision! Christ with the "stars in His right hand"—Christ with His ministers! Christ with His earthly potentates! Christ King of Zion! Yes, Christ King of nations! Christ retaining faithful watchmen on the Church's battlements, who, in times of deepest rebuke, and apostasy, and blasphemy, will not hold their peace day nor night! Christ declaring that the shields of the earth are His alone!—controlling the schemes of other haughty potentates, alike for the chastisement and prosperity of His people! And then, when they have done their work, scattering them as chaff before the whirlwind!

Oh! when John had the first startling intimation of this Divine apparition in Patmos—when he heard the trumpet heralding his Lord's approach, saw the bright blaze of glory projected from His path, and listened to the announcement in whose presence he was—"I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,"—he might have expected, on turning around, to gaze on some dazzling throne gleaming with the coruscations of Truth, and Holiness, and Righteousness; with tiers of attendant angels and burning seraphim lining the celestial pathway! But more comforting far is it to the exiled Prophet, and to the Church of Christ to the end of time, to behold a simpler and less imposing vision—the Lord holding merely a cluster of stars in His hand, and encircled with seven golden candlesticks, proclaiming the perpetuity of His mediatorial sway. "Fear not! I am He

that lives." "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; the Lord shall help her, and that right early."

Church of the living God! how wondrous your privileges! In a succeeding chapter, we have a sublime glimpse given us of Heaven, where Christ is represented in the midst of His redeemed, summoning forth, as 'the Lamb that was slain'—a loud anthem from ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. But here we have Him in gracious love, moving in the midst of the Church-militant—feeding each candlestick with the oil of His grace and keeping every star in its sphere in the firmament.

And the beauty of the vision is, that it is not Christ dealing only with His Church universal—keeping the oil from decaying, and the gold from tarnishing, and the stars from abandoning their orbits and drifting uncontrollably into outer darkness—but we have in this exquisitely tender dealing with John, an assurance of what He is, and is willing to be, to every individual believer—the poorest, the humblest, the lowest, the most obscure—though his heart be a Patmos—lonely and desolate; and his home be a desert rock, or a dungeon of captivity, or a hut of poverty, or a chamber of disease, or a bed of death—there He is, to lay His right hand of love on the trembling one, and say, "FEAR NOT."

Fear not! poor sinner, trembling under the load of your guilt: 'I am He who was dead;' My death is your life, My blood your plea, My cross the passport to your crown! Fear not! you weak and fainthearted, borne down under your corruptions, the strength of your temptations, the weakness of your graces, the lukewarmness of your love—'I am alive for evermore!' My grace will be sufficient for you. Fear not! suffering one—you are contending with a great fight of afflictions—trial after trial, like wave after wave, rolling in upon you—your house has been swept, ties have been broken, graves opened, the tear scarcely dry when made to flow again. Fear not! 'I have the keys of the grave and of death.' Not one deathbed has been ordered, not one grave dug, not one tear permitted, without My bidding.

Are you not satisfied when a Living Redeemer has the Keys of Death suspended from His sash? in whose keeping could they be better than in

His? Are you afraid to die? Is the thought of death, of your coming dissolution, fearful to you? 'Fear not! I was dead!' I have sanctified that grave and that dark valley, by traversing it all before you—I am the abolisher of Death, and to all My people I have made the gate of Death and the gate of Heaven one!

Reader, do you know this ever-living, never-dying Savior? With the triumphant faith of a saint who lived thousands of years antecedent to the Apostle of Patmos, can you say—"I know that my Redeemer lives?" Jesus lives! then perish every desponding thought. Jesus lives! then though heart and flesh faint and fail, He will be the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Jesus lives! the Living among the dead—Faithful among the faithless—Changeless among the changeable—the only unfailing, unvarying Friend in a failing, varying world! Jesus lives! then when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory! Like John, we will fall down at His feet and exclaim, "this God shall be our God forever and ever!"

## **THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES**

A well-known commentator on the Apocalypse has graphically pictured the aged Evangelist ascending one of the rocky heights of Patmos, and from thence, as a center, beholding on every side, even at that early dawn of the Christian era, undoubted evidences of the spread of the Gospel. Flourishing churches were planted all around, far beyond the line of the visible horizon. In Greece, those of Philippi and Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth; in the East, Jerusalem and Antioch; in the South, Cyprus, Alexandria, and Crete; westward, in Caesar's household and Caesar's capital; while the bearers of the glad tidings had even left the impress of their early footsteps on the shores of France and Spain, and our own remote island of Britain. He who in his former years had



witnessed the whole Church of Christ contained in one upper-room in Jerusalem, had lived to see its line gone out through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world.

In that wide sweep—that supposed panoramic prospect, there was one cluster of Christian congregations, which, above all the rest, was peculiarly dear to the Exile, that is, the Churches of Asia. Not the Asia we are accustomed to think of, in its wide geographical acceptance; not even the Asia Minor—the peninsula equally familiar to us under the sway of modern Turkey, which embraces a continent in itself; but a comparatively limited district or province along her western coast line, and of which Ephesus formed the recognized capital. To these cities and their Churches, John's great Lord commissions him to write seven distinct Epistles or addresses.

We are not to understand that seven exhausted the number of congregations of the faithful planted in that region; for, independent of other testimony, we have reliable information from the Epistles of Ignatius that at least two additional cities, larger than some of those mentioned, had Churches in their midst. The number seven was evidently again employed as the type of completeness—that same symbol which we have already had occasion to note in regard to the description of the Holy Spirit in His manifold operations—"The seven spirits which are before the throne"—the symbol which we shall meet in other significant figurations in subsequent portions of the Book. For example, the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes; the seven burning lamps before the throne; or, in the outpourings of Divine judgments, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven vials.

This symbolic number further betokens, that the epistolary addresses were designed as a directory of perpetual obligation for the whole universal Church, of all ages and all climates—European as well as Asiatic. The internal condition of these congregations, as unfolded in the varying language employed, reflects, as in a mirror, the mixed and conflicting aspects and elements which attach in all periods of her history to the Church-militant. They are, if it may be so expressed, outlines, filled in with their own appropriate details, but in bold outline depicting the ever-varying and diversified features in church life and character—the

admixture of wheat with tares, truth with error, zeal with coldness, fidelity with unfaithfulness, light with darkness, life with death.

There is Ephesus, bold in resolute endurance, discerning, intolerant of departures from the faith, and of all tampering with heathen libertinism—yet this coupled with lamentable declension from first love.

There is Smyrna, battling nobly with tribulation and danger in the midst of poverty and suffering—rich in faith and good works.

There is Pergamos, environed with satanic influences in varied forms and phases—the seat of hostile Jews clinging to the beggarly elements—the professing members of her Christian Church polluted with the defiling doctrines of Antinomianism—yet the band of faithful and true-hearted holding fast the true Name in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

There is Thyatira, amid charities and zeal and all outward activities, endangered by the seductions of false teachers, those who would set up sensuous and sensual worship, deifying material forms, and encouraging immoral practice.

There is Sardis, with its few noble exceptions, yet, as a Church, careless, unwatchful, formal, joined to its idols, dying while it lives of spiritual sloth and blandness.

There is Philadelphia, with its little strength in the midst of fierce temptations, but keeping resolutely the word with patience, repressing the spirit of evil, strong and loving in its very weakness.

There is Laodicea, distinguished for its worldly riches, its high-toned profession and spiritual pride; yet lowest in the scale and standard of all, with its perilous lukewarmness, neither cold nor hot—a religion of boasting words, but devoid of vitality and moral strength—"poor, blind, and naked."

Each individual Church has thus its distinctive peculiarities, its points of danger, and points of strength and safety—its subjects for commendation or rebuke. And hence these seven written messages may be regarded as a

charge addressed by the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, through seven representative congregations, to His great diocese of Universal Christendom. There is a word of solemn warning and admonition to all, against the sins of pride and worldliness; formalism and self-sufficiency; doctrinal and heart apostasy; compromise with error; laxity of life.

There is a word of gracious encouragement to the lowly, the suffering, the patient, the faithful, the duty-doing, the good and the true; especially when alive to their spiritual weakness and insufficiency. And more solemnizing is the lesson they further convey, that He who spoke so familiarly to John of these seven congregations in that early age, is, with the same searching scrutiny, in the midst of all His congregations and churches to this hour, noting with His eyes of flaming fire their faults and errors; their neglects and failures; their sinful departures from truth; their tamperings with error; their declensions and shortcomings.

But ready, too (when He sees their weak faith requires it), with His encouragements and approval—His promises and support; His sympathy and love; and the last more than the first. In a word, these Epistles contain a stereotyped message for all time—as much for us in Britain as for the Orientals of the first century. Nor is it at all necessary that we should regard the seven Churches, as some writers have done, as representatives of successive epochs or chronological eras of the Christian faith—describing the evolution of the church-life of future Christendom; as if they resembled the rainbow, the seven-colored arc of heaven, spanning the centuries from the earthly ministry of our Lord to His second coming—depicting the Ephesian age, the Sardis age, the Laodicean age, and others. Such an interpretation seems alike forced and fanciful; for it is at once manifest, by reference to a map, that the names of the towns are taken in their local order as the Apostle himself may have visited them, beginning naturally with Ephesus—alike from its own pre-eminence and John's association with it—taking a northerly line to Pergamos and Thyatira, then a southerly direction, until the circuit is completed by a return to the great capital of the province.

We are abundantly warranted, therefore, rather in asserting that these seven Churches, by a sort of complex unity and symbolism, embrace all periods as well as all characteristics. The lessons embodied in their

Epistles are limited to no age or circumstances. In common with every other portion of Scripture, they are "written for our admonition." In the words of good old Bengel, "Whether one may be so dead as the Church of Sardis, or may stand so well as that of Philadelphia, . . . this book is still fitted to be serviceable to him, and the Lord Jesus has something in it to say to him."

And here may we not pause to remark, how honored was John to be the instrument in the hand of Christ and of the Divine Spirit, in preparing this legacy for the Church of the future? Mysterious, doubtless, at the time to him and to others, was the Providence which divorced him from the scene of his active labors—his ministries of apostolic love, and condemned him to silence and inaction in the sea-girt isle. But his pen was to achieve more lasting good than all his sermons and spoken utterances. The things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel. His own tongue, with its fervid accents, was for the time silent, and his bereaved flock would mourn the cruel separation. But the place of his exile is to be consecrated as a temple for mankind—lonely Patmos is to become a spiritual oasis! The Church throughout all the world is to enjoy the compensating blessing to its last era, in these letters of surpassing faithfulness and comfort, and these visions of surpassing glory. He is shown that there are other ways of glorifying the name and promoting the cause of the Great Master he served, than by an answer to the prayer, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise."

And so is it still in God's inscrutable dispensations! By these, there are often gracious ends to be subserved, which at the time are indiscernible. The tongue of the mute has been caused to sing—the parched ground has become a pool, and the dry land springs of water. "Men see not yet the bright light in the clouds." "But it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light."

The form which these seven letters or addresses assume is unique; or, as it has befittingly been called, artistic. They are cast in a similar mold and have a harmony and congruity of parts, which it may be well briefly to notice.

(1.) They are all addressed to "the Angel" of the respective Churches—the recognized representative or messenger of each congregation. It was a name or term probably borrowed from the presiding functionary, the minister or president, of the Jewish Synagogue.

(2.) Each letter begins with "These things says He." Followed not only with a reference to the glorious Person of the Sender, but embodying some imagery borrowed from His own previous words in the preparatory vision. "These things says He that holds the seven stars in his right hand." "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive." "These things says He which has the sharp sword with two edges." "These things says the Son of God, who has His eyes like a flame of fire"—and so on.

(3.) Each Epistle further begins with the impressive, solemnizing formula of the Divine omniscience—"I know your works." The congregations are thus prepared with befitting seriousness and awe to listen to the words of the Great Heart-searcher.

(4.) Each address ends with a phrase concerning conflict and victory, and a promise "to him who overcomes." Moreover, while the first part of the address is couched in plain words, the closing promise is in language of varied and beautiful figure—the Tree of life—the White stone—the Morning star—the White clothing—the New name—the Heavenly Throne.

(5.) The address to each Church is wound up with the solemn exhortation, or refrain, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the Churches"—a sacred reminder, that although it is Christ who walks in the midst of the Candlesticks, and Christ who indites those Epistles to His servant John, He does not supersede the office of that Divine Agent of whom He had aforetime said, "He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you."

One general practical and comforting observation may be further added—that Christ, the Divine Overseer, cares for all His Churches, however great or however small. Perhaps He purposely left out the larger congregations, and inserted the Epistle to the comparative handful of believers at the almost unknown Thyatira, in order to give the assurance to all faithful

associations of Christian men, limited in number and resources—battling it may be for dear life, that it is not numerical strength or social position, or local influence and importance, which are required to ensure His cognizance and care. The few names in Sardis—the little strength of Philadelphia—the hundreds in Thyatira—as well as the thousands in the teeming marts of Ephesus; the Church among the Valleys of Piedmont; the missionary settlements of the lowly and unlettered Moravians; the grain of mustard-seed, wherever it has fallen—each is tended, and watched, and nurtured by the Great Husbandman with patient and discriminating regard.

The sublime contrast is alike true and comforting concerning Churches as concerning individuals: "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom—your dominion endures throughout all generations; yet the Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down." "In that day we will sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the Lord, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it." "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

Well would it be for us faithfully to hold up that mirror of all these Churches, and see in it the reflection of our individual selves; to note the warning and the danger-signals as we are careering onwards in life's swift and speedily-ended journey. How soon, in their case, did the golden age degenerate into the brass and the iron! Founded in the midst of ultimate and apostolic zeal, with the dew of Christian youth upon them, how soon did they lapse into error, apostasy, and open sin—removed away from the faith and hope of the Gospel, the faithful counsels and burning prayers and tears of earth's holiest men forgotten, as a dream when one awakens!

May we not well take home the lessons from their extinguished light and vanished glories? "If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin." "You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and forever. Amen."

# The Epistle to the Church of EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1-7

In the previous chapter, we were led to make some preliminary and general observations regarding the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia. As we now proceed to the consideration of three of these, let us be solemnized by the reflection, whose utterances they are—not those of John (the scribe, instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, though he was), but the living words of John's great Master and Lord—words communicated by the divine teaching and resistless energy of the Spirit of all Truth. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the Churches."

The first Epistle is that to the metropolitan city of the province at that time; and for many years afterwards, one of the world's greatest capitals. Any one who has had the melancholy pleasure, as the writer has done, of treading the ruins of EPHESUS, can understand, even amid present desolation, how it rose to its proud pre-eminence—what that now pestiferous swamp, with its reeds and morasses, must have been, when it formed a spacious harbor for the merchantmen of the Aegean Sea; the unrivaled temple of Diana, a glittering mass of white marble from the adjoining quarries of Mount Prion, crowning its upper end. On a height overlooking these, amid the semi-circular seats of its great theater, a view is still commanded of the entire ancient site, reaching far out to the sea.

One can still re-people the present solitude with the once busy life—fancy the coasting-vessel, which more than once rounded the Island of Samos, bearing on its deck the great Apostle of the Gentiles to the city most tenderly associated with his life and labors. Here, for three years, Paul was engaged in unremitting toil—bodily and mental. Here he encountered the most virulent of persecution. But here, too, he had left behind him the most indubitable proofs of his earnest ministry; for he tells us, "By the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one day and night with tears." From the language employed in his Epistle to the

Ephesians, we can indeed draw no decisive inference, as there are strong grounds for surmising that that Epistle was rather a circular letter addressed to the Churches of the province, than to the individual Church of Ephesus. But even if the latter were no more than merely included in this most deeply spiritual encyclical, it shows that the Apostle's sacred lessons had there taken congenial root. It is an Epistle which could only have been understood and appreciated by those "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," and who had been enabled to comprehend, as none other of His converts had, "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ!"

This Church of glowing zeal and fervor he had afterwards committed to the special charge of his spiritual son, Timothy. And if we can add yet one other to its holy memories, it was when this city of Paul's loving Epistle received in its midst the loving and beloved Apostle John, bearing along with him, according to tradition, the most honored of women—the aged mother of his and her Lord. Someway amid these thorny and tangled thickets of Mount Prion in Ephesus, the dust of the Apostle of Patmos is said to rest. There, as he lived to glorify, so there he waits, to welcome his Savior at His second coming.

Be that as it may, to this 'eye of Asia', as it was proudly called—the civil and ecclesiastical center of Asia, the first of these seven inspired messages was sent by the Great Bishop of souls. He who was seen in the vision simply "in the midst of the golden candlesticks," announces Himself, by a notable variation of phrase, as "walking" in their midst—going about to and fro—from church to church, from congregation to congregation—we may add from soul to soul.

"Walking"—a term suggestive of His unresting, wakeful vigilance. His under-shepherds may sleep, but He that keeps Israel does not slumber—He neither slumbers nor sleeps. If these candlesticks were left to faithless man, how often would the flickering flame languish and die! But He is the true "Watchman of the house"—the sleepless Keeper of the temple courts. Blessed be God, no church, no individual, is dependent on pastor or minister! The presence and sustaining grace of Christ are the secret of all life and light! We are "kept by the power of God." It is because the great God is in the bush, that, though burning, it is never consumed.



The Omniscient Savior now enjoins John to put on record the grounds of His commendation. He begins with the lights of the picture before filling in the contrasting dark background. The subjects of approval, as we might have expected, are not few, in the case of a Church which, at all events in its earlier life, had proved itself worthy of being made the depository of such rare means and privileges. "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary." All this bespeaks a gigantic and prolonged struggle; just such a fierce struggle as we might have looked for with the multitudinous adversaries in that city, where cultured Greek, and subtle Oriental, and libertine Roman, and intolerant Jew, combined with the native and bigoted votaries of Diana in uncompromising hostility to the faith of Jesus.

The Elders of Ephesus, when they met Paul at Miletus, had been forewarned by him in his touching address, of the grievous wolves that were before long to assail that faithful fold. His anticipations had been too faithfully verified. With ravening fury they had descended; but though, in the simile of a greater than Paul, the wolf had come, it had failed to scatter the sheep. He whom they had taken as their Shepherd, whose cause and religion they had boldly espoused, had noted their "labor" (their toiling, oppressive labor, as the word means); their "patience" under threat, and persecution, and violence; their "intolerance" alike of doctrinal defection and inconsistent conduct—"You cannot bear those who are evil;" their rigid and impartial discipline, exercised in the case of all false teachers and false brethren who were sneakily bringing in damnable heresies, which, under the semblance of human wisdom, were undermining the foundations of the faith. Amid scorn, and ridicule, and worldly loss—with martyr-heroism and martyr-patience, they were firmly enduring all for His name's sake! What a noble eulogy! What more could be said on His part? What more can be lacking on theirs? It almost seems as if the supreme Judge of all had in a miniature court averted the great Judgment-scene, and pronounced His unqualified "Well done!" on their good and faithful service.

And yet this prolonged eulogy—this full catalogue of well-earned praise, is followed with a "nevertheless." "Nevertheless, I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." The first ardor of their early love had cooled. It was only a few brief years since Paul's Epistle was sent, but its phraseology would need to be sadly altered and modified now. Their Lord's saying on Mount Olivet had a mournful fulfillment regarding their collective body, whatever might be the individual exceptions—"The love of many shall wax cold." He speaks of them as "fallen"—fallen from a high eminence—like once-soaring eagles, now with wings collapsed, struggling in the dust, their noble plumage soiled and ruffled—their glory gone!

Does not this righteous upbraiding come home in solemn, searching truthfulness to many churches, many congregations, many hearts? Where is the fire and fervor and devotion of your first love? Is God's word by His old prophet a bygone memory—"I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals?" Has the love of the world, or the love of sin, has neglect of prayer and of the means of grace, dulled and deadened spiritual life—so that there are no kindlings of soul, as once there were at the mention of the name and the love of Jesus? Has a mechanical, formal orthodoxy taken the place of the life of faith and the life of devotion?

What is to be done? Is the dull torpor, the mournful deterioration to be perpetuated? Is the lamp to be allowed to flicker and dim and die away in the darkness, without an effort to resuscitate the flame? No! the Lord's loyalty in rebuking us, is only to prepare the way for a gracious challenge—"Remember therefore from where you are fallen, and repent and do the first works." However great or ignominious the fall, it is never too late to rise and redeem the neglected past. "Turn! turn!" He seems to say, "that you die not." And turn not by rekindling a mere fitful glow of ardent emotion, but by doing "the first works"—the true tests and exponents of a genuine revival of that love which has suffered so sad a decay.

The opportunity, however, may be short. If the season of grace and repentance be allowed to pass unimproved—"I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick (or lamp) out of his place." The one glimmering, unfaithful candle is only taking up room in the temple-court, which another would better supply. It is like the barren fig-tree of

the parable, drinking in to its worthless stem and branches the summer rains, and dews, and sunshine which would have nurtured abundant fruit in others. In either case, the defaulter must be removed, for needlessly occupying temple-space or cumbering productive ground.

Oh! it is a solemn thought, alike regarding churches and individuals, that it is only by reason of the Lord's marvelous patience and tolerance they are preserved. The hour of mercy is on the wing. "Except you repent" trembles on the lips of the infinitely forbearing One. His Spirit will not always strive. If His patience be tampered with and abused—if a church, instead of going from strength to strength, degenerates from weakness to weakness—the long-deferred sentence must go forth! How did it fare with Ephesus? Alas! she knew not the time of her visitation. The grievous wolves completed the havoc of the fold—the waning love gradually lessened—the once-bright candle was quenched in darkness!

And where is the queenly city and her loyal, God-loving church now? The place that once knew them, knows them no more—the pen of desolation has written on every fragment of her moldering ruins, "I will remove your candlestick out of his place!"

The Divine Savior, after recurring once more to a redeeming feature in the case and character of the Ephesian Christians—their determined stand against the licentious creed and practice of the Nicolaitanes or Baalamites, concludes with the first of the beautiful cluster of figurative promises—"To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." In wrath He remembers mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and who stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind, always mingles reproof with kindness. He wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live.

In that apostate Church there were doubtless a few still faithful—still glowing with the old fervor of pristine love—a few olive berries still on the top of the wintry boughs. It is to such He addresses the closing promise—to those who would hold fast their faith and patience to the end, He would give to eat of the tree of life in the celestial Paradise. In the earliest chapters of Bible story, we have a glimpse of that Tree of life within the

earthly Eden; but its gates close and the mysterious object vanishes from our sight. But a more ravishing Eden and Paradise is revealed above, where sin dare not enter, where no cherubic sword guards the way. There, is this Tree with its perennial fruits, wafting immortal fragrance and distilling immortal balm—the symbol and emblem and guarantee to the glorified of the perpetuity of their bliss.

It is worthy of notice—as showing the connection between these Epistles to the seven Churches and the second (and in some respects distinct) part of the Book of Revelation—that the figurative promises of the one have a remarkable correspondence in the other. Indeed, these figurative sayings in the seven Epistles have their amplest fulfillment and interpretation in the subsequent glowing visions of the millennial state and heavenly glory. As an old commentator says, "The first thing promised in the seven Epistles is the last and highest in the fulfillment." In the closing gorgeous vision of the water of life, "on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Whatever was forfeited in the Fall will be more than compensated in Redemption. "Behold!" says He who sits on the throne, "I will make all things new!"

And what is the great practical lesson, on a review of this searching and solemn letter? Is it not to prompt the question—How does it stand with us as churches? How does it stand with us as individuals? Have we forgotten the vows of our early heart-dedication? Are the symptoms of decay and declension too painfully visible among us? Is the spiritual death-chill upon us? Has the cable been cut which anchored us to the living Rock, and are we drifting farther and farther out to the great sea of darkness?

Again we ask, "What is to be done?" Is it to be abandonment? despair? No! Let us return and "do the first works" before we become castaways forever! Let us search out the peculiar sins which have caused the terrible departure and quenched the first love—whether it be worldliness, or pride, or sensuality—or, like these Nicolaitanes, turning the grace of God into a license for sin—a boasting profession with an inconsistent or immoral life—whatever has enfeebled the moral courage, and left a miserable, heartless outward form as all the remains of the once-loving

soul and devoted purpose. "To him who overcomes," the Divine Head—Himself the mightiest of conquerors; reminds His people of toil and struggle, as the condition of victory.

Nor let us fritter the solemn individual application away, as if the reference had no bearing on ourselves, and was restricted to that martyr age—to amphitheaters and arenas of blood—to Domitian's dungeons and Nero's lions. The conflict, though imperceptible, is often to the spiritual nature, deadliest in a time of peace—when there is nothing to rouse from the slumber of self-security and sleepiness—when we are apt, by base worldly concessions and sinful compliances and self-indulgences; by arrogance and pride; by grasping covetousness and portentous forms of greed; by lax doctrines and immoral life; to deny and dishonor the name and cause of our Great Master.

By those who prefer (for there is a contrast intended) eating the debilitating fruits from the tree of guilty pleasure, there will be gathered none of the fruits of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God. That tree is the reward of conquest, and toil, and self-sacrifice to the fighting Christian—not to the coward and selfish children of Ephraim, who, though appearing in soldier-armor, "carrying bows," have turned faint in the day of battle. On the other hand, nobly fighting and striving, the fruit of the tree (Christ's grace and strength) will be imparted even now, to give nourishment, and vigor, and needful support in all time of our tribulation.

But as it is to churches in their collective capacity to which the Divine Redeemer here specially speaks, neither let us lose the solemn distinctive lesson by dwindling it down in an application to individuals alone. As surely as Ephesus—the home of apostles and martyrs, with her bright sisterhood of Christian cities, was weighed in the balance and found lacking, and has been swept with the broom of destruction—so surely will Britain and America be dealt with if she allows herself to be a traitor to the most gigantic spiritual trust ever bequeathed to a great people.

All churches are on their trial. Well for us if we get guiding-light from these beacons of the past—if we carefully hearken to the cautionary word. The Great Head who moves in the midst of His candlesticks will never be

without a Church! He will never be stripped of faithful witnesses to His name and cause. His Churches may be transferred—but they can never, like the candle of the wicked, be put out. The place of the faithless will be transferred to the faithful. If we refuse to shine for Him, others will—if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out!

Christ indeed may not—and from His utterances in these Epistles will not—be unmindful of a Church's good deeds in the past. Her historic recollections, her struggles, her martyrdoms, are engraved on the palms of His hands—the kindness of her youth, the love of her espousals. But neither let us trust to the possession of mere ancestral fame and prestige. It will not save us when we cease to fulfill our mission, and we become guiltily oblivious of those great truths and great principles for which our fathers suffered.

"Remember from where you have fallen!" Remember! It is a word of rebuke; but it is a word of quickening and revival also. It is designed by Him to recall to us, as to Ephesus, these grand legacies of holier and better times. It is the sharp blast of a trumpet to stir within us the memories of the departed—calling upon us to rekindle the torch dropped from their hands, and which is now, we fear, smoldering amid error of doctrine and laxity of life. "Remember therefore from where you are fallen, and repent and do the first works!"

Be this our reply, in the might of Him who walks amid the candlesticks, "Quicken us, and we will call upon Your name." "Turn us again to Yourself, O God. Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved!"

## **The Epistle to the Church of SMYRNA**

Revelation 3:8-11

A distance of forty miles separates Ephesus from Smyrna. The modern traveler finds himself journeying between these two sacred cities of the Apocalypse, not as in ancient and apostolic days, by means of horse, or camel, or caravan, but by our own familiar train, the only railway that has as yet invaded the desolation of a country so rich in resources of soil, climate, scenery, and imperishable historic interest.

If we found the city of Ephesus specially associated with John, Smyrna is equally identified with another name of undying celebrity in the Church of Christ. Sailing along the magnificent bay (the finest in the Archipelago), at the head of which the city with its 120,000 inhabitants is situated, the eye discerns on one of the crested heights, amid a cluster of tall cypresses, the white wall which encircles the reputed tomb of POLYCARP, the most famous of the early martyrs. This whole Epistle "to the Angel of the church in Smyrna" has a new pathos and significance added to it, if we connect it with this honored member of the noble army of martyrs.

A careful reader will at once observe that it stands out pre-eminently from the others—as "the Martyr's Epistle." Its theme is suffering and trial. Nothing could possibly be more appropriate than its "comfortable words," on the supposition that the Angel or chief minister to whom these were addressed, was none other than he, who, we know from the earliest annals of the Christian Church, was an illustrious sufferer for the Gospel's sake, and was enabled so manfully to endure his fiery baptism.

There is what may almost be called a romance of sacred interest about the whole history of this saintly Father; "the blessed Polycarp," as the ancient Church, for successive centuries, seems distinctively to have named him. He had lived to a venerable age, far beyond even the allotted fourscore. In the prime of his youth he had become (and that too by no formal profession, but by ardent attachment) a loving disciple of the Lord Jesus. Thenceforward, he himself tells us, for many a long year he served Him with an unswerving and unfaltering devotion. There was much in the outer circumstances of his life to deepen and stimulate the ardor of this holy love. He was the disciple of John—standing to John very much in the relation of Timothy to Paul—"his dear son in the faith."

Irenaeus, who lived a generation later, touchingly tells how he himself in early boyhood had been honored and privileged with the personal friendship of Polycarp—how he used to hear from his lips what had been told him by John, of Immanuel's person, and converse, and earthly ministry. We can picture the scene; the aged Apostle from Bethsaida—one of the inner circle of beloved Disciples, and the most loved of the inner circle—he who of all the honored twelve had drunk deepest of his Lord's spirit, and had the nearest place at his Lord's side—how would he delight, in the mellowed evening of his days at Ephesus, to recall that matchless fellowship! How fondly would he confide every hallowed memory, as it rose before his mental eye like a dream of heaven, into the ear of the trusted friend at his side!—their walks on the lakeshore of Gennesaret—their confidential communion at early morn or dewy eve on their way from Galilee to the pilgrim-feasts—their silent meditations as they wandered at sunset across the heights of Olivet—or during the last and most solemn closing scenes, at the Supper-table—the Garden—the Cross—the Resurrection morning—the forty days—in short, the "many other things which Jesus did" he so touchingly speaks of in the last verses of his Gospel, and which, though he had the heart, he had no room to record.

Think of him thus making the beloved and like-minded Polycarp the depositary of this unwritten Gospel! Need we wonder that the love of the disciple and saint for his great Lord grew and intensified under such teaching, and that, with a transport of emotion, he could utter the words as his own—"Whom having not seen, we love: in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"?

After a life of noble consistency, the hour of trial—the hour of suffering arrived. It was under the reign of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. The storm of persecution was first roused by the malignant enmity of the Jews, who found no difficulty in enlisting and stimulating the passions of the heathen mob. Not ingloriously to evade the hour of persecution, but obedient to the intercessions of his flock, who naturally wished to save for themselves a life of such priceless value—Polycarp took refuge in the adjoining mountains to await there the subsidence of the storm; spending



his anxious hours, along with a few others, in wrestling at the mercy-seat —not for his own suffering Church alone, but for the whole suffering children of God scattered abroad. It seemed like a Mount of Transfiguration, where angels and the Lord of Angels strengthened him for the deace which, like a Greater Sufferer, he was about to accomplish.

The cup, however, as in the case of the Prince of Martyrs, was not to pass by him, and he accepted it without a murmur. The secret of his place of concealment was divulged; but the tread of his frenzied persecutors at the door was heard with no words but those of uncomplaining submission. On his way to Smyrna, the magistrate met him, and inviting him into his chariot, sought in vain to shake his constancy. He offered release on condition of retraction. "What hurt," said he, "I beg you, shall come thereof, if you say 'My Lord Caesar,' and do sacrifice, and thus save yourself?" Once more, on reaching the amphitheater, the magistrate gave him the option of having his hands unbound by consenting to curse his Savior. "Be good to yourself," said the magistrate, "and favor your old age: take your oath, and I will discharge you. Defy Christ." The Christian hero boldly replied, in the memorable testimony, "Eighty and six years have I been His servant, yet in all that time has He not so much as once hurt me; how then may I speak evil of my King and Sovereign Lord, who has thus preserved me?"

The judge rose from his seat, and tried to overawe him with the threat, "I have wild beasts to which I will throw you." "Let them come," was Polycarp's reply; "I have determined that I will not turn from the better way to the worse." "Then," said the incensed magistrate, "I will tame you with fire." "You threaten me," returned Polycarp, "with fire, which shall burn for the space of an hour and shall then be extinguished. But you know not the fire of the judgment to come, and of everlasting punishment reserved for the wicked and ungodly. Give me whatever death you desire." His silvery hairs made their silent appeal in vain to his murderers. "To the lion!" was the cry which rose from a hundred voices, alike Jewish and Pagan; and it was only because the beast of prey was already glutted, that they had to resort to the equally terrible alternative of a slow death by burning. The stake was ready. With calm deliberation

he stripped off his upper garments and undid his sash—making no remonstrance except for the iron hoops with which they sought to make him fast to the stake. Such appliances he told them were needless, as his heroic steadfastness proved.

To quote the quaint and touching words of the original narrative, "Being bound as a ram out of a great flock for an offering, and prepared to be a burnt-sacrifice acceptable unto God, he looked up to Heaven and said— (truly no nobler page is there, out of the grand liturgy of dying martyrs) —"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your well-beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have attained the knowledge of You, the God of Angels, and powers, and every creature, and of the whole race of just men which live before You; I give You hearty thanks that You have allowed to bring me to this day and this hour, that I may have my part among the number of Your martyrs, in the cup of Your Son, unto the resurrection of eternal life, both of body and soul, through the operation of Your Holy Spirit; among whom may I be received this day before You as an acceptable sacrifice, as You have before ordained. For which, and for all things else, I praise You, I bless You, with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son: to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and to all, succeeding ages. Amen."

Owing to untoward causes, he had to submit to lengthened suffering. The sword completed what the fire had left undone; and when all was over, the gang of hating Jews, who had been the first to collect the wood for the fire, instigated their heathen accomplices to refuse delivering up the charred remains to the Christians and accord them decent burial. In the words of the old Epistle, which furnishes these particulars, "By his patience he overcame the unrighteous ruler, and received the crown of Immortality."

What a light does this touching tale throw upon the older inspired Epistle, when we bear in mind that all this tragedy of martyrdom, in which other Smyrna Christians besides Polycarp were involved, must have been vividly portrayed to the omniscient eye of Him who wrote, as if by anticipation, the needful message of warning and comfort! What balm-words for the martyred disciples to carry with them to their scenes of torture, and to which they might cling when the growl of the hungry lions

was in their ear, or the fuel was collecting in the arena! What was that comfort? "These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." Heart-stirring theme of consolation! That He who in His Divine nature was from everlasting to everlasting, had, in His lowly suffering humanity, as the Incarnate Redeemer, Himself passed through the terrors of death, and that these terrors, as in the case of His true people, were only the passage and entrance into endless life! What could disarm that amphitheater and these blazing faggots of their horrors, if this could not?

Then the Almighty Speaker proceeds to a more detailed cognizance of their trials. "I know your works and tribulation" (outward persecution) "and poverty" (the spoiling of your worldly goods, which, being a feeble band compared to your adversaries, you are unable to resist)—"but you are rich." Hostile Jews and mocking heathens and ruthless Roman officials may "oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats and blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called"—you may be poor in this world, but you are rich in faith, rich in heavenly treasure. You may be looked upon with cold arrogant disdain as the filth and off scouring of all. But very different is the estimate of the mocking undiscerning world from that of Him who sees not as man sees. I know the world-verdict, "Your poverty;" but here is Mine, "You are rich." Beneath the outward tattered garment obvious only to the world's eye, there is a "clothing of wrought gold."

After forewarning of the blasphemous hate of the Jews—those who arrogated to themselves the sacred name and prerogative of God's Israel, but who proved themselves to be rather "the Synagogue of Satan"—He reveals the unseen leader and instigator of all this foul, and persistent enmity. He is styled here in the Greek 'Diabolos'—that is, 'accuser' or 'calumniator'. "Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried." Some may affect to discard belief in the literal personality and power of Satan, resolving these into myth and symbolism—mere allegorical representations (like Bunyan's Apollyon), of the force of human depravity and moral evil. But the story of the Church's martyrdoms tells a different tale.

As Christ seemed often to afford precious discoveries of His own glorious

presence to the faithful in the hour of their sufferings, so did Antichrist the great counter-worker (with characteristic malignity, and malice, heading his legions of darkness), come into fierce conflict with the powers of light in these stern battlefields of torture and endurance. In both cases—invisible indeed, yet not the less truthful—did Michael and his angels fight against the Devil and his angels. John would, moreover, be prepared by a reference to Satan's power in this opening Epistle, to acknowledge and estimate his activity and influence in the subsequent visions—playing his own terrible part in the nations' future drama as the gigantic propagator of evil—"the god of this world"—"the Prince of the power of the air"—"making war with the saints."

In the present case, the trial, though sharp, is to be brief—"You shall have tribulation ten days. But the Great Captain of salvation exhorts—"Fear none of those things which you shall suffer." In the might of Him—the First and the Last—who, once dying, now lives for evermore, they are to be made more than conquerors! Greater is He who is with them than he that is in the world. And even should a cruel and violent death threaten, they can regard it only as a glorious passage to endless life; they can mount their fiery chariot, and as they are borne upwards in the flames, can sing, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

He ends with the encouraging and appropriate exhortation and promise to the Angel, in the prospect of what Irenaeus calls "that glorious and splendid martyrdom"—"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Very beautiful is this closing promise, whatever figurative meaning and acceptance we may give it. At first sight we may recognize a new and impressive recurrence to the simile which Paul again and again employs in his Epistles with reference to the Grecian foot-race—the runners pressing on to the goal, straining every nerve in the exciting contest—and the crown, the laurel wreath, awaiting the victor at the end of the stadium, ready to be bound around his brows. More than one commentator, however—and we think on good ground—dissents from this interpretation.

There is a harmony and uniqueness of design in the Apocalypse, as in all the other parts of Sacred Writ; and a nice and careful investigation will

show, that though the Book itself be full from first to last of emblems, none of these are taken from the customs of the heathen. While the Apostle of the Gentiles never scruples to take a Pagan custom or rite to enforce a sacred lesson, the imagery of the Apocalypse is altogether Jewish, or rather is composed exclusively of sacred symbols, from the Temple candlesticks onwards. And if, as one discriminating writer remarks, the palm-bearing multitude in a subsequent vision seems at first sight to refute this theory (with its reference to the symbol of Greek or Roman triumph), it is strictly speaking no real exception, as a much more natural and beautiful meaning is its allusion to the palm branches of the Hosanna-day used by the multitudes at the great Jewish festival, the 'Feast of Tabernacles'—the eternal commemoration, not so much of victory, as of rest in the true land of Canaan.

The crown of life, therefore, here spoken of, would seem rather to indicate a royal crown—"a badge of royal dignity"—Peter's crown of glory—Paul's crown of righteousness—the crown given to God's king and priest—the crown especially bestowed on the enduring martyr, as in that same record of Polycarp's death already referred to it is said, "he was crowned with the crown of martyrdom."

Yes! we repeat this is emphatically the martyr's epistle—the flame—the prison—the torture—the sword—are traced through it all. We in this peaceful age, when the faggot is quenched, and the dungeon is closed, and the sword sheathed, cannot enter into its especial comforts. But let us, as we close it, feel as if we had been treading sacred ground—tracing words of hallowed consolation which ten thousand trembling hearts have read in their hour of darkness and horror—words which have breathed many a blessed requiem while the tortured flesh was still palpitating and the soul struggling to be free; which have revealed to the sufferers in the hour of death, amid a canopy of smoke and flame, the white-robed angel—yes, the Lord of Angels—holding out to view an unfading diadem.

And what seems its great lesson to us? if not this, **LOYALTY TO CHRIST**. The Church of Smyrna had no such roll of varied commendation as that which we found recorded concerning the Church of Ephesus. But neither is there in her case the "nevertheless" which qualifies the former, and demands from the lips of the All-Seeing a "Repent." Though nothing,

however, specially and distinctly commendatory is said, she is spoken of by implication as "faithful"—suffering and willing to suffer, for her divine Master's sake—poverty, imprisonment, death. For this, the glorious gift and reward of life is hers—the life purchased by her risen Head—a part and portion of His own resurrection-life—" Because I live you shall live also."

Are we faithful stewards to our trust, whatever that trust may be? Are we faithful to our work, whatever that work maybe? Even though we may be painfully conscious of our lack of success—seeing at times our weapons shivered in our hands—the best and noblest efforts and struggles of life—efforts for God and for Christ apparently a failure—the fire burning our work—the tide washing our breakwaters away? Never fear! It is faithfulness, not success, God looks to. The last great words of the Great Day will be these—"Well done," (not good and successful, but) "good and faithful servant."

What we have alone to fear is, what is here unfolded in the closing utterance of all—"the second death"—that death which is the fearful inheritance of the 'unfaithful'—"the faithless and the unbelieving"—that death which has too its transition into life—but it is a life in which the raised and revived body is married to the lost soul! A fearful thought truly to the sinner, but bringing no terror to the saint; for "he that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death;" "on such the second death has no power."

Let us be up and doing our appointed task; for soon the allotted term of working will be past, followed by the hour of reckoning and recompense. Death will not come, as in Polycarp's case, with the flame and the sword—but rather most probably with noiseless step and gentle whisper. But that solemn moment we have so often thought of and so little thought of—that moment when the last grain of sand in the hourglass shall run out—come it must—sooner than we dream of. And the great question is, How shall we meet it? Shall it be with the martyr's prayer and the consciousness of fidelity? or with the inward shudder of those who are standing on the brink of an undone Eternity? God save us from such an alternative! Be it ours now to make a heart and life surrender of ourselves to that great Conqueror, who has plucked the sting alike from the first and the second

death. Relying on the strength of Him who 'was dead, and is alive, and lives for evermore,' let us feel assured that victory will at last crown our steadfast and loyal allegiance to His cause; and that we shall be able, in some lowly measure, to appropriate that beautiful comment on this whole Smyrna Epistle contained in the words of James, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him!"

## **The Epistle to the Church of LAODICEA**

Revelation 3:14-20

Laodicea was an emporium of trade, distinguished especially for woollen manufactures of rare texture-fabrics woven from the hair of the sheep and goats which browsed in vast flocks on the surrounding pastures. It was also noted for those ointments and cosmetics so prized by Orientals, and which still afford no inconsiderable commerce to the surrounding cities. Being, moreover, on the high road of commerce between Ephesus and the East, it had gathered within its walls a goodly number of merchant-princes. Its gold was well known to the traders, who with their caravans passed through its streets. Although shorn of much of its outward magnificence in the year 62 A.D., owing to the devastations of an earthquake, yet, as a test of its opulence, the havoc thus made, was repaired by the citizens alone, unaided by any imperial grant. Now a miserable village, there are yet remains, in the shape of broken columns and ruined aqueducts, to attest its former luxurious splendor.

These characteristics may be mentioned, because some of them at least, as will presently be seen, throw light on the peculiar symbolism and figure employed in the Epistle. A Church had been planted there in Apostolic days. Paul, thirty years previously, refers in his Epistle to the adjoining Church of Colosse, to "the great conflict he had for them of Laodicea." However successful that hard fight may have been in the days

of the Hero-Apostle, his death would seem to have turned the tide of battle: the simplicity of the 'truth as it is in Jesus' succumbed before the spirit of evil, which had its outward manifestation in worldliness, pride, and lukewarmness.

The figurative language of the latter portion of the letter (to which we shall in this chapter confine ourselves) seems appropriately borrowed from the merchant city. Its material gold and silver and gay clothing—its woollen mantles, silk trappings, and abundant traffic—are taken as the symbols of boastful self-sufficiency and complacent self-righteousness—masking and concealing its own utter beggary and nakedness in the sight of God. The Great Redeemer, the author of the Epistle, represents Himself as a traveling merchantman, the head of one of these Eastern caravans, coming laden with true riches and heavenly vestures, divine ointments and perfumes, to supply the place of the spurious and the counterfeit. He personates such a merchantman going from house to house and from door to door with His own priceless goods—those spiritual verities which no material wealth can purchase.

Standing in front of each dwelling, He proclaims in the ear of its residents, however unwilling to hear—"You say, I am rich, and increased with goods" (or 'I have enriched myself'), "and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable" (or rather, 'the wretched one and the miserable one'), "and poor, and blind, and naked." And then, having uttered the solemn protest and warning, He calls on His listeners with their hoarded goods to draw near. He opens up these, His own costly wares, the gold without alloy, which no Ophir mine could produce—the glistening white vesture of His own righteousness, which no loom on earth could weave—salves and aromatic oils for true spiritual vision—ointments for the head, which no earthly laboratory could furnish.

These Laodiceans were living in guilty self-deception. They were clad in gaudy clothing. They were imagining themselves to be in king's houses while they were bankrupts—their whole life and being was a lie. "Open your doors," says the Great Vender of spiritual riches—"transact with ME." "I counsel you to buy from Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that



you may see."

The summons however seems to be in vain. The earnest importunate voice is, by these self-satisfied and self-contented Laodiceans, disowned and neglected. On, however, He pursues His way from street to street and from house to house, repeating the warning and the gracious offer, until the shadows of evening begin to fall. The hours of His sojourn are numbered. Tomorrow, this wayfaring Man, who has turned aside to tarry for a night, must depart. By early morn the camels must be re-loaded, the tents outside must be struck, and He must journey onwards to offer the rejected treasures to other cities. But He will not leave—He will not abandon His blessed purpose of love, without one other effort at the doors of those who had in their folly spurned Him away. Though needing rest Himself, He is busied from sunset until midnight-hour in re-traversing the now silent streets, and thus exclaiming, as He stands in front of every dwelling, "behold, I stand at the door and knock." Alas! for Laodicea. These pleadings were disregarded. Christ had knocked at her dwellings, but He had knocked in vain.

Separating these latter words of the Epistle from their special reference to the Laodicean Church, and giving them a universal, or rather a spiritual and personal application, let us dwell for a little on this amazing picture. The rejected yet loving Savior—the Divine Merchantman from the Heavenly City, a suppliant at the door of the sinner's heart. The two brief words in this brief clause are each of them suggestive, "Behold I STAND" and "Behold I KNOCK."

I. The attitude of standing suggests His CONDESCENSION. If condescension be a relative term, and increases in proportion to the distance and disparity between him who exercises it and those who are its objects, where can there be condescension similar to this? There are noble instances of condescension and kindness in earthly chronicles. We have read of those of lofty rank, who, at the promptings of philanthropy, have gone down into the dens of misery and vice, to relieve suffering and mitigate wretchedness. Tales still linger in the memories of nations, of disguised sovereigns entering the hovel of distress—hands that grasped the scepter of empires, drying the orphan's tears, soothing the infirmities of age, or the pangs of sorrow.

We can ascend a step higher still. We can leave the crowns and monarchs of earth, and imagine one of those bright Seraphs who hymn their songs in the upper Sanctuary coming down to our world on some mandate of mercy, hovering around the straw-pallet of some Lazarus-beggar, stooping to smooth his death-pillow, before bearing the spirit to Abraham's bosom. But what even is this?—these angels bathing their wings of light in the floods of infinite glory before the throne—what is this stoop of theirs, in comparison with that marvelous tale of Him who announces Himself in the opening of this Epistle as "the Amen—the faithful and true Witness—the beginning of the creation of God"—whose throne is of old from everlasting—the blaze of worlds, the jewels of His crown—who has reared every arch and pillar in Nature's temple—making its bells to ring an eternal chime to His glory? Yes! Behold Him who has kindled up the altar-fires of Heaven, who calls every star by name, and from whose boundless empire this tiny earth of ours would be no more missed, than the fall of the leaf in the forest, or the bursting of the bubble on the ocean—to whom the universe is but as the small dust of the balance, all time but as the beat of a pulse or the swing of a pendulum! Behold Him, the mighty uncreated Lord, the all-glorious Redeemer, "of whom are all things, and by whom are all things!" Behold Him "as one that serves"—His head bared to the pitiless storm, a petitioner at the door of a human heart!

2. This attitude of standing suggests further, the thought of FORBEARANCE and IMPORTUNITY. "Behold I stand!" 'I have been standing long,' He seems to say, 'and I am standing still; and though My head is wet with dew and My locks with the drops of the night, I am unrepulsed by a life of ingratitude—how can I give you up?' If He had been the very kindest of human benefactors, His patience would have been long ago exhausted, His pleadings silenced, His remonstrances closed. But "have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary?"

His loving appeals are like the billows which, century after century, lashed into fury, have been beating on the rock-bound coast. They make no departure. They strike, but return, chafed and buffeted and baffled, to

their ocean-bed, to gather up new strength for a fresh assault. Emblem of the rocky heart. The ocean of a Savior's love has been knocking and surging against it, for days and weeks and months and years. Yet, though beaten back by that adamant stone, it returns with new force to the charge. Wondrous thought, the importunity of Christ with sinners! What patience! Think of the myriads of hearts He has thus been pleading with for 6000 years! Think of the different ages and dispensations! Think of the different climates and tongues! Who would have imagined anything else but that these stern refusals would have driven Him forever away to other hearts and homes that would give a holier and kinder welcome? But, "Behold, I STAND!"

Let us pass now to inquire into the import of the second term here used—"Behold, I KNOCK." Christ knocks at the door of the heart in various ways.

1. He knocks by His Word. It is the rod of His power. "Is not my Word as a hammer," says He, "that breaks the rock in pieces?" His preached Word has ever been made by Him mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. It would be a poor matter indeed for a mortal man, in his own strength, with stammering tongue and feeble arm, to try and plead with sinners, and wrench the bolts from the doors of their hearts. But, "the wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." It matters not by whom the warriors' bugle-note is sounded which musters the host for the charge. It stirs the bosoms of the brave. It may be piped by coward and unworthy lips: but the old, familiar, heart-stirring strain sends the flush to the cheek and the flash to the eye, and puts nerve and sinew into the most prostrate arm. The great Gospel-trumpet, by whomsoever blown, is the trumpet of God. It sounds forth the words of God; and, as such, they shall not return to Him void. Many a poor, faint, coward-heart, in the hour of spiritual battle, hearing these, out of weakness has been made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

But see that you refuse not Him that speaks. Remember, every resisted knocking will woefully diminish the chances of opening. If first convictions are allowed to die away, the world's oblivion-power does its work. The next Sabbath returns—its impressions are feebler. The heart,

from very familiarity, becomes gradually more callous, uninfluenced, unimpressed—lapsing into awful unconsciousness to the perils and prospects of eternity. And then, how sad! when these knockings of Christ fall, like the gushing tears of the bereaved, as they sob their tale of unresponded-to anguish in "the dull, cold ear of Death!"

2. Christ knocks by sickness. A bed of languishing is spread. A man is called to renounce bodily strength and prosperity for an unexpected pillow of pain. Christ had often and again knocked at his heart while busied in the world; but the hum of an engrossing industry—the fever of gain and money-making—allowed not the voice to be heard. He had given him the talent of health; but he had been a traitor to his trust, for no atom of time had been consecrated to the soul and eternity. He takes him aside and lays him on a couch of disease. In the quiet of that lonely chamber, the world's carking cares and siren voice now hushed and overborne, Jesus speaks! Yes, and often He speaks there loudly too. The man is hurried, without a note of warning, to the borders of the grave. The dim lamp of life flickers in its socket. It was but last week he was in the Exchange or in the market. It was but last week he was following his plough, or digging his garden, or standing by his counter, or plying his vigorous hand in his workshop. And this week, he reads in the physician's countenance, and in the choking sobs and ill-suppressed tears around his bed, that eternity is near at hand. How loudly does Christ then knock! How loudly does He speak—"Prepare to meet your God!" While the answer is breathed out in trembling agony, 'Lord, I cannot meet you as I am!—a few more days—a few more weeks! Oh, spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more!'

Has He thus been speaking to any of us? Are we the living monuments of His sparing mercy? Has He heard our prayer?—has He arrested the axe, and revoked the sentence, "cut it down?" Let not His voice die away like the retiring thunder. Be it ours to say—"I will pay You my vows which my mouth has spoken and my lips have uttered while I was in trouble!" "The living—the living, even he shall praise You, as I do this day!"

3. Once more, Christ knocks by bereavement and death. This is the loudest knock of all. The lion is said to make the forest echo loudest in a storm of thunder. With reverence be it said, He who is "the Lion of the

tribe of Judah," and who is spoken of in this Book as uttering voices "as when a lion roars." Yes! Jesus speaks and knocks loudest in the season of affliction—in the lowering, thundery, storm-wreathed sky. Some beloved object of earthly affection is taken away. The world is a wilderness to the stripped and desolate heart; embittered are all its joys, poisoned its sweetest fountains. Who is there but can tell of such knockings as these? When, seated in the chamber of dissolution, you saw some cherished spirit taking its flight, leaving you to weep unavailing tears and to breathe unavailing prayers—hoping against hope that it might be some wild and feverish dream which the morrow would dispel? The morrow comes, but with it the waking thoughts of agony—Jesus knocks! In the silence of that death-chamber, when seated with emotions too deep for utterance, Jesus knocks! Or when standing at the grave's mouth and committing loved dust to its kindred dust—in the awful stillness and solemnity of that scene, Jesus knocks! And when, returning home to the rifled and deserted dwelling, the vacant seat is marked, the absent guest is missed, the joyous voice or innocent prattle, familiar at every turn, its music gone, and gone for the forever of time—and the deep, settled silence of desertion all that is left in exchange—Jesus knocks!—Jesus speaks!

And what does He say? Poor trifler! who did prefer your clay idols to Myself; admitting them within your heart, and keeping Me standing outside—I have seen fit to dash one after another to the ground, that you may be driven from the perishable to the eternal.

We cannot, however, enlarge. Time would fail to tell of the many ways by which Jesus knocks. He knocks by prosperity. He can knock through the blessings with which He loads us, as well as through those He takes away. He knocks in all the vicissitudes of life. He knocks by great events, and by trifling occurrences. It may be, the return of some mournful anniversary; or the notice of a death in the obituary; or the passage of a funeral in the street; or the reading of a simple tract; or the well-timed observation or admonition of a friend. Jesus knocks! But who can tell how long? At the present hour He may be making His last appeal—a final remonstrance. For oh! though persistent—slow to abandon—reluctant to give up—there is a point beyond which even His forbearance cannot go. And THEN?—What then? The dread mark is affixed on the doomed and fated doorway,

and the awful word is uttered—"Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone!" "How often would I have gathered you, and you would not?"

But the tread of His footstep is still heard. His angels are still hovering around, waiting to carry tidings to Heaven of His Spirit's knocking and hearts yielding. Surely this picture of the Laodicean Church tells, as few other scriptures do, that no door, however long closed, can be hopelessly shut—that no heart, however obdurate, can be beyond the reach of grace and mercy. To those of whom He spoke—in the opening of the Epistle, as 'lukewarm,' and of whom He uttered the strong language that, as such, He would reject them with loathing, out of His mouth as a nauseous thing—not only is it at their doors He stands pleading, but to them, if they hearken, He gives the highest, the crowning and culminating promise of all. Accepting the 'gold'—the riches of His grace and salvation—the 'white clothing'—the glistening robe of His imputed and imparted righteousness, He will make them sharers and partakers, and that too in its most exalted aspects, of His heavenly bliss—"I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am seated with My Father in His throne."

Let us give to Him the throne of our hearts, that He may thus at last give to us the throne of His glory. Even now, as the Savior's voice is heard, in the majesty of omnipotence, let there be the willing response—"Come in, you blessed of the Lord; why do you stand outside?"

## **THE OPENED DOOR: AND CREATION- SONG**

Revelation 4

One may well shrink from the risk of dimming, by the employment of any human words, the grandeur of such a passage as this. It is a passage which brings us not only to the threshold of Heaven, but opens a vista into Heaven itself. We also now enter on an entirely new portion of the

Apocalypse. It was the golden candlesticks with the Son of Man walking in their midst, and the messages to the seven representative Asiatic Churches, which hitherto engaged the attention of the Seer of Patmos. He is now to pass within the Palace gates into the presence-chamber of the King. The "former trumpet-voice" summons him to higher manifestations.

It is, moreover, the Future—the future of the Church militant and then the glories of the Church triumphant—which are henceforth to engage his thoughts, "Come up here and I will show you the things which must be hereafter." That 'hereafter' is to occupy the whole sequel of the Book. The present chapter and the one following present to us in glowing coloring the scenery of Heaven. They give, as it has been appropriately called, the description of the celestial council-chamber—also the words of the threefold song which thrills on the lips of its glorified inhabitants. It is the first of this triple theme of praise which we mainly listen to in this vision.

As we might well imagine, when the privileged Disciple gets his initial glance into that Heaven of Heavens, it is the magnificent Throne of Deity, the focus and center of all, which arrests his gaze. And combining the description of the chapter with others which follow, this grandest of visions—truly a Revelation of Revelations—consists in the manifestation of God as the God of Redemption. It is the FATHER (His redemption-name, in His paternal covenant relation to His people) who is seated on the Throne. The second Person in the adorable Trinity is subsequently represented under the name and form of a LAMB—the emblem of His mediatorial character and work. The seven lamps of Fire (flaming torches), burning before the throne (like 'the seven spirits of God' of the opening chapter), form the appropriate symbol of the HOLY SPIRIT in the plenitude of His gifts to His Church, enlightening, purifying, refining—"the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning."

The Throne itself was like a jasper and a carnelian stone, the emblems alike of purity and justice; for the jasper, whatever it was, is spoken of in a later chapter as being "as clear as crystal." While encircling all, was the Rainbow of emerald—the refreshing memorial of the covenant of grace—tempering the awe which must have been felt by the emission, ever and always, from "out of the throne" of the old Sinai symbols of judgment,

"lightnings and thunderings and voices." "Green (emerald)," says the best of the old commentators, "is of all colors the most agreeable; . . . and when God represents himself as the jasper and carnelian, He exhibits Himself in His holiness and glory; . . . but the green rainbow is a mark of the Divine condescension and forbearance. . . . We are not able to fix our eyes on the Divine majesty and holiness—they frighten us away; but the friendliness of God allures us and inspires us with an assured confidence." Such were the leading features in the vision.

But there were, besides, other imposing and significant accessories. There was before the Throne "a glassy sea like unto crystal." A needful space thus intervened between these great and glorious figurations and the person of the spectator; while the Sea of glass itself suggested the calm majestic repose of the Heavenly Temple, in contrast with the discords and disharmonies of the earthly. Strange and marvelous, too, were other forms in immediate proximity with the throne. "Round about the throne were twenty-four thrones" (lesser thrones), upon which twenty-four elders were sitting in the symbols of priesthood and royalty, of endurance and victory, arrayed in white clothing, and having on their heads crowns of gold. These assessors were doubtless representative beings—the representatives of a double twelve—the twelve Patriarchs or tribes of Israel under the old, and the twelve Apostles of the new dispensation—those same who are subsequently heard blending their voices in the twofold song descriptive of both economies, "The Song of Moses the servant of God and the Song of the Lamb."

Nor is this all. "In the midst of the throne—(perhaps, rather "in front of the throne"), and round about the throne—were four Living Creatures full of eyes before and behind," and which assumed the fourfold similitude of a lion, a young ox, the face of a man, and an eagle. These six-winged beings were also doubtless representative; and though other figurative meanings, as we shall see, may be attached to them, they were intended, in the first instance, to symbolize, not as in the case of the twenty-four elders, the later and more glorious results of Redemption, but all the Creatures of God, or rather, Creation itself, animate and inanimate. They are the embodiment of creature perfection, creation-life—Strength, Patience, Intellect, Activity—and as such they have their assigned place



and mission to celebrate the glory of the Great Supreme. Their unresting song, struck by the key-note of the Book, is this, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come."

But they sing not that song alone—it is an antiphonal strain. Their ascription is immediately followed by a repeater from the twenty-four elders, who take their blood-bought crowns and cast them before the throne—by the expressive act disowning all claim of merit or righteousness.

It is specially, however, to be noted, that this their opening song, is not a Redemption-anthem; it is not even the anthem of Providence—both of these are reserved. It is the earlier—the anterior ascription which had been sung of old by the morning stars at Creation's birth—"And when those living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives to the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "You are worthy, O Lord (or, as it is in some translations, "Our Lord"—our God in covenant—differing thus from the song of the four living creatures), to receive glory" (or rather) "the glory, and the honor and the power" (which these Your representative creatures have rendered You), for You have (not redeemed, but) created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created."

This rapid and superficial outline of the vision itself will be better filled in and supplemented, as we endeavor to ascertain its practical bearing on the case of the Apostle of Patmos and on ourselves.

(1.) As to the special meaning and lessons it conveyed to John. In this vision, the truths and symbols regarding the Church on earth which were set before him in the first chapter, were, if it may be so expressed, authenticated and countersigned in Heaven. It was shown to him that they formed as glorious a reality in the upper, as in the lower Sanctuary. A Jew, and familiar with the writings of the Prophets, he could hardly fail, as he now gazed within that opened door, to call to mind two similar pictorial revelations, unfolded at an earlier era to Seers of kindred spirit and temperament with himself. The first of these was that remarkable

vision given to the Prophet Isaiah when just entering on his great career. He stood, as he himself tells us, under the entrance of the holy Temple of Jerusalem. All at once gates and inner veil seemed mysteriously uplifted or withdrawn, and he was permitted to gaze far within, on those awful recesses, which even no prophet was permitted to enter—the very Holy of Holies itself. There he saw the Jehovah of Israel seated on a throne —"seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." The two bright-winged seraphim as a royal guard stood on either side. Each had six radiant wings: with two of these the head was covered, in token of reverence—with two the feet, in token partly of imperfection, partly of humility—two were outstretched as if ready for flight, in token of willing obedience.

It was a seasonable Apocalypse to the untried and misgiving youthful messenger, at a time when the horizon was black with storm and disaster. The Assyrian was about to make his nest in the cedars of Lebanon, ready to swoop down on the doomed and defenseless kingdom of Judah. And more depressing to the fervid spirit of the young Prophet was the inveterate obstinacy of the hearts he had been called to quicken. Was his mission to be surrendered in despair? Will he use his prophetic foresight only to proclaim "Ichabod" (the glory has departed) in the midst of a guilty people and a hopeless cause; and perhaps abandon his own faith in the God of his fathers? Is the cruel tyrant who sat enthroned in the palaces of Nineveh, henceforth to rule the earth without a rival? A glimpse within that temple told him the reassuring truth. There was there a Living Being mightier than the Assyrian king Sennacherib. His name was "The King, the Lord Almighty," surrounded with ministering spirits, swift of wing in his service, and reverentially waiting His commands. And even though, at the very time, he was told that the cities were to be "wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without men, and the land to be utterly desolate"—yet the Lord being in His holy place, the children of Zion might well be joyful in their King.

The earth would never be without its Ruler—Judah would never be without its God. In the blinding splendors of that temple-vision, he could exclaim in trembling transport, "My eyes have seen the King!" What though earthly armies should be let loose on the people and the land he

loved, his ears had just heard glorious Creatures chanting the song, (and so loud and fervid was the ascription, that post and pillar and cedar-gate shook to their foundations,) "Holy, Holy, Holy! the whole earth is full of His glory."

It is enough—he is nerved for more than half a century of toil and heroic endurance, "The Lord reigns; let the people tremble—He sits between the cherubim; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; for it is Holy."

The other kindred vision, which could not fail to be familiar to John, was the still sublimer one given in a later age to the Prophet Ezekiel. That mourning exile was located, with many of his banished countrymen, on the banks of the river Chebar. The land of their fathers was lying desolate—the city sitting now uninhabited, that was once full of people. A whirlwind seemed to come from the far north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, chariot-like in motion—a series of mighty wheels of strange complexity intersecting one another, were turned by means of four living creatures. "Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle." While high over all was "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." This likeness of the glory of the Lord was moreover encircled with "the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud in the day of rain."

Ezekiel, like Isaiah, was filled at this time with saddest anticipations. All around, in the land in which he was a stranger, he beheld the visible symbols of gigantic regal power, boundless ambition, savage cruelty. He listened to the crushing story of human tyranny and wrong. But the vision on the Chebar revealed, in his case too, a mightier than the mightiest of human kings and tyrants—wheels higher than these chariot-wheels of Assyria—wheels apparently involved and in confusion, 'wheel within wheel;' but all, when understood, moving in sublime harmony.

Glorious, mighty beings were impelling them, putting their shoulders to

their gigantic circles; while above all, was a lustrous throne of sapphire purity and righteousness; and on that throne—not as in the marble sculptures on which the Prophet's eye must often have gazed, the gigantic embodiment of brute force—but "the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it"—with the bright emblem of grace and love—the encircling rainbow. What did these picturings reveal to the lonely exile? What did they tell him? But to bide his time—to fear neither the might of Babylon nor Assyria; for there was a great Being enthroned over and above the wheel-like complications and confusions of the lower world, and directing them all. Himself holy and omnipotent. "Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like a surface, sparkling and awesome like crystal," which was beneath His feet. He had also an army of glorified creatures doing His pleasure, who would yet vindicate His ways in the restoration of His people, and in the evolution of good to His Church and to mankind.

John, the later of the three Jewish Seers, needed a similar assurance in times of similar darkness and impending woe. He had, indeed, as we have previously seen, already received the guarantee of the Church's safety—beholding his Lord walking amid the candlesticks, with the two-edged sword in His mouth, and holding the stars in His hand. But these same soul-comforting truths, viewed from the earthly standpoint, are now further confirmed by this glimpse into the heaven of heavens. Gazing within that opened door, he too has his apprehensions allayed. He also, like the two ancestral Prophets, beholds in vision a glorious PERSON, a personal God, a personal King; not as the earlier Seer did, enveloped in whirlwind and cloud—but seated on a throne of jasper and carnelian in a blaze of light—with the clear sea of rock-crystal before Him reflecting His own glorious image, and angelic servants waiting upon Him, eager to do His pleasure; while the well-known Rainbow, the Rainbow of God, spanning the firmament—the rainbow which succeeded the deluge on the earth—was again seen, the blessed pledge of peace and love!

John knew that the world was on the eve of great events; that even the apparently immutable throne of the Caesars would soon rock to its foundation. But what of that? There was one seated on the Throne he now beheld in that unveiled Heaven, who "lives for the ages of the ages"—

a King above all human kings, a power that would outlive all human dynasties and empires. "The Lord God Almighty" was the name by which He was adored by these living Beings. All else might change—HE was unchangeable. Whatever tribulations may be appointed, the Apostle and the Church will patiently endure, because they are ordained by Him.

The complicated wheels of Ezekiel are again to revolve but their revolutions he can now calmly and trustfully contemplate. With the simple faith of the little child in the dark Temple of Shiloh, as further truths are to be unfolded to him, he can say—"Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears."

But though these were the special lessons of the time for John, there are comforting lessons of another and more general kind, for us also. We must not think of this vision as one, so to speak, improvised for a particular occasion—in other words, that it is the representation of an exceptional scene in Heaven, introductory to the subsequent unfoldings of the Book. It is a glimpse or symbol of what Heaven is now, and what Heaven will be to all of us who enter within the gates into the city; its peerless element of glory and bliss consisting in the full vision of God—God in His covenant aspect, as the God of Salvation—His throne encompassed with the emerald rainbow.

Interesting is it to contemplate the diverse multitude of worshipers who surround Him—the Redeemed from the earth, as well as the other multitudes of created intelligences. The Redeemed are here represented in their twofold character of "kings and priests." As kings, wearing golden crowns—as priests, wearing white clothing; while the other worshipers, who appear under the fourfold similitude, are described as "full of eyes" (or "teeming with eyes"), and moreover, that "they rest not day nor night." From this we may infer their wakeful vigilance, their unceasing, untiring employment in the heavenly ministry; the four-fold symbol further indicating, it may be, different occupations, and different arenas for the enlistment of their immortal energies, but all conspiring to promote the glory of the one great Object of adoration and love.

We are further reminded, as we listen to the majestic voice in the vision, that all events in the world's history and our own are planned—

appointed. "Come, said that voice, and I will show you things which must be hereafter." That word must is a precious one, considering Who utters it. The Divine Being seems to say of, and to every actor in the subsequent chapters, as He did to Cyrus of old, "I clothed you, though you have not known Me." The program of coming events is in His hands! That Heaven where He reigns supreme is a world of order. In the calm blue of these serene ethereal heights, there are no more rolling clouds or moral hurricanes—no more darkness and gloominess. Justice and Judgment are the habitation of His throne: Mercy and Truth go before His face.

We may further, from this vision, draw the inference how deep is the sympathy between the members of the Church triumphant (the church in heaven) and the Church militant (the church still on earth). These twenty-four elders—the representatives of the Redeemed from the earth—form part of the worshipers of the enthroned King, and are present during the future unfolding of the great drama. How cheering and elevating the thought that even now, amid our struggles and trials, "the great ones of the olden time"—the glorified dead, are interesting themselves in us; sympathizing with us in our sorrows, desiring our welfare—waiting, it may be; to give us welcome home!

And more solemn than all—how near this other world is—or may be. "Heaven is in no far distant star"—no "land that is very far off." There is but a narrow curtain separating from the true inner sanctuary. A door is opened, and Heaven is there! Death seals our bodily senses, as a temporary trance did John's, and we are ushered in a moment (in the twinkling of an eye) before "God the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect."

Oh! are we ready? Whether it be in the lonely Patmos of a long sick-bed, or fresh from the marts of busy life, or like Isaiah, at the threshold of the Temple, or like Ezekiel, in the Chebar of a distant land—are we ready for John's summons, "Come up here?" Are we ready to meet the twenty-four elders? Are we ready to put on the white robe and the golden crown? Are we ready to take up the holy song? Are we ready to meet the Holy God?

# THE SEVEN-SEALED ROLL AND THE NEW SONG

Revelation 5:1-10

The CREATION song of the preceding chapter is now to be blended with grander anthems, the song of PROVIDENCE and the song of GRACE. These are evoked by new objects or figures in the sublime Heavenly Vision. The Almighty Father, seated on the throne of jasper and carnelian, has, lying on His open right hand a Roll, similar to what was used by the Prophets in recording their divine utterances. It was the Roll of Providence, the symbolic Volume of the Divine counsels, containing the prophetic history of the Church, and the destinies of the nations to the end of time. This roll was "written on both sides"—that is, not only on the upper side which met the Holder's eye as it was unwound from its cylinder; but on the back also it was filled with lettering. There were no blanks in it—no vacant spaces that would admit of new entries. This crowding of the writing indicated exhaustive fullness. It was, moreover, "sealed (lit. "sealed down") with seven seals"—again the mystic memorial symbol of completeness, betokening, in another way, that it formed an all-comprehensive record and register of the will and ways of the Supreme, its contents reaching onwards through the world's six work-days to the great seventh day—the Sabbath of eternity.

The sealing further implied that its contents were sacredly locked and concealed from public gaze; and yet, lying on the open palm of the hand indicated also that there was no unwillingness on the part of the enthroned One to divulge its contents, if any worthy to undertake the task could be found.

"A mighty angel" appeals to his fellows. He asks if there be no potent arm

that can wield its strength in breaking open these seals and revealing the hidden mysteries? He proclaims with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the roll and to open the seals thereof?" There is silence in Heaven. Amid the adoring ranks around, no one responds to the summons. None in the heights of glory—none on the platform of earth, none "under the earth (that is, in the deeps of Hades—the region of departed spirits) were able to open the roll, neither to look thereon."

The awe-struck and wondering Seer "weeps" at the confessed failure. He had received the invitation and assurance, on the first opening of the heavenly door, "Come here, and I will show you things which must be hereafter." Is He, whose name was "Faithful and True," to belie His own promise and to defraud His servant of his fond expectation? John knew the priceless value of what that Book contained. Let only the seals be broken, the parchment unfolded, and a flood of light would be thrown on an enigmatical future; many an anxious fear and foreboding would be stilled; many a perplexity solved. Whether in dark characters of mourning and woe; or in golden and silver lettering, he knew there would be a glorious revelation of Truth and Righteousness, and a sublime "vindication of the ways of God to men."

What a boon would such a Revelation be to the Church in every coming age! But when the proclamation of the herald Angel is unanswered—the secrets of the scroll likely to remain locked in impenetrable mystery, the tears of the lonely man on his lonely island begin to flow, tears akin to those of Mary Magdalene when she stood by the blank sepulcher "weeping," mourning over the apparent ruin and frustration of her fondest hopes. This is surely a touching episode in the apocalyptic drama! the Apostle, in his moment of glowing rapture at the very gate of Heaven, with a tear, (or rather a flood of tears, for he 'wept much',) furrowing his cheek, in the sincere sadness of baffled and disappointed expectations.

It reminds us of yet another kindred weeper, whose hero-heart was proof against all cowardly weakness, but who was similarly moved when he heard of those who were enemies to the cross of Christ. Paul was jealous for the Cross and the Sacrifice; John for the Crown and Kingdom of their common Lord and Master. Both were in unity in their unselfish interest for the advancement of His cause, the vindication of His name, the



promotion of His glory! Yes! it is indeed an impressive picture to see men who never wept for themselves weeping for that which was to them dearer than self—dearer than life. It lets us into the tender agony of great souls. We have heard of patriots mourning for their Fatherland—noble natures throbbing at the contemplation of iron-handed tyranny and cruel wrong—men whose brave spirits would never permit them to wince or falter under the threat of torture or in the storm of battle, but who could only speak through tears and choked utterance in proclaiming their country's woes.

Such too is the anguish of earnest Christian patriots—such the tears shed by them over the misapprehension and misinterpretation of the Divine ways and counsels, the rejection of the Divine offers of mercy through stern unbelief and defiant pride. Such ought to be the feelings and emotions of every true soldier of the cross as he sees thousands perishing around him—the Gospel-trumpet sounding its warnings apparently in vain—honest efforts apparently frustrated and baffled—all a gigantic failure. We lately heard of one of the standard-bearers in the Missionary battlefield—a noble and a true man—weeping like a little child, because the work he had so near his heart seemed to be progressing so tardily—the little done, the much undone—the colossal walls of heathendom frowning defiance on his puny endeavors, and he left to cry through his tears and prayers, "Lord, how long?"

Would that there were more of a similar spirit! And such there would be, were the surpassing grandeur and importance of that work and its awful responsibilities realized as they ought. There is a saying of one of our old divines, that "the sins of men are enough to make devils triumph and angels weep." If a tear can thus be said to befit the eye of an angel-spectator of earth's depravity and corruption, what should it be in the case of those, who, partakers of the frailties and sins of humanity, are themselves called as God's witnesses and ambassadors to stand between the living and the dead!

It well becomes all Churches and all their members, from time to time, as if it were at Heaven's opened door, thus to ponder the shortcomings of the past; opportunities of good neglected; souls around still perishing; God's name blasphemed; Christ's cause dishonored; vice unrebuked;

infidelity rampant; and yet Death, Judgment, and Eternity at hand! May God kindle some of the fervid spirit which dictated the impassioned agonizing declaration of the Prophet of Judah—"Oh, that my head were as waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

But to return. The aged Apostle's 'much weeping' is immediately changed into joy and triumph. One of the Elders—one of those forming the redeemed white-robed multitude—bids him dry his tears—for some Being had been found infinitely worthy "to open the Book." John was at this time the most illustrious believer in the Church on earth—a giant among his fellows. Few if any in Heaven had been so honored as he; yet an unknown member of the Church triumphant is now his instructor; showing that there are revelations of truth made to the glorified which are withheld from those who, as ministering priests in the lower sanctuary, are still compassed with infirmity; so that it may be said with regard even to the most advanced in knowledge and faith and love among the latter, "He who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

But who is He who is thus discovered to be worthy? When all Heaven is silent, who is the favored one found equal to the task? It is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." The Lion—the victorious symbol of the favored and the royal tribe, of whom the dying Patriarch thus spoke in his farewell benedictions: "Judah is a young lion that has finished eating its prey. Like a lion he crouches and lies down; like a lioness—who will dare to rouse him?" But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has conquered. He is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals." It is Christ—He who was alike of the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David, that is pronounced worthy to be the unfolder of the hidden mysteries.

But He is so by conquest. It is as the Divine Vanquisher of sin and death He has qualified Himself (so to speak) to be the exponent and interpreter of the Divine counsels. "It is," says Augustine, "by reason of His humiliation as man, that Christ received the roll, and not by reason of His Godhead." It is as the Mediator of His Church He has the right and prerogative to break the seals and unfold the contents.

John gazes upwards in joyful expectancy. But what sudden change has taken place in the mystic figurations? He turns his eye in the direction of the Throne, where the worshipers already described are bending before some One adorable object. That object was seen "standing in the midst of the Throne" (or rather perhaps "in front of the Throne"); and from this time onwards, occupies the most conspicuous place—the central point in the Heavenly Visions. The Apostle looks for the majesty of Judah's Lion. He expects to see some Being of unutterable might. But—strange thing for Heaven!—the object of adoration is no longer symbolized by the Lion, but by A LAMB. The word used in the original is also remarkable. It is "a little Lamb"—a word peculiar to the Apocalypse, occurring here alone in this diminutive form in the New Testament, with the single exception of its use in Christ's charge to Peter in the closing chapter of John's Gospel, where he employs the same expression, "Feed my little lambs."

More than this, the Lamb of the vision appears covered with wounds and blood-scars, as if recently killed in sacrifice; and the closing ascription of the heavenly throng is not "worthy is the Lion that has conquered"—but "worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" What is this but the Divine Redeemer proclaiming, in expressive similitude, both the tenderness of His nature and the perpetual efficacy of His mediatorial sacrifice and work, in the midst of the Church purchased by His precious blood?

In conjunction, however, with these symbols of meekness and gentleness, humiliation and suffering, there are two others added of omnipotence and omniscience. That little Lamb had "seven horns" (horns—the invariable emblem of kingly power) and "seven eyes," which are interpreted as "the Seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"—the Holy Spirit, in the sevenfold symbol of perfection and manifold operation, sent forth according to Christ's own promise as His Glorifier and Testifier.

All seems now ready for the longed-for disclosure. This glorious Being "came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat upon the Throne." The Apostle, we may imagine, is all eagerness to listen to the stupendous revelations of the future which are to be made on the breaking of the seals. But he must for a time at least suspend his anxiety until two grand doxologies are sung—two new and distinct ascriptions of

praise welcoming the approach of the Lord of Providence and the Lord of Grace, who was thus alone found worthy. "And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." We have in these the twofold symbols of praise and prayer. The Harps, whether gold or silver, were for purposes of adoration, while the golden bowls were filled with the prayers of the Saints (or literally, of "the holy ones") of earth. Beautiful picture! the prayers and cries from the sorrowing, suffering Church below, are received into these golden bowls by "the ministering ones," and placed, as we shall afterwards find, in the hands of the One only Intercessor, to be perfumed with the incense of His adorable merits.

Meanwhile, the first part of the "new song" rises from the conjoined voices of these Saints and living Beings; "new," because evoked by the sudden appearance in the midst of the Throne of the Unfolder of the roll, the majestic Expositor of the otherwise inscrutable counsels. The words sung are these—"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." "We shall reign on the earth;" not, as in our rendering, in the future tense, as if some glorious kingdom were in store—but it is a present reign. Cheering, as it has been observed, must the utterance have been to the Apostle, that even that afflicted, despised, persecuted remnant called 'the Church on earth,' was recognized in Heaven as a reigning power—exercising dominion and lordship through its great Head, anticipatory of that period when, as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will put all things under His feet, and vindicate His claim to universal sovereignty as celebrated in the fourfold enumeration of "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!"

Such was the First song, or the first chorus of the "new song." But it was sung by a comparatively limited number of representative voices. The vast myriads of unfallen angels—the originals of Heaven, if we may so call them—had taken no part in it. There is a pause; and then we listen to a

strain sublimer still, which may be designated the Great Redemption anthem joined in by the entire heavenly host. We shall do no more than give its own grand words without comment. It is a mighty volume of praise, which sends its multiplying echoes out to the very circumference of being. Not now the few favored representatives—but the countless multitudes of angels, principalities, and powers, in their endless concentric circles, have gathered to this great inauguration festival, to present their lofty homage and adoration to the slain Lamb.

We seem to realize for the first time the sublime meaning of the saying, "Inhabiting the praises of eternity;" for the wide vault and circuit of heaven, the vast corridors of limitless space and time, are crowded with ministering spirits, and have become vocal with song. This is their doxology, "Then I looked again, and I heard the singing of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: "The Lamb is worthy—the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They also sang: "Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever."

Such is the ascription. It has waxed louder and louder like the noise of many thunderings; the waves of sound have extended themselves in ever grander and increasing cadence until they reach the outskirts of being. Then gradually receding, they seem to rock themselves to rest; and the terminating strain is given by those who struck at first its key note—" And the four living creatures said AMEN." Then all is silence. The twenty-four Elders prostrate themselves in silent adoration, and worship Him who lives for the ages and the ages!

There are many thoughts, alike of grandeur and comfort, which crowd upon us on a review of this vision. We must be content with alluding to the two leading consolatory ones. The first embodies the same truth we met with in the preceding chapter, but which is more fully developed here—that the roll of Providence is in the hands of Jesus. There are times, in the history of the world, we spoke of in connection with the former vision, when, amid political complexities—the prevalence and triumph of human

tyranny and wrong—still more, times in our individual experiences, in the mysteries of daily life—amid startling providences or baffling dispensations, that the old moorings threaten to give way, or have momentarily given way, and we feel ourselves drifting out on the cheerless sea of human doubt and distrust—when all is dark around, no rift in the cloud—no star in the midnight sky—and in the anguish of bitter unbelief we are tempted to mutter the querulous complaint, "Where is now my God?" Or, if that God lives and reigns, does He live as a God of terror? does He answer to the fire-god of the Phoenician in his Baal-worship, or to the Jupiter-god of the Roman, armed with the thunderbolt and forked lightning? or, in the phantasies of a later philosophy, has He abdicated His throne, and left man and his fortunes to wild chance, to be driven, as things of fate, here and there on the fitful waters—the vessel without a pilot, the world without a ruler?

No! the roll of Providence, containing the fortunes of the nations as well as all that concerns His Church and people, is in the keeping of the Christ of Calvary. "The Lord is King! He sits between the Cherubim!" It is He who mingles every drop in the cup, and lights every furnace, and orders every trial, and draws every tear. Oh! what would many have been in those hours of gloomy despair, when the props of existence were tottering underneath them—what they thought were life's strongholds giving way like the yielding ice beneath their feet—what would they have been, but for the sustaining assurance that that roll of human destiny is in the hand of the Lord who died for them!

We can now understand the reason of this strange, mingled symbolism—the appropriate figure of the Lion of the tribe of Judah in conjunction with a slain Lamb—that anomaly in Heaven—the memorials of pain and suffering in a place where sorrow never enters and suffering is unknown. Is it not to tell us of a blessed union of might and tenderness; that we may confidently commit our everlasting destinies to Him; for as the Lion of the tribe of Judah He is able to defend us—as the slain Lamb He is able to sympathize with us? What more could we desire, than this combination of Omnipotence and Love—the greatness of Godhead and the sympathy of Humanity in the Person of the now Living One, who once was dead? Let the seals be opened and the vials descend! We will trust in Him who

alone is found worthy to open the book; add our "Amen" to that of the four living creatures; and with the Elders fall down and worship Him who lives forever and ever!

The second memorable thought or reflection here suggested is, that it was the SLAIN Lamb in the midst of the Throne, who summoned forth this loud anthem peal. It was sung by myriads of myriads; and among those myriads, by the lips of unsinning Angels who had no personal interest in His great atoning work. How much more surely ought that amazing sacrifice, thus symbolized, to evoke our loftiest praises and stir our deepest gratitude and devotion! Let us fondly grasp the magnificent truth in all its wondrous reality—not diluting it to square and dovetail with modern theologies—not eliminating from it its grandest mysteries because they are mysteries; but rather content to receive them and rejoice in them as stupendous mysteries of love: "Christ crucified! the power of God."

While we delight to adore Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah—while earth's lowly praises blends with the grander symphonies of the skies, "You are the King of glory, O Christ! You are the everlasting Son of the Father!"—let the ever-present recollection of His anguish, His bleeding love and atoning sacrifice, give deeper fervor and intensity to the prayer—"O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us your peace! O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!"

It is the cross of Christ, the everlasting love of God in 'so' loving the world, which will form the theme of eternity. Angel-intellect from every corner of the universe of being, will stoop over the fathomless abyss and exclaim, "Oh, the depth!" Not to Elders alone, with their white clothing and redemption-crowns and golden vials full of incense—the representatives of the ransomed—but "to principalities and powers in heavenly places, will be made known by the Church" (through the glorified Person and adorable work of her living Head and King), "the manifold wisdom of God."

## **OPENING OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS— CREATION'S CRY**

Revelation 6:1-8

The strains of the threefold song having now died away, all is ready for the opening of the seven seals. "As I watched, the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll. Then one of the four living beings called out with a voice that sounded like thunder, 'COME!'" In the context, Jesus had made twice over the announcement, "Behold I COME quickly." And in the words immediately preceding, He had proclaimed that speedy Advent under the most beautiful and appropriate simile—as if the long weary night-watch of earth were near over, and the glorious sun-rising were at hand—"I am the Bright and Morning Star." This herald-voice wakes into expectant joy the whole multitude of His ransomed people. Immediately the prayer goes up from the Church militant on earth, and gets a glad response from the Church triumphant in Heaven—it is the echo of His own announcement—"And the Spirit and the Bride say COME! and let him that hears say COME!" And then, as the Apocalyptic drama is closing—as the last inspired vocables are dying away on the ear of the Apostle, that prayer seems answered. The words "COME! COME!" ascend before the Throne. The reply is given, "He who testifies these things says, surely I COME quickly." And yet again, the impassioned exclamation issues from the conjoint Church on earth and Heaven, forming, as we have repeatedly noted, the terminating cry of the Inspired Record, "Even so, COME Lord Jesus!"

We should regard this four times repeated 'COME' (verses 1, 3, 5, 7) as identical with that which the Spirit and the Bride utter at its close. In the present case, however, it emanates not from the Church, but from the four living creatures; those symbolic beings which we have already described as the representatives of God's vast Creation. As such, we may well regard that fourfold repetition as Creation's loud and anguished cry for the advent of her great Deliverer. We can hardly fail, in connection with this passage, to call to remembrance the Apostle's striking words in



his Epistle to the Romans, "For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are. Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay." The call of these Four living beings then, is just the jubilant hope of material nature embodied in a sublime prayer.

Creation 'in earnest expectation,' 'groaning and travailing in pain,' had been longing for the hour when her birth-pains would be over—when her iron chains of sin and sorrow would be broken, and she would be ushered into her glorious liberty. This "subjection"—these pains and sorrows—could only terminate by the COMING of her Great Lord. That was the grand event towards which all her longings and prayers were directed—the bright rainbow of hope that spanned the lowering sky of a distant future. What can be more beautiful, therefore, than that these four living beings—the impersonations of that Creation—should make heaven and earth ring with the loud Advent-cry—that the breaking of each of the four seals should be accompanied, like the reverberations following the flash of lightning, with the fourfold "Come! Come! Come! Come!"

They had just sung in concert the anthem of material Nature. They had joined with the representatives of the redeemed Church in the New Song of Providence. They had heard the mighty chorus of redeemed and unredeemed in the song to the slain Lamb. And now, when those who had first awakened the strain, see the Lamb opening in succession the four seals of that roll which they knew contained every event that was to transpire previous to the Second Advent; how befitting (though all in ignorance of its contents, and only desirous that no delay should frustrate the fulfillment of creation's hopes), that they should give utterance to her longing desire, 'Make no tarrying, O my God,' by the emphatic declaration, 'COME!'

And this, moreover, would be in strict harmony with the two additional seals—the fifth and sixth. The slain martyr's cry, though in different words, is also for their Lord's coming, "How long, Lord?" And the sixth seal conducts to the very threshold of the Advent-scene—creation's sorest travail heralds the coming of the Prince of Peace. Shall we be wrong, then, in interpreting these four successive exclamations, as nature's voice—or

rather the unsyllabled sighs and groanings of a dumb creation taken up by the four living ones, addressed, not to the Apostle, but to his enthroned Lord, the Opener of the seals?—a voice from every corner of a now sin-stricken, woe-worn world, to Judah's Lion and the slain Lamb —'COME! O Great Being of combined might and tenderness: break these fetters, and usher us into our glorious and promised freedom!'

"Your whole creation groans,  
And waits to hear that voice  
Which shall restore her loveliness,  
And make her wastes rejoice.  
COME, Lord, and wipe away  
The curse, the sin, the stain,  
And make this blighted world of ours  
Your own fair world again.  
COME, then, Lord Jesus, COME!"

This fourfold cry receives a fourfold answer. A vision is given to the Apostle at the opening of each seal of the prophetic roll. In other words, four preparations for the Second Advent are symbolically unfolded to him. Alas! they are visions more of trouble than of comfort. The roll, like that of Ezekiel, is full of lamentation, and mourning, and woe; for it speaks of God's four dreadful judgments as these were revealed of old to the same Prophet—the Sword, War, Famine and Pestilence. He, however, who tempers judgment with mercy, begins in the opening vision with a theme and pledge of comfort: for it is none other than John's adorable Lord Himself who appears in the scenic representation. The Lion and the slain Lamb still retain their places in the midst of the Throne. But apart from these, under the new and expressive symbolism of "a Rider on a white horse" (a horse 'white as light'), with a bow in his hand and a royal crown on his head—Jesus, the King and Lord of all, appears, heading a strange and varied equestrian procession. It is the reappearing of the prophetic Conqueror of the 45th Psalm—The King "fairer than the children of men," with His sword girt upon His thigh, in His majesty riding prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; His arrows sharp in the heart of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under Him: recalling also the subsequent, where the same Rider,

similarly mounted and adorned, appears under the title of "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Moreover, while in the three seals which follow, we only have, in equestrian symbol also, His followers and retainers—His approach is in the present case heralded by "the great voice" of the first chapter. There it was spoken of as "The voice of many waters." Here it is, "As it were the noise of thunder," as "He went forth conquering and to conquer" (or, 'in order that He might conquer'). The kingdom of this symbolic warrior, unlike the gigantic ones of Babylon, Nineveh, Macedonia, and Rome, which triumphed, only in their turn to be overthrown—was to be ever advancing. That God-man Conqueror rides forth, invisible, on an errand of victory which cannot be frustrated: "Of the increase of His kingdom and government there is to be no end."

We have already had occasion to note the similarity between some of the visions of Ezekiel and those of John. There is another Jewish Prophet who seems to give the original framework of the present. Zechariah records two visions which bear a striking resemblance to it. In the one he saw, by night, "a Man" (the same Divine-human Conqueror) riding on a red-colored horse, and reining it up in the middle of some myrtle bushes that were growing in a valley. Behind Him were followers mounted on horses also—their color, red, speckled, and white; representing either His attendant ministering angels, or those providences which follow in His train and are subservient to His wishes.

The other vision of the same Prophet is that of four chariots with red, black, white, and dappled-gray horses, going forth to different corners of the earth; representing, in slightly diverse form, these same ministering spirits, or ministering providences, under the bidding and control of the Great Head of the Church: for it is added, "These are the four spirits of the Heavens, who go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth."

Alike in these Old Testament and in the present New Testament figures, the theme and thought of comfort is, that Christ, the Lord of all, either heads the procession or gives His agents their mission and decree. He Himself goes forth, the first in the heavenly scene, marshaling all the other agencies and events, and making them subordinate to His will and

pleasure. The very color of the horse on which He is seated is not without its symbolic significance. Unlike the red, and ashen, and black which follow, it is the White horse—the sure pledge of righteousness and ultimate peace and victory.

Such, then, was the first memorable vision given to the Seer of Patmos. Whatever might be those which follow, John could never forget this opening one. His thoughts might be occupied with the details of the subsequent procession as it swept by, after the Leader was out of sight. But the animating presence of that Divine Precursor would never be obliterated. All were following in His wake. The declaration had gone forth from Him who sat on the Throne, alike regarding angels and providences and human agents, "Behold, I have given HIM for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people." With a commencement of the Divine drama so full of sublime consolation, the Apostle is so far prepared for the very different visions which were next to follow. We shall do little more than simply specify these.

There was the fiery Red (blood-red) horse with its appropriate rider, the too truthfully symbolic color of terrible war.

There was the Black horse—its rider holding a pair of balances in his hand—the ordinary image of peaceful commerce, of barter and exchange; but here, the equally appropriate emblem of scarcity—when provisions have to be portioned out, not by bulk or measure, but by weight—when the toiler of seed-time could reap nothing from the blighted fields—when the harvest sickles hang rusting in the granary, and the 'famine pines in empty stalls.' "The wheat and the barley, the wine and the oil" specified, are at famine prices: the usurious vendors dealing out a stinted pennyworth to the famishing and hunger-stricken.

There was the Pale horse—ashen, corpse-like—with ghastly skeleton—Death as his rider—Hell or Hades, in grim co-partnership, tracking his desolating path; the symbols and impersonations of the pestilence which walks in darkness, and the destruction which wastes at noonday—the mortality so sweeping, that the wild beasts of the earth are represented as holding their carnival in the waste and devastated region—the valleys of the shadow of death!

What are these successive figures, but Christ Himself, under expressive imagery, rehearsing the significant sayings of His own great prophecy on Mount Olivet, as to the fearful judgments which were to be the forerunners of His second coming? Is it the Red horse? "You shall hear", said He, "of wars and rumors of wars, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Was it the Black and the Pale horse? "There shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in diverse places—all these are the beginning of sorrows." Appalling visions indeed! partially fulfilled in the history of the last eighteen hundred years; but which will doubtless have their main fulfillment in the times immediately preceding the Advent.

And if the reflection suggests itself, How is it that that loving Prince of Peace to have so ghastly and dreadful a train of followers? We answer, they are to be regarded, not as ministers of chastisement on His Church, but rather as His judgments on the unbelieving world—as an illustrious commentator calls them, "The three scourges of the wrath of God." And it is because, even as such, they are anomalies in the kingdom of a great, and good, and beneficent Ruler—(the curses evoked by the sin of man)—that the fourfold cry goes up loud and plaintive from a suffering creation, 'COME! COME! Why tarry the wheels of Your chariot? Undo the bandages that bind and cripple this wounded, anguished earth, and set her forth from her pining couch, walking, and leaping, and praising God!'

Never let us forget that it is SIN which has been the author of all the miseries of our unhappy world! It is sin which has let slip from their leash, the dogs of war. It is sin which has given the commission alike to the black horse of Famine and the pale horse of Death. It is sin which has written so many houses and hearths and hearts desolate, and made the world we dwell in, more a tomb of mortality, than a home of the living. Shall we not long for that event, 'the Blessed hope,' which will terminate these symbols—these realities of sadness? When the Royal Conqueror on the white horse shall turn around to His followers and say, "Thus far shall you go and no farther?"—when these followers shall dismount their ghastly steeds, the sword of war slumbering forever in its scabbard: "When Death shall yield his ancient reign, and vanquished leave the field?"

Oh! with all these untold miseries which sin has entailed and perpetuates to this hour, how appropriate, how sublime, is the loud, anguished cry which this vision so strikingly describes as going up into the ear of the Sovereign God, or rather into the ear of the great King and Head of His Church, from every corner of a burdened creation! All nature seems to have become vocal—the earth has resolved itself into one vast oratory for united prayer. Its litany is monosyllabic. Its misery is too deep for language. It can articulate its grief only in the one expressive word—that word is "COME!"

Come! cry the four representative living ones. Come! It is echoed back from rocks and mountains, dens and caves. Come! It is warbled by streams, and repeated by torrents, and thundered by ocean-waves. Come! It is chanted by winds, it is borne on the breath of the tempest, it is wafted amid the shrieks of perishing crews. Come! It rises in mute agony from the battlefields of the slain, the homes of haggard famine, the couches of the suffering, the beds of the dying. Come! It is heard amid the tramp of the funeral procession. It mingles with the wail of the mourner. It ascends, saturated with tears, from ten thousand graveyards. Come! Blessed Redeemer! break the seals, unfold the roll, let loose the judgments. Prepare the pathway for Your chariot—end the night-watch and usher in the glorious day!

CREATION, God's great world, animate and inanimate, is thus with giant voice, like a mighty Levite in the courts of her own temple, ever pleading for the hour of emancipation by the coming of her King. Shall we—shall the Church—with all her grander, profounder interest in that majestic event, fail to reciprocate her longings, and pray that her cry be heard and ratified? Shall not the Bride say COME, and him who hears say COME? "Even so! COME Lord Jesus! COME QUICKLY!" "Make haste my Beloved! be like a roe or young deer upon the mountains of spices!"

# **THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEALS THE MARTYRS' CRY THE GREAT DAY OF WRATH**

Revelation 6:9-17

In the previous chapter we considered Creation's cry for the coming of her great King, and the visions accompanying the opening of the first four seals of the prophetic roll. The symbolic personages revealed to the Apostle, at all events in the three latter, represented the variety of appalling judgments which were to be visited on the earth and on its guilty inhabitants. But what, meanwhile, of the Church? It is this, under a new and peculiar figure, to which his attention is next called on the opening of the Fifth seal.

The locality of the scenic representation is changed. While it was athwart the broad earthly landscape, that John, from his place at the heavenly vestibule, had seen these strange equestrian riders go forth on their several commissions—it is now inside the celestial sanctuary his eye is turned. At the base of an altar, similar to that with which he was familiar in the courts of the earthly Jerusalem, he listens to voices proceeding from some shadowy human forms. But not, as he had shortly before heard, uttering melody and praise, but rather a loud wail of suffering—not the voices of the living, but, if the expression can be used, the voices of the dead. It was the cry "of those who were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held"—a cry extending from the death of the proto-martyr Stephen, onwards through long gloomy centuries of persecution and hate.

Time would fail to enumerate the voices which mingled in that cry—to rehearse the entries in that illustrious roll of heroic endurance—the martyrs of the Roman catacombs, who have left the significant signature of their sufferings on monumental tablets in these subterranean vaults—their blood thus crying from beneath the ground—the martyrs of Lyons in the age of Irenaeus—the Waldenses and Albigenses of subsequent

centuries, the devoted thousands in the valleys of Perosa and San Martino, or amid the savage wilds of Dormilleuse—the Huguenots of a still later epoch—those involved in the massacres of St. Bartholomew, the fires of Smithfield, the secret tortures of dungeon and inquisition; which no human pen was ever allowed to describe, down to the Madagascar martyrs of our own century—all who have perished by the sword or the axe, the flame and faggot, the hemlock and poison-cup, the cross and the stake; hurled from the precipice, or torn amid the savage shouts of the amphitheater; all who may have a similar legacy of suffering bequeathed to them in the Church of the future.

These martyrs are represented as having their blood, like that of the sacrificial victims of old, poured out at the foot of the altar. Not, be it observed, the golden altar of incense of a subsequent chapter; but the great brazen altar of burnt-offering, where bloody offerings were alone presented. The figuration is in accordance with the literal words of the Prince of Martyrs—the great Apostle himself, when, in anticipation of a violent death, he thus with calm fortitude asserts his preparation, "I am now ready to be offered," (or literally to "pour out" my life—my blood—as an sin-offering.

From the blood of these martyrs in the vision, flowing at the base of the altar, there is a petitioning voice represented as rising loud before Him who sits on the throne, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before You judge the people who belong to this world for what they have done to us? When will You avenge our blood against these people?" It is of importance, however, that we note a peculiarity in the imagery; lest by a false interpretation we be led to regard this as an unworthy cry of vengeance uttered by the disembodied souls of the departed, an imprecation unbefitting the lips of the followers of Him whose dying prayer was that of forgiveness for His enemies—unbefitting the crowned victors who bore their sufferings so meekly, and who might well now forget the fiery chariot which bore them to so glorious a heaven.

Were it no more than to bring the present vision into harmony with subsequent ones, it could not be the souls of the martyred witnesses (in the sense of their glorified spirits) which are here represented as uttering the loud petition to an avenging God. For these, in the very next chapter,



are spoken of as having already entered upon their state of exalted bliss, amid the crowd of jubilant worshipers, before the Throne and the Lamb, "clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands." It is rather by a bold and beautiful symbol—their natural or animal life, "the blood, which is the life thereof"—sending up its dumb inarticulate protestation into the ear of a Holy Judge. They are themselves (their immortal spirits), as we have just said, above and beyond all such wail of earthly suffering. But at the base of that heavenly altar, on which they are beautifully represented as having yielded their lives in sacrifice to God, they have left their own blood-drops to plead in silence. "How long, O Lord?" "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, show Yourself!"

Meanwhile it is added, "White robes were given to each of them." These white robes are generally taken, simply as the evidences of justification and acknowledged righteousness before God. But when Bengel calls the "white stole, or long white vestments, an excellent ornament and high honor," he indicates what we think is a truer and more appropriate meaning. May we not regard them as the distinctive badges of martyrdom and suffering—glistening attire superadded to the "white robes" common to the whole Church triumphant specified in a future vision—heavenly decorations of peculiar and pre-eminent glory, like the stars in the crown elsewhere spoken of, which are given as the distinguishing mark of those who 'turn many to righteousness'?

The cry from that altar-base was not to be in vain. It is abundantly answered, in the subsequent figures, amid the soundings of the trumpets and the outpouring of the vials. God's law of righteous retributive vengeance can admit of no relaxation, either in the case of nations or individuals. Persecuting Pagan-Rome, and persecuting Papal-Rome would in due time have their scourges, to verify and ratify the truthfulness of the saying, "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, who cry to Him day and night?" said One greater than the greatest of these martyred dead. "I tell you He will avenge them, and that speedily." The "souls," however, in the vision, were told meanwhile to wait for the completion of that noble army of martyrs. It was said unto them that "they should rest yet for a little

season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

Such then is the vision accompanying the opening of the Fifth seal, the heavenly altar of sacrifice, and the martyrs' cry.

We now turn to THE SIXTH SEAL. It may deliberately be affirmed that there is no word-painting (if the term may, without irreverence, be used of inspired writing) so grand and impressive in all Scripture, as this "memory of Patmos." The most daring of modern imaginative artists has selected it as his greatest work—although his treatment, however powerful, is confessedly tame side by side with the majestic language of the Apostle-exile. As in the preceding vision, John's eye had been abstracted from the equestrian symbols of the four first seals, to gaze on a great altar of sacrifice within the celestial Temple; so now again, is he called back from the heavenly to the old earthly landscape—to sun, moon, and stars, rocks, and islands, and mountains. But these are in a state of convulsion and chaos.

Nature, in a paroxysm of agony, reels to her core. Not now, among living creatures and elders—not now, among the white-robed martyrs—not now an auditor of the sweet psalmodies of the skies—but among earth's varied tenants, from the crowned monarch to the bond-slave in his chains, he listens to a wild but unavailing cry for help. And who is it that has evoked this wail of terror? It is no earthly despot—no earthly incarnation of tyranny and oppression. It is not even the subordinate figurative riders of the preceding seals, mounted on the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, the pale horse of pestilence and death. It is One "mightier than the mightiest." It is the majestic Being seated on the Throne! It is the wrath, not of a perishable mortal, but "the wrath of the LAMB!"

The wrath of man is great; the rage of the nations, as depicted in the sequel of the Book, is terrible; the track of the conqueror is "with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood." But what is this, compared to what forms the climax and closing of this appalling vision, "the Day, the Great day" (as it stands in the original) "of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Now, to what does this tremendous description refer? In answering the question, we must bear in mind here also, that the interpretation of the present vision must be harmony with those which precede it. While what is called the historical school regard these seals as representing successive epochs or eras following one another in chronological sequence, and their fulfillment exhausted when the eras are past; we are disposed far rather to consider the figures, not as progressive, neither as restricted in their application to any one particular period, but co-extensive over the entire ages of the Church, from the time in which John wrote to the end of the world.

Nor is it any violation of this theory, to credit some particular epochs with a larger share of the realities described in the visions than others. The red horse of WAR may have been more rampant in one age than another: in that of Nero, Vespasian, Attila, Mahomet, or Napoleon. The black rider of SCARCITY may have had to poise his balances with a more trembling hand in one era than another: for example, during the Roman age—in the reigns of Alexander Severus and Caracalla, which enjoyed an unhappy distinction for their grinding taxation and merciless fiscal oppression; or during those invasions which desolated the dismembering Empire of the Caesars, and when millions were left to send up their unsuccoured cry amid once smiling fields, now blackened with ashes and smoke, dearth and famine.

The grim rider with his follower on the Pale horse, may have had wider scope at one time than another for their baleful work, in the decimating PLAGUE and PESTILENCE. The cry of the martyrs was doubtless louder than it has been before or since, in what was pre-eminently called "The Martyr age"—during the reigns of Diocletian, Galerius, and Valerian—the first grand effort of Pagan Rome to strangle the infant religion at its birth. Or, again, during the great struggles of the era of the Reformation.

But still, the visions are not to be limited or restricted to any period, or to any special historic events; but rather are to be regarded as co-extensive with the history of Christendom; partially fulfilled in the past, and having, it may be, a fuller and ampler exposition in the future. The Sixth seal must, in this respect, be in harmony with its predecessors. Those who adopt the purely historical view, and represent this wondrous description

to have exhausted its fulfillment with the others in the earlier centuries, appear to restrict it to events altogether unproportionate in importance and grandeur with the language of the seal itself. In accordance, indeed, with the general and enlarged interpretation we have assigned to the previous seals, we are far from asserting that this last one may not also have had a partial fulfillment in some of those more appalling revolutions which in the course of eighteen centuries have convulsed the nations.

The Hebrew language—the language of Scripture—deals greatly in hyperbole. Figures are often employed to describe events which, to the prosaic Western mind, would appear overwrought, exaggerated, and unreal. Moreover, we must remember, that the very same symbolism here employed—the veiling of the heavens, the darkened sun and falling stars—was adopted by the Jewish Prophets to depict the woes impending on their own country and capital. We are not therefore disposed to question that, in a primary though subordinate sense, these vast convulsions may apply to the subversion of the enthroned despotisms and tyrannies of the world; and specially to the greatest of all moral and social revolutions, which occurred at the commencement of the Christian era—the downfall of Paganism in the Empire of Rome.

But yet we ask, What unsophisticated Christian, what simple reader of his Bible, can peruse these words, and rest in any interpretation short of the culminating one—that we have here an unmistakable description of THE DAY OF JUDGMENT! Among all the revolutions of earth (and making, too, every allowance for the boldness and license of Hebrew symbolism), what one of them can for a moment lay claim to such a portraiture as this? Whereas, on the other hand, it does appear an appropriate conclusion to a series of visions containing a synopsis of the world's history subsequently to be amplified, to have thus depicted in magnificent coloring the final scene of all—the terminating event of long ages and centuries, in the descent of her great Lord and King to His throne of Judgment; accompanied with the wild cry of the fearful and the unbelieving, to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb, as they invoke rocks and mountains to screen them from His withering glance.

That great day waited for by all time, has "surprised the hypocrites!" A daring defiant world that had long treated the warning as an idle dream,

now by the heaving earthquake, and the falling stars, and the blackened sun, and the blood-red moon, awakes up to the awful verity. The despots who lived for ambition, and the misers who lived for gold, and the mighty men—the warriors who made the earth to tremble, and lived for fame—the freeman in his fancied freedom, and the toiling slave in his iron fetters—all (be their station what it may) all who have lived a selfish, skeptic existence, are now roused in a moment to a bitter agonizing sense of their misery and ruin, call upon rocks and caves to screen and cover them from the wrath of the Lamb, "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Does not, indeed, the Savior Himself, in significant and emphatic words, uttered in His own final prophecy on the Mount of Olives, give the best commentary on this seal? The very language and figures He employs are the same as here, "Immediately after those horrible days end, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then at last, the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the nations of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

What are our feelings in the prospect of "that great Day of His wrath?" It is the only one—at all events out of four of the previous visions—in which we have each of us individually a sure and certain personal interest. The red horse of war, we know only in pondering the sad annals of the past, or the records of contemporary history; our eyes (God grant it) may never see the plungings of that crimson steed and the unsheathings of that terrible sword. Although ever and always, in other districts of the world, we hear of the locust and the drought together marking out the desolating pathway of the black horse of famine. And although many a pining heart at home, in dens of misery, is familiar with the gaunt visage; yet that pale steed and its balance-bearing rider is a stranger, and in all probability will ever be, to those whose eyes trace these pages. The pale horse of death, in the terrific sense of plague and pestilence, only lingers in the recollection of a few: we have never seen the dreaded mark of doleful memory affixed on stricken doorways—the lumbering death-wagon gathering its bundles in the awful harvest, and pursuing its errand amid silent streets.

The martyr's cry has been heard in our days in the islands of the Pacific and within Spanish and Italian dungeons; but it is a stranger, and will, we trust ever be so, in this land of glorious light and freedom, where social and spiritual slavery are alike unknown.

But not so the awful verity contained in this Sixth seal. We cannot decipher the hieroglyphics of the future—we cannot interpret the times and seasons of prophecy; but this we do know, that sooner or later the hour will arrive, when our ears shall hear that earthquake's sound, and our eyes witness these departing heavens! Oh! with what different feelings will that event be contemplated by the two great divisions into which mankind shall then resolve themselves—when all the conventional distinctions of earth shall be ended forever—when the rich and the poor, the king and the peasant, the slave and the free, shall meet together under the blaze of that descending Throne!

The WICKED, those who have rejected and neglected the great salvation—spurned the offers of pardon—despised the day of grace—dishonored the Savior's name—dethroned Him from their hearts and lives, when "the great day of His wrath" has bursts upon them in all its appalling and blazing splendors—when the earth is shaking, and the heavens are dissolving, and the stars falling from their orbits, it will not be one, or all, of these spectacles on which their eyes will be fixed in trembling agony. One Object, and one Object alone (as if their senses were locked to all others), will arrest their gaze, and from which they will try in vain to escape: "Behold! HE comes with clouds, and every eye shall see HIM."

They make dumb nature their god, uttering wild imprecations to its rocks and mountains, "Fall on us! and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" But there is no response; Creation, loyal to its great Maker, is deaf to their call. That wrath MUST be borne; that withering glance of rejected, unrequited love must be endured. "Who shall be able to stand?" receives no answer in the heavens above, or in the depths beneath. We can imagine the sinner rushing from spot to spot in a wild delirium of despair, making rock and mountain echo to the wail from which there is no response, "Where shall I go from Your Spirit? or where shall I flee to escape from Your presence?"

But "who shall be able to stand?" That cry—that question in the lips of the true and devoted followers of the Lamb—can be answered. In that wildest drama of God's moral and material creation, there will be to him one glorious Rock of shelter and safety, where he may flee until the indignation be over and past. "A MAN shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and as a covert from the tempest." That LAMB, whose wrath will be so terrible to the scorers of His grace, will be the Dispenser of love and blessing to His own people. The pillar-cloud, all dark with terror and wrath to the Egyptians, will be gleaming with light and glory to His covenant Israel. The Hand, in the one case, 'strong to smite,' will, in the other, be 'strong to save.' Let none leave the safety of that day to hang on the risk of a peradventure. Let not the question remain in perilous doubtfulness, "Am I among the saved, or the unsaved?" Shall I stand, or shall I not stand? Shall that revelation of revelations be to me a revelation of wrath and terror, or one of peace and joy? Can I, even now, take up, in anticipation, the song of one of the glorified dead?

"Bold shall I stand on that Great Day;  
For who ought to my charge shall lay,  
When by Your blood absolved I am,  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame?" -John Wesley

Yes! it will be 'the Blood'—the blood sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts—that will then be the passover to that righteous wrath. Flee to it now. "Run for your lives! Do not stop anywhere in the valley. And don't look back! Escape to the mountains, or you will die!" Escape! for, as you linger, the ominous clouds may be gathering—the now slumbering earthquake may be about to burst—and grace and repentance and mercy may be among the things of an irrevocable past. Blessed be God, that "great day of His wrath" has not yet overtaken you—Mercy still lingers on the steps of her golden throne. The "still small voice" of redeeming love is now heard preceding "the earthquake, the wind, and the fire." Oh! hearken to its message of pardon and peace, before, in the midst of these symbols of terror and judgment-wrath, "the great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?"

While sinners in despair shall call,  
'Rocks hide us!—mountains on us fall!'

The saints, victorious over the tomb,  
May sing for joy—"The Lord has come!"

## **THE VISION OF THE SEALED**

Revelation 7:1-8

The sixth chapter, as we have seen, contains a description of the opening of the first six seals of the prophetic roll. We regarded these as presenting a synopsis of the history and experiences of the Church, from the beginning of the Christian era to the end of the world; the terminating one of the series containing a vivid, but unmistakable, description of the Day of Judgment. The cry had just fallen on the ears of John, from the terror-stricken myriads, "The great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?" Can we wonder that, after such words and such a scene as this, the Apostle should feel himself awed and confounded? If such be the tremendous judgments on a guilty world, could he fail to have the question suggested to him, What as to the safety and security of believers—the Family of God? In the midst of that deluge of predicted wrath, could the ark be relied on to ride out the storm? Was there any sure provision made by the Church's great Head to shield and shelter His own people until the indignation be over and past?

There is a pause before the opening of the seventh seal—an episode or interlude, as it has been expressed, in the epic drama—in order to answer this question. The unsettled spirit of the spectator is calmed by a two-fold vision. Although the chapter commences with the words, "After these things," we are not to infer that what follows was intended as a historical continuation—a chronological sequence to the preceding revelations.



That could not be, if we are correct in considering the Sixth seal as referring to the Judgment-day.

These six seals, in accordance with that interpretation, must be taken as complete in themselves, commencing with the picture of the crowned Conqueror riding forth on the white horse of triumph, and ending with that same majestic Being coming amid symbols of dreadful majesty to the great judgment day. With that closing catastrophe the series ends; and any visions subsequently given, can only be additional illustrations, by a new set of symbols, of the antecedent ones. Although, therefore, the two figures of the present chapter may point with a more special application to "the time of the end," and the judgments immediately preceding the Second Advent, their consolatory words embrace the whole existence of the Church. They are spoken for us, and for our age, as well as for the days of Augustine, or for the mysterious Armageddon era of an unrevealed future.

The First vision contains a representation of the security of the Church on earth. The Second, of the bliss of the Church in Heaven. In other words, the safety of the Church militant, and the glory of the Church triumphant. It is the first of the two which is now alone to occupy our thoughts.

### The Security of the Church on Earth

John beheld "four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree." We shall come immediately to the figurative interpretation of these symbols: but we are not precluded, in the first instance, from accepting them in a literal sense, as representing the elements of nature delegated to the keeping of Angels. Winds, and earthquakes, and tempests are not the capricious outbreaks of unregulated mechanical force. The 'laws of nature' are, in the loftiest sense, the exponents and expressions of God's higher will. "He holds the winds in His fists." "He gathers the waters in the hollow of His hand." "He makes the clouds His chariot." "The Lord sits on the water-floods; yes, the Lord sits King forever." Let us not dethrone and undeify the great Maker and Sustainer, by substituting for His sovereign rule what are called the laws and sequences of nature. "In an instant, I, the Lord

Almighty, will come against them with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and storm and consuming fire." Isaiah 29:6. God, indeed, works by law. He is a God of order—not of confusion. But the world's vast machinery, with all its varied and intricate movements, is not less under His supervision and control than higher moral agencies.

It was an elevating theme of comfort to the awe-struck Apostle, amid the moral hurricanes that were threatening to break forth, that even the forces of nature were under the governance and regulation of the great Lord of all. Though man sees them not, and science in her pride may smile at the fantasy, there are sentinel-angels—angels of repression and restraint—holding back the impatient winds, controlling the tempests, and calming angry seas; offering no hurricane to go forth on its mission of vengeance until He gives the word.

It offers a lesson of soothing consolation to many a stricken heart. That lightning which struck down my child was an arrow out of the quiver of God! That wave which swept him from the vessel's side! That hurricane which overthrew my dwelling, and buried loved ones in the ruins, had their pathway marked out by God. He brings forth the lightning out of His treasuries! He gives the sea its decree! He walks on the wings of the wind! And if we have been mercifully shielded from accident; if lightning and tempest have passed us by unscathed, and the waves that have submerged other boats have brought ours to the desired haven—without casting one doubt on the order and stability of physical laws, let us think of John's imagery as the true and ultimate cause of our safety—the angels of God, at His omnipotent bidding, holding back the winds of the earth, "that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."

But if it be admissible, in the first instance, to give to the vision this natural and primary meaning, doubtless its language has a higher significance with reference to moral tempests, and the merciful subordination of these to the controlling will and purposes of the Most High. This interpretation is brought out with greater force and significancy in the verse which follows. John was attracted by the sight of "another Angel ascending from the east (or the sun-rising)." This new celestial visitant has been considered by some as only one of the many

glorious hosts of the skies, though more glorious and honored than his fellows. But are we not abundantly warranted in according to him a loftier nature still? May we not rather recognize him, under another name and figure, as the crowned Conqueror of the opening seal—the great Angel of the Covenant? His place of advent is from "the sun-rising"—the region of glad hope and rejoicing; an emblem, moreover, more than once used in connection with Christ's Person and glory. Had not the father of the Baptist previously described his coming Savior as "the Day-spring from on high," giving light to the dwellers in darkness and in the shadow of death? Had not that Savior thus announced Himself, "I am the Light of the world?" And as the figure of 'ascending from the east' tells of life as well as light, had not the Apostle of Patmos asserted of Him in his opening Gospel, "In Him was Life, and the life was the Light of men?"

This mightiest of Angels—this mightier than angels—had in His hand "the seal of the living (or "the life-giving") God;" and He cried—as if claiming superiority over the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, "saying, do not hurt the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." If it be objected to such an interpretation, that the phraseology used, "our God," would be out of place in the lips of the co-equal Son—it is not really so. All throughout the Book of Revelation, in reference to the adorable Person of Christ, there is a beautiful blending of the Divine and the human—the majesty of Deity with the assumption of the true though sinless manhood. Were not these His own words in the days of His flesh—not in a moment of profound humiliation, but in the hour of glorious triumph, when the trophies of His great victory were lying scattered around the mouth of His sepulcher, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God?" The Apostle Paul too speaks of God as the God as well as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the same loud voice, then, which met us in the opening chapter of the Book, this magnificent Being utters His command to the four angels of the four winds. He calls on them to keep these in check until they receive His summons. Zechariah's Horseman in the midst of the myrtle-trees is again recalled, who had his angel-retinue behind him, so that no myrtle branch could be touched until they had His authority to do so. However

scriptural and however comforting may be the thought of the ministry of angels, let us ever think of them as subservient to Him whose pleasure they fulfill. As in the case of Mary of old, these bright Beings are in themselves unable to dry a tear and take the load off a sorrowful heart; no answer can they give to the quest of the anxious soul, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." But, as it was in her experience also—when the great Redeemer whose deserted tomb they had been watching comes to her, as she stood weeping and disconsolate—the tears which angels fail to wipe away are wiped away by Him.

In our hours of trial, when we listen to the deep moan of the moral tempest—when all is brooding night around us—when in our darkened skies, star after star, it may be, of earthly hope has been quenched from sight, let us turn toward the eastern horizon, Heaven's own region of hope and consolation. Let us look for that "ascending Angel" of light and life, saying, "My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning; I say, more than those who do watch for the morning."

In Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," the window of the chamber called Peace, in which Christian lay, "opened toward the sun-rising." Steadfastly gazing on Him thus so appropriately symbolized, let us take the inspired words as alike a prophecy and a promise, and that too for a darkened heart as well as for a benighted world, "Unto you who fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with keeling in His beams."

There is a special purpose here spoken of in connection with the sudden advent of this Angel of the Dayspring. It was to repress judgment, only until a certain object was attained—until the true servants and people of had been "sealed on their foreheads." The language employed reminds us of those faithful few in the days of Ezekiel, who, when dreadful judgments were about to burst on Jerusalem, had a mark set on their foreheads by the man clothed in linen with the inkhorn at his side. John heard the number of those that were thus sealed. He minutely records them—12,000 of each tribe of the children of Israel. Israel being the figurative, representative name of the Christian Church: in all, 144,000—the number symbolic of completeness. The whole of the tribes too were included—the lowliest as well as the greatest—the crouching servile tribe

of Issachar as well as the Lion tribe of Judah. What was this, but, under the most beautiful and expressive of figures, to proclaim that of the Church which Christ has redeemed, not one shall be missing—that "all Israel shall be saved?"

As in that most memorable of incidents in Old Testament story, when the Hebrew people stood on the shores of the Red Sea and made it echo to their song of triumph, there was not so much as a hoof left behind, not a child or infant that had perished amid the roar and heaving of the surging waters—all were saved with a great salvation! So is it with the true Israel of God in every age. The floods may have lifted up their waves and made a mighty noise; but "the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters—yes, than the mighty waves of the sea." Their experience is, "We went through the flood on foot; there we rejoiced in Him." A greater than Moses—the triumphant leader of His ransomed people—as He stands on the earthly shores of His stupendous victory, can say, "Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost!"

John, as we have seen, had just been the witness of terrific revelations, "the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear." He had beheld the earth moved, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea, the waters thereof roaring and troubled, the mountains shaking with the swelling thereof. He had seen direful invaders—Plague, Pestilence, Famine, Death—go forth on their baleful mission. He had heard the cry of innocent blood ascending from the base of the altar. He had seen dreadful signs in sun, and moon, and falling stars; and voices more appalling still, calling for shelter from Infinite wrath.

Oh! when upon the vision of the Apostle there bursts this aggregate of terror—terrors greater far than those which desolated of old the doomed cities of the plain—what does the great Covenant Angel say to His servant John, (the Lot of the Apocalypse)? It is in the spirit of the words which were uttered to that same dweller in Sodom, as the sun in his case too was rising upon the earth, "Hurry! For I can do nothing until you are there." (safe in 'Zoar', an emblem of heaven)

Not a bolt can descend upon the world to destroy it, until all the people of God be gathered in, and the number of His elect be accomplished.

Individual trials—personal afflictions—the Church collectively, and believers individually, must and will endure; they have a heritage of tribulation: but their spiritual safety is unassailable. Every member of the tribe of true Israel is sealed on his forehead by the seal of the living God—God's own indelible mark of election and adoption—God's own pledge of inviolable security. The deluge may sweep as it may, but the Covenant Ark, containing its sacred 144,000, will rise buoyant on the waters. The Lord, as in the case of Noah's family, has 'shut them in;' and that Ark will do battle with the storm, until it is anchored on the top of the true Ararat—the Mount of everlasting 'rest'—surrounded by the new heavens and the new earth.

Let us rejoice in this covenant safety. Let us rejoice—not indeed that we are exempt from the trials of life, for that we are not, but that God will allow no trial to be sent but which is for our good. There was an Angel for every wind; there is a restraint on every judgment. He will not tempt us above that we are able to bear. Of that true "God of tempests," natural and moral, it is sublimely said, "He arrests His rough wind in the day of His east wind." If we have this SEAL, this mark of God upon us, it will form a mighty amulet (a charm) to dispel all real evil during life. It will be like the blood sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of old, when the destroying Angel passes by. It will form a glorious passport in the hour of death into the regions of bliss. And, as if to make sure that none shall be missing on the great Day of Judgment, "He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

But, in closing our contemplation of this vision, let us bear in mind that the sealing, which has its precious lesson of security and safety, has also its solemn lesson of responsibility. Sealing indicates property, possession, appropriation, on the part of the sealer. As the sealed of God, we are the property of Christ. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." The ancient seal contained the name of the king, who put his own mark on his slaves or servants. That seal of John's vision, set on the foreheads of His true Israel, has engraven on it, so to speak, the very name of God. Part of the promise to the Church of Philadelphia, in a preceding chapter, is this, "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the

city of my God." The writing of the name should indicate preparation and readiness to enter the celestial city. Is it so with us? Does our character correspond with our charter of heavenly citizenship, demanding as a qualification that "holiness without which no man can see the Lord?" Christ calls us here "the servants of our God." Have we risen to any true realization of the grandeur and the destiny of such a name as this?

## **VISION OF THE WHITE-ROBED AND PALM-BEARING MULTITUDE**

Revelation 7:9-17

The Apostle has still another vision given to him, previous to the opening of the seventh seal; it reveals **THE BLISS OF THE PERFECTED CHURCH IN GLORY**. In the preceding figure (the sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand), his eye had been directed to the terrestrial landscape, amid winds and trees, seas and tempests—the emblems of tribulation. Now he is in the midst of celestial scenery, surrounded by Throne and Temple, white robe and festal palm, the living fountains and pastures of the blessed. To the question which we have supposed must have suggested itself, after witnessing the vengeance-symbols, "What of the Church?"—The sealing-vision conveys the assurance of her imperishable security; that, despite of lightning and tempest, plague, pestilence and famine, battle, murder, and death, she will be preserved intact; not a unit in her ranks missing—not a name missing at the great roll-call—that from all her troubles she will come forth "fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

But the sublime imagery which we are now to ponder, tells far more than this. It assures not only of present immunity from destruction, but of an inheritance of glory—a fullness of bliss and joy, beyond what heart can conceive or tongue can utter! It opens up, once more, the glories of the Heaven already described to us previously, and which will yet be more

fully disclosed in the cluster of visions which terminate the Book. John not only sees God's seven thousand hidden in sheltering caves of safety—kept by 'the Angel of the Day-spring' from the avenging winds of judgment—but the completed Church triumphant assembled in that calm world which lies beyond the reach of hurricane and storm—engaged with a brotherhood of angels in blessed ministries of love, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

If we described the language and scenery of the vision, on the opening of the sixth seal, as unsurpassed in Scripture for majesty and terror, we may well speak of the present as unique and peerless in a combination of beauty, tenderness, and grandeur. Although it almost seems presumption to attempt to paraphrase the words, let us briefly rehearse the substance of the vision.

The Apostle beheld a great multitude (defying calculation), composed of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the Throne, and before the Lamb. In connection with these, a twofold emblem or characteristic specially attracted his attention—the white robe in which they were attired, and the palms-branches they held in their hands. The white robe cannot be other than the pure white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness, that in which He presents His ransomed people before the Throne, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Tertullian and some of the Fathers, as well as some later writers, have taken the palm-branch as the Greek or Roman emblem of victory. This, however, is a misapplication of its significance and beauty. We have in a previous chapter noted, that the imagery of the Apocalypse, so far at least as its references to the Church are concerned, is never classical or Pagan, but exclusively Jewish; we must, therefore, discover the true meaning of the palm-bearers, not amid the victors of Corinth and Olympus, nor in the Roman processions to the Capitol, but rather in connection with some expressive Hebrew rite or custom. This is not far to seek.

However appropriate and expressive the references in Paul's Epistles may be to the games of ancient Greece (its races and wrestlings and garlanded victors), in illustration of the Christian conflict and triumph—far more beautiful, as emblematic of Heaven, and especially of Heaven's glorious rest, was the palm-bearing festal gathering of the Jews of old, the Feast of



Tabernacles. That feast was the concluding one of the year, when the vines had surrendered their vintage, the olive-groves their berries, when the garners of Palestine were full of all manner of produce. It was the feast of ingathering—the great 'harvest-home' of the nation; designed, too, among other things (while celebrating the close of the agricultural season, and the storing of the land's produce), to commemorate the tent-life of their forefathers in the desert, and specially, when these wanderings were over, their rest and settlement in the land of Canaan. It was a joyous, unrivaled holiday throughout the whole kingdom. All manual work was suspended. Even their dwellings were forsaken; and the memories of the desert were impressively revived, by constructing temporary booths, made of intertwined palm, olive, pine, myrtle, and "willows from the brook."

During the continuance of the feast, the jubilant crowds carried in their hands, along the streets or public ways, palm branches, accompanied with festal song. What more befitting imagery of the scenes and employments of the Heavenly Canaan, the land of everlasting rest? What more appropriate emblem, when the wilderness wanderings of all God's redeemed Israel had ceased, the Jordan crossed, and Canaan entered, "hungering no more," and "thirsting no more," the fierce sun not "lighting upon them," nor the sirocco "heat" of the desert—than to represent them, not so much as conquerors with the emblems of victory (though that would have been appropriate also), but rather as keeping, through eternal ages, their Feast of Tabernacles—waving their palm branches and singing their anthems of festive joy, crying with a loud voice, "Hosanna! salvation to our God."

And not to anticipate the remaining portion of the vision, this antitypical similitude to the Feast of Tabernacles is still further carried out by a subsequent reference, where it is said, at the close of verse 15, "and He who sits on the Throne shall dwell among them." God Himself—the God of the eternal feast and the eternal rest—will Himself mingle with the festive throng; and not only so, but (as the meaning of the expression in the original may rather be accurately rendered), "He shall tabernacle among," or "spread His tent over them." They shall each dwell in their separate booth of joy, and each wave their separate branch of triumph;

but there will be a mightier Tent over-canopying all. The pillar-cloud of the desert, unlike the olden type, will follow them across the Jordan of death, and spread its brightness above the rejoicing myriads in the true Land of promise—they "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The beautiful imagery of the evangelical Prophet will obtain its grandest—its everlasting fulfillment, "Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain." The same magnificent simile is expanded in a future chapter of Revelation. "And I heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will 'tabernacle' with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and their God."

The cry of the palm-bearers is "Salvation!" (or more literally), "The Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." They would disown any personal merit in entering upon the enjoyment of such bliss. Salvation, from first to last, they owe to sovereign grace and redeeming love; their palm branches they would cast at the feet of the enthroned Mediator, saying, 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto You be all the glory.' Moreover, "they cried out with a loud voice." It is not a passing, fleeting strain, which had died away as they sang it; but a never-ending ascription. In the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, the palm branches, green today, were withered tomorrow—it was a scene of transient joy. But these heavenly palms are never-fading; robes ever-lustrous; songs never-ceasing; "the rest without a rest," in the Heavenly Canaan.

After John had thus beheld "the sealed ones" of the former vision among the white-robed of the present vision—their safety and bliss secured and perpetuated—he is arrested by the adorations of a wider circle. The redeemed multitude were surrounded by all the unfallen angels, who raise an antiphonal or responsive song. These stood "round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four living creatures; and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Amen."

And then they added the sevenfold ascription of their perfected song (as

it is in the more emphatic original), "The praise, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honor, and the power, and the might, be unto our God for the ages of the ages." These angels—these ministering cherubim and seraphim—the "principalities and powers in heavenly places"—are thus represented as exulting in the bliss of the completed Church of the redeemed. If even on earth there is said to be joy in heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repents, how can they refrain from testifying their joy at the manifestation of God's glory in the final safety and well-being of His whole Church? If even the return of one wanderer from the fold creates a jubilee amid these unfallen ranks, what must be their joy, as they gaze on the whole gathered flock, the mighty multitude which no man can number? If even the restoration of one stone in the ruined temple is to them matter of lofty exultation, what must it be as they behold the vast spiritual edifice completed, "the top-stone brought forth with shouting," and the cry, "Grace, grace, unto it?"

But this beautiful vision revealed to John—this brilliant interlude in the majestic drama—is not concluded. As the song of these angels is still vibrating in his ears, one of the white-robed multitude seems to approach him; as if desirous, by prompting a question, to prolong the great words and thoughts of comfort, before the curtain falls, and the spectator is once more back again amid vials and trumpet-soundings, voices and thunderings and lightnings and earthquake. "Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, 'Who are these who are clothed in white? Where do they come from?' The respectful reply was returned, 'Sir' (or 'my Lord'), 'you know.'" And gathering from the Apostle's brief rejoinder that he desired further explanation, the interrogator proceeds, "And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation (or, supplying the twice-repeated article, which is omitted in our translation, 'the tribulation, the great tribulation'), and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him by day and by night (heaven's emblem of perpetuity) in His temple: and He who sits on the throne shall tabernacle among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat (or sirocco blast). For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them (tend them or shepherd them), and conduct them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall

wipe away every tear from their eyes." Or, as our oldest translation has it, "God shall lead forth them to the wells of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away each tear from their eyes."

We must defer, until next chapter, gathering the manifold lessons of hope and comfort which this wondrous vision supplies. Meanwhile let us ask the question, Are we preparing for the true heavenly Feast of tabernacles—the great reaping-day of glory? That well-known feast and season in the land of Canaan was a joyous one of old, only to the Hebrew who had been unremitting in spring and summer toil. To the sluggard who had left his fields unsown, uncultured, untended, there could be no participation in the songs of the jubilant multitude—he had gone forth before the fall of the early or the latter rains, bearing no precious seed—he could not, therefore, on that festive week, come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. It was he who had used, with laborious fidelity and drudgery, spade and plough and pruning-hook, who had utilized for field and vineyard the precious rains of heaven, that would bear his palm-branch with most exultant joy, and repose with grateful satisfaction within his shady arbor. If there were no harvest-spoil to divide, there could be no gladness. "They rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

It is so, on a vaster scale, with the spiritual sower and reaper in the prospect of immortality. While we never dare lose sight of the foundation-truth of the gospel, that salvation is of grace, not of works; yet neither dare we reject or overlook the great counterpart assertion, which contains at least no paradox or inconsistency to the eye gifted with spiritual discernment, that "faith without works is dead, being alone." No waving of the festal palm, by those who have abandoned their fields of heart and life labor to the thorn and the thistle—who have left the seed unsown, the ground untilled, the vine to languish; and whom God, the great Husbandman, will address with the withering words on the Great day of harvest, "What could I have done more to my vineyard than I have done? I plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with choice vines. Then I waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were wild and sour."

If we would have the joyous song of the heavenly reaper, we must now be

among the faithful and diligent sowers. The rest of the Feast of tabernacles above, is only possible to such. No toil here—no repose, no festal hosanna yonder. "Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest." Up! sow your fields and plant your vineyards; do noble work while you have space and opportunity to do it (in your own hearts and in the world around you) for God and His Christ, encouraged by the cheering assurance, "Do not be weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not."

To all such willing and devoted laborers; to all who have listened to the summons of the Master, "Go, work in My vineyard;" to all who have done battle with sin, manfully struggled with temptation, eradicated from the seed-plot of the heart its roots of bitterness; who in a spirit of earnest self-sacrifice have renounced the world, and in a spirit of holy self-consecration and self-surrender have given themselves to God—the invitation of Christ to the weary and heavy-laden here, will have a new and glorious significance as He welcomes them hereafter at Heaven's great harvest-home, the eternal Feast of tabernacles—"Come unto Me, and I will give you REST!"

## **THE WHITE ROBES AND LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATER**

Revelation 7:13-17

These beautiful verses (explanatory of the previous part of the vision) we were unable to fully expound in the preceding chapter. They are more, however, than explanatory—they contain some new and precious unfoldings of the Heaven of the redeemed, which cannot be passed cursorily or in silence. After the preceding revelations of judgment and terror, how grateful and soothing to the Seer of Patmos must have been

this lull in the storm—this bright though momentary glimpse through the midst of the tempestuous clouds! The words must have fallen on his ear like serenest music. Let us, with him, enjoy the elevated calm.

Laying aside the perplexities of interpretation and conflicting renderings which beset many other portions of the Book, let us, under the direction, not of human commentator, but of John's celestial guide, the member of the white-robed multitude—this Interpreter in the true "Palace Beautiful," enter in spirit within the open door of the upper sanctuary. The passage is like a mirror set in eternity, in which the believer sees reflected his future character and condition. We all, beholding as in a mirror our heavenly glory—are encouraged to look forward to the time when we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. The verses unfold to us the former experience and condition of the Redeemed, under the twofold aspect of SIN and SUFFERING.

(1.) It was a condition of SIN, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." From the hour when Abel was admitted a solitary representative of the glorified Church, to the time when its voice shall become "as the voice of many waters and as the voice of mighty thunderings," no human soul has ever passed, or ever can pass, within the gate into the City, that has not been stained with guilt. Every pillar in the Heavenly Temple is a ransomed pillar, bearing the inscription, "The chief of sinners, but I obtained mercy." The whitest robe there was once soiled with pollution—the holiest and purest member of that redeemed family was once a rebel against the authority of the Being before whose throne he is casting his crown.

What an encouragement, amid our struggles with temptation, the buffetings of Satan, our proneness to backsliding, our depressing consciousness of ever-present frailty and corruption, our defiant pride and hardened unbelief, that this "bright array" have had thus an identity of experience with ourselves—that they have passed through the same "sloughs of despond;" been held captive in the same dungeons of Doubting Castle; felt the same chains of corruption dragging them to the dust in spite of every effort to rise heavenwards; and have finally reached their thrones and their crowns covered with the scars of battle!

They are now glorified witnesses to the fullness and freeness of the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. The Blood that has been so precious to them may be equally precious to us, their robes may be our robes—their Heaven may be our Heaven—their God may be our God. The guiltiest there was not too guilty to be the recipient of one of these shining garments; and there cannot, therefore, be a sinner on earth too degraded or vile to listen to the Divine invitation, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

(2.) But their past earthly condition was also one of SUFFERING, "These are they who came out of great tribulation." And in the conclusion of the verses we are led to infer something as to what this tribulation was. When we are told they are to "hunger no more, neither thirst any more," it is equivalent to telling us, that once they hungered and thirsted, and fainted and groaned and were burdened. And in that most exquisitely tender of all Bible delineations of divine love, God 'wiping away all tears from their eyes,' we are informed that the place where these Redeemed came from was a weeping world, where every eye was once dimmed with tears.

God's Word does not conceal, but, on the contrary, rather publishes and forewarns, that the road to Heaven is one of trial. Christ prepared His people for the highway there being hedged with tribulation, that if any would follow Him to the crown, it must be by the way of the cross. "Beloved," says Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice." These trials are the ladder-steps by which the immortal spirits in this vision attained their bliss. We can almost imagine ourselves listening to their varied testimony.

"God laid me," would be the experience and retrospect of one, "on a bed of sickness. I was living a life of engrossing worldliness. I was taking my health as a thing of course. I thought that the strong frame, and vigorous pulse, and undimmed eye, could never, in my case, be shattered or impaired. I had no thought of death—eternity I put immeasurably away from me! He who gave me the abused talent stretched me on a couch of pain. Year after year I was familiarized with the dim night-lamp—the sleepless vigils—the aching head. Mine was the mournful monotonous

soliloquy, 'Would God it were evening! would God it were morning!' But He allured me into the wilderness that He might speak comfortably to me. I now praise Him for it all. Through the chinks of the battered earthly tabernacle were admitted the first rays of the heavenly glory. In the solitary night-watches my lips were first tuned for the heavenly song. Heart and flesh fainted and failed me, but my tribulation led me to Him who is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

"I was reposing in the sunshine of earthly prosperity," would be the testimony of another. "The fabled horn of plenty exhausted its ample stores in my lap. Riches increased; ah! I set my heart upon them; they filled my waking and sleeping hours; my closet, my Bible, my family, were sacrificed in the demon scramble. Life was a mad attempt to refute and gainsay the great utterance of incarnate Truth—"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses!" At an unexpected moment the crash came—the whole fabric of a lifetime (the golden fabric) fell to the ground. Seated amid empty coffers, and dismantled walls, and blighted hopes, I was led to bring the perishable into emphatic contrast with the eternal. I too thank my God for it all. But for that whirlwind-blast which swept over me, burying the hoarded treasures of a vain existence, I would have died the fool that I lived. But the loss of the gold which perishes, led me to the unsearchable riches; to lay up treasure beyond the reach of bankruptcy and the fluctuations of capricious fortune."

"I was an idolater of my family," another would tell. "I was leaning too fondly and tenderly on some cherished prop—some gourd in the earth-bower of my happiness. The prop gave way—the gourd withered. But as some gentle spirit (be it that of husband, or wife, or child, or brother, or sister) winged its flight to the realms of glory, it brought me, as I was never before, into near and holy contact with the Unseen. The tie snapped on earth bound me to the Throne of God—voices from the celestial shore were heard saying, 'Come up here!' I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Henceforward my heart was where my garnered treasures were. And though every step of my saddened way was sprinkled with tears, every one of these were needful—I could not have lacked one of them; the pangs and voids of the smitten spirit, of which they were the outward



exponents, served to wean me from this poor world. These thorns inserted in the earthly nest drove me to the wing, and allowed me not to cease my flight until I had reached the golden eaves of the Heavenly Home!"

While, however, we thus speak of the Redeemed as a tried and suffering band, we must not be misunderstood; as if we meant that their sorrows brought them there, and were the procuring causes of their white-washed robes and immortal bliss. No! Though these once weeping sufferers had wept an ocean of tears, that could not have wiped away the guilt of their sins. Observe, it is not "These are they who came out of great tribulation," therefore are they before the throne of God; but, "These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It is not the tribulation which saved them, but the Blood shed by the adorable Redeemer.

Suffering of itself never can conduct to Heaven. The most fearful succession of trials can never certify to me that I am a child of God. It is only when affliction is sanctified that I can glory in it. In vain did the angel of old come down to Bethesda to "trouble the pool," unless the diseased person stepped in. In vain does the Angel of sorrow come down to the Bethesda pool of the human heart to trouble it, unless the "troubling of the waters" be followed by "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." "Affliction," it has been well said, "never leaves us as it finds us. We have only reason to rejoice in our tears, when they serve, not as, alas! is the case with many, only to dim our eyes more to unseen realities—but rather, as the lenses of a telescope, to bring nearer and more endearingly to view a the Better Country."

Let us pass to the other great topic these verses bring before us—THE HISTORY OF THE HEAVEN OF THE REDEEMED. They supply many interesting and suggestive thoughts.

(1.) It is to be a state of PERFECT HAPPINESS. This comprehends entire exemption from trial and complete freedom from sin; in other words, a beautiful combination of Holiness and Happiness. "You shall hunger no more!" There are there no more longings that cannot be satisfied—blanks that cannot be filled—shadows which mock the hand that would vainly

grasp them. "You shall thirst no more!" You who have been wasting your strength on nature's broken cisterns and polluted streams, listen to this. "Thirst again," the attribute and characteristic of universal humanity, is unknown yonder—where God Himself is revealed as the Fountain of Life, and where we shall drink of the rivers of His pleasures. "The sun shall not beat upon you!" Here on earth, your journey is in a desert land; often you sigh in vain for shadowy palm or sheltering rock, to screen you from the scorching heat of affliction. In Heaven, that sun shall set to rise no more; and in its stead, God Himself is to rise on you; for "they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light."

And it would seem from the glowing description, that this felicity, though it is to be perfect all at once in kind, is to be ever increasing in degree—a progressive felicity, advancing with the years of eternity. The Lamb is represented as "feeding them"—opening up new sources of enjoyment, affording new matter and new motive for praise, fresh views of His own glory, brighter displays of Redeeming love! "The Lamb shall lead them to living fountains of waters" as if there was an insatiable longing in these Redeemed bosoms to know more of the Great salvation, every fresh draught only quickening their desire to drink deeper still.

And it is "THE LAMB" who shall lead them and feed them! The Lamb and the Fountain are the two most precious words to the pilgrim in the wilderness, and they are precious still in the land of everlasting rest. Though in Heaven there is to be eternal freedom from sin and trial and suffering, the remembrance of these is not to cease. This, we found in a previous vision, is the song which the twenty-four Elders—the representatives of the redeemed, love to sing: "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!" Yes, and these memories of sin and sorrow, so far from marring or interrupting, will rather quicken and intensify, the grateful praises of the ransomed myriads!

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!" This tender and beautiful description would lead us also to infer that there will be a gradual opening and unfolding of the wisdom of God's dealings with His people on earth, until the tear-drops of the wilderness, still lingering in their eyes, are all removed. Every providence will be cleared up, every

dispensation vindicated. With an eye once full of tears now tearless; and a spirit once repining now giving utterance to no murmur, every new morning will find the Redeemed reposing in serener confidence and with profounder and more restful love, on the God whose hand has obliterated the last trace of sorrow!

(2.) It is to be a state of GREAT GLORY. That once suffering, but now triumphant multitude are represented as having their station nearest the throne, "They are before the throne," and He who sits upon the throne "tabernacles among them." We have previously found the angels depicted as standing "around about the throne and around the Elders" (the multitude of redeemed). This intimates the amazing fact, that it is ransomed sinners who occupy the inner circle around the throne! It is ransomed sinners who are honored with the nearest gaze of Deity! What a wondrous glimpse does this open to us of Heaven!—to see angel and archangel giving way to the redeemed from the earth, to let the joint-heirs with Christ be partakers with Him on His Throne!

We listen to the song of the entire multitude—bright armies of unfallen angels—principalities, and powers, gathered in to this majestic festival of the Lamb, headed by cherubim and seraphim. One theme thrills on every tongue—onward rolls the triumphant anthem, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." But these surrounding voices are at intervals silenced. From the one favored band in the vision who are "before the throne," with festal palms in their hands and blood-bought crowns on their brows, there rises alone the chorus, "He was slain for us!"

(3.) God Himself is to constitute the essence of their enjoyment. In all the beautiful and varied imagery in which these verses abound, the same grand idea is present in every clause. Is Heaven spoken of as a Palace, and He as a Sovereign seated on the throne? the Redeemed are represented as ranged before it, and the summit of their happiness attained, when it is said of them, "Now are they before the Throne of God," gazing on His unveiled majesty.

Is Heaven described as a Temple, and the occupation of the Redeemed that of High Priests in the regal Sanctuary? Still He is the supreme object

of their worship, "They serve Him day and night, in His temple."

Again the figure is changed. These favored citizens of the Heavenly Zion are pictured as a happy Flock reposing in the meadows of glory. But what would they be without the presence of their Shepherd? "The Lamb who is in the midst of the Throne" shall tend them, feed them, guide them, enfold them!

Or do we behold them changing their posture of adoration, and going in search of the living fountains of waters? While yet they were inhabitants of earth, often were they seen in the attitude of pilgrims, "coming up from the wilderness leaning on their Beloved." Behold them now, coming up from the Throne; they are leaning on their Beloved still, "It is the Lamb who leads them." It is a bold but fine conjecture of one of our great poets, when he is telling of the bright consummation of that "Course of Time" of which he sang, that there are moments in Heaven when the Redeemed around the Throne hush their voices and go, as it were, amid the solitudes of eternity, to hold communion with God alone.

But these words, from which the idea probably is derived, tell us that there is no such thing as absolute solitude in Heaven. The Ransomed may for a while lay aside their harps and retire from the company of angels amid the sequestered fountains of waters; but still they are not alone—the LAMB leads them and feeds them.

Once more—when, in the light of eternity, mysterious earthly dealings are cleared up, and dispensations vindicated, every tear removed—the most touching part in this office of tenderness is the hand which wipes these tears away—still it is God—"And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Yes! He is the light of Heaven—the central glory of that world of brightness. Tell what this world would be without the sun, and you can form some feeble idea of what Heaven would be to the Redeemed without HIM. There are many other powerful incentives to draw us to this world of glory. Departed friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus are there. Sacred are the voices which seem ever and anon to steal down in sweetest cadence—the soft whisper of Heaven's own love—telling that though they cannot come to us, there is a blessed meeting-place in their own inheritance of light, which knows no parting. But in this vision of John's,

there are no other or subordinate motives mentioned. The lesser rays are swallowed up in the glory that excels, and God is all in all!

Reader! if you are looking forward to taking your place as a worshiper in the upper Sanctuary, the same Divine Being who will form the center and focus of your bliss there, should form the center and substance of your happiness here. Test the reality of your hopes by this. What is it that is drawing you to Heaven? Is it some dreamy indefinite idea of material splendor—a place of exemption from sorrow and suffering, where every wish is satisfied, and the very fountain of tears is dried? This may be, and doubtless will be, all true. But are its Mansions desirable, because they are the dwelling-place of your God? If at this moment it were divested of all its other attractions, would it be enough to know "God shall be with them and be their God?"

This was David's Heaven, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." This was Asaph's Heaven, "Whom have I in Heaven but You, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." This was Paul's Heaven, "Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." This was John's Heaven, "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Yes! it is interesting specially to note, that to this mighty gazer of Patmos, to whom, in his apocalypse, had been revealed so many visions of dazzling beauty, Heaven consisted not in these—not in scenery, nor in any outward elements of bliss; but that the essence of its happiness and glory was likeness to God—serving HIM with a fervor that never wearies, and a love that knows no languor or decay.

What shall we say, then (as we sum up these observations), of this dwelling-place of God's redeemed-Israel—this home of the Church-triumphant? Is there nothing in all its endless bliss to fire our ambition? Do the harpings of that innumerable multitude; these perennial fountains of water; these palms ever green; these thrones ever bright; the thoughts of sorrow ended; sufferings forgotten; tears wiped away; angels our companions; above all, of God Himself our everlasting Friend and portion—not urge us to break loose from the enthralling chains of earth, and to feel as if there were nothing worth living for in comparison with this?

It is said of Anaxagoras, the philosopher, that one night when in the act of studying the stars, his countrymen came to confer upon him an inheritance, in token of their appreciation of his genius. His reply was, "I wish it not—these heavens are my country." Can we say the same in a grander, diviner sense? Are all earthly joys, and honors, and pleasures a bauble, compared with what faith unfolds in the splendors of immortality? Would that we might thus rise to the full realization of that glorious heritage, to whose priceless blessings all can be heirs through the blood of the Lamb. There are white robes for all—palms for all—crowns for all—Heaven for all. This vision is one of many chimes from the bells of Glory, gathering in the ransomed worshipers to the great festival. Let us listen to the summons. Let us be putting on now our festal garments, and prepare to take our place amid the rejoicing throng.

**THE HALF-HOUR'S SILENCE  
PREPARATION FOR THE TRUMPET-  
SOUNDINGS  
THE ANGEL AT THE GOLDEN ALTAR**

Revelation 8:1-6

It would have essentially contributed to a clear and intelligent apprehension of this passage, as well as of the structure of the entire Book, had the first verse in the present chapter formed the closing one of the preceding; or rather, had it taken a more distinctive place still, by forming the terminating words of the first of the three parallel visions of which the Apocalypse is composed. If we can venture again to use the simile which we have more than once employed in speaking of this portion of Scripture, that is, a prophetic drama in three acts, each act

consisting in succession of the vision of the seals, the trumpets, and the vials, then the opening verse would form the conclusion of the first great dramatic scene.

A significant interval takes place, before new figures and personations present themselves to the Apostle-spectator; "There was silence in Heaven for about half an hour." It is the beautiful remark of Victorinus (one of the oldest commentators on the Revelation) upon this half-hour's silence, that it denotes "the beginning of the saints' everlasting rest." The idea is no doubt a sublime one, and more especially taken in connection with the antitypical reference, of which we have previously spoken, to the Feast of Tabernacles—the heavenly feast of rest—the beginning of "the rest which remains for the people of God."

But we think a more natural meaning is that which we have just given, that is, to regard the words as simply marking the pause between the parts in the sacred representation. The Apostle is once more amid the familiar surroundings of Patmos. Stunned, or, to use a phrase of Chrysostom's, "made dizzy," with these revelations, he required a temporary relaxation from the tension of thought and feeling and strong emotion. Just as Zechariah, overpowered and exhausted with the glories of one of his prophetic visions, had sunk into slumber, so that the Angel that talked with him had to come again and "wake him as a man is wakened out of sleep;" or just as John's great Master, when on earth, required such a period of respite and suspension from prolonged bodily and mental toil, to satisfy the requirements of His humanity; so, on that memorable Lord's Day in Patmos there is a break in the imagery, in order that the favored Apostle may enjoy a season of needed rest before the second great act in the apocalyptic drama opens, with its fresh revelations of the mysterious future.

The half-hour's silence being concluded, the curtain anew rises, and a fresh series of visions is unveiled. We are not, however, to suppose that the vision of the seven trumpets and the trumpet-blowing angels (the new section on which we now enter) follows that of the seals chronologically. This could not be. The seven seals conducted us down to the end of the world, to the Day of judgment, and the very threshold of Heaven. If, therefore, the trumpets speak of earthly things, as they unquestionably do

(the trees, the seas, the rivers, the lights of Heaven), they can only, under new phases—a new set of symbols with varying representations, traverse the same ground. Indeed we are constrained to regard the seals, the trumpets, the vials, as constituting a triple "equivalent" series of visions—a series not consecutive, but parallel, each embracing seven figures, each complete in itself, each starting from the same point of departure (the commencement of the Christian era), each depicting the various fortunes of the Church, until these culminate in the triumphs of her great Head, the destruction of His adversaries, and the salvation of His people. This parallelism will be found to be accurate and complete.

As the opening of the seventh seal indicated the beginning of heavenly bliss, so the blowing of the seventh trumpet similarly announces the completion of 'the mystery of God,' and is ushered in by a song of thanksgiving—by great voices in Heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. . . . And the temple of God was opened in Heaven." And so also is this harmony sustained in the pouring out of the seventh vial; for then we read, "There came a great voice out of the temple of Heaven from the throne, saying, It is done."

Let us proceed, then, in profound reverence, to open this new volume of the great prophecy, and to follow, though with extreme brevity, this new train of revelations. The Apostle, refreshed after his half-hour's silence, is ready for the new invitation, "Come up here." The dull, commonplace scenery of his rocky home once more fades from view, and in a revived heavenly ecstasy, he waits his Savior's summons. Seven angels standing in the presence of God have had seven trumpets put into their hands. And here, too, we have preliminarily to note, that the parallelism and uniformity in the structure of the Apocalypse is still farther preserved. The reader will remember, that previous to the breaking of the seals, there was a sublime opening vision given to the Apostle—a "glorious appearing" of Christ as the Mediator of His Church, under the strangely blended symbolism of the Lion and the Lamb, worshiped by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. This formed a magnificent preparation—a grand prologue to the first section of the Book.



There is a similar preparatory vision or theophany before the sounding of the seven trumpets—a similar glorious revelation of the Lord Jesus as the Great King and Head of His Church, to whose Divine will and pleasure these trumpet-angels are all subordinate and subservient; just, as we found, were the avenging angels of the winds in the chapter preceding. As the former preliminary vision was that of the God-man Mediator, and specially of "the Lamb," as pointing to His atoning death and great propitiatory sacrifice, so now it is the same Divine Being, only symbolized as an Angel-priest engaged in the performance of His great intercessory work; standing (not now by the brazen altar of burnt-offering, at whose base we heard the "souls of the martyrs" uttering their cry), but by the golden Altar of incense in the Heavenly Temple. There He is represented as offering in "the golden censer filled with much incense, the prayers of all the saints"—the hundred and forty-four thousand mentioned in the sealing vision—the numerical symbol of completeness, and including, therefore, the entire multitude of the redeemed on earth.

(n. b. The Angel-Intercessor, receiving and offering the prayers of the whole symbolized Church, is clearly beyond the capacity or functions of any mere created angel. Moreover, the priestly symbol is no new figure, but only the reappearing of Christ under the emblem by which He is first presented to us in the opening of the Book. The same observations apply to the imagery regarding "the mighty angel," in the beginning of chapter 10. He is "clothed with a cloud," the invariable emblem of Deity. The "rainbow upon his head," "his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire," crying "with a loud voice, as when a lion roars"—all equally identify Him with the majestic Being in the opening chapter, at whose feet John fell as one dead; whose countenance was as the sun shining in its strength, whose feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters.)

It was a prelude-vision of glorious comfort to His servant and to the whole Church. Whether in the case of those gigantic persecutions which were more specially symbolized by the subsequent trumpet-soundings, or in the trials and tribulations of individual believers, there was a voice within the veil sending its word of consolation to every desponding spirit, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as

wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

The Old Testament incense-offerings are associated with two very different occasions in the services of the Jewish Temple. Solemn and imposing must have been the scene on the great day of Atonement, when the Jewish high priest, divested of his customary gorgeous robes, and dressed in a pure white vestment, stood before the great brazen altar. After the preliminary sin-offerings and burnt-offerings for himself and for the nation had been presented, burning coals were taken by him from the altar and deposited in a golden censer. Carrying with him a handful of sweet incense, he proceeded within the curtain into the Holy of Holies. As he stood in this majestic presence-chamber of Jehovah, he took a portion of it "beaten small," and cast it among the burning embers; the cloud enveloped the mercy-seat, the fumes filling the most Holy Place with grateful odors.

Similarly imposing must have been the scene which is more probably referred to here—the daily offering of the incense by the ministering priest, morning and evening. Standing by the same great brazen altar, and placing, by means of a silver shovel, some live coals in his censer—carrying at the same time a handful of frankincense, he advanced to the Golden altar in front of the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The whole of the congregation, during these solemn moments, preserved a profound silence. They remained outside engaged in devout prayer; as we read in connection with the ministration of Zechariah, "he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary and burn incense in the Lord's presence. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying." The priest on an appointed signal, after laying the censer on the golden altar, cast the incense on the fire, and the fragrant cloud ascended.

By combining these two interesting Temple memories, have we not, in this vision, strikingly brought before us the great Antitypical Priest, standing in the Heavenly Temple, receiving into His golden censer the prayers of His waiting people on earth? Perfuming them with the incense of His adorable merits, the grateful cloud ascends! The petitions of the Church throughout the whole world, individual and aggregate, rise with acceptance before God Almighty.

Let us pause for a moment by this consolatory vision. A vision of comfort it was intended to be for John and for the Church of his day; and it is designed to be so also for us. The Angel-Intercessor revealed in Patmos is "that same Jesus"—the same High Priest who stood in His lowly sacrificial attire beside the altar of burnt-offering on earth. The glowing embers of His own awful sacrifice He has carried within the veil—within the curtained splendor of the true Holy of Holies, and there, He ever lives to make intercession! What an encouragement to prayer! Mark, they are the "prayers of all the saints" which are received into the censer, and incensed with the odor-breathing spices. The prayers not only of those 'strong in faith giving glory to God,' but the prayers also of the lowliest, the humblest, the weakest—the tremulous aspirations of the penitent, the lisping stammerings of infancy; the prayer of the palace amid tiled ceilings and gilded walls; the prayer of the cottage, where the earthen floor is knelt upon, and where the only, although, after all, the noblest altar is that of the lowly heart, and the purest sacrifice that of the broken spirit; the prayer ascending from the time-honoured sanctuary and 'the great congregation;' the prayer rising in the midst of the silent desert, or from the voyager on the lonely sea.

Poor and utterly unworthy as these petitions may be in themselves, they are perfumed by the fragrant merits of the Covenant-Intercessor! They are made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. His pleading voice is never heard in vain. No variety, or amount of prayer, can bewilder Him. He can receive all, and attend to all, and answer all. The glowing coals in His censer are feeble emblems of the burning love which glows in His heart. Penitence can still go, as of old, to His feet, to pour out in silent tears the tale of sadness. Sorrow can still rush, as of old, with throbbing emotion, and cry out, in His own words as the Prince of Sufferers, "If it be possible let this cup pass." The hand of faith can still touch the hem of His garment, and the voice of faith still utter its cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

And as the "all saints" spoken of here, refer, in the first instance, to those who, in the time of John, lived amid trumpet-soundings and vials (times of judgment and persecution), so is this vision specially precious and comforting to all the children of affliction. It is in the season of trial and

sorrow Jesus lends most lovingly His ear to hear His people's voice. It is 'songs in the night' He most delights to listen to. It is prayers, if we may so speak, saturated with tears, He loves best to put into His censer. It was the express Divine injunction regarding the daily incense-offering in the Temple-service of which we have spoken, that on the lighting of the lamps 'at evening time,' Aaron was to burn sweet incense on the Golden altar.

Afflicted believers! it is so still. 'At evening time,' when the bright world is shaded—when the flowers have closed their cups—when the song of bird has ceased, and the sun of your earthly bliss has gone down in the western sky—then it is that the lamp of Prayer is kindled in the soul's temple. Yes! just when other lamps that have lighted your pilgrimage pathway are quenched in darkness, prayer lights its lone lamp in the heart's deserted sanctuary. It was amid the darkness of the night, at the brook Jabbok, that Jacob wrestled of old with the angel and prevailed. It is in the soul's dark and lonely and solitary seasons still, that the Church's moral and spiritual wrestlers are crowned with victory, and as princes "have power with God!"

**THE CASTING OF THE ALTAR-FIRE ON  
THE EARTH  
THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVEN  
TRUMPETS  
THE CLOSING VISION AND SONG**

Revelation 8:5-6; 11:15-19

In the previous chapter, we considered the beautiful vision of the Angel-Intercessor standing by the golden altar of incense—a vision conveying so

many lessons of consolation and encouragement. The prayers of the hundred and forty-four thousand are received into His censer. There is room there for all; from the petitions of the lisping child or trembling penitent, to those of the full-grown saint in the manhood of his spiritual being. The hands of this true Moses on the Heavenly Mount never grow weary, and the omnipotent "Father, I will" is never uttered in vain.

But while the vision has its message of unspeakable comfort to the believer, it has its utterances also of solemn warning to the sinner and to the world; for we read, that immediately subsequent to the reception of the prayers of the saints, the same Angel-Priest "filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake." This imagery calls to mind the same vision of Ezekiel to which we formerly had occasion to refer, wherein a the "man clothed in linen" was commanded to "go in between the wheels under the cherub, and fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." In both cases we have the unmistakable symbols of judgment.

The hot ashes, thrown by the very hand that had just been revealed as 'strong to save,' indicated that to "the fearful and unbelieving" His arm was 'strong to smite.' These glowing coals, if they mingle not with the prayer-offering of the saints, will be cast forth amid despisers and scorers. The fire which does not purify, will, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, destroy and consume. Where shall the prayerless—those who have never cast one offering into the censer—be found on that day when the Lord shall make inquisition? "Their drink-offerings of blood," says the Savior they have rejected, "will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."

You who have never known what it is to bend the knee in prayer, who are now living on with no interest in the intercession of Christ—no part in these angel-pleadings, think how you will be able to confront on that day, an injured Savior, when He addresses you in the words He spoke to Philip of old, "Have I been so long time with you and yet have you not known Me?" Have I been with you so long in the preaching of My Word; in ordinances, in sacraments, in afflictions, in the Patmos-chamber of sickness, at deathbed scenes, at the solemn grave—and yet, has My

golden censer not received one solitary petition, has no breathing of yours ever helped to fuel the incense-cloud?

Go to the unfrequented prayer-chamber; let the untrodden way to the mercy-seat be no longer choked with the rank weeds of forgetfulness. Let it be henceforth a beaten path. As the Divine Aaron this night lights the lamps—kindles the altar-fires in the upper sanctuary, let there be altar-fires on earth too, kindled for the first time. Let angels carry the glad tidings to Heaven, "Behold, he prays!"

Let us pass now to a few observations on the vision of the Seven Trumpets. These Apocalyptic trumpets evidently do not refer to the silver trumpets used on the great festival which bears the name. These latter summoned to a joyous celebration, corresponding (as has been supposed from its date in the Jewish calendar, as "the beginning of months"), to our own New Year's day. It was to the Jew the anniversary festival of the world's 'genesis.' Trumpets emitting jubilant notes, were appropriately employed in memory of the glad occasion when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." It formed a prelude and preparation also, for the most sacred of their convocations, the great day of Atonement.

But the trumpet, to the Hebrew of old, had other and different associations. It was used to sound the alarm of war, or to be blown by the sentinels on their cities' watch-towers, when the enemy was in sight or danger was at hand. The present symbolic soundings have a similar reference; they are premonitory of battle and conflict, the precursors of judgment. As the vision of the Seals was designed to minister to the comfort of the Church in the midst of her trials, by the assurance of her ultimate deliverance and safety; so the vision of the Trumpets immediately following, was intended to be prophetic of God's judgments on the Church's enemies, and the certainty with which that punishment is to overtake them.

As a commentator has well observed, the moral of the seven seals is, "Say to the righteous it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." The moral of the seven trumpets is, "Woe unto the wicked; it shall be evil with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

All commentators, from the earliest to the latest, have with singular unanimity pointed out the evident allusion in these apocalyptic trumpet-blowings to the occasion of the siege of Jericho on the entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan. Numerically, as well as otherwise, the resemblance is remarkable. On seven successive days was the Canaanitish stronghold to be encircled by the armies of Israel. Trumpets were to sound as the desert warriors marched round the walls, preceded by the Ark of the Covenant—the token of the Divine presence. And when we remember the seven vials, which in the Book of Revelation follow the seven trumpets, we are forcibly reminded of the special additional injunction regarding Jericho, that on the seventh day of the seven trumpet-blowings there was to be a sevenfold encircling of the city and that not until the seventh circuit was completed and "a long blast" was given with the rams' horns, accompanied with "a great shout," were the gigantic walls to fall and the conquest obtained of this key to Palestine.

The whole of the Apocalypse may be regarded as a New Testament and gospel history, of the march of the true Israel through the successive stages of the world's long wilderness, to the heavenly Land of Promise. It is a history of gradual aggression against the powers of evil; the triumph of the true Joshua-Jesus over all His adversaries, until He has secured for His people permanent rest within the celestial Canaan. And as the siege and conquest of Jericho presented to the Hebrews alike a vivid memorial and rehearsal of their long struggles and a pledge of final victory; so it forms no unbecoming type and picture of the greater and more glorious struggle, with its ultimate triumph and rest, which belongs to the Church of God.

The whole history of the Church, as embraced in the book of Revelation, is a history of the siege of a moral Jericho—the compassing of the walls of the world's giant unbelief, and their final fall before the might of Him, of whose glorious Person and presence the ancient Ark of Israel was the significant type. Trumpet after trumpet sounds its judgment-blast, each separate peal is directed with symbolic import against some department or element of outer nature—the earth, with its trees and green grass; the sea, into which plunges a mountain burning with fire; the rivers and fountains of waters, poisoned with a falling meteor; the luminaries of

heaven, sun, moon, and stars, smitten with darkness.

As the Apostle in the previous sealing-vision had obtained the pledge of Israel's security, the Church's ultimate safety and triumph; so, through this new series of symbols, he receives the pledge and assurance of God's judgments on an unbelieving world—the overturn and destruction of every citadel and bulwark of evil which has hitherto opposed the triumph of truth. The progress of the siege is necessarily slow. It may be seven encirclings and yet seven again. The faith and the patience of the true Israel is sorely tried, as they cry aloud in the anguish of hope deferred, "Lord, how long?" The scoffers on the battlements seem to hurl their taunts and missiles with impunity—no split is seen in the walls, no premonitory symptoms of a breach. But come it will.

Since John stood in Patmos, many circuits have been completed; many a time have these herald-angels, in the past history of Christendom and of the world, sounded their martial trumpets; nation has risen against nation and kingdom against kingdom; every fresh blast, every fresh mustering of the hosts for the battle—every startling calamity—the famine, the pestilence, the fall of the Siloam-tower, the storm which has strewn the coast with wrecks and filled desolate hearts with agony—all these tell of the nearer approach to the grand consummation, when 'the shout of the people,' the cry of united Israel—the prayers of the true Church of God, now ascending apparently in vain—will obtain the expected response in a voice from Heaven, saying, "It is done!"

In the midst, then, of these very judgments which now passed before the eye of John—amid these trumpet-peals which carried the sound of woe to the guilty world, there were blended notes of comfort and encouragement to every drooping, desponding spirit. The triumph of truth might be chequered, but it would be sure and complete. As in the case of Jericho, "our weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Human might and human power can do nothing in themselves against the bulwarks of evil. "We have no might against this great multitude, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon You." "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." "For He brings down those who dwell on high; the lofty city He lays it low, He lays it low even to the ground, He brings it



even to the dust." "The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly." "The haughtiness of man shall be laid low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day." As of the type, so of the antitype will it be in due time said and sung: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about many days."

We may even carry further the resemblance to this old story of Israel's border city—connecting it with the reference which we have previously pointed out in the palm-bearing vision, to the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast, among the other incidents it commemorated, embraced that of the siege of Jericho. For we are told that during its continuance, a procession, bearing branches of palm, accompanied with the sound of trumpets, entered the courts of the temple for seven successive days; and that, on the seventh day, they compassed seven times the altar with the same trumpet-blowings, singing their Hosanna.

At the true Feast of Tabernacles in the Heavenly Temple, when the redeemed enter on their everlasting bliss and everlasting rest, they will be able to commemorate, with triumph, their toilsome struggles, their long marches around the defiant walls of earth's unbelief, when they had nothing but faith to sustain the assurance of ultimate victory.

And as a befitting termination of this necessarily rapid and cursory reference to the trumpet-visions, let us only farther note the closing picture given under the sounding of the seventh Angel. "The temple of God was opened in Heaven" (Rev. 11:19). The impenetrable veil which screens from mortal sight the mysteries of that true "Holy of Holies," was for the moment drawn aside. And what is the disclosure made to the eye of the Apostle? It is another old memory of Jericho, more sacred even than its trumpets. There was seen in this Temple "the Ark of His covenant." Glorious and comforting vision with which to terminate all these terrific trumpet-soundings—these symbols of wrath and judgment—the voices of lightnings and thunders! The walls of the world's Jericho have fallen—its bulwarks are demolished, and Israel's possession of the better Canaan is secured. But, as if to remind John, and to remind the Church in every age, of the secret of all her past victories, and to give her the pledge of her eternal rest, he gazes on the familiar symbol so often and so long associated with the fortunes and the history of the Hebrew

people—the safeguard of their liberties—the rallying-point in every hour of disaster; but which had now to him a still deeper and holier significance as the type of the Great Propitiatory—the true Covenant Ark. In the glories of His Divine person and the fullness of His mediatorial work, Jesus is set in the Heavenly Temple, the pledge and guarantee of eternal safety and peace to the Church purchased with His blood. "Because I live you shall live also."

In the same closing vision, the twenty-four Elders—the symbolic representatives of the whole Church of the redeemed—are further pictured as falling down on their faces in an act of supreme adoration, and breaking forth in one glorious ascription, saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is, and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have reigned."

Be it ours, meanwhile, patiently to wait such an assured and glorious consummation; "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God." Let us take our festal palm-branch and follow the pealing trumpets—trumpets of joy to the Church, trumpets of woe and judgment to the world. The seventh Angel not having yet sounded, let us raise our Hosanna—the "Come, Lord Jesus!"—the reiterated key-note of the Book, with its divine harmonies. "Yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." "The coming of the Lord draws near."

The downfall of the world's anti-christian powers—the destruction of its moral Jerichos—will be coincident with this great event, for which all creation longs. May He who holds the seven-sealed roll in His hand hasten the day, when the last trumpet voice shall be heard, and the last shout of prayer ascend, "Your kingdom come!"—bringing the glad response, ushering in the longed-for moment and announcement, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign to the ages of the ages!"

# **THE LAMB STANDING ON MOUNT ZION WITH THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR THOUSAND**

Revelation 14:1-5

In entering on these 'memories' of John's great Words and Visions, we stated that it would be alike unprofitable and uninteresting to attempt investigating many portions of the Apocalypse which have formed the battle-ground of rival interpreters and conflicting interpretations; and that we should confine ourselves to those which are alike more perspicuous in meaning and replete with practical instruction. It was for this reason we passed so cursorily in our last, the details of the first six trumpet-soundings. We simply alluded, indeed, to the first four of these, which had reference to God's judgments on the outer world, on the trees, the sea, the rivers, the lights of heaven. The fifth and sixth trumpets were not even mentioned. They referred to the outpouring of the Divine judgments, not on material nature, but on living men; and consisted of the plague of the locusts and the plague of the horsemen. Without attempting to dwell on circumstantials, but simply to preserve continuity, we may link together in a few sentences the intervening portions, occupying, as they do, four chapters between the sixth trumpet-sounding and the beautiful passage which opens upon us like a welcome gleam of heavenly sunshine in chapter 14.

At the close of the sixth trumpet there is inserted a twofold vision—that of the mighty Angel holding in his hand "the little Book," and of "the two Witnesses" prophesying in sackcloth. Then comes the sounding of the seventh Angel's trumpet, to which we have already particularly alluded. It evoked a song of triumph from the lips of Christ's ingathered Church. Heaven was opened, and a disclosure made of "the Ark of his Testament," the pledge and symbol of the inviolable security of the glorified. The

special theme of their song, however—the first outburst of praise on this birthday of the Church-triumphant, being an ascription of thanksgiving for the completion of God's righteous judgments on the world—the symbols of bliss and joy were appropriately accompanied with "lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail."

With this imagery concludes another great act in the apocalyptic drama. Yet, before the curtain falls, and before the terminating scenes, in the outpouring of the seven vials, take place, there is inserted a lengthened interlude—a great prophetic vision, complete in itself—regarding the Church and her three enemies. The Church is represented as a Woman arrayed in dazzling effulgence. The light of the midday sun is her vesture; the moon (probably the crescent moon) is under her feet, forming her sandals; and around her head is a tiara or coronal of twelve stars, recalling the description in the Song of Songs, "Who is she that looks forth as the morning? Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as a starry host with banners." She is further depicted as fleeing into the wilderness, pursued and persecuted by a portentous monster—a great red Dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and a cluster of seven crowns on his head. This we are specially told was Satan himself, the Prince of Darkness, the arch-enemy of the Church and of mankind, "That old serpent which deceives the whole world." Evicted by Michael and his angels from the highest heavens, the dragon and his angels are represented as turning their foiled and baffled rage against the Woman, and "making war with the remnant of her seed." But the exiled and persecuted Church is shielded from the rage of the destroyer. Eagle-wings are given her to fly farther still into the recesses of the wilderness, where, like the great Prophet of Cherith, "She is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent."

Again, as the Apostle-spectator stands on the sands of Patmos, the Aegean waves rolling at his feet, he sees emerging from the bosom of the deep, another hideous monster, somewhat akin and yet differing from the former. This new fiendish beast has "seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." These heads and horns are the well-known symbols of world-power; and

though evidently referring, in the first instance, to the colossal dominion of the Roman Empire, which, in the time of John, had from its Capitol on the Tiber carried winged thunderbolts wide over the earth; yet they are by no means restricted to this; but may rather be regarded as representative of all the vast earthly empires which are hostile to Christ and His Church. To this sea-monster Satan surrenders his throne and kingdom, making him his substitute and viceroy; and terribly does the delegate fulfill the commission by his blaspheming tongue and his war with the saints.

Once more, John beholds another—a third Beast—rising now, not from the sea, but from the earth—one of hybrid form, half lamb, half dragon; yet an emissary of the abyss and darkness, and confederate with the sea-born Beast—wearing a pretended gentleness and lamblike meekness, combined with the dragon's subtlety, cruelty, and mischief—a giant deceiver, doing great wonders, performing false miracles, and arrogantly exacting homage from "those who dwell on the earth." This has been generally supposed (however interpretations may conflict in details) to represent that gigantic religious machinery, in all its varied phases and protean shapes, first Pagan then Christian, but which has attained its culmination in the persecuting power and tyrannical usurpation of the Church of Rome—that hybrid of simulated meekness and humility, the gentleness of the lamb in combination with haughty pretension and cruel intolerance—the washer of pilgrims' feet, yet the kindler of Inquisition-fires—the disposer of crowns and kingdoms—the arch-ruler of men—the Vicar of God!

While the previous sea-monster was the representative of brute force, secular despotism, the tyranny of sword and conquest, of dungeon, and rack, and faggot—this latter is that of ecclesiastical despotism, going forth among the nations with all deceivableness of unrighteousness—its weapons moral and spiritual—its enthralled and crouching victims—the depraved intellect, the enslaved conscience, the distorted reason, the fettered will. We are reminded of the description which the great Dreamer, in his "Pilgrim's Progress" puts into the lips of Christian when in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, "While I was musing, I espied before me a cave, where two giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old times, by whose power and tyranny the men whose bones, blood, ashes, and

mangled bodies lay there, were cruelly put to death."

But in this mystic Book, vision is interlaced and supplemented with vision. And as we have just described that of the Woman and her three enemies as an appendage to the seven trumpet-soundings preceding the opening of the vials, so the figure which we are now more specially to consider, forms an epilogue or addition to this interjected imagery; while it constitutes also a befitting introduction to the scenes of final triumph and final vengeance which occupy the last chapters of the Apocalypse.

The preceding revelations, so full of woe and sadness, were calculated to depress and overwhelm the spirit of the Apostle. The present is, as if a telescope were put into his hands, enabling him to pierce the environing gloom, and obtain the assurance of ultimate safety; or, to use the simile suggested by the wilderness where the persecuted Church had fled, as if an oasis had suddenly been opened up to him in the midst of the desert, with its wells and palm trees, telling of the welcome refreshment and shade.

Perhaps the darkest part of the whole Apocalypse had now been reached. The very heaven above, which, at the opening of the Book, was radiant with visions of surpassing glory and resonant with song, brings before the mind recent memories of conflict and the clang of battle. "There was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels." The final expulsion of the Great Enemy from the heavenly world seems to have been, in some mysterious way, connected with the completion of Christ's Redemption-work on earth. "Now," says the true Michael—the 'Man-child' of the prophetic vision, caught up unto God, and to His Throne, "Now," says He, in anticipation of His ascension, "shall the Prince of this world be cast out." "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven." The same event had thus been celebrated in prophetic strains: "You have ascended on high; You have led captivity captive."

And when that war was hushed, and the battle turned from the celestial gates, it was only, as we have noted, for the cast out legions to make earth the scene of their renewed unholy strife. If these judgments on the Church had been the disciplinary chastisements of her Great Head, John

would have bowed with unfaltering trust. But it was a fearful brotherhood and confederacy he beheld of the powers of human and satanic evil—a compound of brute force and demon force; man, the tool and instrument of hellish impulses, raging against the Lord and His Anointed. Satan was marshaling the hosts of evil men; and from these duped, malignant human agents the appeal was heard, "Who is like the Beast? who is able to make war with him?" Well might the trembling Apostle exclaim, in words uttered by David in a kindred hour of terror and despondency, "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hands of man."

It was, then, amid such gloomy picturings that the Patmos-exile turned his eye from sea and earth and wilderness, to the already well-known emblems of the Lamb, the four Living ones, the Elders, the Throne, the Hundred and forty-four thousand. It deserves, moreover, specially to be noted, in connection with the vision, that it is not to be taken as a picture of the Heaven that is hereafter to be—the Heaven of the completed Church-triumphant (that is reserved for future revelations, which we shall come by and bye to consider); it is rather the Heaven of the present—the calm world that now exists, when the earthly battle is still raging, and the lower horizon is still black with tempests.

The first object in this new scene which arrests John's attention is his beloved Savior—the great King and Head of the persecuted Church. "I looked, and lo! the LAMB!" (so it with the definite article)—"I looked, and lo! the Lamb!"—as if that symbol was now to him a well-known and welcome one. He whom he had previously seen, in the opening vision, in the midst of the Throne, adored by the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, is now beheld "standing on Mount Zion," set as King on His own holy hill. He had with Him, and around Him, an assemblage of an hundred and forty-four thousand; having "His name" as well as "His Father's name written in their foreheads."

It was expressly asserted in the preceding chapter, as one blasphemous usurpation of the third Beast, or monster from the earth, that "he causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their forehead." This was Satan, the great counter-worker, mimicking and counterfeiting the work of God, as

described in the previous sealing-vision, thereby deceiving, if it were possible, the very elect.

John had just seen crouching nations stooping to the usurper, and, allowing the degrading mark of vassalage to be put on their foreheads. He looks up to the Church in glory. He sees the redeemed, with the indubitable brand of a diviner vassalage, bearing in their bodies, (on their foreheads,) "the marks of the Lord Jesus."

Then he listens to a strangely-mingled psalmody, whose combined cadences come floating to his ear, as if it had been one voice from Heaven. It was made up of 'many waters,' 'great thunder,' and 'the voice of harpers harping with their harps.' It was the loudness of the thunder-peal and of the ocean-waves, combined with the dulcet tones of the sweetest musical instrument. The song he heard was as it were "a new song." We are not told in what its newness or novelty consisted, nor what formed the theme of its magnificent melodies; probably it would be an ascription of joyful thanksgiving for their safe deliverance, on the part of those who had now exchanged the pilgrim warfare for the pilgrim rest: those who, with eagle-wings, had once taken themselves to the desert shelter, but who had now soared to the heights of Heaven, and made their perch on the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God. It may have been a song in which was mingled a celebration of safety and joy, with the rehearsal of former struggles—the trials they had patiently borne, the temptations they had successfully resisted; or it may have been a song of heart-cheer and encouragement directed to the toiling warriors and sufferers below, anticipatory of a like sure triumph if faithful unto death; or it may have been a song only "as it were" new, but which was really the ever old one—the same which Abel sang at the gates of Eden, and which John had either sung that day on the rocks of Patmos, or subsequently in his home at Ephesus, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood!"

All the information he gives us regarding the song is, that no man could learn it but the hundred and forty-four thousand. It could not be understood or sung by the saintliest of human lips, inasmuch as, very possibly, until the spirits of the just are 'made perfect'—until they are ushered into their state of glorification—they cannot fully comprehend



the language of Heaven; those "unspeakable words which it is not lawful (or possible) for a man to utter." Even this favored Apostle, in entering the Temple above, would require his lips to be touched with the seraphic live-coal, before they could be attuned to the meaning and melody of its praises.

Such being the scene of worship in Heaven unfolded to the eye of the Apostle, let us proceed to note the delineation here given of its WORSHIPERS.

(1.) They are described as Redeemed (verse 3) "Who were redeemed from the earth." And, again (verse 4), "These were redeemed from among men." Not that modern amplification of Scripture—that travesty of a revealed truth—which would read it, "the redeemed of the earth," as indicating the universal ransom and restoration of the race. But "the redeemed from among the earth"—the ransomed elect—those represented in a former vision as specially sealed, or in the preceding chapter as having overcome the red dragon, (yes, all their foes,) by the blood, or "owing to the blood, of the Lamb." In other words, they are God's own seven thousand (distinguished from the Baal-throng), once hidden in the wilderness-caves of earth, now forever in the clefts of the True Rock of Ages—safe from the windy storm and tempest.

This warrant for the possession and occupancy of their thrones and their crowns, occupies, as well it may, the forefront and vanguard of their characteristics. It is the repetition, in another form, of the words of a recent figure we specially considered, "Who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." As on the earthly mount of Transfiguration, so on this heavenly Zion, the Apostle recognizes the theme of ecstatic conversation to be, "the death accomplished at Jerusalem." Their New song is the song of Redeeming love. Redemption has alone earned them a right to the description with which the vision closes, when they are spoken of as being "without fault before the throne of God."

(2.) The worshipers are represented as being undefiled. Not only in this world were they justified by the blood, but they were regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. Not only had they the righteousness

imputed, but the righteousness implanted: and one special element in that subjective righteousness here mentioned, is that of chastity of life—virgin purity. How searchingly does the language of the vision come home to every heart, with its deep corruptions and impurities of thought and deed—making inquisition of those fleshly lusts that war against the soul, which blunt and wound and defile the conscience, and all the sensibilities of our higher natures, setting these on fire of hell—the fierce antagonists to that holiness, without which, it is declared, no one can see, and, doubtless, no one can enjoy, God!

How it brings down the sentence of withering condemnation on those, whose unchaste imaginations and unchaste lives have converted their souls (yes, these souls that were designed to be God's temple) into chambers full of all pollution and sensual imagery—a den of foul beasts, a cage of unclean birds—those whose every look is impurity, and who are as reckless of the virtue and innocence of others as they are of their own! How could any such, wallowing ever deeper in the mire, dream of joining that unspotted band in the Heavenly Zion? How could these polluted lips think of warbling the virgin-song of the undefiled? Those who are thus earthly, selfish, sensual, devilish, would be as incapable of appreciating that bliss, as the uncultured and untutored savage, to whom noise is alone music, and gaudy tinsel is alone beauty, could appreciate the exquisite harmonies of Mozart or Beethoven. Ascend to Heaven? join the faultless choir before the throne? No, they are self-conscious that they carry a chronic hell within them. The words which our own great epic poet puts into the lips of Satan, are indorsed by such, as containing a too truthful description and photograph of their own feelings and history: "Each way I fly is hell—myself an hell!"

"Myself an hell!"—its fires already kindled—the hell of fiendish, lustful, polluted thoughts, with their corresponding hell of remorse and upbraiding—the eagles of vengeance already preying on the carcass—the fabled lash of the Furies already descending—retribution already begun.

On the other hand, blessed truly are "the undefiled, who walk in the law of the Lord"—who have escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust; in the volume of whose heart the white leaves have their virgin purity unblotted and unstained. You, too, who are mourning the

loss of those whose sun has gone down in early morning—who, full of high promise, have perished "at the threshold-march of life"—rejoice in the thought that they have "clean escaped"—that these lambs of the flock have passed into the heavenly fold, with the fleece of early innocence unpolluted. Before impurity stirred the well of pure thought, they have been taken away, it may be, from much evil to come!

More blessed and honored, in one sense, are those—and many such there are—who, by dint of resolute self-discipline and high principle, have bravely fought the long fight, and come out of it unwounded, unscathed; who with unabashed face can make the appeal to the great Heart-Searcher, of a good conscience and a pure life: but safer at least are they, who, away from the sudden gusts and hurricanes of temptation, have soared early upwards, and, with unsoiled plumage—unruffled wings, have sank into the clefts of the Rock forever. If they had been allowed to remain longer on earth, who can tell but some crude storm might have blighted fair promise and belied fond hopes? But before summer's sun could scorch, no, before spring's frost could nip one bud or blast one leaf or blossom, the Great Giver, in mercy, took the flower to His own safer paradise—gave the summons,

"Waft her, angels, to the skies,  
Far above yon azure plain;  
Glorious there like you to rise,  
There like you forever reign."

Oh! what would thousand and thousands give, who are now drifting, as miserable, shattered wrecks on life's sea—health, innocence, purity, gone—what would such give, to be as they are, inheriting in all its grandeur that best beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!"

"She is not dead, the child of our affection,  
But gone into that school,  
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,  
Where Christ Himself does rule.

"In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,  
By guardian angels led,

Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,  
She lives whom we call dead."

(3.) They are represented as following Christ (verse 4) "They follow" (or literally 'who are following') "the Lamb wherever He goes." They are seen indeed, in common with their great Lord, "standing" on the Mount Zion. But it is standing ready for His service—prepared to embark in ministries of holy love for Him—and, along with "the armies which are in Heaven," spoken of in a subsequent vision, ready to follow Him "upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Is this our conception of a future state of bliss? Not a dreamland of inaction, consisting only of a series of negations, the absence of the sad catalogue of evils which beset us here; but do we realize it as a sphere of holy, spiritual activity, where we shall be enlisted in embassies of love and loyalty to the dear Lord who redeemed us? If so, Heaven—the manhood of our spiritual being—should have, at all events, its childhood on earth—what we are to be, should have its dim and shadowy reflection in what we now are. If we are to follow the Lamb in glory, that path of trustful and loving obedience should have its commencement here on earth.

Is it so? Are we thus following Him—following Him as a flock trustfully follows its shepherd? following Him, not fitfully or capriciously—not at set times and seasons only, when the summer sky is overhead, and the birds are on the boughs, and the valleys of life are shouting for joy—but willing to follow Him when the sky is lowering—when the birds have folded their wings, and these valleys of existence are shrouded in mist and darkness—no patches of verdant grass to be seen, the music of no still waters to be heard, yet ready to say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him?"

Do we follow Him in the sense of seeking to be like Him—to have our wills equivalent with His?—setting His great Life of purity and obedience and self-sacrifice before us, and desiring that ours be a feeble transcript of its spotless excellencies? Do we follow Him, moreover, with the realizing thought before us of a Living Person?—not as the votaries of a creed, linked to some dry and formulated dogmas from which the great living 'life' has departed—but following, as these undefiled and faultless on the Mount Zion are represented as doing—following Himself—the

Lamb of God—anticipating the time when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," and when we shall be able to say the words of Peter, "We are eyewitnesses of His majesty: we are with him in the Holy Mount!"

(4.) One other characteristic of the hundred and forty-four thousand is here mentioned—they are honest and sincere. (verse 5) "And in their mouth was found no lie." It is the echo in the New, of an Old Testament beatitude, "Blessed is the man. . . .in whose spirit there is no deceit." The great Lord of all could pronounce no higher encomium on an earnest seeker becoming a beloved follower, than this, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." We need not consider strange the special closing reference which is here made to this attribute of heavenly bliss, when we think how much of the reverse is, alas! manifested on earth—how much duplicity, double-dealing, lack of candor, truthlessness, how much finessing and deceit, counterfeiting the pure and the real with what is base admixture and alloy—pretentious blossom with an utter failure of fruit; a world of appearances, mocking and deceiving; like the apples of Sodom, beautiful to look upon, but perishable caskets enshrining dust and ashes.

They who have grown thus weary with the world's falseness and hollow hypocrisy will cease to wonder how, amid higher elements of bliss, John finishes the record of one of the grandest of his visions with the assertion regarding the redeemed—"And in their mouth was found no lie, for they are without fault before the throne of God."

This entire figure, as we have seen, was primarily intended as a vision of comfort for the Church in her dark days, when the wilderness was her home and the dragon of persecution was tracking her flight. She is encouraged to look forward to that bridal-hour, when, as the affianced Spouse of the Heavenly Bridegroom, she shall come up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of her Beloved, to sing her nuptial song on the Hill of Zion.

But it is a vision of comfort and consolation also, to every individual pilgrim and child of sorrow. It is a glimpse above and beyond the clouds, into that calm world where the voice of wailing is no more heard

—"wasting nor destruction within its borders." It tells, that whatever be the needed wilderness-discipline here, the redeemed of the Lord shall at last come to Zion with everlasting songs on their heads. To all of us, it is an answer to the question, 'What are the characteristics, what the qualifications, of that heavenly citizenship?' "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart—who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully." "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart." "He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

## **THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE HOLY DEAD**

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from all their toils and trials; for their works (good deeds) follow them!" Rev. 14:13

The beautiful vision we last considered, was intended, as we found, to be one of comfort and consolation for the Church in a season of environing darkness and trouble. It is followed immediately by a succession of three angel-voices. The first, is that of the bearer of the everlasting Gospel, as he speeds his way in mid-heaven to the nations of the earth, with the wide commission to preach the glad tidings to every nation and kindred and tongue and people. The second, intimates the fall of the mystic Babylon. The third, in tones louder still, issues a proclamation of warning to all abettors of the great anti-christian apostasy; to come out from among them, that they do not be partakers of her plagues.

It is at the close of these three, that the words which head this chapter come in, like another of those sweet, solitary strains of heavenly music we have noted more than once in the preceding pages. One resplendent and dreadful picture after another had just been passing before the eye of the Apostle; the scroll had its alternating dark letters, and its illuminated coloring. But there was something now which could not be delineated by symbol. It is a Divine revelation, addressed, not to the eye, but to the ear. Moreover, it was one of such sacred importance as to demand immediate transcription. Other words—other picturings and figures—might be safely left to memory; but this, dictated by a heavenly voice on the spot, must on the spot too be committed to writing. The roll of apocalyptic thunders is suddenly hushed, and thus is the silence broken—And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from all their toils and trials; for their works (good deeds) follow them!"

It is vain to inquire from whom this voice proceeded. This is left indeterminate. It may possibly have come from one of the twenty-four elders of chapter 7; possibly it may have emanated from the Great Covenant Angel Himself—the Majestic Being standing on the sea and the earth, with 'the little book' in His hand. More probably it may have been uttered by one specially delegated from the ranks of the ministering spirits, who are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation—some heavenly Barnabas—some "Son of Consolation" dispatched on an errand of comfort to the lonely isle and its lonely prisoner. Be he, however, who he may, his voice has become loud as the sound of many waters: for the brief utterance, wafted like a chime from the bells of the Upper Sanctuary, has awakened chords of responsive harmony in ten thousand, thousand aching and sorrowing hearts in every age of the world.

Nor need we pause too curiously to ascertain the precise meaning and import of the term here used, "from now on." It may simply indicate, that, from the moment of death, when the spirit is emancipated from its earthly fetters, that blessedness begins; or, as in the verse immediately preceding, John speaks of "the patience or endurance of the saints" in the midst of their persecutions, it might be designed, in the first instance, as a

special word of hope and comfort to those who had the prospect of suffering and martyrdom. But it was by no means restricted to such. It is a message intended and adapted for all time and for all places—wherever there are weeping eyes and bleeding hearts—wherever there is a Christian's deathbed—a Christian's funeral—a Christian's grave.

Let us consider these two points: I. The Beatitude, "Blessed are those who die in the Lord." And II. Its divine ratification, "Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from all their toils and trials; for their works (good deeds) follow them!"

I. "Blessed are those who die." Startling words are these, viewed by themselves and apart from the Gospel. "Blessed are those who die!" How the death-chamber belies the utterance—refuses to countersign the strange benediction! Where is the blessedness in the spectacle of that inanimate clay—that mute and voiceless marble—that moldering and shattered casket from which the glory has departed? Does it not seem a cruel mockery—a parody on the sacred words? That eye which once beamed affection now rayless—that hand which once gave and returned the grasp of tender love, or that smoothed the wrinkles from the brow of care or sorrow, now powerless—that intellect with its varied resources—the memory with its garnered treasures—the heart with its divine sympathies—all now dull, pulseless, unresponsive as the unfeeling stone!

Do you call the flower 'blessed,' that yesterday was swinging its tiny censers with their fragrant perfumes, but which today, nipped by the frost, or battered by the hail, hangs shriveled on the branch or has fallen on the ground? Do you call the giant oak, the ancestral monarch of the forest 'blessed,' when it lies prone on the sward with upturned roots, wrenched from its old moorings by the sweep of the pitiless tempest? Do you call the sculptor's breathing marble 'blessed,' which had just received the last delicate strokes of his chisel, but which, by unfortunate accident, strews in a hundred fragments the floor of his studio? Then, but not until then, can you pronounce 'blessed' that apparent destruction of all that is fair and lovely in life—that cruel severance of dearest ties and fondest associations—the eclipse and extinction of some orb of love, some familiar star, which has risen and set, gleamed and gladdened in the little firmament of our being ever since memory did its work!



And then follow that procession to the narrow house appointed for all living—while the bright jewel is gone, the very casket, broken and mutilated, must be buried out of our sight. Not the altar-fire only is quenched, but the shrine itself must be demolished. The green sod or the silent stone is all that is left to memorialize the 'loved and lost.' No! no! call it not 'blessed.' There can be no gladness—no jubilee here. Stop the music of pipe and tabret—call in the hired minstrels—muffle the drum—put on sackcloth—sit in dust and in ashes—say, 'Ah, my brother!' or, 'Ah, sister!' Do not mock the dead—Do not mock the living, with the mis-timed utterance of 'blessed.' It is not the scene or occasion for beatitude and benediction.

Death!—it is a dark, cruel, ruthless, repulsive thing—a cold, frigid destructive avalanche coming sweeping down amid the warm heart's affections—making earth's smiling valleys scenes of desolation and ruin. It is an anomaly in God's universe. It is a dreadful and awful thing to die!

The ship has sailed to the silent land, we know not where. No sign, no look of affection can be returned as we wave the tearful adieu. There is no retracing of the voyage; no homeward-bound vessel from these distant mysterious shores. We need not hoist the signal from the watch-tower; love need not light its beacon to greet the lone wanderer. Weep sorely for him who goes away—for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

Such is nature's cold philosophy—nature's sad soliloquy, uncheered and unilluminated by the Gospel. Such, too, is the sad musing of many to whom that Gospel has never come in its quickening and enlightening power—to whom the present world is their "be all and end all." It is the Christian alone, who, under the teachings of a diviner philosophy, can utter through tears, as he stands by the grave of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, "Blessed are those who die in the Lord."

We cannot pause now to investigate the pregnant meaning of that brief description of the Christian character here given, "who die in the Lord." Those who have been privileged to stand by a believer's death-bed will know what the phrase means better than by words. It implies vital union

with Christ; the acceptance of Him as a Savior—alike from the guilt and the power of sin; and the reality of which union has been evidenced by the testimony of a holy life. It is effected not by the application of the outward baptismal sign; not by sacramental act, or efficacy, or ritual; not by the holding up of the crucifix before the face of the dying, nor muttering prayers and incantations over the casket of the dead—neither does it consist in the badge and shibboleth of any ecclesiastical party, nor in the mere religious utterances of the last hour, to which the whole previous life is in painful contrast. It is not the transient ecstasy of frame and feeling; not the bidding farewell to the world, and an avowed resignation to leave it when nothing else remains; a willingness to loosen the cable when the vessel is already drifting from its anchorage into infinite darkness. Far less is it the sinful, morbid desire—dictated often by wounded pride, or disappointed ambition, or faithless friendship—to be done with the world, and become oblivious to its ingratitude and wrongs—saying, with the fugitive Prophet of Carmel, "It is enough—take away my life;" or, with the peevish Prophet of Nineveh, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But it is the calm, peaceful resting at the close of life, on the work and merits of a Savior, long ago found and long ago precious. It is Paul's noble and triumphant affirmation, "To die is gain," grounded on the antecedent testimony, "For me to live is Christ." The sublime consciousness that he was "in the Lord," gave him a noble indifference alike to living or dying; it made him content either for a while with the distant vision of heaven, or to be ushered at once into the full fruition. It mattered not whether Christ were magnified in his body by life or by death. He could say, with heroic calmness and complacency, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." Oh! to him, and to all such, the last Enemy is robbed of his terrors! What to the unsaved sinner is the gloomy portico leading to the grave, is to the Christian the vestibule of Heaven. The life of faith in the Son of God encircles, like a crown of glory, his dying head.

Neither is it of any moment where or how that death may come. It may be the long tedious experience of months and years, when pin by pin of the earthly tabernacle is taken down—the wasting consumption, the gradual

decay. Or it may be with the speed and suddenness of the lightning-flash. It may be in the stillness and quiet of the home-chamber, surrounded with loving eyes and familiar voices; or it may be in some far-off Patmos isle—or in the hut of the settler—or in the cabin on the lone sea—or in the dungeon's darkness—or at the martyr's fire—or amid the shout and shell of battle. It signifies not—the Gospel requiem is the same wherever sounded. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." "Blessed are those who die in the Lord."

II. But this angel-utterance is ratified by a Divine voice, "Yes, says the Spirit." The Divine Spirit of God sets His seal to the beatitude; and He assigns a twofold reason for the blessedness which had just been pronounced on the holy dead.

(1.) "They rest from their labors." Many are the scriptural symbols employed to illustrate the future glory and happiness of Heaven. It is spoken of as a mansion, a city, a kingdom, a temple. But no figure comes home with such power and beauty and appropriateness as that of rest. It is the weary husbandman having gathered in his implements, and stored the fruit of his spring and summer toils. It is the weary laborer at the end of life's long week enjoying the calm of the eternal Sabbath. It is the warrior having ungirded his stained and dust-covered armor on the banks of the river of life, and exchanged the weapons of conflict for the festal palm and the victor's crown. It is the weary bird now no longer beating its wings against the bars of its cage, as it caught up the notes caroled in the far country, and warbled its pensive earth-song, "Oh, that I had wings, . . . for then would I flee away and be at rest!"

Sin and suffering together have converted this fair earth into a place of wailing and unrest, and made the spirit long for a world where these are felt and feared no more. Not that the Christian desires heaven as a place of exemption from the holy activities of his being. No! if we hear of "the Divine gift of rest," there is "a divine gift of work" too. Work, consecrated work, even on earth is happiness; and the higher the consecration, the higher will be the satisfaction in the unresting occupations of the glorified. The believer longs only for cessation from that which impedes his activities here; and the absence of which would enable him to continue a rejoicing laborer in that world where the cry is never heard,

"Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

There he will be enabled to serve God without interruption. No baffled labor; no crushing disappointments; no wearing anxieties; no treachery of tried and trusted friends; no silent, secret griefs, which, unknown to the world, take from life its sweetest ingredients; no evil heart of unbelief, no failure of cherished plans and brilliant hopes; no sickness, laying its paralyzing hand on successful toil, and crippling the warrior on the very eve of conquest. But rather, the bud stymied on earth will expand into the full blossom; those cut off in the midst of their days will be permitted to complete the unfinished and unfulfilled purpose, and, unclogged by all material hindrances, to go forth in endless missions and ministries of loving service. It will be "the rest without a rest"—the rest from sin, and the rest in God. "Blessed" are such dead! "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing."

(2.) A second element in the blessedness of the holy dead here given is, that "their works (good deeds) follow them." "Not," says an old divine, "that their works go before them in order to win God's favor." But they follow after them, alike as the tests and evidences of their vital living union to Christ, and as the grounds on which will be apportioned the nature and degree of their eternal recompense.

For we must never, for the support and vindication of one great Bible declaration, nullify and contradict another. While the title to heaven is altogether apart from ourselves, secured as a free gift of grace in Christ—the purchase of His dying love; yet every good deed done by His people as the fruit of their faith, will have its corresponding reward. As in the material skies, 'one star differs from another star in glory,' so will believers have their different spheres assigned them in the firmament of eternity—some describing a nearer, some a more distant orbit relative to the great central throne. There will be the inheritor of five, and the inheritor of ten cities; the possessor of the five talents, and the possessor of ten; those who will shine as the brightness of the skies; those who will have a crown of surpassing glory round their brows, even "as the stars forever and ever."

It is not, however, the doer of great works and gigantic or brilliant deeds who alone is to have this glorious recompense—he who out of his abundance can give the golden tribute to the cause of Christ, or bear in a jeweled cup the offering of love to His people; but the poor, the humble, the lonely, the bedridden, who have glorified their Savior by meek submission and patient bearing of the cross; who had nothing to give but the two mites, or the cup of cold water, and that, too, from an earthen pitcher; yet valued and recompensed by Him who accepts the deed according to what a man has, not according to what he has not.

Nor must we exclude from the words their significant meaning with reference to this world, as well as to the next. For even here, the works of the holy dead follow them. When a Christian dies—when the lips are closed and the voice silent, and the sods of the churchyard cover him—that is not the last of the man in the living sphere of living being, which in one sense he has left. He lives on! There is a presence and influence more real, more deathless, than the mere bodily frame. Like the glow of the descending sun lighting up the Alpine peaks long after the orb itself has sunk behind the visible horizon, so the works of the holy and the good linger behind them. They have an earthly as well as a heavenly immortality.

The friend you loved is sleeping the long sleep where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." Men say of him, as they miss him on the street, or in the busy mart, or in the house of God, "He is gone!" No, not so! Do not call the sacred spot where his ashes lie—do not call regarding him, "the land of forgetfulness." His words and works are still among us. There is a speech of the dead, the language of undying memories. The outward features have perished, but the spirit is indestructible. Mind cannot die. Holy deeds know no death-bed, no grave, no corruption. "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

How many there are whose only "blessed life" is the life of sense—the life of selfish and sensuous pleasure—the life of glitter and display and superficial gaiety! In such, there is nothing glorious to "follow;" and even those things which are objects of honorable aspiration—lands, houses, riches, titles, diadems—the accidents of existence, not its realities—

cannot be ferried across the dark river! Then it will be said to every votary of the present and the perishable world, who has no inheritance in anything that is higher and better, "Your gold perishes with you!" "Remove the diadem, take off the crown!" "The fashion of this world passes away!"

Let us ask, What anticipations have we regarding our own departure? Can we contemplate that hour with calm emotion? Can we echo and anticipate regarding it and ourselves the words before us? or are we content to leave it an unsolved problem until the unwelcome hour arrives? Certain on everything else, are we all uncertainty on this?—heedless, it may be, whether the works following will be the trail of light, or the shadows of darkness, and the legacy we bequeath, that of blessings or of curses.

There is nothing, surely, more calculated to rouse from the perilous dream of indifference, to the hopes and hazards of eternity, than to bear about with us the realizing sense of this aspect of a limitless future—as the perpetuation and expansion of present character, the prolongation of present tastes and habits.

The works of earth, "following" like the wake of a vessel, will have their completion in the world beyond. Earth is the germ, the seed-plot of immortality; the child of time, is the father of the full-grown manhood of eternity. Every passing hour of the present life is gathering and shaping that endless futurity; these transient moments we now value so little, are molding everlasting destinies; the words we utter today will go echoing on forever; the deeds done today will be the architects of our bliss or woe, and will outlast millenniums!

And if such be the case, then it is plain that character is not a thing that can be formed and extemporized on a death-bed. Character is the epitome of the life—the steady glow of its morning, noon, and evening hours; not the mere watery gleam and burst of sunshine at the close. We dare not, indeed, limit the grace of God; we dare not close the doors against the peradventure of a death-bed repentance; and yet we never can sufficiently lift up the voice of warning against the awful deception of which thousands are guilty, who flatter themselves that a few hours of

penitence, just when the sand-glass is at its final grain, will reverse a guilty past—that a few tears then, will wipe out what has been engraved on the life as with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever! Oh, "live in the Lord" if you would "die in the Lord!"

And if these words we have been pondering have to any a more sacred meaning, if they sound fresh in your memories, as you may have lately stood by the solemn death-bed or solemn grave, the lines chiseled with tears on your heart of hearts—take them from the unknown heavenly Voice of the Vision as a special parable of consolation. I repeat, it is beautiful to find in the very midst of a Book of strange and portentous figures—amid its voices of thunder, and flashes of fire, and smoke of darkness—this gleam of heavenly sunshine—an olive branch of comfort, borne to the lonely exile and lonely heart in the midst of the storm.

What can more touchingly evidence God's tender interest, alike in His dying people and in those who are mourning their departure, than when He thus hushes the tempest's breath, that this balm-word may fall first on the ears of the Island Prisoner, and through him on the ears of a whole weeping world? Yes, believer! "Blessed are your dead." "They have entered into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." Kindle around their graves lamps of fire; not the lamps which superstition places around the shrines of the departed, but the holy lights which they themselves kindled—the lights of faith, and love, and patience, and submission, and meek bearing of injuries, and close walk with God. They have joined the ranks on the distant shore, and beckon you to follow. Do not be disobedient to the Heavenly Vision. Grasp up these torches as sacred legacies they have left you, to bear you on in your darkened way. And if their bright example has taught you how to live, let it tune your lips also to the prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like His!"

## **THE SONG OF THE HARPERS BY THE GLASSY SEA**

I saw before me what seemed to be a crystal sea mixed with fire. And on it stood all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name. They were all holding harps that God had given them. And they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your actions,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
O King of the nations. Rev. 15:2-3

The seven angels who were holding the bowls of the seven plagues came from the Temple, clothed in spotless white linen with gold belts across their chests. Rev. 15:6

Then I heard a mighty voice shouting from the Temple to the seven angels, "Now go your ways and empty out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." Rev. 16:1

We have, in previous chapters, taken a rapid glance at two out of the three great parallel series of visions in the Book of Revelation—those of the Seals and those of the Trumpets. One other group of figures, that of the Vials, still remains, previous to the grand final disclosures regarding the Celestial City and the Church of the glorified. We found the two former were preceded by magnificent introductory visions—the adoration of the slain Lamb, and the Angel with the golden censer standing by the golden altar. So also is it in the case of the Vials, in which there was to be a new symbolic outpouring of divine judgment on one especially of the portentous monsters delineated in chapter 13— "the Beast and his image."

The true Church being, moreover, basely counterfeited in this hybrid foe, which conjoined the horns of the Lamb with the mouth of the dragon,



could not fail to tremble for her own safety, and to stand in need of a special upholding word of comfort in the prospect of retribution. That preparatory vision of consolation is given in the words we are now to consider. Before the seven golden-belted angels come forth from the opened temple, bearing in their hands the cups or bowls of wrath to be poured on an apostate church and an apostate world, John has his attention directed to another "sign in heaven." It is a sea, calm as glass, mingled with fire. A crowd of victors are seen on its shores, uniting with harp and voice in a song of lofty adoration.

There would seem to be little doubt as to the real allusion in the suggestive imagery. Standing, indeed, now (as the spectator himself describes in chapter 14), "on the sands of the sea," looking across the Aegean Sea—its calm waters transmuted into molten gold—the island-home of the Apostle-prisoner and its surroundings may have possibly added power and reality to the figure.

But who can question that it had its grand original in the memories of another sea-shore—other minglings of fire—and other harps of triumph? Who can fail, in this new apocalyptic representation, to call to remembrance that ever-illustrious scene in early Jewish story—the proudest in all the old Hebrew annals—when the Israelites, ranged on the sands of Asia with the Red Sea between them and their old house of bondage, sang their song of victory—Miriam and her sisters answering with timbrels, as they made the shores ring with the refrain, "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea"?

Nor is it the name given, "The Song of Moses"—which alone is suggestive of the allusion. The glassy sea was "mingled with fire." Have we not here, also, the counterpart in that opening drama of the Exodus—the pillar of fire giving its glorious light to Israel, but flashing vengeance on their Egyptian pursuers? You may remember the exceptional appointment on that night of miracle, with reference to this fiery column—it "removed and went behind the Hebrews." At other times their pioneer and precursor, it now remained in their rear; so that as the Israelites, rank by rank, reached the opposite shore, they saw its lurid light reflected in the waters. The opposite side of the same pillar formed a murky cloud and

darkness to the Egyptians; or, if it emitted light, it was only the fitful gleams and coruscations of the forked lightning—the arrows of God—to dazzle and perplex and terrify.

After the world's long night of peril, the symbolic Church of 'just men made perfect'—God's glorified Israel—having left forever behind them the land of their oppressors, stand safe on the heavenly shore. Every billow of tribulation is hushed—all is changed into a calm, reflecting the glory of the Everlasting Hills, and of the Sun of Righteousness. How vivid the contrast between that glassy, waveless sea—without a disturbing element—and the apostate Church on earth spoken of in chapter 14 as "seated on many waters"—fretted with tempest, tossed on a troubled ocean-sea which cannot rest! Blessed and glorious emblem of everlasting tranquillity—these celestial harpers celebrating the downfall of all evil, and recognizing, in the survey of the past; the love, wisdom, and faithfulness of God's every dealing—this their joyful testimony and experience on these blissful shores, "We went through fire and through water, but You brought us out into a wealthy place."

We may add, in a word, yet one other feature of resemblance. It is the place which the vision occupies in the Apocalypse, in connection with the pouring out of the vials; recalling vividly, also, the vial-plagues of Egypt, the pouring forth of which preceded Israel's emancipation. For although we have spoken of these beautiful words as a prologue or introduction to the seven plagues which follow, perhaps from the literal rendering of one of the phrases we may also assign to them this additional significance, that they are not only anticipatory, but are rather sung all through the course of the vial-outpouring. The golden-belted angels pause, so to speak, to listen in silence to their mandate; but after the former have issued from the temple, the song continues. It is not a brief introductory solo merely—a solitary paean before the conflict; but rather like martial music mingling in the roll of battle, or like words of heart-cheer and sympathy borne ever and always, amid the surging of the tempest, to the ears of the perishing crew. If so, the song has this additional interesting characteristic, that it is being sung now—that as the judgment-angels are abroad on their mission, the ear of faith can catch up its strains. The song of the perfected Church we shall come to hereafter; the present is that of

the partially completed and completing ranks of the glorified.

It is the song sung on the Heavenly Mount while the battle is still raging in the plain beneath. Let us then, for a little, ungird the wilderness-armor and hearken to the music of the harps of God. On His own Sabbath, it may be, the day and hour of solemn truce, with the arms of conflict piled on the silent sands, let us forget the Egypt plagues behind, and the perils of the desert before, and listen with rapt reverence to "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

There are various interesting views we may take of this blended song. First, we may regard it as the Song of the two Dispensations—that of the Old and the New—the mighty multitude of redeemed gathered in under both, meeting under their great representative heads—a united Church. The glorious company of apostles, the goodly fellowship of prophets, and the noble army of martyrs, are assembled on the celestial shores to sing the song of their common deliverance—to mingle their combined yet diverse experiences, and proclaim these for the encouragement of the drooping and faint-hearted, who are still struggling in the conflict, or buffeting the billows.

How vast and varied are these experiences! Each harper has his own tale to utter and his own song to sing. There are the patriarchal harps swept by the hand of Abel and Noah, Abraham and Joseph; telling of purposes of covenant love proclaimed amid the withered bowers of Eden, or written in the rainbow of heaven that spanned the receding waters of the flood, or recalling mercies that were showered around the tent of the Pilgrim of Canaan, and the Captive in the Egyptian dungeon. There are the prophetic harps, from Moses to Malachi, rehearsing those glowing utterances which evoked of old their tuneful melodies. There is Isaiah, resuming the very strain of his undying parable of consolation, "Comfort, comfort my people." There is Hezekiah with his balm-words for the troubled and terror-stricken, "God is our refuge and strength, a present help in trouble," There is David and Daniel, with their older memories of heroic faith and calm reliance, which led to ultimate deliverance and victory. There is the harp of the Simeons and Annas, who, in their day and generation, stood on the threshold of a new era of time, celebrating still the praises of the great "Consolation of Israel," for whom they had

long waited, and waited not in vain. There is the Baptist, in the presence of the "True Light," uttering louder than ever his old proclamation, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

One after another of the apostolic band has his own hallowed story to relate—reminiscences of touching tenderness, and motives and encouragements to brave and stern endurance. John has more glorious visions of endearing fellowship with his great Lord than all the sublime picturings of Patmos. Paul has to tell how the things that happened unto him "have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." Peter, in loud accents which know no faltering, can now exclaim, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." We can listen to the holy women of Judea, and Galilee who tracked on earth the footsteps of Incarnate Mercy, joining with the Miriams and the Deborahs of the olden dispensation in abundantly uttering the memory of His great goodness, and talking of His righteousness. There are the Marys and the Elizabeths, rejoicing in God their Savior. There is the weeping penitent of Gennesaret with nothing now but the tear of love in her eyes, sweeping her harp with bolder hand because she had been forgiven much. There is the woman of Sychar and Mary of Magdala, and the sisters of Bethany, and the other holy watchers by the tomb of buried love, now echoing and prolonging the song through everlasting ages which they were the first to raise, "The Lord is risen indeed."

There are the martyred multitudes under Pagan Rome, and the faithful and heroic confessors under Papal Rome, who are described, in this vision of the crowned harpers, as having "gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name." But we are lost in the attempt to catch up or follow these lofty harmonies. It is the blending, in one magnificent cadence, of all the voices of the fast-gathering Church triumphant—from Adam, re-tuning the broken harp of Paradise lost, to those who are at this very hour entering the spirit-land; all of every rank and of every age—from the true Israelite wearing the monarch's crown, to the true Israelite whose earthly birthright was rags and penury—from the aged Melchizedecs and Methuselchs and Elis, to the little children who sang their hosannahs in the temple—the representatives of ten thousand thousand whose infant tongues, stilled on

earth, have been early tuned to the immortal song.

Oh! whatever be the jarring notes of conflicting ages and conflicting sects here, all is harmony yonder. "Those who are delivered from the noise of archers," now, in the fellowship of unmarred and unbroken communion, rehearse to one another, harp answering to harp, and soul to soul, "the righteous acts of the Lord." It is the realization of the longed-for unity of God's people—the interchange of the patriarchal and the apostolic—the Jewish and the Christian—the Song of Moses blending in sweet accord with the Song of the Lamb; and the words of sublime liturgy, so often belied on earth, become the noble and truthful liturgy of Heaven, "The Church throughout all the world does acknowledge You!"

II. Another view we may take of this blended ascription is, that which is most obvious, to regard it as the song of PROVIDENCE and the song of GRACE. "The Song of Moses"—the song of Providence. "The Song of the Lamb"—the song of Grace, or Redemption. The anthem itself is an antiphonal strain, sung in alternate parts; and its subject-matter, as given in verses 3, 4, would seem to justify the twofold division. It was God's wondrous providential "works," in the miraculous plagues of Egypt and the passage of the Red Sea, which formed the special theme of the olden Song of Moses. The Song of the Lamb, again—that of the New Testament Church—celebrated rather the wondrous "ways" of God—His justice, His truth, His dreadful holiness, as manifested in the plan of redemption. And, therefore, if the strains of the former befittingly be this, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty," no less appropriate and beautiful are those of the latter, "Just and true are all Your ways, O King of the ages; who shall not fear You, and glorify Your name? for You only are holy."

First, then, let us hear these harpers sing the Song of PROVIDENCE, "the Song of Moses, the servant of God." They delight, in other words, to sing a song similar to that which Moses sang on the shores of the Red Sea—the leading characteristic of which is the recognition and adoration of God's sovereignty. It is worthy of special note, how strikingly, in all their references to the exodus, the Hebrew psalmists and prophets love to bring into bold prominence this grand feature of the personal agency, foreknowledge, and power of Jehovah. "They went through the flood on

foot; then did we rejoice in Him." "He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and He made the waters to stand as a heap. In the daytime, also, He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire." "You rode upon Your horses and Your chariots of salvation. You walked through the sea with Your horses—through the heap of great waters."

And these are but the echoes of the original song itself. "Your right hand, O God, has become glorious in power. Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy. With the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together; the floods stood upright as a heap. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. You blew with Your wind; the sea covered them, they sank as lead in the mighty waters. . . The Lord shall reign forever and ever!" Oh! blessed assurance for the Church of God in the midst of all tribulations, and one we have found so often repeated in this closing Book of the sacred Canon, that there is a personal will and a personal God enthroned behind and above these apparently conflicting elements! The God of the olden pillar-cloud is in the pillar-cloud still. Man proposes, but God disposes.

It is for us, meanwhile, patiently to wait the development of His plans; to take on trust these strains from the harpers which we cannot understand until we ourselves join their ranks. Every evolution in the great program is His, who presides alike over the counsels of His Church and the destinies of the nations. It is He who now strengthens and appoints the angels of judgment. It is His own mighty voice which gives the commission, "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." When that judicial errand was being accomplished, the subsequent confession of one of these ministers of vengeance would doubtless be that of all—"And I heard the angel of the waters say, 'You are righteous, O Lord, who are, and were, and shall be, because You have judged thus!'" These glorious Beings, in the execution of their ministry, ask no questions. It is JEHOVAH, the Lord God Almighty, the Just, and the True, and the Holy—who has given them their mandates. With unswerving loyalty, forth they go, panoplied in "pure and white linen, having their chests girded with golden sashes."

And when their task is done—when the last vial has been outpoured, and

the Great Voice again comes out of the Temple of Heaven, saying, "It is done"—when they return to their thrones to surrender their trust, and lay the emptied vials at the feet of their great Lord—what is the next entry of the recording spectator? "After these things I heard a voice of much people in Heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments . . . And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

Let us catch up the lofty echo of this Song of Moses—the Song of Providence; the song sung—yes, and now being sung, on the shores of glory! The Providence which sits enthroned over the Church and the world presides over our individual destinies. Often there may be profound mysteries in the Divine dealings, "deep may call to deep." We may at times lose the footsteps of a God of love, and be led in our bewilderment to exclaim, "Your way is in the sea, and Your path in the deep waters, and Your judgments are not known." But there is a day coming when the rectitude of His dealings and doings will be vindicated—when the floods which now lift up their waves and make a mighty noise shall be stilled into a glassy calm, mirroring nothing but the red, fire-like glory of Justice, and Mercy, and Love; and when, not with the blare of the trumpets of earthly warfare, but on the tuneful chords of Heaven's own sweetest instrument, we shall sing with the harpers on the glassy sea—"The Song of Moses, the Servant of God."

The Second theme of the twofold song is "The Song of THE LAMB"—the Song of Grace and of Redemption. This is a louder, loftier, sublimer strain. We have met it before, more than once, in the previous figures, so that we have the less need to dwell on it here. In the connection in which it stands in the present passage, we are forcibly reminded of one of the most impressive incidents in the life of our Incarnate Redeemer. Moses, the author of the Song of Providence, in company with another illustrious fellow-harper from the glassy sea, came down to an earthly mount to witness the Transfiguration of Him whose day they had both seen afar off, and were glad. It was not, however, the theme of Providence which then engrossed their thoughts, nor the Song of Providence which thrilled

on their lips. "They appeared in glory, and spoke of His death, which He would accomplish at Jerusalem."

As if they would thereby proclaim, that the theme of Redemption, the Song of the Lamb, is the sublime topic which fixes the contemplation—tasks the immortal energies of the redeemed above—the blessed bond of union linking together the varying dispensations—the legal, the prophetic, the Gospel—the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven. All other themes pale before it. All other works and designs of Providence constellate around the Cross of Calvary, as the planets around a central sun. No other theme, no other song, has any glory, by reason of this glory which excels—Christ is all and in all! Not only of Him and through Him, but "to Him are all things." Glorious indeed is the Song of Creation—the song which the psalmist puts into the lips of the starry heavens, as these spangled, glittering minstrels of the skies declare the glory of God and show forth His handiwork—day unto day uttering speech, and night unto night showing knowledge.

Glorious, too, was that Song of Moses on the Red Sea shores. No greater or more signal earthly deliverance was ever celebrated in poetry or music. It stands out by itself with peerless grandeur, in annals sacred and profane. But, after all, what a feeble type of that deliverance which is being now sung and celebrated by the heavenly harpers!—a deliverance from the bondage of condemnation and death!—as we look across the sea of Divine wrath, and behold our sins, like the hosts of Pharaoh, sunk into its depths! Oh! sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things! His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Thanks, eternal thanks, be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

If the befitting utterance of Creation and Providence be, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty," Redemption, as it takes its stand by the Cross, and beholds the meeting in blissful harmony of all the attributes of Jehovah—Truth with Mercy, and Righteousness with Peace—has this song, too, peculiarly its own, "Just and true are all Your ways, O King of the ages! who shall not fear You, and glorify Your name? for You only are holy."



Let us sing that twofold blended song now, that we may sing it forever. It is continually waxing louder. Well-known voices missed on earth, add to the sublime harpings and melodies of the skies. The host passing through the Red Sea of earthly trial is, age by age, year by year, week by week, diminishing; the shores of glory are crowding with ever-augmented numbers. Meanwhile, let the girded angels of judgment go forth on their mission—and whether it be to pour the contents of their incense-bowls on a desolated world—on rivers, and fountains, and sea, and lights of heaven—amid predicted voices and thunderings, lightnings and earthquake—the crash of falling cities and the wild paroxysms of affrighted nature; or whether it be to carry these vials to individual homes and hearths—we shall listen to the voice of Him who has given the mandate, "Go your ways;" we shall hearken to the calm lullaby stealing down from the harpers on the sea of glass, as they proclaim, amid all convulsions and all changes, the sway alike of a God of Providence and Grace, and exhort us to sing with them, even now, what will form the theme and anthem of eternity, "The Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the LAMB!"

## **THE COMING ONE; AND THE BLESSED WATCHER**

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Revelation 16:15

In the previous context, we found the golden-belted angels issuing forth from the Temple with their bowls or vials full of the wrath of God. They are completing their mission of vengeance. The great Day of Judgment—

the time of the end—the consummation of all things—is gradually drawing near. In the immediately preceding verse there is described a mustering of the forces of evil at the instigation of three unclean spirits. These, in language of strong metaphor, are represented as "going forth to the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." At this announcement of Satan's final gigantic effort for mastery—the last conflict of great principles—when a bold and defiant skepticism is rampant, and ungodliness is abounding—the faith of the Church may be ready to fail, and her courage to falter. But a Divine voice, alike of comfort and of warning, breaks in parenthetically.

John, up to this point, has been the faithful recorder of the visions which were passing before him. Once more it is THE COMING ONE whose utterances are interjected in the midst of the dreadful and dreaded figures. It is the old key-note of the Book—the leading "Memory of Patmos," which is again sounded. We had almost forgotten it amid the rapid rush and succession of apocalyptic symbols—amid the thunderings, and lightnings, and tempest. But the trumpet-tones once more rise clear and distinct above the clang of battle. He of whom in the first chapter it was announced, "Behold, HE COMES with clouds"—He who, in the closing chapter of all, announces Himself, "Surely I AM COMING QUICKLY"—makes the intermediate proclamation, "Behold, I COME AS A THIEF! Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments with him."

We have in these words a Monition (a warning) and a Benediction. Let us briefly ponder them in their order.

I. The MONITION, "Behold, I come as a thief." The second coming of Christ is to be sudden and unexpected. It was not so with His first coming. Independent altogether of Hebrew prophecy, that advent had its dim and shadowy premonitions in the Gentile world. It was amid the hush of general expectation—when "all men were musing"—when, in the words of the great poet, "Birds of calm sat brooding on the charmed wave"—when the sword was sheathed, the temple of Janus was shut, and palm branches of peace strewed the pathway of the expected King—that the Child of Bethlehem was born.

"No war or battle's sound,

Was heard the world around;  
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;  
The hooked chariot stood  
Unstained with hostile blood;  
The trumpet spoke not to the armed throng;  
And kings sat still, with awful eye,  
As if they surely knew their Sovereign Lord was by."

So also is it with the spiritual Advent of the Redeemer to the souls of His people. That, too, unless in rare and exceptional cases, is a gradual 'coming.' "His going forth is prepared as the morning." His approach is not like the abrupt and sweeping water-flood, but rather like the silent dew as it distills imperceptibly on blade and flower.

Different will it be, however, at His second Advent. With the speed of the lightning flash—with the suddenness of the entrapping snare, or the assault and surprise of the midnight robber; when men are asleep—when every bolt and fastening seem protection against the prowling invader, then the cry shall be heard, "Behold, the Judge is at the door!" Our Lord Himself, in His own memorable discourse, gives a vivid picture of the state of the world at His final appearing. It shall be "as in the days of NOAH." The ante-diluvians were pursuing their guilty revelries—listening with mocking incredulity to Noah's strange parable of predicted wrath—seeing in the clear sky overhead no symptoms of coming disaster—then "the flood came and destroyed them all."

Or it shall be "as in the days of LOT." The same tale of terror seemed contradicted by the smiling plains beneath and the bright skies above; for "the sun," we read, "had risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar." In other words, when he reached his shelter, and the hour of doom had arrived, there was nothing seen but the play of sunbeams, "sowing the earth with orient pearl." No black omen was visible; the dwellers in Sodom woke up, heedless of fears, to a new day of godless riot; when suddenly the windows of heaven were opened, and bolts of living fire descended on the doomed cities!

So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. "Behold, I come as a thief!" The world will have rocked itself asleep on the subject of its Lord's

appearing. That appearing will be among the obsolete dogmas of its creed; denounced and discarded as a myth of prating fanatics and enthusiasts. It is so in large measure already. Outer nature, in its unvarying and apparently stereotyped laws, gives no indication of any such arrest on its appointed sequences; day follows night; summer treads on the heels of winter; autumn repays with interest the sower's springtime toil. There is no wrinkle on earth's brow—no symptom of decrepitude. It may be rather augured from the progress of science—the gigantic strides of discovery—that the earth is like the eagle, molting her feathers for a renewal of her youth. Nothing is there in the canopy above, nor in the garnered treasures hidden beneath her surface, to countersign and ratify the incredible warning of this Seer of Patmos.

The lovers of pleasure—those who desire to have no higher portion than this life—are only too ready to accept these theories of a godless and skeptic philosophy—to pursue with undisturbed greed the paths of sin and the race for riches. Secure against invasion, avarice heaps up its treasure, and shouts its defiant boast, "Tomorrow shall be as today, and much more abundant." "No," says Christ, as He awakes the dormant peal of the Advent-bell, "do not believe the world's lie; for it is just when that lie has won for itself a fatal acceptance—when mankind have sunk into this state of guilty, bold, defiant indifference—that My footfall shall be heard—Behold, I come as a thief!"

Just when the scoffer is uttering his arrogant challenge, "Where is the promise of His coming?"—when all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of the creation—when the husbandman is pursuing his peaceful labors—when the groves are vocal with song, or the valleys shouting with summer joy—when the marts of commerce are crowded, and the wheels of industry are revolving—when the ring of hammers is heard in workshop, when white-winged commerce is tracking as aforetime the highway of the nations, when the student is poring over his books, or the astronomer is registering the time of the next eclipse, or the politician is casting up the possibilities of peace and war—when the oblivious world, little dreaming of change, is immersed in her own gigantic selfishness and ambition—then, yes then, "Behold! I come as a thief!"

The figure here used by the Lord, and spoken by Him from a state of glory, is the very same He employed in His magnificent prophetic utterance on the Mount of Olives in the days of His humiliation.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him!"

Paul uses the same significant simile, "for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape!"

And to the same effect, Peter remembers the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and everything in them will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be exposed to judgment."

It is at night—midnight—the robber's hour—when darkness has drawn its sable curtains around a silent world—that the cry shall be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes! Go out to meet Him!"

II. We have spoken of the Monition. Let us now glance at the appended BENEDICTION, "Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." The reference here may be the simple and ordinary one, of a man, heedless of all danger, lying down to sleep with his garments cast carelessly aside; the thief suddenly enters his chamber, takes forcible possession of his clothing, and leaves him naked and defenseless. Or more probably, according to the great commentator Lightfoot, the allusion may be to a Jewish custom in the service of the Temple of Jerusalem. Twenty-four wards or companies were appointed night by night to guard the various entrances to the sacred courts. One individual was appointed as captain over the others, called the "Man of the Mountain of the House of God." His duty was to go round the various gates during the night to see that his

subordinates were faithful at their posts. Preceded himself, by men bearing torches, it was expected that each wakeful sentinel should hail his appearance with the password, "O man of the mountain of the house, peace be unto you!" If, through unwatchfulness and slumber, this were neglected, the offender was beaten with the staff—his garments were burnt—he was branded with shame for failure of duty, by being left in a state of nakedness.

It was in contrast with these slumbering Levites, that Jesus may be supposed to pronounce a blessing on His true people, who watch and keep their garments ready, and are saved from the reproach of spiritual nakedness. Their attitude is that of wakeful sentinels, who, anticipating their Lord's coming, are ever standing on their watchtower, pacing their rounds, having on the whole armor of God, "the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left;" so that, "being clothed, they may not be found naked."

And yet, be it ever remembered, that, knowing the possibility even of His own faithful disciples being involved in this state of drowsy unwakefulness, it is to them He addresses, as the great Captain and Overseer of His spiritual Temple, the solemn words, "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn."

Are we in the expectant attitude of those who are described as those who "love His appearing?" Who are waiting for "the promise of His coming?" That second coming of Christ ought, with all of us, to be regarded by its apostolic name as "The Blessed Hope"—the polar star in the sky of the future. It is true, indeed, that in one sense, to the believer, death is equivalent to the coming of his Lord, as being the hour which will usher him into His immediate presence. But death is never spoken of in Scripture as a blessed hope. Even the Christian holds his breath as the King of Terrors passes by. He may be ready to slip the cable whenever his Lord gives the word—he may be ready to enter the dark valley, and, under the guidance and grace of the Shepherd-Leader, he may fear no evil—but it is a dark valley notwithstanding: the tear, and the weeping cypress, and the sable mourning, have ever formed the associations and

accompaniments of the final hour and scene.

Not so is it, however, with Christ's Advent. It is a jubilant anticipation. The believer can long for it—can pray for it, "Even so, COME Lord Jesus;" "Make no tarrying, O my God;" "Make haste, my Beloved! be like a roe or a young deer on the mountains of spices."

How often does Samuel Rutherford break forth into some such impassioned words as these, "All is night that is here: therefore sigh and long for the dawning of that morning. Persuade yourself that the King is coming. Wait with the wearied night-watchers for the breaking of the eastern sky."

Nor let us for a moment suppose that this watching is some foolish, transcendental frame of mind which divorces the Christian from daily work and duty. These vigils may be best kept, not in cloistered seclusion. He watches most nobly and truly, who does so, not by abstracting himself from life's rough drudgery and needful calls, but who, in the midst of the ordinary avocations of the world—amid the fever and turmoil of busy existence—can catch up the jubilant chimes wafted to the ear of faith from the bells of glory.

Let these inspired utterances be ever ringing their varying magnificent melodies in our ears, "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." "A little while, and you shall not see Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me." "The end of all things is at hand; be therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." "Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed!"

Be it ours to keep this sentinel-guard over the garments of a holy character and spotless life; jealous of the invasion of sin; realizing from day to day and from hour to hour the solemn thought, "In this dress—in these garments, I must one day appear before my great Lord!" dreading the possibility, through unwatchfulness, of being deprived of any part of them, and thus of being "ashamed before Him at His coming."

If we expected a long-absent brother or friend from a distant land, how

careful should we be in our preparations to give him welcome! How house and hall would be decorated and adorned! How would ingenuity be taxed to deck out his chamber with every tribute which fond affection could devise! How careful to efface every association or memory of sadness, and prevent the occurrence of one note of discord or disharmony that would mar the joy of that glad return!

How should it be with us, in the prospect of welcoming the Brother of brothers, the Friend of friends? How should the home of every heart be "swept and garnished," decked in best holiday attire, to give to the long-absent Lord, love's most loyal welcome! Every day is bringing that Advent nearer—lessening the span of that rainbow of promise. The "little while, and you shall not see Me," is widening; the "little while, and you shall see Me," is diminishing.

The Church is like the sailors in the book of Acts, who "as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near." Is this true in a nobler sense of "the Better country?" Are we thus on the outlook to "see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off?" Others may be voyaging on in guilty unpreparedness, having nothing but the prospect of being stranded in a night of darkness and despair. "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Let the Blessed Hope impart new animation and intensity to your every Christian grace, strengthening your faith, calming your fears, quickening your zeal, disarming affliction of its sting, and death itself of its brief triumph. Let each Sabbath, each providential dispensation, add new power to the summons, "Awake, awake! put on your beautiful garments!" "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" So that when that glorious second Advent shall be consummated—when the Lord shall come and all His saints with Him—we may be able rejoicingly to exclaim, "Lo! this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

"Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when HE COMES, shall find watching!"



## THE GREAT DAY OF JUDGMENT

"And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the One who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from His presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done. The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead in them. They were all judged according to their deeds." Revelation 20:11-13

In the previous chapter we had our attention again specially called to the theme of the Advent—the approaching consummation of all, "Behold, I COME as a thief." It was the herald-cry, "Prepare the way of the Lord." "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come." The chariot wheels to a waiting, weary Church had long "tarried;" but they are now at hand. The warning voice need no more be sounded. The Day—that dreadful Day, "the Great Day of the Almighty;" the Day waited for by all time, has come at last, the Day of Judgment—the Assize of God. Remembering that we, each one of us, will be among the myriads who will throng the area of that Great tribunal, let us with profound reverence and godly fear unfold, in brief outline, the contents of these sublime and solemn verses. We have successively set before us—the Throne, the Judge, the Flight, the Gathering, the Books, and the Final Judgment.

(1.) THE THRONE—"And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the One who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide."

Other thrones had been spoken of in the preceding part of the Apocalypse; but these have vanished. The glories of all the old empires have passed as a dream when one awakens. All other crowns have crumbled into decay. Kings of the earth, and great men, and rich men—

colossal powers, political and ecclesiastical, "sitting on many waters"—have been driven like chaff before the whirlwind. "The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked and the scepter of the rulers." In the immediately preceding context, the throne, too, of the chief apostate Satan, the arch-usurper and arch-deceiver, who had so long held earthly kingdoms and scepters under his vassalage, had fallen—his iron crown had been torn forever from his brow; his doom consummated by being cast into the lake of fire.

High above this wreck of powers, human and Satanic, rises conspicuous before the Seer of Patmos the Throne of all Thrones. It is designated "a Great white throne"—a throne of pure alabaster, corresponding with the "garment white as snow," spoken of in the Book of Daniel, in which was attired the Ancient of Days. The color indicates the spotless purity and justice of Him who is seated thereon, as the sole, unchallenged arbiter of the eternal destinies of mankind. No other imagery could so solemnly testify to the unsullied rectitude and righteousness which will characterize the awards of that Day. As a commentator justly notes, there is here not even the emblem which is employed in the fourth chapter of this book, where there is seen surrounding the same Throne and the same Judge an encircling rainbow of emerald, the well-known symbol of covenant-grace. The reign of grace is now over, these rainbow-tints have melted away in the inaccessible light. Grace has descended the steps of the tribunal, and Justice has taken its place.

(2.) It is this JUDGE who next claims our thoughts. "And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the One who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from His presence, but they found no place to hide."

In one respect it is the joint throne of Father and Son, "the throne," as it is spoken of in the immediately preceding context, "of God and of the Lamb." But in the truest sense it is the crowned Mediator—He who has been throughout looked and longed for as "The coming One," who assumes by mediatorial right and prerogative the office of Supreme Judge. Other scriptures leave us in no doubtfulness as to this. The Divine Redeemer Himself, in the most unequivocal language, asserts and claims these judicial functions, "The Father has committed all judgment to the Son. . . . He has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because

He is the Son of man." "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations." "It is He," says Peter, "who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead." "For," says Paul, "we must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ." Yet, again, in addressing his Athenian audience on the heights of Mars Hill, "For He has appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He has ordained."

From the expression employed in the words which follow the verses we are now considering, "from whose face"—we may almost infer, that it is not God Almighty in His spiritual essence and divine glory who is to occupy in invisible majesty that majestic tribunal; but rather one wearing the face and form of glorified Humanity. The present passage is antithetical to the magnificent introduction in the first chapter, "Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." The now undisputed Judge of all, is the same Being who is there represented with a countenance like the sun shining in his strength. The Angel-intercessor before the golden altar, of a former vision, receiving the all-prayers, is now exalted in His absolute sovereignty to be the dispenser of both punishment and reward. What greater attestation could be given to the supreme divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ than this? "The heavens shall declare His righteousness: for GOD is Judge Himself!"

None but One invested with the Divine attributes could have the necessary qualifications for the gigantic task. Omniscience to take in at a glance all the crowded incidents in the histories of these countless millions; to sift with unerring and impartial scrutiny 'the secrets of men.' Omnipotence to secure that none evade His summons—or succeed, behind rock or mountain of earth or in cavern of ocean, to screen themselves from His searching, discriminating eye! Yes! "The hour is coming, in the which all who are in their graves shall hear His Voice, and shall come forth: those who have done good unto the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

(3.) Next, we have to note the FLIGHT of the earth and heaven at this great Epiphany. "And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who

was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from His presence, but they found no place to hide."

We may perhaps best leave the interpretation of these words to their own indefinite grandeur. Some commentators, in order that they may tally with their own prophetic theory, have regarded them as nothing more than highly-wrought poetic drapery, intended to indicate figuratively, the stupendous nature of the transaction described; just as physical convulsions in other parts of this Book are taken to symbolize great moral crises and catastrophes. Or if there be a fleeing away of material luminaries, that it is not intended to mean any actual convulsion or displacement of the existing system; but only what we are spectators of every morning, as the moon and stars dim their pale lusters before the advancing sun,

"The Lord will come, the earth shall quake;  
The mountains to their center shake,  
And withering from the vault of night,  
The stars withdraw their feeble light."

Had the words stood alone in the Apocalypse, such an interpretation might have been entertained or accepted. But in the light of other passages of Scripture we are driven to conclude, that they refer to a literal destruction and wreck of the present economy, "a dissolution of the present cosmos"—preliminary to renovation and renewal. The parallel words of Peter's unfigurative Epistle, are too strong and decided to warrant any more modified interpretation, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

(4.) We have the GATHERING, "I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne." What an assembly! All who have ever trod the earth, from the first to the last member of the human race. No conventional human distinctions can plead exemption. Rich and poor— young and old—learned and unlearned—peasant and wealthy—king and beggar. It matters not where or when they have lived; whether when the world was young, or in its colossal manhood and maturity, or in its years of decrepitude and decay; whether their home was amid the burning

deserts of the tropics or amid polar snows—the icebergs of eternal winter; whether amid the hum of busy cities, or the stillness of mountain solitudes. It matters not what their name, or rank, or color of skin, or age, or pedigree. Tyrants who have made the world to tremble; Nimrods in the race for fame, and riches, and conquest; cottagers unknown beyond their village home; the aged pilgrim of fourscore years; the little child laid in its early grave.

The SEA is represented in the following verse as surrendering its dead—giving up what for ages it has held in custody—the myriad of sleepers in its still silent caverns, those who have gone down amid the howling of the tempest with the costly freight. Or amid the tug of grappling weapons and the roar of battle—or the wasted invalid who had fallen into the last long sleep far away from the graves of his forefathers.

Death and Hades, too, are in the same verse, by a bold personification, represented as twin demons surrendering their captive prisoners with reluctant grasp, whether from storied urn and marble mausoleum, or from the heaps of the battlefield, or the winding-sheet of Alpine snows, or the churchyard's unepitaphed mounds—all will be there in that teeming mass of immortality! Vain will be the attempt to escape or evade the scrutiny. A previous figure of this same Book has represented the sinner calling on the rocks and mountains to fall upon him, that he may be hidden and covered from the face of the Judge. But their adamant ears are deaf to pity; loyal to their great Creator, they refuse to forsake their old moorings—they leave the suppliant to wail out the unsuccoured cry, "Where shall I go from Your Spirit, or where shall I flee from Your presence!"

(5.) We have next the OPENING OF THE BOOKS, "And the Books were opened; and another Book was opened which is the Book of life."

The imagery is borrowed from human tribunals, where a written or printed indictment is produced. These 'books' or rolls, or registers, described here, embody this written indictment. They contain all the charges that can be laid against the sinner. They have engrossed and catalogued in their infallible pages, all the deeds which have been committed by every single individual of that mighty assembled aggregate.

How scrupulously minute and detailed each such biography will be! details in the life-story that have long ago passed into oblivion, but which now, like the undeveloped photograph, jump into life on exposure to the sunlight! Sins of thought that never embodied themselves in deed. The unchaste look, the envious glance, the muffled resentment, the harbored malice, the uncharitable wish, of which none but the eye of the Unseen and the All-seeing took cognizance!

How will the guilty footsteps be retraced on the sands, which the tidal wave of oblivion was thought to have effaced forever! How will the tale be engraved as with an iron pen on these enduring tablets, as to the means by which many dragged themselves or dragged others downwards to ruin! Volumes of recorded sin which were thought long ago to have perished in the flames, or their leaves to have moldered and been moth-eaten, they discover have all been treasured up in the library of God! and one by one is brought down—every line and every entry read before men and angels!

The blasphemous oath uttered in a moment of fiery passion—read out! The successful lie which screened a deed of dishonesty or fraud—read out! The stab at their neighbor's good name and reputation to exalt their own—read out! The deed of darkness and villainy, of which they thought the stars alone were the unconscious witnesses—read out! In that hour there will come forth the writing of a man's hand, as of old at Belshazzar's feast, on the wall of the king's palace. Nothing is now hidden that shall not then be known! The Divine saying will then be invested with new and dreadful emphasis and meaning, "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!"

But "another book is opened, which is the Book of Life." In that Book the names of the saved are written. It would be presumptuous to speak confidently or dogmatically with regard to the precise nature of this volume and its relation to the others just adverted to. It is supposed by some to be the register, not only of the names of God's spiritual Israel, but to contain an enumeration of the services rendered by them to their heavenly Master; and thus, while the entries of previous books will regulate and adjust the retributive sentences to be pronounced on the ungodly, the Book of Life will regulate the graduating scale of rewards in

the case of the righteous.

(6.) This, at all events, is the next point spoken of, THE FINAL JUDGMENT, embracing the case alike of sinner and saint, "And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." That throne and judgment will be an impartial and just tribunal. The sentences of the Great Judge will not be arbitrary; each one will be scrupulously and exactly weighed and meted out. To this principle of retribution we have recently been led to advert in connection with another Memory of Patmos. It was announced in unmistakable words by the Great Apostle, "For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world, will judge all people according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who persist in doing what is good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But He will pour out His anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and practice evil deeds." And yet again, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

While the thought of just and equitable retribution ought, to the sinner, to be a solemn and appalling one, should it not form also, in the case of every true believer, a quickening motive and incentive, that the allotments of eternity will be the counterpart of the deeds and doings of time; his everlasting recompense will be in accordance with the measure of fidelity which has regulated the discharge of his earthly trust. In the last chapter of Revelation, where the Divine Redeemer again strikes the key-note of the book, and reveals Himself as the quickly 'Coming one' where He is speaking, too, specially, if not exclusively, to His own people, He affirms this same truth, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Reader, what is it that fires men's ambition in this world?—the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, the lust of conquest, the triumphs and trophies of intellect, the love of fame, the thirst for riches. But what are these, all combined? Baseless nothings, compared to the honor and privilege of him who has his name written in the Book of Life, and who, by reason of that very eternal inheritance, is giving all diligence to make

his calling and election sure; adding to his faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and every Christian grace. Everything else perishes with the present world! But the wealth of holy character—that alone is enduring. It alone knows no bankruptcy: it alone owns no decay.

Space forbids farther to dwell on these sublime and dreadful picturings of the great terminating act in the terrestrial drama!—the close of the present dispensation. Some philosophers of our own time may throw doubt on the question of future retribution as one which they have ventured to call "insoluble to human creatures." And yet it is strange to find modern skepticism thus lagging behind even the old philosophy of heathen nations. They at least had groped their way, through the darkness, to their own solution of the problem, and admitted no such insolubility. The dreams of Pagan mythology recognized alike the gloom of Tartarus and the bliss of Elysium. Even the philosophers of Athens, who scouted and scorned Paul's doctrine of the "resurrection of the dead," offered no denial to his assertion that "God would judge the world in righteousness." And when the same apostle subsequently brought the same great theme before a profligate Roman, "the judgment to come," Felix trembled!

In every human bosom, be it Christian or Pagan, savage or civilized, there is a consciousness of right and wrong, a recognition of moral responsibility. The coming tribunal of a last Judgment has its harbinger and preliminary in the miniature court of conscience here. The solemn adjudications of the Great Day come floating up the ages. So that despite of all infidel creeds and the rejection of the authority and inspiration of the written Word, conscience brings many a man, in his more earnest and sober moments, to subscribe the saying of Solomon, "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Add to this, and apart also from the unfoldings of revealed truth, we have the strongest presumptive expectation of a future retributive economy, from the fact of the present unequal distribution of happiness and misery, and its probable, or rather its certain rectification and adjustment hereafter. Who is not cognizant, every day, of instances of vice pampered and caressed, and on the other hand, of goodness and beneficence and



virtue trampled on and overlooked? We see, in one case, a creature of God, who has belied His image—some miserable and depraved victim of selfishness, and baseness, and lust, scattering nothing but baneful influences around him, "earthly, sensual, devilish," yet, with the cup of material plenty filled to the brim; the world smiling on him; wealth unimpaired; an apparently enviable and envied child of prosperity.

While on the other hand, we see, it may be in the adjoining house or street, some lofty, pure, generous, unselfish spirit; but on whom the arrows of misfortune, one after another, have been emptied from God's quiver. Is it the widow in her agony, bereft of husband and children, health and means; hurried by successive bereavement into pitiless and broken-hearted poverty, and weeping over the helpless orphans she has to cast unbefriended on the world? Oh! forbid the thought, that a kind, and just, and righteous God would allow such inequalities, were there no Judgment Day coming when these discrepancies would be rectified, these inequalities adjusted; when the villain who walked now unchallenged in his villainies, would at last be visited with his long-delayed penalty; and when the pining flower of goodness and virtue, that had nothing now but harsh tempests and withered scattered blossoms, would be allowed to waft its fragrance in a more genial climate! Abraham's philosophy has an echo and response in every bosom and in every age, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

But though we thus conceive that this question of a coming retribution is congenial to both reason and conscience, and on the principles of eternal rectitude, we have a more sure word of prophecy to which we do well to take heed. "The word that I speak unto you," says Christ, "the same shall judge every man at the last day." God's Word leaves us without excuse. Not in all questions certainly, but in this, at least, it fully endorses the judgments of reason. They both set their seal to the one immutable and equitable principle which is to regulate the decisions of that Day, "He who is unjust let him be unjust still; and he who is filthy let him be filthy still; and he who is righteous let him be righteous still; and he who is holy, let him be holy still!" What more need be added, but to urge preparation for that magnificent gathering, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!"—each standing in his lot at the end of the days—his weal or

woe for eternity unchangeably fixed!

We would not, if we could, enter on the undefined awfulness of the words embraced in this same passage, 'The second death,' and 'the lake of fire.' It is enough that they describe the unutterable anguish of a spirit born for immortality and for union with the divine, having, by its own recklessness and guilt, lost its glorious center, and left in self-abandonment to drift away—an outcast from bliss!

"The second death!" It tells of the extinction of true life and gladdening hope—no memories but the poor memory, it may be, of having gained the world, but at the priceless uncomputed sacrifice of losing the soul! A solitary, isolated being, with the blank of despair around him, above him, beneath him, within him: the spectral forms of his own sins, the sole companions of that infinite of darkness; and the crushing, withering reflection ever present, that he was himself alone responsible for the undoing of his eternity!

But we shall not enlarge. With these dreadful words, and this dreadful vision, the terrors of the Book close. The curtain once more falls amid these thunderings, and lightnings, and tempests—when it rises again, it is to unfold the gladdening pictures of the two last chapters; a glorious burst of heavenly sunlight after the thick darkness!

The seer of Patmos has concluded his record of the Church's conflicts, and trials, and persecutions; and the befitting punishment to be inflicted on her enemies. Nothing now remains, but that to which the whole preceding figures tended—the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth, the dwelling-place of the Redeemed! The storms are all past, every wave is stilled, the haven is in sight! "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." At the close of this chapter, we seem to be in the position of Christian and Hopeful in the Pilgrim's Progress; "They had the city itself in view, and they thought they heard all the bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereunto." When we resume these "Memories," it will be to "enter within the gate into the city."

# THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

Revelation 21:1-4, 9-12, 21, 25-27

We have reached the concluding act in the great drama to "the things which shall be hereafter." The number of God's elect is accomplished; the bridal day of the Church Triumphant has at last arrived—the consummated bliss of Christ and His people. It is the clear shining after rain; the morning, without clouds; "the darkness is past and the true light shines." All the apocalyptic scenery regarding the Church Militant (the church on earth) terminates with the previous chapter. All its fierce Armageddons are fought—the great assize is dispersed—the Books are closed—the inquiry hushed, the 'wide gulf' is fixed forever. The Evangelist is now represented standing like another Noah on the heights of Ararat, gazing on a renovated world. After passing through the crucible of its own latent fires, it has come forth, immortal, from its ashes, in new resurrection-attire. On the occasion of the deluge, although a vast aqueous mass rolled over the surface, or part of the surface of the globe, submerging its hills and valleys, this did not involve the destruction of the planet. It rose rather from its water-baptism clad in fresh loveliness and verdure. So, we have strong reason to believe, will it be in this second and last fiery baptism. The earth will be in a state of melting—the elements "melting with the fervent heat." The now imprisoned fires sweeping over its surface, charring its forests, and reducing its rocks to powder. But though there will be displacement, dislocation, decomposition, there will be no annihilation—these will be no more than fiery purifiers, from which it will come forth, newly created—attired in more than pristine beauty.

Travelers, who have ascended Mount Vesuvius, tell us that some of the old lava-channels, which years ago poured down their molten streams of destruction, are now covered with luxuriant vines and purple clusters. So will it be on a vast, gigantic scale, with this world and its thousand volcanoes of living fire. Life and luxuriance will once more clothe its

seared and smitten sides. From that tremendous conflagration will emerge "a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness."

One special feature alone is here noted in its altered physical aspect, that there will be "no more sea." These last fires have dried up the watery element—reclaimed those vast solitudes of ocean, which now often form a rampart, preventing the brotherhood of nations. The world's habitable surface being thus indefinitely widened and expanded, room will be made for all "the nations of the saved." Do not think that these picturings of a renewed and renovated earth are too strange and incredible facts for human belief. They are not a whit more so than other Scriptural revelations dearest to our hopes and encircling our every thought of the future. Not more strange, surely, is the astounding truth that the body laid in the grave resolved into its primitive clay—moldering in insensible dust—is one day to rise exultant from the tomb, its pulses beating with immortality! Not more strange is the fact of the unsightly seed or grain, embedded in the ground, springing up in graceful and multiplied form; or the dull, torpid, loathsome caterpillar, bursting its dark prison-house and soaring aloft in varied and brilliant hue. Not more strange or unaccountable are any of these, than that this earth, convulsed, shattered, disorganized—a wreck of matter—shall emerge from its grave in holiday attire—break from its chrysalis shell, radiant with beauty, "like the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

In the present chapter, we have brought before us, in succession, what the Apostle saw and what he heard. In other words, we have THE PICTURE, or what was presented to his eye; and THE VOICE, or what was addressed to his ear. In vision, John stands on the bare, naked platform of the new heavens and the new earth, over which we may imagine the morning stars are again singing together, and all the sons of God are shouting for joy. As he gazes—lo! a resplendent city, and one of gigantic proportions, with towers, walls, and gates—reminding him, at a glance, of his own beloved Jerusalem—seems slowly and magnificently to descend from the upper heavens. At first, as if dazzled with the sight, and awed by the majestic voices which accompany and follow, he ventures on no description.

By and by, however, in a subsequent verse, he is conducted by an angel—

a bright inhabitant from the spirit-world—to a great and high mountain. From this height he obtains a more thorough survey. He marks that the city has twelve gates, each gate sentineled by angels—that these gates are never shut at all by day, seeing that the city itself is bathed in a flood of everlasting brightness; "for there is no night there." All the costliest material—gold and crystal, and every stone of priceless value, from the jasper to the amethyst, are employed as the earthly symbols and exponents of a glory which cannot otherwise be translated into human language.

What unutterable thoughts must have thrilled through the beloved Disciple's soul at that moment of all moments! For what was that moment? It was the fulfillment, in vision, of all his life-long prayers and longings. It was the birthday of the perfected Church! Amid the crowding reflections which rushed to his mind on the figurative descent of this new Jerusalem, his memory seems at the instant to travel back to the streets of the old Jerusalem. He thinks of solemn words uttered by Divine lips within view of its towers and temples, "Behold the bridegroom comes!" The new city suggests the emblem of this sacred parable. The Bridegroom has come!

The last vision in the chapter preceding, was of the Judge seated on His throne. But now that enthroned Lord has left the judgment-hall for the coronation-hall. The Day of the everlasting marriage has arrived. Make way for the Bride—the Lamb's wife!—the glorified Church without spot or blemish or any such thing. "The new heaven and the new earth" are her royal bridal chamber. "I, John, SAW the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband!" Such, then, was the PICTURE which rose before the enraptured eye of the seer of Patmos.

Having sought briefly to describe what John's eyes saw, let us now turn to what his ears heard; let us turn from the Picture, to THE GREAT VOICE.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For

the old world and its evils are gone forever."

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making all things new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."

The evangelist spectator is not now forbidden, as on a former occasion, to "write." When the seven thunders uttered their voices, after the appearance of the rainbow-crowned angel as detailed in the tenth chapter, and when he was about to transcribe, a prohibition was addressed from heaven, "Write not." No such arrest is at present put upon his hand. It is the reverse. He receives the positive instruction from the great Judge Himself, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." God graciously authorizes him to pen the glorious revelation for the comfort of His Church in every age. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." The utterance of the unknown Speaker contains a beautiful twofold description of the citizen's felicity. First, we have a positive description of what that bliss is to comprehend; and second, a negative.

The POSITIVE—"Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them."

The NEGATIVE—"He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever."

We shall in the present chapter confine ourselves to the positive aspect of heavenly happiness. The essence of this positive bliss is, yet again, to consist in (what we have had occasion to note more than once as a main characteristic of heavenly felicity set forth in previous visions), the everlasting presence and enjoyment of God Himself! "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them." That holy city, new Jerusalem, descends, but it descends not alone. The name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah Shammah—"The Lord is there." The children of Zion are joyful in their King. Farther, does not this passage seem strongly

to indicate, that the Great God of heaven designs to make the new redeemed earth the future abode of the Shekinah-glory—His own palatial residence, the special seat of His vast empire, the metropolis of eternity? "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them." Just as Jerusalem—the first Holy city—was the sacred capital, the seat of the theocratic government—so this "holy city, new Jerusalem," the home of the Church triumphant, would seem destined to be the future capital of a rejoicing universe. Jehovah is to transfer the pavilion of His heavenly glory to His ransomed world.

There is a throne in the city; "And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making all things new!'" In one beautiful sense, indeed, already may it be said, with reference to Christ's incarnation, that the tabernacle of God has been with men. Jesus, the incarnate Son, pitched His tabernacle in the midst of human tents. "The Word," says John in his Gospel, "came and dwelt (or lit. tented or tabernacled) among us." And it is this sublime antecedent fact which disarms the other of any marvel and incredibility; no, which, indeed, would almost render appropriate and befitting the transference of which we speak, of God's manifested presence from the invisible heaven to the visible platform of a regenerated earth.

We cease to wonder at the bestowment of peerless honors on a world that was selected, amid a wide sisterhood of planets, for such a marvelous display of love and mercy as in the atonement and death of the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory! If this is the case (as we know on Scripture authority it is) that God passed by the angels that sinned—and as the word literally means, those, too, highest in state, principal in rank—the aristocracy of heaven; if God passed by them, "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants;" if He selected this insignificant world of ours on which to uprear that wondrous cross, and make it the theater of His Son's humiliation and death—is there any improbability, rather, is there not the strongest presumptive probability, that He may convert the scene of surpassing abasement and suffering into the scene of honor and exaltation; and to principalities and powers in heavenly places make known by the Church (the Church redeemed and glorified) His own

manifold wisdom?

There would, we confess, have been something almost transcending belief, in the thought of this earth being thus marked out for such peculiar and pre-eminent distinction, if we had not the antecedents of Gethsemane and Calvary. But after the great "mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," we can marvel at no other mysteries; no, we seem to see a sublime congruity in the world where the God-man suffered, being the spot where the God-man glorified is eternally to reign. "Why do you look with envy, O rugged mountains, at Mount Zion, where God has chosen to live, where the Lord Himself will live forever?" Psalm 68:16. But we shall not farther expand this thought. For, after all, the mere locality is comparatively immaterial.

More momentous, delightful, and comforting is the great truth we have found so often reiterated in these visions, as forming the main element in the bliss of the ransomed citizens—namely, that God is in their midst. Twice over in one verse is it here said, "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them"—the fully verified meaning and interpretation of "IMMANUEL" (God with us). It has been beautifully said, that just as every lovely and varied tint in field and flower is traced to the one pure, parent, colorless ray—so every gate and jasper wall and sapphire pavement in that jeweled city, owe their brilliancy and glory to the altogether lovely One, "the Light which no man can approach unto."

Oh, wondrous assemblage! Oh, amazing honors! The tabernacle of the great God with redeemed men! As the ranks of the unredeemed cherubim and seraphim gather around the Holy city—hovering with their bright wings over the new Jerusalem—we can picture them exclaiming, in a higher sense than the words ever bore on earth, "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!" The City of the Heavenly Jerusalem, although it is described here as of immense size, is but one House. All will dwell together as brethren, as children of the same Heavenly Father, in one Everlasting Home. 'In My Father's house are many dwelling places.'

We have room for only one other point in the suggestive themes of these



verses—the near and intimate fellowship which is to exist between the ransomed multitude and their God, further brought out in the additional strong and expressive language, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." What does this mean? We need not say that there can be no tears in heaven. The symbol must be explained by reference to some earthly feelings. It has been truthfully observed by an expositor of this passage—his remark, we think, furnishes the right key to the interpretation of the figure—that "the most sacred test of affection is to wipe away a tear."

It is indeed the most delicate of all offices one human being can perform towards another, that of offering sympathy in seasons of tearful sorrow. The most experienced "sons of consolation" can testify, that the more they venture to come into personal contact with aching hearts, and to cross thresholds darkened with bereavement, the more do they feel the great solemnity of the ground; that sorrow is a thing of that exquisite tenderness, that no stranger dare intermeddle with it. Every bereft spirit will respond to words of an earnest writer, who evidently knows well what a sacred thing it is to give sympathy; or, in the significant figure now before us, to "wipe away a tear." Oh, the preciousness of silence in the hour of heart-cutting grief! Oh, the misery of the minstrels and people making noise! Oh, the jarring discord of glib sympathy! Oh, the bitter mockery of commonplace condolence! Oh, for those who know how to speak with the pressure of the hand; for those to whom God has given the mute eloquence of the eye; for those who do not pretend to understand our grief! Yes, we repeat—it is no ordinary one—no ordinary friend—who can dare touch these harp-strings of sorrow!

There are indeed such, in seasons of deep desolation, whom we love to welcome into the smitten home. There are hands we love on such occasions, to hold. While drawing back from the cold commonplace contact of ordinary routine sympathy, there are those to whom, in this significant language of John, we gratefully entrust the wiping away of the gathering or falling tear. Such, however, is the prerogative alone of true and faithful, of tried and tested friendship and love. 'Behold,' says John, in the expressive figure of this passage—Behold the endearing relationship which will exist between God and the believer in that Holy

city. They will confide in Him as lovingly and tenderly, as the bereft one on earth, who allows the hand of human affection to wipe the tear-dimmed eye!

Are we looking for this city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God? Amid the other gorgeous symbolism, do we keep in mind that which has met us under various figures in previous descriptions, and which is suggested here under a new one, its "streets of pure gold like transparent glass"—that vast as are its dimensions, a gigantic cube, with gates in every quarter, wide open for the admission of every tribe of God's spiritual Israel, yet within it "there enters nothing that defiles." Multitudes of the saved are to be welcomed in—yet there is one badge of citizenship indispensable in the case of every person in these teeming millions—"the pure in heart" alone can "see God."

The sentinel angels at every watch-tower have the old prophetic summons addressed to them, "Open the gates to all who are righteous; allow the faithful to enter." Isaiah 26:2. Over every entrance is the superscription, "This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter." Psalm 118:20. "Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life"—the City which has foundations! There are no permanent foundations for anything here in this present world. Here we have no "continuing city." Earth's most stable social and domestic structures are sand-built, not rock-built. They are at the mercy of every capricious hurricane; and death, sooner or later, will convert them into a mass of ruins! Let us seek to live under the elevating assurance, that we are the soon to be glorified inhabitants of this new Jerusalem! taking as our motto, "Pilgrims and Strangers on the earth!" "Our citizenship is in Heaven!"

Let us live up to our peerless privileges, as those who in the future are to dwell with Him who has promised to be with us and to be our God. If trial be appointed—the loss of earthly friends—earthly portions—be it ours to fall back from the wreck and bankruptcy of the present world, and focus on our glorious inheritance to come! Let us take down our harp from the willows; and sing, it may be amid withered props and perishable refuges—amid rifled homes and falling tears and the shadows of death, "But they

were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a heavenly city for them!"

**NO DEATH  
NO SORROW  
NO CRYING  
NO PAIN**

"And there will be NO MORE death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever." Rev. 21:3-4

In already considering the representation given by the Apostle of Patmos of the New Heaven and the New Earth, "the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God"—we have confined our attention to the positive elements of bliss in store for the Church of the glorified, as these are described in the verse immediately preceding, "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

We come now to the negative description which John gives of that same blessedness. It is a fourfold delineation. He conducts us in thought, first, down to Earth, and exhibits a hall or picture-gallery, whose gloomy recesses are hung with representations of—Death; Sorrow; Crying; Pain; and then, taking us to the New Jerusalem above, we find, if we may so express it, the corresponding recesses in its glorious walls are blank—"And there will be NO MORE death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever." These in their order—

I. There shall be no more DEATH. We must, in the first instance, visit the Earth and pace its picture-gallery of gloomy illustrations. It contains a

vast gathering of diverse and ever-varying portraits of death. Here is a picture of old age, one who has lived beyond the appointed fourscore years—his brow furrowed with wrinkles, "gathering up his feet into the bed." Here is manhood in its prime, with eye apparently undimmed and natural force unabated, bidding farewell to those who are soon to be fatherless. Here is a mother pressing a blighted flower to her bosom. Here is a king borne from his sack-clothed palace, a mourning nation following the funeral procession. Here is the friendless beggar carried from his couch of loneliness and poverty to the last narrow home of all. Here is the Philanthropist, the widow and orphaned children lining the streets as the funeral procession passes, and pronouncing the silent eulogy with their tears. Here is the strong swimmer in his agony resigning himself to his inevitable fate. Here the companion-picture, as from the side of a vessel, the coffin is lowered into the silent depths where no epitaph can be written, nor footstep follow, nor tear fall. Here is the captive in his cell, uttering alone his last appeal to Heaven, with no human eye to cheer him, and no human hand to smooth his straw pillow. Here is unfortunate courage, lying on its crimson shroud, deaf to the roar of battle, amid heaps of slain. Here is the drunkard, with the drained cup at his side and delirium in his eye. Here is the bold skeptic, the defiant reprobate, the scorner of grace, with haggard look, gazing on the sand-glass at his side, wearying for the termination of its wasted grains. Here is the Believer, his lips moving in their last prayer, his eyes closing in their last slumber gently as an infant's sleep; while white-robed angels hover over his pillow ready to bear the soul to Paradise.

But why linger in these corridors? They are co-extensive with all time. Every second, it has been computed, a fresh picture is thrown off for their somber walls. At every beat of our pulse a death takes place! The Rider on the Pale Horse has never slackened his speed since the hour of the fall. Death has passed upon all. Every household has its saddened memories. What circle is there where there is no name mentioned with faltering lips? What fold among us but misses its lamb? What family Bible but has the significant record under a cherished entry? Who has not pressed the cold hand? Who has not watched "life balanced in a breath"—the dwindling candle-flame flickering in the socket? Who has not contributed a loved portrait to the silent gallery? Who has not chiseled names,

fragrant with affection, on monumental tablets?

And if, in some rare exceptions, death, the great foe of human happiness, has not yet come, who among us has not the dread anticipation for ourselves or for others of the inevitable hour? Who has never been a prey to the disquieting thought of the unheralded footfall—the sudden incursion of nature's great midnight robber?

But in Heaven "there shall be no more Death!" In that Holy City, New Jerusalem, there shall be no death-gallery—no chamber of terrors—no brush—no paint—no canvas to delineate them. No "loved and lost" there; but all loved and restored, never to be lost again—the iron crown of the King of Terrors trampled forever in the dust! The Believer, the glorified citizen will there reign in life—wear the diadem of immortal being, sealed by the mighty Angel who has in His hand "the seal of the life-giving God!" Oh, blessed, comforting thought!—the very fear of this last enemy, felt and dreaded no more—the saying brought to pass, as it is written, "DEATH is swallowed up in victory!"

II. There shall be no SORROW there. We descend yet again to Earth's picture-gallery. We are taken now to a silent, secluded, lonely spot. The hush of sacredness and privacy is here. The former corridor we trod, is patent to the observation of all. Ah! it cannot be hidden; it comes with observation: the muffled bell—the darkened window—the mournful procession—the somber attire—the missed face in the exchange, the street, the home, the House of God.

But there are often pictures of hidden grief and sorrow, hung away from public view in the secret chambers of the heart. The saddest spectacles of earth are not those unfolded to the eye. There are scenes with a screen drawn between them, which are not for public gaze. They are kept with key and padlock; the gallery is paced with silent footstep and bated breath. It is this hidden, muffled, unuttered grief which we believe is here referred to in the word "Sorrow."

Are there none whose eyes trace these pages, who know of such pictures that are engraved—deeply-embedded in the walls of their inmost heart? That cutting disappointment of young and ardent affection—that cruel

withering of a cherished gourd—that faithless wound of your trusted friend—that base requital of a long friendship—that unkind stab on reputation? Or, more painful still; as we pass to Sorrow's most secluded, shadiest niche—that blot on character—that profligate boy—that picture of lost virtue and blighted innocence—that castaway on his plank—that ship, that abandoned lonely hulk, without mast or sail or rudder—drifting, drifting away on the surges of despair!

In that city of God there shall be no more Sorrow. These pictures of sorrow shall be burnt to ashes with the last funeral fires of Time. No sad realities, no sad memories can be perpetuated on the walls of Heaven. To take an illustration from the photographic world—the undeveloped picture remains on the plate, while it is preserved in a dark chamber. But expose it without using the fixing solutions to the light, it immediately fogs and evaporates; every trace of it is lost. So with these pictures of Sorrow. Remove them from this dark world and its gloomy corridors; expose them to the eternal sunshine of Heaven, where the darkness is past and the true light shines; they are gone—not a vestige of sadness is left. "There shall be no more sorrow;" the former things are passed away.

III. There shall "be no more CRYING." Enter another room in the Earthly gallery. John could doubtless understand, better than we, the meaning and appropriateness of the expression here employed with reference to this next chamber. It is an oriental corridor. In these eastern countries a wild demonstrative grief was often indulged in, as it is to this day. With us, it is otherwise. Our homes of sorrow are seldom or never scenes of frantic and uncontrollable anguish. The smitten heart rather retires within itself, seeks the sacred calm of its own chamber, and utters its plaint in silent tears. Perhaps its sorrow is all the profounder and more real on this account—like the deepest stream, it has least sound.

It is different with other nations, and specially the orientals. Their funerals, as we know from a Gospel picture, were accompanied with "the minstrels and people making a noise." When the first-born in Egypt were found dead, there was "a loud cry," we read, that went up throughout all the land of Egypt. Doubtless, that night when Israel marched forth in the darkness, they would be met at every step by bereaved mothers having dust on their heads and sackcloth on their loins; beating their chests, and

making the still air resound with the dirge of woe.

When Herod executed the cruel decree of slaughtering all the infant children of Bethlehem, "In Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they were no more." The voice of these bereft Hebrew mothers is represented as waking the echoes of the death-stricken land. By a bold figure or impersonation, Rachel is represented rising from her grave, as if her ashes were stirred by the cry of blood, and seating herself amid the murdered innocents, indulging in a wild and inconsolable lament.

We may take perhaps the crying spoken of here, more truthfully still, as denoting aggregate mourning; the loud shout or wailing of numbers, in contradistinction to the individual and personal woes indicated by the previous word Sorrow. Such was the howl which reached the ear of the wakeful prophets of Israel, rising throughout the land at the approach of the hosts of Sennacherib. Such was the shriek (as the word literally means) which arose from Philistia on the approach of the same colossal invader, "Wail, you Philistine cities, for you are doomed! Melt in fear, for everyone will be destroyed."

Such, above all, was the cry, unparalleled in its fearfulness, which arose from the unfortunate millions of doomed Jerusalem—the dirge of woe which was heard amid the horrid blaze of their temple and city—an utterance of despair so loud and terrible, that, in the words of the historian, the very mountains around gave back the echo. Such is the cry which is still, ever and anon, heard from wounded, tortured, terror-stricken nations, when the sword leaps from its scabbard at the bidding of unbridled ambition, and plunges whole kingdoms into mourning—or when oppression lifts its cruel rod, and the old, old story is told of the strong trampling on the weak; wringing a mournful wail from the down-trodden and enslaved.

In our great Indian Empire, it seems but yesterday, since a similar shriek of bereft widows and desolate orphans ascended to the skies. The war-drum has again been heard. The dogs of war have been again let loose, and a louder moaning than all has just ascended from bloody battlefields,

and that, too, in the midst of the fairest provinces of God's earth, desecrating the name alike of Christianity and civilization, "enough to make devils triumph and angels weep." Alas! that cry will be echoed and perpetuated so long as the Prince of darkness holds sway over the pride and passions of fallen humanity.

Blessed be God, in Heaven, that "cry," in whatever sense we take it, shall never be heard. "There shall be no more Crying." One of the songs of the ransomed citizens of the New Jerusalem, as they call to their now conquered oppressors, will be, "My enemies have met their doom; their cities are perpetual ruins. Even the memory of their uprooted cities is lost." We read in ver. 24, "The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it." Whatever was great and glorious and honorable among these earthly kings and sovereigns will be brought into the new City and kingdom of the redeemed. But no crown shall be there stained with sinful ambition—no scepter dimmed with the lust of conquest—no spirit debased with the cannibal-thirst of war. No, the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for peace shall be within its walls and prosperity within its palaces. How joyful to forecast the glories of that celestial city where "there shall be no more Crying!"

IV. Neither shall there be any more PAIN. Descend we yet once more to the supposed picture-gallery of Earth. It is this time, again, a quiet, secluded corridor in these halls of sadness. We leave the loud din and cry of multitudes; and our thoughts are centered on the picture of one solitary object. For long years, that wasted invalid has been prostrated on a couch of distress, uttering day by day the weary plaint, "Would God it were evening; would God it were morning;" suffering ploughing its deep furrows on the cheek—every nerve a chord of anguish—gnawing pain fastening, vulture-like, on every bone and sinew; the very footfall of loving friendship forbidden to cross the hushed chamber, lest it may awake sensations of torture.

Or, is there not emotional pain as well as physical suffering? Yes; there are painful duties, painful associations, painful meetings, painful partings, painful separations. There is the pain of breaking up and severing valued and trusted friendships. There is the pain (what parent



has not felt it when it comes?) of the first break in the family. There is the pain of having oceans and continents intervening between those whom the ties of nature, or the accidents of life, have taught us to love. There is the pain which Paul's Ephesian friends had, when they accompanied him to the ship at the Port of Miletus, and in solemn prayer the parting blessing of Heaven was asked and given.

There is the worse emotional pain of unhappy estrangement between Christian and Christian—those who are conscious of loving the one Lord, yet passing and repassing on the street without one sign of acknowledgment and recognition; alienated by some miserable party distinction or some still more unworthy private misunderstanding, which in their better moments and better natures they deplore with tears.

But in Heaven there shall be no more pain of any kind and the key to all the blessedness of this deathless, sorrowless, painless place is, that it is to be a Holy city; "I John saw that Holy city." Hushed will be the cry of anguish, because ended forever will be the reign of sin.

And now, having explored these four picture-galleries of Earth, to illustrate by contrast the fourfold negative bliss of Heaven—let us bear in mind, in conclusion, to whom it is we owe all the joys, positive and negative, of this celestial city—who is it that has plucked that sting from death; that has hushed, and will at last forever hush, that voice of wailing and crying and pain? We must revert to the magnificent opening vision of the Book—to the majestic Being who was seen walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and hear His voice: "Fear not; I am He that lives and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of the grave and of death."

Enter by faith the Redeemer's vacant tomb. See the vestments in which He had been wrapped. These are lying scattered on the rocky floor, the blessed vouchers and evidences, that in behalf of all His covenant people, He has burst the bands of death. But behold, too, a further significant symbol. The napkin is folded up. It is carefully laid by. It is of use no more. The time of tears is over. The weeping world has had its anguish hushed by that risen Conqueror. Its sorrow, its crying, its pain—oh! for a little longer these may, and will continue. But the fear of eternal anguish,

eternal weeping, eternal crying, is now past! And so brief is our weeping time during earth's passing night, so near is the tearless hour, that the napkin may well be folded up, "wrapped together in a place by itself." Gaze upon it reposing in the tomb of Jesus as the pledge of a tearless immortality.

Blessed Savior! You who shed for me, not Your tears, but Your blood, open these gates of righteousness in the celestial city; then shall I enter into them, and praise the Lord. It is Your sovereign grace and bleeding love which will bring me there! This, shall be my ascription now, in sight of these jeweled gates and jasper walls, and my ascription, when admitted as a glorified inhabitant, "Blessed be the Lord, who has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong City!"

## **THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE**

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him." Rev. 22:1-3

In the previous chapter, we had the sublime description of Heaven as a City, the palatial residence of the glorified Bride of Christ—a city without temple, without light of sun or moon, or material luminary, yet resplendent with eternal radiance. Here we have conjoined to it a restored Paradise, with its crystal river and perennial Tree of Life. Earth's

two holiest spots, Eden and Jerusalem, are thus employed in blended symbol, further to image forth a bliss which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. The verses form a befitting climax to the series of preceding visions. How often have they been listened to by the dying believer, cheering him in his passage through Jordan, tuning his voice to his closing earthly song, until its notes mingle with those of the Seraphim!

Let us seek to gather from them a few additional thoughts, under new emblems, of the nature of the coming Heavenly bliss—a few additional glimpses of the Everlasting Home. The reader must bear so far with repetition; although under varying imagery, some of the same characteristics recur with which we are already acquainted. The inspired Painter loves to delineate over and over again the same subject, only rendering it under new aspects.

The first thought here regarding the happiness in reserve for the saints of God in their future Heaven is, that it is a divinely-originated happiness. John sees this River of the Water of Life "flowing from the Throne of God;" it has its fountain-head there. Could the simile possibly have been suggested by the only river-source with which he was familiar in Palestine, and which had to him the holiest of memories; that which no traveler who has seen it can ever forget—the welling up of the Jordan in the cavern at the base of giant Mount Hermon ('the kingly mountain'), itself the most glorious emblem in that land of sacred symbol of the Throne "Eternal in the Heavens?" Proceeding from the footstool of this mountain-throne, the Jordan river, from the gush of its pure stream, might well suggest the words, "the river of the water of life."

This, too, is the first feature in the vision which arrests the attention of the apostle; for, although the scenery on either side of the river occupied the foreground of the picture (nearer his point of vision,) yet, before entering on its description, he follows the Stream to its source. He sees it rising up from the foot of the Throne of God! And this will form one of the great elements of joy to the ransomed saints above, tracing all their wealth of bliss and glory to its origin in the free sovereign grace and love of Jehovah! Except for His sovereign grace, there could have been no river, no harp, no crown, no song. By the grace of God they are what they

are!

Moreover, not only does the vision tell that God is the author and source of all happiness in heaven, but that He Himself constitutes heaven's happiness! It is an emanation from Him—its beams radiate from the great central Sun. Let the proclamation be sounded in the upper Sanctuary—"There is no God"—and the joys of Heaven would terminate. Annihilate that majestic Throne, and the river would cease to flow; the blessedness of angels and the Redeemed, would be at an end. There may be, and there doubtless will be, other joys; but God Himself will be to His Ransomed their "exceeding joy." Jerusalem of old had no river. No Tigris, or Euphrates, or Tiber washed her walls, or flowed through her environing valleys. The Jordan was at a distance, and the Kedron was a winter torrent, which left a dry channel all summer long. But she had a nobler equivalent and compensation—"The glorious Lord will be to her in the place of broad rivers and streams." This, in a loftier sense, will be true of the Heavenly Jerusalem—"GOD is in the midst of her." The song of earth will be the song of eternity, "all my springs are in You," "with You is the fountain of life."

A second element in the Heavenly bliss of the redeemed, spoken of in these words, is that it is a happiness derived from, and dependent upon, the atoning work of Christ. The river proceeds from "the Throne of God and of the Lamb." And it is again added, in verse 3, "But the Throne of God and of THE LAMB shall be in it." 'The Lamb' denotes in this Book, as we now well know, the sacrificial name of Jesus. While we are reminded by "the Throne of God" of the purposes of love in the adorable Trinity from all eternity, we are specially reminded that the redeemed, as they crowd by the banks of the River of Life watching its outflowing, will trace up all their covenant privileges to the Savior who died for them, and make this their eternal ascription, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, for You have redeemed us unto God by Your blood!" They will see every gem of their crown, resplendent with His atoning work and righteousness. They will understand then the full meaning of that expression of Paul's, where Heaven is spoken of as "the purchased possession."

Each gate of this 'City of the Crystal sea' will bear the inscription, "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." No, more, it recalls one of

the truths of a former vision, which we need not again expand, the perpetuity of the exalted humanity of the Savior. Though His throne is spoken of here, denoting His Deity and kingly Sovereignty, it is the Throne of THE LAMB. He will still be known in the midst of His redeemed Church as the sacrificial victim of Calvary—not only the Brother in our nature, but as "Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood!"

The next thought these words bring before us, is also one with which previous visions have made us familiar, that the heavenly happiness will be pure in its nature. It will be the happiness of holiness. If we take the River as symbolic of the believer's bliss, its purity specially arrested the attention of the Apostle. "He showed me a pure river of the Water of life;" and in verse 3 it is said, "there shall be no more curse." The greatest curse of all, is the curse of sin. That curse will be at an end; and the Redeemed will know, in all its beauty and fullness, the truth of the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

How present happiness and peace are marred and polluted by impurity! The breath of sin blurs the windows of the soul; the curse of sin blights the fairest flowers in the earthly garden. The corruption of the heart, like the wind on the surface of the lake, disturbs its loveliest reflections; and every stream that flows from it is ruffled and troubled too. Many a man, with all the world can give to make him happy—riches, honors, fame—is wretched, because of the venom of some serpent-sin, which he has nurtured and fondled, to the destruction of his own peace! The moral virus has tainted his whole life and being—he has become the slave of his lust and is therefore miserable. Look at the world around us—what a scene of fretfulness and agitation! How unlike the divine picturing of the Seer of Patmos! Mark sin's 'plottings and counter-plottings'—its envyings and slanders—its frauds and ambitions—its feuds and hatreds—and intense love of self.

By that pure River of Life there will be no such disturbing causes—"no curse" (or "accursed thing"); but one vast community of holy beings pervaded by one law—the law of love. We shall be happy, because holy; heaven will be found to consist in assimilation to the divine character in its holiness—the blending of the human with the divine will. "It does not

yet appear what we shall be" (there is much regarding the circumstantial of heavenly bliss which remains unrevealed); "but (this) we know, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." "And," adds the Apostle, "let every man that has this hope in him, purify himself even as He is pure." Think once more of this often reiterated qualification of heavenly citizenship. It is "a pure river of the water of life" on whose banks the Redeemed are to recline, and of whose streams they are to drink. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord."

A fourth element of future Heavenly joy suggested in these words is, that there shall then be a full disclosure and revelation of all that is mysterious in earthly dispensations. What often makes the river of earth dark and turbid, is the mystery of the Divine dealings. We watch that river in its flow, or gaze down into its channel, but all is muddy, baffling, perplexing—"Your judgments are a great deep." But John, as he gazes, sees not only a pure river, but it is translucent—it is "clear as crystal." In God's own light he sees light—all will be revealed then. Every 'why' and 'wherefore' will be resolved—every "needs be" will be interpreted and explained. As we stoop over the crystalline depths, the ascription often before uttered through tears, will be then made with jubilant voice, "Righteous are you, O Lord;" "We have known" (and now believe) "the love of God to us!"

A fifth characteristic of future Heavenly happiness here suggested is its diversity. The figure of the River is now changed to that of a Tree. "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Unlike the fruit-bearers of earth, which had only their annual crop and no more, it is fruit-yielding each successive month of the eternal year—it has its twelve fruit harvests. That Tree is Christ! We read of the Tree of life in Eden lost. Here we read of it again in Paradise regained. No flaming sword now guards the way. It stands in the open street, free to every glorified citizen—the pledge and guarantee of his immortal joy. In Jesus, this ever-living Tree, there is found every kind of exalted happiness; bliss suited to the varied tastes and capacities and spiritual longings of His ransomed people. All are pictured as being congregated under its majestic shadow, gathering the food they most desire; and no sooner is one crop gathered—than lo! the branches are

anew laden and the baskets anew filled.

"There is a river, the STREAMS (the manifold streams) whereof make glad the city of God." How different from earth! There, often when one stream is dried, all is dried. One awful misfortune comes, and the heart pines and withers, and nothing else can fill up its aching voids; one gourd is smitten, and nothing can reanimate its drooping, withered leaves. Even those on earth whose worldly cup has been fullest, who know best what joy is, how short-lived, how unsatisfactory, after all! How it palls on the worn-out appetite, if it have no higher and nobler element in it!

But in Heaven the blessedness is ever new. Its characteristics are—abundance, variety, perpetuity. "You are complete in Him." The Tree, the River, the Leaves, seem beautifully to harmonize with the successive emblems, which, in a preceding vision, describe the happiness of the glorified. Is it the Tree and its abundant fruits? "They shall hunger no more." Is it the River of living water? "They shall thirst no more." Is it the shadowy overcanopying Leaves with their healing influences? "The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat." The believer's bliss being a covenant one, and divine in its origin (flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb), is changeless and inexhaustible! No darkness can cloud it—no rock of human vicissitude can impede its current. It flows on, and on, forever, "to the ages of the ages!"

Once more. The words indicate another constituent element in the happiness of Heaven (which has also been anticipated in a previous vision), that is, the activities of a glorified life, "and His servants shall serve Him." Heaven is not to be a blank existence. Even on earth there is a blessing in the law of labor—a blessing wrapped up in the very curse, "In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." The most wretched of lives is a life of compelled idleness. The most joyous is a life of active usefulness—the apostolic combination of diligence in business with fervency in spirit. And the same law will hold good in Heaven. It will be no dreamy, sentimental, Mohammedan Paradise. The Redeemed will be engaged serving God in active ministries of holy love. "They rest," and yet "they rest not." They rest in the perfect peace of God, the realized possession of His favor. But they rest not, in the labor of a faithful service. Their highest happiness is in doing His pleasure. They "serve Him day

and night in His temple."

What a pleasure on earth, a faithful servant experiences in doing the work of his master well! Even when such fidelity may be little deserved, or such labor poorly requited, it is rendered cheerfully from a sense of duty. What infinitely higher and purer joy will those Redeemed Saints in Heaven have, in serving ONE all worthy of their love, and who has infinite and surpassing claims on their regard! Then, at least, shall they serve Him with a devotion that never flags, a constancy that never falters, a singleness of eye and aim which admits of no deflection or deviation, a zeal which knows no decay. Duty will be transformed into delight. God's service will be its own noblest recompense. The cry of the old champion, as he first girded on his armor, will be the joy of eternity, "Lord! what will you have me TO DO?"

How are we affected by these renewed glorious picturings of a future Heaven? Is it to us a pleasing prospect, that all the evils once brought in by Sin are to be removed—that the unstrung tuneless harp is to have its old harmonies revived—that our lost Eden is to be more than restored, for it is to be restored without the possibility of failure or fall. We have been again specially reminded of Heaven's main moral characteristic. If this passage had described nothing but material beauty—the River, the Tree, the luscious Fruits, the Golden-paved streets, these would all (in themselves) fail to satisfy the aspirations of the Redeemed Soul. But "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."

Nor are these spiritual blessings (symbolized by the Tree and its abundant fruitage) blessings reserved only for the future. They are ours now. We are invited now to partake of these fruits, and to repose under that shelter. "Christ who is our Life." Life is now alone found in Him; out of Him is death—the curse. Like the emblem of this Heavenly vision too, He is accessible at all times. The Tree bears fruit every month. Every month of life's momentous year we may come to Him. Youth may come to Him in spring. Manhood may come to Him in summer. Even Old age may take shelter under these glorious branches. When other trees of existence are bared and stripped by winter blasts, He is filled with leaves, a refuge



from the storm and a covert from the tempest.

In the bright months of prosperity, in the dreary months of adversity; in months of sickness when laid on the lone pillow; in the dark months of bereavement, this Tree is stretching forth its sheltering arms of mercy, that every weary, wandering bird may be screened from the gathering tempest. God grant that we may experience in part now, and in their glorious reality for evermore, the fulfillment of the Psalmist's exulting words, "He who dwells in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty!"

## **CLOSING CHIMES**

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Rev. 22:7

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. Rev. 22:11-12

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Rev. 22:17

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Rev. 22:20

We have now arrived at the close of our meditations on this deeply interesting, though mysterious and difficult portion of the Word of God. In accordance with what was stated at the outset, whatever is ambiguous and conjectural, has, as much as possible been avoided, and from the golden treasure-house, selection has been made only of those passages which are most practical, solemnizing, edifying, and comforting. It has been called by Wordsworth, who has grasped well its spiritual meaning and significance, "a manual of consolation to the Church in her pilgrimage through this world to the Heavenly Canaan of her rest. It

cheers with the consolatory assurance, that Christ is mightier than His enemies; that they who die for Him, live; that they who suffer for Him, reign; that the course of the Church upon earth is like the course of Christ Himself; that she is here a Witness of the Truth; that her office is to teach the world; that she will be fed by the Divine Hand, like the ancient Church, with manna in the wilderness; that she will be borne on eagles' wings in her missionary career; and yet, that she must expect to suffer injuries from enemies and from friends; that she, too, must look to have her Gethsemane and her Calvary, but that she will also have her Olivet; that through the pains of agony and suffering, and through the darkness of the grave, she will rise to the glories of a triumphant ascension, and to the everlasting joys of the New Jerusalem; that she who has been for a time 'the Woman wandering in the Wilderness,' will be, forever and ever, the Bride glorified in heaven."

The great topic of the Second Coming of Christ, with which we are now so familiar, again challenges our consideration, standing out, as it does, more prominently in this concluding chapter than in any of the antecedent portions of the Apocalypse. We may appropriately liken these reiterated closing references to the ringing of the chimes with quickening peal, as the worshipers are gathering to take their places in the Heavenly Temple. Again, and again, and again, and yet again (four times in this one chapter), do these bells sound in the ears of a waiting expectant Church. First, in verse 7, "Behold, I come quickly." Second, in verse 12, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Third, in verse 17, where 'The Coming One' had beautifully announced Himself as "The Bright and Morning Star;" the response—the longing-prayer—rises in blended harmony from the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come." Once more, in verse 20, the last audible voice of the Great Redeemer until that voice be heard on the Throne—gives too the assurance of His speedy coming. We close the Divine record with this "blessed hope," like a rainbow of promise spanning the sky of the future, "He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!"

Has the Lord been slack concerning His promise? The hands of the clock of Time have moved slowly on, generation after generation since these

declarations were uttered, and the Advent-hour has never yet struck. There is still no sign of the "Coming"—no sound of the Savior's footfall. We strain our eyes from the window of prophecy; and though, at times, prognosticators and solvers of chronological numbers would persuade us that they see the heralds of His approach—the indications of the Morning Star; new events transpire to demolish their theories—the world goes on as before, and 'the glorious appearing' is as far from us apparently as ever. Like the mother of Sisera looking through the lattice, the cry of deferred hope still is, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

"The Church has waited long,  
Her absent Lord to see,  
And still in loneliness she waits,  
A friendless stranger she.

"Age after age has gone,  
Sun after sun has set,  
And still in weeds of widowhood  
She weeps, a mourner yet."

How is this? How are we to reconcile the repeated assertions of a Savior who is faithful in all His promises, with the fact that eighteen centuries have traveled onward in succession, and yet the great culminating promise of a speedy coming has not been fulfilled? In reply, we may begin by giving the words of another Apostle, "Beloved, do not be ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Space and time are two relative terms. Is it space? a yard, even a mile, is a brief distance to us; it is a laborious pilgrimage to the tiny insect. To traverse a hemisphere would be for us a vast journey; it would be but a moment in the angel's flight. A planetary system would appear a wide expanse to the angel; it would be but a speck in the eye of God—one of the milestones of immensity, so to speak, in the journeyings of Omnipotence!

So also with regard to Time. Periods of time which seem great to some, may seem small to others. Look at the ephemera, with their apparently

fugitive moments of conscious being. They were called into existence after the morning sun had risen, and before he sets again, they have perished. The same day witnesses their birth and their death. Their lifetime to us, is like the briefest of one day out of our threescore and ten years. All things are thus long or short, great or small, according to the standard by which we judge them. Hills that appear high to the peasant born in the plains, are nothing to the shepherd of the Alps and Apennines. The inland lake which appears large to the child who has never been beyond the mountains which enclose it, is nothing to the sailor who is familiar with the wide ocean. The swiftness of the railway train or of the cannon ball is great; but what is it to the man of science, who can compute the velocity of light—those golden arrows shot from the sun at the rate of 192,000 miles in a second?

We may apply this to the saying of Christ in these verses. The period elapsing between His first and second Coming is great to us, but nothing to Him. To us, during these indefinite ages, generations have already come and gone; revolutions of empires have taken place; kingdoms have risen and fallen, and new dynasties have sprung from their ashes. But what is that to the everlasting God, with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night? Our standard to measure periods and events is 'Time.' His standard to measure periods and events is 'Eternity.'

ETERNITY—it is the lifetime—the biography of the Almighty—each epoch and era a page in the vast volume! If we compute from the birth of creation, when the first pillar of the earth was laid, to the period when the angel shall proclaim 'time to be no more,' it may appear a long lapse of ages—eras on eras—millenniums on millenniums; yet in His sight, compared with Eternity, what is it all? as the beat of a pulse, or the swing of a pendulum. When, therefore, we may be inclined to wonder at the apparent non-fulfillment of Christ's assertion, let us remember who says it! It is He to whom past, present, future, are alike the same. What to Him is that span of years, be what it may, which bridges the period between His first and second coming? It is as nothing! As He is leaving with His servant and Evangelist His last inspired utterance, and the clouds which screen Him from mortal vision are once more gathering around Him, He

exclaims, taking all time in at a glance, "Surely I come quickly!"

Again, it is worthy of remark, that in the apparent delay of the second Coming, God is only acting in conformity with His own uniform procedure and with the principles of His government, alike in nature and providence. In accordance with the analogy of nature, the Divine purposes are slowly matured. The full light of day is not ushered in all at once. There is first the glimmering dawn, then sunrise; gradually the fiery chariot is driven up the steeps of heaven. The development of vegetation follows the same progressive law, from the incipient bud of early spring, through the green leaves and blossoms of summer, to the golden glories and ripe fruits of autumn. Our world might have been created by a word—the fiat of the Almighty might have formed and finished it in the twinkling of an eye—but He purposely took six periods of time to elaborate His own handiwork before pronouncing it very good. In the physical and mental development of man—the High Priest of this creation—we have to note the same thing—he reaches his natural stature and his intellectual maturity, not at once—but after the lapse of many years.

And so it is in greater things. There is a plan in all God's dealings and providential arrangements. There was a preparation of a thousand years before the first advent of Christ. He, the promised Seed of the woman, might have come at once—in the very hour of the Fall. He might have come (as Eve expected Him) when she hailed her firstborn child with the words "I have gotten a man—the Lord!" That Lord might have glorified Eden with His presence, and restored its blighted, withered bowers. But such was not God's way. A long ritual of blood and sacrifice had to intervene. Prophecy upon prophecy had to be uttered and fulfilled. Many an old pious Hebrew "looked" anxiously; but, like Simeon and Anna, they had to "wait" for the Consolation of Israel. There was an era set apart and appointed, called "the fullness of time," when the Incarnation would take place, and no sooner.

Christ seems to have anticipated with holy ardor that appointed period. When it arrived He came "quickly." "Lo I come!" were His words, "I delight to do Your will, O my God." Moreover, even after His advent to the manger of Bethlehem, many years elapsed before the great Offering

took place. He would not—could not anticipate. He would not leave Galilee for Judea until "the hour had come." But no sooner had the appointed season elapsed, than His reserve and reluctance are set aside: then He waited not a moment—again He came "quickly." "When the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." "There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished."

So also is it with regard to His future Coming. Certain great transactions have to take place in the world; certain great events have to be evolved, before the grand climax of His advent in glory. He Himself tells us that His gospel must be "preached as a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come." It is remarkable that even His apostles, though their language at times seems to indicate that they expected the Advent in their own day—specially note some great antecedent occurrences, which leave the period not only indeterminate, but connect it with a distant future. Paul speaks of a great "apostasy" preceding it, "That day shall not come unless there be the apostasy (or falling away) first, and that Man of Sin be revealed." James exhorts to patient endurance and waiting; and gives the comparison of the husbandman having patience for the maturity of his seed; as if he looked far onwards to the Great event which was to signalize the world's harvest-home. Peter, while in one breath he speaks of the end of all things being at hand, and this as a motive to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer, guards in the next, against the unwarrantable inference of a coming of Christ in the generation then living.

And what have we seen in this Book of Revelation, in which the same topic is so constantly introduced, but the record of a series of providential dispensations, which must all occur before Christ can take to Himself His great power and reign? These repeated statements in this chapter regarding the Second Advent, are inserted in the form of a postscript to the Book. Might they not be equivalent to the declaration, "When all these preceding visions are accomplished, when all these seals are broken, these vials exhausted; when the power of the false Prophet is crushed, and Romanism trodden underfoot, the great Dragon cast out, Apollyon the deceiver vanquished; when the mission angel shall have sped his way amid the world's benighted millions; when every nation

shall have heard the joyful sound; when the Jews, My own outcast people, shall have caught up the universal hymn, and mingled with the Gentile Hosanna their Hebrew 'Alleluia'—then (immediately after) I shall Come QUICKLY! I am only waiting the signal that the mystery of God on earth is finished, and the gates and everlasting doors of Heaven which lifted up their heads that I might enter in, shall be once more opened, that I may come forth to pour My benediction on My redeemed Church."

Zecharias of old "tarried in the temple;" the people waited for him. It is so with our Great High Priest. He has said, "I come quickly." He seems to tarry. But there is work to do before the celestial veil can be withdrawn, and we can see Him as He is. "From henceforth," we read, (after His ascension), "He is waiting until His enemies be made His footstool." But whenever these preliminary conquests over His enemies are complete; whenever the final intercessory prayer ascends, "Father, I will that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am;" then with joy ('quickly') will He appear, to utter the last and most gladsome of all His invitations, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

And, in addition to what has already been said, it may be yet further added, that when Christ says, "Behold I come quickly," and has not come, the delay may be to give the world space for repentance. This is one of the views which the apostle Peter emphatically sets forth: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (of His second Coming), as some men count slackness; but is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." There was a reprieve of 120 years, in the case of the dwellers on the old earth, before the flood came and destroyed them all; and now, again, before the deluge of fire sweep, He would give space—"He would command all men everywhere, to repent." His not coming quickly, is a gracious token of His marvelous forbearance. He will give this prodigal world an opportunity, before He closes the gates of home and welcome, to arise and go to its Father.

There is a merciful pause and parenthesis before the final doom is uttered. Like that emphatic pause and ellipsis in the words of Micah, He says, "And because I will do this to you, 'Prepare to meet your God!'" The patience of God waited in the days of Noah before the reservoirs were

unsealed. The patience of God waited in the days of Abraham before the bolts of fire leapt from the brimstone-cloud, and laid Sodom and Gomorrah in ashes; and His patience is now again manifested in this last dispensation, that sinners may yet embrace the call to repent and be saved, and that every living member of His living Church throughout the world may be gathered in.

But without dwelling on these and other possible reasons for the delay of the Coming, the word is sure, "He that shall come, will come and will not tarry." "SURELY I come quickly." In other things we may have varied experiences. Some may never know what sickness is. Some may never know what the loss of worldly substance is; what it is to confront chill poverty, or to hear orphans crying for food which they have not to give. Some may never know what bereavement is; to have stripped houses, vacant chairs, and desolate and aching hearts. But "every eye shall see HIM!" "We must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ." The Second Advent is to the believer a glorious, to the wicked a dreadful certainty.

How strange that this magnificent truth should exercise so little practical influence over us. Everything else in the world is uncertain. The ordinary business of life (trade and merchandise) is built on contingencies. The soldier goes forth to field and fame; but fever strikes him down before he plants his foot on the enemy's shores—before he has opportunity to wreath his brow with laurel. The voyager goes forth on his ocean-highway, anticipating the fond welcome of friends in the distant harbor; but rocket and lifeboat and heroic effort all fail to save, when the fatal reef is struck. The merchant sends forth his vessel, borne along with propitious breezes, but when in sight of port it founders or a mighty cyclone comes, as if the very spirits of the deep were stirred—its moorings are snapped as string—its timbers are tossed on the wild waves, and its owner is a ruined man. The farmer has his fields filled with a golden harvest—in one night the rains have descended on the mountains—down sweeps the torrent, and his waving crops are a mass of desolation. You can say "Surely," of nothing here; all is 'Perhaps'. But the Lord is "not a man that He should lie." "He SHALL come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all those who believe." "SURELY," He says, "I come



quickly!"

Believer, be it yours to be living in the habitual anticipation of this day. This prospect put music of old into the lips of Patriarchs and Psalmists and Apostles and Prophets. "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad . . . before the Lord; for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth." "The Lord, my God, shall come, and all the saints with You." The Apostle Peter, like a watcher on cliff or tower, eager to catch the earliest beam of sunrise, speaks of "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God."

We have already adverted to the remarkable contrast between the way the inspired writers speak of Death and of Christ's Second Coming. Death! it is ever described as an enemy—a terrible foe armed with a sting—a destroyer, a usurper. But the Second Coming of the Redeemer is the topic of joyous expectation. Believers are represented as servants, cheerfully working on during their Master's absence; but all alert for the sound of His footsteps, that "when He comes and knocks, they may be ready to open unto Him immediately." We know well, that this most glorious yet dreadful of truths has been despised by the scoffer, and made the subject of unholy derision. The challenge is presumptuously made, 'Where is this speedy coming which is spoken of? It is a tale of superstitious terror—a lie for which you have no authority, save the ambiguous words of an antiquated Book.'

Because the Lord delays His coming; because nature maintains her unvarying sequences; because she has no sign of age or decay on her majestic brow; he cannot credit the amazing truth that all these visible things shall one day be dissolved. So thought men, "filthy dreamers," before the flood. They would not believe the tremendous catastrophe, until the waters were sweeping down their refuges of lies; and they found, when it was too late, that the door of the ark and of mercy was shut against them! May it not be so with us? There may be in our case, as with them, a time of reprieve—a merciful period of grace and forbearance—when from the true Ark there is a voice heard saying, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest."

If the eye of one such unhappy scorner should fall on these pages, let him

avail himself of this "the day of merciful visitation." Forbid that when the deluge is heaving, the trumpet sounding, the world passing away, he should come to find, but find too late, that "neither is there salvation in any other;" to bewail wasted years, lost opportunities, misspent Sabbaths, niggardly and selfish deeds, unrighteous and unjust practices, his work all undone when his time is done! For, let such observe, that there are warning sounds which mingle in this closing chapter with other joyous advent chimes.

Among these, none is more solemn than that verse which asserts the permanence and perpetuation of moral character—that as men live, so do men die; that present principles, habits, tastes, are shaping, molding, consolidating, our eternal destinies. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. Behold, I come quickly, and," it is added, "My reward is with Me to give" (or literally, "to give back") "each one as his work is." "To give back!" solemn, truthful, equitable definition of a limitless future of bliss or of woe! It is a 'giving back' to each one of the present—a paying back of contracted debt, whether of good or of evil—a reaping corresponding to the sowing—the awards of eternity scrupulously regulated by the transactions of time.

Is it not a comfort, also, to those who may be mourning their "loved and lost," that while the unjust will be unjust still, and the filthy will be filthy still; the holy will be holy still, the meek and gentle will be the meek and gentle still; those known for lowly and unostentatious deeds of love, will continue these ministries of holy activity through eternity. Yes! the flower we think nipped in the bud, will there unfold and expand its blossoms, shedding unfading fragrance, and decked with unfading beauty.

God grant we may not be in darkness, that that day should overtake us as a thief! Rather, as we now listen to the latest voice of the Great 'Testifier,' the last toll of the advent-bell, the last 'Memory of Patmos,' let it sound to us like strains of seraphic music floating on a midnight sea. Let it ring in our ears blended comfort and warning; tempering prosperity, mitigating adversity, moderating the world's ambitions, stimulating to holiness, preparing for heaven.

Whatever may be the antecedent or intervening events to which we have alluded, let the Second Coming itself tower above them all, in the glorious distance, like some colossal Alp, with plain and valley and lowlier mountain between, but rising peerless in the blue horizon, its gleaming top golden with heavenly sunlight, and from its eternal snows and hidden fountains sending forth ten thousand streams of hope and joy, to refresh the dwellers in the Valley of tears! Bright and Morning Star! Harbinger of eternal day! who will not bid You welcome!

"The SPIRIT says come!" The Divine Agent, whose own "coming," as the Paraclete or Comforter, was declared by the departing Savior to more than compensate the Church for her Redeemer's absence, hails the advent which is to crown and consummate His own work as the Glorifier of Christ.

"The BRIDE says come!" The ransomed Church on earth, longing for the bridal day of perfected bliss—the ransomed Church in heaven, saints, martyrs, departed friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus—take up the antiphonal strain, and cry COME!

A groaning CREATION, weary of the bondage of sin and sorrow, and longing to go forth from its leper-couch, walking and leaping and praising God, cries COME!

Can WE take up one of the multiplying echoes, and, blending our prayer with the sons of God, give willing response to the Apostle's closing invocation, "And let him that hears say COME?" In lowly rejoicing confidence, can we include ourselves in the sublime words of another faithful 'Watcher' for this glorious Day-spring, "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." 1 Thes. 4:16-18

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.

Amen. Rev. 22:20-21

"Christ is coming! let creation  
From her groans and travail cease;  
Let the glorious proclamation  
Hope restore and faith increase;  
Christ is coming!  
Come, O blessed Prince of Peace.  
Earth can now but tell the story  
Of Your bitter cross and pain;  
She shall yet behold Your glory,  
When Thou comest back to reign;  
Christ is coming!  
Let each heart repeat the strain.  
Long Your exiles have been pining,  
Far from rest, and home, and Thee;  
Soon, in heavenly vestures shining,  
Their Restorer they shall see.  
Christ is coming!  
Haste the joyous jubilee.  
With that 'blessed hope' before us,  
Let no harp remain unstrung;  
Let the mighty advent-chorus  
Onward roll in every tongue:  
Christ is coming!  
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come!

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Rev. 22:7

# **SUNSETS ON THE HEBREW MOUNTAINS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

If the following pages contained a mere roll and record of death-bed scenes, they would form a gloomy volume.

Such, however, is not their purpose. While the author has occasionally dwelt (as in the two opening chapters) on the closing hours of Scripture

worthies--whenever incidents of note in connection with these are recorded--he has, in general, rather sought to make their "last days" the standpoint for a retrospective view of character and history. It has been his endeavor, mainly to inculcate, not so much lessons from death, as lessons from life viewed from this, its solemn termination. As an eloquent writer has remarked--"Death is often at once the close and the epitome of existence. It is the index at the end of a volume. All a man's properties seem to gather round him as he is about to leave the world." There is often, moreover, a mellowed glory surrounding the hour of dissolution. God's saints are like forest trees in their golden autumn tints--grandest in decay when the hand of death is on them. They often hear, like Bunyan's hero, distant bells from the land of Beulah. Ministering angels seem to bring down draughts from the river of life, to refresh their spirits in the closing conflict.

Perhaps, to some, the name selected for the book may require explanation. If we regard the world of nature as a TYPICAL volume, full of suggestive analogies--an exponent and interpreter of the world of spirit--no symbol surely is more striking and appropriate than "SUNSET" is of Death. Every evening, as the sun goes down, we have a permanent type and enduring parable of the close of life, as well as a pledge and prophecy of the rising again in the eternal morning. The God of nature, in this His own hieroglyphic, countersigns the beautiful utterance of His Word--"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace," (Ps. 37:37.) In support of these assertions, reference might be made to the motto-verses from some of our best poets which head the following chapters. It will be seen that these masters of sacred song, in their delineations of the believer's death, have fondly clung to the same impressive figure. They have dipped their pencils in the golden hues of a western sky.

Few can have beheld a gorgeous sunset, without the same suggestive association. Incomparably the grandest scene the writer ever witnessed in nature, was a sunset on Mont Blanc. The "monarch mountain" had appeared during the day, under varied, shifting, capricious effects of light and shadow--at one time fleecy vapors, at another, darker masses obscuring his giant form. As evening, however, approached, all these

were dispelled--not a cloud floated in the still summer air, when the glowing orb hastened to his setting. The vast irregular pyramid of snow became a mass of delicately-flushed crimson. In a short time, the shadows of night crept up the valley, until nothing but the summit of the mountain retained the hectic glow of expiring life--a coronal of evanescent glory. This, also, in its turn, slowly and impressively passed away. The flaming sun of that long afternoon sank behind the opposite range of Alps; and the colossal mass in front, which, a few minutes before, had been gleaming with ruby splendor, now lapsed into a hue of cold gray, as if it had assumed robes of sackcloth and ashes, in exchange for the glow and warmth and brightness of life. The image and emblem could not be mistaken. Both fellow spectators at the moment gave expression to the same irresistible suggestion--What a sublime symbol--what an dreadful and impressive photograph of DEATH!

Nor was this all. When that last lurid glow was lingering on the summits, lighting up the jewels in this icy diadem, the sun itself had in reality already set--he had sunk behind the line of horizon. The valley beneath had long been sleeping in shadow, and lights were twinkling in the chalets. This, also, had its irresistible spiritual meaning and lesson, a lesson which is again and again noted and enforced in the succeeding pages--that the radiance of the sunset lingers after the earthly course has run--a man's influence survives death! These glorious orbs of the olden time have set for thousands of years, but their mellowed luster still irradiates the world's mountain-tops. Though dead, they yet "speak."

There is no teaching so interesting or so profitable as that of inspired biography. There are no lessons so grand or so suggestive as those derived from the study of the lives and character of the great heroes of the past, who manfully struggled through trial and temptation until crowned with victory. They are truly the world's great "artists." They have molded life. Wondrous as are the conceptions wrought out by the sculptor's chisel in breathing marble--what, after all, are these? Speechless creations--soulless, inanimate expressions of beauty and power. Grandeur, and more godlike, surely, has been the work of those "great ones of the olden time" who, by their words and deeds, have influenced successive ages--chiseled the moral features of mankind.



It is the humble wish of the writer, to act as guide to his readers through these corridors of hoary time, rich in this noblest sculpture. Amid the hum of a busy industry; amid the race for riches; amid the wheels and shuttles of labor--at the counter--in the exchange--the house--the family--let us learn from these great biographies how to live and how to die. Each character delineated in sacred story, if we read it aright, has some grand individual lesson to teach for this work-day world--some principle, or spiritual grace we do well to ponder; whether it be faith, or fortitude, or patience, or self-sacrifice, or submission, or endurance, or scrupulous honor. In a few of the examples selected, we have beacons to warn; but in the main, they are designed to guide, stimulate, and instruct. Let us watch the life-struggle, and profit by its close. Let us see how these candidates for immortality ran their race and reached their goal, and let us "go and do likewise."

With one exception, for reasons stated in the chapter itself, the author has restricted the "Sunsets" to those on "the Hebrew mountains." Though thereby constrained to exclude several well-known Bible characters, it has enabled him alike to set needful limits to the volume, and also to include some names less known and familiar in the roll of Hebrew worthies. He will not venture to offer any apology for the imperfections of the volume, and the inadequate justice done to a great theme. Such as it is, he commends these "sunset" memories to the Great Head of the Church, with the earnest hope and prayer--  
"That often from that other world on this  
Some gleams from great souls gone before may shine,  
To shed on struggling hearts a clearer bliss,  
And clothe the truth with luster more divine."

# ABRAHAM

## SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF MAMRE

"Then ABRAHAM breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite." Genesis 25:8-9

We begin with the oldest, and in many respects the most memorable, of all the "sunsets" on the Hills of Canaan--the departure of the illustrious Father of the Hebrew nation, whose name to the "children of ABRAHAM" is still their most treasured patrimony, the great household word in their world-wide home. There is little recorded in connection with the mere closing of the Patriarch's life. Like the sunsets with which his eyes were familiar in his own Eastern sky--we have no twilight hour--no melting shadows of eventide. Other death-beds in the olden time, as we shall find, were rendered remarkable by saintly counsels--children and children's children were summoned in to receive the hallowed benediction and catch the last glimpse of the dimming eye! All this is a blank in the terminating chapter of Abraham's history. Whether Isaac had stood by his dying parent's pillow, listening to parting attestations to God's faithfulness, and in some new visions of the "far-off" Gospel "day" had poured into his ear words of prophetic rapture--whether roving Ishmael had sped from his desert "castles" (Gen. 25:16) to receive and return the final blessing--whether old Eleazar of Damascus was there, faithful in death as he had been in life, lifting up his withered hands in prayer to "the Lord God of his master Abraham"--of all this, not a word is said--not even is the locality described where that great orb of Israel hastened to his setting. We have every reason to believe it must have been near to Mamre. But whether in some sequestered spot, with only a few of his own family around him, or amid the suppressed hum of a "city of tents," hushed in awe and silence under the shadow of death, we are not informed. The simple narrative tells us no more than that, at the ripe period of one hundred and seventy-five years, "Then Abraham breathed

his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite."

Nor is this silence of the biographer and of the Spirit of God without its significance. Does it not announce the lesson, constantly recurring in the succeeding pages, that life, and not death, is the all-important part of human history? We test the strength of the vessel, not by the way in which she entered the sheltered harbor, but by how she wrestled with the storm out in the defenseless ocean. We estimate the prowess of the warrior, not as he returns at the close of conflict, weak and weary, but as he bore himself up amid the fray, in the heat of battle. It is the opening and middle chapters of a man's biography that are the momentous ones, and which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, determine the character of the closing scene. It may, indeed, be soothing to the bereaved to listen at the hour of death to devout expressions of faith and hope--these, in the case of all, are hallowed keepsakes and souvenirs to be exchanged for no earthly treasure. But rather, far rather, would we revert to the even tenor of a close walk with God.

If the death-bed be in silence and gloom--if the spirit be hurried away to meet its Maker amid the ravings of delirium--what signify a few gathering clouds at sunset? Better is the memory of meekness and gentleness, patience and submission, through a bright heavenly life. Better surely these, than the reverse--a storm-wreathed life-sky--the sun of existence wading through clouds, and a watery burst of sunshine at the setting.

But brief as the record of Abraham's death is, it is not without its impressive lessons. Let us take clause by clause in the order of the inspired register.

"Then Abraham gave up the spirit." "The English word spirit," says an able critic and commentator, "is supposed to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *gast*, 'an inhabitant--inhabitant--guest'--and also 'spirit.' In popular use it is now restricted to the latter meaning. But the primitive idea seems to be that of dismissing the soul or spirit as the guest of the body." In this etymological sense the reference is peculiarly beautiful.

Abraham's spirit--his immortal and nobler part--was "a guest," a lodger or wayfarer in an earthly tent--a perishable dwelling. Its tent-life was not its home-life. It was like an imprisoned bird longing to soar away. And now the appointed time has come--the cage is opened--the winged tenant goes free. The tent is taken down, pin by pin--rope and stakes and canvas--and the "lodger for the night," forsaking the blackened patch in the desert--the smouldering ashes of his campfire--speeds away to "the better country"--

"His spirit with a bound

Left its encumbering clay;

His tent at sunrise on the ground

A darkened ruin lay."--Montgomery.

Not long ago, a group of Alpine villagers were engaged, in early summer, weeding their crops close to their native hamlet. Above them rose mountain piled on mountain, crested with jagged peaks of everlasting snow. A low, murmuring, crushing sound was heard at eventide, high up among these cliffs; a sound too familiar to be mistaken by experienced ears. It was the dreadful messenger of wrath and destruction. A fragment of rock, loosened in the topmost crags, became the nucleus and feeder of the avalanche. Down came the terrific invader, sweeping all before it, and burying the handful of huts in a common ruin. The villagers themselves escaped unhurt. Disentangling their mutilated furniture from the midst of the broken pine-rafters and stones, and thankful for their providential escape, they moved to the opposite slope of the valley, and reared their dwellings anew.

Death is that avalanche! "At such a time as we do not think!" It may be in smiling spring, or in radiant summer, or hoary winter--down it comes, destroying all that is fair and lovely and beautiful--rooting up tender flowers, budding blossoms, trellised vines, primitive forests--overwhelming "the house of the earthly tabernacle," and leaving it a mass of dilapidated walls and shattered timbers. But what of the inhabitant? What of the immortal inhabitant? The house is dissolved, but the tenant

is safe. A new home is reared for it. The soul leaves the wrecked bodily frame-work, and seeks the "building of God," "eternal in the heavens." The same idea is beautifully expressed by a Christian poet of the land of Luther in one of their funeral Hymns—

"Here in an inn a stranger dwelt,  
Here joy and grief by turns he felt:  
Poor dwelling, now we close your door,  
The task is o'er,  
The sojourner returns no more!

"Now of a lasting Home possest,  
He goes to seek a deeper rest.  
The Lord brought here; He calls away,  
Make no delay,  
This home was for a passing day."  
--Sachse.

The golden-winged butterfly soars aloft from its broken chrysalis home. Death, like the angel in Peter's dungeon, breaks the fetters of mortality, throws open the prison doors; and from the gloom of night, and the crash of the earthquake, leads the spirit out to gladsome day. Oh that we would ever view it as such--the exodus of life--the outmarching of the soul from its chains and its bondage to the land of rest and liberty and peace!

"He died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years." We must be struck with the tautology here. First the Patriarch's age is given in the previous verse—"Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years." (ver. 7.) Then it is added that he died--"in old age"--"a good old age"--"an old man"--"and full of years."

The reason of this redundancy of expression would have been better understood and appreciated by a Jew than by us. The Old Testament economy dealt largely in temporal blessings. These were bestowed as types and shadows and pledges of higher spiritual ones. Old age was one of these. "Wisdom" is represented in the Book of Proverbs with "length of days in her right hand." And the Psalmist, in enumerating the blessings heaped on the head of the righteous, says--"The Righteous shall flourish like the Palm-tree; he shall grow like the Cedar in Lebanon...THEY

SHALL STILL BRING FORTH FRUIT IN OLD AGE," (Ps. 92:12-14). "The hoary head is a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness," (Prov. 16:31).

In the case of Abraham, his advanced years were perhaps the more specially noted by his biographer as a testimony to God's fidelity to His promises. Eighty years antecedent to this time, in the earlier life of the patriarch, the Lord had led His servant forth amid the glories of an Eastern night, and pointed to the spangled skies as an emblem of his spiritual seed. In the solemn covenant which He made with him on that remarkable occasion, He included this among other promises, "And you shall go to your Fathers in peace, you shall be buried IN A GOOD OLD AGE!" (Gen. 15:15) Jehovah had been with him in life. He had been repeatedly true to His assurance, "Fear not, Abraham, I am your SHIELD, and your exceeding great reward!" (Gen. 15:1) And now "with long life" did He "satisfy him" before He fully showed him the promised "salvation!"

But this good old age--this fullness of years--this protracted life had its close. The sun lingered at his setting but he set at last! Abraham was "the friend of God," yet he died. He was the "Father of the Faithful," yet he died. All his greatness and goodness, and faith and patriarchal virtues, could not exempt him from the universal doom. "Though he lived long and lived well, though he did good and could be ill spared, yet he died at last." (Matthew Henry)

His first inheritance in Canaan was a grave for his dead. God had assured him that all the land his footsteps trod would yet be his own; but for many a year the Pilgrim Wanderer could only point to one little spot, and say, "That is mine." It was the field and the sepulcher he purchased of Ephron the Hittite, by the walls of Hebron, where he laid the body of Sarah, and where his own was next to follow. "I am a stranger and a sojourner," said he, as his eye fell for the first time on that grave. Let us seek to cherish the old Pilgrim's spirit. We may have no other foot of ground in the world which we can call our own--but we shall one day claim the narrow house "appointed for all living!" With our eye upon it, let us, with the great patriarch, confess that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

"He was gathered to his people." It is a pleasing and a hallowed thought, the dust of a household mixing together! The most sacred spot on earth is the place where the ashes of our kindred repose. And beautiful is the exception which one occasionally sees made in our own land, when, by reason of family misfortune and disaster or other causes, the old family property and inheritance has passed into other and alien hands--there is yet one spot which has been still preserved--where the yew tree and weeping willow every now and then have their stillness invaded by the tramp of the funeral throng!

Abraham had doubtless the same feeling. We know not where he died--but we are here expressly told that the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the Hittite, was opened to receive his lifeless remains. But is it this to which the historian alludes when he records of this illustrious saint that he was "gathered to his people?" Abraham's own people (his fathers) were not in Canaan but in Haran, and it is evidently not to them he refers, in the sense of being interred in their distant sepulchers, for the next verse informs us that this was not the case. Alike of Moses and Aaron it is said, in recording their death, "They were gathered to their people." But this plainly could refer to no vault where rested the ashes of their sires, for the loneliest of sepulchers was appointed them, amid the solitudes of Hur and Mount Nebo.

Without grounding too positively on an ambiguous phrase the statement of a great and comforting truth, which has other passages in its support, may we not, in common with many trustworthy interpreters, ancient and modern, venture with strong probability to conclude, that by the expression in question, the sacred writer meant, not that the patriarch's body, but that his soul was gathered to swell the ranks of that true "people" in the Church triumphant, with whom his name is so often associated in Holy Writ. His ashes were laid in the cave of Machpelah--(we come to a description of their funeral rites immediately)--but the biographer first describes the destiny of the nobler part. He speaks of Abraham as "giving up the spirit," (dismissing the spirit-guest from the earthly tabernacle,) then he follows that spirit in its arrowy flight, until he sees it folding its wings amid the ranks of "the people of God" in the Church of the glorified.

It affords a delightful theme for hallowed imagination, to picture the soul of this great and good man entering the gates of glory, to be welcomed by the Abels, and Noahs, and Enochs, and the unrecorded saints in the ranks of the redeemed, the pledge and first-fruits of a mighty "multitude which no man can number."

Moreover, we are left to infer that his was an immediate entrance on a glorified state. That the moment he breathed away his spirit, it took its place in the mansions of bliss. When, three hundred and thirty years subsequently, God appeared to Moses out of the burning bush at Horeb, He revealed Himself as "the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob." Our blessed Lord's own comment on which, in reply to the Sadducee objection to a resurrection, is, that Abraham was then alive--for God was "not the God of the dead, but of the living," (Matt. 22:32). And in His parable of "the Rich Man and Lazarus," He represents the glorified beggar as reclining on "the bosom of Abraham," (Luke 16:23).

This informs us that "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." They are a living people! Oh, most precious and consoling truth to those who have treasures in the tomb! Years after they have gone to their "long home;" when perhaps the moss may have gathered on their grave stones, and time has dismantled their old earthly dwelling, God appears to the lonely survivor and says--"Fear not! I am the God of your sainted one!--Fear not! I am his shield and his exceeding great reward." It gives us also the ennobling and encouraging assurance that when we die, if we die in the Lord, we go not to a strange or unfamiliar land; that yonder heaven is a second home. "Our people" (our loved and lost) are gathered there before us. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, parents and children, are waiting to welcome us, and to renew the old groups and greetings of hallowed earthly communion. When David said regarding the tender blossom that lay withered at his feet, "I shall go to him," can we suppose that the eye of that stricken parent rested only on the cold walls of the mausoleum where the cherished dust was to repose? No; his thoughts were dwelling on reunion in a better world, where affection's "silver cord" would no more be loosed, nor its "golden bowl" be broken.



Cheerless indeed would be the thought, as we lay beloved relatives in the grave, "I shall see you no more forever!" We cling to the belief that there shall be renewed friendships, undying restoration of earth's sweetest fellowships. How comforting especially must this expectation be to those who like Abraham are "full of years"--the last of their generation--the friends of their early life removed--the village, or street, or city where they were born, filled with new and unrecognized faces--the lights in their own homestead one by one extinguished--the trees of the home forest, one by one, cut down, and the gnarled trunks alone remaining! How cheering for them to think, when stretched on a death-bed, that they are not so much going from home as to home--that if they wish to be "gathered to their people," they must go to heaven! That that "dark Valley" from which they used, in the bright buoyant days of youth, to terrify them as something fearful, is really the avenue leading up to their Father's dwelling-place--the rendezvous of their kindred. As they draw near, they hear music and joy; and many a familiar voice exclaiming--"This my parent, my brother, my son, was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found!"

There is just one other entry in this register of Abraham's death--"And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah."

We read of no great funeral procession!--no trappings or pageantry of mock-mourning, such as mar the solemnity of death in modern times. There are only two mourners mentioned. More there may have been. As we read of Samuel that "all Israel" mourned him, so the thousands in the strange land who had come to recognize Abraham as a mighty prince (Gen 23:6) may have gathered in as mute spectators of the solemn scene. If they did, nothing is said of it. For anything we know the old servant of God may have uttered a wish, often expressed still--that no pomp, or equipage, or crowd should throng the way to the field at Mamre.

The sacred text pictures to us a grave, with only two attendants, paying the last tribute of filial devotedness to the most honored of parents! And who were these? Other sons had Abraham. But the heir and the outcast, the child of the bondwoman and the child of the free woman, are alone there the representatives of his family. See them smoothing his death pillow, composing his limbs, embalming his body, and committing it to

its last resting-place!

Beautiful and touching spectacle! Ah, Death! how often have you proved the healer of breaches? We know that a bitter hostility had separated the brothers; Hagar's son had never forgotten the hour of dishonor when he and his mother were thrust out by a jealous rival. Who can tell but the old father, before he closed his eyes in death, got the estranged children to lock their hands together in forgiveness? Be this as it may, we see them at all events in hallowed brotherhood, standing by the grave of the patriarch--Isaac with his meditative spirit, his soul full of burning memories of parental fondness--Ishmael, "the wild man" of the desert, leaning on his reversed spear--and both, on this sacred altar of their common affections, rekindling the smouldering embers of brotherly love. A pregnant lesson to divided relatives--divided families--divided churches--divided nations!

"He being dead yet speaks!" Is Abraham dead? His body sleeps, we believe to this day undisturbed, in the old cave of Machpelah, guarded by a cumbrous pile of rocks. But, the death-wail, which arose from the mouth of that grotto at Mamre, did not close the earthly record of this spiritual giant. His example and influence have been living through a hundred generations. His faith has been spoken of throughout the whole world. The lamp which he lit on leaving Haran, unquenched by the damp and darkness of the tomb, still burns bright and clear. The winds which shook the boughs, and at last laid prone on the ground this old Terebinth of Mamre, have blown its seeds into earth's thousand sequestered nooks and crevices. The sanctity of his great character never dies. How many a Jewish, yes, and Christian father--as with bereft and desolate heart he mourns over family losses--has had his misgivings and murmurings silenced and reproved as he thinks of that unparalleled surrender of the child of promise--God exclaiming, "Abraham! Abraham!"--the foreboding of heavy tidings--while the Patriarch with alacrity responded--"Here I am."

Let it be with us, in some imperfect degree, as with this holy saint. Let us seek to leave behind us some hallowed influence. He left behind him much that the world would call great--much cattle, substance, herds, flocks; a great name--a patriarch, a shepherd-king. But these were

nothing compared with what out peered them all--the testimony that he was "the Friend of God." (Hebron is still called El Khalyl, that is, "The Friend," from its having been the abode of the Patriarch.)

In this sense, may many of us be the children of Abraham; ambitious to bequeath as he did, not a legacy of money, or wealth, or honors, shekels of silver, herds of camels, or changes of clothing--but a legacy of holy living and happy dying--lives of sterling integrity and worth.

Who among us (I believe not one) but can summon up, amid the graves of our fathers and deceased relatives, some such sacred character--some hoary patriarch, some Abraham or Sarah--whose exalted and consistent walk has left on our minds impressions never to be effaced; who, when we think of true Christians, (Israelites indeed,) start up before us in vivid reality! They thought they bade us farewell when we were summoned to their death-chambers to receive a last blessing. No, deathless ones! you are, indeed, "gathered to your people," but in many an hour--in the rustle of the dense crowd, in the hush of unbroken solitude--your silvery voices are still heard. You are "gathered to your people," but the people you left behind you on earth still gather in thought around you. The flame has left for heaven, but the live-ashes still linger on the altar. The voice has ceased, but it reverberates in endless echoes among the earthly hills!

Nor let any suppose a long life like that of Abraham is required to fulfill the great purposes of existence. The expression in the sacred record is significant and suggestive, "an old man, and full." The words "full of years," are added by our translators, and are not in the original. "Full"--the idea is that of a tree, whatever its age and dimensions, whose branches, great or small, are filled with sap and clothed with verdure. This fullness is not to be measured or estimated by time or years. It is the fullness of character; ripeness for transplantation to the heavenly Paradise. The young sapling if covered with foliage is fulfilling the conditions and purposes of life, as much as the oldest inhabitant of the forest. Of the loving child or youth who has consecrated an early existence to God, and who leaves the memories of worth and goodness behind him, as well as of the hoary-headed saint with his mantle of snowy age, it may be said, "He died a hundred years old," (Isa. 65:20).

Let us seek especially, as we take the last look of Abraham's mausoleum, to be partakers of his FAITH. It was this exalted and exalting grace which made him the hero that he was. "Faithful Abraham" is the eulogy which, more than once, inspired lips pronounce over his ashes. Faith was the motive principle, the guiding star throughout his chequered history. It was FAITH--simple, calm, dignified trust in the bidding of God--which led him from his paternal plains to the wild glens of distant Canaan. It was faith which reared altar upon altar wherever his tent was pitched. It was faith which girded on his armor against the confederate kings, and crowned him with victory. It was faith which dictated the unselfish proposals to Lot, in the partition of the land. Faith sent him to wrestle for the doomed cities of the plain. Faith enabled him to master the struggling emotions in his heart of hearts, in the hour when that grace culminated in its grandest triumph on the Mount of Sacrifice. Except in one solitary instance, his Faith ever forbade any mercenary calculations--any debate between duty and expediency--between natural affection and divine obedience. He had but one thought, and that was to obey his God--making his own will coincident with the Divine. He lived for this. It was enshrined in his soul, and sanctified and interpenetrated his whole being. GOD was to him food and clothing, home and country, Father and Friend--ALL! Abraham offers perhaps the grandest illustration earth has ever beheld of the great characteristic of the heavenly state, where the angelic will is finally and completely merged and absorbed in the Divine.

And the Great Being he so trustfully served, allowed not his faith to go unrecompensed. Never does the patriarch rear his altar, but the sacrifice is acknowledged by the promise of some new blessings. Never does he gird himself for some fresh heroic deed, but some inspiring vision or "word" is ready to meet him. If his own character was one magnificent example of--faith, obedience, self-surrender, and self-sacrifice, God in various ways, in the course of his history, repeats the touching and impressive picture of the King of Salem--coming forth to meet His servant with tokens of royal favor as "the King of Righteousness" and "peace." His life is like a mighty pyramid rising to heaven. Every stone of trustful obedience which Abraham lays, God cements with some new covenant token. That enduring pyramid of FAITH still towers above his ashes, testifying alike to the moral greatness of the patriarch and to the

faithfulness of Him "who promised."

Reader! have you this faith of Abraham--a faith which, as in his case, manifests its legitimate and invariable influence in "working by love," "purifying the heart" and "overcoming the world?" When you come to die, in what sense could it be said of you, "He is gathered to his people?" for this (in a widely different sense) will be said of all. "Say to the righteous," You shall be gathered to your people! "Say to the wicked," You shall be gathered to yours! The angels, who are to be the final ingatherers, are said to "bind" the righteous and wicked in separate "bundles." "The unjust" shall be gathered among the unjust bundles, to be "unjust still." "The filthy" shall be gathered among the filthy, to be "filthy still." The righteous shall be gathered among the righteous, to be "righteous still;" and the holy among the holy, to be "holy still."

There will be moral assimilations. Like will draw to like. Spirits will cling to kindred spirits, like steel-filings to the magnet; or, as if the planets of heaven were suddenly to have the present equilibrium and balance of the great law of forces destroyed, so that many would rush to the central sun, and others shoot away into the illimitable abyss of darkness. There is a common saying on earth, "The child is the father of the man." Equally true is it, in a vaster sense, of the great future, that the mortal life is the parent of the immortal. What we are, will determine what we shall be. The moral and spiritual affinities of earth will decide those of eternity.

Let each ask, to which would I be gathered? What would be my bundle? If the ingathering angel of death were to put in his sickle tonight, which would be the bundle into which the reaper's hand would cast me? The children of God, or the children of the wicked one? Can I now, looking up to Abraham "afar off" in the true Heavenly Canaan, say in the words of Ruth to Naomi, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God?"

And if we would add a closing sentence, it is this--Let us seek that the same lustrous, animating truth which doubtless irradiated the countenance of the Patriarch at death, as it gladdened him in life.--"Your Father Abraham," says Jesus, "saw MY DAY afar off, and was glad!" (John 8:56.) It was the Vision of Christ--as the EL-SHADDAI, the "All-Sufficient," which surrounded with a heavenly halo the pathway of this

Pilgrim-father, and, as "he stood before his dead," gilded the sepulcher of Mamre with hopes full of immortality. Who knows but that the ecstatic vision may have brightened and increased in intensity amid the deepening shadows of age, until it became brightest of all at the close--the glory of this "full orb's" setting, derived from the reflected splendor of the Sun of Righteousness?

"None but Christ"--"None but Christ," has ever been the motto and watchword of departing believers in every age of the Church. Is it not interesting to think of the key-note of this dying song of triumph as having been struck by the Father of the Faithful himself--to stand by that entranced pillow, and behold a panorama crowded with Gospel scenes passing before his eye; Bethlehem and Nazareth--Capernaum and Bethany--Gethsemane and Calvary; and more than all, the Divine PERSON who has given these names all their imperishable significance and glory? Other luminaries were to intervene before His day--all "the goodly fellowship of prophets"--but these lesser orbs pale before the brightness of "the Light of Lights." They had "no glory by reason of the glory which excels."

Champion of Faith as Abraham was, he had, like others, his hours of weakness--misgiving, distrust, unbelief. Bright as was the setting of this patriarchal sun, we can observe 'spots' in his descending sun. Morning and mid-day 'clouds' obscured its radiance. And, therefore, like all the good and true who have preceded and followed him, he sought to have these, lost and swallowed up in the blaze of that "better Sun" whose rising was hailed with such triumphant joy.

Reader, would you die happy? Would you have yours also a peaceful "sunset?" Bring this "day of Christ" continually before you. Gather up, if we might so speak, the rays of the Sun of Righteousness in store for the hour of your departure. Blessed, thrice blessed are those on whom in life He rises, and at death He sets with healing "in His beams." Thrice blessed those who, at that hour, when their earthly warfare--their spiritual conflict is closing, are met by the true Melchisedek to receive His benediction.

Abraham was the Friend of God; and He whose person and work made

the patriarch "glad," says, to each of His true disciples, "I have called you Friends!" Magnificent patrimony! better than earth's best hereditary honors--"the child of Abraham," "the Friend of Jesus!" Believers; rise to the consciousness of your exalted rank, as the true aristocracy of the world, with the blood of patriarchs in your veins--allied to "the Prince of the kings of the earth," "sons of God"--yes, and along with nobler honors and destinies in future possession, permitted to "sit down with ABRAHAM . . . in the kingdom of YOUR FATHER."

## **JACOB**

### **A DISTANT SUNSET**

"By faith JACOB, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff."--Hebrews 11:21

JACOB is the only name in our roll of ancient worthies whose departure was not strictly "a sunset on the Hebrew mountains." His sun set behind the pyramids of old Egypt, far from the land of his birth and his pilgrimage. But we cannot dissociate "Israel" from the hills and valleys which bear his name. In truth, no death-bed was in reality more in the heart of Canaan than his. The Hebrew mountains alone rose before his dying eye. We forget, as we listen to his lengthened farewell counsels, that so many miles separate him from the land of his early life and wanderings; and are only reminded that he is at a distance from his home, by the preparations made for his funeral by the house of Pharaoh, and by the vast funeral procession, as it winds along the highway from Egypt to Canaan.

No closing chapter in the annals of the patriarchs is so full of circumstantial detail. It was a quiet eventide after a stormy and troubled

day. Moreover, it must be a scene peculiarly replete with animating and elevating lessons, when the great Apostle, out of the crowded incidents of Jacob's history, selects from the article of "death" the greatest and grandest illustration of his faith. Let us stand by his bed-side, and receive instruction alike for the hour of life and the season of death.

1st, Let us note his "blessing both the sons of Joseph." Joseph, on hearing that his father was laid on his death-bed, and that his last moments were approaching, hastened to conclude a life of filial devotedness by being present at the solemn scene. He took along with him his two boys, Manasseh and Ephraim, that they might profit by the old man's dying words, and receive his blessing. On their entering the apartment, the half-blind patriarch raised himself on his bed, and a supernatural strength seemed to be imparted to him.

"What grandeur and vivacity of genius must Jacob retain even in that hour when strength and power fail, to be able to convey his ideas in such august terms, and in a flow of such happy poetic imagery as he does in the 49th chapter of Genesis! Who that reads this chapter would imagine that elevated strains like these--strains that would have done honor to the Muse of Homer, warbled from the lips of a dying man; of a man, also, laboring under the utmost decays of age, and over whose head no fewer than one hundred and forty-seven years had passed?"--TOPLADY.

We have heard of "second sight" at death; and, indeed, in the case of God's people, as we have already noted in a previous page, who can gainsay that there seems often and again to be a strange brightening and quickening of the inner sense as the outer man perishes, as if light from "the excellent glory" were let in through the torn and broken walls of the cottage of clay? Who, that have been privileged to stand often by Christian death-beds, have not occasionally observed a vast and marvelous expansion of the spiritual vision; as if, though the breath still lingered, and the faltering tongue still spoke, in reality, the mortal fetters had snapped, and the spirit had already begun its upward soaring? We have known of more than one ecstatic departure where there were either visions of the Savior or of angels--the death-couch lighted up with a mystic glory--the imagery of Revelation actually realized--the golden paved streets--the sapphire throne--the harpers harping with their harps,



and voices saying, "Come up here!"

The sea of life over--the voyager seems to observe the lights, and listen to the praises of the angel-crowd lining the celestial shore. The fragrance of the spicy groves seems wafted to the enraptured senses before gardens of immortality are themselves in sight. The gate of Heaven seems ajar, and its music reaches the soul, as it waits under the portal ready to enter in! There was more than this in the case of Jacob. The spirit of prophecy had evidently descended. Glorious visions of the future rose up before him, until his eye rested on the very Angel that blessed him at Jabbok--the Redeemer of the world--the coming "Shiloh" of a future day! Filled with that glowing perspective of spiritual blessings, he calls the sons of Joseph to his side. He formally adopts them as his own. "They are MINE," says he; "as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be MINE." And again he says, "Let my NAME be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac" (Gen. 48:16); "and Joseph brought them near to him, and he kissed them, and embraced them," (Gen. 48:10).

But let us pause and ask--Who is the giver, and who are the recipients of these blessings? As it has been well observed, if we had not already known how the patriarch and the youths stood relatively to one another, we would have concluded, from the way in which Jacob bestows his dying benediction, that he was some aged Sheik or shepherd-king taking two of the sons of his herdsmen and adopting them--serving them heirs to his wealth and fortune. Who would ever dream that the picture is really the reverse; that it is a poor old man--himself a pensioner, and dependent on foreign bounty--bringing in the sons of a prince, and telling them with a dignified demeanor and bearing, that they are to be adopted as the heirs and children of a wandering shepherd; that they are to renounce the certain honors of Egypt, the land of fertility and wealth, of wisdom and renown, and to barter all, for the possessions of two tribes in a hilly country--itself far distant, and much of it yet to be conquered?

What is the explanation of this remarkable transaction? As in the case of Abraham, Faith--a lofty faith, solves it all. When Joseph and his two sons entered the dying-chamber, and when Israel strengthened himself and sat upon his bed, what were the old man's opening words? "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz (or Bethel) in the land of Canaan, and blessed me,

and said unto me, Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people; and will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession!" (Gen. 48:3, 4) And again, "He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads!" (Gen. 48:15, 16) He transfers to these his two grandchildren the blessing which he himself received on that ever-memorable night at Bethel when he awoke from his ladder-dream--a blessing which, among other things, included the noblest of all--that "in him and his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed."

Had temporal blessings been what the patriarch sought to confer on these children--had it been a mere splendid provision for their earthly good--how different would have been his dying words, how different his parting advice to Joseph--"Never leave Egypt!" he would rather have said--"Good fortune has raised you to the pinnacle of earthly prosperity. I am justly proud of your elevation. Bring up your sons as princes of the land. To ingratiate them with the people, let them serve the gods of Egypt. Blot out from their memories all trace of the poverty-stricken country of their fathers. Do all you can to found a mighty dynasty; and, now that I am about to die, rear a magnificent mausoleum over my ashes--leave those of my fathers to rest alone in distant Machpelah."

How different was his conduct! "Bring," he says to princely Joseph--"Bring near your two sons that I may bless them with my blessing and name upon them my name. Riches I have none to offer. But the blessing I crave for them, and which I seek to bestow, is mightier than Egyptian treasure, and more enduring than your pyramids." He said, turning to Joseph, "May the God of your ancestors help you; may the Almighty bless you with the blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the earth beneath, and blessings of the breasts and womb. May the blessings of your ancestors be greater than the blessings of the eternal mountains, reaching to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills. These blessings will fall on the head of Joseph, who is a prince among his brothers."  
Genesis 49:25-26

Seventeen years in that strange land--seventeen years, also, of great

prosperity in fertile Goshen, undoubtedly the least clouded period of Jacob's life--had neither obliterated the memories of Canaan, nor lessened his estimate of the superiority of spiritual blessings to the pomp and glitter of earthly renown. One smile from the God of Abraham was to him better than all the riches and honors of Egypt. His son being the Prime Minister of Pharaoh was nothing to the honor of being the child and the friend of God! And to give the best evidence of his sincerity, the dying patriarch, with a singular frequency, charges Joseph on no account to permit his remains to be buried in Egypt, but to carry them up to the land of Canaan. When he first feels himself dying, he sends for his son, and takes an oath of him on the "If you are pleased with me, swear most solemnly that you will honor this, my last request--Do not bury me in Egypt." (Gen. 47:29). And then, after finishing his family blessings, before the curtain finally falls, he renews and reiterates the request (Gen. 49:29), getting at the same time the children pledged to fulfill and ratify their father's oath.

Joseph, also, with a faith and magnanimity as noble as his dying parent's, joyfully acquiesces at once in receiving the blessing for his sons, and in swearing faithfully that he would obey his father's wishes regarding his funeral rites. Amid all the grandeur of earthly empire, he too had learned the superiority of spiritual to temporal good, and knew in what true greatness consisted. "His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob," (Gen. 49:24). And this was what he coveted for his children. Many might call him fool and madman for casting away from him these golden prizes. He cared not. He loved their souls more than their earthly magnificence. He would rather have God's blessing and poor Canaan, than rich Egypt without it.

What a lesson for us! Are we equally willing to barter temporal for spiritual good? Are we equally willing to cast aside the costly prize for our families, when we see that the acceptance of it would endanger their spiritual interests? In forming connections in life--friendship connections, marriage connections, business connections, trade connections--can we read this touching story of sons, father, and grandfather, and say with a good conscience, "We have done likewise?"

that we have had respect--not to the gilded bauble, the high position, the dazzling honor, the brilliant earthly prospects--but that we have "had respect to the spiritual recompense of the reward?"

Are our fondest and most earnest prayers that our children be the children of the living God?--that though they have little of this world's goods, they may be heirs of the incorruptible inheritance? And when we come to die, what a lesson from the death-bed of Jacob, to have the one absorbing thought for ourselves and those near and dear to us, that we meet in the true Canaan! His thoughts were wandering on the sunny pastoral hills and valleys of the covenant-land. Would this be our farewell prayer and longing--"I die! but I am only a pilgrim here--Canaan is my home." I desire "a better country, that is, a heavenly one," (Heb. 11:16).

But there are two other incidents mentioned in connection with the blessing of the sons of Joseph to which we must advert.

The first is, the giving the precedence in the blessing, not to Manasseh, but to his younger brother Ephraim.

We read in the narrative, that Joseph took them both to the bedside of the sightless patriarch, "Then he positioned the boys so Ephraim was at Jacob's left hand and Manasseh was at his right hand. But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys' heads. So his right hand was on the head of Ephraim, the younger boy, and his left hand was on the head of Manasseh, the older." (Gen. 48:13, 14). Joseph remonstrated. He imagined it was the mistake of his father's blindness, and was rectifying it by transferring the hands so as to retain the right of primogeniture to Manasseh. But his father refused, saying, "I know it, my son, I know it," adding that, though Manasseh should be great, the younger son should be greater far, and his seed become "a multitude of nations."

What was this but the foreshadow of a great truth--the Gentile displacing and superseding the Jew. And surely it was only a further exemplification of Faith (implicit obedience to God's will and word) that Jacob persisted in his determination to bestow the chief blessing on the younger. His mind had just been wandering on the land of covenant promise, and the

spiritual blessings God had in store for his seed. Would it be easy for him, on natural grounds, to make the affirmation, or rather in his dying scene to give the significant sign that there was a time coming when these exclusive privileges of his children were to cease; when his heirs and descendants (the Jews--the Theocratic people) were themselves to be rejected--their land and glory wrested from them--the entail of spiritual privileges broken and given to others?

Add to this, must it not have cost him an effort thus to negate and thwart the wishes of so dutiful a son as Joseph, who was earnest that Manasseh should retain the right of the firstborn? But he was divinely instructed otherwise; and he acted on the future apostolic maxim, "I must obey God rather than men." We read, "He guided his hands wittingly," (Gen. 48:14). He acted according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."--The natural olive tree was to be cast out, and the wild olive tree engrafted in. The fall of his own descendants was "to be the riches of the world;" and this, (as God's will,) he boldly declares by the most expressive of symbolic actions.

Oh, little did Egypt (where his dying-chamber was) know all that was signified for her in that closing transaction--the transference of the old man's hands from the head of Manasseh to that of Ephraim! It was a promise that is yet to be fully realized in the case of this "basest of kingdoms," when, as part of the Gentile world, she shall listen to the glad tidings, and Egypt shall be "a blessing in the midst of the land--whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people--and Israel my inheritance," (Isa. 19:24, 25).

One other topic still remains in connection with the blessing of Joseph's children. It is the naming of God under a twofold character. "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads," (Gen. 48:15, 16). "God"--"the God that FED me"--"the Angel"--"the God-angel that REDEEMED me."

He leaves the world exulting in Jehovah--first, as a God of PROVIDENCE. "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day." He seems to delight to dwell on God's watchful care of him during the dark

and troubled and chequered morning of his life. He loved to trace His hand amid all the vicissitudes of his eventful pilgrimage. May it not be to this fond memory of God, as a God of PROVIDENCE, that the apostle makes special reference, when he speaks of the dying man as "leaning on the top of his staff?" What was that staff? It had been his constant companion--the pilgrim prop which he had carried with him and treasured, ever since the dark and gloomy night he fled as a fugitive from his father's house! He makes special mention of his "staff" on returning from his long sojourn in Mesopotamia. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I have become two bands," (Gen. 32). He clung to his staff as the memento and memorial of many loving-kindnesses of Jehovah. He had flung it at his side on the night of the dream. It would be the first thing he grasped when he awoke in the morning, and said, "How dreadful is this place!" It was the same staff he had used, when he went forth a halting cripple from Peniel, when "the sinew shrank in the hollow of his thigh." Doubtless it was the same staff he had leant on, when he was bowed with grief at his successive trials--when "Joseph was not, and Simeon was not," and they threatened to "take Benjamin also;" and it had formed the prop of his tottering steps when he had come up to Egypt to see Joseph before he died. It was the souvenir alike of prosperity and diversity.

If that shepherd's crook had been able to speak, it could have told many a tale of Providential kindness and faithfulness. And now, when, for the last time, he calls to mind "the God who fed him all his life long," we see the aged patriarch strengthening himself on his bed, yet still "leaning on the top of his staff." It would be in patriarchal days what an underlined Bible or diary would be to a dying man in modern times--a glance at it would aid memory in recalling unnumbered instances of love and kindness.

But the Apostle says more. Not only does he mention the "leaning on the staff," but he mentions also that "he worshiped."

Whom did he worship? Whom could he worship, but the Being of whom he speaks? And who is this? Let his own words tell us--"God--the ANGEL--who redeemed me." Oh, beautiful close to the life of Jacob! He leans on the staff of Providence, but he worships and adores the grace of a Redeeming Savior! Christ is the last vision that floats before his dimming

eye. He sees the cross of Calvary. He speaks of "Redemption." He exults in One who had paid a costly price--who had "redeemed" him from all iniquity. He had wrestled once with that Angel at Jabbok, and now he beholds, in distant futurity, that Angel wrestling for him! What, then, is this, but Christ preached at Jacob's death-bed--Christ the last word on his lips? Like his father Abraham, "he sees the day of Christ afar off, and is glad"--the music of that name, in his case also, refreshing his soul in death.

Come, let us stand by that pillow and learn the secret of a triumphant departure. See the old man, first so mindful of others, gathering his children and his children's children to his bed-side, and breathing on them a fond benediction. But he now turns to himself. He has settled accounts with those near and dear to him. He has taken a touching (I had almost said a sublime) farewell; and now he begins to think of his own soul, and the great unknown on which he was about to enter.

How does he enter the dark valley? He seems to have caught up the words and the melody of a great descendant--"Your rod and your staff they comfort me; yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil--for you are with me," (Psalm 23.) Fetch me--he seems to say--that pilgrim-crook. These hands can grasp it, though these eyes can see it no more. I shall love once again to lean upon it, and get absorbed in the remembrance of a faithful, covenant-keeping God!

He does more. There is a brighter hope and nobler vision that fills his dying eye--a nobler prop on which his aged frame and spirit repose. The old wrestler of Jabbok is again by his side, unfolding to him the great Redemption. So overpowered does he seem with the vision, that in the midst of the blessing of his sons he is obliged to pause. He interrupts the prophetic strain as he clasps his aged hands in ecstasy, and exclaims, "I have waited for your salvation, O God," (Gen. 49:18). "I have waited;" "and now," he seems to say, "I have found it!" The chariots of salvation and the horses of fire are ready to bear him to "the Angel's" presence--the true Peniel--where he will see God "face to face." Like the patriarch of a future age, he had taken Christ in the arms of his faith, and he breathed away his spirit in a rapture of gospel triumph--"Now, Lord, let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen

your salvation!" (Luke 2:29)

## **JOSHUA**

### **SUNSET ON MOUNT EPHRAIM**

"After these things, JOSHUA son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of EPHRAIM, north of Mount Gaash." Joshua 24:29-30

Here is a glorious orb in the old world sinking peacefully to rest behind the pastoral hills of Ephraim.

Joshua was in every sense of the word a great character, a saintly hero--the man not only of his age, but of many ages. If his name does not shine so conspicuously amid the galaxy of patriarchs and ancient worthies, it is very much because, as has been said of him, "the man himself is eclipsed by the brilliancy of his deeds"--like the sun in a gorgeous western sky, when the pile of amber clouds--the golden linings and drapery with which he is surrounded--pale the luster of the great luminary.

His was a varied and chequered career. What strange and stirring memories must have floated before his mental vision as now he closed his eyes in the quiet valley of Timnath-serah! Thirty-eight years he had been in Egypt--familiar from his childhood with the tale of his brethren's bondage and oppression--his young soul stung to the quick by their sufferings, and doubtless burning with ardent enthusiasm to redress their wrongs. His fond longings had been realized. He had taken no



inconspicuous part in that marvelous exodus--when, in one night, a million slaves burst their fetters. For forty years he shared their toils and dangers in the Sinai deserts, amid architecture grander and more imposing than the colossal forms of Egypt--"temples not made with hands." He had triumphantly crossed the Jordan--conquered the land which had gladdened the dying vision of Jacob and Joseph--and struck terror and awe into the Canaanitish nations. First in the south, and then in the north, the warrior tribes bowed before his whirlwind marches. For several years previous to his death he was allowed to see the covenant people reposing under the shelter of their vines and fig-trees--the "sword turned into the ploughshare."

Of his last hours we know nothing. There are no remarkable incidents or details mentioned, as in the closing scene of Jacob's life. We have no family partings--no prophetic benedictions. He himself, we have every reason to believe, was the writer of the book which bears his name; and after his own final entry, another sacred recorder appends the postscript--"After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash." Joshua 24:29-30

This is a brief obituary. It allows no scope for imagination to paint the scene of the dying hero. If ever one was worthy of military honors, it was he. The chivalry of Israel might well have gathered around his grave. His casket might have been covered with crowns of vanquished kings; even the savage warriors he had humbled, might not have refused to come and do homage to his valor. But his life is his noblest monument--His vast and varied achievements are his best eulogy. Let us gather, in thought, around that solitary tomb "on the north side of the hill of Gaash." We can read the epitaph of "the man of God" as well as of the warrior and the patriot--"He being dead yet speaks!"

Four elements of strength appear to stand out conspicuously in Joshua's character, and which distinguish him pre-eminently in the Old Testament as "the Warrior SAINT."

First, ZEAL FOR GOD'S HONOR. This seemed to have been his

paramount aim and motive through life. We trace, through all the vicissitudes of his history, a beautiful and never-varying abnegation of self, and exaltation of his great Lord--stripping himself of all personal glory, and giving the glory to whom alone it is due.

Take some examples--

Witness at the miraculous passage through Jordan, when twelve stones are taken from the channel and set up in the fortified camp at Gilgal.

"What do you mean by these stones?" Are they to perpetuate the completion of his campaign, that future generations may associate these river-banks with the name of the hero-leader? No--"Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "In the future, your children will ask, 'What do these stones mean?' Then you can tell them, 'This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the Lord your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over. He did this so that all the nations of the earth might know the power of the Lord, and that you might fear the Lord your God forever." Joshua 4:21-24

When, under the walls of Jericho, a warrior-form with "a sword drawn in his hand" stood "over against him." How does he receive the mysterious stranger? Flushed with previous successes, does he spurn the offered assistance, and haughtily disdain the thought of any other, human, angelic or divine, dividing with him the glory of new conquests? No! When he heard from those regal lips the announcement, "As captain of the Lord's host I am come!" the champion of Israel unlooses his shoes, in token of homage and deferential adoration. He bows his head in the dust, and, seeking no honor for himself, asks in simple faith the question, "What says my Lord unto his servant?" (Josh. 5:14).

Jericho and Ai have been conquered, and the key to the whole land is thus in the hands of the commander of the Israelite host. But before another sword is drawn, or martial bugle sounded, a religious convocation is appointed. The tones of the silver trumpets convene the whole army at the base of Mount Ebal; and, (in noble keeping with the monument erected after his first battle in Rephidim, with the inscription, "Jehovah-nissi, the Lord is my banner,") Joshua raises an altar of gratitude "to the Lord God of Israel." (Josh. 8:30.)

Somewhere in the twilight of his life, when he imagined his end was drawing near, although he seems to have been spared for some years afterwards, we read, "And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers." And how does he address them? Is it the warrior's stirring appeal to arms and fresh conquests; or the man of political sagacity and worldly wisdom seeking to consolidate his kingdom by arts of statecraft? No! it is the burning desire of his nobler nature to have another opportunity of ascribing all the glory of past victories to Jehovah, and of securing for Him the willing homage and obedience of the nation. Hear the opening sentence--it is the keynote to the whole address--"You have seen all that the Lord your God has done unto all the nations because of you--for the Lord your God is He that has fought for you," (Josh. 23:2, 3).

How different from the tone of other oriental conquerors! How different from the promptings of human nature!--"By my own power and wisdom I have won these wars. By my own strength I have captured many lands, destroyed their kings, and carried off their treasures." (Isa. 10:13). The old hero convenes the aristocracy of the land--officers, elders, magistrates--to give them a farewell charge--and his first act is to tear every wreath from his own brow, and to cast these at the feet of his father's God! If he had given vent to the emotions of his heart in strains of sacred song, they would have been akin to those sung, in a future age, by the minstrel of the universal Church, as he reverted to this same bright epoch in their early history--"They did not get the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them--but your right hand, and your arm, and the light of your countenance, because you had a favor unto them," (Psalm. 44:3).

A few years after this convocation at Shiloh, a final and still more impressive one took place at Shechem. The aged chief feels that the shadows are lengthening, that the silver cord must soon be loosed, the golden bowl soon broken. Might not he be well permitted to remain undisturbed in the peaceful seclusion of his inheritance, and leave the tribes with the faithful counsels he had already given them? What need of again invading his dignified repose? May not the entire consecration of his former years be pleaded as a valid reason for exemption from further

public duty? No! the venerable father (for he WAS the father--the oldest man in all Israel,) feels that life to the last has its solemn responsibilities. He seems to have caught up the words and spirit of a future apostle, "Yes, I think it fit as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my body."

And forth he comes, with patriarchal bearing and silvered locks, from his dwelling in Mount Ephraim, to give the final exhortation--to bear the final witness for his God, before his lips are sealed forever. As he began, so he finishes--"The Lord our God, He it is that brought us up out of the land of Egypt." Oh, sweeter to him than the strains of sweetest earthly music must have been that parting burst from the assembled tribes that rang through the rugged gorge! It was the echo of his own life-thoughts. It seemed like the anointing for his own burial as he departed for the last time from the army, never to see them again--"The people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey!"

How stands it with us? Are God's glory and honor paramount? or are we content with seeking our own glory, our own projects of self-aggrandizement and worldly ambition; living for anything but the God who loved us, and the Savior who died for us? If the Israel of a succeeding age had taken heed to the words of their hero-leader, it would have saved them many a conflict, much bloodshed, humiliation, and disaster. Contrary to his dying advice, they did tamper with the neighboring idolatrous nations, and entered on forbidden fellowships. The purity of worship was corrupted, Jehovah was displeased, and vengeance followed. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," (Heb. 3:12). Faithful to Him, He will be faithful to you. His own promise will be verified in your experience as in that of Joshua, "Those who honor me, I will honor!"

A second feature in Joshua's character was his DEFERENCE TO GOD'S LAW.

We have just seen that, warrior as he was, he rejoiced in acknowledging his own subordination to a Greater than himself. Like every true and loyal soldier, he acted up to the orders of his superior. When, on the death of Moses, God invested him with the responsible post of commander-in-

chief of the army of Israel, the first--the only injunction which, with reiterated emphasis, was laid upon him was this--"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Joshua 1:6-8

It is a noble and interesting picture, to see the youthful soldier, yes--and when the ardor of youthful enthusiasm had passed away, and care was furrowing his brow, to see the aged warrior retiring amid the seclusion of his own tent, and poring over the sacred law transmitted to him by his great predecessor. If any could ever plead lack of time or of leisure, surely it would be this great man, who had the burden of thousands upon thousands on his shoulders; and whose whole life was one long warlike march--the sword scarcely ever sheathed, or the armor ungirded! But he was faithful to the great trust confided to him. His guiding principle was undeviating adherence to the Divine word and will.

See how the Law of God is honored in that sublime convocation we have already referred to, at Mount Ebal and Gerizim. One portion of the tribes--the chiefs, the judges, the officers, the elders--stood on the one mountain, and another portion on the other; while the sacred ark, guarded by the priests, was in the valley beneath. It was the Word of God that awoke those silent echoes! "And Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law," (Josh. 8:34). The six tribes on dark and gloomy Ebal, thundered out its curses; and back from the greener slopes of Gerizim, from the corresponding number of tribes, were echoed the blessings; while from the crowded ranks that thronged both hills, there followed the loud "AMEN!"--the solemn national subscription to each blessing and curse of that precious Word. To crown and perpetuate all--on that commemorative "altar of whole stones" which Joshua reared on Mount Ebal, a copy of the law of Moses was written or engraved by his own hand, in presence of the assenting multitude.

This convocation of the tribes took place while yet they were engaged in the strife of conquest--a solemn breathing time amid the din and dust of battle. But when "the land had rest from war," and Joshua was drawing near the close of his eventful life, so far from his love and veneration for that law suffering any diminishing, he seems to rejoice in it still, "as one that finds great spoil." While he could say, in reverting to the past, "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage," it seems no less to be his experience when old and grey-headed, "Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors."

On that same occasion to which reference has already been made, when in the decline of years the aged chieftain gathered together the tribes from their different inheritances, still does he revert to the same theme. He tells them as the secret of his own success, and he would urge it upon them as the secret of theirs, "Be therefore very courageous, to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses; that you turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left," (Josh. 23:6).

And again, as he had done years before at Ebal, he took means alike to perpetuate his own sacred counsel and the vow of the people. He transcribed the account of the whole transaction into the copy of the book of the law which was kept in the ark; and then a huge stone was set up under a terebinth, as a silent attestation to the oath of the tribes. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it has heard all the words of the Lord which he spoke unto us--it shall therefore be a witness unto you, lest you deny your God," (Josh. 24:27). What a lesson for us! He had but a fragment of that divine law--the books of Moses (the Pentateuch and the book of Job) were all his Bible. Yet see how he makes it "the man of his counsel"--pleads earnestly with the people to take heed to its sacred utterances, and to regulate their lives by its lofty requirements!

Amid the duties and difficulties, the cares and perplexities of life, how many a pang and tear would it save us, if we went with chastened and inquiring spirits to these sacred oracles? How many trials would be mitigated--how many sorrows soothed, and temptations avoided--if we preceded every step in life with the inquiry, "What says the Scripture?" How few, it is to be feared, make (as they should do) the Bible a final

court of appeal--an arbiter for the settlement of all the vexed questions in the solemn assembly of the soul. God keep us from that saddest phase and dogma of modern infidelity, the Sacred Volume classed among the worn and outdated books of the past! God keep us from regarding His lively oracles with only that misnamed "veneration" which the antiquary bestows on some piece of mediaeval armor--a relic and memorial of bygone days, but unsuitable for an age which has superseded the cruder views of these old "chroniclers," and inaugurated a new era of religious development. Vain dreamers! "Forever, O God, your word is settled in heaven." "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." "The word of the Lord is tried." "Your word is very sure, therefore your servant loves it."

What a crowd of witnesses could be summoned to give personal evidence of its preciousness and value. How many aching heads would raise themselves from their pillows and tell of their obligations to its soothing messages of love and power! How many death-beds could send their occupants with pallid lips to tell of the staff which upheld them in the dark valley! How many, in the hour of bereavement, could lay their finger on the promise that first dried the tear from their eye, and brought back the smile to their saddened countenances! How many voyagers in life's tempestuous ocean, now landed on the heavenly shore, would be ready to hush their golden harps and descend to earth with the testimony, that this was the blessed beacon-light which enabled them to avoid the treacherous reefs, and guided them to their desired haven!

Ah, Philosophy! you have never yet, as this Book, taught a man how to die! Reason! with your flickering torch, you have never yet guided to such sublime mysteries, such comforting truths as these! Science! you have penetrated the arcade of nature, sunk your shafts into earth's recesses, unburied its stores, counted its strata, measured the height of its massive pillars, down to the very pedestals of primitive granite. You have tracked the lightning, traced the path of the tornado, uncurtained the distant planet, foretold the coming of the comet, and the return of the eclipse. But you have never been able to gauge the depths of man's soul; or to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

No, no--this antiquated volume is still the "Book of books," the oracle of

oracles, the beacon of beacons; the poor man's treasury; the child's companion; the sick man's health; the dying man's life; shallows for the infant to walk in--depths for giant intellect to explore and adore! Philosophy, if she would but own it, is indebted here for the noblest of her maxims--Poetry for the loftiest of her themes. Painting has gathered here her noblest inspiration. Music has ransacked these golden stores for the grandest of her strains. And if there be life in the Church of Christ--if her ministers and missionaries are carrying the torch of salvation through the world--where is that torch lighted, but at these same undying altar-fires? When a philosophy, "falsely so called," shall become dominant, and seek, with its proud dogmas, to supersede this divine philosophy--when the old Bible of Joshua, and David, and Timothy, and Paul, is fastened and closed--the only morality and philosophy worth speaking of, will have perished from the earth. Dagon will have taken the place of God's ark--the world's funeral pile may be kindled!

Love your Bibles. As they are the souvenirs of your earliest childhood--the gift of a mother's love, or the pledge of a father's affection--so let them be your last and fondest treasures--the keepsakes and heirlooms which you are most desirous to transmit to your children's children.

A third feature in the character of Joshua was, **DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S STRENGTH.**

"Certainly I will be with you," was the guarantee with which he accepted his formidable responsibilities as leader of the many thousands of Israel. "As I have been with Moses, so will I be with you." "Have not I commanded you? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed--for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." These assurances seem to have rung their echoes in his ear from the moment he entered on his gigantic task. In the hour of disaster he casts himself humbled before the "Rock of his strength." He tempers and glorifies the hour of victory by ascribing all the praise to the same "God of Jeshurun."

On the occasion of the temporary repulse at Ai--when the chosen men of the army fled panic-stricken before the Canaanite warriors, "and the hearts of the people melted and became like water"--where do we find their leader? Is he (stung with the humiliation of defeat) venting his



wrath against the demoralized army? deriding the vanquished with their cowardice? or, worse, in sullen remorse upbraiding his God for desertion at this crisis-hour? No, we see him prone on the earth, with dust on his head, and his garments torn, before the ark of the Lord. The men of Ai, flushed with victory, may, for anything he knows, be in hot pursuit down through their gorges to Gilgal. It matters not. He neither fears nor trusts to an arm of flesh. Nor is this a mere momentary burst of impassioned prayer. In that posture he and his elders continue until even-tide, jealous for the glory of his God, and acknowledging His hand alone in the discomfiture. Thus does the prostrate leader urge his sacred suit--"O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turns their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth--and what will you do unto your great name?"

Or turn to the brightest episode--the most picturesque and chivalrous chapter in all Joshua's history--his campaign against the Amorite kings, and subjugation of Southern Canaan.

The five kings of the south had become confederate against the Gibeonites. These latter, in their hour of imminent peril, resolved to seek the assistance of Joshua. Ambassadors from their helpless city appear one afternoon at the camp of Gilgal with the importunate request--"Slack not your hand from your servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us." Joshua at once perceives the urgency of the crisis. It is his own cause fully more than that of the Gibeonites. He responds at once to the call of duty and danger. Nor need he hesitate. The God who nerved his arm has given him the assurance, "Fear them not--for I have delivered them into your hand; there shall not a man of them stand before you."

Not a moment, however, is to be lost. At the ordinary rate of marching, it will take three days to reach the beleaguered garrison. The tidings reach Joshua at eventide, and, before the sun has gone down on the heights of Jericho, the army is in motion, and by a rapid starlight march, early morning brings them face to face with their foe. The war-note sounds! the battle closes! and the five confederate armies--broken and scattered--flee headlong down the western passes of Benjamin; thence upwards by the heights of Beth-horon. Joshua is in hot pursuit. The victory cannot be

complete unless advantage be taken of the panic. If they slacken their march, or if the shadows of evening fall before they have overtaken the fugitives, the broken ranks of the enemy may on the morrow be rallied, and another bloody struggle undo the triumph of today. What can he devise? One night and morning have worked marvels. Heroism could do no more--three days' march compressed into one--five powerful kings with disciplined troops humbled and beaten by a tribe of desert wanderers. Faint and weary as these brave heroes are, they would willingly yet struggle on for hours to finish their mission of death and victory. But they cannot fight against nature--they cannot contend with impossibilities.

Joshua, at the head of the Beth-horon mountain-ridge, gazes along to his right on the undulating hills which now hide Gibeon from view. He sees the sun hanging over them in fiery luster, that blazing lamp which had looked down upon their fearful struggle during the long morning, until noonday heat, perhaps, compelled the weary warriors to pause for a breath under the shadow of the surrounding rocks. The enemy had more to contend with than the swords of the Israelites. As in a future campaign "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," so now the very elements of nature become confederate with Joshua, and wage vengeance on the foe. The terrific hailstorm--truly "the hail of God"--arrows from the Almighty's quiver--was driving in the faces of the broken chivalry of Canaan, and "the faint figure of the crescent moon visible above the hail-storm" rose over the green valley of Ajalon, down which the defeated legions were pouring in wild confusion.

Can He who makes the "fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind to fulfill His word"--can He who "appoints the moon for seasons, and the sun to know his going down"--can He not, if he please, arrest the movements of nature, even should it be to stay the orbs of heaven in their course? Can He not rein in these fiery coursers, put a drag on these burning chariot-wheels, as He did on those of Pharaoh in the depths of the sea? Can He not lengthen out this momentous day, and allow neither sun nor moon to stir from their places, until victory resound through the hosts of Israel?

So mused Joshua, as he stood in silent contemplation on these

memorable heights. "On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel--'O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!" Joshua 10:12-14

We pause not to ask any curious questions as to how this miracle can be reconciled with the conditions of modern science, although we believe it can, without impairing the reality of the miracle. We advert to it at present as a beautiful testimony to Joshua's dependence on the omnipotence of God. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" was the inmost thought of his soul, when he ventured on the strange request. The two obedient orbs were arrested until the triumph was complete, and until they beheld, from their silent thrones, the five warlike kings mingling with the trophies of that bloody day.

And how terminates the record of this bright and brilliant campaign, the conqueror of ancient Canaan? We extract it from the book of Joshua (and remember, Joshua was himself the recorder of the fact and of the cause assigned for it)--"And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, BECAUSE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL FOUGHT FOR ISRAEL." (Josh. 10:42.)

Would that, in our seasons of sorrow, and trial, and threatened bereavement, we could imitate the faith of this hero-saint. When some "sun," some orb of earthly joy is threatening to set in the darkness of death, can that same omnipotent One who said, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and Moon, in the valley of Ajalon," can He not still, as of old, in answer to prayer, command these lights of our skies to "stand still," and forbid them "going down while it is yet day?" Why should we "limit the Holy One of Israel?" Is the Lord's hand shortened since the days of Joshua that it cannot save?

What a lesson, also, of dependence on Almighty strength in spiritual exigencies! And the beautiful and instructive example, in the case of

Israel's leader, is, that his is no rash or feverish fanaticism--no blind fatalism--no unwarrantable trust in extraordinary or superhuman agency, so as to permit dispensing with human effort. There is the fine combination of entire dependence on God, with the conviction of human responsibility, as if each warlike movement depended on his own personal prowess. He had the firm persuasion that in himself he had no power against these giant walls or confederate multitudes. He went in "the strength of the Lord his God." But even after receiving the assurance of Divine aid, and the promise of victory, there was no relaxation of personal effort. Never did soldier go forth with a more firm resolve to do his duty. The assurance of triumph did not tempt him to defer his midnight march on Gibeon, or lessen his resolve to strike a sudden blow. It is said of him "he drew not back his hand when he stretched out his spear;" and yet, at the same time, no warrior of Scripture story bears about with him a more habitual recognition of the truth that "the shields of the earth belong only to God."

Let the same beautiful combination be ours!--a simple dependence on the grace and strength of God--cherishing habitually the feeling that if a better Canaan ever be ours, "not unto us, not unto us," but unto God be the glory--and yet acting as if all depended on ourselves. The two are not incompatible. It will always be found that those who are the most earnest workers are those who exercise the most childlike trust in a higher strength. The oars are strong, but we must ply them if we would overcome the opposing current. The armor may be well made, but we must test it if we would gain the battle. "Prayer and pains," said the missionary Elliot, "can do anything;" and this was in spirit Joshua's motto and watchword. He who had boldness to tell sun and moon to "stand still" is the same we see lying prostrate for hours in prayer within the camp of Gilgal. His life is one of the many testimonies that it is the men of prayer who are men of power. The first time he is brought before our notice is as the young warrior fighting the veteran hosts of Amalek at Rephidim; but he looks up to the adjoining mount and beholds Moses with his hands uplifted in prayer--"Out of weakness he is made strong, waxes valiant in fight, and turns to flight the armies of the aliens."

This is a picture of every Christian still. He is the successful Joshua in the

plain, because he looks with the eye of faith to the great pleading Intercessor on the true mount in heaven, whose hands never "grow heavy;" for "He faints not, neither is weary." "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slips; your mercy, O Lord, held me up." (Ps. 94:17, 18.)

Let us advert to one other element in Joshua's character. TRUST IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.

This was only the necessary companion and result of the preceding. Let us speak of it more in connection with the closing period of his life, when he came to take a retrospect of his past history.

When he first undertook to lead the armies of Israel, this was the warrant and encouragement on which he set out--"I the Lord am with you wherever you go." No promise could have been stronger or more unqualified. "There shall not any man be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so will I be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you."

Have these repeated assertions been rigidly fulfilled? Has "He been faithful that promised?"

"Yes," says Joshua; "God has been true to His word. He has been better than His word!" When the land had been partitioned to the various tribes, he records this emphatic attestation, "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel--all came to pass." (Josh. 21:45)

It is a beautiful picture to see this burning and shining light of the old skies nearing his glorious sunset!--this old warrior of Israel thus coming forth from the seclusion of his old age to bear witness to the faithfulness of a promising God! His public work is over--his sword is sheathed--his spear and shield are resting as proud trophies in his family halls at Timnath, never more to be taken down. But he appears once more as the great apostle of the covenant people, to pour upon them his benediction, and make a farewell acknowledgment of God's gracious and unchanging fidelity.

Though "old and stricken in years," he was yet strong in body as he was strong in faith; and able with his tongue to give glory to God. He seems to catch animation and power from the spectacle before him--the thousands of Israel, that loved him as a father, gathering at his call, and listening with bated breath to his last words. Imagine the scene! as with simple but noble eloquence, the patriarch warrior makes the appeal, "Choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" The enthusiasm of the speaker seems to be communicated to his hearers! With tumultuous acclamation they make the united response, "And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods--therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is our God!" (Josh. 24:18)

We like to hear (there is always weight and authority) in the sayings of the aged. There are no words that come to us in our pulpits with such solemnity and interest as those spoken by the veteran warriors of the cross--patriarchs in Israel--whose shattered bark has braved many a storm, and whose brows are furrowed with life's deep and changing experiences. And if the man, moreover, has been conspicuous in the world--one of towering intellect, or brilliant genius, or illustrious deeds--with all the greater interest do we hang upon his lips.

Such was Joshua. Come--you mighty man of valor! you before whom "kings of armies did flee apace!" Come, tell us, in the evening of your life, what is your experience.

Hear it--"Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth--and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof," (Josh. 23:14).

If we (like Joshua) combine the power of faith with the power of earnest effort; if we use the two means which he seems specially to have used, (the word of God and prayer,) like him, we shall be able at our dying hour, to declare the faithfulness of the Lord, and to say, in the words of a

future leader of Israel, who in no small degree inherited Joshua's spirit, "Come, hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul," (Ps. 66:16). As sure as Joshua's zeal and trust and fortitude crowned his arms with victory, so surely, if we, in the noble gospel sense, stand firm in the faith; and are men of courage and strength, God will give us His promised rest--the rest which remains for His people. Joshua's "good success" has in it a higher spiritual meaning and interpretation. It was written "for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world have come." And this is the burden of the spiritual promise, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life," (Rev. 2:10).

Let us learn, in conclusion, the same great, practical lesson we shall have so often to note in connection with these ancient worthies--the influence that a great and good man exercises on others. The influence of Joshua was felt for a whole generation. At the close of that last stirring appeal--(his farewell address)--the concluding words of the record, written by his own hand, were these, "So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance." It is a mere casual remark, a simple winding up of the story, and yet imagination loves to dwell on that "departure." We picture group upon group wending their way along highway and valley--some immersed in deep thought, others breaking forth in the votive soliloquy, "No, but we will serve the Lord"--others, as they reached their homes, pouring out their full hearts to their children, repeating the words of the saintly warrior. Yes, and in future ages, on their way to the feasts, as many passed by that stone under the Terebinth at Shechem, how would it recall the living voice of the hero, and enforce, in silent impressiveness, the terms of his covenant.

This we know at all events, that the fragrance of his good words and deeds survived his death. The writer, whoever he be, who records his departure and burial, adds the brief notice--it is the best funeral oration that could be pronounced over his grave--"Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the leaders who outlived him--those who had personally experienced all that the Lord had done for Israel." Joshua 24:31

Joshua was a great man, and his influence was therefore correspondingly great. But each one, however lowly be their sphere, may exercise a similar

influence for good. They may erect their Shechem-stone, and their children's children may catch inspiration, from lips which death has long ago silenced! As the youth, plunged amid the temptations of a city life, opens his desk, his eye may light on a Shechem-stone--the last letter of a parent's affection, full of the yearnings of holy solicitude; or the Bible, with its fly-leaf blotted with a mother's love and tears. That mother may have been sleeping quietly for years under some yew-tree in a village church-yard hundreds of miles away; but her voice still speaks--the old tones, choked with tears, are heard, the hand that was used to be laid on his head in prayer as he knelt on her lap, knocks at his heart-door, and does not knock in vain!

Happy and honored are they who, like Joshua, can give a bold, outspoken testimony to the truth! Though he died amid the affections of a loving people, his was not an influence or an attachment purchased by any base or unworthy compromise of principle. There was no truckling to their weaknesses or foibles. It was the influence of a faithful as well as kind man. He was one of those "righteous" who are as "bold as a lion." One of his last utterances was a faithful warning--a warning off from that very rock on which thousands on thousands are at this day making shipwreck--a false and ungodly trust in the 'mere mercy of God'--a sinful and unwarrantable ignoring of God in his character of the Just, and Holy, and Righteous One! "Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy and jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you.'" Joshua 24:19-20

Did the people resent his manly straightforward declaration? No, they loved him too much--they trusted him too much, to take offence at these bold threatenings; their voices again rang through the gorge, "No, but we will serve the Lord."

Are we ready to go and do likewise? Are we ready, like the tribes of Israel, anew to subscribe our covenant, and to say with a more earnest resolve, that "whatever others do, as for us we will serve the Lord?" We may well take the life of this brave and good man as an outline--a model--for our imitation, in fighting "the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal



life!" A life of calm trust and submission to the divine will brought with it a peaceful and tranquil departure. Hear how he speaks of death--"I am going the way of all the earth." He looks on the world he is soon about to leave--What does he see? A troop of pilgrims marching to one long home. "All the earth" one vast funeral crowd rushing into the grave! None had ever seen so many entering its portals as he. He had left Egypt with six hundred thousand--he had seen every one of them (save one solitary man, Caleb,) pass to that long home. He was now himself following--ready to enter the "house appointed for all living." But the same Warrior, who stood at his side before the walls of Jericho, is there, to make him "more than conqueror!"

And the same Lord, who upheld and sustained Joshua, will be with you! "Joshua-Jesus"--He who stands for your defense, amid life's temptations and trials, with the sword drawn in His hand--He who, when Moses, the type of the law, dies, brings His spiritual Israel to the true land of promise. Yes, and when you come, like this old hero-saint, to take farewell of all that is under the sun, when you come to take your stand by the dark river side, the voice of the true Joshua (like that of his illustrious forerunner,) will be heard saying, "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan!"

## **ELI**

### **A TROUBLED SUNSET**

A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day. He had torn his clothes and put dust on his head to show his grief. ELI was waiting beside the road to hear the news of the battle, for his heart trembled for the safety of the Ark of God. When the messenger arrived and told what had happened, an outcry resounded throughout the town. "What is all the noise about?" Eli asked. The

messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, "I have just come from the battlefield—I was there this very day." "What happened?" Eli demanded. "Israel has been defeated," the messenger replied. "Thousands of Israelite troops are dead on the battlefield. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed, too. And the Ark of God has been captured." When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and very fat. He had led Israel for forty years. 1 Samuel 4:12-18

Mournful is it to see the life of a great and good man terminate in trouble and sorrow--to see the sun which has held on a glorious course through bright skies during a long summer day, go down at his setting, mantled in lowering clouds--a pillow of gloom and darkness.

Such is the closing scene in the life of ELI, the aged Priest, Ruler, and Judge of Israel. Ninety-eight years have furrowed his brow with wrinkles and dimmed his eye with blindness, as we see him sitting, in an agony of emotion, on the wayside near the gate of Shiloh.

The Philistines (the old enemy of his nation) had come up against them in battle on the preceding day at Ebenezer. The fight had ended in the defeat of the hosts of Israel. The news of disaster and defeat had spread. Four thousand noble Hebrews lay stretched on that bloody plain, and when the retreating host fell back on their tents, a loud wail burst from the elders of the people--"Why has the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?" (1 Sam. 4:3)

Is there no way of retrieving their disaster? Doubtless on the morrow, the warriors of Philistia will follow up their triumph; and years of servitude and oppression may be the result of a second defeat. They bethink themselves of what should have occurred to them long before now. The Ark of God, the pledge and symbol of victory in times gone by, was not many leagues distant from their encampment, within the gates of Shiloh. Might they not send fleet-footed messengers to request of old Eli, its custodian and guardian, that the sacred symbol might be sent without delay. It might form yet a rallying point for the defeated ranks, revive drooping hearts, and nerve for the morrow's struggle.

The aged priest assents. He cannot himself accompany it--his years--his sightless eyes--his shattered frame--could not stand the hurry of the march and feverish excitements of the battle. His two sons, Hophni and Phineas, are, however, ready for the exploit. They are the bearers of the sacred chest. The old man is able only to follow them and their consecrated cargo to the city gate. There he seats himself, uttering, (perhaps, with trembling lips,) his benediction, until the noise of their footfall dies away in the distance. In other circumstances, a father's heart would have swelled with patriot-pride to see his children going forth, bearers of the great standard of their nation--that which was more to the "sons of Abraham" than the proud eagle ever was to the legions of imperial Rome, and which, in older and better times, both in the wilderness and Canaan, out of weakness had made strong, imparted valor in fight, and "turned to flight the armies of the aliens." His spirit, also, might have revived, had he listened to the frenzied shout of joy which rose from the ranks of Israel as they saw the palladium of their liberty come into their midst. "When the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud that it made the ground shake!" 1 Samuel 4:5

But ah! there were mingled thoughts in that old man's breast, as his dull ear caught the last sound of these retreating steps. Amid the wreck of memory, he could not forget that dark and solemn night when, within the hallowed curtains of Shiloh, the voice of a little child (the very child he had with fondest love adopted as his own, and like a tender lamb nestled in his bosom), the voice of that child uttered, in the name of Israel's God, accents of stern doom and disaster against his house--tidings which would "make the ears" of every one that heard them "to tingle." The substance of the Divine communication was, that the Lord "would judge the house of Eli forever, for the iniquity which he knew; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not," (1 Sam. 3:13).

Twenty years had rolled by since the first utterance of these prophetic warnings. Had the Lord become slack concerning His threatenings, because sentence against their evil works was not executed speedily? Does the old Priest and Judge imagine that God has retracted or modified His solemn threatenings? He knew better. The cloud has for years been

gathering--and now in this war-tempest that is blackening the political heavens, he fancies he reads too truthfully the omens of approaching disaster. The coming event, anticipated for well near a quarter of his protracted life, now casts a deeper shadow on his path; and stinging must have been the aggravation of his woe, that he was himself the guilty cause of impending judgment, that, but for his parental neglect--culpable parental fondness--he might have transmitted an unsullied name from generation to generation, his children rising up and calling him blessed.

Other and gloomy thoughts, too; crowded upon him. "His heart trembled for the ark of God." Strong as were his feelings of parental solicitude, a deeper and intenser anxiety was gathered around that holy treasure, of which he was delegated keeper. The failing of Eli's whole character was irresolution--indecision--a facile, easy, wavering temper--"a righteous man," but he was not "bold as a lion." His weakness was manifested alike in his family and in his government. It was mainly by reason of his irresolute sway the state was now hovering on the brink of ruin. His conduct at this solemn crisis, regarding the ark, as alike High priest and Chief magistrate, illustrates his administrative incapacity. That ark either ought not to have been trusted in the battle at all, or it ought to have been there when Israel first marched to the field. It ought to have formed the rallying point of the fight of yesterday as well as of today. It was little else than an insult to Him who dwelt between its cherubims, to neglect the symbol of His presence, until the hour of disaster and defeat forced them to an acknowledgment of His hand. They went out to the first battle to meet their old enemy, confident in their own prowess; and now, it was only when their ranks are broken, that they have recourse to the consecrated shrine. They flee to God when they cannot help it. They flee to Him only when their own bruised reeds have failed--as a last resort--the forlorn hope of their demoralized and defeated squadrons.

No wonder, then, that that old man sits by the way-side tremulous and fearful, stretching out his palsied and withered hands to every passer-by for tidings of the fray. His was indeed an accumulated load of anxiety and woe.

The ARMY. Might not the uncircumcised Philistines be already rejoicing over "the beauty of Israel slain in high places?" Might not that evening

sun be already setting on fields of carnage and blood, and leave a thousand Rachels weeping and refusing to be comforted?

His SONS. Once the pride of his heart--but, alas! on whom now rested the brand and curse of God--the shadows of time, followed by the gloom of a darker hereafter!

The ARK. Could it be hurried once more amid the defiled fires of Philistine altars?--polluted with the incense offered to Chemosh and Dagon?

Oh! it was a lifetime hurried into a few eventful hours. How heavily would the moments drag along until the terrible suspense was relieved! At last, the moment has come! A haggard messenger--a man of Benjamin, a fugitive from battle, supposed in Jewish tradition to be Saul--with torn garments, and dust on his head--ran to the gates of Shiloh. Had Eli's eyes been as once they were, he would not have required to ask so eagerly the fate of the day--the symbols of woe and defeat, in the torn dress and earth-besprinkled head, would have made known too truly the worst. A loud wail is carried to his ear from the city!--Stretching forth his withered arms, he exclaims--"What is the meaning of this uproar? What happened, my son?"

Touching is the reply. Bolt after bolt pierces his soul! Wave upon wave--and each succeeding one sadder than the last--rolls in upon him! It is a succession of cruel tidings rising to a terrible and significant climax.

Mark them! "And the messenger answered and said, Israel has fled before the Philistines!" That is the first, and sad enough is the announcement. Still, the old man might cling to the hope that matters might not be desperate. It might be more perhaps of a strategic movement--the messenger, in too hot haste, may have exaggerated or misapprehended; or, if a temporary repulse, at least, there might be little bloodshed, and, rallying their broken ranks, the defeat of the hour might already be retrieved!

But the next sentence of the message extinguishes these hopes. "There has been also a great slaughter among the people!" It has been a grievous

defeat! "Philistia has triumphed." The pride and flower of Israel has fallen--and the cry of the orphan and the widow shall be heard in many desolate homes!

Is there not yet a ray of hope for the parent's heart? Amid these thousands whose blood is staining the plains of Aphek, is it possible that the two forms he has been following all day in anxious thought may yet be spared? that God may in mercy close His own eyes before He executes His denunciations regarding them? But this is the burden of the third portion of the message--"Your two sons also, Hophni and Phineas, are dead."

One and only one gleam still remains in this wreck of life--to one plank alone, does the old castaway still cling amid these buffeting waves. Israel may have fallen!--Rachels may be weeping!--Philistia may have conquered!--the fruit of his own body may be lying amid the heaps of gory slain. But if the Ark be still intact--unpolluted, unviolated by uncircumcised hands, he will stem the torrent of burning grief. All may yet be well. The hopes of Israel are not irretrievably annihilated. If the old symbol of God's favor be still in the hands of the feeble remnant, who can tell but it may, before the morrow's dawn, work wonders as of old; and that at the ancestral battle-cry uttered over it, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered"--God will prove to be "in the midst of them; they shall not be moved--the Lord shall help them, and that right early."

But the last tidings is the saddest of all. The messenger rises to a gloomy climax, "and the ark of God has been captured!" It is enough--the old man can bear up no more! He can listen with comparative calmness to the tidings of national disaster--death--family bereavement; but when the crowning woe of woes reaches his ear--that "the glory of Israel"--its jewel and crown--has ignominiously fallen--he cannot survive the shock. Like aged Jacob, he can say with an intenser bitterness, "I am bereaved!" The old palm-tree quivers at its roots. "When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and very fat. He had led Israel for forty years." (1 Sam. 4:18). That sun, which for forty years had been the political and ecclesiastical light of Israel, now sets behind their mountains in the darkest shadows of death.

Let us endeavor to draw one or two practical lessons from this touching story. It contains a special lesson to parents, and a general lesson to all.

The first and most patent, surely, is a lesson to PARENTS.

What a heritage of sorrow and suffering might not Eli have warded off, by fidelity to that immortal trust confided to him. He was in many things worthy of all commendation. He was, we have reason to believe, "an Israelite indeed." He loved the God of his fathers. He was jealous for His glory. He treasured, with patriot fidelity, the symbol of His presence. As a man and a parent, also, he was not stern or repulsive or vindictive. He was evidently of a kindly nature--his tender affection for young Samuel is one of the most touching episodes in sacred story. What a proof of his meekness and childlike spirit was his conduct, on hearing from those infant lips, the doleful tidings of wrath and judgment! How many would have received the withering communication, and that too from the mouth of a child, with fierce indignation! How many would in wrath have spurned the tiny messenger of evil away, and rejected his message as a piece of childish presumption, a frightening dream of infancy! But there is no frown on his brow. This "still small voice" brings him, like the prophet of Horeb, to stand wrapped in his mantle, calm, submissive, self-convicted and self-condemned, and to say--(oh, considering such a wound in a parent's heart, how great the effort, how strong the faith to be able to say it,) "It is the Lord, let him do what seems him good."

But notwithstanding much (very much) that was laudable and loveable in his character, he had allowed youthful folly to go unchecked; he had looked on the first outbreak of vice in the young tyrants of his household with a too lenient eye; he had nestled the snake too fondly and too thoughtlessly. A few judicious words--a few loving counsels--a few firm prohibitions timeously addressed to these lawless boys, would have saved him many a bitter hour and bitter tear. But from motives of false delicacy, or indecision, or indifference, he did not repress the beginnings of evil. What was the result? Shame in Israel, dishonor to God, national disaster, a violent death!

Let parents lay these things to heart. There is among all a natural

partiality for their own children. When they see family wrecks around, they cannot bring themselves to believe that it could be so with theirs. "Others," they are apt to say, "of baser natures, of wicked dispositions, ungovernable tempers; the children of profligate parents, who have been nurtured under the shadow of evil example, and who bore from their cradles the stamp of ungodliness--we wonder not at hearing of their worthlessness and ruin--but no fear of ours. Their temperament is of a different cast. We need not be so fastidious--so watchful. We can leave them very much to themselves. Restraint--too much tension--will only end in a greater rebellion. As for some early outbreaks, they are only the usual manifestations to be expected of youthful folly--they will cure themselves. We must not press matters too hard, or domineer with too high a hand."

"It is good that a man bear the yoke in his YOUTH," (Lam. 3:27). A word spoken then, in due season, how good it is! It is easy to bend the sapling--not so easy to bend the tree. "Train up" (not the youth, not when on the threshold of manhood or womanhood)--but "train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," (Prov. 22:6). Eli, indeed, we find reasoning and expostulating with his sons, "And he said unto them, Why do you such things? for I hear of your evil dealings. No, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear--you make the Lord's people to transgress." Alas! these gentle chidings came too late. "Notwithstanding they hearkened not to the voice of their father." Unchecked and unbridled boyhood led to dissolute youth; and then the course was rapidly downward, headlong to destruction!

Yes, and the bitterest part of it all, to a heart like Eli's, must have been the second death. The words of the child Samuel are among the most dreadful in the Bible--"I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." It reminds one of another parent in Israel in similar circumstances. What was the terrible element of David's grief in the touching lament for Absalom? It seems to lie in the middle clause of that piercing elegy, "Would God I had died instead of you!" as if he had said, "If it had been myself and not you, there would have been need of no such bitter tears. To me, it would have been a gain to die--for the God I serve



has 'made with me an everlasting covenant' But, alas! 'my house is not so with God!' I have no such joyous hope hovering over your early grave. 'O Absalom, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for YOU, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Sam. 18:33)

There is, in a review of Eli's history and character, A GENERAL LESSON TO ALL.

There is a lesson to SINNERS. Learn from Eli's death, that God will not wink at sin. Even when He sees it in His own people, He will punish it. If He spared not this good and holy saint--this long-tried priest and judge in Israel--if He spared not "the branch His own right hand planted," take heed, sinner, lest he spare not you!

Sentence against Eli's evil works (his sins of omission) was not executed speedily. Israel, who doubtless knew the doom hanging over his house, might think and say--"The God who uttered these stern things is to have mercy on his hoary hairs. Whatever He may do to Eli's abandoned sons, He will let the old man, first of all, die in peace, and be gathered to his fathers."

No, no, aged servant of God! the thorn shall pierce your unpillowed head! the scorpions of vengeance shall yet overtake you! You shall, in your clouded sunset, be another beacon to all time, another attestation to the truth of the words, "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

And if God thus dealt with a holy, meek, gentle, childlike saint--careless one! say, how will He deal with you? "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Oh! as we see the poor, helpless, unbefriended, blind man, staggering back on his seat by the wayside; and dying, pierced with worse than a thousand Philistine arrows--as we see the venerable tree of God, which had been rooted for a century on the high hills of Israel, wrenched up by the roots in a moment by the terrible blast--may we not well exclaim, in the words of the prophet to the worthless children of the forest all around--"Howl fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!" (Zech. 11:2)

There is a lesson to SAINTS, to Believers, to the Church! It is a lesson for

imitation! Would that there were more among us who died like Eli, with a tear in our eye for the ark of God! Beautiful was that solicitude of his for the sacred symbol. It was dearer to him than home, or country, or friends. He listened to the other crushing tidings with calm magnanimity. But "the ark of God taken!" he cannot survive such a blow as this!

Have the fortunes--the welfare of the Church of Christ--any such corresponding interest to us? Do we live for it? Could we, like Eli, die for it? Alas! alas! where is the picture among us, of Christians sitting on the wayside of life, trembling for the Ark of God? See them by hundreds and thousands sitting trembling for their business; for the worldly good of their families; for their money; for the golden chest of mammon! See ten thousand swords ready to start from their scabbards for the defense of hearth and home, and the protection of civil privileges and national honor. But where is there a corresponding trembling apprehension about the war of principles, though the spiritual enemy be coming in like a flood--a rampant infidelity at our doors, and the masses of our people in crowded cities perishing for lack of knowledge!

Let us take care that we be not traitors to our great trust as custodians of the Ark, the great center of light for a dark world. The era of Scripture history, and the subsequent annals of the Church, give us significant warning that it is a possible thing for the disaster of Ebenezer to be repeated; for the Ark to fall; for the candlestick to be removed! After this sad day of old Eli's death, the ark of Israel never again returned to Shiloh. Shiloh became a desolation. Its very walls were buried. Travelers to this day tell us that it is the most "featureless" place in the Holy Land. Its site can be identified no more. The ark was carried from place to place for a hundred years, until it rested on Mount Zion, and even there also, the "Ichabod" pronounced on this fatal day is now written. Zion is desolate as Shiloh; according to God's own words, "I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse!" (Jer. 26:6) And the same mournful tale was uttered, generations afterwards, amid the bleak ruins of the favored churches of Asia. They forgot their first love; their light was quenched in darkness; the rejected Ark had to seek kindlier shores.

If for three centuries it has dwelt in our island home, let us remember that we also, like the churches before us, enjoy it only if we remain

faithful. God seems to say to us, as to Jerusalem, "Go now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set up my name at the first, and see what I did to IT." If we neglect His ark, or desecrate it, or leave it in unhallowed hands, God will give it in custody to others. He will never lack some people or some nation to glorify Him and hallow His name--"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out," (Luke 19:40).

It might, indeed, on that eventful day at Shiloh's gate, have been little to Eli whether the ark returned or no. His course was run, his sun about to set. And it may, in a selfish point of view, be little to us, the waxing and waning fortunes of the Church of Christ. We may be in our graves before the Philistines--the powers of evil--muster for the last conflict. But shall we have no thought for those who come after us? Shall we estimate so lightly the wasteful blood of a martyred ancestry who died in defense of the Ark of God? Shall we count it no sacred heirloom to hand down undesecrated to our children's children?

Let us not be mistaken. We make no allusion to championship for sect or church. See that you do not in this respect commit the very sin of Israel in Ebenezer, when the wild and frantic shout rang through the valley as they saw the ark approaching. They gazed upon it with superstitious veneration; they put the symbol in place of God. How many do so still, whose cry is, "The temple of the Lord! the temple of the Lord!" who are loud in some Shibboleth of party--guilty of the basest idolatry of man--looking to priest, or sacrament, or holy place, instead of to Him "who sits between the cherubim." Go! love the Church of God; fight for it; weep for it; if you will, die for it; but do so because you love Him who "loved that Church and gave Himself for it," and because you desire to glorify His name.

The Ark of God is now in the battlefield. Enemies outside receive encouragement from traitors within. Many an old saint with bent form is sitting weeping and trembling at the gates of Israel. When does the mother feel most anxious for her child? It is when she knows it is girdled with fire in the burning house, or far out in the tiny skiff in the midst of a roaring sea; and if God is now bringing His Church "through fire and through water," causing it to ride amid the surging sea of the nations

abroad, or amid elements charged with destruction at home--let others make their political calculations, and forecast the destinies of kingdoms, but be it yours to "seat yourselves by the wayside," and, "trembling for the ark of God," to raise the prayer amid the gathering storm, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered."

## **SAMUEL**

### **SUNSET ON RAMAH**

Now SAMUEL died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah." 1 Samuel 25:1

What a gathering of mourners is this!--thousands upon thousands--for it is "all Israel" that are assembled to do honor to the deceased prophet. We found, at the death of Abraham only two sorrowing survivors named as having been present--Isaac and Ishmael. Here we have a mighty nation congregated around the casket of SAMUEL at Ramah.

His must have been of no ordinary worth. There must have been an unusually rare combination of goodness and greatness, which gathered together, in a village-city of Benjamin, so vast a crowd.

Come, let us join the saddened throng--and, as the wail of the mourners wakes the echoes of the hills around, let us inquire what it was that made the name of Samuel so revered--what so embalmed this prophet and judge in the affections and memories of Israel--what the secret of his greatness in life, and of the universal lamentation at his death and burial.

The First element in his character we shall notice is **KINDNESS OF HEART**; this was accompanied with the kindred virtues of generosity, unselfishness, and delicate consideration for the feelings of others.

We could almost have inferred this congenial beneficence of spirit in Samuel, independent of any specific instances in his history, from the mere fact of old Eli's affection being drawn out so early and so strongly towards him. There could be (we are naturally led to think) but little affinity or sympathy between this old man and this mere child. Eli! the most illustrious name in Israel--God's high priest, the chief magistrate of the nation--combining the regal and priestly functions--gathering around him, from his position, all the great and wise and good. Yet see how he clings to that child at Shiloh. No father ever loved his offspring more tenderly than did that old half-blind patriarch and priest the little boy wearing the linen ephod, and whose bed was in the chamber adjoining his own. Indeed, ever since that father's eyes had been opened to the reckless and profligate conduct of his own sons, he seems to have turned his broken heart towards this devoted youth; and nothing, in all the Bible's pictures of human love, is more affecting than the tender attachment that sprang up between them. It was old Winter, with furrowed brow and hoary locks, and tottering step, clasping Spring with its buds and blossoms. It was the Alpine glacier nestling the tiny floweret in its snowy bosom; or in some deep crevice, screening it from the blast. It was the old gnarled cedar bending its top bough to the sapling that had taken shelter under its shadow. See how youth and age love one another!

This remarkable kindness of the old man was so far, doubtless, unselfish--the offspring of a naturally easy and confiding nature; but it must have arisen, also, from idiosyncrasy. There must have been loving and endearing qualities in that young heart which converted the boy into the confidential friend.

Take one instance, one illustrative trait of this kindness, or rather, considerate delicacy of feeling, from the opening chapter of the prophet's history.

"The word of God," we read, "was precious in those days; there was no open vision." That is to say, the old prophetic communications--the miraculous appearances and divine interventions had been long suspended--it was a comparatively rare thing for a divine utterance to be heard. Yet, on a memorable night, when Samuel had laid himself down to sleep--when the lamp was dimly flickering in the temple--a mysterious

voice sounded in his ear--"The Lord called Samuel!" (1 Sam. 3:1-4.)

Favored child! to be the first, after a long interval of silence, to listen to the lively oracle. The message, indeed, was a sad one--"not a joyous chime, but a funeral knell." It would "make the ear of every one that heard it to tingle," (1 Sam. 3:17). But yet, sad and direful as it was, and tenfold more so to the sleeping priest near by--how few at such an age, elated with the signal honor, could have resisted the impulse to go at once and make it known. Unthinking childhood, from the very love of communicating what is startling, marvelous, or strange, often unwittingly wounds and lacerates--making public the tale of sadness which a maturer judgment would see it befitting to suppress. But mark Samuel's kind consideration for the old father's feelings. He dreads to disclose the terrible secret. Locking it in his bosom, he lies until morning on his sleepless couch; and when morning comes--the customary hour for duty--wearing as joyous a countenance as he can, he resumes his ordinary work. It is not until Eli (guessing perhaps too faithfully the burden of the vision) urges his young attendant to make the disclosure, that Samuel, with misgiving heart, reveals what dare no longer be concealed. If a less tender affection had subsisted between them, Eli might have indignantly spurned the message and the messenger. What! a child the rebuker of age! a child the prophet of evil, the bearer of tales of horror to God's High Priest! But he has watched and appreciated his kind consideration. He knows too well the tenderness of that little heart, and in reply he pours into the child's ears nothing but words of sublime resignation--"It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to Him!"

Or shall we go to the end of his life for an illustration of that same unselfish kindness, the unselfish generosity of a noble nature? It was after a long period of unflinching devotion to the interests of the commonwealth, that Samuel one day, in his house at Ramah, was waited on by the heads of the tribes. In their mad love of change, they demanded the introduction of a regal government. The prophet heard them in silence. He was not wounded, as he might have been, by any apparent slight of his own services; but too well he foresaw the consequences of this reckless disregard of the principles on which their nation was established by God himself. If he had been like many, he would have

resented the affront. Stung to the quick by their ingratitude and dissatisfaction with his rule, he might at once have flung aside the reins of government. Driven from the helm, he might have allowed the ship to drift hopelessly among the breakers, saying, "Well, do what you please; you have sown it the wind, I leave you to reap the whirlwind."

What is his conduct? With a beautiful abnegation of self; without one spark of envy, or jealousy, or wounded pride--consulting only the well-being of his country--he does that for which generations unborn had reason to bless his memory. He tells them, indeed, with the plain outspoken candor of an honest man, that they had committed a great political blunder. No, further, he expostulates and remonstrates. But when all is in vain--when he gets in reply the dogged answer--"No! but we will have a king over us, that he may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles"--then this noble pilot, that had weathered the political storms for twenty years, will not desert his post until he has done his best to equip the vessel afresh. He shapes for them their new form of regal government, and does what he can, probably to modify the insolence of oriental kingly rule.

Farther, we see him and his political successor, at their first meeting at Ramah, seated side by side at a banquet, then walking together on the top of Samuel's flat-roofed house--the Judge initiating the elect King into the duties and responsibilities of his momentous destiny. And when he pours the consecrated oil on Saul's head, and by this act consummated his own deposition and the elevation of the young Benjamite, it was accompanied, not with the frown of envy, but the kiss of friendship, the token of good success. He cheerfully steps down from the pinnacle of power, and is the first of the Hebrew nation to utter the loyal prayer, "God save THE KING!" It reminds us of the generosity shown by Jonathan a few years afterwards, when, as lawful heir to the throne, he willingly waives his princely prerogative, saying to him whom the world would have called his "rival," but whom he loved as his friend--"You shall be king, and I shall be next to you."

Let us imitate this kindness, this unselfish love in another's welfare, even where our own interests may suffer. Ah! what magic there is in kindness. How many a little Samuel in a household has smoothed the brow of

wrinkled age, and erased the channel of hot tears. How many a morose and moody spirit has had cheerfulness imparted by the light, buoyant step, the sunny countenance, and the little, thoughtful act of unostentatious attention! It is an easy and inexpensive way of doing much. Kindness is not measured or expounded by great deeds, by princely gifts, generosity, extravagant and showy acts of beneficence. It is often best manifested in little ways--in the visit to the sick--the mindful interest shown in the failing invalid; the clothing or schooling of the orphan; readiness, as in the case of Samuel, to minister to the aged. Remember the apostolic injunction, "Be kind one to another." "Let all your things be done with charity or kindness." "The cup of cold water given to a disciple will not lose its reward."

Another trait in the character of Samuel was FIRMNESS.

We often find in great men a remarkable union of opposite qualities. This was eminently the case with Samuel, who combined the gentleness of the lamb with the boldness of the lion. He suggests, in more than one passage of his history, the composite character of Luther--at one time, the center of a peaceful domestic picture in the bosom of his family, doting with unwonted fondness and tenderness on the one little daughter that was early taken from him--at another, displaying the dauntless hero-spirit which never failed him in his great life-struggle.

Samuel's was no child's work, in the era of Hebrew history in which his lot was cast. During the first twenty years of his public life, the people had fallen into a humiliating state of vassalage under the iron yoke of Philistia. The Philistines had not actually taken possession of the country, but they had so garrisoned all the border-towns, that they were enabled to overawe the entire land, and exact exorbitant tribute. And what intensified this patriot's sorrows was, that the worship of Dagon had in many places been introduced--idolatry in its worst form had been corrupting the purity of the ancient faith. The lamp of the Lord in the temple was, in a figurative sense, "waxing dim"--the patriot spirit was low--the tribes had been broken up into separate petty republics, with few elements of cohesion.

For these twenty years, this bold champion ceased not to exhort and to



expostulate--rousing the apathetic to a sense of their guilt and danger, and vindicating the name and worship of the great God whose servant he was. Great in this respect was the contrast with his revered father, Eli, whose fatal blemish was an easy flexibility of temper; seen first in the insubordination of his own family, and more fatally manifested in the feeble way in which he grasped the helm of government. This cowardly conduct--this "fear of man which brings a snare," had no place in the character or administration of Samuel. His first magisterial act at the close of these twenty years of political servitude, was to issue a public manifesto on the guilt of idolatry--to quench the fire of these defiled altars--to hurl Baal and Ashtaroth from their seats, and re-establish the national faith. He was no warrior--he was not bred to fight. We look in him for no feats of chivalry--no bold marches and surprises such as we read of in the life of Joshua. Perhaps this was the main reason for the Israelites afterwards desiring a king; that they wished one with more of a soldier look, and demeanor, and training. But though no soldier by name, the true warrior-spirit lurked under the lowly and unwarlike attire of the prophet of Ramah. See how that spirit rose with the occasion, when he assembled, at this same period of his history, all the tribes at Mizpah. The scene itself must have been a striking one. Though the position of Mizpah has not positively been ascertained, there is the strongest reason to identify it with the well-known eminence called "Nebi-Samuel," so conspicuous in the northern view from Jerusalem. It is the highest eminence in the landscape, and was peculiarly fitted as a rendezvous for the surrounding tribes.

The thousands of Israel have mustered at the bidding of their great head! The tidings are carried through the ranks, that the lords of Philistia are advancing; a panic spreads through the host of the Hebrews--they are taken at unawares, and are all unprepared for conflict. Left to themselves, they must either abandon their camp in inglorious flight, and their city and adjacent villages to merciless pillage, or else submit to the humiliating alternative of unconditional surrender. It was a moment requiring promptitude, courage, decision. But Samuel was equal to the emergency. It is to his brave conduct, his calm fortitude on this occasion, (to which we shall have cause afterwards to revert,) that the inspired apostle refers. In his illustrations of faith, in the Epistle to the Hebrews,

among other ancient worthies, of whom he says, "time would fail him to tell"--he specially includes Samuel, "who escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness was made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Take one other example. Look at his bold and manly bearing on the occasion of summoning the same tribes at Gilgal, to ratify their own choice of a king, and publicly inaugurate him in his regal functions. Saul had just returned, covered with martial glory, from his first successful campaign against the Ammonites. He is the idol of the hour. The camp had rung with loyal acclamations; and had Samuel wished to ingratiate himself at that moment of elation, alike with monarch and people, he would have kept silence, and allowed the vast assembly to disperse, with no utterance of rebuke or warning to mar their rejoicings. But this moral hero must, on this the occasion of his last public appearance, deliver a faithful and earnest reproof for their wickedness and apostasy. Though the monarch's crown is glittering before his eyes, and the wreath of victory on his brow, the old prophet does not scruple thus to address the people in hearing of their sovereign--"If you shall still do wickedly, you shall be consumed, both you and your king!" With his wrinkled hands uplifted to heaven, his warning is divinely ratified by thunder and rain; and that, also, at the unusual time of wheat-harvest, when neither thunder nor rain is known in Palestine. We are told that "the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel," (1 Sam. 12:18).

Alas! the monarch does fail to fulfill his covenanted obligations--adding hypocrisy to a delinquency of duty in his conduct regarding Amalek. The bold reprover of his wrongs is once more at his side, telling that the penalty of disobedience is the forfeiture of his crown--demanding, "What is more pleasing to the Lord--your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15:22. Yes, even after the old prophet is laid in his ancestral grave at Ramah, the affrighted king bribes the enchantress of Endor to summon him up--knowing that from those lips that never shrunk from duty, nor trembled with coward concealment, he will get, at all events, the dreadful truth.

Nothing is so much the attribute of a noble mind as strength of purpose--

moral fortitude. True, there is a point where firmness lapses into its counterfeit of wilfulness--where strength of principle is confounded with obstinacy. Nor must we mistake for boldness and fortitude, rash impulse and blind fervor. Saul himself was, in this worst sense, a man of boldness and firmness; exhibiting at times flashes of kindness and generosity, along with vindictive temper, intense selfishness, impatience of restraint, fiery passion, and cruel revenge. He had much of the soldier spirit as well as the soldier look. Moral courage is the greatest of all. Be it ours to aspire after this fortitude--"Add to your faith," says the apostle, "fortitude!"

It is the fortitude of Daniel, the prime minister of Babylon, standing in a heathen court and maintaining a resolute and uncompromising fidelity to the faith of his fathers. It is the fortitude of the saints in Nero's household, "rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," but all subordinate to "rendering to God the things that are God's." It is the fortitude of the merchant, upholding his Christian integrity and commercial honor amid temptations to fraud and prevailing corruption of principle. It is the fortitude of youth, amid the snares of a vast city and the jeers of scoffing companions--hallowing the remembrance of a father's counsels and a mother's prayers, and the voice of One greater still--able to say with unabashed countenance, and to act out the saying--"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believes," (Rom. 1:16).

A third element in the character of Samuel was his INTEGRITY.

He was, in every action of his life, the true patriot. He had but one end in view--to uphold his country's honor--to defend it from foreign invasion and internal feuds. He loved his country more than himself--Well might Saul's servant, as they were approaching the gates of Ramah, in search of their stray donkeys, say, "Behold, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man," (1 Sam. 9:6).

His unworthy sons, so strangely unlike the noble example set them from their youth, seem to have been displeased that he had not been less scrupulous. Of them it is said, "They took bribes, and perverted justice." Never was there one so guiltless of ambition for personal aggrandizement. Hear his great address on the heights of Gilgal, where he

had assembled the tribes for Saul's public inauguration as king, "Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right." (1 Sam. 12:3.) It was a glorious testimony to the justice of this appeal, when the shout of an assembled nation echoed back, "You have not defrauded us, or oppressed us."

Can we, each of us, say the same? Can we stand up before high heaven, whatever our situation, or circumstances, or profession, and say with an honest heart, "These hands are clean! I have never defrauded my neighbor, or wounded his character, or sought to exalt my own on the ruins or at the expense of his? I have never stooped to do an underhand deed, or be a party to a clandestine transaction that cannot stand the light of day? I may be in humble circumstances--wealth, or position, or influence I may have none. I may be poor, the victim of contriving men; but, thank God, I have 'a good conscience.' This volume of my inner life corresponds with the outer. Every leaf may be read; find the blot if you can."

There are volumes in this world's strange library which have their splendid exteriors--a binding gilt and embossed--but on opening them, they are tattered and worm-eaten; they cannot bear inspection; they are to be looked at, not examined. When opened, they fall to pieces, like the dust in the mummy-case! Oh, rather have the outside cover poor--the binding tattered--than the leaves soiled with mercantile depravity and villain fraud; rather the scanty meal and the frugal dwelling, than the banquet with its every piece of plate showing the reflected face of a hungry creditor, and the music jarred with the whimpering cry of the defrauded orphan!

If there be a character which we would, more than another--like the enchantress at the cave at Endor--conjure up from the invisible world, as a grand pattern for the times, it is this great--this venerable impersonation of old-world honor and integrity. Would none cower in guilty shame at his apparition? Would no knees tremble if the apparition appeared in the shop, the warehouse, the market-place, the exchange?

We have plenty of Sauls now-a-days--men of brave heart, and fiery impulse, and warrior-spirit, all ready with the armor of brass and spear of iron. We need more of the Samuels; who, with the moral armor of virtue and honor, will save their country from a sadder invasion than that of sword and bayonet, and from a more humiliating and debasing ruin.

Avoid--and young men especially--avoid all base, servile, underhand, sneaking ways. Part with anything sooner than your integrity and "conscious rectitude;" flee from injustice as you would from a viper's fangs; avoid a lie as you would the gates of hell. Some there are who are callous as to this. Some there are who, in stooping to business tricks and baseness, in driving the immoral bargain, think they have done a clever action. Things are often called by their wrong names--deception is called shrewdness, and wrong-heartedness is called long-headedness, evil is called good, and good, evil, and darkness is put for light, and light for darkness. Well! be it so. You may be prosperous in your own eyes; you may have realized an envied fortune; you may have your carriage, and plate, and servants, and pageantry; but rather the poor hut and the crust of bread with a good conscience, than the stately dwelling or palace without it. Rather than the marble mausoleum, which gilds and smothers tales of heartless villainy and fraud--rather, far rather, that lowly heap of grass we were used often to gaze upon in an old village churchyard, with the simple stone that bore record of a peasant's virtues, "Here lies an honest man!"

There is nothing more sad than to be carried like a vessel away from the straight course of principle; to be left a stranded outcast thing on the sands of dishonor. There is nothing more pitiable than to behold a man bolstering himself up in a position he is not entitled to. "That is a man of capital," say the world, pointing to an unscrupulous and successful swindler. Capital! What is capital? Is it what a man has? Is it counted by pounds and pence, stocks and shares, by houses and lands? No! capital is not what a man has, but what a man is. Character is capital; honor is capital; the world's wretched version sometimes is, "the man makes his worth"--"makes" it, they care not how--over-riding others, cheating others, clever and successful roguery. But the old proverb of the good old times condemns the counterfeit, tosses the base coin aside, and

proclaims, "worth makes the man."

Angels, as they look down at times on our streets, say, as they point to someone walking there, "That man is ruined!" Ruined! what has ruined him? Do they see him in tattered attire, with shabby dress, the ticket on his house, or the shutter on his place of business? Was he once a prosperous man--a credited millionaire? but the sand-built castles have become the sport of the tide, his wife and family beggared? No; he has all that--town and country house, equipages standing at his door, lights of luxury gleaming in his windows. Ruined! then how is this? Ah, his character is gone, his integrity is sold; he has bartered honor for a miserable mess of earthly pottage.

He is put on the bankrupt-list by all the truly great in the ranks of lofty being. God save us from ruin like this! Perish what may--perish gold, silver, houses, lands; let the winds of misfortune dash our vessel on the sunken rock, but let integrity be like the valued keepsake the sailor-boy lashed with the rope round his body, the only thing we care to save. Let me die; but let angels read, if friends cannot afford to erect the gravestone, "Here lies an honest man!"

Another and crowning element of Samuel's character was his PIETY.

We have been speaking hitherto only of the virtues of native growth--those which made him the man. We speak of him now as the "man of God"--the Saint--the Minister of heaven. Piety, like a silver thread, runs through the weaving of his every-day life, from its earliest commencement. He had been baptized by the prayers of a godly mother. Better far than that little coat, (the little linen ephod which she made him and brought year by year as her offering of love), were those childhood lessons with which faith and piety clothed his infant spirit. Instead of being, as many a youth is, launched at tender years on the wide world, sent out to buffet a sea of temptation--she had the joy of taking him up to be placed under the influences of an aged saint of God. For twenty years of his early life there is a blank in his history.

One single entry is all the historian gives us, but it is significant and suggestive--"And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." We meet

him at his own city of Ramah, but, like Abraham, he has "built an altar to the Lord." He was emphatically a man of prayer. On a great emergency when even his sagacious and well-balanced mind was greatly perplexed to know the path of duty--afraid perhaps that personal feeling mingled with his displeasure--we read, "the thing displeased Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord." It was the befitting time for prayer. How often do we go to our knees with difficulties prejudged--hard questions we pretend to ask God to solve, but which our own poor judgments have solved already. Samuel gives us the definition of prayer--it is a cry to God in straits--a groping for direction not from sparks of our own kindling, but from the great Fountain of Light.

In God's name and strength he embarked in all his enterprises--"Elimelech" (my God is king) seemed to be his life motto; and it was the denial of this by the people, the rejection of God's regal prerogative, and the substitution of the earthly kingship, which roused him more than once to honest indignation. The boldness he displayed at that striking convocation at Mizpah, was all inspired by Religion. It was his own pious reverential spirit that gathered together the vast assemblage. He convened the tribes, that he might inaugurate his own rule and government by prayer and solemn fasting. The people, at his bidding, brought buckets of water from a neighboring fountain, and pour them on the ground, in token alike of their denunciation of idolatry, and in confirmation of the national oath. And, when the shout of the Philistines is heard, and their gleaming array is seen in the distance, see how Samuel comforts himself! "No time now," some would say, "for religious duties. Why tarry by that altar? Why linger by the bleating cries of that 'young lamb?' when the ranks should be forming, and the arrow on the bow-string?" (So Samuel took a young lamb and offered it to the Lord as a whole burnt offering. He pleaded with the Lord to help Israel, and the Lord answered. 1 Samuel 7:9)

"Some trust in chariots," is the spirit of Samuel's war-song, "and some in horses," but "we will remember the name of the Lord our God." As the theocratic governor in that hour of imminent peril, he stands between the living and the dead! See him, calm and undismayed, behind the smoke of his sacrifice, his hands raised to heaven, until he sees these blue skies

melting into allies. The clouds (nature's chariots and horsemen) mustering to battle. It is enough--God answered him in peals of thunder. "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice--hailstones and coals of fire!" Not a sword was unsheathed--not a bow was bent--not a spear hurled. These thunders and lightning-arrows from the quiver of God, did the work of victory. They had only to "Stand still and see His salvation." The Philistines fled, and Israel pursued them with great slaughter to Beth Car. (While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car. 1 Samuel 7:10-11)

And when the pursuit is over, and the trumpet musters its victorious squadrons, the first act of the prophet-conqueror is to give the glory to whom the glory alone is due. Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer—"the stone of help"—for he said, "Up to this point the Lord has helped us!" 1 Samuel 7:12

Let Samuel's piety be ours. That manly piety--the happy cultivation and combination of the active and passive virtues--the blending of the inner with the outer life--not a negative saintship, like that of the men of Meroz, but the harmonious intermingling of diligence in business, with fervor in spirit "serving the Lord." The true type of "the Man"--the ideal of the Christian--is simplicity of faith and activity in duty. Samuel was kind in heart, strong in faith, and pure in spirit--but all was crowned and beautified by giving glory to God. The true Christian is not like the pyramid, with its naked sides, and tiers of monotonous stone; but rather like the Alp--its majestic slopes feathered and studded with forest and cave, shady rock and limpid stream; where the antelope may bound, and the bird may nestle, and the fox-glove hang its bells, and the weary pilgrim rest and slake his thirst--while its diadem of snow, glorifying all, is bathed in the cloudless azure of heaven.

We have thus endeavored to stand in the midst of that dense crowd which



followed the prophet to his earthly resting-place at Ramah, and taken a brief retrospect of his life and character; tracing the sun from its earliest rising on Mount Ephraim and Shiloh, on through the clouded political skies, to its setting in Ramah of Benjamin. The latter portion of his life was spent in apparent seclusion. He retired from his public work. But to the last, he was the devoted patriot. Saul was the appointed king, but Samuel the real ruler. Saul, in the eyes of the electing tribes, may have had the right, but even they seemed to assign to the old prophet the might--for we read, "He judged Israel all the days of his life." (1 Sam. 7:15.)

His closing years could not fail to be years of sorrow. Not only had his own children failed to profit by the example of his lofty principle and exalted piety, but he saw the scepter dishonored in the tyrant's hand, and him, on whose head he had poured the anointing oil, proving sadly untrue to his great mission.

There must, however, have been gleams of hope and comfort, also, amid the anarchy and confusion of the present. That consecrating oil had been poured also on a shepherd-boy in Bethlehem, now the unmerited victim of Saul's worst passions. With prophetic foresight, the closing hours of the old Seer and Judge may have been gladdened by assurances of a great national revival under "the man after God's own heart." Yes, the vision of a mightier than David may have risen up before him in the dim future--that of "a King" who was to "reign in righteousness;" who was to pour His blessing not on the tribes of Israel only, but on "all the families of the earth"--"the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star!" As to how he fell asleep--his closing moments, his dying words and benedictions, we know nothing. Nothing is recorded. But this we do know, that his influence and life, in its best sense, perished not with him in the grave of Ramah--its pulses beat in the nation's heart for generations afterwards. It might be averred of him, as was afterwards said of a nobler Prophet, that he was "set for the rising of many in Israel," (Luke 2:34).

"Samuel died," we here read, "and all the Israelites were gathered together and lamented him." No, in one sense, weep not! lament not! He is not dead, but lives! Let the prophet's ashes repose in peace. We need

not go with Saul to the cave at Endor, to utter incantations, that we may see his shape, and listen to his burning words. His deeds are living, imperishable realities. His voice is even now heard. He is enrolled in the Bible's high genealogies--canonized in the noblest sense with the great and the good of all time--"Moses and Aaron were among his priests; Samuel also called on his name. They cried to the Lord for help, and he answered them. Psalm 99:6

## **BARZILLAI**

### **SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF GILEAD**

"This world is all a fleeting show,  
For man's illusion given;  
The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,  
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow--  
There's nothing true but heaven.

"And false the light on glory's plume  
As fading hues of even;  
And love, and hope, and beauty's bloom,  
Are blossoms gathered for the tomb--  
There's nothing bright but heaven.

"Poor wanderers of a stormy day,  
From wave to wave we're driven;  
And fancy's flash, and reason's ray,  
Serve but to light the troubled way--  
There's nothing calm but heaven." --Moore.

BARZILLAI the Gileadite now arrived from Rogelim to conduct the king across the Jordan. He was very old, about eighty, and very wealthy. He was the one who provided food for the king during his stay in Mahanaim. "Come across with me and live in Jerusalem," the king said to Barzillai. "I will take care of you there." "No," he replied, "I am far too old for that. I am eighty years old today, and I can no longer enjoy anything. Food and wine are no longer tasty, and I cannot hear the musicians as they play. I would only be a burden to my lord the king. Just to go across the river with you is all the honor I need! Then let me return again to die in my own town, where my father and mother are buried. But here is my son Kimham. Let him go with you and receive whatever good things you want to give him."

So all the people crossed the Jordan with the king. After David had blessed and embraced him, Barzillai returned to his own home.

2 Samuel 19:31-37, 39

Here is a noble sunset on the border hills of Palestine.

We do not, indeed, see the sun vanishing behind the mountain-tops; it is rather the flush of crimson before the setting. We are not called around the death-couch of BARZILLAI; but his words all speak of approaching departure. He knows that the sand-glass is hastening to its last grain; and, in the prospect of a speedy exodus from the house of his earthly pilgrimage, he summons us to hear his simple but significant discourse on the philosophy of life.

We have only this brief glimpse in his biography. He comes before us--the Melchisedek of his age--to meet David, as Melchisedek had met his great ancestor, with the spoils of victory. He gives him his blessing, and then vanishes from the scene. But enough is recorded, to make us admire and love him; and though living in an age of lesser light and fewer privileges than ours, there is much in his character which we shall do well to imitate.

We shall endeavor, with God's blessing, to draw one or two lessons from the character of Barzillai suggested in the interesting Bible narrative.

Let us first observe, his PITY FOR THE FALLEN.

It is a beautiful picture to see this old chieftain, when he hears of David's sudden humiliation, hastening to the place of exile, to offer him his generous sympathy, along with substantial gifts for his exhausted followers. In concert with other two chiefs of the Trans-Jordanic region, hearing that "the people are very tired and hungry and thirsty after their long march through the wilderness," they bring with them, as presents, the fruits of their pastoral domains--"wheat, barley, and flour, honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese," (2 Sam. 17:29). Barzillai seems to have been a wealthy proprietor or chief in Gilead--a petty prince among the mountaineers of Palestine, animated with a true clansman's spirit, and capable of noble and generous deeds. Even though the gifts had been less valuable and needed, they would still have evinced a spirit of generous sympathy and commiseration for the fallen.

The scene in these highlands of Gilead, where the interest centers on a dethroned monarch, forcibly reminds us of the same generous impulse which, more than a hundred years ago, in our own Scotland, stirred many a Highland heart--when one, in whose veins the blood of kings flowed, was a homeless wanderer among her moors and mountains. Many who had no sympathy for his cause commiserated his fate. They forgot the crimes of his house, in his personal misfortunes; they knew that he had seen better times--that he had once walked in royal halls; and cave, and cottage, and hut, were freely tendered to shelter his defenseless head.

This pity for the unfortunate is one of the finest traits in our human nature. Would that it were a universal one! But the world is not always so lavish of its pity. It finds it easier and more profitable to fawn on the prosperous--to flatter the great--to give to those from whom it may hope again to receive. How many, (so long as you are in affluent circumstances,) will be seen in your company; visitors at your house, guests at your table. But if the gifts of capricious fortune take wings and flee away--if (with no stain on your honor, or blot on your character,) the bleak winds of misfortune have scattered your hopes in the bud, and made havoc and ruin of your capital--then such friends as these can afford to forget you; no time, as formerly, for a talk on the street, or a friendly call in passing--a forced, fake smile takes the place of the old

familiar one. These are summer friends; out, like the butterfly, on the day of sunshine; away, we know not where, when the sky is cloudy and lowering. Ah! there is nothing--(I speak in the case of reverses for which you are not morally responsible)--there is nothing so base and dastardly as this. Unkindness and resentment, under any circumstances, are indefensible; but to trample on a fallen friend--to crush the powerless--to visit them with coldness and unkindness at the very moment when they most need their aching wounds bound up--this is cruel indeed!

On the other hand, how noble is the example of Barzillai, and such as he, who love to come with words and deeds of kindness in the hour of bitter reverse and altered fortune. He had often, doubtless, admired David in his greatness; alike as the warrior, the king, and the saint; and being, like himself, "an old man, and full of years," he would all the more commiserate him when sent forth to buffet this pitiless storm. If he can do no more, he will hasten across the mountain-passes, to offer the tribute of his sympathy to the crownless king; and, in accordance with oriental munificence, take with him the produce of his rich meadows.

Be it ours to imitate the spirit of this Gilead chief, and never to be guilty of the dastard act of trampling on a humbled foe. In commercial communities especially, where money is the standard of everything, and where the man in the ceiled house today, may be in the humble lodging in a few months, there is a greater temptation to treat misfortune with unkind severity; to be all familiarity and courtesy to king David in the Jerusalem palace, but to be all disdain and distance to the exile at Mahanaim!

How does our blessed Lord rebuke, in us all, this cold, hardened, heartless behavior to the fallen; yes, also, even when there was more than misfortune. You remember that withered flower that tried, in the presence of the Infinitely Pure One, to lift its drooping head? The Pharisees (in the spirit of the world) would have crushed it in a moment. The disciples, in an equally cruel spirit, would have cast it among the weeds as outcast and polluted. But what says Jesus whose great errand from heaven to earth was to lift the fallen, and commiserate a world of "the lost?" "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more!"

As a second lesson, mark his UNSELFISH LOYALTY.

Expediency! expediency! with how many is that the regulating, governing principle of their lives!--not what is right--but what is profitable. Such are they who sail with wind and tide--in politics, in religion, in commerce, in daily society and friendship. They will take the winning side. They are what the world call far-seeing men. They look before them. They make a careful calculation of consequences; and are not very scrupulous as to principle.

How did right and might--principle and expediency--stand to one another at this juncture of Hebrew history? Absalom had stolen the hearts of Israel. By consummate art, or rather by unprincipled princecraft, he had undermined his father's throne, sown disaffection among the people; and, in short, with everything to favor him, in youth, attractiveness, pomp, and display, (all powerful qualities with the oriental mind,) he had seized the Hebrew scepter.

According to human calculations, his aged father's case might be deemed desperate. He had crossed Jordan, in all probability, to his grave; and the risk old Barzillai incurred, in fraternizing with the outlawed king, was a serious one. What if Absalom and his army, in the flush of triumph, cross Jordan, and cut to pieces David's panic-stricken force? Woe to the aged clansman of Gilead who has dared to show him kindness. His hoary head will be hung a trophy on the gate of Mahanaim! And Barzillai must have weighed all these consequences. By becoming confederate with David--sending these camel-loads of butter and honey and cheese, and these bushels of corn--he made himself a marked man. His fertile fields at Rogelim, will be swept by the army of the usurper. He and his, will be the first to feel Absalom's revenge.

But how does he act? He will do what is right, and leave the results in a Higher hand. Though with fearful odds against him, he will cling to injured goodness, and assert the majesty of truth over baseness and wrong. What cared he for those hollow acclaims that rose on the other side of Jordan, welcoming a villain to a throne to which he had climbed over the grey hairs of an honored father. No; though he should stand alone, he will denounce Absalom's deed. Though it should cost him his

lands, his flocks, his patrimonial inheritance, he will cast in his lot with dishonored and deeply-injured virtue, rather than with a successful but unprincipled traitor.

Had Barzillai made it a question of expediency, he would either have preserved his neutrality, not mixing himself up with the quarrel at all, but remaining in quiet possession of his flocks and inheritance in the south; or else he might have lent the weight of his influence to the popular side, "for the conspiracy," we read, "was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom," (2 Sam. 15:12). Had he been a mercenary adventurer, by becoming confederate with the victorious army, and cutting off the supplies from the camp of David, he would have decided the fortunes of the day.

How differently does he act! He never hesitates. Whatever might be the result, he knows who has the right; and hastens to the expatriated king with acceptable supplies of the best he has; yes, and with what to a wounded spirit was better than all the balm of Gilead or the flocks of its mountains, he carries his own sympathy and manifested pity for fallen greatness.

And then, see the sequel of the history. When all was over--when a Greater than any earthly might had scattered the alien armies and laid low the usurper, and the venerable monarch was on his triumphal march back to his throne, the old Gileadite chief came down once more from his secure place with a body of servants, to do homage to the King and give him his patriot welcome and blessing. Nor was David forgetful of the unselfish loyalty so lately manifested. In a spirit of equally noble generosity and gratitude, he urged Barzillai to join the triumphal cavalcade, to come and have a home in his palace in Jerusalem, and a place and seat at his royal table.

But he will take no reward or recompense, although what millions are spending a lifetime to achieve was within the grasp of this border Sheik. Up the steep hill of fame, few reach more than half-way; fewer still ever gain the summit. But here was one to whom was offered the hand of friendship by the greatest king of the age, and a dwelling in the palace of Zion. Thousands would have coveted the honor. His name would have

been on every tongue as a favored old man, the envy of all his brother chieftains.

"But no," says he. "It was for no such base, paltry, selfish motive I acted a patriot's part to a patriot king. I brought not of my produce in hopes of getting in return some princely recompense. In giving in my faithful attachment to the cause of David, it was with no base hope of bettering my position or aggrandizing my family. Let me give and receive a blessing--that is all I want. Let me bend homeward these aged steps. My best reward--my only accepted reward--will be the feeling, I have done my duty."

Mark, once more, as a third lesson, HIS ESTIMATE OF LIFE.

A flattering proposal had just been made to him. In the brilliant pageant that was sweeping past, he had a place of royal and conspicuous honor in his offer. Few would have resisted the golden bribe. But he remembered that fourscore years had whitened his head. A brief time, at the best, he could still have in the world. He had outlived the age when he could enjoy its pageantries and honors—"But Barzillai answered the king, "How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way? Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother." 2 Samuel 19:34-37

As if he had said, "Tempt me not. The day was when I might have grasped at the munificent honor. The day was when this heart would have beat with pride at the thought of being a lordly confidant of the Hebrew king--a guest at his table. But these things have lost their relish for me now. The whirl and excitement, the glitter and pageantry of a courtier's life have no charm. The festive rejoicings on the return of the king would be too much for this aged frame. 'I am this day eighty years old.' This head, once covered with raven locks, is now white with the snows of winter. These hands, that once dealt and repulsed the warrior's blow, have now



tremblingly to grasp the pilgrim's staff. These limbs, that once could nimbly chase the gazelle up the craggy heights of Gilead, now totter underneath me. These eyes, 'the windows of the house,' are beginning to be darkened; they look out on a dimmed and murky landscape; I could not see the glories of the king's palace at Jerusalem even were I there. These ears, once the inlets of enjoyment, which once loved to hear the dulcet tones of my own mountain-pipe, would listen with unavailing effort to the choristers of Zion, or to tabret and lute and harp of sweetest Hebrew minstrelsy. I would be but a poor accession to the royal table--a poor guest in the palace of Judah. Bid me not go there! Allow me rather to say farewell on the banks of the frontier river. Return! O monarch, beloved of the Lord! return to your capital, and may the acclamations of a grateful people greet your restoration. For myself, permit me quietly to abide in my own highland-home--these my native rugged mountains. Their sepulchers hold dust that is sacred to me. This is now my only unfulfilled wish--that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother."

We cannot positively pronounce on Barzillai's piety. The very respect and personal kindness manifested for David, "the man after God's own heart," combined with his loyalty, unselfishness, and filial devotion, would lead us to draw favorable conclusions regarding his religious character. At all events, we cannot think of him as a mere satiated voluptuary, his bones full of the sin of his youth; with debilitated frame and shattered nerve, breathing out the fretful soliloquy of a peevish old age. We would accept these words of his, rather as the address of a good and venerable old man, who takes the grand view of this present life as a prelude to another, and who wishes to be tempted by nothing that would dissipate his thoughts, and unfit him for solemn preparation for his great change. "Tempt me not," he says, "with what might divert my thoughts from more solemn and urgent verities. Let me enjoy a quiet eventide before the great night-journey! Let me go and set my house in order before I die!"

And it is to this we must all come! Life is now before most of us, with its bright plans and phantom-visions--its rainbow-hues and air-castles. Many have no eyes to see the end of that glowing perspective--the close of the avenue, which at present is overarched with the green boughs of

hope. But as we go on, the distance sensibly diminishes; our consciousness becomes more and more vivid that the end is nearing; and we feel that we are passing, like the millions that have preceded us, to our "long home."

"How long," said Barzillai, "have I to live?" "How long have I to live?"-- what a solemn question for us all, amid the daily-occurring proofs of our frailty and mortality. Oh, what a motto to bear about with us continually amid the wear and tear of life!

YOUNG MAN! with the flash of young hope in your eye; existence extending in interminable vista before you; pause ever and always on the enchanted highway, and put the solemn question to yourself, "How long have I to live?"

MAN OF BUSINESS! in availing yourself of new openings in trade, accepting new responsibilities and anxieties, involving yourself in new entanglements, have you stopped at the threshold and probed yourself with the question, "How long have I to live?"

CHILD OF PLEASURE! plunging into the midst of dissipating excitement--the whirl of intoxicating gaiety--have you ever, in returning, jaded, and weary, and worn, from the heated ball-room, flung yourself prayerless on your pillow, and sunk into a feverish dream, with the question haunting you, "How long have I to live?"

FRUITLESS PROFESSOR! who, with the form of godliness, are yet destitute of every practical active Christian virtue; who have never known what it is to relieve the needy, or support the poor, or whisper the word of unselfish kindness, or help the languishing mission-cause. You who have lived a useless life--who in the retrospect can point to no one good, or generous, or self-sacrificing deed. Amid abounding opportunities, perhaps with full coffers at your side, and the bar of God before your eyes, have you ever seriously pondered the question--how soon the opportunity may be past and gone?--"How long have I to live?"

How long have I? A short time, almost all of us. And those who are past life's mid-day, on whom the glow of sunset is stealing; those who have

crossed the grand turning point--passed over the mountain-top, and are beginning to descend the shady side to the grave in the valley--let them, especially, listen to the warning. Let them imitate the example of the aged chief--seek leisure from over-much and over-many cares, to prepare for death.

It is strange that OLD AGE is as disinclined as youth to listen to the voice of wisdom in this. You imagine that you can take on new worldly burdens, and reach heaven safely enough notwithstanding! Ah! these burdens too often weigh hopelessly down. Like the bee that has wandered from its garden-hive, or its hole in the rock, in search of honeyed treasure, but which, in winging its way back, drops exhausted, and never reaches home. Old Barzillai was a noble exception to this. With courtier's grace, and a sublime moral fortitude, he declined the regal request, "Come you over with me!"--a question which does not always get a negative from old age, when Pleasure, shaking in her hands her crowns of beautiful flowers, cries, "Come over with me!"--and Mammon, clinking his bags of gold, cries, "Come over with me!"--and Ambition, pointing to the hazy mountain-top, and her coveted temple gleaming in the sun, cries, "Come over with me!"

Be it ours to reply--"I have a nobler heritage now to care for, a nobler temple for which to prepare. The day will come when these things will yield me no pleasure--when they shall be seen in their true light, as the empty baubles of an hour." Oh, what though you may have all that now caters to the pride of life--affluence, prosperity, success in business -- "gaining the whole world," if you imperil or impoverish your immortal soul? What though life's morning and midday be bright and sunny, if you have made no provision for the wet drizzling rain of its afternoon, and find creeping upon you the joylessness of a godless old age. You imagine it will be easy enough to seek God, and find Him amid the 'dregs of existence', at the close of its weary day. But it will be with you as with the child who imagines, in the bright morning, that it will be safe to spend the sunny hours in play, and put off learning the morrow's task until night. When night comes, the little procrastinator is nodding over the book. Through fatigue and sleep, the unlearned lesson is abandoned, and it wakes on the morrow with its pillow bedewed with tears, under the

consciousness that its work is undone.

On the other hand, how beautiful is that close of life which is ended with God! "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace," (Ps. 37:7). "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you," (Isa. 46:4). What though the sun may have waded through clouds in the early morn? It has a couch of amber and gold now. The beginning and close of many a Christian's life is like that glorious Alp of which we have previously spoken. Its base and furrowed sides are in mist and cloud; but its white, hoary summit of everlasting snow, is bathed in the crimson hues of fading day.

Be it ours, to live the life of the righteous, that we may come at last to die their death; and standing, like Barzillai, by the brink of Jordan, hear the voice and invitation of a Greater and Mightier than earthly monarch calling us to a seat at His table in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

## **DAVID**

### **SUNSET ON MOUNT ZION**

Now these are the last words of DAVID. David the son of Jesse said, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, "Although my house is not right with God; yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." 2 Samuel 23:1, 5

If we treasure, with peculiar fondness, the last sayings of great men, shall we not, with devout interest, contemplate the closing days of the sweet Singer of Israel--the great Minstrel of the universal Church--whose hymns have been chanted for three thousand years, gladdening and consoling and comforting millions of aching hearts--and hear his "last

words" (2 Sam. 23:1), the last cadence of his harp? Let us watch the shadows gathering over the Hebrew mountains, as this glorious orb in the old hemisphere hastens to his setting; as a prince in Israel--poet! warrior! king! saint! all in one--is about to expire.

We can imagine the aged DAVID, like another Jacob, seated on his death-couch, or, at all events, with death near at hand. The grandeur of earthly empire is fast waning and fading from his view. The pulse, that once beat so manly and strong, is quickly ebbing. His harp had long been laid aside; but, now that he has climbed the hill Beulah and gotten the first glimpse of the heavenly plains, its melodies must once more be awakened--his wrinkled hands must again sweep the strings, before he takes up the nobler minstrelsy of the skies. In notes full of comfort, full of joy, not unblended with warning and sadness, thus he sings--"Although my house be not right with God." Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me. His agreement is eternal, final, sealed. He will constantly look after my safety and success."

Let us, then, open this dying will and testament of "the man after God's own heart." Let us examine (as he repeats them) clause by clause, article by article, in good old David's dying confession of faith; or (to retain our first figure) let us hearken to the successive notes of this remarkable death-song, as these are carried to our ears. Oh that we may make the better part of them, at least, our own, when we come to a similar hour!

The first note from the harp of the dying King is a note of SADNESS. He begins on the minor key--"ALTHOUGH MY HOUSE IS NOT RIGHT WITH GOD."

His heart is filled with rapturous joy, standing as he is at the very gate and threshold of glory; but bitter tears will force themselves to his dimming eye. At that moment a ray of memory darts across the past; gloomy anticipations, not regarding himself but others, come looming through the future. With faltering voice he begins his song--"Although my house is not right with God."

An old commentator makes the quaint remark on this verse--"There is an 'although' in every man's life and lot." Paul was the mightiest of

preachers, the noblest of spiritual heroes, but he had his "although;" for "a thorn in the flesh was sent to buffet him." Jonah was "exceeding glad because of his gourd," but, a vile insect lurked unseen at its root. Ezekiel soared, as few prophets did, with bold wing, amid the magnificent visions of Providence and Grace, but he was brought down to the dust with wings collapsed--for "the desire of his eyes was taken away with a stroke."

Ah, hide it under a false appearance as we may, this world is a chequered scene, its joys are mingled joys, and much appears to be joy which is not. Many a heart and countenance wears a disguise of gladness, only to conceal its deep sorrow. We cannot always judge of a man by what he seems. Looking at the sea of life, we see it studded over with white sails and gay flags and sparkling waves; we forget its eddying whirlpools and treacherous reefs and brooding storms. How little do God's ministers know, in looking down from their pulpits, on apparently bright and sunny faces, gay attire, and undimmed eyes--how many breaking hearts there are--sorrows, too deep for utterance, with which a stranger dare not intermeddle!

No, we cannot let all that looks happy, pass for unmingled joy. It is often the reverse; like the wretched singer on the street, who passing from door to door, struggles to warble her gleeful songs. Singing! It is a poor counterfeit of crushing sorrow. Singing! The tones are joyous; but little does the passer-by know of the long tale of woe, the widow's agony, the orphan's tears, the desolate hearth, which is muffled and disguised under that apparent "glee." Pass from pew to pew in our churches, or from door to door in our streets, and how few bosoms indeed would be found in which there is not an "although."

"I am strong and vigorous," says one; "I have health of body and activity of mind, but, I am doomed to chill poverty!" "I have wealth," says another; "my cup is full, kind fortune has smiled upon me; but, I am condemned to drag about with me a suffering frame; my golden treasures are often a mockery to me, for I cannot enjoy them!" "I have both health and wealth," says another; "but, yonder grave has plundered me of what wealth and health never can purchase back. Mine is the saddest of all 'althoughs;' mine the bitterest 'crook' in the lot; wealth may come back again; health may again smile upon me; but my children! my children!

These treasured barks in the sea of life that have gone down, no power can raise them up again, or bring them to my side!"

Reader! is this not a true picture? We know it is. Be assured it would not be well were it otherwise. Were all bright and sunny and joyous, you would be apt to "settle on your lees." "The wicked have no changes," says the Psalmist, "therefore they fear not God." If the bark were not tossed, the mariners would be asleep. If the thunder were not sent, the air would remain unpurified. If the earthly lamp were not put out, you would never lift your eye to Heaven. These "althoughs" are like the rustling among the leaves, which you have seen causing the timid bird to hop upwards, and still upwards, from branch to branch, and from bough to bough, until, attaining the top of the tree, it wings its flight away to a securer shelter!

Let us proceed to the second clause in the dying confession of David. He passes now from the plaintive minor key, to happier notes and a happier theme. "YET"--although my house is not right with God--"Yet."

We may pause for a moment over that little word. It bears its own message of comfort. It tells us that there are always solaces in our trials. The "althoughs" of life are generally qualified by some "yet." There is something to balance our griefs--some counterpart comfort, so that we can say with the Psalmist, in an earlier period of his life, "In the multitude of my sorrows within me, your comforts delight my soul." Listen to his testimony in one of the sorest and saddest experiences of his life. He was never more sad--an outcast from his throne--wandering beyond Jordan amid the bitter memories of departed glory. "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls--all your waves and your billows are gone over me. YET! the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." "I will sing of MERCY and JUDGMENT," says he, in another psalm.

Oh, how many can utter the same in the midst of their trials! Mark the order. He sings of Judgment, but MERCY comes first. Our mercies are always greatest. The "yets" outbalance and overbalance the "althoughs." The prophet Habakkuk mourns over the "fig-tree without blossom," vines withered and "fruitless." But amid pining herds and famished flocks, and

fields blackened with dearth and pestilence, "YET," he adds, "will I glory in the Lord and rejoice in the God of my salvation."

And is it not so with all God's true people? Tried believer! are there no yets in your night-song?--no mitigating circumstances in your affliction?--no "tempering of the wind to the shorn lamb?"--no "staying of God's rough wind in the day of His east wind?" The bitter cup has its sweet drops--the dark night has its clustering stars of consolation and solace--the "Valley of Baca" has its wells of joy--the warm and green and sunny spots in the wilderness, outnumber the dreary.

But David now passes from these introductory notes, to a full and very glorious burst of gospel triumph.

We have been speaking hitherto of the "yets"--as contrasting earthly sorrows with earthly solaces; but here is the greatest of all consolations--a sinner turning to the overwhelming contemplation of a great Savior. Having touched one tuneless and broken string, he proceeds from the others to extract a sweet melody. "Yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure--for this is all my salvation and all my desire."

Let us mark each successive note in this rich anthem. The theme of it is, "the Everlasting Covenant."

He speaks, first, of THE AUTHOR OF THE COVENANT. "HE has made."

"He," my father's God, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob--the God who found me among the sheep-cotes in Bethlehem--(happy days! when the pastoral staff was my mimic scepter, the pastoral reed my simple harp, and the starry skies my temple and palace roof;)--"He," "the Lord my Shepherd," has made a "covenant" with me! It was He who nerved my arm for battle, and tuned my lips for song--led me to the green pastures of grace, and who has brought me now to the gates of glory!

Never let us forget that it is God, the Eternal Father, who is the Author of our covenant mercies. That it was He, who from the depths of a past eternity, planned that covenant. "Yes, I have loved you with an



everlasting love," (Jer. 31:3). "GOD so loved the world." When the TEMPLE of fallen humanity lay prostrate in the dust, it was He who resolved on the work of reconstruction--"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation," (Isa. 28:16). When the VESSEL of our eternal destinies was wrecked and stranded--it was a tide flowing from the sea of His own infinite love which set it once more floating on the waters. He might have left us to perish. He might have put a vial of woe into every angel's hand to pour down vengeance on an apostate race--or He might have commissioned His Eternal Son to cast the earth into "the wine-press of His wrath." He might have "awoke" the sword of Justice from its scabbard to be bathed in the blood of the guilty! BUT "God sent NOT his Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world through him might be SAVED."

Let us listen to another note in this covenant song--another article in this covenant deed. The departing monarch's PERSONAL INTEREST in it next engages our thoughts. "With me." "He has made with me."

Blessed assurance! Vain would all its wondrous immunities and privileges have been, unless David, in opening the charter deed, had seen his own name in living letters there.

There is nothing that will impart true joy to the soul, but a believing, personal appropriation of the blessings of salvation. It is not enough for the sick man to know of a physician--he must make personal application to him for a remedy. It is not sufficient for the faint and thirsty traveler to reach a fountain, or to hear the murmur of the limpid stream, he must partake of it to be refreshed. The brazen serpent was within sight of the thousands of Israel as they rolled in the desert sand, gasping in agony--a look saved them--but unless they looked, they perished! The city of refuge was open to the man-slayer--if he fled there he was safe; but if he lingered even one footstep without, the avenger would cut him down! Seek to lay hold, each individually, of the blessings of the gospel covenant, and to be able to say with the appropriating faith of the great apostle, "He loved ME, and gave himself for ME;" or, with the Church in the Canticles, "My Beloved is MINE, and I am HIS," (Cant. 2:16).

And what is there to hinder us from making every blessing of the covenant our own? Not God, for "He has justified!" not Christ, for "He has died!" We cannot say with the king of Nineveh, "Who can tell if God will turn?" He will turn. He HAS turned. To each individual sinner He declares, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies." He seems to take each of us by the hand, leading us to the patriarch's dying pillow, and saying, in the words He puts into the mouth of Isaiah, "I will make an everlasting covenant with YOU, even the sure mercies of DAVID!" Are we ready to reply, "Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten?"

But this suggests the next strain in the dying man's song. It is the PERPETUITY of the covenant--an "everlasting covenant."

Everlasting! What a contrast was that word to the whole former experience of the dying king! He had known of human covenants, and how little worth they were. His past history and life was a fitful and changeful one--a tangled web of vicissitude--a long April day--showers and sunshine.

And so it is, and so it ever shall be, with the ways and works of man. He builds his Babel towers; and in a few centuries, the bleak winds, as they sweep over the deserted ruins, ask in bitter derision, "Where are they?" He rears his hundred-gate cities. Their name has perished. They have become the wild beast's lair; or the sea-waves howl over their dismantled bulwarks!

But it is different with God's works, and with this "work of all works." Amid the changes of a changing world, that covenant remains, "an everlasting covenant."

It is FROM everlasting! Wing your flight back to the ages of eternity when it originated. How blessed to think that, then, God the everlasting Father loved you! Christ the everlasting Son had your name written on His breastplate! God the Holy Spirit was waiting to utter over the moral chaos, "Let there be light!"

And if it be from everlasting, it is TO everlasting. Earth's future, like the

past, is full of uncertainty. Look, in these our times, at many of the poor covenants of earth--unstable as water, they cannot endure--delusive ropes of sand!--nations alternately becoming friend and foe--the ally turning the aggressor, and the aggressor the ally, proud ambition trampling in the dust the sacredness of international compacts. But here is the covenant of the everlasting God. It is a golden chain, stretching in unbroken links from the eternity that is past, to the eternity that is to come!

Reader! if you are a saint of God--if you can say with David "He has made with ME"--what a security is yours! Your title-deeds are from everlasting. "Predestinated unto the adoption of children"--"heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ"--you can utter the unanswerable challenge, "Who shall separate me from His love?"

And observe, just in passing, an incidental clause in the dying patriarch's confession regarding this covenant--that he was already in possession of it.

"He HAS made!" Not that he was standing then at the gate of heaven, about to have that charter put by angels into his hand, and his name for the first time engraved in it. It was a compact in which he was already personally concerned in. He had rested on it during many a weary and forlorn hour in his bypast pilgrimage. "O Lord, you ARE my God," had often made "the wilderness and solitary place glad." It was not some far-distant shelter where he had to flee when the storm overtook him. He was there already. He had long sat under the shadow of this "great Rock in a weary land!"

Christian! think of your present safety and security. If you have closed with God's offers of mercy in Jesus, you are even now within the bonds of this everlasting covenant. You can now look up to Him with a child's confidence and trust, and utter the endearing name--"My Father!"

But, to hasten to the remaining words of the dying minstrel regarding this covenant; observe next, "It is ordered"--"ORDERED."

Which of the works of God are not pervaded by a beautiful order? Think

of the succession of day and night. Think of the revolution of the seasons. Think of the stars as they walk in their majestic courses--one great law of harmony "binding the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and guiding Arcturus with his sons," (Job 38:31, 32). Look upwards; amid the magnificence of night, to that crowded concave--worlds piled on worlds--and yet see the calm grandeur of that stately march--not a discordant note there to mar the harmony, though wheeling at an inconceivable velocity in their intricate and mysterious orbits!

These heavenly sentinels all keep their appointed watchtowers. These Levites in the upper skies, light their altar-fires "at the time of the evening incense," and quench them again, when the sun, who is appointed to rule the day, walks forth from his chamber. "These wait all upon you," (Ps. 104:27). "They continue this day according to your ordinances, for all are your servants," (Ps. 119:91).

The same wondrous order obtains in the covenant of Grace. We see every attribute of God constellating in beautiful harmony around the cross of Jesus--Mercy, Truth, Holiness, Justice, casting a reflected glory on the central throne, and each throwing a luster on the other. The claims of the law have been fully met. It is not a salvation founded on some shadowy, indefinite trust in God's mercy; but it is a salvation based upon everlasting righteousness. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have combined to make every stone in the covenant building secure. God points us to the everlasting mountains, the great barriers of creation, nature's mightiest types of immutability--and says, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10

Again, it is ordered "in all things."

Not a need, believer, you can have, but what is supplied here. Christ is your Prophet, Priest, and King; God is your Father; the Holy Spirit is your Sanctifier, Guide, Comforter; the blessings of the covenant--justification, adoption, sanctification, peace in life, support in perplexity, triumph in death, grace here, glory hereafter--all the events of your life--its incidents, its accidents, its vicissitudes--are the ordered "all things" of this well-

ordered covenant. God--"the God of all grace"--promises to give you all "all-sufficiency in all things." "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly," (Ps. 84:11).

The next note in the dying song is, that this covenant is "sure."

What is sure or abiding under the sun? Our health? The strong frame may in a moment be bowed, and the death pallor mount to the cheek of manhood. Our wealth? It may breed its own worm, and take wings and flee away. Our friends? A word--a look--may estrange some--the grave, in the case of others, may have put its impressive mockery on the dream of earth's immortality. Our homes? The summons comes to strike our tent, and leave behind us the smouldering hearths of a hallowed past--so that "the place that once knew us, knows us no more."

But here is one thing sure. Here is a covenant which has the pillars of immutability to rest upon. Casting your anchor within the veil, you will outride the storm; the golden chain of covenant grace links you to the throne of God! That covenant is as sure as everlasting truth and power and righteousness can make it. The blood of Jesus purchased it, and the intercession of Jesus secures it. Mark, it is not "I have made with Him"--(that would be a poor security; how the brittle reed would bend to every storm!)--but it is "HE has made with ME." The saint's watchword and guarantee is this--"Nevertheless, I am continually with you." "YOU have held me by my right hand," (Ps. 73:23).

"This," he adds, as the closing note of his song--"this is all my salvation."

He needed no more. He had sung a short while before, in that beautiful 72d Psalm, of the glories of the Messiah's kingdom. He had seen with the eye of faith that kingdom extending from pole to pole, and from shore to shore. He had heard with prophetic ear, the gospel strain chanted "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." He seems to have felt at the time, as if with these glowing anticipations he could put aside his harp forever--that such would be a befitting close to a minstrel life--"Amen, and amen," he said; "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."

But no! As he is now really drawing near the end of his pilgrimage, the spirit of the old man "revives." He had sweetly sung of Christ as the Savior of a WORLD. But he is now himself about to pass through the swellings of Jordan--he must again take down that harp to sing of Him as his own Redeemer. "He is all MY salvation!" Oh, what a word for a dying man and a dying hour! Christ "all in all." He had no other trust. He needed no other.

Reader, it is on a dying couch, be assured, you will be led most deeply to experience the preciousness of an undivided trust in the Savior. All other cobweb confidences shall then be swept away. It has been the significant, triumphant utterance of a thousand death-beds, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Surely if any man could have felt otherwise, it was David. True, he had great sins; presumptuous sins; but he had great and manifold graces also--manifold subjects for glorying in, to which many at least would have been inclined to cleave. As a King, he had served faithfully his day and generation. He had raised the covenant nation and people to a high pitch of prosperity. He had the materials collected for a majestic Sanctuary for his God. He had prepared for unborn millions the noblest of liturgies. But, see his last deed! He hangs his harp on the cross of Calvary, saying of a Savior "whom, having not seen," he "loved"--"He is all my salvation!"

"Other refuge I have none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on You!"

Once more; he adds, "He is all my DESIRE," (or "my delight," as that word may mean.) In comparison with this, (his covenant God,) all earthly objects had lost their attractions. The stars that helped to light up the Valley of Tears, were now dimming before a Brighter Sun; the false glitter of the world, and the magnificence of empire, were fading before the rays of heavenly glory. He could say, with a meaning his own words never had before--"Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."

We, also, shall come, some day, to see the false and fascinating joys of earth in their true light--like the bubble on the stream, dancing its little moment on the surface, and then vanishing forever! Ah! how cheerless

will old age be, if it know no better than earthly delights, with which to fill the aching void of the jaded spirit; how helpless, if it find the world's scaffolding removed, and no higher and nobler prop in its place to bear the sweep of the storm! Take God as "the strength of your heart," that He may be "your portion forever"--yours in a living hour, that He may be yours in a dying hour. "He is all my delight!" Nothing else--nothing less, can satisfy the cravings of an immortal spirit. All other happiness is a mimic happiness--a wretched counterfeit of the true--a base alloy, on which Satan may have stamped the currency of heaven--but it is "of the earth, earthy," and upon it Death will put an extinguisher forever!

We could almost have wished that the strains of the sweet Singer of Israel had ended here--that his had been a glorious, unclouded "SUNSET." But this "bird of Paradise" mounting upwards, and singing so joyously as he nears the golden eaves of heaven--utters, just as he is almost lost from our sight, one other wailing note. We dare not pass it unnoticed, for it is an instructive one, full of solemn monition. He repeats his opening sentence--"Although he makes it not to grow." It was a sentence the departing monarch must have uttered through his tears.

His happiness would have been complete could he have left the world with the joyous thought, "God is my covenant God--my salvation--my delight--my desire. I am soon to bask in His presence; and, what augments these glorious prospects, is the assurance that I am not alone--that 'my house,' my family, are also 'so with God'-- I can bid earth farewell, knowing that my harp will be swept by the hand of my children's children, that they will rejoice to follow their father's steps, and share in his incorruptible crown. THIS God shall be their God forever and ever."

But, alas! they are far different thoughts which, for a moment, choke the utterance of the dying king. That covenant, in their case, is "not to grow." It is (so far as earth is concerned) a sad farewell; for more than one of these his own children have embittered his life. They are to dishonor his name, desecrate his grave, and forsake his God.

And worse than all is the self-interrogation, Why all this? Ah! conscience could not fail to recall his own sin, as the sad and humiliating cause of family degeneracy. The words of Nathan, planted a thorn in that dying

pillow. He was himself guiltily responsible for his house being "aliens to the" (spiritual) "commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise." Reader, see to it, that you do not embitter your death-bed with the agonizing reflection, that by your own sins, or by the force of evil example, you bequeath a heritage of woe to those that come after you, and with anguish like that of David your gray hairs "go down with sorrow to the grave."

On this we shall not dwell. Let us not mar those notes of joy by dwelling on this closing dirge of sorrow. Let us rather contemplate a house that "IS so with God." Let us rather picture the beautiful spectacle of a whole family, linked in the indissoluble bonds of the one "everlasting covenant," treading the same pilgrim pathway, and anticipating the same pilgrim rest--a father and mother bending their knees in prayer for their little ones--themselves living a life of high-toned consistency--their children rising up and calling them blessed--in affliction resigned; in provocation meek; in sickness sympathizing; and the epitaph on the family gravestone, written by man and ratified by God--"These all died in faith." "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Are we prepared to lie down on our death-beds, and to exult, as David did, in hopes full of immortality? Can we omit the only note of sorrow in his song, and make the words of the dying warrior our own? Can we sing it in life amid all its changes? Can we sing it in affliction, amid all its tears? Can we sing it as we walk through the valley of death-shade? Can we take it with us, as our passport at the golden gates?--"HE has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure--for this is all my salvation, and all my desire!"

## **ABIRAM & SEGUB**

### **TWO SUNSETS ON THE HILLS OF**



## JERICHO.

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath--"Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho--At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates." Joshua 6:26

"It was during Ahab's reign that HIEL, a man from Bethel, rebuilt Jericho. When he laid the foundations, his oldest son, ABIRAM, died. And when he finally completed it by setting up the gates, his youngest son, SEGUB, died. This all happened according to the message from the Lord concerning Jericho spoken by Joshua son of Nun." 1 Kings 16:34

In the midst of the reign of an idolatrous king of Israel, we come to an epitaph on the gravestone of two children, within the city of Jericho.

It is probable that the whole family of Hiel lie entombed in that rocky cave. Two blossoms, at all events, have been nipped in the bud--two "little suns" have set on the mountains of Judah--going down "before it is yet day."

As we stand on the heights of Jericho, beside this newly-hewn sepulcher, with the Jordan flowing through the green plains below--let us inquire WHY it is that these two youthful pilgrims have been called so soon to tread the waves of the typical Jordan--why these two little lives have been so prematurely taken.

There is always a solemn and saddening interest surrounding the death-beds and the graves of the young. There are often, though we understand them not, wise and loving reasons for these early removals. It is God's own inscription, though it often cannot be read through our blinding tears--"Taken from the evil to come." Parents often erroneously infer that the Lord has been inflicting merited retribution on themselves, for their own sins, by snatching away "the desire of their eyes with a stroke;" while in reality it was some gracious purpose regarding the little ones themselves, sparing them unforeseen experiences of sorrow and sin, and gifting them with an early crown.

In this passage of sacred story, however, we have a special exception. Jehovah here vindicates His own word and righteousness, in writing the household of this Bethelite childless. It is a story of significant warning and instruction. Though dead, these silent tongues still solemnly speak.

Jericho, the old city of palms, had been lying in ruins for five hundred years, ever since the Israelitish conquest. God had pronounced by the lips of Joshua a solemn curse on the man who would dare to rebuild it-- "Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho--At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates." Joshua 6:26. That curse had been handed down from generation to generation. Many, doubtless, as they passed near the site of the old city, and saw the magnificence of its situation as "the key of Palestine," with its two valleys behind, each pouring into it a fertilizing stream--the magnificent forest of palm-trees for miles on every side--the Jordan flowing, with rapid torrent, amid rare luxuriance, on its way to the Dead Sea--many who witnessed all these manifold natural advantages, would long to see the walls of the city again restored, and its ramparts rebuilt, as when Israel first beheld them from the opposite valleys of Moab.

But any such longing was immediately repressed, when they recalled the stringent prohibition which threatened bereavement and death to the man that should dare to violate a Divine decree. It must have been an impressive sight to see the old ruins, "beautiful for situation," scattered as they had been for ages, untouched by the hand of man; the shepherd alone, perhaps, following his flock amid the lush herbage--or the wandering Arab, then, as now, pitching his tent amid the moss-grown stones. But no builder dared set his foot among them, lest haply he might be found "fighting against God."

At last a bold, defiant spirit rises up, to make the daring venture. A dweller in Jacob's old city--which had now, alas! by the worship of Ahab's golden calves, sadly belied its name as "the House of God"--Hiel the Bethelite rises up, in impious pride, to brave the prohibition, and risk the dreadful consequences. But who has hardened himself against God and prospered? He enters the proscribed ground, and already, just as he has begun to dig the foundation for a new capital--a messenger speeds from

his dwelling with heavy tidings. In digging these forbidden foundations, he has dug the grave of his first-born son! On the first stone of the old ruins being removed, an arrow sped from the quiver of God with unerring aim, and laid low the pride of his heart!

Will he take warning? Another child still is left--his youngest--probably his only other--his Benjamin--his best beloved. Amid the bitterness of the first bereavement, he fastens the severed tendrils of affection around his surviving boy, saying, "This child shall comfort us."

Surely now at least Heil will profit by the dreadful voice of warning! The Hebrew workmen will be disbanded from their cursed enterprise, and desolation will once more be installed amid the lonely ruins. But, No! it has been well said by the preacher, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." The arrow is again on the string. He refuses to humble himself by repentance--own the Divine hand, and desist from his impious enterprise. With "hardened and impenitent heart" he spurns the dreadful counsel, and will listen to none of the reproof!

He has cleared the foundations. Stone by stone, edifice by edifice is rising--an imposing city again crowns the Jordan-heights, and looks forth amid its forests of majestic palms. Hiel, inflated with pride, forgets the early warning. If staggered at first by the occurrence of the death of his firstborn, simultaneously with the digging of the city's foundations, he speaks of it, as we often find many still doing in similar circumstances, only as "a strange and unhappy coincidence." His inmost thought is, "Let me bury my vain grief for the loss of my first-born. I have yet a son called by my name. He will be the pride of my family. He will transmit my name to posterity as the founder of the second Jericho."

The battlements are raised. The walls are completed. Perhaps thousands are congregated to witness the last act in the bold enterprise--raising the ponderous gates of iron on their hinges. Something like the ovation of a conqueror awaits the hero of the day. Hiel's bosom is swelling at the moment with the one dominant thought--"This is the great city I have built." But another messenger, at that moment--like him who sped to the patriarch of a former age--comes with the heaviest tidings a parent's

heart can hear. The voice of triumph is that day turned to mourning. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not," and his own obdurate disregard of the Divine command compels the taking of "Benjamin also." The first procession we see treading the new streets is a funeral crowd! Hiel is the chief mourner. He is bearing his last--his only one--to the rocky vault where his first-born lies. He has rushed with madness against Jehovah's shield, and terrible has been the price of his audacity and sin; for "When he laid the foundations, his oldest son, ABIRAM, died. And when he finally completed it by setting up the gates, his youngest son, SEGUB, died."

As that mournful procession is pacing the streets, let us join it in thought, and gather solemn lessons and warning for ourselves.

What could have induced Hiel to brave so solemn a prohibition, and risk incurring so dreadful a penalty?--A Bethelite--a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"--he must, like all his brethren, have been abundantly cognizant of the curse recorded by Israel's leader. It was the nursery tale of every Hebrew mother to her child. How did he come to be so mad and foolhardy as to dare the Almighty's displeasure, and serve himself heir to the curse? To get his name immortalized as the founder of a city, was a poor equivalent for the irreparable loss. And, independent of natural affection, to a Jew, (as the possible ancestor of Messiah,) the heaviest infliction was the deprivation of his offspring.

Let us try to conjecture one or two reasons for Hiel's contemptuous disregard of the Divine command.

To take the extreme view of his character, Hiel (Israelite by name as he was) may have been in heart, like many professing religionists still, a practical Infidel and Atheist. We know that, under Ahab's reign of unparalleled wickedness and irreligion, many were contaminated with the impiety of the reigning monarch. God, the God of their fathers, was by multitudes virtually disowned. Hiel may have denounced the whole story of the threatened curse as a fable--a bugbear and delusion--some old legend of a lying prophet--the falsehood palmed on an unsophisticated age and people; and when, passing oftentimes along the valley of the Jordan, he saw that marvelous site abandoned to ruin and decay, solely,

as he surmised, on account of a foolish superstition, he at length resolved to expose and unmask the lie. He put forth his hand, like Achan, to touch the accursed thing; saying in his heart, in the words of the wicked boasters of old, with a proud, self-confident, infidel sneer, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard," (Ps. 94:7). But woe to the worm of the dust that contends with his Maker! As wave after wave sweeps over his household, the solemn truth is brought home to him, the confession is forced from him amid the wail of death--"Who has hardened himself against the Lord, and prospered?" (Job 9:4.) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," (Heb. 10:31).

How many are there, it is to be feared, with Hiel's spirit still among ourselves! God has put a solemn curse on the man who will dare to upbuild the city of iniquity. He has put a curse, also, on the neglecter of salvation. He has solemnly declared, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished," (Prov. 11:21). But there are those (bearing, it may be, like Hiel, the name of Israelite), outward professors--who carry inwardly Hiel's atheist heart. They spurn God's curse; they treat His solemn warnings about death, judgment, eternity, as idle tales. Yes, and there is so much, to them, startling, and apparently inconsistent, in the providential, government of God, that, in their secret thoughts, they deny alike a moral government and a moral Governor. Regardless of consequences, "they will take their chance;" they will outbrave these denunciations--they will build where God has forbidden to build. They say, with the people to whom Ezekiel prophesied, "The Lord has forsaken the earth;" (Ezek. 8:12)--what do we care for lying prophets--enthusiastic dreamers!--neither nature nor experience endorses these pulpit utterances and Bible threats. "We will walk in the light of our own eyes. Who is the Lord, that He should reign over us?"

"Woe unto those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him," (Isa. 3:11). God may not, as in the case of Hiel, undeceive you, in THIS world, in your atheist-dream. He seldom now, as in the old dispensation, makes visible and temporal retribution to descend on the scorers of His word and warnings; sentence against an evil work is not now, as it then was, "executed speedily," and therefore the

hearts of the sons of men are all the more "fully set in them to do evil." But there is a day coming, when, as the gates of death close upon you, (as Hiel's gates closed on Jericho,) the Divine denunciations shall be awfully verified; and the conviction be solemnly flashed upon you, (shall it be for the first time?) before the great white throne, "Truly there is a God who judges in the earth!"

But let us pass to a more modified view of Hiel's self-delusion. In rebuilding Jericho, he may have had an honest belief in the being and power of the God of his fathers, as well as in the truthfulness and reality of Joshua's warning. But he may have been influenced by the thought that the stringency of the old prohibition may now have been relaxed; that what was imperative enough in Joshua's time, was not so binding after the lapse of five centuries. Time does much in softening the rigor of MAN. He may have measured the Divine feelings and procedure by a comparison with the human; he may have concluded that God had now modified the severity of the olden curse. "There surely" (he would argue) "could be no great sin, or risk, or danger now, in rescuing such a noble site from ruin, and erecting a strong frontier-city to guard incursions from the border-tribes of Moab. The curse, binding and literal at the time, had now, surely, become obsolete." He may have even made out a case of necessity; that he was only doing a patriot's deed, for which he would be lauded in all coming time as one of the heroes of the nation!

MAN may change, but GOD never can. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years." When God pronounces a curse, it is not as a human being, who is influenced by momentary emotion, passion, prejudice. The WRATH OF GOD is not a passion, but a principle. It is the calm, deep, deliberate response of His nature to sin. His word is unalterable--His judgments are subject to no waywardness or caprice.

How many there are, in these days of ours, who apply Hiel's false reasoning to the Word of God and its solemn averments. Disciples, as they call themselves, of a dreamy dogma--or theory of "development," who dare to speak and write of the Bible as an antiquated book, containing only the utterances of some Jewish shepherds, and vine-growers, and fishermen; and whose day, and meaning, and obligations are past. As "progress," say they, is the world's normal law, so there is

advance here, as in everything else. This Bible, with its old-world threatenings, was all very well for that old-world state of things, when it was a child, and spoke as a child, and understood as a child. But now the world has reached its manhood, and "put away childish things." The Bible curses are contained in the code of "the law which genders to bondage." We live under the Gospel, and the truth has made us free. The God that spoke in curses amid the blackness, darkness, and tempest of Sinai, is not the God who now speaks to us from heaven.

He is! The same "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," (Heb. 1:1). And hear how that Son speaks--they are his own living utterances--"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Mat. 5:17, 18). His word is very faithful. His word and His throne have immutability to rest upon. "I am the Lord; I change not," (Mal. 3:6). "These things," he says to every such presumptuous dreamer, "these things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought" that I was changed--that I had altered the thing that had gone forth out of my mouth--"that I was altogether such a one as yourself." But I will demonstrate my righteous adherence to every threat against "the workers of iniquity." "I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes." (Ps. 50:21).

Let us beware of measuring God by our puny selves. Oblivion does its work with us. Time, like the waves of the sea on the rippled sand, obliterates much of the memories of sin; and because it does so, we are apt impiously to dream that such is the case with God also. But He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The past, and present, and future are to Him alike. There was to Him, no measurable period of time between Joshua's utterance of the curse against a builder of the doomed city, and Hiel's futile attempt to fight against it. Be assured, all that God has said in His Word in ages past remains uncanceled, unaltered, and unalterable, to this hour. We may well write, "Thus says the Lord," on every curse, as well as every blessing. With the memorable example and

signal retribution of Hiel before us, let us make it our earnest prayer, "Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins."

We have just surmised, that one false idea which Hiel may have fostered, and trusted in, was, that the lapse of ages had modified the stringency of the old prohibition. He may also have been influenced in his undertaking by an expectation that God would not rigidly stand to His word--that He would not adhere so sternly to His threat, as many supposed and dreaded He would.

Perhaps he might be strengthened in this supposition by what he had observed in his own native city of Bethel. He had there seen that same God of Israel foully dishonored--His name blasphemed--His word and authority scorned--golden calves and Baal-shrines polluting the sacred places--and yet, notwithstanding, He had interposed with no visible judgment. He seemed to "wink" at these heinous sins. He had visited the idolaters with no retribution. Hiel, from all this, may have drawn the unwarrantable conclusion that Jehovah was not rigid in the enforcement of His threats--that He did not mean all He said--that, having apparently overlooked the Bethel calf-worshipers, He would not be over severe on the less heinous sin of braving His curse in the building of Jericho.

He makes the dreadful venture. But first, over the grave of his elder, and then of his younger son, he is brought to read the inscription--"God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent." As he returns, through the streets of the new-built city, to his rifled home, and as he marks the two vacant seats in his desolate house, he could say--(may we hope it was through penitent tears of shame and sorrow and devout humiliation)--"God has spoken once, yes, TWICE have I heard this, that power belongs unto God!"

Ah! is not Hiel's reasoning here, also, the ruinous, soul-deluding reasoning of multitudes still? There is no more common or fallacious argument than this--"God will not be so strict as He says He will be. His nature and His name are love. He never could, and never will, curse the creature of His own making. These denunciations will be modified and softened at the Great Day. His justice will merge into compassion. Stern Retribution will descend these iron steps, and Mercy will ascend



triumphant to her golden throne."

"No, but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Go back to these twin graves at Jericho, and read in them the great principle of God's moral government--that when He says, "Cursed be the man," He means "cursed," and when He says, "Blessed," He means "blessed."

You remember, when Saul ventured on a similar unworthy tampering with the Word of God, in the commanded extirpation of Amalek, and reserved (contrary to an express injunction) King Agag and the goodliest portion of his flocks and herds. He doubtless imagined that there was no great evil in the reservation itself--that, at all events, God would overlook it--that He would visit so trivial a departure from the letter of His Word with no great severity. What was the result? Saul lost his kingdom. The prophet of Jehovah stood before the monarch, confronting him with the question, "What means this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king," (1 Sam. 15:23). The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, (and that is a blessed truth to us!) But let us always view it side by side with its counterpart--"The Lord is not slack concerning his threatenings."

When we see vice apparently unrebuked, walking with unblushing front, pillowed often in affluence--the wicked apparently with no bands either in their life or death--we are apt to draw the false inference that God is, like Baal, "asleep"--that He has flung the reins of His moral government loose to chance--that He takes "no account of these matters." But though it is true that His dealings now-a-days are so far altered from those of the earlier dispensation, that transgression is not followed by temporal retribution--yet judgment is in dreadful reserve. The sinner treasures up to himself "wrath against the day of wrath." God is saying now, in words He uttered of old to Isaiah, "I will take my rest; I will CONSIDER in my dwelling place," (Isa. 18:4). This is the time for His "considering." The weapon of vengeance is still sheathed. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dies. He waits to be gracious.

But let us not misconstrue His forbearance as if it denoted any alteration in His purposes. If not now, at least hereafter, on the Great Day, the

dreadful truth shall be made manifest--"Be sure your sin will find you out." "Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." (Eccles. 11:9).

The great practical lesson from all this subject is, **BEWARE OF RESISTING GOD.**

He ever speaks to all of us solemnly in His providences. Let us beware of attempts to stifle His voice and precipitate our own ruin. Hiel's offence was deeply aggravated. When the impious builder, in digging the city's foundation, carried to the grave his elder-born--he might well have bowed his head in the dust--owned God's sovereignty, and "turned at His reproof." But he despised all His counsel. The solemn warning failed to impede him in his unrighteous resolution. The buildings rose; but he was only thereby exposing his bosom to another dart of death.

How many there are among ourselves like Hiel! Reader! God has spoken to you once by some solemn warning--by sickness--by worldly loss--by opening perhaps the grave of your child. Have you listened to His voice?--Have you bowed to the rod?--Have you profited by the warning?--Or is it the case that the monition has passed and gone?--that the Jericho of pleasure or sin is, rearing just as before--provoking Him to new, and, it may be, severer judgments?

"Harden not your hearts." "Exhort one another," says the apostle, "while it is called today, lest any of you be **HARDENED** through the deceitfulness of sin." Beware, like Moab, of "settling on your lees," of getting into that dreadful state of callousness and indifference, alike under warning and mercy--"fattening your hearts for a day of slaughter," (Prov. 29:1). In the case of Hiel, it was a presumptuous hardening after God had solemnly pled with him through tears of parental anguish. Remember that solemn word--"He that being often reprov'd hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," (Prov. 29:1). Are any who read these words sinning in the face of solemn monitions, when God is giving them "line upon line, precept upon precept"--speaking to them by "earthquake," or "whirlwind," or "fire," or "the still small voice?" Be assured He will yet make inquisition for these

rejected warnings--this unrequited love! Go in thought to Jericho. Stop and read the epitaph on that tombstone--"Consider THIS, you that forget God!"

One other sentence in conclusion. Let none suppose, from all that has been suggested by this subject, that we entertain a repulsive theology--a theology that would represent God--the loving Father of His people--as a vindictive Being, armed with curses, stronger to smite, than "strong to save." He visits indeed "iniquity unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate him;" but He shows "mercy unto thousands of those who love him." While "He can by no means clear the guilty," yet "He delights in mercy." His blessings are more abundant than His curses. His gospel message begins with the proclamation of "peace on earth and good-will to men;" and it ends with the invitation, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely," (Rev. 22:17). The infatuated builders of every city of sin--what can they expect but ruin and disaster?

But "we HAVE a strong city--salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks;" and He who, by His own blood, purchased a right to bestow upon us that city, says, as He stands by its gates, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28). Yes, say not that we teach a gloomy theology with such a God as this--who, in order that He might be a Father to us, "spared not HIS own Son." Hiel, from pride and vainglory, sacrificed His son in laying the foundation of an earthly city. But we can tell of a great Being who, in laying the foundations of a more magnificent city than earth ever saw, surrendered "His only-begotten," His "well-beloved." He laid its foundations--He set up its immortal gates in the death of His First-born; and all in order that guilty, worthless sinners might be saved!--that in the exercise of His paternal love, He might embrace a lost world in the arms of His mercy, and exclaim, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!"

That city expands its sheltering portals to all. None are forbidden to enter. We are encouraged to "open the gates, that the righteous (those made righteous through the righteousness of another) may enter in." A city in which--unlike that of which we have been speaking--the wail of the mourner is never heard, and where death never enters!

Oh, look away from all human shelters to that "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Be assured, all who are content with building for earth the Jerichos of the present, shall find there the grave of their hopes. But "they of THIS city shall flourish like grass on the earth." "The world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever!"

## **JEHOIADA**

### **A LONG DAY AND LATE SUNSET**

"Now JEHOIADA was old and full of years, and he died at the age of a hundred and thirty. He was buried with the kings in the City of David, because of the good he had done in Israel for God and his temple." 2 Chron. 24:15-16

That must have been a remarkable spectacle in Jerusalem, when this funeral procession was seen wending along the ridge of Mount Zion, on its way to the sepulcher of the kings. No 'royal' head had bowed to the stroke of death--and yet the gates of that sacred mausoleum, which holds the dust of David, Solomon, and the succeeding kings, have that day been flung open to receive an addition to its silent trust!

Who can be the newly-embalmed and shrouded occupant for the 'long home of silence'? For whom has a nation decreed this strange, unusual honor? Honor, indeed, it was; for zealously were these precincts guarded against unworthy entrants. Royalty itself was not always a passport through these gloomy portals, if life had been stained with dishonor or crime. The very last king who died in his palace in Jerusalem (though the blood of David flowed in his veins) was deemed unfit to repose along with

the dust of his sires. After an inglorious reign of eight years Jehoram was buried, we are told, "in the city of David, but not in the sepulchers of the kings," (2 Chron. 21:20).

Who, then, is this honored subject for whom regal funeral rites are appointed, while his master is left to his long slumber in a common resting-place? No regalia, no imposing symbols of royalty, are carried alongside that casket; yet the long funeral crowd, and the undisguised, sincere lamentations, truthfully proclaim that "a prince in Israel has fallen."

True, JEHOIADA, in his official position, as God's high priest, was worthy of all honor; yet, most of the Jewish pontiffs passed to their graves in strict privacy, without leaving in the sacred chronicles even a register of their death or burial. It was his character and worth, not his position, which gathered that mourning crowd, and opened that place of honored interment! We are summoned in thought to the funeral of a faithful public servant--a venerable patriarch--a minister and man of God--one who, for the long period of one hundred and thirty years, had lived out that great definition of spiritual existence, "to be good and to do good."

His name was not associated with great hero-deeds or brilliant martial exploits. He had a better and nobler vocation. By his piety and zeal, his prudence and sagacity, he had steered the ark of God amid environing storms. Half a generation--thirty years--had passed, since he had been able to engage in active duty; but even that long "sunset"--that period of deepening twilight--was one, also, of sacred and momentous influence. Alas! no sooner had his hand left the helm, and death sealed his eyes, than the ark was once more among the heathen. His brother Hebrews, therefore, had not miscalculated his worth when they followed his body to its grave with tears, and decreed to him a regal funeral.

The funeral is all left to imagination. The sepulcher on Zion has long ago moldered with the royal dust which for ages it enclosed; but the epitaph on Jehoiada's shrine is still left deathless and imperishable on the pages of Scripture--"Now Jehoiada was old and full of years, and he died at the age of a hundred and thirty. He was buried with the kings in the City of David, because of the good he had done in Israel for God and his temple."

As we read his eulogy let us select, among others, three features of his character which stand out with special prominence--his faith, his courage, and his unselfishness.

I. HIS FAITH. His lot, as we have just said, was cast in a stormy period of Judah's history. It will require a brief historical summary to put the reader in possession of the ecclesiastical and political exigencies of the time.

One of the basest and most unscrupulous of tyrants (a disgrace to her sex) swayed at this moment the usurped scepter of the house of David. It was the only blot in the fair fame of good Jehoshaphat, that, from motives of worldly policy (oh, how many in a similar way blight and ruin their children's prospects), he brought about an unhallowed marriage-union between his son and successor to the throne and a daughter of Ahab and his infamous queen Jezebel. Athaliah inherited alike the depraved nature and practice of her Syrian mother; she obtained a speedy control over the facile mind of Jehoram, who, obliterating all memory of his father's goodness, plunged into the wild excesses of the house of Ahab--importing to Jerusalem Phoenician idolatries, and stripping the very Temple to decorate a shrine for Baal.

Ahaziah's name means "God-exalted," but by his own guilty deeds he became rather God-forsaken. Philistines and Arabians were stirred up to inflict on him the divine retribution. They sacked the palaces, dragged his wives and children into captivity--Athaliah and her son Ahaziah alone being left.

Ahaziah's reign was a brief and inglorious one. He fell, mortally wounded, on the heights of Jezreel, and was buried in Samaria. On his unexpected decease, the artful queen-mother, as the only means of perpetuating her power, and of gratifying an unnatural ambition, resolved on the desperate and unscrupulous measure of consigning the remaining seed-royal to a cruel and indiscriminate massacre. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she may not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget," (Isa. 49:15). Yes, she did forget! It was her own unhappy grandchildren whose blood had to answer the bloodthirsty edict! "When Athaliah, the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, learned that her son was

dead, she set out to destroy the rest of Judah's royal family." 2 Chron. 22:10

Good old Jehoiada the high priest, at an age extending to nearly a century, looked on in dismay at the inauguration of this reign of terror. He was himself united in marriage to a daughter of Jehoram; and they were jointly cognizant of a fact that had escaped the knowledge of the murderer--that is, that one infant child of the king still survived the cruel extermination. They knew God's promise, and they had faith to believe that it would not fail. "The Lord has sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it. Of the fruit of your body will I set upon YOUR THRONE," (Ps. 132:11). It was a perilous experiment--a bold venture, whose discovery would cost them their lives; but they resolved (confiding the fact to a select few) to hide this only remaining descendent of David's line, with his nurse, in one of the chambers of the Temple. Meantime they would watch the favorable moment, to wrest for him the scepter from the hands of the usurper, and invest him with his hereditary rights--"But Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, took Ahaziah's infant son, Joash, and stole him away from among the rest of the king's children, who were about to be killed. She put Joash and his nurse in a bedroom. In this way, Jehosheba, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, hid the child so that Athaliah could not murder him." 2 Chron. 22:11

We can imagine that nothing but a devout faith in God could have instigated this pious pair to so perilous a resolve. It was, of all others, a subject for the exercise of faith. The very spot in the sacred corridors where that little one night by night was rocked asleep, seemed to be a pledge of safety and success. Was it not of the temple-courts the Lord Himself said, "THERE will I make THE HORN OF DAVID to bud; I have ordained a lamp for my anointed," (Ps. 132:17). Might not this be the sacred lullaby his aunt loved to sing in the sacred chamber over his cradle, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me?" (Ps. 27:5) Yes! God HAD "ordained a lamp for his anointed." That lamp was flickering. It was reduced to one feeble spark in the person of a little infant. The extinction of that spark would be the extinguishing of God's promise. But they knew that "what God had promised, he was able also to perform." That tiny

lamp was confided to their custody. They would do all they could, looking to Him for a blessing, to preserve it from being quenched by the fury of the oppressor. Did not the parents of Moses, in similar circumstances, and in the face of an exterminating massacre, hide their child for three successive months, and "were not afraid of the king's commandment?" In a like spirit, undeterred by the certain vengeance which disclosure of their plot would entail, they are "strong in faith, giving glory to God," (Rom. 4:20).

Oh, for a spirit of similar faith in the midst of difficulties--believing God's declarations, trusting His faithfulness, and with our finger on His promises, saying, "Remember this word unto your servant, on which you have caused me to hope!" God often puts us in perplexing positions for the trial of our faith. He brings his people, or his Church, into exigencies, where "vain is the help of man," just that we may, with unswerving confidence, cast our burdens upon Him, saying, with the Psalmist, "This I know--God is for me. In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word. In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me," (Ps. 56:9-11).

## II. Let us note Jehoiada's BOLDNESS and COURAGE.

Boldness in action is the necessary result of faith. It is the principle of faith bearing fruit. Doubtless, Jehoiada had often and again commended his enterprise in prayer to Him "who dwelt between the cherubim," and was encouraged, by an appeal to the Urim, to go boldly forward.

It was on a Sabbath morning--when the sacrifice was laid on the altar, and the crowd were standing round the outer temple-gates. The fresh relay of priests and Levites had just come in; and the others, whose weekly course that day expired, according to custom, remained inside the sacred enclosure until evening. Thus a double guard--a double force was secured, for the carrying out of the bold plot. The secret, wisely and judiciously confided to a confidential few, had been whispered in other favoring ears. "These men traveled secretly throughout Judah and summoned the Levites and clan leaders in Judah's towns to come to Jerusalem. They all gathered at the Temple of God, where they made a covenant with Joash, the young king. Jehoiada said to them, "The time



has come for the king's son to reign! The Lord has promised that a descendant of David will be our king." 2 Chron. 23:2-3

The votive trophies of battle--spears and swords which king David had placed in the temple-armory--were taken down from the walls on which they had for a century hung. Making use of these weapons, the enrolment of a volunteer band of priests and Levites was speedily completed. These were posted at the several avenues, to guard alike against confusion or attack. On a raised seat or platform, adjoining "the king's pillar," with massive golden crown on his head, and God's law in his hand, stood an innocent boy of seven years of age. It was young Joash, the alone survivor of the murdered family! But there he was, God's own pledge that the fruit of David's body should "sit upon his throne!"

And now the astounding fact, (for six years carefully concealed from the populace,) that in these priestly chambers there slumbered, night after night, an heir of the throne of Judah, was made known! It spreads with the speed of a conflagration. The shout "Long live the King!" rises first in the Temple-court. It is caught up by the dense crowd thronging the gates. The strange, unusual commotion floats across the valley, and is wafted in at the palace windows to the ears of the queen. In a few moments she has crossed the bridge connecting palace and temple. A glance of her infuriate eye reads the whole truth. "Treason! treason!" she cries in vain, to her speechless, unpitying, un-supporting guards.

Her life of guilt is fast ebbing to a close--her die is cast. As the shouts of a patriot people are ringing a welcome to their young king, the infamous Athaliah is dragged outside the sacred enclosure to pay the just penalty for her crimes. She lies weltering in her own blood!

2 Chron. 23:9-15--Then Jehoiada supplied the commanders with the spears and shields that had once belonged to King David and were stored in the Temple of God. He stationed the guards around the king, with their weapons ready. They formed a line from the south side of the Temple around to the north side and all around the altar. Then Jehoiada and his sons brought out Joash, the king's son, and placed the crown on his head. They presented Joash with a copy of God's laws and proclaimed him king. Then they anointed him, and everyone shouted, "Long live the king!"

When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and the shouts of praise to the king, she hurried to the Lord's Temple to see what was happening. And she saw the newly crowned king standing in his place of authority by the pillar at the Temple entrance. The officers and trumpeters were surrounding him, and people from all over the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Singers with musical instruments were leading the people in a great celebration. When Athaliah saw all this, she tore her clothes in despair and shouted, "Treason! Treason!"

Then Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders who were in charge of the troops, "Take her out of the Temple, and kill anyone who tries to rescue her. Do not kill her here in the Temple of the Lord." So they seized her and led her out to the gate where horses enter the palace grounds, and they killed her there.

We cannot sufficiently admire the calm forethought, the consummate prudence, and the determined courage of Jehoiada. It was an enterprise which required a wise head and a strong hand, as well as a pious heart. We would naturally look, at all events, for the accomplishment of such a plot to other than one whose head was whitened with the snows of a century. In this respect, it is a deed unparalleled in the annals of sacred history. Such exploits generally demand the prime of manhood, when the sun of life is at its meridian. We look for quiet bars of purple and gold-- emblems of repose--when that sun is going down--then "the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and those that look out of the windows are darkened; when fears are in the way, and the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails," (Eccles. 12:5).

The stirring ambition, as well as the physical endurance, requisite for such deeds, have then generally declined; and when they occur, we must look for some stronger than any impelling natural principle. GOD had evidently nerved that old man's arm. He had girded him for the battle. He had, with reference to his old age, verified the truth of that unfailing promise--giving "strength" equal to his "day." He had answered his prayer--"O God, you have taught me from my youth--and hitherto have I declared your wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have showed your strength unto this generation, and your power to every one that is to come." (Ps. 71:17,

18).

It belongs not to God's ministers to intermeddle with political intrigues, except in the gravest emergencies, when His cause and His Church are concerned in the issue. But it is a remarkable and encouraging fact that, in all great and momentous crises of His Church's history, when its bulwarks have been assailed by enemies without or traitors within, He has ever raised up men adequate for the exigency; sage in counsel; firm in principle; bold and fearless in action; who have, like Jehoiada, not only been instrumental in sheathing the sword of oppression, "stilling the enemy and the avenger," but in vindicating truth, upholding the cause of righteousness, and transmitting a heritage of spiritual blessings from generation to generation.

III. Let us further mark Jehoiada's UNSELFISHNESS. Duty and self-interest are often in conflict and antagonism. It was so with Jehoiada. Had he been a selfish man--guided (as the world too often is) by policy, and sacrificing all that is sacred to base and unworthy personal ambition, he was the very last who would have shown any anxiety to shield Joash from the general massacre. Though he himself had no royal blood in his veins, yet (by marrying the sister of the former king) his own son Zechariah was (failing the children of Ahaziah) the heir-apparent to the throne of Judah. If, therefore, on principles of base worldly expediency, he had been careful to hide anyone from the vengeance of Athaliah, it would have been his own child rather than Joash. But this good and honored man would spurn such sordid baseness. Though he had the strong temptation of the golden crown glittering on the brow of his own son, with a noble unselfishness he takes with parental fondness the unprotected orphan and rival under his nurturing roof, and does all in his power to prevent a cruel tyrant stretching forth her hand against the Lord's anointed.

Noble lesson here, also, in the midst of a world and an age of selfishness! When we see so many grasping with unscrupulous greed any tempting bribe--from avaricious monarchs grasping kingdoms, to avaricious and unscrupulous citizens in private life building their own reputation and fortune on the ruins of another--stooping to base craftiness, godless "expediency," unprincipled policy, in attaining their ends--oh, it is

refreshing to turn to these staunch examples in the olden days, where self-interest spurned to climb the coveted heights on the ruins of a man's life, or means, or character--willing, unselfishly, to give way, although another rather than themselves be bettered, if the will and cause of God be promoted, submitting to any amount of sacrifice for private and public good. "All seek their own" is the too truthful motto of these degenerate times; but the noblest feature in a man's character is abnegation of self--if his fellows can point to him and say, "That man is as much interested in the welfare of others as in his own."

If we have dwelt mainly on the one public act of Jehoiada, it is not to the exclusion of the more strictly religious traits of his character and history; for it is evident from the sacred narrative, that what embalmed him most in the memories of Israel--what summoned forth the warmest tears on that day of his funeral--was his great work in connection with the repairing of the house of the Lord. His sacred influence had happily been brought to bear upon the young king. He summoned the priests and Levites and gave them these instructions: "Go at once to all the towns of Judah and collect the required annual offerings, so that we can repair the Temple of your God. Do not delay!"

The king and Jehoiada gave the money to the construction supervisors, who hired masons and carpenters to restore the Temple of the Lord. They also hired metalworkers, who made articles of iron and bronze for the Lord's Temple. So the men in charge of the renovation worked hard, and they made steady progress. They restored the Temple of God according to its original design and strengthened it. 2 Chron. 24:5, 12-13

Happy for a nation, happy for a church, when they have in their rulers, civil and ecclesiastical, this combination of political sagacity and manly piety--unflinching alike in their fidelity to the throne and the altar, "rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"--who, moreover, imbued with the great truth that it is "righteousness" alone which "exalts a nation," deem it the loftiest mission in which they can be embarked, to "lengthen Zion's cords and strengthen her stakes."

How many there are whose life-long ambition is posthumous fame--that,

like Jehoiada, they may be "buried in the city among the kings," and on storied urns or marble monuments their names may be handed down to successive generations! God's Great Ones have a truer and nobler immortality; but if you would have the most enviable immortality earth can bestow--if you would aspire to live in the memories and hearts of those that come after you--let the eulogy on the old priest of Israel be the coveted epitaph on your lowlier grave-stone--it may stimulate others, as they read it, to follow your steps--"He had done much good for God and his Temple."

# ELISHA

## SUNSET ON THE HEIGHTS OF GILGAL

2 Kings 13:14-21. When ELISHA was in his last illness, King Jehoash of Israel visited him and wept over him. "My father! My father! The chariots and charioteers of Israel!" he cried. Elisha told him, "Get a bow and some arrows." And the king did as he was told. Then Elisha told the king of Israel to put his hand on the bow, and Elisha laid his own hands on the king's hands. Then he commanded, "Open that eastern window," and he opened it. Then he said, "Shoot!" So he did. Then Elisha proclaimed, "This is the Lord's arrow, full of victory over Aram, for you will completely conquer the Arameans at Aphek. Now pick up the other arrows and strike them against the ground." So the king picked them up and struck the ground three times. But the man of God was angry with him. "You should have struck the ground five or six times!" he exclaimed. "Then you would have beaten Aram until they were entirely destroyed. Now you will be victorious only three times." Then Elisha died and was buried.

Groups of Moabite raiders used to invade the land each spring. Once when some Israelites were burying a man, they spied a band of these raiders. So they hastily threw the body they were burying into the tomb of Elisha. But as soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the dead man revived and jumped to his feet!

The quiet glory of this SUNSET corresponds with the antecedent history. We love to seat ourselves on the brow of Gilgal, and watch his sun slowly disappearing over the neighboring hills.

ELISHA stands out, in sacred story, in striking contrast to his great predecessor, Elijah.--The prophet of Horeb had a reflection of his own character in the earthquake, the tempest, and the fire seen from his mountain-cave. He on whom his mantle fell, and whose life-close we are now to consider, had his type and symbol in "the still small voice" that

succeeded.

The one was the Peter, the other the John of the prophetic period. The one, bold, vehement, daring--coming forth with shaggy hair and leathern belt from the savage glens of Northern Gilead, where he had been "fitly nursed" for his life of visionary exploits--with a mind subject to strong impulses, as easily prostrated as elated. The other, dignified, yet calm, faithful and uncompromising, yet loving and tender--the Barnabas of the Old Testament, ("the son of consolation,") amid the stricken homes of Israel.

The one is like a meteor blazing through the skies--startling us with the suddenness of his appearances, from the moment he appears on the stage of sacred history confronting guilty Ahab, until, with equal suddenness and equal splendor, he is borne majestically to heaven in a chariot of fire. The other has less of this fitful luster. Yet in conjunction with milder attributes he has the majesty, also, of the sun "going forth as a bridegroom from his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race!"

In one word, Elisha was, in the strictest sense, a great and a good man; and in his goodness consisted his greatness. His life is a living sermon. He was to be found in season and out of season, in every occasion of need. Never do we find him lacking in moral courage. Wherever his word and presence were required to rebuke sin, this righteous man was "bold as a lion!" He seems to grudge no time, no labor, if only his great work be advanced. We find him in royal palaces, in martial camps, in weeping households. At one time, hurling the dreadful malediction over impenitence and wrong-doing; at another, mingling his tears over "the loved and lost," and then his songs of joy over the lost, raised to be loved again.

Poor and unostentatious in dress, in demeanor, in dwelling, he had been again and again the savior of his country, and exercised what was equivalent to regal sway in court and city, by the throne and by the altar. He had fostered, with loving heart, the schools of the prophets--training, with holy fidelity, those on whom the mantle of his office and example was afterwards to fall. Never was there greater need of such a man than at

this crisis of Israel's history. Their sensual idolatries, the deep moral and spiritual degradation of the whole country, cried loudly for one who would mingle words of love and wisdom with those of stern rebuke, and who, by the exercise of those miraculous powers which were peculiarly conferred upon him, would bring the people back from their gross materialism to the spiritual worship and national recognition of their fathers' God.

But the time has come when Elisha also, must pay the great debt of nature. Long before he had attained the mature age at which he died, the old man seems to have retired into comparative obscurity. His brilliant public work was over; and, before he passed to his rest and his crown, God saw fit to lay him on a couch of sickness in some lonely, unknown dwelling in Israel. It is around that couch we are now summoned. As the sands in his life-glass are slowly falling, grain by grain, come and let us gather a few of the solemn truths which the scene presents.

I. We watch a 'royal visitor' entering the obscure abode of Elisha. It is no other than the king of Israel. And from what we can gather from the brief notices of his history, the remarkable thing about Jehoash's visit is, that he must have had little sympathy, at all events, with the high-toned and elevated piety of the man of God. With many fair traits of character--intervals of sincere and true devotion--he was still following many of the guilty ways of "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." For this he had, doubtless, been often and again rebuked by the faithful admonitions of the prophet--he had quailed under his piercing eye--and evaded, whenever he could, that presence of exalted sanctity. We never hear, during all the sixteen years he had already reigned, of his once coming to Elisha on a personal visit. But now, when he hears that the aged Seer's end is approaching, he hastens to do homage to the greatness and goodness that are so soon to leave behind them an irreparable blank! No--more than this--it is no mere courteous visit. It is not the patronizing stoop of haughty royalty coming to parade vain etiquette and adulation when the time for just recognition of service is past. But he comes as the representative mourner of a whole nation. He comes to pour out one of the noblest eulogies ever pronounced over departing or departed worth. It was uttered from a bursting heart, and through eyes moist with



weeping.

Mark the picture. (We can imagine no nobler subject for inspired painting.) An old man on the threshold of a century, shriveled and wasted by long sickness, with pale lip and feeble hand, lies stretched on the couch from which he is never to rise. His monarch stands by, and stoops over him, bathed in a flood of impassioned tears. We read, "He wept over him," and then broke silence through his choked utterance with the words, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel, and their horsemen!"

What did he mean by this? In that moment of profound emotion, the king saw in that waning eye--that ebbing life-pulse--that there was about to pass away "a power mightier than all the armies of Israel." "I lose," he cries, "in you, my best chariots and horsemen; with the decay of these mortal walls of your frail body, I forfeit my best bulwarks--my nation's tower of strength. I can recruit any depleted ranks, decimated by famine and pestilence and by the cruel fortunes of war; but I cannot reanimate or recall your saintly prayers--your godly counsels--your commanding influence--your unsullied example, and untainted life. Your death will be, as if, by one fearful sweep--one cruel blow--my chariots and horsemen were cast into the depths of the sea--as if the beauty of Israel was slain in the high-places. "Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!"

We have here an example of the homage (often tardily extorted) paid by men of the world to true piety and principle, pure devotion, consistent character, and unblemished life. No more--it is the assertion by kingly lips of a great truth, from which we may well, in these days, gather comfort and instruction--that there are walls and bulwarks constituting a nation's strength, nobler than material strongholds and vast military strength--that the great and the good--men of prayer, and men of faith, and men of God--are a nation's noblest defenders, the truest guardians of her liberties, the best shield of defense around her hearths and homes!

Let us not be guilty of the impiety of measuring a nation's might by her arsenals and dockyards, the stockpiles of her ammunition, and the caliber of her weapons. Thanks be to God, we have all these to boast of too--and brave souls, ready to leap, like the sword from its scabbard, to do gallant defense for all that is dear in the hour of peril! But we are thankful that

Britain has more than these. She has more than the bravery which had its representative in the furious courage of another contemporary of Elisha, and one divinely appointed to co-operate with him--she has more than her "Sons of Nimshi," with horses' hoofs trampling the plain as they rush on to battle.

She has her ELISHAS also--noble, lofty souls--bold in the maintenance of Christian principle--yes, men in her high places, who count not their coronets tarnished because they love their Savior; and who are not ashamed to avow their allegiance to the Prince of the kings of the earth. Yes, we may be proud to point to the annals of our country's old martial glory; to listen to the roll of her conquering drum by land, the voice of her thunder by sea, challenging the sovereignty of the ocean--the old indomitable lion making its proud leap still, against fearful odds, as on the stern battle-fields of other days.

But we own a nobler title to supremacy--one which preserves our ark in the midst of European storms. "We have not only a strong city"--(a strong nation)--but "Salvation is appointed for walls and for bulwarks." While the statesmanship that in some momentous crisis wielded the nation's destiny is lauded and extolled--while brilliant homage is awarded to the political sagacity which steered the vessel amid conflicting storms--while every tongue is justly eloquent in the praises of the valiant squadrons that mounted breach after breach to victory--while science wins new laurels in girdling our shores with impregnable bulwarks, frowning defiance on every invader--we may do well also to ask Israel's king to read to us the grand philosophy of a nation's greatness--we may hear his voice echoing in every chamber where a Christian dies--"My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and their horsemen!"

But let us pass to a strange episode in the story of Elisha's deathbed. The old prophet has all the love of his country, as well as of his God, still unquenched in his bosom. And with the grand heroism of a dying patriot, he gives a significant token and assurance of success over their hereditary foe, to the king and nation to whom he is so soon to bid adieu forever.

He tells the young monarch to take his bow and quiver--and opening the eastern window of the sick-chamber, to shoot an arrow in the direction of

Aphek. This was a frontier-town, near the eastern shores of the Lake of Galilee, where the Syrian army were then encamped. Before, however, the arrow is discharged, the prophet puts his withered hands over the hands of the king, aiding him in drawing the bow; forth flies the feathered weapon in the direction of the foes of Israel, the aged Prophet adding-- "This is the Lord's arrow, full of victory over Aram, for you will completely conquer the Arameans at Aphek."

Nor was this all. After the flight of the arrow, Elisha told him to take the remaining contents of the quiver, and "smite the ground with them." This Joash did three times only. The prophet, displeased at his lack of faith, tells him that, instead of a series of victories ending in complete triumph, the armies of Israel should only have three successful battles with their old adversary. It seemed to have been the old man's expiring act. The accounts of his death and burial immediately follow.

There are many INSTRUCTIVE REFLECTIONS suggested by this incident.

The prophet seeks to leave the world, impressing on his sovereign and his people the great truth, that the hand of the Lord can alone give deliverance from any enemy. He was now as God's viceregent, speaking and acting in the name of the God he served. When he laid his wrinkled hands over those of Jehoash, it was to proclaim by an expressive symbol, "If that arrow proves to be an arrow of deliverance, it is because the Lord's hand and might have been with the bowmen. If the Syrians be routed, as routed they shall be, give Him all the glory. In every military project and campaign, look to Him for direction and victory."

The king had just spoken, in the ears of the prophet, of the "chariots and the horsemen of Israel." Elisha's reply was in the spirit, at least, of another noble Hebrew. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses," but you remember "the name of the Lord your God." "Blessed be the Lord, who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight." (Ps. 20:7; 144:1.)

But we cannot think that in this dying, symbolic act, there were no spiritual lessons for the Church of God and for every believer in every age.

Mightier adversaries than the Syrians are around us--invisible spiritual enemies, "whose name is Legion, for they are many." God would impress upon us, alike in our spiritual conflicts and spiritual advancements, our dependence on Him--that if we ever reach the heavenly inheritance, this will be our confession on our every retrospect of the earthly battle-field--"We did not get possession of the land by our own sword, neither did our own arm save us. But your right hand and your arm, and the light of your countenance, because you had favor unto us." It is the good hand of our God being upon us--His hands "overlaying" ours--that gives power and direction to every arrow, whether of conviction, or deliverance, or comfort. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name we would give glory." "By the grace of God we are what we are."

But while all this is true, He would at the same time teach us here a great counterpart truth, that is, that He works by means. He tells us to "take bow and arrow." What are these? It is the bow of FAITH and the arrow of PRAYER! and the direction to us, as to Joash, is "shoot." Prayer is the arrow of deliverance. Christ himself has strung it. He has, like Elisha, put his hand on ours, declaring, "Believe, only believe." "All things are possible to him that believes." "Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you." Alas! that, like Jehoash, we should "limit the Holy One of Israel," that we should get "weary of smiting," and thus cheat ourselves of the promised blessing. We do not empty our quivers. We "smite the ground" with a feeble, irresolute hand. We ask with the half-hearted faith of those who think that the Lord's hand is so "shortened that it cannot save." We think we do enough when we have smitten thrice.

As with Israel's king, UNBELIEF is the guilty cause of all these religious failures and declensions--these shortcomings and defects. When our enemies smite us and vanquish us, let us blame ourselves--not Him, whom we have displeased by our lack of faith. We refuse to take God at His word. We question and deny His commands by our carnal reasonings. "What" (that proud young monarch might say to himself) "what is the need of these silly repetitions--dashing these arrows on the clay floor of this dwelling? I understand the significancy of the arrow of deliverance which sped a little while ago from the eastward window, but this 'smiting on the ground' is a meaningless act. I shall (to please the old

Prophet) go the length of casting three arrows on the floor, but I shall submit to no more."

What a picture of ourselves! We stop short in the means of gaining spiritual conquests, just when a little more faith, prayer, courage, self-sacrifice, trust in God, might have won the day, and given us victory. It is the case with thousands, that they go a certain length in well-doing, and then they cease. They are content with languid, fitful efforts. They lop off a few branches and leave the old root to grow out fresh shoots. They stop half way up "the Hill Difficulty." They go half way through the torrent, manfully breasting and buffeting it, and then sink. Their religion is not the work of men in earnest. After a few victories over master sins, a few dominant lusts subdued, they leave unvanquished corruptions to impose a new army on the side of evil. The tide washes out all their good resolutions, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first." Oh that we knew, and realized, and acted out, the power of believing prayer and persevering prayer--that great truth which Christ inculcated and illustrated by no less than two parables, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint," (Luke 18:1).

It must be BELIEVING prayer. "I will direct my prayer to you," says David, "and will look up," (Ps. 5:3). And so it is with the true Christian. Prayer with him is not an empty form. "He knows he will have the petitions desired of God." He "directs" his supplication, and "looks up" for the descent of the promised blessing, saying, "Do as you have said," (1 Chron. 17:23).

It must also be PERSEVERING prayer. Let us not cease to smite the ground with Heaven's own winged arrows, when Christ says, "Smite on." Paul, in his Christian-armory-chapter, in naming this "arrow of deliverance," most specially reminds us never to desist until our quiver be exhausted--"Praying always," says he, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints," (Eph. 6:18). Beware of distrusting and dishonoring God--becoming languid and indifferent--"the hands hanging down and the knees feeble;" and that, also, in the best period of your lives, when you have health and strength to serve Him--keeping back "the arrows of the mighty" when your hand is best able to grasp the bow. If you neglect to

draw it now, when your arm is strong, and God is guiding you, what will you do when the arm is feeble--"when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves?"--"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5).

One other point still remains--the LESSONS from the sickbed of the prophet.

The comparison has often and again been suggested (and the contrast is a striking one) between the departure of Elisha and that of Elijah. Both are characters truly great; each possessing their peculiar features of greatness and grandeur. But while Elijah is unquestionably the more brilliant and dazzling of the two, encircled with a halo of moral chivalry, which his successor does not, at least to the same extent, both share--we think (as we have already indicated) that the purer, godlier life belonged to Elisha.

Why then so startling a difference in the manner in which they bade adieu to the earth they had gladdened with their presence? Why was there given to Elijah the brilliant equipage, "the chariot of fire and the horses of fire?" Why to him give immunity from pain and suffering, from the languor and decay of sinking nature, the decrepitude of age, the pangs of a sick-bed? why spare him all these, and, in the glory of his manhood, when the laurels were green on his brow, and his eye undimmed, send him majestically up to heaven on the wings of the whirlwind; while the saintlier man--the man of more even walk--more consistent life and rarer goodness, is suffered to waste away by sickness in the secluded home of his old age?

From the peculiar expression, "Now Elisha was suffering from the sickness from which he died," we are led to conjecture that his was no brief illness--but that the aged prophet may rather have been "made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights were appointed him, full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." Many require such discipline and chastisement--but he needed, apparently, no such polishing for his crown, no such furnace to refine him; he needed to give no further testimony (for his life was already an eloquent evidence) that

"he pleased God." Why, then, we again ask, was it not with him as with Elijah? Why did the fiery horses not come down to his cottage home too at Gilgal, and save him these long days of weakness and suffering?

It might be enough for us to answer, "The Lord willed it so!" But we generally find that God has a reason for all He does--that He acts on great principles. There is nothing capricious in His dealings--nothing accidental even in His appointments regarding a sick-bed.

And we may the more readily speak of this contrast between the departures of the two great prophets of their age, because it is a contrast constantly occurring still in the diverse experiences of believers. Some are surrounded with a halo of brightness to the last--others are laid low in the midst of public usefulness--chained, for years on years, to a couch of languishing--the dim lamp of life flickering long in its socket, until the flame of wasted nature expires.

Let us learn, from the contrasted cases of Elijah and Elisha, that God adapts His dealings to the different temperaments of His people. He knows exactly what they can best bear. He knows how they can best glorify Him. "He stays his rough wind in the day of his east wind." He "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." Elijah, that spirit of the storm--bold, manly, full of zeal for his God and his nation--yet by natural temperament, rash, impulsive--and if severely tried, fretful and irritable--with a hero-heart--one day up amid the frantic crowd on Mount Carmel--the next hiding amid the clefts of the Sinai desert, away from life and its great mission--though God's grace, indeed, could have braced himself for anything--yet (judging on ordinary grounds) he would not have been well fitted to stand the wasting ordeal of a prolonged sickness. He glorified his God also, but it was, as with David's lion-like men of a former age, by brilliant but fitful feats of moral championship. Act after act of his life was too often like wave upon wave dashing proudly in succession on the rock, but retreating again to hide the chafed foam in the porous sands.

We can hardly picture to ourselves this Gilead chief--the Bedouin of his age--laid for years on years in some lonely cottage of Israel--the fire of his noble spirit burning slowly out. It would have been like Samson chafing in his dungeon, but unable, like Samson, by the Divine sanction and by a

brilliant deed, to terminate his humiliation. And therefore God, (knowing the constitutional temperament of His favored and devoted servant) prepares for him rather the glorious translation. He uses him in another way, to give testimony to the doctrine of the resurrection; and without one moment's pang--without one day's experience of suffering or sickness--the eddying whirlwind and the fiery horses bear him away as in a chariot of victory to the gates of glory!

Not so Elisha. The Lord who tries all hearts, knows that He can get another revenue of glory from this holy man, in addition to what he had already rendered, in his public character, during the day of health and manly vigor. He will not carry him off while he is yet in his prime--He allows the lengthening shadows of age to creep upon him; He whitens his brow with the snows of fourscore winters--He takes him to a lowly home of obscurity, there lays him on a sick-bed--and He would have him preach to all Israel, and to us also, by these days of passive endurance and suffering, as well as by his former life of stern work and active and laborious duty.

Let no one say that a man is unable to serve and glorify his God in a home of obscurity or on a couch of prolonged and hopeless distress. We go to Elisha's sick-chamber for the refutation. True--we are told nothing as to how he bore his trouble. There is no positive record of his patience and endurance, his calm and childlike submission in this season of illness. But we gather, at all events, that he lived through his sickness as he had lived through his health--a man of God--a man of faith--with a soul glowing with high patriotism, which the pangs of a death-couch could not quench! If sickness and trouble had soured and irritated him--he would have turned his back when he heard these royal footsteps--he would have mocked and scorned these royal tears. Thinking nothing but of himself, and thinking hardly of his God, he would have said, in the peevish mood of Elijah, "It is enough; take away my life!" How different! Grand it is to see this feeble, decrepit Sage, racked with the pains of approaching death, raising himself up to deliver, with patriot lip, a message of peace to Israel. Like a great dying hero of our own, he would not compose his head on its last pillow, until "victory" was borne to his ears amid the shout and shell of battle.



Thus, then, we deduce the lesson, that God will adapt His dealings to our varied temperaments and capacities of endurance. He suits the soldier to the place, and the place to the soldier. He will send us no temptation or trial, which He knows we are unable to bear. Look at the deaths which are constantly occurring around us--some swept away like Elijah, suddenly in a moment, "as a dream when one awakens"--others, in the delirium of fever, saving them mercifully the bondage-fear of dissolution; and with a glorious surprise opening their eyes in heaven.

To others, He appoints the slow process of wasting and decay--transfigured on the 'mount of suffering' before being glorified--the light of heavenly peace shining through the chinks of their "earthly tabernacle" before it is finally "dissolved!" But all is His appointment. It is not for us to question, in these varied experiences--"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" "Where is the Lord God of Elisha?"

We may learn more than this--whether, in the case of ourselves, when visited with future, unforeseen, protracted sickness, or in that of some near and dear to us, who may now be laid on couches of anguish and suffering. Let us never think that we or they are useless to the world--cast as weeds and wreckage on the desert shore--unable to glorify our God.

No, far from it. There is no grander pulpit than a sickbed--no more impressive preacher than that weak and languid sufferer who has for years on years been familiar with no more cheerful vision than the obscured light creeping through the shaded windows, no sound but the suppressed footfall or whisper of affection. Ah, it is often easier to be an Elijah than an Elisha. It is often easier to mount the steeps of Carmel, to pronounce maledictions on transgressors, and make the river Kishon run with blood--to confront an Ahab, and dare a royal frown--than, lying low under the, Divine hand, with a meek, gentle, kind, loving spirit, to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems him good," (1 Sam. 3:18). And be assured, God does not (like man) measure character or deeds by their greatness and luster. When man's eye is on some brilliant action--or some display of ostentatious munificence--God's may be on the unselfish kindness, the unostentatious deed of lowly beneficence, the humble trust of the widow in the widow's God--the pining sufferer, amid long years of anguish, giving forth no utterance but ONE--"Even so, Father, for so it

seems good in Your sight."

And was Elisha's prolonged life of weakness--was his sick-bed unproductive of glory to the God he served, and of good to the people he loved? Go! (after that noble old hero-prophet is sleeping in his grave)--go north amid the glens of Gilead, where the army of Israel is reposing after a day's bloody conflict with Syria, and hear how they connect the last act of that palsied arm with the victory they had achieved! The Syrians have fled from Aphek, and Israel is triumphant. But it was the old prophet's symbolic "arrow" which that day inspired every bowman and spearman with indomitable valor. The voice of the dead has led them on to victory! Tears may well flow afresh down the cheeks of Jehoash as he sees the tide of conflict setting in his favor. He may well turn the old eulogy into a battle-cry, and shout over the prophet's ashes, as he had done over his death-pillow--"My father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and their horsemen!"

God, moreover, would not allow His servant, who had glorified Him so faithfully in his life and in his death--He would not allow him to pass to his sepulcher without a fresh attestation to the words, "Those who honor me I will honor." The historical narrative further narrates, how a dead body, that was cast into the prophet's tomb to hide it from a band of Moab marauders or bandits. On touching the bones of the buried Prophet, that dead body sprang into life. It was an exception to the great truth, "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." Here was one who did praise Him; praised Him in life, and praised Him after he descended into the tomb.

Come, and learn from all this, not only that you can honor God in old age, in sickness, in suffering, in obscurity, yes, in the very valley of death, but (by an expressive allegory--a miraculous figure in the enlivening of this body by contact with the bones of Elisha) you are taught that your influence can survive dissolution, that there may be a power in the holy memories of your life and example, which may kindle new aspirations in others when your own tongues are silenced! Ah! it is a mighty theme--this of posthumous influence.

While you gather round the sick-bed of Elijah, and learn its lessons,

gather around his grave. See that dead corpse touching his bones, and learn the lessons that it conveys. Shall our graves and sepulchers wake up some dormant fount of life? Shall the arrow of deliverance which speeds from our living hand, enter into some heart when the hand that sped it is mouldering in the tomb? If we, when dead, are thus to speak, remember, our speech will be the echoes of the present. What we shall say then, is what we are now! Stupendous thought! glorious privilege! We do not envy Elijah his burnished chariot and majestic whirlwind. We will cheerfully, if God sees fit, lie down with Elisha in his humble couch and lowly sepulcher--if we are better able thereby to quicken others by our example, and animate them by our faith.

Spirit of God! breathe upon the dry bones that they may live! If now, the memories of the departed come hovering over us--their virtues in living, their submission in trial, their peace in dying, let us touch their ashes--let the dead speak; let them meet in the affirmative the challenge of the Psalmist--"Shall the dust praise you? shall it declare your truth?"

## **MANASSEH**

### **A DARK DAY AND A BRIGHT SUNSET**

"The rest of the events in MANASSEH'S reign and all his deeds, including the sins he committed, are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah. When Manasseh died, he was buried in the palace garden, the garden of Uzza. Then his son Amon became the next king." 2 Kings 21:17-18, 2 Chron. 33:1-21.

Here is an unostentatious, an unhonored, an unepitaphed grave! Though

one of the kings of Judah, MANASSEH is laid, not in pomp and splendor, amid the dust of his ancestors, but in a private tomb, in the garden of his Jerusalem palace.

Striking is the contrast between these funeral rites of Manasseh and those of his royal father Hezekiah. The funeral cortege and burial of the latter was one of unprecedented splendor. "They buried him," we read, "in the chief of the sepulchers of the sons of David--and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death." But however brief be the chronicle of Manasseh's departure and funeral, however lowly or unregal the monument reared over his ashes, he is himself a wondrous "monument"--a monument of Divine grace and mercy and forgiveness. As we gather around his tomb, let us ponder the spiritual epitaph for ourselves, which many have read through tears of guilt and despair, thanking God and taking courage--"The chief of sinners, BUT I obtained mercy!"

We have to trace, in his case, as described in the motto-lines of the Christian poet, a "sunrise" of promise, soon obscured with clouds of guilt and crime. These clouds burst in floods of penitence and sorrow. A meridian of sudden brilliancy succeeds. The sky clears, and the orb of a chequered life sets cloudless and serene on the hills of Judah. Standing by his grave, under the shadow of Zion, let us take a retrospective view of his strange history. He is the prodigal son of Old Testament story. We have the departure from the hallowed parental home; the life of alienation, misery, and sin, and his final restoration and return. In other words, let us consider, in their order, these three points--Manasseh's sin; his conversion; and his new life.

I. His career of SIN was a peculiarly sad one; and all the more so, when we reflect that his infancy and boyhood were nurtured under the training of the best and holiest of fathers. Hezekiah, when he received the respite from sickness and expected death, was divinely apprized that fifteen additional years would be added to his life; and it was three years subsequent to this, that Manasseh was born. With the precise knowledge which the good king of Judah thus possessed as to the assigned limit of existence, (a knowledge given indeed to none else,) and knowing, moreover, how susceptible youth is of lasting impressions, we may well

imagine, as year by year drew near when the crown would devolve on the head of his young boy, how faithfully he would employ the brief allotted period in training him for his great duties; educating him in that noblest of inheritances, a father's piety and devout example. How zealously would he echo the dying exhortation and benediction of his great progenitor, "And you, my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind--for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts--if you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever," (1 Chron. 28:9). Above all, how would Hezekiah (man of special prayer as he was) baptize that child's infancy and youth with these burning devotions?--these earnest petitions, which, mightier than all his armies, had laid the proud chivalry of Sennacherib low in the dust.

But ah! we are too truthfully, too painfully reminded, in the case of Manasseh, that grace is not hereditary; that piety, despite of the most devout and religious training, is not always transmitted from father to son. To take an older illustration; Adam, with all the recollections fresh on his memory of Eden lost, the galling bitterness of forfeited bliss, would doubtless often and again rehearse in the ears of his children the dark story of transgression. He would paint to them, as he alone of all the human race could do, the unsullied beauties of holiness, in order to scare them from that accursed thing which had entailed upon himself so terrible a ruin! Yet what was his success? What effect had these blinding tears of penitence and remorse, shed before his children at the very gates of the lost paradise? His own first-born, despite of all, turned out a murderer and a vagabond.

And here, in a later age, we have another child of prayers and tears, scarce mounting the throne still fragrant with parental piety, before he insults a parent's ashes, tramples on his counsels, mocks his tears, and becomes a desperado in guilt. Altars to Baal and Ashtaroath were erected within the Temple's sacred enclosures. The groves in the valley of Jehoshaphat and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives were polluted with defiled altars, on which incense rose to the host of heaven. Deep down in the valley of Hinnom, behind his palace, he caused his own son to pass through the fire, dedicating him a votary to bloodthirsty Moloch. With

servile credulity, while he rejected the God of his fathers, he listened to lying oracles, and did homage to those who pretended communion with dead spirits.

Proud, passionate, overbearing, he became the persecutor and fanatic of his day. He poured out the blood of Jerusalem like water. Innocent lives were sacrificed. Those who loved the God and the religion of their fathers better than existence, were given over to massacre. Cruelty and torture were added to death; and tradition has it, that good old Isaiah was, at the savage command of the royal master whom he had too faithfully reproved, ordered to be "sawn asunder." "He wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger," (2 Chron. 33:6).

Nor was his guilt and ruin confined to himself. There is a terrible contagion in moral evil. We read that "He made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to sin, and to do worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before the children, of Israel," (2 Chron. 33:9). This tells the malignant influence his creed and example had on his subjects--that he sowed the seeds of his own wickedness among the thousands that owned his sway.

It is a dreadful and solemn thought, continually recurring to us in these Bible characters, that individual influence assumes greater and more responsible proportions according to position or scale in society. The influence of mind upon mind, and especially of those in exalted position, is truly gigantic--the magnetic power of moral attraction or repulsion. It is often said that "the age makes the man." We believe that the converse is oftener true, that "the man makes the age." At the close of last century, in France and England, there was, in high places, a galaxy of great and commanding intellect. In France, the infidelity of a few, gave the first impulse to that wild wave of moral ruin which is chafing and eddying there to this day. Simultaneously in England, a number of influential minds appeared in prominent positions. They cast their talents and influence as trophies at the foot of the cross. But while they themselves are gone--long slumbering beneath the storied urns which a nation delighted to rear over their honored ashes--the seed wafted from these Trees of righteousness is this day springing up, in a forest of holy influences, to the praise and the glory of God.

So it was with HEZEKIAH and Manasseh. In the case of the former, how marvelous the influence for good. How his own faith and piety were reflected in the hearts of his people. Look at that memorable instance to which we have already incidentally referred, when Sennacherib and his giant host came up against Jerusalem and the fenced cities of Judah. It was enough to strike panic and dismay into the boldest and bravest. But Hezekiah, undismayed, because he knew where his true strength lay, gathered together his soldiers and captains of war in the open street, and thus addressed them--"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said. (2 Chron. 32:7-8)

See, on the other hand, in the case of MANASSEH, the influence for evil; and that, also, long after he had mourned his sins, with breaking heart, and sought repentance carefully and with tears. Yes, it was an influence that survived his death, and bore bitter fruit after he himself was laid in his grave, when his own son perpetuated the idolatries of his father's earlier years; for we read, "Amon, his son, sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them."

Let us never forget, each of us, our solemn individual influence; an influence, also, not confined to place or time, but made up of words and deeds that transmit their endless echoes and images from age to age--giving us very life when we are dead--putting speech into our ashes. After the stone is sunk in the quiet lake, and lying still in the bottom, the waves generated by it, are being propelled in concentric circlets to the shore. They are chafing and rippling on the pebbles, when the disturbing cause has been for many minutes lost to sight, and buried in unconscious rest in the underlying bed of sand or mud. When we are sunk in our last long rest, lost from the sight and from the land of the living, "gone down into silence"--the ripple of influence, for good or for evil, will be heard murmuring on the shores of Time!

Note again, as an aggravation of Manasseh's sin, HIS REPEATED AND

OBDURATE REJECTION OF DIVINE WARNING. "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not hearken," (2 Chron. 33:10).

He may have spoken to him as He does to us, in varied ways. He may have spoken to him by blessings. He may have sent His holy prophets and seers to exhort with him. He may have knocked at the door of his seared conscience by the hallowed remembrances of a parent's piety, and a youth of rare spiritual privilege. But it was all in vain. And now He prepares the ROD for severer punishment. He makes ready the bow, and puts the arrow on the string, to send the dart of deeper conviction home to his heart! Let us here admire God's patience and forbearance with this guilty, daring, aggravated apostate. He might have cut him down in a moment--He might have commissioned the lightning from heaven, or the pangs of some sudden disease, or the hand of righteous violence, to rid the nation of a villain. He might have sent him out, like Ahab, in his chariot to battle; and some bowman might have drawn his arrow at a venture, and sent him reeling to a grave of despair! But, no! Manasseh's name is in the Book of Life. He is one of God's chosen ones from before the foundation of the world; that lost sheep must be brought home to the fold--that lost son must be brought to the paternal halls. "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help found," (Hosea 13:9).

And how does God deal with this self-destroyer? What are the means He employs to humble his hard heart, and evoke from the wretched prodigal the cry, "I will arise, and go to my Father." He sends one of the generals of Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, against him and his fenced cities. The panic-stricken monarch presents a painful and humiliating contrast with the brave, bold heart of Hezekiah. The latter, when the same hosts were encamped against him at his very gates, led his men up the temple steps, singing, as they marched, his own sublime psalm, written for the occasion--"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!" (Ps. 46:1-3). His son, without, perhaps, the shadow of resistance, flees humiliated from his palace, and takes shelter in a thicket of thorns to elude the fury of the invader. But the commissioners of the Divine vengeance track out his guilty footsteps. He



is loaded with chains, marched in ignominy to Babylon, and consigned there to a dungeon-vault. What a comment on the striking parallel made by the wise man--"The wicked flee when no man pursues; but the righteous are bold as a lion!" (Prov. 28:1.)

II. Let us consider next, Manasseh's CONVERSION--the great turning point in his history. That dungeon became to him as the gate of heaven. His God, in a far higher than natural sense, "brought him out of darkness and the shadow of death. He broke the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder," (Ps. 107:14, 16).

We are called to note here the power of sanctified affliction.

There is a twofold effect of trial and adversity. Sometimes it hardens the heart, leading a rebellious spirit to murmur and repine under the hand that chastens, and to say, like Gideon, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?" or to utter the worse infidel scoff, "Let me curse God, and die." But it has another effect--the more blessed one, of humbling the rebellious spirit, bringing it to consider its ways, bewail its sins, and, instead of kicking against the pricks, to cry, "Lord, what would you have me to do?"

It was so with Manasseh. In that dungeon, God knocked at the door of his obdurate heart. The prison in Babylon became his spiritual birthplace. "Behold, he prays!" Knees that never bent before the God of his fathers, since he knelt a child by his parents' side, are now bent on that dungeon floor!

We can imagine his exercise of soul. How, in that solemn, silent prison, the memory of years on years of past sin would rise up before him. His father's prayers and saintly counsels--the innocent blood he shed in Jerusalem--the terrible desecration of the holy place--the thousands he had involved, by his guilty example, in apostasy and ruin! Oh, as the rush of the past came on his lonely spirit, in the midnight hour, and the tears of burning remorse and shame rolled down his cheeks, would not this be his despairing thought--Can iniquities such as mine be pardoned? Can there be forgiveness for such aggravated transgression--such unparalleled, presumptuous sin?

Who knows but, as the vision of the holy prophet he had slain rose up before him, adding a new scorpion sting to his agonized conscience--who knows but at the same moment, balm-words of comfort which that prophet had spoken may have fallen on his tossed soul like oil on the troubled waters. Did they not seem to speak home to him, as if the seer, in uttering them, had his own case of agonizing despair specially in view--"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord--though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," (Isa. 1:18). "Scarlet and crimson," indeed, his sins were. But he will take the God of his fathers, the God who had borne with him so long and so patiently, at His word--"When he was in affliction," we read, "he sought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers," (2 Chron. 33:12). God heard the voice of his groaning. A light, brighter than the sun, broke through his prison bars. He could say with Jeremiah in his dungeon, "I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You drew near in the day that I called upon you. You said, Fear not!" (Lam. 3:55.)

Perhaps one of his bitterest and saddest thoughts may have been that same terrible influence, already alluded to, which he had exerted, in the past, over his subjects. This thought, in that moment of penitence and illumination, may have been uppermost in his spirit, and hardest to bear--"Oh, that I could undo that guilty past! Oh, that God would spare me to recover strength, and bring me back again to my palace and capital, that I might declare what He has done for my soul, and seek to counteract these memories of blood-guiltiness and sin!" God did hear him in this matter too; for "he prayed unto him--and he was entreated by him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God," (2 Chron. 33:13). He left Jerusalem bound (soul and body) in fetters, after having closed on himself and his people the temple-gates, and quenched the sacred fire on his fathers' altars. Now he returns, the possessor of a nobler liberty than he ever before enjoyed, saying, "Open unto me the gates of righteousness; then will I enter into them and praise the Lord." "O Lord, I am your servant; yes, I am your servant, the son of your handmaid, and you have freed me from my bonds! I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. I will keep my promises to the Lord in the

presence of all his people, in the house of the Lord, in the heart of Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!" (Ps. 116:16-19).

Does not all this teach us, that God's grace can reach any heart, in any place? The soul that despised God in the consecrated ground of Canaan and Jerusalem, was reached in the heathen city, and in the military prison in heathen Babylon. Prayer, also, needs no sacred places--no high altar--no temple-court--no gorgeous cathedral to give it power and efficacy. Wherever there is an earnest heart, there is a present God. The prayer of Saul of Tarsus in heathen Damascus, or when tossed at midnight on the sea of Adria, or when immured in the dungeons of Philippi; and the prayer of Manasseh, here narrated, in this dungeon in Babylon--these, and similar penitential cries of earnest, broken spirits are heard, when many an imposing service and intoned liturgy dies away in empty echoes within "consecrated walls!"

And mark what was the instrumental cause of Manasseh's conversion. What was it that drove him to his knees, and led him to know God as the hearer of prayer? It was "when he was in affliction he sought the Lord his God, and humbled himself." It is Manasseh, "taken among the thorns, and bound with fetters," who stands before us a new man!

And is not affliction still God's own angel-messenger? Does not He still drive His own people amid the thorny thickets of severe trial, hurl them from their thrones of prosperity, and immure them "in darkness and in the deeps"--just that He may dash to pieces all their earthly confidences, break their hard, stubborn hearts, send them to their knees, and save their souls?

Ah, how many can tell, "But for these thorn-thickets, these fetters of trial, I would still have been an enemy to my God, plunging into greater and greater sin? But I may well take these thorns and chains together, and weave them into a garland of triumph." It is said that the mother eagle inserts a thorn in the nest, to drive her young brood to the wing. God puts many a thorn in His people's downy nest of ease and worldly prosperity, to urge them to rise heavenward. If Manasseh had not known the thorns, the fetters, and the dark prison, in all human probability, he would have lived and died an idolater. If Moab had not been "emptied from vessel to

vessel" he would have "settled on his lees." If many of the redeemed, spoken of in Revelation, had not "come out of great tribulation" they would not have been in their white robes "before the throne!"

III. Let us now proceed to consider Manasseh's NEW LIFE.

The grand test of the reality of conversion, is the regenerated being. The tree is known by its fruits. The purified fountain is known by its streams. With many, alas! returning prosperity only hardens the heart, causing it to lapse into its old state of callous indifference.

It might have been so with Manasseh when the dungeon-vault was left, and when, under a royal escort, he was once more conducted back to his palace and crown. He might have basely spurned the hand that rescued him, and relapsed into his old courses. But he stood the test. We read that it was WHEN God had brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom, "THEN Manasseh knew that the Lord was God."

It must have been a noble sight, to see him, in the face of his whole people, not only manifesting the saving change in his own heart and life, but as all true religion is expansive, and seeks the good of others, commencing at once religious and civil, ecclesiastical and political, reform. He began by cutting down, root and branch, all his old abominations. The statues of Ashtaroath--the heathen groves, the defiled altars--all are swept away. Nor was it a mere external reformation--a mere negative religion--the "ceasing to do evil." But he taught himself, and he taught his people, "to do well." "He repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings." Offerings for sin, and offerings of gratitude for mercies. He became himself a preacher of righteousness. It was a great revival in Judah. "He stood by the altar, and" we read, "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." He evidently returned in the spirit of Zaccheus the publican, resolved to "restore fourfold;" saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

Strange but joyous sight to the true Israel of God in Jerusalem--those who for years had wept in secret over their monarch's sins, and over "the holy and beautiful house where their fathers worshiped"--to behold now

the long-smouldering ashes again kindled on the altar for the morning and evening sacrifice--the king's own voice joining in the solemn hymn, "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever."

Add to all this, and as a proof that worldly wisdom and prudence, in the best sense of the word, go hand in hand with true piety, he set himself with equal vigor to the strengthening of his kingdom. He raised a wall on the defenseless side of his capital, besides augmenting the strongholds of his fenced cities. He was more a king than ever. All his praying, and praising, and temple-worship, had made him no fatalist, no presumptuous dreamer. It was no creed of his--"God will save us; we need not trouble ourselves about defense or munitions--walls or standing armies, horses or chariots, the Lord will fight our battles!" No! his piety served only to invigorate his patriotism. He acted out the truth of that grand apostolic maxim, "Not lacking in zeal, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

True piety does not require us to sink into sentimental devotion--a dreamy life of inaction or enthusiasm, but to interfuse all worldly work with religion--to let life's duties be saturated with the fear of God--erecting our churches, yet building our dockyards--rearing our altars, yet casting our cannon--letting the white wings of commerce be studding our seas, and bringing back laden stores from distant continents, yet sending, at the same time, to heaven the winged vessels of prayer--waiting in faith for their return, laden with costlier merchandise--taking religion and incorporating it with daily life, letting it regulate our transactions behind the counter, in the exchange, in the family, in the world, and proving to all the truth of that noble aphorism--"A Christian is the highest style of man."

We may conclude this chapter with a word of warning, and a word of encouragement.

The word of WARNING may be read from the consequences of Manasseh's guilt--

He was a penitent, a sincere penitent. His aggravated sins were all

pardoned and forgiven, and he afterwards lived and died, a true "Hebrew of the Hebrews," an "heir of promise." But the deadly influence of his early life of sin, was not so easily obliterated. We have already casually alluded to the fact, and return to it once more. If you read the sequel to his brief history, you will find that with all his efforts and zeal, he could only at best effect a partial reformation. He found that personal repentance was an easier thing than national; that it was easier far, in the earlier part of his reign, to undo the effect of his father's virtues, than in the latter part, to undo his own crimes. "Nevertheless," we read, "the people still sacrificed in the high places." Ah! how it would embitter his closing days to see, here and there, polluted incense still rising from unhallowed groves and altars, and the trumpet of vengeance sounding its retributive note in his ear--"Be sure your sin will find you out!"

Even in his own private funeral rites and secluded tomb, we can see a fruit of his early sin. By his reformation, and return to the worship of his father's God, he had alienated the companions of his guilt and the abettors of his idolatrous practices. Those, on the other hand, who gladly hailed his change of mind, would be slow, as is generally the case, to credit the reality; and even if certified of this, they could never heartily forgive, or at least forget, the murderer of their fathers or mothers or children. Dying, therefore, though he did, a believer--a true child of Abraham--many tears did not follow him to the grave, nor did willing hands rear a monument to his memory; moreover, he himself, painfully aware how his inconsistent former life had compromised him in the eyes of his people, might forbid the funeral pomp usually accompanying royal burials. With no pretended humility, he had probably, as the shedder of the blood of God's prophets, pronounced his ashes unworthy to mix with that of his nobler ancestry, and on his death-bed given instructions that his interment might take place within the precincts of his own garden.

Reader, beware of sin. Think of the bitter consequences it entails, how by unholy acts or inconsistent deeds, influence is lessened or character lost. Avoid debatable ground. Keep off from what is likely to compromise you. Remember righteous Lot. He made little after all of the rich plains of Sodom and its luxurious capital. Men pointed at him with the finger of scorn. Dark stains blotted the close of his life. Even in the case of

Manasseh, with a nobler and more consistent termination to existence (many years, as we may surmise, of devotedness to the God of Israel), yet it was easier for men to remember Manasseh the infidel, the scoffer, the profligate, the persecutor, the reckless prodigal--than Manasseh the converted, the royal penitent, the prodigal restored, the wondrous monument of divine grace and mercy!

But we have also, as we watch this singular "sunset," a lesson of ENCOURAGEMENT--

We have a glorious testimony, in the case of Manasseh, that no sinner need despair. Manasseh is now stooping over the walls of heaven, in company with Saul the blasphemer, Zaccheus the extortioner, the Magdalene of the Pharisee's house, the dying felon of Calvary, and proclaiming that, for the vilest sinner, there is mercy. Yes, although this man had defied his God; had scorned pious counsels; had added bloodshed and cruelty to rampant unbelief and lawless lust; yet when the blast of God's trumpet sounded over the apparently impregnable citadel of his heart, it fell to the dust; and from that hour, in which grace triumphed, its walls became "salvation and its gates praise."

And that grace which saved Manasseh, can save every one of us--the poorest, the vilest, the most desponding.

Is there one such whose eye traces these pages--some one whose whole past life is one sad foul retrospect--a story of aggravated guilt and impiety--a father's counsels, a mother's prayers, mocked and scorned--deep, dark stains blotting every page of conscience and memory? Have God's bowmen of conviction found you in the thorns? Have they dragged you to some dungeon of despair, and left you, amid the darkness of its rayless vaults, to brood over impending death? Oh! send up your cry for mercy to Manasseh's God. HE will not scorn you. No; though you have scorned Him, scorned His people, scorned His mercies, scorned His afflictions, scorned His providence, scorned His ministers, yet He will not scorn you. "He will regard the cry of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer." This story of Manasseh has been "written for the generations to come, that the people who shall be created may praise the Lord," (Ps. 102:18).

And is there no special encouragement here to Christian parents? We have alluded, more than once, to Manasseh scorning his father's piety and prayers. We have spoken of good Hezekiah, as his end approached, imbuing that young heart with these prayers, pouring on that young kingly brow this best anointing oil. Alas! is it another case on which to found the sneer of the infidel?--"What need is there of prayer? Here is another testimony that the prayer of pious lips ascends in vain. Hezekiah prays. But the heavens are as brass and the earth as iron. The Lord has 'not heard,' the 'God of Jacob has not regarded.' This child of prayer grows up a daring and defiant unbeliever. 'Is there a God on the earth?'"

No, O man; who are you that replies against God? Hezekiah's prayer is heard. His cries have not entered in vain into the ears of the God of Sabbath. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie--though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry," (Hab. 2:3). Years upon years--half a lifetime--had elapsed--since the arrow of prayer had sped from Hezekiah's bow. But when the good old king is sleeping his deep sleep, in the regal sepulcher on Zion, lo! in yonder far-off dungeon, washed by the tide of the distant Euphrates, the arrow has reached its mark; the word of the Lord is tried--"Cast your bread upon the waters, and you SHALL find it after many days." (Eccles. 11:1).

## **SIMEON**

### **SUNSET ON MOUNT MORIAH**

Luke 2:25-32. Now there was a man named SIMEON who lived in Jerusalem. He was a righteous man and very devout. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he eagerly expected the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple.



So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

Simeon occupies, in sacred story, a place peculiar to himself. He is the Melchizedek of this transition-period--the connecting link between the Mosaic and the Gospel dispensations--telling by significant word and act, that "all old things" were "passing away" and all things becoming "new!"

We may regard him, moreover, as the "representative man" of the pious remnant of Israel of that age. He had long been sitting, an earnest student, at the feet of the prophets who had testified of Christ; or standing, like the mother of Sisera at the window, with the roll of Micah in his hand, and straining his eyes towards Bethlehem, he had been asking, in prayerful expectation, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?"

But he can afford, also, to resign himself patiently to the will of God. This he knew, that that great event waited for by all time, must be close at hand; for he had personally received a divine promise, that his eyes should not be sealed in death, until gladdened with the glorious vision which many saints and wise men of old had "desired to see, but were not permitted!" At length are his hopes and prayers gloriously realized. "The Desire of all nations," according to the latest prophetic intimation, has "come." "The Lord," whom the devout Israelite had long sought, "suddenly comes to his temple," and, in the person of a little child, "fills it with his glory!" (Mal. 3:1.) With the infant Babe in his arms, and the tear of joy and gratitude in his eye, he is permitted to take up the strains which for ages past had hung on the lips, and supported the faith of a waiting church--"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given--and his name shall be called--Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace," the glory of his Church, the Consolation of Israel, the Light of the World! And now, the rejoicing patriarch, with the promised Savior in his arms, and salvation on his tongue, is ready to die.

Let us gaze on this Gospel Sunset with its mellowed glory. Let us gather, in thought, around this hoary-headed sire, and listen to the exulting notes with which he is willing to bid farewell to the world. Well, truly, might he exult. The greatest of the Caesars was then on the throne. But what was that scepter--that rod of empire, he wielded--although the badge of the world's sovereignty--compared to that "rod out of the stem of Jesse," which an old Hebrew clasped in his arms? The throne of Caesar!--it has long ago crumbled--the scepter of Caesar!--it has long ago been broken in pieces by the grasp of contending nations. But Simeon beheld, in these smiles of helpless infancy, the seed of a kingdom that would overthrow all others, and, yet, itself "never be destroyed;" a throne that was to be "established forever," and of "the increase of whose government and peace there was to be no end!" (Isa. 9:7).

It is interesting to mark the occasion of this scene in the temple of Jerusalem, which had brought Mary and the child Jesus from Bethlehem. At the birth of every son, the mother, by the Jewish law, was regarded as ceremonially unclean, and for forty days (as we read in the 12th chapter of Leviticus,) she was permitted to "touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary." She was enjoined thereafter, to carry a sin-offering and a burnt-offering "unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to the priest," who was to "offer it before the Lord, and make an atonement for her." "When the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, or a young pigeon, or a turtle-dove, for a sin-offering." And in the case of those whose extreme poverty and lowly condition did not permit of this costlier sacrifice, it was sufficient for them to bring a humbler one--"And if she be NOT able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt-offering, and the other for a sin-offering--and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean," (ver. 8.)

What a touching delineation is here given of the Savior's lowly state and poverty! Mary coming up to the temple to offer the accustomed sacrifices, "according to that which is said in the law of the Lord," "a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons." But where is the lamb for the burnt-offering? Has her meek spirit already forgot the thanksgivings of that

hour of unexpected joy, when in exulting strains she thus poured out the emotions of an overflowing heart--"My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden--for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. He that is mighty has done to me great things?" (Luke 1:48-49.) No! Her lowly estate cannot afford "the lamb for the burnt-offering"--and in its stead she must substitute the gracious alternative provided for the poor of the people, "a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons!"

It is from such incidental circumstances as these, those minuter incidents which crowd His mysterious pilgrimage of love--that we obtain the most affecting displays of the Redeemer's humiliation. At one time, we behold Him a homeless wanderer, who, when "every man went unto his own house, Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives" (John 7:53)--(when there was a home for every one in Jerusalem, there was no home for Him!) Again, as a weary, toil-worn pilgrim, exhausted and fatigued with his journey, He is seated by a well on the way-side, asking a cup of cold water from a poor sinner whom He had redeemed with His blood (John 4:6); and here, we contemplate a lowly woman, bending before the temple-gate, and telling to all around, by the humble offerings she lays on the altar, that poverty is the birthright of her infant Child!

But we proceed to gather a few beams from this hallowed "sunset"--a few thoughts from this closing chapter in Simeon's life, as delineated in the sacred narrative.

We have there presented, A BEAUTIFUL EPITOME OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. And though his spiritual graces were called into lively exercise by what was presented immediately to sight, that same glorious reality remains to us still an object of faith, which we may appropriate as really and as substantially as Simeon did!

Observe, I. THE OBJECT OF ALL HIS JOY--it was "seeing Christ the Lord."

To see God! what an honor! The, highest Archangel in heaven knows no higher! It was the culminating prayer of Moses of old, "I beseech you,

show me your glory." The prayer was answered--but how? The honored servant of God was hid in a rocky cleft; and the hand of God covered his face, as the terribleness of the divine Majesty swept by; for, said He, "no man can see my face and live." But here, a devout Hebrew, who trod in the footsteps of Moses' faith, is permitted to gaze on the God-man unconsumed. His glory is veiled under a garb of humanity. God is "in very deed dwelling with man on the earth"--"Great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in the flesh." Yes! Simeon stands in the magnificent shrine of which Haggai and Malachi spoke. The glory of Solomon's house, with all the gold of Ophir, and all the wealth of Lebanon, and the lavish splendor of Tyrian handicraft, fades into nothing by reason of the new consecration it has received from that "Infant of days." "The glory of this latter house" is "greater than the glory of the former." Let its veil be torn! let its dim altar-fires be quenched! Let it not bewail its missing Shekinah, or cling to its melting shadows. The types have given place to the great Antitype. The advent-hour is striking--"Lift up your heads, O you gates, that the King of glory may come in," chimes from the temple-towers. The Lord truly was in that place, though a scoffing world knew it not--"it was none other than the House of God, and the gate of heaven."

The object of the joy of every genuine believer is the same as that of Simeon--"Christ the Lord." True, indeed, that Savior is changed in His outward state or condition. The infant Babe, whom the aged man folded in his arms, is now seated on a mediatorial throne, wielding the scepter of universal empire. The earthly Temple in which He stood, is exchanged for the magnificent sanctuary above, where every knee is at this moment bending, and every tongue confessing that He is "Lord to the glory of God the Father." But though no longer an object of contemplation to the natural eye, His heart changes never--"Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing," (like Simeon) "we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory," (1 Pet. 1:8).

And as Jesus, the Object of faith, is the same to the believer now, as he was to this Saint of old; so will every soul, which has felt the burden of sin, be equally prepared to hail Him as "the Consolation of Israel." The world had been longing for its Lord; it was growing weary of its sins and sorrows; all the remedies philosophy and civilization had applied, had

failed to erase one furrow from its brow, or bind up one of its bleeding wounds. Woe-worn humanity had been sighing for four thousand years for a Deliverer. The Jewish Church--the godly remnant of God's covenant people--were also panting for a brighter day. The nation's altars were blazing with unhallowed fire; a general apostasy prevailed; many a holy saint sat in ashes, amid a sadder spiritual desolation than that of the prophet who uttered the plaintive soliloquy, "How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!" (Lam. 1:1.)

But the great Consoler has appeared! the footfall of the great Physician is heard--the Lord has come! "He shall speak peace to his people and to his saints!"

What Christ was to the believing Jewish remnant collectively, He still is to His believing people individually. In every possible variety of condition and circumstance; in all their needs and sorrows, their afflictions, their sufferings, their temptations and fears, this is the blessed "name with which he is called"--"the Consolation of Israel."

Are there any who peruse these pages, overwhelmed under a sense of sin, which they feel too heavy for them to bear, and which is almost leading them to despair of pardon? Christ is "Consolation" for you. These are His precious words, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," (Matt. 11:28).

Are there any who are struggling with the corruptions of their own evil hearts--who feel the power of indwelling iniquity dragging them to the dust in spite of all their efforts to soar heavenwards--temptations so assailing them, as oftentimes to extort the cry of agony, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Christ is "Consolation" for you. Hear His own blessed promise, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," (2 Cor. 12:9).

Are there any who are experiencing seasons of darkness and depression, who are sighing in vain over the loss of hours of holy joy and peace, whose memory is now all the remains--any who are tempted, in the despondency of their hearts, to say with mourning Zion, "My God has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me?" Christ is "Consolation"

also, for you. These are His own gracious words, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget, yet will I not forget you," (Isa. 49:15). "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding," (Jer. 3:12).

Are there any who have been called to pass through the furnace of affliction--who are mourning over the wreck of some beloved earthly joy--some cup of 'earthly' consolation which has been dashed from their lips, and with it all their hopes of earthly happiness? Oh, Christ is "Consolation", for you. These are among the last words which dropped from His lips before He gave the great, the omnipotent pledge of His love--"I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you," (John 14:18).

But why need we swell the catalogue of a Savior's consolations? There is not a wounded bosom on earth for which "there is not balm in Gilead, and a Physician there." Christ is "THE consolation"--"the God of all consolation." He has a remedy for every evil--an antidote for every sorrow--a cordial for every heart--a hand of love to wipe every weeping eye--a heart of tenderness to sympathize with every sorrowful bosom--an arm of power to protect--a rod of love to chasten--immutable promises to encourage on earth--an unfading crown to bestow in heaven--strength to bestow in the hour of weakness--courage in the hour of danger--faith in the hour of darkness--comfort in the hour of sorrow--victory in the hour of death!

The world's consolations! What are they in comparison to this? Test them in the time when they are needed most, and they will be found to be the first to give way--broken reeds--the sport of every tempest that desolates the heart. But here, O tempest-tossed, here is "your Consolation," emphatically "THE consolation"--for the consolations of Christ are those alone which are independent of all times and circumstances, all vicissitudes and changes--which avail alike in prosperity and adversity, in joy and sorrow, in health and sickness, in life and death. No, the drearier the desert, the sweeter and more refreshing are the streams of consolation of which He calls us to partake. The darker and gloomier the night of earthly woe, the more gladsome is it when this great Day-star of "CONSOLATION" is made to arise!

II. Let us note the CHARACTER given of this aged man.

He was "just and devout"--"just" to man, and "devout" to God; implying a scrupulous observance of both tables of the law--a beautiful combination--the result of an active, living, influential faith--"working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world." Here is the secret of all true morality and holy living. Never let it be said that the tendency of the doctrine of free forgiveness is to turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and give permission to sin with impunity! What does experience testify? Is it not that the holiest and humblest--those most distinguished by lofty integrity to man, and close and habitual walking with God, are they who are looking most simply and undividedly to Christ as their only ground of hope and assurance, who, like Simeon, have taken Him in the arms of their faith, and embraced Him as "all their salvation and all their desire?" It was the same mighty, constraining influence, in his case prospective, in ours retrospective, which leads us thus to judge, that "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

III. Observe the special Christian grace in the character of Simeon called into exercise with reference to the great object of his hopes. He is represented as "WAITING"--"waiting for the Consolation of Israel."

He had again and again gone, like the lone watcher on the mountain-top, to catch the first glimpse of the rising beam. Often, we may well believe, had he climbed, with pilgrim-staff, the steeps of Zion, and planted himself by the temple-gates, to hail the entrance of the promised King, saying, in the words of one of the old songs of Zion--"My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning." Nor would he abandon these holy watchings until he could joyfully exclaim, "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for him," (Isa. 25:9).

"Waiting." This is a compound virtue. It is made up of the two Christian graces, Faith and Patience. When a man waits, it implies, first of all, belief in the reality of the object of his expectation. He believes it to have a real existence, and that eventually it shall be his. But it implies also

uncertainty as to the time of the fulfillment of its hopes; the possibility of a period of suspense and anxiety intervening before the object of his wishes can be attained.

No child of God can be ignorant of this twin Christian grace. Every redeemed soul in yonder heaven knows of it; for it is expressly said, that, from Abel downwards, it is "through FAITH and PATIENCE they are now inheriting the promises." Think how many and how precious are the assurances the Bible gives to waiting Christians. "The Lord is good to those who WAIT for him," (Lam. 3:25). "WAIT on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart," (Ps. 27:14). We found in a previous chapter that aged Jacob's dying words of exultation and joy were these--"I have WAITED for your salvation, O God."

It were easy for God to give an immediate answer to the prayers of His people; by snapping all at once every chain of sin or suffering, to usher them into the glorious liberty of His children. But He would have them learn a lesson of dependence on Himself--of trust and submission--of resignation and patience. He would have "weeping" and "waiting" to "endure for the night," that they might value all the more "the joy" which shall assuredly come "in the morning." Yes, their waiting time here, though often doubtless a trying time, will, in the light of eternity, be seen and confessed to be a precious time; a gracious part of the cross, which, in the case of every redeemed child of God, must precede the crown. How will not the blessedness of that world of unbroken rest be enhanced, by the trials and struggles, the tossings and tribulations which went before; when life's tempestuous sea, wherein faith and patience were often well-near shipwrecked, is exchanged for that haven of peace, where not one wave of trouble is ever after to roll!

IV. Let us note how Simeon was brought at this time into the Temple.

He came "by the Spirit." We read, in the previous verse, that "the Holy Spirit was upon him;" and without the Spirit's influences, none of these lofty Christian graces could have been his. On entering its courts, what does he find there? A lowly woman with an infant babe. No mystic star, no angelic host is there, to proclaim His glory. Yet the Holy Spirit opens the aged saint's eyes, and tells him to behold in that helpless Child, the



Savior of mankind.

The ordinances of God are the Temple to which believers are still summoned to behold their Lord. The House of prayer is such a Temple. The power and glory of God have, in the experience of His people in all ages, been "seen in the sanctuary." "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Ps. 87:2); and it is His own gracious declaration, "I will make them joyful in my house of prayer," (Isa. 56:7).

The Bible is such a Temple. Unlike that in which Simeon stood, whose holiest courts were open only to a favored few, it is patent to every worshiper. Glorious temple it is! God's own words its living stones; His immutable promises its pillars; His oath and covenant its foundations; its walls salvation; its gates praise; Jesus Christ its corner-stone; prophets, and apostles, and saints its high-priests, giving forth the responses of Deity!

But what will all the glories of either temple be to us, unless, like Simeon, we be led there of the Holy Spirit? Without His influence, we shall find a deserted sanctuary. We may have the name of Jesus on our lips, and His praises on our tongue; but without the Spirit of God, there will be "no beauty that we should desire him," (Isa. 53:2). Many other worshipers were doubtless in the temple of Jerusalem when Simeon entered, and who gazed with him on the infant Child; but it was he alone who had come forth from communion with his God, and on whom the Spirit was, who "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," (John 1:14).

Let the prayer of Moses ever be ours, before entering the holy ground of ordinances, "If your presence," O Spirit of God! "go not with us, carry us not up hence," (Exod. 33:15). Remember that "no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit," (1 Cor. 12:3).

V. Observe next, THE CONSUMMATION OF HIS FAITH--"Then took he him up in his arms."

What a moment of ecstasy was this! The day on which his hopes, and wishes, and prayers had long been centered, had now at last arrived. He

of whom Isaiah had sung as "the Hope of Israel," was now its "Consolation!" "My eyes have seen your salvation!" The waiting-time of the saint is now at an end; and, with the promised Child in his embrace, he can look forward to a peaceful departure. What glowing emotions, in this hour of joy, must have been kindled in his heart! That great "mystery of godliness," of which seers had sung--the theme of the types, and prophecies, and hopes, and longings of ages--"the seed of the woman"--the promised "Shiloh"--"the Star of Judah"--"the hiding place from the storm"--"the Branch" whose "leaves were for the healing of the nations"--"the fountain to be opened for David's house"--"the Desire of all nations"--"the Prince of Peace"--is now folded in his arms.

But the aged Israelite, in these moments of exultation, is carried by inspiration down the vista of coming ages; and fresh visions of glory crowd up from the future. National bigotry can find no place in a heart overflowing like his. He knows no distinction between Jew and Gentile. With the true Christian and expansive spirit of the dawning gospel dispensation, he looks forward to the time when men of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue, shall kiss the scepter of this anointed Child, and confess him to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords"--"My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel," (Luke 2:30-32).

It forms a fine picture, to watch the sunset radiance--the last visions which crowd and linger around the evening of this old man's days. He is standing on the borders of the grave. Earth seems receding, and heaven in view. But where are his thoughts? not on himself, but on the 'Light of the world'--on that day when the Sun of Righteousness was to arise on the nations with "healing in his beams," and when "Gentiles should come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising," (Isa.)

It is a missionary prayer which forms the last breathings of the departing saint. It reminds us of the concluding strain which rose from the harp of the royal Psalmist of Israel. It was a magnificent anthem over a regenerated world--a prayer, not for Israel, but for mankind. "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory"--then, then only, could he close the fervent aspirations of his soul--then, then only, when he had commended

the cause of A WORLD to God, could he add--"The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," (Psalm. 72:19, 20).

So it was with Simeon. He holds the Messiah forth, in his withered arms, by a symbolic action, to the whole world. As if he had said, "Take Him, you nations! Israel's glory is now to wane. The mission of the peculiar people is ended. The gates of the old economy are now to be shut, after being opened for two thousand years. The portico of the wide world is now to be unclosed! Gentiles, meet him with your hosannas! Come, Sheba and Seba, and offer him your gifts! Come, Ethiopia, strike off your iron fetters, and stretch out your hands unto God! Distant isles of the ocean, prepare His diadem--'crown him Lord of all.' Ships of Tarshish, spread your sails for a costlier freight, and nobler mission--carrying apostles from shore to shore with 'the unsearchable riches of Christ!' Let the kingdoms of the earth 'sing praises to this King;'--for that holy Church, which is now trodden by my tottering steps, is henceforth by Him to be made 'a house of prayer for ALL nations.'"

That which formed the consummation of Simeon's faith, is the consummation of ours also--taking Jesus in our arms! Happier the soul cannot be, than when it is enabled to lay hold on Christ as "all its salvation." Simeon having seen his Lord, his hopes could go no further. Earth could give no more, and the aged man seeks no more. And so with the believer still. When he gets Christ as his portion, he needs no other--he seeks no other. His language is, "Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside you;" for, in point of fact, in thus by faith appropriating the Savior, all worth calling a portion becomes his--"the world," "life," "death," "things present," "things to come," the light of God's countenance, the sweets of His friendship, the smile of His love--assurances outweighing the wealth of worlds.

Observe, finally, Simeon having seen and embraced Christ, is PREPARED TO DIE. "Now, Lord, let you your servant depart in peace, according to your word."

Not that he wearied of life. If God had willed it, he would cheerfully have remained to be a sharer with Christ in His sufferings, before being a partaker of His crown. But the divine promise, that death should not seal

his eyes until he had seen the Savior, was fulfilled. He had now no longer any assurance of continued life, and he could fall asleep whenever his faithful Lord saw fit to take him.

Reader, having embraced your Lord by faith, are you ready to die? With a Savior in your arms, is the King of Terrors to you vanquished? and are you prepared, when it is the will of God, to depart? But mistake not. There may be some ready and willing to breathe, in one sense, Simeon's prayer--"Lord, let me depart in peace." If not at this present moment, you may, in times past, have experienced seasons, when, weary of the world, life seemed a burden, and death was coveted and longed for as a welcome relief. In hours of sadness and desolation, when some fond earthly hope has been leveled with the ground--some cup of earthly happiness dashed from the lips--some lacerating disappointment, some instance of deep ingratitude, or faithless friendship occurred--in such an hour as this, you may have often felt a longing to be done with the world, and tempted to exclaim with David, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest," (Ps. 55:6).

But mark! Simeon's prayer was a prayer uttered, not in an hour of wretchedness, but in one of holiest and most rapturous joy--the most hallowed hour that had ever dawned on him.

It was the sight of the promised Redeemer that disarmed death of its terrors, and made him alike content to live, or willing to die. With a Savior-God in his arms, come what might, the aged saint was ready to meet it all.

Learn here, the great secret of calm composure and joy in death--a cleaving closely to Christ. Simeon was "just and devout;" and doubtless as he had lived holy, so would he, in very proportion, die happy. But the "justness" and "devoutness" of his character could not, by themselves, have smoothed his death-pillow. Many there are who thus may be said to die in peace--who can look back on lives of comparative moral purity, unstained, it may be, by any very gross or glaring violation of God's law--just in all their dealings with their fellow-men--faithful in the discharge of life's relative duties--amiability and benevolence may have followed their footsteps, and in the world's estimation and their own, heaven is all

secure. And yet they may all the while be whispering to themselves, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." It may be a delusive dream--a false slumber of self-security. Amiability of character--lofty moral virtues--will prove, in a dying hour, poor preparatives for a throne of judgment.

But, united to Christ by a living faith, we can, with this aged saint, stand on the very borders of eternity, with the declaration on our lips that we are ready, whenever it is the will of God, to depart in peace. "Jesus! Jesus!" that is the magic word the dying man loves! Jesus!--How sweet that name sounds! what music is there in it!--when the recollection of all other names, (yes, that of wife, children, sister, brother,) has faded away. "Jesus!" It is a green spot in the wasteland of memory! When all other earthly props and fastenings have given way, and the mind is drifting like a vessel broken loose from its moorings--"Jesus!" That anchor secures it. The arms that can clasp nothing else, can clasp a living Redeemer, and the lips can exclaim, "Now Lord, let me depart in peace!"

We have all heard of "triumphant death-beds," here is the secret of them--"triumphant death-songs," here is the key-note of them. Let us learn the first notes of that song now, that when we come to a dying hour, we may sing it with unfaltering voice--having then nothing to do, but to die, with Christ in the arms of our faith, and salvation thrilling on our tongues. "Jesus! Jesus!" It has been the one passport to white-robed myriads at the gate of heaven! It was the name they last uttered on their dying couches. They were heard singing it through the dark valley--they have carried it with them before the throne. Let it be our firm resolution, in a strength greater than our own, that that name shall be all our boast; "that whether we live we will live unto the Lord; or whether we die we will die unto the Lord," that thus, whether living or dying, we may be His, that, having Simeon's FAITH, we may at last be sharers in Simeon's CROWN, and with him look forward from a death full of peace, to an immortality full of glory.

# JOHN THE BAPTIST

## SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF ABARIM

"So JOHN was beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a tray and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came for his body and buried it. Then they told Jesus what had happened. As soon as Jesus heard the news, he went off by himself in a boat to a remote area to be alone." Matthew 14:10-13

John 1:1-25; Luke 3:1-20; Matt. 2:1-20.

What an affecting scene is the burial of JOHN the Baptist--the first martyr of the gospel age! A handful of attached disciples have taken up the headless body of their Master, and consigned it to its last earthly resting-place. And, most touching of all--when they had completed these sad offices of affection--returning the dust to its kindred dust--they hastened away to unburden their sorrows to One who, they knew, was in all cases, but would be pre-eminently in the present--a "Brother born for adversity." "Then they told Jesus what had happened!"

With all the deep and intense sympathies of His holy human nature, and in the true spirit of a mourner, that gracious Redeemer seeks, in this hour of bitter sorrow, the sacredness of retirement. "As soon as Jesus heard the news, he went off by himself in a boat to a remote area to be alone." The cruel blow seems to have been inflicted in the castle or fort of Machaerus, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, where Herod (on his way to settle a feud with King Aretas) was holding a court festival. The faithful reprover of his lusts was pining in a dungeon under the banqueting hall; and the rash oath that had escaped the royal lips, enables his paramour to accomplish her deep-laid plot of revenge and blood.

The mourning disciples of the murdered prophet had traversed a long

and weary distance, all the way from Judea to Galilee, to pour their sorrows into the ear of the Great Sympathizer. After mingling His grief with theirs, and imparting, doubtless, some sublime though unrecorded solaces, that Divine Redeemer, leaving the mourners to their tears, crosses the lake of Tiberias to a sequestered spot, where He may muse in silence over the terrible bereavement, and give vent in solitude to His grief at the loss of His earliest human companion and friend.

If we hear of no eulogy pronounced by the Savior over the Baptist's tomb, or in the ears of his disciples after his burial; that verdict and eulogy was anticipated at an earlier period, to which we shall presently advert, when He, who "spoke as never man spoke," declared, "I assure you, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist." There is something unique and picturesque about the whole history and character of this singular man. Travelers at this day, in the little-frequented gorges, the rugged ravines around the Jordan rapids--describe the remarkable dress and appearance of the Bedouins or Dervishes, with their bronzed skins, and the striped Bedouin cloak or blanket, crudely woven of camel's hair, fastened with a leathern belt round their naked bodies. Their homes either the caves and grottoes of the wilderness, or a rustic arbor or canopy formed of branches stripped from the abundant trees around. Their food the wild fruits of the mountain, the honey found in the rocks, or the nutritious manna exuding from the tamarisk tree.

We cannot wonder that these modern pictures should be suggestive of the olden scene which attracted wondering thousands to those inaccessible glens of eastern Palestine, in the dawn of the Christian era.

The voice of prophecy had been silent for four hundred ears. God had sealed up the vision since the days of Malachi. With the exception of a few devout souls, who, like Simeon and Anna, "waited for the consolation of Israel," the spiritual life of Judah was well-near extinct--religion had degenerated into a round of empty forms and worthless routines. Its truthful type and delineation was that of Ezekiel's Valley, filled with bones and skeletons, from which all animation had departed. But the long night of darkness has at last spent itself--there are indications of coming dawn. Tidings spread that the prophetic spirit has again revived--that a seer in the spirit of Elijah, if not the great Tishbite himself, had

appeared in the remoter wilds of Judea! At, all events, One had risen, bold enough to make his voice heard, summoning, like the old prophets, the degenerate nation to repentance.

The desert was alive with crowds hurrying to listen to his message. They formed a strange and heterogeneous assemblage. There were rough laborers, unlettered peasants, and fishermen from northern Galilee. There were stern Roman soldiers from the barracks of Herod Antipas; others from Damascus, on their way to measure swords with a lawless Arabian chieftain. These stood, with sheathed weapons, to listen to one as heroic as their bravest. There were grasping, avaricious tax-gatherers, from Jericho and Tiberias, who came, either wearied of their corrupt life, or incited by the novelty of the occasion, to listen to the scourger of their vices. And, stranger than all; Jerusalem, from its Sanhedrin, pours forth its phylacteried representatives--the Pharisee, (the high churchman of his day,) the stickler for forms and ritual observances, rubric and ceremony, going to hear this unconsecrated man in an unconsecrated place; the Sadducee, the cold, scoffing infidel of the age, who looked on the world to come as a devout myth--forth they go, many of them, perhaps, with a sneer on their lips; but others also, impelled by a nobler and truer motive--by the deep-felt needs of their souls. Onward flow these crowds; the diverse streams all meeting and mingling around this strange, eccentric man. Yes, and more than all, and what stamps a surpassing interest on the scene, there is a Divine Personage, then unknown and unrecognized--who has come also, from far north Galilee, to listen to His great forerunner, and, in these rapids of the Jordan, to partake of the mysterious baptism.

There must have been a grand, rough eloquence in the preaching of this child of nature. No labored sentences, no artificial oratory, no metaphysical distinctions. They were short, abrupt, emphatic, stirring aphorisms--like the call of the prophet of Nineveh, when he rushed through that heathen capital, with his one solemn announcement of its impending doom. Such were John's exhortations. "Repent!"--Soldiers, Repent!--Publicans, Repent!--Pharisees, and Sadducees, generation of vipers, Repent! "flee from the wrath to come!" His illustrations are borrowed from the scenes among which he stood. The masses of rock that



had tumbled from the heights of the gorge were strewed, in wild confusion, on the banks of Jordan--the river fretting its way between them. The woodman's axe may have been ringing in the boundless forests around! "Men of form and routine!" he says, addressing the Pharisee group; "entrench not yourselves behind these your ancestral and hereditary prerogatives, apart from holiness of character and life. God is able, if He sees fit, from these rough stones, these rugged rocks, to raise up children unto Abraham." "Lose no time, any of you, in listening to my trumpet summons! Let these forest echoes sound a warning, Behold, now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees--therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire," (Matt. 3:10)

Even the locality which this brave preacher of righteousness selected, had its solemn associations. It could not be very far from the spot--(perhaps a little higher up the stream)--where the thousands of Israel had crossed the Jordan when in full flood. If so, this modern Elijah must have been near also to the place at which his illustrious predecessor had divided the torrent with his mantle, when on his way to the solitudes beyond, which were to witness his glorious departure.

This hallowed ground--the great Temple of nature--was a fit sanctuary surely, for the thunder-voice of the new prophet; its walls, the precipices of the Jordan--its canopy, the sky--the worshipers, a mingled congregation of earnest souls--brave men in tears--hard men softened--careless men arrested--men of business--men of learning--men of public life--all coming forth to hear a preacher of the wilderness, a Bedouin of his day--a man with no priestly consecration--claiming no prophetic succession--his vestments from the desert--the rough covering of camel's hair--and his watchword the rallying-cry that brought these many sick hearts around him--"REPENT, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Alas! that so bright a meteor-light should have been so suddenly quenched in the darkness of death!--that at the age of thirty-four, weeping mourners should be gathered round his bloody tomb! But he had accomplished his work. Gloriously and faithfully had he fulfilled his special mission, and doubtless he now rejoices that he was honored to be the first to inscribe his name in the yet unwritten page of the gospel book

of martyrs--the "noble army" that were in after ages "to praise God."

Let us gather round the early grave of the Baptist, and seek to analyze, for our profit and imitation, the leading elements in his character.

The first element in John's character we may notice, is his BOLDNESS AND FIDELITY. It was indeed a noble thing to see a man come forth, with heroic heart, to unmask hypocrisy in all its forms and phases, and lash unsparingly the conventional follies, and sins, and vices of the times. We require to put ourselves in the place of his contemporaries, rightly to estimate his moral courage and fearlessness. It was no small matter, surely, for a Jew to say boldly to an excited crowd of Hebrews, that descent from Abraham was nothing; to turn to numbers of grumbling, mutinous soldiers and say, "Be content with your wages"--to turn to the fraudulent publicans and say, "Forsake your impious gains, and be honest men"--no, more--giving forth the unmistakable warning to all, that if the covenant nation were unfaithful, some other would supersede it; for out of barren Gentile rocks, God could raise up true "children unto Abraham."

Nor was his the mere momentary impulsive boldness that rose suddenly to its climax and then collapsed--sustained by the excitement of the thousands gathering around him, but which dwindled and dwarfed into imbecility whenever the tide of popularity and power had turned. He was no Peter, with brave hero-speeches one day, and coward and craven fears the next. He was not even like his great but more impetuous prototype--the reprover of Ahab one day, and the next plunging into the wilderness--forsaking his post of duty. His dauntlessness is noblest in adversity.

He who could best read his character, bears emphatic attestation to his indomitable boldness to the last. When John's disciples, who still seem to have had access to him in his imprisonment--saw their noble-hearted master apparently thus hopelessly immured, their courage began to droop, their faith to stagger. "Could he not have been mistaken, after all, in the testimony he bore to the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth? If Jesus were indeed the Christ, why did He not come, in the might of His divine omnipotence, to the rescue of His innocent forerunner--rending these cruel bars asunder, and letting the wilderness' voice, so unjustly

stifled, be once more heard?"

John saw their incipient misgivings. Strong in faith himself, he desires to have their wavering minds confirmed. For this purpose he selects two of their number, and sends them directly to the Savior, with the question, "Are you he that should come? or look we for another?" Christ, in reply, points them to His miracles, enumerating them in detail, and then adding, "Blessed is he whoever shall not be offended by me." And when these messengers have departed, Jesus turns to the multitude that were present, and delivers to them a very noble vindication of his servant's character. In most of the utterances of Christ, there is a grand and serious simplicity--the calm statements of a Being of meek majesty--who had come "to bear witness to the truth," and scorned any unnecessary drapery of 'fine language'. But this occasion seems an exception. In vindicating His beloved friend from any unworthy aspersions, He rises to fervor--His words glow with a lofty energy, beauty, and power. Fearful lest the people might have misunderstood and misinterpreted the motive of John in sending these delegates from prison, He impresses upon them that it was from no doubt that existed in the mind of the sender, who had ever been "strong in faith, giving glory to God." "What," says He, "did you go out into the wilderness to see? a reed shaken by the wind?" Was John's a character whose fitting type was one of those trembling, shaking, brittle reeds rustling amid the jungles of the Jordan? Is he likely now to lapse into infidelity--to droop, a withered flower, in that dungeon--his sun going down gloomily amid clouds of unbelief? No; he is too much the hero, the true, the brave, for that. His whole life gives the lie to the insinuation. He will prove no renegade, who had the boldness, at the opening of his ministry, to denounce Pharisee and Sadducee--and at the close of it to rebuke the royal adulterer--though in so doing, he could calculate too well on the penalty he would be called to pay for his outspoken fidelity.

Would that there were among all of us (and especially among God's ministers) more of this bold, uncompromising statement of truth! in rousing from their false dream--like those John addressed--many who are content to rest in mere outward privileges--as if stated attendance on ordinances were enough--the skeleton form without the living spirit--

church going and church worship severed from holiness of heart and life. Evangelical preaching, in these our days, is not only tolerated, but sought, so long as it adheres to doctrinal statement, and keeps clear of the call to special duties, or the rebuke of special sins. But we oftentimes need men in the spirit and power of the Baptist, who have the moral courage to stand up in the pulpit as the reprovers and denouncers of sins which have become fashionable--glossed over--palliated--excused--yes, to the reality of which, through the deadening influence of habit, conscience may have become insensible.

The Baptist's was no mere indefinite homily about "the evil of sin" in general. He spoke pointedly and personally, to every class and every individual, of their dominant passion or lust, whatever it was. He spoke to the Pharisee of the day of his resting in forms. He spoke to the soldier of the day of his spirit of insubordination. He spoke to the publican of the day of his dishonesty and grasping avarice; He spoke to the court of the day of their dissoluteness, and to the head of that court of his special sin--"It is not lawful for you to have her." Nor was there any ambiguity or indefiniteness employed regarding a state of coming retribution. The solemn reality was not mystified, and explained away, and blunted by hazy figures of speech--honeyed words. It was no shadowy vision that dark futurity. He gave things their right names--"Wrath to come." "The chaff shall be burnt with unquenchable fire!"

Shall we summon in, this great preacher of the olden time, and imagine what personal sins he would unmask and condemn among ourselves? Shall we try to imagine how this prophet of the wilderness would speak, were he either to enter the sacred enclosures of social life, or stand in the streets of our cities, and, with scrutinizing gaze, mark their eager crowds hurrying along! What would be the special sin or sins, his eagle eye would detect, and against which his trumpet tongue would declaim?

Would it not be our varying phases of intense worldliness--at one time manifesting itself in public, in the eager, all-engrossing scramble in the race for riches, as if money were the chief and only good, the old philosopher's summum bonum (highest good)--as if gold could dispel care, and solace sorrow, and soothe suffering, and bribe death? Or, this same master sin, manifesting itself in another form, in private--the

feverish and absorbing money-chase, only exchanged for an endless, exhausting round of artificial excitements to close the day. Family duties guiltily curtailed, and in many instances sacrificed, parental responsibilities neglected--the great "end of being," in this whirlpool of excitement, often thoroughly ignored--the foot-road to the family altar, or even to the closet, covered over and hidden with the noxious weeds of forgetfulness and neglect. What religion remains is shoved into the Sabbath-corner. Mammon, the most exacting of charioteers, giving his steeds breath once only in seven days, and, ready, as Monday returns, for the fresh run of the week!

But mistake us not. Be assured, if John were thus to speak out his honest convictions, in the midst of us, he would combine sagacity with boldness. His would be no mystical and unnatural dis severance of man from his work-day world; as if business and religion were antagonistic and incompatible. Do you not observe, in the narrative of Luke, how he enjoins all the classes that came (just as he would enjoin each class among ourselves) to go back to their ordinary occupations, but only imbued with a new heaven-born spirit; seeking that religion would moderate worldly cares, engrossments, employments, and enjoyments, and leave its sanctifying influence upon all?

To the common people he said--"Go back to the world and your work, and manifest a spirit of brotherly kindness--'He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise,'" (Luke 3:11) To the publicans, he did not say--"Leave your irreligious toll and custom-houses--give up your gains at Tiberias and Jericho." No! but "Return home! Be tax-gatherers still; but hold the balance of truth in your hand. Scorn all that is base and dishonest! 'Exact no more than that which is appointed you,'" (Luke 3:13) To the soldiers, he did not say--"Leave that horrid trade of war--throw down your commissions--cast sword and scabbard into the depths of Jordan, and live lives of hermit seclusion on its banks." No; but--"Go forward in your present warlike mission against the desert chief of Petra. Be brave, and good, and true. Temper your heroic deeds with mercy to the vanquished! Set a noble example of obedience and subordination to your superior officers--Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be

content with your wages," (Luke 3:14)

Yes, here is the honest, outspoken boldness of a man of God; and yet one who took broad and noble and generous views of existence and its duties. Would that we thus sought more thoroughly to incorporate religion with every-day life, and have all interfused with the fear and love and favor of God. Would that we felt more, that the grand problem which we, as Christians have to solve, is "to be in the world, and not of it"--that thousands on thousands in our thoroughfares would listen to his monitory voice, expressed in the words of a kindred spirit--"Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever." 1 John 2:15-17

A second notable element in the character of John is his SELF-DENIAL. Weary and sick at heart with the corruptions of the times, the Baptist, at or before the age of thirty, just at the period of existence when the world--"the pride of life"--wears most attractions, retired to the solitude of the desert for meditation and prayer, until "the time of his showing unto Israel."

We have no reason to suppose that, like his Lord and master, his early home was one of poverty. His father was a priest; and alike from the social status of his parents, and from the education he would receive as a priest's son, we infer he must have occupied no low position in Hebron, the probable place of his birth and boyhood. But any thoughts regarding mere earthly well-being and advancement were, in his own mind, superseded and expelled by a higher principle, and the consciousness of a nobler mission. He willingly forfeits the prizes which the mere natural man would have coveted; the pride of family--the love of the world--the distinctions of learning. Assuming a poor man's garb, he secludes himself among the Judean mountains and by the shores of the Jordan, that he might attune and tutor his soul for his appointed work. "What did you go out to see?" says Christ, in the same impassioned appeal to which we

have already referred. "A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold! those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces." He was no candidate for earthly honors. The sackcloth and the leathern belt excluded him from court life. If he had been the devotee of the world or of fashion, he would have clad himself in different attire. But he was one of these lofty spirits to whom the world and all its tinsel glitter was nothing--a star dwelling apart--shining not for itself, but for others--a grand and rare example of self-sacrifice and self-surrender to God.

Noble pattern, surely, to us in this selfish age and this selfish world, is this self-denying man! Not that the rough garb and crude attire--the uncostly and undainty fare and lodging of the desert, are in themselves either proof of self-denial, or an example for us to follow. Many a time has a proud, selfish, unloving heart lurked under an affectation, either in dress, or living, or unworldliness. Christianity is as opposed to all this morbid and vain singularity, as it is to ostentation and pride. Let none, therefore, imagine that, for the exercise of John's spirit, it requires the monkish garb and the hermit's cell--the leathern belt and the meal of locusts and wild honey. All these are but incidental accompaniments--no more necessary to self-denial, than standing in the corners of the streets would be necessary to prayer. They were perhaps required in John's case, to rouse the slumbering multitudes, and attract attention to his great theme. If this burning and shining light had come with the silence and stillness of the dawning day, the benighted world might have slept on, disregarding his message; and therefore he had to flash upon it with the glare of the meteor. Moreover, we know, that He who must ever hold an infinitely higher place than the Baptist, and yet who honored him and his pure life--He, the infinitely pure and holy ONE--lived no such hermit existence, and was sustained on no such ascetic fare--"The Son of man came eating and drinking," and was on that account falsely stigmatized as "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber;" and yet, in the case of both--John, the man of the desert, and Jesus, mingling in social life--there was the manifestation, though in different phases, of the great principle of self-denial. The saying was appropriate in the case of either--"He pleased not himself."

How much room is there, in these our times, for the exercise of this noble

grace! How many there are, who from year's end to years end--know not what it is to be swayed by its generous impulse--whose thoughts, feelings, deeds, aspirations, are centered all on self. If they be happy and prosperous--if their purses be full--if their business thrive, and their families be well provided for--what do they care for anything else? The poor are (with them) a sort of myth. They can devour books describing fictitious sorrows. They can weep over the hard struggle of poverty pictured in sentimental novels; but as for clothing an orphan, or helping a struggling widow, or denying themselves some luxury or comfort, which might easily be spared, that the hungry might be fed or the naked be clothed--they have never dreamt of that.

If we be Christians indeed, we must manifest more or less of this spirit of self-denial for the good of others--this abnegation of self. John by his example, and John's Master, alike by His example and His words, have left us the sacred command--the solemn legacy--"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself," (Matt. 16:24). "See that you abound in THIS grace also--For you know"--(oh! matchless example of self-denial)--"you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich," (2 Cor. 8:9).

A third element in John's character was his EARNESTNESS. The phrase is familiar to us all--it has passed into a proverbial saying--"an earnest ministry." Here was a living exemplification of it; and its earnestness was the secret of its power. John (so far as we know) was neither polished, nor learned, nor eloquent. Judging from the brief recorded specimen of his preaching, he had nothing of the logical acumen and intellectual grasp of the great scholar of Gamaliel. His sentences, as we have already said, are strong--pointed--vigorous--the sharp, arrowy words of a bold, outspoken man--no more.

But--mightier than all eloquence, and than all the logic and learning of the schools--his winged appeals went forth from his inmost heart. The words were those of one who deeply felt all he said--whose every utterance came welling forth from the depths of an earnest soul.

After all, this is what the world, what the Church, needs--a living



earnestness. It is the earnest man who alone can stand the test, and shall alone be honored in his work. Have we not manifold instances in proof of this in our own times? Look at those places where there has been manifested a deep and growing interest in divine things--and where hundreds, before in a state of utter indifference and death, have been brought to a knowledge of the truth. What is the instrumentality that has been employed? Often the very weakest. Ministers of little intellectual energy--devoid of all the arts of oratory--who can clothe their utterance only in the simplest and rudest garb--but they are men in earnest--men who have their work at heart--who go to it in the spirit of believing prayer--animated by one predominating motive--love for souls and the glory of God. And where there is this earnestness and heart-work, it is pleasing to see those of cultivated minds, and who may even be called fastidious hearers and worshipers, many among them far superior to their instructors in natural and acquired gifts and knowledge of life, sitting and listening with docility to the "simplicity of the truth." It is the old scene witnessed in the Jordan wilderness--those of strong and vigorous intellect--learned men of the world--polished Pharisees--subtle Sadducees--soldiers with Roman blood in their veins--officers trained in all court etiquette--wily, far-seeing tax-gatherers--in one word, hundreds skilled in the world's logic--shrewd, knowledgeable men of business--coming and sitting at the feet of this half-savage-looking hermit--a man all unschooled in worldly art and courtly manners and the business of life--and asking him, "What shall we do?"

And the same characteristic which gave him access to the hearts of the people, opened his way to the heart of the Tetrarch. When no other power could have reached the polluted soul of Herod Antipas, the earnest truth of the wilderness messenger enabled him to confront, face to face, the royal debauchee. He honored his earnestness, though he hated his piety. "Herod heard him gladly." Why? "because he knew that he was a just man and a holy."

God grant us ever an earnest ministry! It will be the mighty lever for a revival in its noblest sense. Here is the grand theme for the prayers of our people, that among ministers and students there may be the infusion of "the earnest life." It is this alone which will confound the reasoning and

surmises of a semi-infidel world. The world is keen in perceiving motives--the world is discerning (severely so sometimes,) in estimating character; and many draw the conclusion, (alas! too often with good reason!) "These men, preach as they may, are not in earnest--they are only skillful players on an instrument. These pulpit orations are shams, ideal pictures, not countersigned by living earnestness." Hundreds go away from the house of God with the smile on their face, and Ezekiel's words on their lips, "Ah, Lord God, does he not speak parables?" (Ezek. 20:49.)

One other trait in John's character was his HUMILITY. This outshines all the others, and indeed embraces and implies them all. If ever a man could have risen to power and position by his popularity, it was the Baptist. The great preacher of the day; the idol of the people; the first to resume and renew the long-interrupted voice of the old prophets, "The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ." Others took a more modified view of his pretensions, but still abundantly flattering, if he had been susceptible of vain-glory. Yielding to the popular belief current at that time as to the transmigration of souls, some seemed to conjecture (from dim and shadowy intimations in the sacred writings) that the soul of Elijah, or of Jeremiah, may have reappeared in the person of John. "Are you Elijah?" and he said, I am not. "Are you that prophet?" (Jeremiah) "and he answered, No."

How many would have been unduly elated by this formal mission of delegates sent from the great ecclesiastical council of the nation to interrogate him as to his claims to the Messiahship--for "the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?" What a grand opportunity was here for an ambitious impostor, or an elated fanatic! The throne of David might have been, without difficulty, won for him by these excited crowds; or, at all events, the hermit's brow might have been encircled by the halo of homage with which they invested the name and memory of one of their greatest prophets.

But what did this humble man say? He repels and rejects the offered incense. "I am none of these; I am but the feeble echo of a Greater far--the pioneer and herald of a Mightier--'the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' I am not that Light, but am sent to bear witness of that Light.

The latchet of His shoes (the work of the humblest menial) I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." And when the brighter Light, the Sun of Righteousness, had arisen--when Jesus began to baptize in the Jordan, the disciples of John, in a spirit of unworthy jealousy, came complaining of the crowds that were deserting John's teaching, and following that of Him they regarded as a rival "Rabbi," said they, "he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness," is unfairly superseding you, "all men come to Him!" John calmly rebukes the unworthy spirit. Under a beautiful figure, he tells those who he is only "the friend of the Bridegroom"--not the Bridegroom Himself--that his joy is fulfilled and complete, by "standing and hearing the Bridegroom's voice"--adding, in a beautiful spirit of self-renouncing humility, the prophetic words, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Ah, how unwilling men generally are, thus to take the shade and make way for another. How unwilling, especially (as in John's case) when but in the dawn of aspiring manhood--when their eye is undimmed, and their natural force unabated--when, with strong arm and vigorous intellect, they have been swaying the minds of a generation--whether it be in the councils of the state, or the councils of the church, or in public citizenship, or even private society--how unwilling all at once to be set aside and superseded. But so it was with this great and good man. As spring melts into the tints of full-blown summer--as the morning star melts into the sky before the brighter radiance of the sun--so this lesser light--the morning star of the gospel dispensation--after shedding his mellowed radiance, is content to be "swallowed up in the glory that excels." This is his comfort under the thought of his extinguished luster, but he needs no more--"HE must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

Let us close the chapter with one or two PRACTICAL LESSONS from this review of the character of the Baptist.

1st, Learn from his example, what is THE GREAT THEME AND OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY. It is the exaltation of Christ! When men, like the people in John's time, are "thinking in their hearts"--when the soul is open to conviction, sighing to have its great unsated longings met--with what are we to fill that heart, and meet these aspirations? It is not by

discourses on philosophy--or by homilies on virtue--but by telling of ONE mightier, who "baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Let the faithful servants of a 'Greater than John' have one ambition, one cause of joy--that Christ their Lord be exalted. Let them take as their motto and watchword the ever-memorable words with which the Baptist pointed his disciples to the great Being approaching them--"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!"--words probably suggested by the scene and circumstances of the spot--the sheep and lambs passing by the fords of the Jordan to the impending passover. As such, the reference is interesting and impressive. "Look no longer," says John, at these bleating types--look no longer on ME. I am myself, like these dumb animals, only appointed to prepare the world for a grander Advent. That advent so fondly waited for is now accomplished. The types may now vanish away. These flocks need no more be driven to the city of solemnities. See Him to whom they have for four thousand years pointed--"Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!"

Learn, 2d, That GOD'S SERVANTS MUST NOT ALWAYS LOOK FOR THEIR REWARD IN THIS WORLD. The faith of many would have sunk altogether under the successive reverses experienced by the Baptist--the decline of his popularity, his own disciples and followers grieving his spirit by the manifestation of base feelings of envy and jealousy--and, worse than all, his own brave spirit, burning eager as ever, with desire to glorify his great Lord, chafed and buffeted by the tyrant of Galilee; he himself cast, at the age of thirty-four, into a dungeon, and made the victim of bloodthirsty revenge--the morning star not only quenched by the sun and hidden from view, but blotted out altogether from the earthly skies!

Let God's servants learn from this, not to be dependent either on the praise or censure of man, or to look for earthly recompense. Let them seek to have their record on high--to have their own motives lofty and pure, so that they may be able to say, in the spirit of the great apostle, "It is a small thing for me to be judged by you or by man's judgment." When their influence is on the wane, be this their comfort, that "their decrease is not Christ's decrease"--that His great cause is not jeopardized by wayward human feeling and caprice. The meteor may flash its little

moment and then die; but the bright and morning Star is a fixed orb, shining far above in changeless and undying glory.

Let us learn, 3d, That CHRIST'S SERVANTS, OFTEN UNRECOMPENSED BY MEN, ARE NOT FORGOTTEN BY THEIR GREAT MASTER.

It was when that lonely captive was in his prison among the mountains, near the shores of the Dead Sea, that his Lord uttered that beautiful and touching eulogy on his character to which we have more than once adverted. John might have appeared to men, at that time, a brittle, broken reed; but the lips of infallible truth said of him, "He is a prophet, yes, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." The humble, lowly-minded man may have thought that not only his work was closed, but his influence gone. But hear, from the lips of his great Lord, how he truly lived. How his saintly life was pointed to, for the example and encouragement of the people of Israel; yes, and when he died, how that heart of more than human love sought "a solitary place," that He might mourn the bright and shining Light which had been so early extinguished!

May we not further add that, on that coming day, when all the inequalities in providence shall be adjusted, and all mysteries explained and vindicated, these same lips of infinite truth and love will be ready with the verdict, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" "you have been faithful unto DEATH, I will give you a crown of life."

From all this, let the lowliest, and humblest, and most despised believer take comfort. Unknown and unacknowledged by men, they are not forgotten by Jesus! A sick-bed, a home of sorrow, a season of bereavement or temporal loss--any one of these, may be to you like the prison of John--the confine where you are shut up--with pining heart--some sea of death rolling its gloomy waves around you.

Be comforted! Christ is thinking upon you. Glorify Him by passive suffering and endurance, if unable to do it by active labor. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love," (Heb. 6:10). He will be with you, as with John, in life--appointing all its circumstances and

"accidents." He will be with you in your hour of trouble--His loving eye will never more lovingly focus on you, than when your soul is "in prison," and the chains of adversity are around you. As He spoke to the multitude in vindication of His captive servant, though at a distance from his place of imprisonment, so will He speak for you, and plead for you, now that He is on His distant throne in the skies! And when you come to die-- though He is no longer visibly present, as He was on earth, to stand by your grave--yet He marks the going down of every sun, He appoints the hour of its setting, and "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," (Ps. 116:15).

And if we would gather yet one other lesson from the tomb of this great and good prophet, it is by pointing to the example of those who bore him to his last resting-place, indicating, as it did, the true refuge and solace of every afflicted one in their season of BEREAVEMENT. The burial scene is over; the body has been transferred to its rocky vault; the tearful lament has died into solemn silence; the stone is rolled to the mouth of the cave; and the mourners, with drooping hearts, are wending their way along from the hallowed spot. But where? "The disciples took up the body and buried it; and **THEY WENT AND TOLD JESUS!**"

Oh, blessed resort in the hour of deepest affliction! Go, child of sadness and desolation; go, with your breaking heart, with your aching life-sorrow, too great for utterance or for tears--"Go and tell Jesus!" Others may give you a false panacea for your grief--others may counsel you to go and bury your woes in the grave--to stifle your tears--to put on counterfeit smiles, to hide the yawning chasm in your heart of hearts--others may tell you to go and feed your grief--to sit in your silent chamber, and mope and pine over your blighted happiness in morbid and unavailing sadness. But let these mourners over their "loved and lost," teach you a nobler philosophy, and dictate a surer ground of comfort and solace and strength. Go, and though all others should be cold and unpitying and unsympathizing, there is One ear, at least, that is lovingly open to the story of your tears--remembering that Friend in heaven--"**GO AND TELL JESUS.**"

# **LOT'S WIFE**

## **A SUNSET ON ZOAR**

"Remember LOT'S WIFE." –Luke 17:32.

Here is a gloomy sunset!--a sun going down, ashen and blood-red, in a darkened, troubled sky--gilding the mountain-tops, not with vanishing glory, but converting them rather into beacons of ominous warning. Let us obey the injunction of Him who "spoke as never man spoke," while, with solemn earnestness and attention, we revisit the mouldering ashes of Sodom; and, as we mark the solitary pillar towering on the way to Zoar, let us pause by it, and profit by its impressive lessons.

We need not rehearse the narrative. How God announced His resolution to smite down these haughty capitals, whose iniquity had risen to the clouds--how He acquainted Abraham with His purpose of vengeance--how the importunate patriarch wrestled in prayer until ten righteous people could not found to avert the doom--how the angels were sent to rescue Lot and his family; and early in the morning, the favored group were seen wending their way up the adjoining arduous slopes--how, when the heights were gained, the Lord, true to His threatening, showered down the burning torrents, spreading conflagration far and wide over home and palace!

Privileged family, to escape so tremendous a fate! On the slope of an adjoining mountain a shelter is prepared. One special command alone is addressed to them--that they were not to look back; but to hasten and flee for their lives to the heights of Zoar. "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" Genesis 19:17

In a regrettable moment, the wife of the refugee tampers with the mandate. With reverted head, she gazes back on the doomed cities. That moment is her last! She becomes a monument of vengeance; and years afterwards, when the waters of the Dead Sea rolled their sluggish tide over the buried capitals--and when the eye of the spectator, in these gloomy depths, could catch no relic of perished magnificence--if he looked to one of the crested heights, he would behold a calcified pillar, which in silent eloquence proclaimed--"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Heb. 10:31.)

Although the wife of Lot lived in an early age--a stranger to countless blessings we enjoy, yet there were few at that period who enjoyed greater. She had been, in every sense, highly favored. Though by birth a heathen, she had been married to a man of God! She had traversed many a league with the "father of the faithful" himself. She had listened to his breathings of faith and holy converse. She had helped him often to rear the altar side by side with his tent in Canaan, and had bent before it. She had heard him discourse, perhaps, of his mightiest honor, as the ancestor of a coming Savior, and had her thoughts turned to Him whose day the patriarch "saw afar off, and was glad." Ever since she left her home in Ur of Mesopotamia, until finally she settled with her husband in the city of the plain, she had been "dwelling in a tent with Abraham," and was temporally "heir with him of the same promise." If she had no other privilege, great indeed was this--to encamp for years under the shadow of this mighty cedar of God!

And when the uncle and nephew, owing to the vast increase of their flocks, had to make separate encampments--though obliged to forfeit the daily society of the pilgrim father, she was not withdrawn from the influences and responsibilities of godly companionship. Lot, though he had imperilled his own spiritual prospects, by a carnal and selfish choice, was yet a child of God. Inspiration depicts him as "a righteous man." She must often have witnessed his burning tears, and listened to his burning words, as, "sick of all the immorality and wickedness around him" of his unrighteous fellow-citizens, from day to day he warned them of the consequences of their "unlawful deeds."

She had surely every reason to give prompt obedience to the will of God,



when she recalled His mercies towards her; bringing her in safety through many strange vicissitudes--from being in a state of obscurity, elevating herself and her husband to opulence--the wandering stranger and adventurer from Chaldea, now a prince and shepherd-king in the choicest Valley of Canaan! That same God had just given her another and still more remarkable token of His favor, in commissioning His angels to rescue her and her family from impending ruin.

But see, amid so many incentives to faith and obedience, how unbelief and worldliness triumphed. She had started on her flight. The warning angels had resorted to force, to pluck the lingerers away; and we see them climbing, amid the gray light of that memorable morning, the footpath to Zoar. We could imagine but one feeling of gratitude dominant in her bosom. Never ought prisoner, immured in some gloomy cell, to have manifested greater thankfulness when his fetters were unbound, and he felt his brow bathed once more in the light of heaven.

But "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" She had obeyed with reluctance the summons. The "brand plucked from the burning" reclaimed against the gracious intervention. Her HEART was in Sodom! She thought of its halls of revelry, its gilded mansions, its rich perfumes, its ungodly feasts, its unholy citizens. The scoffing language of her degraded sons-in-law, had more influence over her than the guiding angel's holy and solemn warnings. She must cast a lingering eye back on the scenes of her godless festivities, and though the express command of God to look not back, might well have deterred her--she would doubtless presume, as thousands do still, that He would not be true to His threatenings--that He would not keep to His word--that, for the 'trivial offence' of looking behind her on the city of her abode, she should not be visited with instant destruction.

The morning sun had risen brightly. No signs of such an dreadful conflagration were visible. Where, in that golden sky, was the storm-blast that had been threatened? She might indeed have thought far otherwise. The material creation all around might itself have read to her the lesson that "the Lord is not slack" concerning His threatenings. The vestiges and foot-prints of the deluge were still fresh on the outer world. The frowning rocks, which gave such stern grandeur to Sodom's valley, had been cleft

and marked with the rush of diluvian waters. It was no very remote tradition that could discourse on the terrors of that scene, when the Lord arose in the greatness of His majesty to shake terribly the earth; and if Jehovah had been true to His threatened judgments in the one case, might she not have felt that the same arm was as "strong to smite" as ever. But she did not listen--the voice of pious relatives, the entreaties of angels, the visible judgments of God, were all unheard and disregarded. She despised their counsel, and would have none of their reproof!

Have none of us to answer for abused privileges and rejected warnings? Are there no Abrahams and Lots and angel-messengers of warning and mercy, to witness to our disobedience and rejection and unbelief? Can we think of no holy relatives who have bent with us at the altar and baptized us with their prayers? Is there no father's counsel, no mother's voice, no brother's or sister's tears that come up before us in vivid remembrance? What are God's dispensations, but angels in disguise? coming to us, as to Lot's household--in the dark night of sorrow thundering at the gates of our souls, and saying, "Hasten! flee for your life!"

Lot, also, (God's minister in Sodom) was not silent on that dreadful crisis. In the depth of midnight, he was at the doors of his sons-in-law pleading with anxious tears, "Up, get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!" So do God's ministers still sound the trumpet of alarm--proclaiming that the brimstone-cloud is charged, the slumbering volcano ready to break forth, and that "it is high time to awake out of sleep!"

How is their message often received? Men hear it as Lot's sons-in-law listened to his. They thought him an old dotard, and his ravings those of a weak alarmist. They scoffed and jeered and hooted him; "he seemed to them as one that was joking." The sharp, shrill call, at that midnight hour, rang in their ears, "Escape! escape!" But all their rejoinder is, "What does this babbler say? On with the dance! refill these golden cups! eat and drink; tomorrow shall be as today, and much more abundant."

Times are changed with us; there may be no open mockings of God's servants now--no disrespectful or infidel spurning of their message. There is a hush of decorous silence when, in their Master's name, however feebly, they deliver their urgent appeal. But alas! with many, is

there not the same lurking unbelief, the same guilty disobedience, the same lingering love of the world and sin? Do we not appear, in their eyes, as the novel-writer, who describes a fictitious scene, or like the actor who acts an unreal tragedy? We seem like "one that jokes."

The real thoughts of hundreds, as they rise from their seats in the house of God, is this, "It is an enthusiast's fiction--a piece of word-painting and word-acting. It is not a sober reality. We may accord with the custom of the age, and pass a vacant hour listening to what this dreamer says. We may follow him in thought up this pictured path to Zoar; we may hear all he has to say when he would attempt to overturn the evidence of our senses by telling us that these calm skies are yet to be gloomy with thunders, these smiling plains sheeted in flames--these forests charred into blackness. Let the credulous think as they please, he seems to a sober, reflective spirits "as one that jokes!"

So thought the philosophic infidels in Sodom of old. But one "righteous man," (it may be, in comparison to them, a child in intellect) put the word of his God against all their carnal reasonings and theories; and, like the lonely prophet of a future age, he rushed through the streets, exclaiming, "In a few brief hours, and Sodom shall be destroyed!"

And was God untrue to His threatenings? Was Lot the lying prophet they imagined him to be? Were these angels some ghosts of this visionary's imagination, who had come at dead of night to startle them with terror? Perhaps the wife of the patriarch was inclined to think so. As she began to linger and loiter behind--and as she saw the sky without a cloud, the sun "going forth like a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race"--the whole valley of Sodom slumbering in quiet loveliness and repose--as she heard the lowing of the cattle, at that early hour, mingling with the morning song of birds--as she watched the Jordan issuing from his gorges, wending his silvery way to water the fertile meadows around her home--she may have begun to entertain the thought, that all was a "devout delusion", that hers was an unworthy, cowardly flight. Then her days of gaiety--her haunts of fashion and pleasure and amusement and sin, came vividly before her. She listened on the slope of the mountain to the hum of the old revelry--Sodom waking up at the summons of the morning. "There can be no harm, at all events," she thinks, "in taking a

glimpse at the beloved old halls. Forbidden though it be, it is but a little act of disobedience at the best! Moreover, if God had been in earnest, He would have smitten me down long before now. He who has allowed me for years to lead a life of gaiety, and sin, and folly, and crime, will surely not visit with sudden judgment so trifling a departure from His express command."

She ventured, and perished! She turned round to indulge in the guilty, because forbidden, look. The rush of darkness came over her eyes--her blood congealed in her veins; and that column of petrified flesh stands forth an dreadful pledge and premonition of the coming vengeance.

What an illustration are the conduct and reasoning of this infidel woman of those of hundreds among us still! "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," (Eccl. 8:11). But the Lord who has kept silence so long, will not keep it always. He will, sooner or later, be true to His own warning--"He that being often reprov'd hardens his neck, shall SUDDENLY be destroyed, and that without remedy," (Prov. 29:1).

Beware of this same fatal rock, on which multitudes still make shipwreck--that fatal 'trust in God's mercy'--that fatal dis-trust of God's Word. The inner thought of that hapless lingerer, doubtless, was--What! God destroy this beautiful Sodom--the pride of the Canaanites--the garden of the Land of Promise! What! reduce these proud towers to ashes, and involve all that wealth of flocks and herds in the terrible overthrow!--Impossible! But has God "said, and shall he not do it? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Yes, the Lord is true to His word. If we go at this very day to the banks of the Dead Sea, we find in its sullen, salt waters, a memorial, which has existed for a hundred ages, of the Divine hatred of sin. There is no traveler who visits that dreary spot, but is awestruck with the scene. The cheerless lake--the dull, leaden pool; whose unfathomed caverns are the grave of cities, seems to defy vegetation on its banks and life in its waters. No fish is sporting there--no flower can raise its head on these inhospitable shores. Few, if any, birds are seen to wing their flight over its sulphurous bosom; and when they do, they hush their notes of joy. The

dreadful stillness of the untenanted sea seems ever to be reading the silent but emphatic lesson--"God is not a man that he should lie." (Numb. 23:19.)

Let us now proceed to gather one or two of the more prominent PRACTICAL LESSONS which this subject suggests.

## I. BEWARE OF QUESTIONING GOD'S COMMANDS, WHATEVER THEY MAY BE.

Sometimes they may be strange and mysterious. He may call us to leave our homes of prosperity, our scenes of joy, and to climb the mount of trial. Let us feel assured, in the apparent blighting of our hopes and prospects, in the destruction of our home-joys, there is the deliverance from evils and sorrows greater still, which we are unable at the present time to see or comprehend. "Taken away from the evil to come"--is an assurance which has sent a bright ray of hope and consolation into many a wounded spirit. "Although you say you cannot see Him, yet justice is before Him; therefore trust in Him," (Job 35:14). Be it ours to ask, in simple faith, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" and to say--"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!" (Job 13:15.) In our saddest and sorest seasons of calamity, He will send His ministering angels of comfort to solace and support our smitten hearts, and guide us, though by a rugged path, away from the empty frivolities and sins of a poor Sodom-world, to the gates of the true Zoar of peace and joy.

## II. BEWARE OF WORLDLY ENTANGLEMENTS!

How many there are who, like Lot's wife have apparently set out to the Zoar of safety, yet who linger and perish in the plains of Sodom! They hear the terrors of the law--they are roused by the tidings of the coming conflagration. They think of fleeing--they have actually set out; but the world they have left has too many attractions and fascinations. Demas-like, they give the preference to these--they look back to Sodom and perish!

Beware of yielding to temptation! See what a look may do! "If your right eye offend you, pluck it out and cast it from you." In the Greek Church, at

baptism, the finger of the priest is laid on the eye, and the sign of the cross made on that organ to show that it is to be turned from evil, and so to be "single" and "full of light." Remember how many bitter tears one sinful look cost David; and how for that look and its consequences, "the sword never departed from his house."

See how sin always begins little by little. The wife of Lot began first to doubt; then to fall behind her companions, and lose the benefit of their encouragement and counsel. She was left a prey to her own evil thoughts. Like Peter, the loiterer "followed afar off." Like Peter, she fell; but, unlike Peter, she had no space to weep.

It was the dreadful aggravation of the sin of this ill-fated woman, that she transgressed just when God had made showed His arm on her behalf--when He had sent His angels to warn her and conduct her to a place of safety--yes, when she was actually on her way to Zoar--when Zoar's gate of shelter was gleaming in her view. She had been roused at midnight--she had gotten out of reach of the summonings and jeers of her evil companions--she had reached the brow of the hill, and was apparently all safe--she had been rescued from the idolatries of Chaldea, the superstitions of Egypt--she had been plucked from the burning fires of Sodom, and yet she perished notwithstanding!

Sad it was, in olden time, for the transgressor to be cut down by the sword of the avenger, when on the very threshold of his refuge city. Sad it is to read the narrative of the great African explorer, who, after a thousand hairbreadth escapes in these dangerous deserts, fell a victim to an accident in his English home! Sad it is to hear of the vessel that had braved battle and storm--that had buffeted many angry waves and a thousand leagues of ocean--wrecked and stranded when the home-harbor is in sight, and friends are standing on the pier giving the wave of welcome!

But sadder than all is it, to see a soul that had set out on the way to heaven; that had escaped the temptations of youth;

that got rid of worldly entanglements; that got out of Sodom and was on its way to Zoar, yet perishing with salvation in sight! "Remember Lot's

wife!" Oh, "take heed lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness," (2 Pet. 3:17).

#### IV. BEWARE OF CHRISTIAN INCONSISTENCY.

There is a lesson to those who are like Lot, as well as those who are like his unhappy partner.

It is said even of him, that "he lingered." Child of God as he was, even he was wrenched with a reluctant heart from his Sodom home--even he seemed to stagger through unbelief, as the angels importuned him to depart. As he afterwards learned with a bitter heart of that pillar-monument of vengeance, or saw it from his refuge-city, might he not reproach himself with the thought--"Alas! may not my lingering have emboldened her in her presumption--confirmed her in disobedience? May not the responsibility of that doom rest much with me? She saw me undecided--she saw me, with reluctant step and misgiving heart, loitering on my threshold. May I not have furnished an excuse for that bold, presumptuous, fatal look?"

Beware of the power of evil example--CHRISTIAN INCONSISTENCY. Beware, lest by our languid frames, our uneven walk, our guilty misgivings, our worldly conformity, we foster unbelief in the hearts of others. Parents! Masters! Ministers! Christians!--seek a high-toned consistency! For this end be ever watchful. "Look to yourselves!" Lot (the righteous Lot) was "scarcely saved." He was saved, "yet so as by fire." But for God's angels, he would have perished like the rest. "Remember Lot's wife," and tremble! Remember Lot, and tremble, too! Read, on the archway leading into Zoar, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." "If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Heb. 10:38.)

#### V. BEWARE OF DELAY.

"Hasten!" every day-- every hour is precious--make the most of the golden moments. If God has now sent His ministering angels to you, whatever these may be, though they should be the black messengers of sorrow and bereavement, listen to their call! Up, and prepare for the

journey; go with the determination of those who feel that life or death is involved in its issues. "WORK out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The salvation is all God's giving--the Zoar of refuge is God's providing. But, if you would reach it, you must set out, with staff in hand, like men in earnest, and "not stop in all the plain." The angels could have wafted Lot and his family on their wings through the air; or they might have reared some fire-proof pavilion in the midst of the city, like another Rahab's house in Jericho, which would have remained unscathed amid the tremendous conflagration. But the command to Lot, as to us, is, "Hasten! FLEE! tarry not! escape!" The angels brought them outside the gates, and then left them to pursue the appointed path.

The gospel is a beautiful combination of simple faith with earnest working--a simple dependence on Christ, and yet the diligent use of means. Its command is, "Run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus." "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." "Of the times and of the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes." "SUDDEN!" yes, "sudden!"--"Remember Lot's wife!" What must have been the feeling of this woman, as, in the twinkling of an eye, she felt every limb hardening her body incrusting with the briny shroud, a winding-sheet of salt! No sculptor's chisel ever so depicted the horror of despair, as in the rayless eyes of that cold statue on the heights of Sodom.

And what shall be your feelings, O careless, negligent procrastinator, despiser of warning, rejecter of grace--when, all unfit and unready, the icy hand of death shall fix you forever, and the irrevocable sentence go forth, "Him that is filthy, let him be filthy still!"

Up then, tarry not! lost or saved--heaven or hell--are the dreadful, the momentous alternatives! "As your soul lives, verily there may be but a step between you and death." With all our abounding privileges, in this age of gospel light and gospel blessing, may we not--remembering how Lot's wife perished despising angelic warning--may we not well conclude with the cogent appeal of the great Apostle, "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall WE escape, if we NEGLECT SO GREAT



SALVATION?"

## **WIDOW OF NAIN**

### **SUNSET ON MOUNT TABOR**

Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of NAIN, with a great crowd following him. A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The boy who had died was the only son of a WIDOW, and many mourners from the village were with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. "Young man," he said, "get up." Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk to those around him! And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Great fear swept the crowd, and they praised God, saying, "A mighty prophet has risen among us," and "We have seen the hand of God at work today." Luke 7:11-16

On one of the descending slopes of Mount Tabor, in the great plain of Esdraelon--the golden granary of Palestine, and the battle-field of the older Hebrew history--the traveler still discovers the ruins of the city of NAIN. It is invested with imperishable interest from the one solitary but touching event with which its name is associated in gospel story.

On the day after the cure had been performed on the centurion's servant, Jesus and His disciples, along with "a great crowd," took this journey of twelve miles from the city of Capernaum; and as the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, they found themselves approaching the village by its one entrance on the slopes of the wooded mountain. Jewish cemeteries were always situated outside the walls of their towns, and the time of burial was at sunset. The coffin was carried on the shoulders, with

the face exposed, until they came to the place of sepulture. Here the lid was nailed on the coffin, and the funeral rites were completed.

Funerals, even to the most hardened, are affecting spectacles. None can fail to be solemnized as the mournful procession wends along the highway, or the street of the crowded city. But we often think, how little unconscious wayfarers can gauge the unknown depths of many such sorrows, or measure the yawning chasms in the hearts of those who are thus, in speechless and pensive silence, passing by.

The words of the sacred narrative touchingly describe to us such a burial scene. A funeral was seen emerging from the gate of Nain as the sun was setting. Bitter sobs and heart-rending weeping from the midst of the crowd, arrest the ear of Him whose mission it was to heal the brokenhearted. There was everything to aggravate the pangs of that lacerated heart, and make it to her the sorest of trials. The whole village had turned out to sympathize with her. "A large crowd from the town was with her." But, in the deep agony of her grief, she stood alone. These tears of hers were not of yesterday. She could once tell of a happy home! The world to her had once been all sunshine, its future stored with happiness. The richness and exuberance of outer nature in her Hebrew hamlet, its summer fruits and purple clusters, had its reflection and counterpart in her own joyous heart--itself a garner of cherished blessings. But her first, and as she supposed, her most desolating blow came! The smile of joy was all at once exchanged for the tear of bereavement. The desire of her eyes was taken away with a stroke. A thousand fond hopes and cherished schemes vanished in the twinkling of an eye, and were buried in that grave. She was left solitary, to toil on her pilgrimage path--"she was a widow."

But in seasons of saddest trial, God often gives supporting solaces. When His children have to sing of "judgment," they can often sing of "mercy" too. (Ps. 101:1.) This poor woman's lot was hard indeed. But amid her fast-flowing tears, there was one object still surviving, around whom her heart-strings were fondly entwined. The partner of her joys was gone; but he had left behind him a sacred legacy of affection! One little child remained, to cheer the lonely hearth of the widowed parent. Often, doubtless, did she clasp the treasured gift to her bosom; and as she

dropped the silent tear over his cradle, or watched the innocent glee of childhood, as he played by her side, would she love to trace in his countenance the image of him who had died! If the past was bitter, the future would have been darker, sadder still, but for this precious link that still bound her to life. Often, in her solitary moments, would she weave visions of happiness around the coming years of her boy, saying, with Lamech, "This same shall comfort us." In him every ulterior plan is wrapped up and concentrated; and the last thought, associated with life's close, is that of his hands closing her eyes, performing to her the final offices of affection, and bearing her to "the house appointed for all living."

Ah! how often are we brought to learn that our chief blessings may be taken away just when we most need them! When was Jonah's gourd smitten and withered? not when the evening breeze was fanning his brow, but "in the morning when the sun rose," and the suffocating heat beat on his fevered head! When was Lazarus of Bethany taken away? just when his sisters--when his Lord--when the Church--seemed as if they could least spare him!

One day, a sudden sickness prostrates the widow's son on a couch of languishing. There may have seemed at first no cause for anxiety. It is but a passing cloud--no gloomy vision of anticipated evil dare cross for a moment that doating heart. Soon the young pulse and buoyant frame will be as vigorous as ever.

Alas! the tale is soon told--that house is darkened with the shadows of death--the last glimmering light, in that desolate heart and dwelling, is put out. He, who had just risen to the pride of manhood, and who, we may infer from the crowds which followed him to the grave, was all that a fond parent could wish him to be, lies lifeless in his chamber--his sun has "gone down while it is yet day."

We can imagine (though we cannot attempt to describe) the succession of bitter hours the bereaved mother must have spent, previous to the time at which the sacred narrative reveals her first to view at the gate of her native town--the sorrowful night-watchings by the tossed and sleepless couch; the dread anxieties of suspense vibrating alternately between hope

and fear--the glad symptoms of revival; but these again, only succeeded by the too faithful premonitions of approaching dissolution. And then, when all was over--when left to herself to brood over the dream of bygone bliss, and the wrecks of her happiness scattered around her--realizing the bitterness of that which, in her land, and in all hearts, has passed into a proverb--the loss of "an only son." While the sympathy of neighbors and friends, each having some kindly word to speak of her boy, unsealed the well-springs of her affection anew, and brought fresh warm tear-drops to her cheek.

And now, the tramp of the mournful crowd is heard pacing along the streets! In another brief hour, she will have to retrace her steps to an empty household, leaving the prop of her earthly existence laid low amid the clods of the valley.

They have reached the gate of the city--they have crossed its threshold. The gloomy walls of the cemetery may be already in view. But the Lord of life, and the Abolisher of death is approaching! There was only ONE in the wide world who could dry that widow's tears, and give her back her "loved and lost." That ONE is in sight!

Jesus and His disciples are seen approaching from the opposite direction. To all appearance, it is but a motley group of wayfarers coming along the Capernaum highway, weary and worn and dust-covered, after the heat of a sultry summer's day. But, in the midst of them, there is a voice which can speak in tones of mingled authority and tenderness--"Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me."

JESUS approaches! He needed no interpreter of the scene of sorrow--no messenger to carry the tidings of the loss sustained by that mother in Israel. "He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." Before He left, that morning, the shores of Gennesaret, well He knew, as the omniscient God, all the peculiarities in that case of severe trial. He had marked every throb of that breaking heart. He had predetermined and prearranged the apparently accidental meeting at the village gate. And now, at the appointed moment, the dead man is carried in his coffin, as the Lord of the dead and the living draws near.

We need not dwell on the sequel. In other cases, the Savior's intervention and healing power are importunately solicited. There is a singular exception in the present instance. No voice pleads with Him to perform the miracle. The crowd are silent. The mourning widow is too deeply absorbed in her own grief to observe the presence of the Prophet of Nazareth. Besides, notwithstanding His other miraculous deeds, He had never yet raised the dead; so that even if she had known, or perhaps personally witnessed His ability to heal the sick and cure the diseased, she would never imagine He had power to reverse the irrevocable sentence, and unlock those gates of death, which, for nine hundred years (since the time of Elisha) had been closed to all miracle.

Without parade or ostentation, the divine Redeemer enters amid the crowd. But observe, it is to whisper, in the first instance, in the ear which most needed it, the balm-word of comfort, "Weep not." And even when the word of power is about to be uttered (that word which is to summon back a soul from the spirit-land) all is done in unobtrusive silence. In silence He touches the coffin--in silence He beckons to the bearers to stand still; and, as the two meeting crowds have now mingled into one--amid the same hush of impressive silence, He sounds the omnipotent summons over the sheeted dead--"YOUNG MAN, ARISE!" Life's pulses begin again mysteriously to beat--a well-known voice again meet a mother's ears. Oh, who would mar the touching simplicity of the inspired narrative, by endeavoring to depict the burning tears of wonder, and love, and praise, which roll down these sorrowful, furrowed cheeks, as, in the simple words of the text, "they delivered him to his mother!"

We have heard of the joy occasioned by the sudden appearance of the sailor-boy in his native cottage, many a long year after she who had loved him best had thought of nothing but of her child in a watery grave, the wrecks of his vessel tossed on distant shores. We have heard of the soldier returning to his long-lost home, when his children were used to talk of their father's grave in the far East, with the palm trees and lush grass waving above it; and we may imagine the joy when the sad dream of years was reversed, and he stood alive before them, locking them by turns in his embrace. What must have been the joy of this Hebrew mother, when the new lease of a prized existence was granted by a gracious Savior; and,

as she returned, holding that hand she had never thought to clasp again on earth, exclaiming--"This my son was dead, and is alive again! he was lost, and is found!"

Let us gather a few practical truths and reflections from this suggestive narrative.

## I. We have here AN ATTESTATION TO THE SAVIOR'S DIVINITY.

We have other examples in Scripture of individuals raised from the dead. We have Elijah, at Sarepta, raising another widow's son--Elisha raising the son of the Shunamite--Peter raising the young woman, Tabitha. But all these cases were effected permissively, by mere delegated power. These holy men stormed death in his iron stronghold; but it was not with their own weapons. Their language was either "Thus says the Lord," or else, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," (Acts 3:6). They disowned and repudiated the thought of any of their own inherent ability over life--any usurpation of the Divine prerogative. They acted only as servants. But here, there is no acknowledgment of derivative power. "As a son over His own house," Christ gives forth the mandate of uncontrolled Omnipotence, "Young man, I say unto you."

O blessed assurance! that that Being to whom I owe every blessing I enjoy--every hope for time and for eternity--who was nailed for me on the bitter cross, and for me, closed His eyes in a sleep of death, that He had infinite Godhead in mysterious union with suffering, sorrowing, woe-worn, death-stricken humanity; and, now that He is upon the throne, and "all power is committed to Him both in heaven and in earth," that nothing can resist His commands, nothing baffle His commands and purposes. There is no evil but His power can ward off, there is no calamity but He can avert, if He pleases. The "I SAY UNTO YOU," He uttered over the coffin at Nain, is His omnipotent formula FOR all times and AT all times. He speaks, and it is done!"

## II. Let us learn THE TENDERNESS AND COMPASSION OF CHRIST AS MAN.

It is striking to observe in the more prominent events of our Lord's public

ministry, how the manifestations of His Manhood and Godhead go together. There is generally a joint exhibition of majesty and tenderness; proclaiming that, while He is God, He is yet "a brother"--while a brother, He is yet "God."

It is the case here. We have just marked the unmistakable proofs, that He who arrests that weeping crowd is indeed Divine! Omniscience brought Him there--the act of omnipotence demonstrates His deity in the eyes of the beholders.

But He is more than this. His look of compassion--His tear of sympathy--proclaim that, in that same bosom where resides the might of Godhead, there beats also all the tenderness of human affection. Observe, it was the sight of woe (the contemplation of human misery) which stirred to its depths that Heart of hearts. It would seem as if He could not look on human grief without that grief becoming His own. In the similar case of Lazarus, it was not the bitter thought of a lost and dead friend, which unsealed the fountain of His own tears. This it could not be; for, four days previously, He had spoken, in calm composure, of that departure; and when He stood in the graveyard, He knew that, in a few moments, the victim of death would have his eyes rekindled with living luster. At Bethany, (as here at Nain,) it was simply the spectacle of human suffering that made its irresistible appeal to His emotional nature. The Rod of human compassion touched the Rock of Ages, and the streams of tenderness gushed forth. "When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews weeping which came with her--JESUS WEPT." "When the Lord saw" this poor widow--"He had compassion on her." He hears her bitter, heart-rending weeping in the midst of the mourners; and, as we already noted--for it is worthy of observation--utters the soothing, sympathetic word, before He utters the Godlike mandate.

Nor should we overlook the fact, that it was but a word He uttered. This reveals an exquisite and touching feature in the Savior's humanity. It attests how intensely delicate and sensitive, as well as true, that humanity was. When we meet a mourner, after a severe trial, we shrink from the meeting; glad, perhaps, when the sad and dreaded call of courtesy is over. There is a studied reserve in making a reference to the departed one--or, if that reference is made, it is short--in a passing word. The press of the

hand often expresses what the lips shrink from uttering. In that touching picture we have of patriarchal grief, Job's friends and mourners sat for seven days at his side, and not a syllable was spoken. It was so here with Jesus. He (even He) does not intrude with a long utterance of sympathy. There is no lengthened and commonplace condolence. With a tear in His eye, and a suppressed sob, all He says is, "Weep not."

It was the same, afterwards, with Mary at Bethany. There was not even the one word--nothing but the significant TEARS.

Behold, then, the beautiful and touching sympathy of a fellow-mourner--"the Brother born for adversity." "When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion." We have seen that that weeping, forlorn woman, had no lack of other sorrowing friends. Her case seemed to be a matter of notoriety. Many went out to mingle their tears with hers. But the sympathy of all these could only go a certain way. They could not be expected to enter into the peculiarities of her woe. Human sympathy is, at best, imperfect; sometimes selfish, always finite and temporary. Not so the sympathy of Him who had just joined the funeral procession. He could say, as none else can, "I know your sorrows," (Exod. 3:7).

The sympathy of the kindest friend on earth knows a limit--Jesus' sympathy knows none. Who knows but, in that gentle utterance of tender feeling, and in the deep compassion which dictated it, the Son of Man, the One born of the Virgin, may have had in view another "Mother," whose hour of similar bereavement was now at hand; when His own death was to be "the sword" which was to "pierce her soul" (Luke 2.)

"Weep not"--that is often an unkind arrest put by man on the sacredness of human sorrow, as if it were unworthy to weep tears which Christ wept before us. But He (the Great Savior) who came to dry more fearful floods of sorrow, could, in His compassionate tenderness, speak His own calming word. That hour was a token and foreshadow of a happier time, when, in a sorrowless world, "God shall wipe away all TEARS from off all faces."

Oh that in all our seasons of trial, we could appropriate this fellow-feeling of the Prince of Sufferers--that divine compassion, in comparison with



which, the tenderest and best human sympathy is but as dust in the balance! Whatever may be your present experiences of sorrow--loss of health--loss of wealth--the unkindness or treachery of trusted friends--remember, the Savior and sympathizer of Nain, is still the same! He had compassion--He has compassion still. He who stopped the coffin, on that summer's night, in the plains of Jezreel, still lives, and loves, and supports, and pities; and will continue to pity, until pity be no longer needed, in a world of light and love--of purity and peace.

III. Let us, from this, as from other similar narratives, recall SIN AS THE CAUSE OF DEATH. It is sin which has caused weeping eyes, funeral processions, widowed and bereft hearts.

There is a sadder death than the death of the body--there is a deeper compassion, which this Savior of love feels over lost souls. He is ever stooping over His world, and marking this one and that one--borne on to their spiritual grave--"dead in trespasses and sins." He is standing, even now at the gate of the heavenly city, as He did of old at the gate of Nain, calling upon such--"Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life." "I am the resurrection and the life--he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." His ministers, His ambassadors, are called to fulfill a mission to the dead--"He said unto me," said Ezekiel, "Prophesy upon these dry bones, and say unto them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" Remember, His calling time, and your awaking time, shall soon be past. In the might of the great Restorer, then, rise from your coffin of sin, and walk in newness of life--so that when the hour of resurrection overtakes you, and, with the buried millions of the globe, you shall "hear the voice of the Son of God," it may be with joy to obey the summons, "Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust."

IV. The narrative before us is full of COMFORT TO THE TRIED AND BEREAVED.

"DO NOT WEEP!" He does not mean, by uttering that word, to put an unkind arrest on tears--He seems by it rather to say--"Do not shed tears by mistake. If you knew all the design and purpose I have in that bitter sorrow--that aching trial--you would chase these tears away. Give

expression to no hasty surmises with regard to my doings."

Look at the scene here described. We read that those present at the funeral the attendant crowd of mourners and spectators--"glorified God." Yes, and could we rend these heavens and ascend up amid the heavenly worshipers--who knows but perchance we might see there two glorified forms bending over the memories of that sunset hour at Nain--the Widow and her Son--telling, with tearless eyes, that it was that death-scene which had led them to their thrones and crowns!

God is ever saying to us, "Trust me in the dark"--there shall yet be a revelation of mercy and love in these mysterious trials! That "Weep not" of Nain, was intended to carry its message of solace and comfort to the myriad hearts of all time, crushed with their ever-varying sorrows--and more especially to those bearing their most cherished treasures to the custody of the tomb. He would proclaim to us, even now, that He has "power over death"--that the King of terrors must bow to the scepter of the King of kings. He prepares His whole Church, in this miracle, for singing the prophetic song--"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" He gives to the world a pledge of the summons which will one day be addressed to its slumbering myriads--"Arise!" when "all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth."

Nor, once more, is the simple statement here made with reference to the young man, without its inferential meaning, "Jesus gave him back to his mother." Jesus rested not with the mere summons to life; nor with beholding the young man raising himself up on his coffin, and giving utterance to articulate sounds; but He takes him by the hand, and places it in that of his rejoicing parent! His first act, on raising him, is to restore him to the heart that mourned him, and to permit them to resume together their old joyous communion.

It is indeed a mere inference, or reflection, suggested by the passage, but borne out by many more decided Scripture references. May it not, however, lead us to cherish the joyful and delightful prospect, at the resurrection of a reunion with those we have loved; that those tender affections, nurtured and hallowed on earth, shall only be for a time interrupted by death, to be resumed in better and brighter worlds--where

the pang of bereavement, and orphanage, and widowhood, shall no longer be either felt or feared! The great "ARISE!" which shall startle the sleeping dead, (the sleepers in Jesus,) shall be followed by personal recognitions, sacred reunions--the old smiles of earth lighting up the countenance--the voice, with its old familiar tones, tuned and prepared for nobler services and loftier songs!

Meanwhile, let the bereaved and sorrowful bow with a calm un murmuring submission to the will of God--rejoicing in the present possession of the compassion of Jesus, and looking forward, with triumphant hearts, to that cloudless morning when "the sun" of earthly prosperity shall "no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself"--but when (reunited to death-divided friends, and with no tear to dim their eyes) "the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended."

## **JESUS**

### **THE GREAT SUNSET**

"Bound upon the accursed tree,  
Faint and bleeding, who is He?  
By the eyes so pale and dim,  
Streaming blood and writhing limb,  
By the flesh with scourges torn,  
By the crown of twisted thorn,  
By the side so deeply pierced,  
By the baffled burning thirst,  
By the drooping death-dewed brow,  
Son of Man, 'tis Thou! 'tis Thou!"

—Milman

A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When JESUS had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.  
John 19:29-30

We have been contemplating, in the preceding pages, the death-scenes of Scripture worthies, whose names are, in most cases, illustrious in sacred story.

ONE other yet remains.

If we have been watching, with interest, some noble "suns" in the world's old skies hastening to their setting, going down in their western horizon amid bars of purple and gold--what shall we say of THE GREAT SUNSET? With what feelings shall we surround the dreadful death-couch, and watch the dying countenance, of the incarnate SON OF GOD?

We have seen, in the case of the others, their influence surviving dissolution, the rays of these glorious luminaries lingering on the world's mountain-tops--so that it could be said of this and that one--"He, being dead, yet speaks." But lo! at the setting of the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, the universe itself seems to catch the glory. Not a few solitary mountain-peaks, but the whole world, is bathed in the light of His dying radiance. It sprinkles the everlasting hills. It gilds and glorifies the very throne of God.

If we have stood, with bated breath, around some of these death-couches of patriarchs, and prophets, and kings, to listen to their last utterances, no, if we treasure, with unutterable solemnity, the parting words of loved ones of our own family or acquaintance--with what feelings shall we gather around the Cross of JESUS, and hear His dying cry? Every incident in His life of marvel--every utterance of His heart of love--is priceless. But full of distinguishing solemnity, surely, must be that last saying which fell from His lips, when His eyes were about to close in their sleep of death. It was the moment of all moments!--the golden link which connected the past and the future--the bright focus-point to which all history, type, vision, and prophecy converged.

And what was that declaration? It consisted of but one word, (though rendered by three words in our English version.) That word was the commencement of endless, undying echoes--FINISHED! A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When JESUS had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Let us feebly attempt to picture to ourselves the scene when that word was uttered. It had been darkness over all the land until now. But the light again shines--the pall is removed--the sack-clothed sun disrobes himself of his mourning, and again discloses the spectacle which the supernatural gloom had hidden. What a spectacle was that!--the sinless, spotless Jesus, transfixed, in the agonies of a shameful death, to the felon's tree--His back bared for the scourge--his brow lacerated with the crown of thorns--his cheeks mangled by the cruel hands that had "pulled off his beard." Faint with loss of blood, exhausted with torture, parched with thirst--the nerves of the hands and feet (most sensitive of all the body to suffering) bearing the whole weight of the exhausted frame! A surging sea of human beings was beneath. Two ruffian thieves are struggling, in their last agonies, at His side; while in the distance, the Temple is seen gradually emerging, in snowy whiteness, from its three hours' darkness, and the green slopes of Olivet are lighted by the descending sun. The calm repose of death settles on the countenance of Him, who, two days before, had moistened the turf of that mountain with tears of compassion, and sprinkled its olive-boughs with drops of blood for His crucifiers!

Let us turn aside for a little, and see this great sight. As we take our position with that sorrowful group who "stood by the cross of Jesus--his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene"--let us take the shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we are about to stand is holy ground!

We shall examine the import of that dying saying of Jesus, when, on receiving the vinegar, He cried, "It is finished--and He bowed His head, and gave up his spirit."

I. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He addressed HIMSELF.

It was a word of triumph--a calm, reposeful utterance; a dying word--but the word of a dying conqueror.

His soul-struggle seemed now over. Stretched as He was, a humiliating spectacle, upon that cruel cross, and excruciating as was the bodily anguish--yet light--the light of heavenly joy--seemed to have streamed in upon Him before He sent His spirit away. As we have often seen the sun in the heavens, after wading for hours amid black and murky clouds--as we have seen the hidden globe of fire, as it dipped behind the horizon-line, sending a gleam of dazzling brightness athwart the whole landscape--a parting burst of glory before the night-shadows fell--so it would seem with the Great Sun of Righteousness. After hours of unutterable darkness, which had their exponent in blood-drops, and in the piercing cry of God-desertion--lo! a gleam of radiance breaks from His eclipsed soul--suffusing His own dying countenance with triumph, and the world with hope! The cross is, for the instant, changed into a kingly throne. The thorn-crowned Monarch "sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied." It was the moment when the great program of His incarnation-work had reached its climax. He had the sublime consciousness that the battle was won, the ramparts were carried, and He, as the moral conqueror, was now planting His banner on their heights.

That is always a solemn crisis, in a man's history, when he has completed some great undertaking. A great historian (Gibbon) has left a memorable record of the evening when his pen traced the last line of a gigantic work. The architect or builder must feel a proud sensation when the last stone of some mighty edifice is laid; or, in our dockyards, when the last ring of ten thousand hammers is heard, and some proud naval ship triumph floats majestically on the waters. The patriot who has worked resolutely and bravely for his country's welfare, must experience an elevating satisfaction when he sees his days of patient toil, and his nights of anxious watching, crowned with success--despotism dethroned, and liberty triumphant.

And what, if we can use the comparison, must have been the feelings of the adorable Son of God, at that moment, when the burden of His tremendous work was at an end--redemption completed, the victory won!--the moment arrived, to which He had looked forward from all

eternity, and regarding which, as cycles narrowed into eras, and eras into centuries, and centuries into years, and years into weeks and days, He had uttered the words with increasing intensity and fervor--"There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished."

If, even in the anticipation of this moment of victory, "Wisdom" had exultingly said, before the foundations of the world--"Lo, I come; I delight to do Your will, O my God"--what must have been His delight when He placed the last stone on the consummated Temple, and looking down the vista of a glorious future, beheld "a multitude which no man can number" casting their ransomed crowns at His feet! If there is joy among the angels even over "one sinner that repents," what must now have been the joy of the Lord of angels, when He had in view the millions on millions, who in all coming ages, would exult in that cross as their chief glory? It is enough; He need keep the chariots no longer waiting, that are ready to bear His spirit away--"His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory." The great redemption is achieved. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

II. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He addressed His FATHER.

The Redeemer stood not alone in that wondrous undertaking. Deeply mysterious are those references in Scripture to the covenantings of Father and Son in a bypast eternity, regarding the work of redemption. There are gleaming passages of light that burst upon us here and there; revealing the First Person in the adorable Trinity, as entering into covenant-stipulations with Christ, "the Servant" He had "chosen"--"the Son in whom He delighted"--for the ransom and recovery of the fallen. Shadowy and undefined as the record of these solemn intercommunings is, we gather from them that that theology is false and unsound, which would represent God as an unloving being, armed with vindictive wrath against the sinner, and only calmed and propitiated by the blood-shedding of an innocent surety. "O righteous Father!" truly exclaimed the Savior, knowing the world's unscriptural dogma--"The world has not known You!" And then He adds, "but I have known You!" As if He said, "If that misjudging world had been admitted, as I have been, into these

eternal secrets, it would not have been slow to attest that God is love!"

Yes, the Father was as profoundly interested as the Son, in the completion of that vast undertaking. It was His sovereign love which devised it--"GOD SO loved the world." "I have finished the work," says Christ, "which YOU gave me to do," (John 17:4). The character of God was, in the obedience and death of the Surety, to have a twofold illustration, as a God of holiness and a God of love. In the cross of His dear Son, He gave the mightiest pledge and exponent of both--of His holiness, that required such an expiation; and of His love, that would give such a ransom price.

God yearned over that prodigal earth; He longed for the times when, rising from its degradation and ruin, the cry would be heard, "I will arise and go to my Father." He longed to clasp it to His embrace, welcome this truant from the brotherhood of worlds, and exclaim, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!" And just as on earth, the consciousness of a son faithfully fulfilling his father's wishes yields the truest comfort and delight, so it would seem to be the noblest and purest source of joy to the Son of God, in His great work, that He was doing and implementing His heavenly Father's will.

"O MY FATHER," exclaimed He, in the garden of Gethsemane, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Or again, when He was in deepest period of His gloom--when the last ray of joy and support seemed quenched in darkness--the floodgates of His pent-up anguish burst in that bitter cry--"MY GOD! MY GOD! why have YOU forsaken me?"

If there was a moment, during the most tragical occurrence of old Abraham's history, when the faith of the patriarch could have staggered and faltered, it was that surely when his innocent boy made the touching appeal, "My Father!" If there were a moment when the courage and heroism of some aged confessor's heart would be likely to fail him--when his aged hands would be tempted to unbind the cords which tie his son to the martyr-stake, it would be when the words are wafted to his ear through the flames, "My Father!" If there were ever a moment in the history of the incarnation, when God the Father's purpose of love to His world was, humanly speaking, likely to fail, or be shaken--when He would



be moved to untie the cords from the bleeding sacrifice, to let the world perish, that His loved One might go free--it was surely when these filial appeals, were sent up amid the thick darkness--"O my Father!" "My God! my God!"

Never since the time when the pledged covenant-vow had been taken and sealed in heaven--never since the voice of the Eternal had propounded the question, "Who shall go, and whom shall I send?" and the everlasting Son had willingly responded, "Here am I, send me"--never had the Father's love been so tested; Redemption, for the moment, seems to tremble in the balance--it hangs suspended on the will and purpose of the Father! One volition from that Father's throne--one utterance from that Father's lips--and the expiring Victim is unbound, and the world, loaded in its own chains, is left to the wail of despair. "Father," He cried, in another similar moment, just when the dreadful crisis had arrived--when the dark shadow of the cross was projected on His path--"Father, the hour has come." "Father, save me from this hour!"

But does the Father falter? Do these melting appeals shake the resolve of eternal love and mercy? We can imagine angels gathering around the garden and the cross, and asking, in suppressed emotion, "Will He save Him? shall the piercing appeal of the Innocent Sufferer prevail? or shall the cry of the doomed world enter into the ear of the God of Sabbath?" "The Lord has sworn by an oath, and will not repent." Father and Son are mutually pledged to fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant. "Father," says Christ, "glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you." "Father, glorify your name! And a voice came from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it yet again."

And now, at this final moment, when yet hanging on the cross, "knowing that all things were accomplished"--that He had fulfilled the requirements of a spotless law, not only by passive suffering but by active obedience--that its every penalty was paid, its every curse exhausted, and the luster of a glorious vindication shed around the throne of God--Jesus proclaims, in the ears of His Father, the completion of His triumphs; He makes the joyful announcement that He had magnified His law and made it honorable, securing "peace on earth, and glory in the highest!"

When a son on earth has completed some great undertaking, or accomplished some great enterprise which has lain near a parent's heart--with what bounding joy does he hasten to that father's presence, crying out, "Father! the work is done; your fondest wishes are realized and fulfilled." If it be lawful to compare human feelings with divine--think of Jesus, the Son of God's love--at the moment of the completion of that which had occupied the Father's thoughts from all eternity, lifting up His eyes from His pillow of more than mortal pain, and with joyful elation--the smile of ineffable love on His lips--saying, "Father, O my Father! IT IS FINISHED!"

### III. When Jesus said, "It is finished," HE PROCLAIMED HIS TRIUMPH IN THE EARS OF SATAN AND THE POWERS OF DARKNESS.

Whatever mystery there may be with reference to spiritual agency, Scripture leaves us in little doubt, not only that there is a gigantic confederacy of evil spirits, with Satan at their head, in league against the world--but one great object of the incarnation of Christ--one part of His mission to our earth--was to break up and disperse this confederacy--as the Prince of Light, to crush and conquer the Prince of darkness; "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." On two occasions especially, in the personal life of the Savior, does Satan, the arch-enemy, cross the path of the Son of God. First, on the Mount of Temptation he gathered all his accursed wiles. On each successive assault, he was repelled, but not vanquished. When the forty days' temptation was ended, we read, "the devil departed from him FOR A SEASON." When wave after wave had spent their fury on the Rock of Ages, they receded to gather up fresh strength for another encounter. "For a season," that malignant demon retreated to his halls of darkness, to organize another--a last daring attack, on incarnate Truth and Holiness.

Two years and a half were spent in maturing his plot. The garden of Gethsemane is selected as the field of conflict. There were, doubtless, other and more dreadful elements in that hour of soul-agony. That mysterious cup, for whose removal He prayed, points to Him as the Surety-substitute, draining the vials of wrath for our sins; and this wrath-cup of imputed transgression was doubtless what He held with most

trembling hand. But we cannot read the passage without being forced to the conclusion, that there was also a personal foe--Satan himself--prowling amid that darkness. The divine Sufferer had the anticipation of his coming. The foul shadow of the tempter's wings seems to be brooding over Him in the hour of His farewell discourse--"The prince of this world comes," says He. Again, "This is your hour, and the POWER of darkness," (Luke 22:53). And again, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out," (John 12:31).

And when, in the mysterious recesses of that olive-garden, He was engaged face to face, as we believe, with His gigantic foe--three times did He rise from his posture of agony, to warn His disciples of the tempter's presence and accursed wiles--"Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation."

That the same Spirit of Evil had followed Him to Calvary, we cannot doubt. In that touching and impressive twenty-second Psalm--the very record of the Savior's sufferings--the soliloquy which, it is with probability supposed, He uttered to Himself on the cross, while He says "Many bulls have encompassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round," He mentions specially "one" roaring lion from "the mountains of prey," mightier and stronger than the rest; and it is remarkable that the last prayer of His lips, during the period of darkness described in that psalm, just immediately before the light breaks upon Him, is a prayer for deliverance from this great personal foe--"Save me from the lion's mouth," (Psalm 22:21).

The prayer is heard. What is the next utterance? It is a burst of triumph, which continues to the end of the psalm, until the lips that utter it are sealed in death--"You HAVE heard me from the horns of the wild oxen," (Psalm 22:21). The battle is over! Satan is defeated, unseated, and uncrowned. The vanquished spirit, in the poetry of the Psalms, "is led, with his captive multitudes, captive." He and his legion-throng are laden with fetters, and chained to the triumphant wheels of Messiah's chariot. "Having," says Paul, speaking of the Savior on the cross, "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." It was on the cross, the scepter of Satan is here represented as broken, and his power crushed and

annihilated. There "he cut Rahab to pieces, and wounded the dragon," (Isa. 51:9). Oh, when the adorable Redeemer, with His omniscient eye, saw this vast Jericho of Satanic power, which four thousand years had matured and consolidated, falling with a crash to the ground--the palace of "the strong man armed" now a dismantled fortress, and all its magazines redeemed for His own service--when He saw the old serpent of Eden writhing in the dust; its head bruised and crushed under His own bleeding feet; He sounds over His prostrate adversary the death-knell of His power! At the sound, the pillars of hell rock and tremble to their foundations. He cried, "IT IS FINISHED; and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit."

IV. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He addressed His ransomed Church and a PERISHING WORLD.

(1.) The CHURCH of all ages heard in that cry what it had long lived and waited for. All the scattered rays of light in type and prophecy, were here concentrated. Here was the day Abraham saw afar off and was glad. (John 8:56.) Here was the true Isaac lying bound upon the altar, (Gen. 22:9). Here was the arbitrator and the living kinsman of Job, (Job 9:33). Here was the antitype of the brazen serpent in the old Sinai desert, (Numb. 21:8, 9). Here was the wounded and bruised and afflicted Savior of Isaiah (Isa. 53:5), yet His "wonderful Counselor" and "mighty God;" "Immanuel, God with us," (Isa. 9:6). Here was the "Shepherd and fellow of Jehovah," against whom Zechariah saw the sword awaking, (Zech. 13:7). Here was Daniel's Messiah, the Prince "cut off, but not for himself," (Dan. 9:26). Here was David's Lord "made a priest forever," yet now drinking the bitter "brook by the way," (Ps. 110:7). Here was the interpretation of all that long mysterious ritual of blood and sacrifice in "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," (Rev. 13:8).

Jesus himself, as He now hung upon the cross, and just before uttering His last saying, saw the completion of all these prophecies--the fulfillment of all these types.

No, not all--there was one prophetic utterance of the Psalmist, apparently trivial and insignificant, that had not yet been accomplished. It occurs in the sixty-ninth Psalm--"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for

my thirst." Until this moment, during all the protracted bodily tortures, He had asked no alleviation. He sought no shelter from the full thunderstorm of wrath that burst on His guiltless head. He wished to give His enemies no reason to suppose that He desired to evade the appointed sufferings. He even refused the offered, "wine mingled with myrrh," which would have induced a torpor, and made Him so far insensible to suffering. But He who has power over His own life, remembers, that, before He can close His eyes in death, one saying yet must be fulfilled. It is all that is required to complete the proof of His Messiahship.

Observe, He makes no specific request, He merely utters the word, "I thirst"--and leaves it to the unwitting agents, in fulfilling the words of an old prophecy, to hand him "the sponge filled with wine vinegar." "And NOW," we read, "when Jesus had received the vinegar"--when prophecy and type, to the last jot and tittle, had been completed--"when he had received the drink," He turns to the Church He had ransomed--His Church on earth, His redeemed Church in glory--and He cries, "with a loud voice"--as if a signal to take their harps and tune them for song, He gives them the key-note of the everlasting anthem--"It is finished."

(2.) Christ in these words addresses ALL MANKIND! There is not a human soul that may not take comfort and hope from the joyous tidings of a completed salvation. He spoke "with a loud voice," as if He wished the whole race to hear it. It was the sound of a great jubilee-trumpet proclaiming that "the year of its release had come!"

The vision until now before His divine mind, had been a world advancing to its doom!--a world in tears, from which rose the wail of never-ebbing anguish!--an orphan world--miserable and naked, that had forfeited home, and father, and peace!--a diseased and dying world--an immense hospital, in which nations and their millions were perishing. Now, from that cross of shame, and yet of triumph, He seems as if He exclaimed--"Weeping world! I dry your tears; bondaged world! your captivity is at an end; bankrupt world! the debt is all paid; orphaned world! I can now tell you of a home and a Father; diseased world! rise from your prostrate couch of suffering and death--tear off these bandages of sin and corruption--go forth 'walking and leaping and praising God!'"

Yes! though, in the first instance, He addressed His Church--the Church which He had redeemed with His blood--He addressed the world also. See that bleeding Savior, suspended midway between heaven and earth!--hear Him, with His hands outstretched, as if, in the yearnings of compassion, He would embrace mankind, saying, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth," (Isa. 45:22).--"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

In another striking and solemn portion of Scripture, God is represented as addressing the sinner by a solemn oath. He swears by His own eternal existence, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." But that incarnate Jehovah--that suffering Immanuel, stretched on the shameful tree, seems to change the form of solemn utterance, and thus to address us--"Not 'as I live,' but 'as I DIE,'--I have no pleasure in your death, but rather that you would turn from your wickedness and live!" "It is finished!" as if He said, "What more can I say, what more can I do, than these words imply?--a full, free, completed salvation. 'It is finished!' Look at the superscription on my cross. It is written 'in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin,'--finished for all--suited for all--offered to all--Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free!"

SINNER, in the depths of your sin and degradation and misery, behold that suffering Victim, and hear the words uttered for you, "It is finished!" SELF-RIGHTEOUS MAN, patching together these miserable fragments of your own merits, come to that cross, and hear the utterance of that spotless Surety, who not only has "finished transgression," and "made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity," but who has "brought in an everlasting righteousness!"--come, and take that seamless robe of obedience which He offers you, as He cries, "It is finished!" Come, BACKSLIDER, with your heartfelt sorrow; come, PENITENT, in your bitter tears; come, RUINED one; LOST one--helpless, hopeless, perishing--yes, come, dying one; come, like that repentant felon--lift the eye of faith and hope to the bleeding Sacrifice--and hear those words which formed for him the golden ladder-steps which led him "that day" to be "with Jesus in Paradise," "IT IS FINISHED!"

# STEPHEN

## SUNSET ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

"And devout men carried STEPHEN to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." –Acts 8:2.

Where the funeral lamentations of these devout mourners took place, we cannot tell. There is a story (which, however, rests on doubtful tradition,) that Gamaliel, Paul's instructor, himself in secret a Christian, had the mangled body of STEPHEN conveyed to a private burial-ground in his own villa, twenty miles distant from Jerusalem--that, in accordance with oriental used, he mourned for him seventy days--and that, when he himself was approaching death, he gave directions that his own ashes were to mingle with those of the venerated martyr.

Be this as it may, let us gather, in thought, around the crude death-couch of this spiritual hero, and watch the going down of his earthly sun. It is a "sunset" alike mournful and glorious. The sky itself is stormy and lowering; but the peaceful orb descends in calm majesty, bathed in the light and glory of a brighter hemisphere.

The death and martyrdom of Stephen has been, to the Church in every age, a hallowed memorial of faith, stern endurance, Christian meekness, and love. It was a testimony specially needed in the apostolic age; for well has it been observed (though the remark is a sad one) that, "the first apostle who died was a traitor; the first disciples of the apostles were hypocrites and liars--the kingdom of the Son of man was founded in darkness and gloom." But here, at last, was a true sun, amid these wandering stars, shedding a chastened and mellowed glory in the olden skies. Doubtless, the simple but sublime narrative of Stephen's dying moments, nerved the arm and braced the faith of many of the noble army

of martyrs who immediately followed him, and whose blood became the seed of the Church.

Let us mingle, in thought, among the crowd of "devout men" who are "carrying him to his burial," and gather a few instructive lessons.

Of his earlier history we know little, except that he was a Grecian, or foreign Jew, converted to the faith of Jesus of Nazareth, and selected by the Church as one of the seven deacons who were to have the administration of the fund for destitute Christian widows. As a Hellenist, his mind was not warped with the weak prejudices which beset the Jewish converts resident in Palestine. Many of these still fondly clung to the old nationality. They looked with pride on their ritual, their temple, their ancestral privileges. Stephen was, in this respect, a step in advance even of the apostles themselves. He saw a nobler spiritual shrine rising on the ruins of the temple of Jerusalem--true worshipers from every nation gathering within its sacred courts, and confessing that "Jesus Christ was Lord."

His character is delineated in a single sentence--He was "a man full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit"--"full of faith and power," (Acts 6:8). These are equivalent terms--for the power this man of faith had was God-derived. The faith of his life, and the superhuman heroism of his death, have this as their exponent--"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts," (Zech. 4:6). That Holy Spirit seemed mightily to strengthen him, as he stood alone, confronting the learning, and, worse than all, the furious bigotry, of the supreme ecclesiastical court of the nation. His Lord appeared, in his case, to afford the first fulfillment of a promise given, in the course of His personal ministry, to all His true disciples--"But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Even to the very last, he was upborne by the same "Spirit of power."

It was this same omnipotent Agent who smoothed his martyr-pillow; for we read, "And he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly to heaven," (Acts 7:55). Moreover, if, as we shall immediately see, it was



Jesus, and a vision of Jesus, which formed the secret of support and holy transport in his dying hour--have we not, in the two statements combined, a beautiful illustration of the words of the apostle--"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit?" (1 Cor. 12:3.) As it was the Holy Spirit who revealed the infant Savior to aged Simeon, so it was the Holy Spirit who revealed the vision of the exalted Savior to the dying martyr.

Let us seek to glorify this blessed Agent, more than we do, as "the revealer of Jesus." "He shall glorify me," says Christ; "for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." Why is it that we see the words of feeble, stammering tongues, often owned and acknowledged, while human learning and eloquence are powerless and unblessed--the golden arrows from the best human quivers falling short of their mark, while "the smooth pebbles of the brook" from the lowly sling, and that, also, in untutored hands, are "making the people fall under them?" Paul tells us why--"My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the Power of God," (1 Cor. 2:4).

Let us pass to Stephen's ACCUSATION AND TRIAL. Though introduced to our notice in the sacred page, only as a deacon, (an distributor of temporal bounty,) yet, being "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," he could not be silent in proclaiming the name of his great Master. We read that "he did great wonders and miracles among the people," (Acts 6:8).

There were in Jerusalem a number of synagogues, belonging to the Jews of various countries. In these, Stephen took the opportunity of vindicating the cause of his Lord, and more especially in that of the Libertines--a word which seems to refer to those Hebrews who had at one time been Roman slaves, but who had obtained or purchased their freedom. Finding his wisdom and arguments irresistible, his hearers betook themselves to the last base expedient for silencing truth. They resolve to get a conviction against him for blasphemy--they forget for the time their mutual jealousies and hostilities, and combine for the overthrow of a common enemy. The Sadducees--the infidel party--hated

and denounced, with the utmost vehemence, the new Christian tenet of the resurrection. The Pharisees, with a still more bitter animosity, repudiated a sect who were bold in advocating the death-blow to their national and ancestral pride--the superseding of the Mosaic ritual by a system which was to know neither Jew nor Greek, and by which God's house was to be made "a house of prayer for all NATIONS."

What is their unworthy policy? They bribed witnesses to exaggerate these dogmas, and put them in the most distasteful and disturbing light--"We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." What! "the holy and beautiful house where our fathers worshiped to be destroyed, and all our pleasant things to be laid waste!" What blasphemous words against the Temple and the Law! The most honored name and most honored locality defamed and dishonored, and that too by a reputed "son of Abraham!" Their blood was stirred--a popular tumult was easily fermented--the Sanhedrin are convened in their ancient hall or stone chamber, on Mount Moriah, and Stephen stands confronting the seventy-two judges.

In calm majesty, he begins his defense. He arrests the attention of his auditors by commencing with a recapitulation of their national annals. Beginning with the call of Abraham, he descends from age to age, until he reaches the era of Solomon, and the building of the temple under whose august shadow he then stood. But he couples his reference to the sacred shrine, with the scope and spirit at least of Isaiah's gospel words--"Howbeit the most High dwells not in temples made with hands; as says the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool--what house will you build me? says the Lord--or what is the place of my rest?"

This startling assertion creates a stir in his hitherto silent audience. A scene of noise and confusion takes place. Stung to the quick by the anticipated inference from the quotation of one of their own seers, they refuse any longer to listen to his defense. He himself watches the tempest gathering round his head; and seeing how hopeless it is to combat malicious rage by calm argument, he abruptly breaks off his historical discourse, and, in an outburst of righteous vehemence and indignation, he denounces them as the slayers of the prophets, and the betrayers and

murderers of Christ.

The commotion in the Sanhedrin now culminates in ungovernable rage. The gray-headed elders of the nation--the scribes, the expounders of the law, the phylacteried Pharisees, the infidel Sadducees, the high priest or president of the assembly--all with one accord rise from their stone seats, their eyes flashing with fire--"When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him."

How true is it, that the word of God is either the savor of life unto life or of death unto death! There is, in many respects, a striking similarity between Peter's recent sermon on the day of Pentecost, and Stephen's present address to the Sanhedrin; but how different the results! In the one case, thousands were pricked to the heart--the tear of genuine penitence rolling down their cheeks, and the cry rising from the depths of their stricken spirits, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In the other, unbelief only settled down into deeper and more confirmed obduracy. Those with the prestige of authority and sanctity became the abettors of one of the foulest crimes that stained the annals of waning Judaism. It loaded the cloud of judgment, long brooding over the nation, and which was before long to burst in dreadful vengeance.

That same sword of the Spirit is still a two-edged sword--mighty to save, or mighty to destroy. Grace received, has more grace given--"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord," (Hos. 6:3). Grace resisted, makes "the hard and impenitent heart" harder still--"treasuring up for itself wrath against the day of wrath."

Let us attend now to Stephen's VISION.

There is something very sublime in this apocalypse of glory! He stands confronting his infuriated judges in their temple hall. But in the midst of that scene of unholy vehemence and rage, as he looks up, perhaps while engaged in silent prayer, the walls and pillars of the earthly court of justice seem to dissolve; and, to his enraptured vision, a house, not made by mortal hands, discloses itself! He beholds the heaven of heavens! The victim of earth's unhallowed malice is transported all at once into "the general assembly and church of the first-born." Turning from the

dishonored throne of an earthly tribunal, he gazes on the throne of One who "judges righteous judgment."

What "the glory of God" was, which he saw, we cannot pretend to conjecture. Like Paul's subsequent heavenly vision, it must have been something beyond the power of human language to describe--not "possible for man to utter." But there was one part of the vision clearly defined--one Object which stood forth in bold relief, in this celestial picture. That adorable Savior who, but a few weeks before, he had himself possibly seen hanging as a criminal on the cross, was now beheld "standing at the right hand of the throne!"

There are two things specially noticeable in the vision--First, The designation given to Christ by the martyr. While the evangelist in his description says, "He saw JESUS standing on the right hand of God," Stephen himself, in relating the vision, uses another, and, in the circumstances, a more touching and expressive title--"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the SON OF MAN standing on the right hand of God." At that entrancing moment--as the celestial portals flew open, and his eye wandered through the burning ranks which surrounded the central throne--he may have expected to behold the Lord he loved, seated in dazzling glory, surrounded with some dreadful symbols of deity. But lo! it is the Son of MAN! It is the same Brother of humankind he had so recently seen on earth--He who, as man, and as "the Son of man," had undergone, near where he now stood, sufferings and tortures, in comparison with which, all that awaited him were but as dust in the balance!

And, secondly, more than this, he sees Jesus "STANDING." There is a volume of tender meaning here. Thirteen times is Christ spoken of in Scripture as "seated at the right hand of God;" only once is He spoken of as "standing," and that once is here. He is "seated"--there is comfort indeed in that truth also; that, on the close of His earthly work and warfare, He was enthroned in Heaven as "Lord of all." On that royal seat, "set as king in his holy hill of Zion"--He is quietly "waiting" until all His enemies are put under His feet; and then, once more will He "rise," that He may "come and receive them to Himself." Indeed, Paul's words are remarkable as viewed side by side with those of Stephen's vision--"He has

FOREVER sat down at the right hand of God, from henceforth waiting until his enemies be made his footstool."

Why, then, this strange exception in the text? Why has the seated Savior changed His posture so that He is seen "standing" by His dying saint? Oh, blessed testimony to the deathless sympathy and tenderness of that loving Savior's heart!--Seated though He be--it is as if He had heard the stir in that court on earth--as if He had heard (as indeed He did) every malicious taunt that was hurled at His holy servant. He cannot remain still. He rises--(or, if we dare use a human expression to give force to the heavenly vision)--He starts from His seat at the "call" of His injured disciple--He feels the cruelties inflicted on him as if they were inflicted on Himself. He, the same gentle, tender, Shepherd that He ever was, sees one of the choicest sheep of the fold in the fangs of ravening wolves! Roused by these wild beasts who were scattering His flock--touched with the tender bleat of that holy and innocent victim of their rage--the good Shepherd stoops down from the hills of glory; and, as Stephen enters the valley of the shadow of death, He comforts and supports him with His rod and staff!

Who knows, when the martyr was thus surrounded by that infuriate rabble, but some such thought as this may have crossed his mind?--"Would that it were with me as in months past--when that Savior-God was personally present with His Church on earth--when He cheered them on the lake-shore, or comforted them in the midnight sea, or wept with them in Bethany's graveyard!--would that He were here, to cast upon me His loving eye of sympathy, or cheer me with His tender words, or with His strong arm to pluck me from the fangs of these merciless destroyers. But, alas! I am alone--the gates of heaven have closed on my ascended Lord. I cannot tell whether, now that He is seated amid the hosannas of eternity, He can bend a look of pity upon me. I may be left unthought of and unsuccoured in this pitiless storm."

No, no! Behold! not only "heaven opened," and the "Son of man"--(Jesus unchanged in human form)--seated there; but, (more amazing than all,) behold Him, roused from His posture of repose, bending down from the skies--the songs of heaven for the moment hushed, that He may cast a look of loving sympathy on a saint struggling in the earthly billows. That

great Shepherd who "calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out," will not listen unmoved to that dying cry. The disciple has made a good confession before many witnesses, and his Lord (holding the portal of heaven open with one hand, and the martyr-crown with the other) seems to say--"Well done, good and faithful servant," "you have been faithful unto death; I will give you a crown of life!"

And what Christ was to Stephen of old, He is to His people still. In every season of sore calamity--whether to His Church collectively, or to its members individually, He is ready to rise from His throne and bend over them in tender love!

What a source of comfort this Vision of Jesus must have been to the suffering Christians of a future age. How they would revert to it, as the ax of the executioner gleamed before them, or the faggots were piled around them! How they would rejoice in the thought that, far above the unsympathizing crowd of human tormentors, there was ONE in heaven who was Himself the "faithful and true Martyr" (Rev. 3:14), bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; and who could say, with all the intensity of dearly-bought experience--"I know your sorrows."

Observe, next, Stephen's twofold PRAYER.

He is dragged by a ruffian crew outside the city gates--and somewhere near (probably within sight of) that Gethsemane where his great Lord had suffered, Stephen is to seal his testimony with his blood. As the showers of stones are hurled upon his guiltless head, the meek sufferer utters a twofold supplication.

1st, Prayer for HIMSELF. He looks upward to that same all-glorious Son of man; but, knowing that infinite Deity is in union with humanity, he invokes His support, not as man, but as God. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Like Christ in His calmness and meekness, he resembles Him in this final prayer. It was almost a repetition of the closing utterance of the Savior Himself--"Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit." As we have already remarked, possibly Stephen had himself been a spectator of that dreadful scene on Calvary. He may have been among the group we read of, as

having been "near the cross of Jesus;" and the prayer of his beloved Lord may have molded his own in a similar hour.

2nd, His other prayer was Christ-like too--more remarkable even than the former. Having besought the Savior's mercy for himself, he proceeds to implore the same FOR HIS MURDERERS--and again, (as if he drank in his inspiration from recollections of Calvary,) "he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice"--and in the spirit at least of his Lord's words for His crucifiers--"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Oh, there is more than nature here! Let those who scorn the word GRACE--who treat it as a figment and illusion--let them come to this dreadful death-bed and say, 'Is there not something more than human, in the divine, forgiving charity of this tortured hero of truth?' We know what nature would have done in the circumstances. We know its look of mad defiance, the frown of malicious revenge. We know what its malediction would be on that perverse throng. How its last shout would be--"Let not my mangled body be cast unavenged in its tomb--let no murderer here go to his grave in peace!"

How different! His last moments of consciousness are spent in prayer for these guilty assassins. No wonder it is said, "He being full of the Holy Spirit." It was the Spirit of God, the blessed Spirit of peace, that, dovelike, hovered around him, in these dying moments! A few years later, the Roman legions, under the victorious Titus, were to be ranged in that very spot where Stephen now lay; and these gates and walls--temple and tower--were to fall under the terrific assault. The conquest of Jerusalem was, even to a Roman, a proud achievement. But a nobler victory, though of a different kind, was being achieved by that one Christian hero, when, bleeding and mangled, he rises to his knees and prays for his murderers--for "he that rules his spirit is greater than he that takes a city." (Prov. 16:32).

And observe, in Stephen's character, a noble combination of qualities. Indeed, as has been well remarked, there is nothing more striking than the manly, uncompromising way in which he denounces the sin of his persecutors, and the loving, tender way he prays for themselves. Let us never forget this refined and beautiful distinction. Be as bold as you

please in the denunciation of all iniquity--withstand to the face, whenever there is conduct to be blamed; but deal tenderly and forgivingly with the persons and character of offenders. No heathen philosophy ever inculcated such a maxim as this--"Love your enemies." There is no more brilliant testimony to the reality of religion than when that maxim is exemplified.

We may feel certain, that in the case of Stephen, that strange, godlike demeanor would not be lost upon the bystanders, or even upon his murderers. We know, at all events, that one was there--a passive, but not uninterested spectator of the scene--of whom Augustine perhaps says truly, "The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen." That wondrous dying prayer for forgiveness could not have entered the ear of the young man from Tarsus in vain; that angel-like countenance he saw in Stephen, conjoined with these last faint utterances of Christian forgiveness, may have hovered before him, when the voice of "that same Jesus" reached his own soul, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" They may have done much in instigating the reply--"Lord, what would You have me to do?"

Once more, let us notice Stephen's CALM DEPARTURE.

"He fell asleep." Sleep is a beautiful image and type of death; but does it not seem strange to use the figure with reference to such a death as this? We can understand its beauty, when the death-bed is surrounded by hearts beating with tender affection--kind eyes looking down on the struggling soul--kind hands smoothing the pillow; but it is hard to think or speak of death as "a sleep," amid a horde of murderers. Yet the sacred historian, simply and touchingly, thus describes Stephen's closing scene!

What was the secret of that quiet repose--so gentle a breathing away of his spirit, in the midst of circumstances so dreadful?

It was the sight of Christ. This had enabled him to triumph over all that was outwardly repulsive--that vision in the Sanhedrin-hall soothed and smoothed that dreadful death-pillow. Just as we have seen a glorious Alp, with its diadem of virgin snow bathed in the hues of purple sunset, while its base was wreathed with stormy clouds and scarred with the path of the recent avalanche--so, the tempests are raging around his perishing body,



but the great Sun of Righteousness is shining upon the departing soul, and gilding it with undying splendor. "BEHOLD!" he exclaims, (as if the vision was something so overpowering that, though he stood alone--no one to share in his emotions of transport--yet he could not resist proclaiming it even to the unsympathizing crowd of persecutors,) "Behold! I see the Son of man STANDING--He is waiting, with outstretched arms, to receive and welcome me, His poor servant. Can I be afraid of death under any form, if it be the portal to unite me to this ever-living, ever-loving Lord?"

And is not this the secret of support in ten thousand death-beds still? It is, indeed, delightful to think, as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, of troops of angels hovering around the saint's death-pillow, and waiting to bear his spirit into Abraham's bosom. But more comforting still, to think of Him who has at His belt "the keys of the grave and of death"--the Son of man on the throne--to think of Him stooping from the heights of heaven and uttering the prayer--"Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Let any who may be mourning the loss of departed Christian friends, rejoice; they are "with Christ," which is "far better." Their absence may be a sad deprivation to the Church on earth; they may leave a sorrowful gap in the home-circle; the devout (as in the case of Stephen) may be making a great and sore lamentation over them; but they have "fallen asleep in Jesus;" no--at the hour of death, Christ stooped from His throne to receive their spirits. Theirs was an immediate entrance. The gate of death and the gate of Heaven was one!

They only are to be pitied and mourned who, while living, are living a life of death; and who, when they come to die, (oh! sad contrast with the departure of the first martyr!) can have no heavenly vision; no "Son of man" standing to receive them; no angels waiting to conduct them to glory, and to chant the requiem--"So gives He His beloved SLEEP!"

Reader, whoever you are, if still without these hopes "full of immortality," Christ is now stooping from His throne to you! He is standing, with His outstretched arms of reconciliation and love, calling upon you to be

"reconciled unto God." Oh! postpone not, until a dying hour, responding to His overtures of mercy. Be assured, all death-beds are the same in this, whether they be beds of feathers, or pallets of straw--whether under the thatched roof or under gilded ceilings--they can afford no ease to the aching head that has postponed until then, the great question of salvation! Be it yours to live the life of the righteous, if you would die their death. Let existence be one sacred mission to "please God"--and then, yours shall be a peaceful "SUNSET." The last enemy cannot appear too suddenly or unexpectedly. Whether a season of lingering, wasting sickness be appointed you--or "in a moment"--with the speed of the lightning-flash--the summons may come--in either case, you can, in humble faith and confidence, appropriate that beatitude, traced by the finger of God the Spirit--a benediction better than all sculptured epitaphs of man's device--"blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!"

# **A BOOK FOR THE BEREAVED**

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## **Introductory Chapter**

"Brothers and sisters, we want you to know the truth about those who have died, so that you will not be sad, as are those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will take back with Jesus those who have died BELIEVING in Him. So then, comfort one another with these words." 1 Thes. 4:13-14, 18

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:13

"He will wipe all tears from their eyes—and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain! These things of the past are gone forever! He who OVERCOMES will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." Revelation 21:4, 7

"All who BELIEVE in God's Son have eternal life. Those who don't obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them." John 3:36

"Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in your sight."  
—Matthew 11:26

I heard these words uttered but the other day, under affecting circumstances, at a young Christian's deathbed.

Pulpit themes should take their hue and color, if possible, from events and impressions of the hour. I have accordingly thought it might not be unprofitable to select this beautiful saying as suggestive of a few appropriate meditations. I separate it from its connection in the passage where it occurs. I shall not even regard the verse, in what is its highest and holiest meaning, as an utterance of the Savior; but look at it as it stands, the simple expression of devout submission to the mysterious decrees of God on the part of all His true people.

The words necessarily, and on the face of them, imply that in this world of ours there are deep perplexities; that on human realities, there are unsolvable problems—that things do not appear "good" in our sight—that if we had the world in our own hands we would order events far otherwise—our own lot and that of others we should mold far differently. But all that concerns us is happily in other and better keeping. Falling back on the Fatherhood of the Great Supreme, in the only true sense of that paternal relation, it is for us to say, humbly and devoutly, accepting the mysteries we cannot explain—"Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

These perplexities and dilemmas are manifold. The long, pining, wasting sickness; and especially, as is often seen, arresting the active and the good in the midst of careers of usefulness and beneficence; health and strength that can ill be spared; days of suffering and nights of weariness appointed—that never seems "good" in our sight.

Take another case, that of worldly impoverishment; the loss of a man's substance—not a selfish, not a penurious hoarder, but a generous giver; one alike with a full purse and an open one, whose delight was to relieve distress, and discharge liberally the responsible stewardship of his wealth to the Great Giver. How strangely mysterious to see the cringing worshiper of Mammon permitted, unhindered and unimpeded to pile up the golden heap, while this noble-hearted almoner of Jehovah's bounty is crippled with disastrous loss and bankruptcy, for which, too, perhaps he is not personally responsible—the innocent victim, it may be, of cruel

wrong and heartless deception. That cannot seem "good" in our sight!

But I shall confine myself now to the one illustration which comes home to many, very many among us, and to some with exceptional impressiveness—the death of the young and promising. I do not refer to those who were so intellectually alone, but to not a few who, in addition to mere natural acquirements, had given evidence of better spiritual gifts, and felt within their youthful bosoms the throbbings and aspirations of the higher nature.

How often do lives of greatest loveliness—the best of the household—appear to be the first taken—the choicest blossoms the first prematurely to fall! Is this a mere illusion, a natural and pardonable fantasy? It may at times be purely sentimental. The bereft heart, like the shepherd of the parable, may at times be blamable in forgetting the ninety and nine, and going in longing parental fondness and partiality after "that which was lost." Yet, explain it as we may, neither can what is a very generally accepted article in the creed of the bereaved be relegated to this domain of mere sentiment. It too often really is the favorite child, or the youth of greatest promise, that is the missing one; one of those whose names are described by a pathetic writer as "always on gravestones; and their sweet smiles, their heavenly eyes, their singular words and ways among the buried treasures of yearning hearts. In how many families do you hear the legend that all the goodness and graces of the living, are nothing to the peculiar charms of one who is not!" (Mrs. H. B. Stowe.) It was an old saying, even of Pagan antiquity, "Those whom the gods love die young."

Be this, however, as it may, there are few, at all events, who will not allow that among the most mysterious of Providences is the mystery of early death. When we think of the possible future of our dear departed had they been spared—their possible, their probable usefulness in the Church and in the world, we cannot see 'good' in their removal. There is little to perplex in the case of the aged Christian's death; for with him the battle is fought and life's mission fulfilled. But the young warrior, full of elastic hope and bright anticipations, suddenly to fall before he has had time to buckle on his armor—the young, it may be the boyish soul, filled with noble yearnings to make the world the better for him while he lived, and to miss him when he died! In vain, in the presence of the King of Terrors,

as he lays his icy finger on the brow, do we ask, "Why is this?"

But "it seemed good in YOUR sight!" There are reasons (shadowy, partial, undefined they may be); but there are such reasons for this apparently premature departure of the youthful Christian, which may lead us in calm faith and submission to breathe that "divinely taught" utterance. Let me proceed, with God's blessing, to specify one or two of these.

I. The young Christian is thereby saved many unforeseen perils. We never like to think of evil in connection with the juvenile, the innocent, the happy. And in the case of a life that has early consecrated itself to God, we can surround it only with sunshine—sunshine in the present, and with a halo of future hope and blessing. But who can tell, if this life of promise had been prolonged, what might have overtaken it? Who that knows the treachery of the human heart can forecast the coming years of the most loving and beloved? Life's shores, alas! are strewn with the wrecks of many a vessel which began its course on the early river with all that a parent's fond heart could desire! How many a father would have been grateful had his prodigal boy been summoned in youth, instead of being spared, not as a blessing, but as a curse! In the quaint often-quoted words of an old writer, "Better David's dead child—than his living Absalom!" Better for the green and tender vine, even with its unripe or undeveloped clusters, to be transplanted, than left for "the boar of the woods to destroy it and the wild beast of the field to devour it." We cannot anticipate or foresee; but there is an omniscient Eye which can—which does! He may discern mercy and kindness in the early removal, unknown and undiscerned by us. "Even so, Father—for, so it seemed good in Your sight!"

II. The young Christian is often early taken away, because in his case the great end of existence is fulfilled. That end is not to be measured by days or months or years. "Man's chief end is to glorify God." That glorious consummation may be attained in ten years, or twenty years, as well as in fifty, or threescore and ten. The child may die "a hundred years old!" It is a promise of God given in one of the Psalms, "With long life will I satisfy him." What is truly long life? Men may survive to the age of Methuselah, and yet the life of many centuries may be a blank. They may live all the while like the men of Meroz, "doing nothing," and sink into their graves

unremembered and forgotten—the world no gainer by them during their barren and profitless existence, and no tear to spare for them at their departure.

While a truly "long life"—the life which is measured and calculated not by arithmetic but by deeds—by virtue and worth, may be compressed within a few brief years. The world has its conventional time for celebrating what is called coming of age; but in the sight of God that life attains its majority when, within a far briefer period, the owner of it can lay his head on a death-pillow, and in humble reverence say, in the spirit at least of the words of the Great Master, "I have glorified You on the earth; I have finished the work which You gave me to do." Even in the case of human genius this is true. Raphael died in comparative youth, and yet, in the earthly sense of the term, he is immortal. He compressed the lives of a thousand into a few brief years, and gave an impulse to art and to the creation of all that, pictorially at least, is devoutest and purest in religious sentiment, which is felt to this day.

So, in a far higher acceptance, morally and spiritually, there are young lives, early taken, of those who, in the truest, grandest sense, have been the Methuselahs of the world; who lived briefly yet nobly here, whose existence is perpetuated in a more glorious sphere above. "He asked life of You, and You gave him a long life, even forever and ever." "Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

But this suggests—

III. The young Christian is frequently summoned to an early grave, in order to draw survivors and friends to heaven. He or she, the early removed, are often thus set as beacon-lights on "the farther shore." Many a heart that resists other influences—sickness, worldly loss, and similar providential dispensations, has been won to God and heaven and happiness by the glorified voices of the departed! The sheep (to use a well-known simple illustration) which no force could drive into the fold—which sternly resisted going through the wicket-gate, is induced to do so by the bleat of her own lamb. The lamb is taken first by the shepherd, and then the other follows with willing and obedient step. Ah! how many who have now reached their thrones and their crowns can testify—"But for



that sainted child early taken from me, I never would have been here! It was that voice which first stole down upon my ear in the soft whisper of celestial love, and made me first listen to the words of the sublime vision in the Book of Revelation, 'Come up here!'"

Several present, have sons who are abroad in a foreign land. What a new interest their going there has given you in that distant country! Kingdoms and colonies perhaps you scarce knew of previously, and which you could not have pointed to on the map, now how familiar! So with many a bereft parent. Your child has emigrated—set sail to the celestial shores. You have an interest in that unseen world you never had before. Heaven is brought near you with all the strength of a home feeling. It is no longer "the land that is very far off." You cannot help, in thought, being drawn to those mansions from which the angel message is ever coming from a voice silent on earth—"If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said I go unto the Father!"

"Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

Once more—

IV. The young Christian is removed; but he is with you still. Though in one sense taken from your sight; in another and better sense he is not so. I speak not of heaven; I speak now of earth. Even in regard to this world he is not "gone." The poet beautifully says—  
"'Tis better to have loved and lost,  
Than never to have loved at all."

Yes, far better; for love is an unquenchable thing. No, love, in the truest meaning of the term, is life; and that love never dies. If you think of it for a moment, it is not the mere bodily presence of a child, or brother, or sister, that is 'life.' If that child grows up to be the prodigal I spoke of a little ago, his life and his love are alike really cut off from his parent; whereas there is true life and love in those memories which cluster round the grave of the sainted dead. That son or brother we have also just referred to, who went to the distant colony or settlement, and who with a smile on his lip and the tear in his eye, gave us the last waive of his hand when the vessel was leaving the harbor, he is not dead. Though separated

from us, there is life and love still in that land of adoption. We think of him as living. It is our daydream to see him and welcome him again.

On the other hand, that friend, that relative, though he may live next door, is virtually 'dead,' who by unkindness and ingratitude is estranged from us; passing and repassing in life's thoroughfares without the nod of recognition. He may be living in the literal sense of the word, but he is "dead while he lives." His personal presence is not life; he is truly "the dead one." While the other, whose memories of holy affection are enshrined in the heart, who spoke words of imperishable kindness and comfort in passing through the dark valley, and pointed, when the tongue was unable to speak, to the land and the ties which know no dissolution, he is truly the living one. The link in the one case is snapped; the other, though invisible, is a golden chain which binds and rivets, now and for all eternity.

"No longer here," says Hawthorn, in the first hours of parental grief; "she is there; gazing, seeing, knowing, loving, as the blessed only see, and know, and love. Earth has one angel less, and heaven one more, since yesterday. Already, kneeling at the throne, she has received her welcome, and is resting on the bosom of her Savior. If human love has power to penetrate the veil—(and has it not?)—then there are yet living here a few who have the blessedness of knowing that an angel loves them!"

Let bereaved fathers and mothers ponder often this elevated and elevating truth. The casket has perished, but the jewel is still safe. Just as in that appalling railway catastrophe the other day, amid the charred ashes of death the gems and diamonds were found untouched and uninjured. Yes; I repeat it. That silent portrait on the wall is not your child. That face in your photographic collection is not your child. That white bust of marble which the chisel has wrought for you is not your child. These are speechless, mute, inanimate—mere semblances, no more; loved and treasured indeed as memorials and souvenirs. But it is a nobler living image and reality on which your heart can repose; the example which was bequeathed to you, the loving thoughts and elevated motives, and the words and ways and deeds which death never can extinguish. The beautiful action of the Savior of old may become, with another sacred meaning, an habitual one with you—"And He took a child

and set him in the midst." With such-like memories, and with so noble a reversion, may all sorrowing parents who have been called to mourn blanks in their households, lives of virtue and promise so apparently quenched in darkness, gather around the 'early grave;' and with these gleams of holy radiance left lingering behind, breathe the word of devout and loving submission, "Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in Your sight!"

If I have a remark in closing, it would be to the young—to those who are still spared in life and health and strength—that they might remember what life is, and how sacred is its mission, whether the period of their natural existence be long or short. You who are still in the morning of youth, try to know and to realize what a blessed thing early piety is. And if there be, now and then, those among your playmates and companions who love God and serve Him, that are cut down, may you have grace to take their places in the heavenly course. Those of you who are older may recall, that in the torchlight races of the ancient Greeks, when one young torch-bearer had finished his allotted part in the running, he handed on the lighted torch to another; this to another; and this to another still. Be it so with you in a higher, nobler race. When young torch-bearers we may be mourning today have finished their course and kept the faith, may their example animate you to follow their steps—to take the torch from their dying hands, and bear it on until you reach, like them, your heavenly crowns. The mansions are filling, the cloud of young witnesses is increasing. "So run that you may obtain!"

"Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in your sight."  
—Matthew 11:26

## THE DEATH OF A CHILD

(1 Kings 17:17-24)

After this, the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. His illness became very severe until no breath remained in him. She said to Elijah, "Man of God, what do we have in common? Have you come to remind me of my guilt and to kill my son?" But Elijah said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him from her arms, brought him up to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and said, "My Lord God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow I am staying with by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself out over the boy three times. He cried out to the Lord and said, "My Lord God, please let this boy's life return to him!" So the Lord listened to Elijah's voice, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Then Elijah took the boy, brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. Elijah said, "Look, your son is alive." Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know you are a man of God and the Lord's word in your mouth is the truth."

The death of a child!—reminding us, that, three thousand years ago, the griefs of the old world were identical with our own—the stricken hearts of mourning parents the same in the ancient homes of Palestine as in the modern homes of England—the Rachels in both "weeping for their children and will not be comforted because they are not!"

From the words which stand at the head of this chapter, the prophet Elijah was now under the roof of the widow of Zarephath. A grievous famine was still raging amid the thousands around. But as each morning's sun rose on the inhabitants of this tranquil home, lo, the barrel and the cruse described in the preceding context, and which the evening meal seemed to have exhausted, were again replenished. God's mercies were "new to them every morning, and His faithfulness every night."

We can only venture to surmise how the Prophet's hours, in this secluded dwelling, would be spent. We can follow him in thought as betimes, perhaps, he wandered up the rocky ridges which flanked the town; gazing

now on the everlasting snows of Hermon, now on the wood-crowned top of Tabor—thus beholding both "Tabor and Hermon" "rejoicing in God's name." Or, as at other times, he would wander along the shores of the great and wide sea, in adoring contemplation of Him who takes up the waters in the hollow of His hand, and who "gives the sea His decree." Yet again, when the barrel had yielded its evening supply, and the lamp had been lighted from the unfailing oil-cruise, we can picture him unfolding to these two dwellers in Pagan Phoenicia—the mother and her child—the name and works and divine character of the God of Israel—dwelling on the glorious promise spoken to the fathers, but in the blessings of which all the families of the earth were to participate.

We can think of them, perhaps, joining their voices together in the psalms of the great Hebrew minstrel—many of them so applicable to their own circumstances and experience—"Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keeps truth forever; which executes judgment for the oppressed; which gives food to the hungry. ... The Lord preserves the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow." Or, more appropriate still in that heathen Tyrian home—"And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat Your favor. Instead of Your fathers shall be Your children, whom You may make princes in all the earth. I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations—therefore shall the people praise You forever and ever!"

But a dark season is at hand for that lowly home. Perhaps it was with this widow, as with many among us still—in her state of comparative prosperity—of exemption, at all events, from the pressure of famine, so severely felt all around—she may have been beginning to forget the Hand which was filling her empty cupboard, and warding off starvation from her dwelling. Miraculously fed from day to day—seeing the barrel and the cruise each morning recruited with the needed supply—she may have begun to feel too confidently secure—that her "mountain was standing strong," and that she might safely calculate on a permanent immunity from the inroads of trial.

How apt are we, after a season of long-continued blessing—unbroken

prosperity—to indulge in this spirit of boastful independence—taking our daily comforts—food—health—friends—children—as matters of course. We may see, in the case of others, these strong pillars shattered and broken; but our inmost thought and feeling is, "I am all secure—I need not fear!" So may have meditated the Sarepta widow. And the last trial she would ever have anticipated would probably be the very one that was in store for her. With appalling suddenness, the little life—the light of her dwelling—is extinguished! "There is no breath left in him."

Since this beloved and only child had been given back to her from the gates of famine and death, we may imagine her heart-strings had entwined more tenderly than ever around him; he was every day growing up more of a companion and solace to her—a pledge of unspeakable blessing in her latter years—when his arms would toil for her, his prayers would comfort her, and his hands at last would close her eyes in death. Sad, indeed, that that one lone star which twinkled in her skies should be blotted out! Better it had been if, two years ago, he had been removed, and thus been spared the pangs and struggles of many an after-hour of privation and suffering. His life being prolonged only to be taken, seemed a cruel mocking of her grief and tears. All her hopes and joys perished in that moment of woe. She could bear to see the barrel of meal yielding a diminished supply—she could endure to look on an empty, unreplenished cruse; but to gaze on that withered flower, lying cold and lifeless in her bosom—to lose HIM, this was death indeed!

We cannot, perhaps, wonder, that for a time, faith, and patience, and submission were tempted to give way. In the bitterness of her bereft soul she thus upbraids the Prophet—"What have I to do with you, O you man of God? Are you come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" The words were a cutting reflection on Elijah, as well as an insinuation against Elijah's God. It was as if she had said, "What have I done to provoke at your hands so terrible a calamity? Is this your recompense and requital for sheltering your defenseless head? In pity I gave you welcome to my humble roof. Have these been your answered prayers for your benefactress? Has your God come, in this fearful retributive sense, to be the 'Judge of the widow?' Have you come, a wolf in sheep's clothing, to ravish my flock—and rob me of my one lamb?"

How striking is the contrast between this agony of her impassioned grief and the calm composure manifested when she first met Elijah. Then her child's death was equally imminent, and threatened, too, under a more terrible form. Her words on that occasion, in speaking of partaking with him of her last morsel, were these, "That we may eat it and die." She had familiarized herself with the approach of the last enemy—it was the passive, silent submission of blank despair. Now, however, it was "sudden death,"—death unexpected—death when she was handling the full cup. It was her gourd withering, not by a process of slow, gradual decay—drooping leaf by leaf; but it was, as with Jonah, the luxuriant plant—coiled fresh and beauteous round her evening bower—becoming, in a night, a mass of blighted, withered leaves. In the words of the Patriarch of Uz, "The morning was even as the shadow of death."

Nor can we fail to admire Elijah's conduct in the trying circumstances. We know to what course his natural character would have impelled him. Hurt at the unkind and unjust reflection, his fiery nature might have prompted him to retaliate. He might, with an angry word, have answered the unkind suspicion breathed by that broken heart. But there is no syllable of recrimination or resentment. He says nothing (as he might have done) about the blessing he had been, and brought, to her household. He makes no reference to the barrel and the cruse beside them, the silent witnesses of God's mercy and goodness. Deeply touched at the impressive sight of death—and, perhaps, with a tender love for the youthful victim—he makes kind allowance for the anguish of the childless widow.

Saying, "Give me your son," he takes the cold marble, the dead body, in his arms, and carries it to his own couch. In Eastern dwellings in these times, as at the present day, there was generally a room higher than the rest of the building, called "alliyeh," or, as it is here translated, "loft," where strangers and guests were accommodated. In the better class of houses it was regarded as the place of honor. To this upper room Elijah bears the lifeless child. That quiet chamber echoes to the voice of impassioned prayer. The Prophet, though he had controlled his feelings before the sorrowing mother, evidently felt keenly the severity of the blow. He dreaded lest the dealings of his God might be misjudged by that

crushed mourner, and he cried out to the Lord and said, "My Lord God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow I am staying with by killing her son?"

Laying the corpse upon the bed, he stretched himself upon it—not for the purpose of imparting, as some have thought, natural warmth to revive and quicken the dormant physical energies, but rather, it would seem, to communicate the quickening power of God. He knew that He who had "brought the evil" could alone remove it. Three times, as he overlaid the dead body, did the importunate cry ascend, "My Lord God, please let this boy's life return to him!" The prayer is heard—the limbs begin to move—the eye dilates—the pulse beats. Back comes the departed spirit. The Prophet has rekindled the cold ashes on this desolated hearth; and carrying in his arms the living trophy of God's goodness, he hushes the sobs of the mother with the joyful announcement—"Look, your son is alive!" Her tears are dried. Her murmurings cease. Her faith in Israel's Jehovah is confirmed. "Now"—is the utterance of her bounding heart—"now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

From this touching and suggestive episode, we may gather, as one out of many practical lessons, that Bereavement is not necessarily a divine judgment on account of any special sin. The widow, in the first moments of her grief, as she sat with her dead child upon her lap—the hot tears coursing down her cheek—was led to form the hasty conclusion, that God had sent her this heavy chastisement as a rebuke and retribution for some previous transgression—"Are you come unto me to call my sin to remembrance?" Many, we know, in the season of bereavement are apt to draw a similar unwarranted deduction—saying to themselves what Job's unfeeling friends reproachfully addressed to him, as they pointed to the miserable bed of dust and ashes on which he lay—"Such, surely, are the dwellings of the wicked; and this is the place of him who knows not God."

But we may thus often misinterpret the reason and motive of the Divine procedure. Our Lord, in one of His great miracles—curing the blind man at the Temple gate—declared emphatically, in opposition to the false and gratuitous assumption of the Pharisees, that it was in consequence of no sin either of the sufferer or his parents that he had been doomed to grope



his way in darkness at noontide, but, "that the works of God might be made manifest in him." Let us not, therefore, hastily surmise, when God at times sees fit to empty the chairs and hush the loved voices of our households, that some specific sin must have evoked that special judgment and drawn forth the arrow from the Almighty's quiver. We shall find in a subsequent page that at the very moment when the darkness of death was shadowing the home of Bethany, "Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus."

We may farther learn from the incident before us, that no amount of good works or of active service in the cause of religion will exempt us from trial. This widow had rendered the greatest benefit which the Church of God at that age could receive, by affording shelter to its most valued servant and defender, the honored Prophet of Heaven. Yet she was smitten. Her generous pity and kindness to God's viceregent could not shield her from the assaults of affliction! It becomes us, whatever be the Divine dealings, never to ask with the voice of complaint and querulous upbraiding, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?" Good deeds, lofty virtues, self-denying sacrifices, will not purchase for us immunity from His righteous ordination—that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom. Whatever be our lot or portion, be it ours to "rejoice with trembling."

The vessel best manned and equipped may strike on the sunken rock, as well as the lowest and most unseaworthy craft. No, God's most favored saints are often put in the foremost ranks of chastisement. Upon the most fruit-bearing trees of His garden He often uses His sharp pruning-knife. Trial, in its varied forms, has ever been employed by Him as a powerful means of leading to deeper convictions of sin, as well as a salutary quickener of spiritual graces. He knows what discipline is best fitted to draw the soul to Himself; and often does He show that none is so effectual as that which was employed in this home at Zarephath—snapping the ties which bind us to the creature—disuniting us from earthly, to bind us to heavenly things. Many can trace their first deep sense of sin—their first lively apprehension of Christ and of Divine realities—to the hour when their dwelling was rifled of its prized blessings. He breaks the heart in order to save the soul.

This, however, reminds us of what has already been noted, and which, as an ever-present reflection with the mourner, will often occur in these pages—how baffling and mysterious are many of God's providential dispensations. Amid all the homes of that region, who would have expected that the one to be so terribly smitten was that which had, for two years, kindly sheltered the exiled Prophet of Israel? Surely, we might think, if there is one dwelling more than another secure from the assaults of the dread invader, it will be that of the widow of Sarepta, and of the hope and solace of her declining years; who, if spared, might become an honored instrument in the defense and maintenance of the true religion. And yet, behold, the desire of her eyes and the delight of her heart taken away by a stroke!

Oftentimes are we perplexed and confounded by similar dealings; decayed scaffoldings, crumbling props remaining—and the strong and vigorous, the virtuous and useful, swept down in a moment! There is no key now to these dark dispensations. Many a weeping eye cannot read them through blinding tears. But the hour is coming when we shall read them—when they shall be luminous with love. "Men see not yet the bright light in the clouds;" "but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light!" We may have to wait until we obtain entrance within the Gates; but then, at least, the legend will be subscribed—rather will the lips be attuned for the everlasting song—"We have known and believed the love that God has to us!"

Earth may not, as in the case of the widow of Phoenicia, give us back our dead—no prophet's voice can reanimate the silent ashes—no anguish of prayer recall the departed spirit. But we joyfully believe the day will yet dawn when we shall write under every mystic providence, "He has done all things well." Meanwhile let us rejoice, like Elijah, in the assurance that "the Lord reigns"—that all bereavements and chastisements are His appointments. "You" (the Prophet says, addressing his God in prayer) —"YOU" (the living Jehovah) "have brought this evil." Oh, comforting thought! enough to dry all tears and silence all murmurings—"Does disaster come to a city," to the cottage, to the palace—is there disaster which blights some unknown poor man's dwelling—is there disaster which clothes a nation in mourning, "unless the Lord has done it?" Amos

3:6

The narrative farther exhibits, what we have revealed in the case of many of the Divine dispensations—the energy and power of Prayer. Not when he supplicates, as he had previously done, that Heaven should seal up its rains and dews from a whole nation—not when afterwards, on Carmel, invoking defeat on Baal and his priests, is his prayer more earnest than now, in this lowly dwelling, when not the lives of thousands, but the life of one lowly child, is the subject of his intercession. He seems, indeed, to have felt, personally, deeply moved under this sudden bereavement. The strong, heroic, brave man could bear with equanimity any ills affecting himself, but he was stung to the quick under the imputation of his benefactress. He could not brook the allegation of bringing evil on the home of one who had opened her door to a friendless stranger.

His prayer is an urgent appeal to God—(we had almost said a bold remonstrance)—as a just and merciful and righteous Being. "It cannot be, Lord," he seems to say; "You can not allow this reproach to descend on me and on Your great Name! You, who have made the widow's cause Your own, oh, recompense not thus, her kindness to me! Let not this heathen woman say, as she points to her childless home and buried treasure, 'Where is now your God?'"

We can imagine the Tishbite pacing up and down his little chamber in importunate, impassioned prayer. It was a mighty demand, indeed, for a mortal to make—a request that had no previous parallel in praying lips. It was nothing short of this—Victory over Death—the iron crown plucked from the head of the King of terrors. When Elijah does manifest faith, it is always of the noblest type. He would doubtless now revert to his life-motto—the first utterance of his prophetic mission—"JEHOVAH LIVES" Confiding in the "El Shaddai," he feels confident that He who provided him his brook at Cherith will restore this more sacred living brook which had been so suddenly dried in its earthly channel. Strong in faith, giving glory to God, he proceeds to the couch where the lifeless child lay. Once more he stands before us as delineated by James, "the righteous man," bearing the glorious testimony as to the "availing,"—the "much availing power"—of "effectual fervent prayer!"

Bereaved one, are your prayers in a similar hour left unanswered? Is your anguished cry rather, "Why these defeated supplications?"—the urgent plea not only left unheard, but responded to in the way you most dreaded and deprecated? Are you tempted to give way to the plaintive soliloquy—"Surely my way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"—the cry of your crushed and broken heart in the well-known words of John Newton—

"Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;  
But it has been in such a way,  
As almost drove me to despair!

Yes, more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds and laid me low."

All we can say in reply is—"Be still and know that He is God." His thoughts are not your thoughts, nor His ways your ways. "A man devises his own ways; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Would that we could believe that at times the denial of our prayers may be the best, the kindest, the really paternal answer to them; that when thwarted in our aspirations after what we think is for our good, we are tempted to pronounce the hasty verdict; we could trust the ALL-LOVING, to guide our steps and grant our petitions, not according to our finite and fallible wisdom, but according to the counsel of His sovereign but gracious will. I believe at times, even in this world, He discovers to us sooner or later the reason of apparently unowned supplications; bringing light out of darkness; and showing that, often in the midst of overwhelming domestic bereavements, there are undreamt-of blessings in reversion, which could not otherwise have been ours. "To think," says Lady Powerscourt, "that led by Him we are safe from everything. No evil shall ever touch us—evil at the end or evil on the way—all is paved with love." Yes, believe it. He answers prayer, not in our ways, but in His. He answers us, even though it may be, at times, "in the secret place of thunder!" (Ps. 81:7).

Finally, we have here a glimpse given us of the doctrine of the

Resurrection. This was a truth dimly unfolded in Old Testament times. Its full revelation was reserved for Him who, under a more glorious economy, "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light." As the gladdening words sounded in the mother's ears, "See, your son lives!" not only was that widow herself taught that the God of Elijah had a power which no Baal ever had, in imparting life to the still ashes—reanimating the cold clay, and putting light into the rayless eyes; but it was a parable to the Jewish Church of that great gospel disclosure, that there is a day coming "when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." No, more; from the fact which is expressly recorded in the inspired narrative, that Elijah brought down the living child from the upper chamber into the house, "and delivered him to his mother," we have the precious thought suggested, under a significant figure, that in that glorious resurrection morning friends will be reunited to friends—there will be undying reunions of the departed in the Church of the glorified; mothers restored to the embrace of children, and lost little ones given back to their parents. How will the happiness of that day of complete triumph be augmented and enhanced, as death-divided relatives, re-linked in bonds of purified earthly affection and love, will be able to exclaim to one another, "See my son! my parent! my brother! my beloved, long-lost child!—see, HE LIVES!"

## **THE DEATH OF AN ONLY SON**

Luke 7:11-16

Soon afterwards He was on His way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were traveling with Him. Just as He neared the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was also with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said, "Don't cry." Then He came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers

stopped. And He said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited His people."

We have here another eclipse of young life in the land of Palestine. It is one that occurred not in Old Testament, but in gospel times—a memory hallowed and consecrated, too, by holier footsteps than those even of the great Elijah.

On one of the descending slopes of Mount Tabor, in the vast plain of Esdraelon—the golden granary of the Holy Land and the battlefield of Hebrew history—the traveler still discovers the ruins of the city of NAIN. It is invested with imperishable interest from this one solitary but touching event, with which its name is associated in gospel story.

Jesus and His disciples, along with "many people," took this journey of twelve miles from the city of Capernaum; and as the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, they found themselves approaching the village by its one entrance on the slopes of the wooded mountain. Jewish cemeteries were always situated outside the walls of their towns, and the time of burial was at sunset. The coffin was carried on the shoulders, with the face exposed, until they came to the place of burial. Here the lid was nailed on the coffin, and the funeral rites were completed.

Funerals, to the least impressible, are affecting spectacles. None can fail to be solemnized as the mournful procession wends along the highway, or the street of the crowded city. But we often think how little uninformed wayfarers can gauge the depths of many such sorrows, or measure the yawning chasms in the hearts of those who are thus, in mute and pensive silence, passing by!

The words of the sacred narrative touchingly describe to us such a burial scene. A funeral was seen emerging from the gate of Nain as the sun was setting. Bitter sobs and weeping from the midst of the crowd arrest the ear of Him whose mission it was to heal the broken-hearted. There was everything to aggravate the pangs of that lacerated heart, and make it the sorest of trials. The whole village had turned out to sympathize with the

mourner. "A large crowd from the city was also with her."

But, in the deep agony of her grief, she stood alone. In more than one feature her case was identical with that we last considered. These tears of hers were not of yesterday. She could once tell of a happy home! The world to her had once been all sunshine. The exuberance of outer nature in her Hebrew hamlet, its summer fruits and purple clusters, had its reflection and counterpart in her own joyous heart—itself a garner of cherished blessings. Her first, and, as she supposed, her most desolating blow came! The smile of gladness was all at once exchanged for the blight of bereavement. The desire of her eyes was taken away with a stroke. A thousand fond hopes and cherished dreams vanished in the twinkling of an eye, and were buried in that grave. She was left solitary, to toil on her pilgrimage path—"she was a widow."

But in seasons of saddest trial God often gives supporting solaces. To this poor woman, amid her hours of sorrow, there was one object, like that in the home at Sarepta, still surviving, around whom her heart-strings were fondly entwined. The partner of her joys was gone; but he had left behind him a sacred legacy of affection! One little child remained, to cheer the lonely hearth of the widowed parent. Often, doubtless, did she clasp the treasured gift to her bosom; and as she dropped the silent tear over his cradle, or watched the innocent glee of childhood as he played by her side, would she love to trace in his countenance the image of him who was not! If the past was bitter, the future would have been darker, sadder still, but for this precious link that still bound her to life. Often, in her solitary moments, would she weave visions of happiness around the coming years of her boy, saying, with Lamech, "This one shall comfort us." In him every ulterior plan is wrapped up and concentrated; and the last thought, associated with life's close, is that of his hands closing her eyes, performing to her the final offices of affection, and bearing her to "the house appointed for all living."

How often are we brought to learn that our chief blessings may be removed just when we most need them! When was Jonah's gourd, already referred to, smitten and withered? Not when the evening breeze was fanning his brow, but "in the morning when the sun rose," and the suffocating heat beat on his fevered head. When, as we shall find in a

future page, was Lazarus of Bethany taken away? Just when his sisters—when his Lord—when the Church—seemed as if they could least spare him.

One day a sudden sickness prostrates the widow's son on a couch of languishing. There may have seemed at first no cause for anxiety. It is but a passing cloud; no gloomy vision of anticipated evil dare cross for a moment that doating heart. Soon the young pulse and buoyant frame will be vigorous as ever.

Alas! the tale is soon told—that house, too, is darkened with the shadows of death—the last glimmering light in that desolate heart and dwelling is put out. He who, we may infer from the crowds which followed him to the grave, was all that a fond parent could wish him to be, lies lifeless in his chamber!

We can imagine (though we cannot attempt to describe) the succession of bitter hours the bereaved mother must have spent, previous to the time at which the sacred narrative reveals her first to view at the gate of her native town—the sorrowful night-watchings by the tossed and sleepless couch—the dread anxieties of suspense, vibrating alternately between hope and fear—the glad symptoms of revival; but these again only succeeded by the too faithful monitors of approaching dissolution. And then, when all was over—when left to herself to brood over the dream of bygone bliss and the wrecks of her happiness scattered around her—realizing the bitterness of that which, in her land and in all hearts, has passed into a proverb—the loss of "an only son;"—while the sympathy of neighbors and friends, each having some kindly word to speak of her boy, unsealed the well-springs of her affection anew, and brought fresh warm tear-drops to her cheek.

And now the tramp of the mournful crowd is heard pacing along the streets. In another brief hour, she will have to retrace her steps to a swept household, leaving the prop of her earthly existence laid low in "the long home."

They have reached the gate of the city—they have crossed its threshold. The gloomy walls of the cemetery may be already in view.



But the Lord of life and the Abolisher of death is approaching! There was only ONE in the wide world who could dry that widow's tears and give her back her beloved. That ONE is in sight!

To all appearance, it is but a motley crowd of wayfarers that are seen approaching from the opposite direction. They are coming along the Capernaum road, weary and worn and dust-covered, after the heat of a sultry summer's day. But, in the midst of them, there is a voice which can speak in tones of mingled authority and tenderness—"Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in Me."

JESUS approaches! He required no interpreter of the scene of sorrow—no messenger to carry the tidings of the loss sustained by that mother in Israel. "He needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." Before He left, that morning, the shores of Gennesaret, well He foresaw, as the omniscient God, all the peculiarities in that case of sore trial. He had marked every throb of that breaking heart. He had predetermined and prearranged the apparently 'accidental meeting' at the village gate. And now, at the appointed moment, the dead man is borne in his coffin, as the Lord of the dead and the living draws near.

We need not dwell on the sequel. In other cases, the Savior's intervention and healing power are importunately solicited. There is a singular exception in the present instance. No voice pleads with Him to perform the miracle. The crowd are silent. The mourning widow is too deeply absorbed in her own grief to observe the presence of the Prophet of Nazareth. Besides, notwithstanding His other miraculous deeds, He had never yet raised the dead; so that even if she had known, or perhaps personally witnessed His ability to heal the sick and cure the diseased, she would never imagine He had power to reverse the irrevocable sentence, and unlock those gates of Hades, which for nine hundred years (since the time of Elisha) had been closed to all miracle.

Without parade or ostentation, the Divine Redeemer enters amid the crowd. But observe, it is to whisper, in the first instance, in the ear which most needed it, the balm-word of comfort, "Weep not." And even when the word of power is about to be uttered (that word which is to summon

back a soul from the spirit-land), all is done in unobtrusive silence—in silence He touches the coffin. In silence He beckons to the bearers to stand still; and, as the two meeting crowds have now mingled into one—amid the same hush of impressive silence He sounds the omnipotent summons over the sheeted dead—"YOUNG MAN, ARISE!" Life's pulses begin again mysteriously to beat—well-known tones again meet a mother's ears. Oh, who would mar the touching simplicity of the inspired narrative by endeavoring to depict the burning tears of wonder, and love, and praise, which roll down these wasted, furrowed cheeks, as, in the simple words of the description—the very same with those of the former miracle—"they delivered him to his mother!"

We have heard of the joy occasioned by the sudden appearance of the sailor-boy in his native cottage, many a long year after she who had loved him best had thought of nothing but of her child in a watery grave, the wrecks of his vessel tossed on distant shores. We have heard of the soldier returning to his long-lost home, when his children were accustomed to talk of their father's grave in the far East, with the palm-trees and thick grass waving above it; and we may imagine the joy when the sad dream of years was reversed, and he stood alive before them, locking them by turns in his embrace. What must have been the joy of this Hebrew mother when the new lease of a prized existence was granted by a gracious Savior, and as she returned, holding that hand she had never thought to clasp again on earth, exclaiming—"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!"

Let us gather a few PRACTICAL TRUTHS and REFLECTIONS from this suggestive story.

I. We have here an attestation to the Savior's divinity.

We have other examples in Scripture of individuals raised from the dead. We have lately beheld Elijah, at Sarepta, raising another widow's son—we have Elisha raising the son of the Shunamite—Peter raising "the certain disciple named Tabitha." But all these cases were effected 'permissively'—by mere delegated power. These holy men stormed Death in his grim stronghold; but it was not with their own weapons. Their language was either, "Thus says the Lord," or else, "In the name of Jesus Christ of

Nazareth." They ever disowned and repudiated the thought of any inherent ability over life—any usurpation of the Divine prerogative. They acted only as servants. But here there is no acknowledgment of derivative power. "As a son over His own house," Christ gives forth the mandate of uncontrolled Omnipotence, "Young man, I say unto you."

O blessed assurance! that that Being to whom I owe every blessing I enjoy—every hope for time and for eternity; who was nailed on the cross for me, and for me closed His eyes in the sleep of death—that He had infinite Godhead in mysterious union with suffering, sorrowing, woe-worn, death-stricken humanity and, now that He is upon the throne, and "all power is committed to Him both in heaven and in earth," that nothing can resist His commands, nothing baffle His behests and purposes. There is no evil but his power can ward off—there is no calamity but He can avert—if He pleases. The "I SAY UNTO YOU," He uttered over the coffin at Nain, is His omnific formula FOR all times and AT all times. "He speaks, and it is done!"

## II. Let us learn the tenderness and compassion of Christ as Man.

It is striking to observe, in the more prominent events of our Lord's public ministry, how the manifestations of His Manhood and Godhead go together. There is generally a joint exhibition of majesty and tenderness, proclaiming that while He is God, He is yet the partaker of our nature.

It is the case here. We have just marked the unmistakable proofs that He who arrests that weeping crowd is indeed Divine! Omniscience brought Him there—the act of Omnipotence demonstrates His deity in the eyes of the beholders.

But He is more than this. His look of compassion, His tear of sympathy, proclaim that in that same bosom where resides the might of Godhead there beats also all the tenderness of human affection. Observe, it was the sight of woe (the contemplation of human misery) which stirred to its depths that Heart of hearts. It would seem as if He could not look on earthly grief without that grief becoming His own. In the similar case of Lazarus, as we shall afterwards find, it was not the bitter thought of a lost and dead friend which unsealed the fountain of His own tears; for when

He stood in the graveyard, He knew that, in a few moments, the victim of death would have his eyes rekindled with living luster. At Bethany (as here at Nain), it was simply the spectacle of those in suffering that made its irresistible appeal to His emotional nature. The Rod of human compassion touched the Rock of Ages, and the streams of tenderness gushed forth. He hears the widow's heartrending weeping in the midst of the mourners; and, as we already noted—for it is worthy of observation—utters the soothing, sympathetic word, before He utters the Godlike mandate.

Nor should we overlook the fact that it was only a word He uttered. This reveals an exquisite and touching feature in the Savior's humanity. It attests how intensely delicate and sensitive, as well as true, that humanity was. When we meet a mourner after a severe trial, we shrink from the meeting; glad, perhaps, when the sad and dreaded call of courtesy is over. There is a marked reserve in making a reference to the blank; or, if that reference is made, it is short—a studied brevity. The press of the hand often expresses what the lips shrink from uttering. In that touching picture we have of patriarchal grief, as a writer observes in commenting on this passage, Job's friends and mourners sat for seven days at his side, and not a syllable was spoken. It was so here with Jesus. He (even He) does not intrude with lengthened, commonplace condolence. With a tear in His eye, and a suppressed sob, all He says is, "Weep not."

Behold, then, the beautiful and touching sympathy of a fellow-mourner—"the Brother born for adversity." "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her!" We have seen that that weeping, forlorn woman had no lack of other sorrowing friends. Her case seemed to be matter of notoriety. Many went out to mingle their grief with hers. But the sympathy of all these could only go a certain way. They could not be expected to enter into the peculiarities of her woe. Human sympathy is, at best, imperfect; sometimes selfish, always finite and temporary. Not so the sympathy of Him who had just joined the funeral procession. He could say, as none else can, "I know your sorrows." The sympathy of the kindest friend on earth knows a limit—Jesus' sympathy knows none.

Who can tell but, in that gentle utterance of tender feeling, and in the deep compassion which dictated it, the Son of Man, the Virgin-born, may

have had in view another "Mother," whose hour of similar bereavement was now at hand, when His own death was to be "the sword" which was to "pierce her soul." "Weep not;"—that is often an unkind arrest put by man on the sacredness of human grief, as if it were unworthy to weep tears which Christ wept before us. But He (the Great Savior) who came to stem more fearful floods of sorrow, could, in His compassionate tenderness, speak His own calming word. That hour was a presage and foreshadow of a happier time, when, in a sorrowless world, "God shall wipe away ALL TEARS from off all faces."

Comforting in our seasons of trial to meditate upon this fellow-feeling of the Prince of Sufferers—that Divine compassion, in comparison with which the tenderest and best human sympathy is but as dust in the balance. The Savior and sympathizer of Nain is ever the same. He had compassion—He has compassion still. He who stopped the mourning procession on that summer's night, in the plains of Jezreel, still lives, and loves, and supports, and pities; and will continue to pity, until pity be no longer needed, in a world of light and joy—of purity and peace! "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

III. This leads us, once more—expanding the same thought—to note that the narrative before us is full of special comfort to the bereaved.

"WEEP NOT!" I repeat, He does not mean, by uttering that word, to forbid tears—He seems by it rather to say—"Do not shed tears by mistake. If you knew all the design and purpose I have in that bitter sorrow—that aching trial—you would chase these tears away. Give expression to no hasty surmises with regard to my doings."

Look at the scene here described. We read that those present at the funeral—the attendant crowd of mourners and spectators—"glorified God." Yes, and could we rend these heavens and ascend up amid the heavenly worshipers—who knows but perhaps we might see there two glorified forms bending over the memories of that sunset hour at Nain—the Widow and her Son—telling, with tearless eyes, that it was that death-scene which had led them to their thrones and crowns!

God is ever saying to us, "Trust Me in the dark." There shall yet be a

revelation of mercy and love in these your trials. That "Weep not" of Nain was intended to carry its message of solace and consolation to the myriad hearts of all time, crushed with their ever-varying sorrows—and more especially to those bearing their most cherished treasures to the custody of the tomb. He would proclaim to us, even now, that He has "power over death"—that the King of terrors must own the scepter of the King of kings. He prepares His whole Church, in this miracle, for singing the prophetic song—"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" He gives to the world a pledge of the summons which will one day be addressed to its slumbering myriads—"Arise!" "Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust!"

Nor is the simple statement here made with reference to the young man without its inferential meaning, "He delivered him to his mother." We may recur to it, although we have already alluded to its suggestiveness, in the narrative of Elijah's kindred miracle.

Jesus rested not with the mere summons to life; nor with beholding the young man raising himself up on his coffin and giving utterance to articulate sounds; but He takes him by the hand, and places it, like His great Prophet of Cherith, in that of the rejoicing parent! The first act, in both cases, is to restore the resuscitated dead to the hearts that mourned them, and to permit the resuming of the old joyous communion. In this, too, as in the former, may we not rehearse the same inference—borne out, too, by other Scripture statements and references? May it not lead us to cherish the joyful and delightful prospect of reunion with those we have loved? that those tender affections, nurtured and hallowed on earth, shall only be for a time interrupted by death, to be resumed in better and brighter worlds—where the pang of bereavement, and orphanage, and widowhood, shall no longer be either felt or feared! The great "ARISE!" which shall startle the sleeping dead (the sleepers in Jesus), will be followed by personal recognitions, restored fellowships—the old smiles lighting up the countenance, the voice, with its familiar tones, tuned and prepared for nobler services and loftier songs!

Meanwhile, let the bereaved and sorrowful bow with a calm un murmuring submission to the will of God—rejoicing in the present possession of the compassion of Jesus; and looking forward, with

triumphant hearts, to that cloudless morning when "the sun" of earthly prosperity shall "no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself"—but when (rejoined to death-divided friends, and with no tear to dim their eyes) "the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended."

## **THE EARLY DEATH OF AN ONLY DAUGHTER**

Luke 8:41-42, 49-56

And now a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, came and fell down at Jesus' feet, begging him to come home with him. His only child was dying, a little girl twelve years old. As Jesus went with him, he was surrounded by the crowds.

While he was still speaking to her, a messenger arrived from Jairus' home with the message, "Your little girl is dead! There's no use troubling the Teacher now." But when Jesus heard what had happened, he said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just trust me, and she will be all right." When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn't let anyone go in with him except Peter, James, John, and the little girl's father and mother. The house was filled with people weeping and wailing, but he said, "Stop the weeping! She isn't dead; she is only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him because they all knew she had died. Then Jesus took her by the hand and said in a loud voice, "Get up, my child!" And at that moment her life returned, and she immediately stood up! Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were overwhelmed, but Jesus insisted that they not tell anyone what had happened.

An only daughter!—the most sacred and hallowed link that can bind heart to heart—the theme of poetry's tenderest epics, lyrics, elegies—Can such be included in the record of early departures—the calendar of "early graves?" Alas! too true, as is the experience of ten thousand sorrowing

parents. It is so in the touching incident we are now to consider. Death is here described as entering another home of the Gospel era, and evoking the wail of desolated mourners.

But, the Prince and Lord of Life draws near. He storms the Invader in his own citadel, compels him to relinquish his prey; and to every bosom in all time thus rudely rifled, bequeaths consolatory words and lessons.

Let us first rehearse the narrative, and then endeavor to gather up some of the more solemn and comforting truths which that narrative enforces.

We have no farther light thrown in Gospel story on the principal personage in this scene. He was Ruler of the synagogue of CAPERNAUM—supposed to be one of those "elders of the Jews" we find coming in a body or deputation to intercede with Jesus in behalf of the Centurion's servant, saying, that "he was worthy for whom He should do this, for he loves our nation, and he has built us a synagogue."

This pious Israelite had urged his suit successfully for another—the slave of a Gentile soldier, who had been stretched on a couch of sickness, "ready to die." The Divine Philanthropist had listened to the pleadings of faith and gratitude, and immediately accompanied him in the direction of that soldier's abode. But a very different case now engrosses this Ruler's thoughts—a very different sorrow weighs down his own heart. The silent Messenger is now standing at his own door-step!

An only daughter gladdened his home. She had arrived, too, just at that age when a father's heartstrings are bound fastest and firmest around his child's soul. With her had been doubtless interwoven every thought of the future—she was the pride of the family; the prop of the present; the promised comforter of her parents' old age. Often perhaps, in the midst of other trials, they would glance at the loving spirit at their side, assured of one abiding stay and solace. But health and strength, youth and intelligence, are unable to exclude the sleepless foe of human happiness. The darkest of shadows are falling around that dwelling!

We have not detailed to us, as in other cases recorded in sacred story, the circumstantial of that hour of anxiety and sorrow; whether disease had



crept imperceptibly upon her—the King of terrors coming with noiseless step—velvet footfall—the candle of decaying life burning down slowly until it reached its socket; or whether, with appalling suddenness, the arrow had sped—the sun, which perhaps that morning rose on a cheerful home, setting over the valley of death amid weeping clouds. All the entry we have in the inspired record is, "She lay dying." She had reached that terrible crisis-hour when hope's last glimmerings were being extinguished—the last tides of life were slowly ebbing.

Can nothing be done to arrest the arrow in its course—to stay that sun from so premature a setting? The anguished father thinks of the only ONE voice which can say, "Sun, stand still!"

"Can that same Jesus" (he might think to himself), "who cured a humble slave, who gave back to a fond master the life of a faithful servant—can He not (will He not) pity 'one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel?' If I rush to Him in this hour of my sorrow, will He deny me His compassionate love, and the exercise of His wondrous power?"

There is no time for delay. With fleet footsteps he betakes himself to the Prophet of Galilee, and in an agony of prayer beseeches Him to follow him to his dwelling. The Savior complies—accompanied by a promiscuous crowd, among whom deeper and holier feelings and sympathies mingle with vain curiosity.

An incident, meanwhile, takes place by the way, which for a time impedes His progress. A woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years, steals unobserved through the thronging crowd, touches the blue fringe of the Lord's garment, and receives an instantaneous cure. But instead of passing, as we might expect, with all haste to the more urgent case, Jesus pauses and dwells on this intermediate one. He summons into His presence the subject of His healing power, in order that He may manifest to others the victory of faith, and utter in her own ear words of encouragement and peace.

Hard, unseasonable interruption, we are apt to think! Each moment was precious to that trembling parent. The sand-glass of that loved one's young life was hurrying to its last grain. He might have reached her in

time, had it not been for this. But the likelihood is that the golden opportunity is past and gone—these few minutes' delay have cost the father his child—locked her fast in a sleep too deep to be disturbed!

And yet, we may well believe, there were gracious purposes in the delay, as there ever are in much which our blindness is apt to regard as untoward and unpropitious. The smaller miracle—(the intermediate cure)—would prepare the crowd for receiving the greater one. Above all, it would strengthen and confirm the faith of the witnessing parent—lead him to hope against hope, and in the extremity of his anguish, make him "strong in faith, giving glory to God." We hear from his lips no fretful and impatient utterances—no insinuations against his Lord, or against the other suppliant, regarding the postponement. Meekly he waits the Redeemer's time and will; and before long he shall have the promise fulfilled in his experience—"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him." "It is good for a man that he both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God."

BUT just at the moment when faith has got its pledge of Divine power—when the procession is again in motion, and joyous visions of the past are beginning to people the future, messengers from his homestead are the bearers of heavy tidings—"Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master!" "Fatigue not (as the word means) that weary, toil-worn Savior—add not to His journey or exhaustion. Let Him have the rest He so much requires; His presence could be of no avail now, for death has put his impressive, irrevocable seal on these lips."

Ah! bitter news! Just when hope was in the ascendant—when the future was beginning again to have its rainbow hues spanning a dark sky—these tints melt and merge into a deeper darkness than before. The torch is quenched. The great dreaded blight of existence has passed over the parent's heart!

Now is the time for Jesus' utterances of comfort; for now was the moment when doubt and misgiving were most likely to rise and eclipse the hitherto unwavering trust. Now was the time for those harsh thoughts of rebellious nature, we have already hinted at, which so often, at such seasons, overmaster our nobler feelings. "If it had been but a few

moments sooner, my child might have been spared! If the Lord had only deferred the performance of that other act of love until He had left my threshold, I might still have had my beloved daughter at my side! It was these moments of delay that bereft me of my household treasure! By stopping to give peace to one sufferer, He has done so at the sacrifice of all that most fondly bound me to earth!"

If these, and thoughts like these, were about to arise, Christ in mercy interposes. We read, "Jesus answered" (not that Jairus outspoke his own feelings, but He who reads the secret heart answered to what was passing in the heaving depths of that soul)—"Hush! hush!" He seems to say, "do not allow these thoughts to arise in your heart—dismiss all such unworthy doubts." "Be not afraid—only believe."

And now He has reached the house. The trappings and outward pageantry of death too truthfully verify the tidings of the messengers. In accordance with Oriental custom, hired mourners and hired minstrels were already filling that silent chamber with dirges—while with these mingled the deeper and truer wailings of the smitten hearts.

"Give place!" said Christ, as in a tone of authority He rebuked these vehement demonstrations of mimic sorrow—"Why make this ado and weep? The girl is not dead, but SLEEPS." An enigmatical expression to the tumultuous mob around, but to the father it was the renewal and repetition under a lovely figure of the former pacifying utterance, "Be not afraid, only believe." The word "dead"—the utterance of the human messengers, too well calculated to annihilate the last spark of hope—is replaced by the rekindling words, "She sleeps." Man has put the terrible extinguisher on that lamp. But Jesus says, "Fear not." What is that message of death, when I, the Lord of life, have been summoned by you? You have seen My power on a suffering woman—'only believe, and I will show you greater things than these!'

The irreverent thronging crowd is kept outside. The mimic mourners are all excluded. His three favored disciples (afterwards the witnesses of His transfiguration on the Mount and of His agony in the garden) are alone allowed to enter the chamber sacred of sorrow. In silent emotion the two parents are bending over their withered flower. But so also is He who

gave it—who planted it—who plucked it—and who is to give it back again. In the might of His own omnipotence—in His own name (without invoking, like His prophets or apostles under similar circumstances, any higher power), death is summoned to yield his victim. "He took the girl by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cum—I say unto you, Arise."

The sleeper awoke! The prostrate lily raises its drooping head, and sheds once more its fragrance in that joyous home! That happy Israelite might well take up the words of his great ancestor, which he had so often read in the synagogue service, but perhaps without being ever before touched by them—"You have turned my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, to the end that my glory may give praise to You, and not be silent. O Lord, my God, I will give thanks unto You forever."

Let us ponder one or two PRACTICAL LESSONS with which this scene and passage are replete.

I. The first lesson we may gather from it is the very general and too obvious one that all are exposed to domestic bereavement.

It may seem unkind to break the trance of earthly bliss by referring to the possibility, far less the certainty, of trial. And yet it is needful, ever and anon, solemnly to repeat the warning that you and yours "will not live always."

If God has hitherto put upon your household the exempting mark—if the destroying angel has passed by your door unscathed—if you have no vacant chair at your home-hearth, no yawning chasm in your heart of hearts—you are the exception, not the rule. God knows we have no gloomy pleasure in being prophets of evil. It is a poor gospel to dwell on harrowing thoughts of death—the shroud—the grave! But we would take these as preachers to enforce the lesson daily taught us, "you be also ready!"—that sooner or later, each one of us, parents and children, will be brought to learn the solemn truth, "I am about to die." And if there be one who peruses these pages, who, like the minstrels of whom we have been speaking, is ready to have a smile on his lips, and to "laugh to scorn" a trite commonplace which every one knows and many care not to hear—if

youth in its strength, or manhood in its prime, is saying inwardly, "No fear of me," "My mountain is standing strong"—we would say with deep solemnity, "You fool, this night your soul may be required of you!"

II. We learn from this passage, that we need trials to bring us near to God.

It was his child's sickness that drove Jairus to the feet of Jesus. But for that home-trial, his faith would never have been exercised, nor his love and gratitude evoked. While in health and prosperity, we are apt to take God's gifts as matters of course. It is not until the storm rises, that with these atheist hearts of ours (like the heathen sailors in Jonah's vessel), we fall upon our knees and feel that our only safety is in Him "who rules the raging of the seas." Yes! when God makes breaches in our households—when He brings home to us the truth that our existence, and the existence of our children, is a perpetual miracle—when we discover that those little lives, Pillars in our households, which we have vainly thought were pillars of iron, turn out to be pillars of dust—when the solid alabaster discovers itself to be the melting snow-wreath—then are we driven to discover what is the alone imperishable Portion!

If God is visiting you now with the deep experience of trial, it is that He may speak home to you. Never does He speak so gently, so wisely, so loudly, so solemnly—as when He asserts His right to take away what He originally gave. See, in the text, the unbelieving, laughing, mocking crowd, are disqualified to hear Jesus. They have quickly turned from their mimic sorrow to heartless mirth; simulators—actors—they are thrust out of that Holy Presence. But the stricken parents are taken into the favored circle. They gaze upwards from the face of the dead on Him who is "fairer than the children of men." In such a Presence unbelief is hushed, and faith is ready to hear "what God the Lord has to say unto their souls."

III. Let us learn from the incident before us, as we noted in the preceding chapter in the case of Elijah and the widow's son—the comfort of prayer in the hour of sickness and death.

This Ruler, we read, "fell at Jesus' feet, and pleaded with Him greatly, saying, My little daughter lies at the point of death; I beg You, come and

lay Your hands on her—that she may be healed!"

Trial drove Jairus also in his hour of dreaded bereavement to prayer, and, as in the case of the illustrious Prophet, "the effectual fervent prayer of this righteous man availed much."

The same blessed refuge is open for us in times of sickness. When our friends or our children are stretched on beds of suffering and death, we take their cases to God, and plead with Him in their behalf at the mercy-seat. We must not indeed dream that our prayers (as they were in the case of the Jewish ruler) must necessarily be answered, and that at our earthly bidding a miracle should follow. This would be presumption, not faith; this would be to usurp the sovereignty of God—to substitute our own wisdom for His—it would be to make our will and not His, paramount. If we had only to speak and it was accomplished, it would make man into God, and degrade God to the level of man. It would be to dishonor the Almighty—making Him the servant of the creature—not the creature waiting on in loving trustfulness as the servant of the Creator. Far, far better is it for the lowly suppliant to endorse every petition with the words, "Father, not my will, but Yours be done."

And yet, let us remember for our comfort, as we had occasion also to remark in the Sarepta narrative, that prayers at a deathbed (apparently unanswered) are not in vain. They may smooth the death-pillow. They may remove from it its thorns, and put the promises of Christ in their stead. They may lead sorrowing survivors to lowly resignation, and disarm earthly reflections of their poignant sting. Yes! do not forget this, when seasons of family trial overtake you—when the best of earthly means and instrumentality prove inefficacious, and those near and dear to you are hovering on the confines of the grave. Do not sit down wringing your hands in despair, as if Jehovah were, like Baal, asleep or on a journey, and his ear deaf, when you most need His intervention. Arise, call upon your God! Plead the assurance that, in accordance with that better Will and Wisdom, "the prayer of faith SHALL save the sick."

The Patriarch David of old, is a rebuke in this respect to the lack of faith in many a Christian parent now. For seven whole days was he stretched on the bare earth importunate for his infant's life. "Who can tell," said he,

"whether God may be gracious to me that my child may live?" Not until the little spark had fled, and the sad accents fell on his ear, "Your child is dead," did the prayer melt into the bright hope full of immortality.

#### IV. Learn the nature of real sorrow.

Jesus does not forbid tears. They are holy things consecrated by Incarnate tenderness. Let the world, if they may, condemn it as unmanly to grieve—or worse, let them seek oblivion for their trials in the giddy round of its pleasures and follies, and make the grave of their dead "the land of forgetfulness." Jesus encourages no such cold and stern stoicism. But, on the other hand, neither does He countenance overmuch sorrow. True Christian grief is calm, tranquil, chastened. The noisy, wailing, mimic crowd are spurned from the scene. If they had been the tears of affection, He would have held them as sacred; but being the hollow echoes of unfeeling hearts, He says, "Give place; why make this ado and weep?"

Jesus, on every occasion in His public ministry stamps with His abhorrence all pretense. He dislikes unreality, what is made to appear gold which is tinsel—whether it be simulated joy, or simulated piety, or simulated tears. That is a poor sorrow which expends itself in funeral trappings—which is measured by doleful looks, and passionate words, and mourning weeds. True grief is not like the stream which murmurs and frets because it passes over a shallow bed—that which is deepest makes least noise. Inconsolable sorrow is unbecoming the Christian. To abandon one's self to sullen gloom, moping melancholy and discontent, is sadly to miss and mistake the great design of trial. God sends it to wake us up to a sense of life's realities—not to fold our hands, but to be more in earnest than ever in our work and warfare. Oh! when He sees fit to enter our households, and, as the Great Proprietor of life, to resume His own, be it ours to acknowledge His right and prerogative to recall the grant.

"The Lord loves a cheerful giver." Although it was in a trial of which God forbid either you or I should ever know the bitterness, I know not in all Scripture a more touching picture of this silent acquiescence in God's sovereign will, than we have in the case of a parent who had seen his two worthless children smitten down before his eyes, and yet of whom we

only read that "AARON HELD HIS PEACE."

V. Finally, let us learn from this passage that Christ is the Great Vanquisher of death.

Up to this period of His public ministry, with the exception of the miracle at Nain just considered, we mainly, if not exclusively, trace His footsteps of mercy and power as the Healer of diseases—the savior of the body—the Lord of nature—the Ruler of the Spirit. We see Pain crouching importunate at His feet; Penitence creeping meekly at His side bedewing Him with tears; Sickness at His summons taking wings and fleeing away.

But He here again breaks the chains of Death. He gathers in another sheaf of that mighty Harvest of life, of which the angels are to be the Reapers in the Resurrection morning.

Note a comforting assurance He gives us—first, regarding the Dying, and second, regarding the Dead.

(1.) He tells us regarding every deathbed—that the thread of existence is in His hands—that He quickens and restores whom He will—that unto Him as "God the Lord, belong the issues of life—and death."

"Your daughter is dead" (said bold human unbelief)—"trouble not the Master." But the message is premature. He has inverted the sand-glass. He has made the shadow, as in Hezekiah's dial, to go back!

Glorious assurance! Our lives and the lives of all near and dear to us are in His keeping. It is He who sends the Angel-messenger. It is He who marks every tree in the forest—plucks every lily in the garden. My health and sickness, my joys and sorrows, my friends, my children, are in the hands of the CHRIST OF CALVARY! We, in our blind unbelief, may regard Death as some arbitrary tyrant lording it, with iron scepter, over hapless victims. But the Gospel teaches a nobler philosophy. It tells of One in heaven who has in His hands "the keys of the grave and of death," and who, at the time He sees best, but not one moment sooner, "turns man to destruction, and says, Return to dust—you children of men!"



(2.) He gives us a comforting word regarding the DEAD.

Christian, He says of your dead (the dead in Christ—true Christians), "be not afraid, only believe." "Weep not—she is not dead, but sleeps!"

Stand in thought beside the great Luther, as we see him stooping first over the deathbed of his beloved daughter, Magdalene, and then follow him in the mournful sequel of that life-sorrow. "Gracious God," he exclaims, "if it be Your will to take her hence, I am content to know that she will be with You...I would gladly keep my child, for she is very dear to me, if our Lord God would leave her with me. But His will be done. To her nothing better can happen...You dear one," he exclaimed through his tears when all was over, and he gazed upon the coffin, "how well it is with you!...You shall rise and shine like a star, yes, like the sun...You should be pleased," he added to the bystanders who had come to render the last offices of affection, "I have sent a saint to heaven."

As they returned from the funeral, "My daughter," he said, "is now provided for, both in body and soul. We Christians have nothing to complain of. We know it must be so. We are more sure of eternal life than anything else. For God, who has promised it to us for His dear Son's sake, can never lie." And, yet once more, in his silent darkened home—"Ichabod,"—from which the glory had departed—he thus writes a cherished friend—"I from my utmost heart crave that to me and all mine, to you also and all dear to us, may be given a like hour of departure; that is truly to fall asleep in the Lord."

It has been often noted that there is a beautiful and striking progression in our Lord's three miraculous raisings from the dead. This instance, we have been considering, was the first in point of time. The daughter of Jairus was raised immediately after death had taken place, when the body was still laid on its death-couch. Her soul had but taken its flight to the spirit-world, when the angels that bore it away were summoned to restore it. The second, in order of time, was the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. Death, as we then saw, had achieved a longer triumph. The customary time for lamentation had intervened; he was being borne to the sepulchral grotto when the voice of Deity sounded over his coffin. The third and last of this class of miracles, was the raising of Lazarus at

Bethany. Death had there attained a still more signal mastery. The funeral rites were over—four days had these lips been sealed before the life-giving and life-restoring word was uttered. There is ONE OTHER gigantic step in this progression. "The hour is coming when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth!"

In the first case we have cited from our present narrative, the time elapsing between the dismissal of the spirit and its recall was measured by moments, the second case by hours, the third by days; the fourth is measured by ages—centuries—millenniums! But what of that? What though we speak of the tomb as the "long home," and death as the long sleep? By Him (with whom a thousand years is as one day) that precious, because redeemed dust, shall in some mysterious way be restored. "I will ransom them," He says as He looks forward through the vista of ages to this glorious consummation—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague—O grave, I will be your destruction." Blessed, thrice blessed time!

As in this house of Jairus, it was his own loved daughter who, in form and feature, was again before them—as we beheld the widows both of Sarepta and Nain gazing on the unaltered countenances of their own cherished sons—as we shall before long find the sisters of Lazarus seeing in him who came forth from the grave, no alien form strangely altered—but the brother of their hearts, so, we believe, on that wondrous morning of immortality, shall the beloved on earth wear their old familiar smiles and loving looks—retain their personal identity.

No, further, we believe that the affections which hallowed homesteads on earth shall not be dulled, quenched, annihilated—but rather ennobled and purified. Brothers, sisters, parents, children, shall be linked once more in the fond ties and memories of earth, gathering in loving groups around the living fountains of waters, and singing together the twofold anthem of Providence and Grace—"the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb!"

If we descend for a moment from these lofty contemplations, it is to utter a brief word, in conclusion, to those who know nothing of such glorious hopes—who are locked in the slumbers of a far sadder death. Yes! there is

a more dreaded sleep and death than that of the grave! They are rather to be envied who have "fallen asleep" in Jesus. Faith, in her noblest musings, would not weep them back from their crowns, and deprive them of their bliss! But they are to be pitied who are still slumbering on in the deep sepulchral stillness of spiritual death. With deep solemnity let the monition be heard, "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life!"

When we are called, as at times we are, to hear of deathbeds in every phase of existence—in every stage of the chequered journey—manhood in the sere and yellow leaf—youth in its prime—childhood in its innocence—infancy in its tenderest bud; or when these truths come home to us as arrows feathered from our own bosoms—solemn thoughts welling up from the very deeps of our being—I know not what will make a man in earnest if such impressive lessons fail to do so! Reader! If God were to meet you tonight, could you meet Him? Would you be ready for the opened books and the Great day of judgment? Nothing—nothing will be of any avail at that hour but the life of faith in the Son of God; not the wretched peradventure of a deathbed repentance, but an honest, loving, cordial closing NOW, with that great salvation.

It is but a slender thread that binds us, or our children, to existence; every moment, truly there is but a step between us and death! Oh, that we may so live, and seek that our children may so live, that that step may be regarded as a step between us and glory. And that, when the final summons comes, it may be—what weeping friends cannot see—the chariots of salvation and the horses of fire, waiting to bear us to Paradise!

## **THE GRAVE OF AN ONLY BROTHER**

John 11:11-14

He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on My way to wake him up." Then the disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well." Jesus, however, was speaking about his death, but they thought He was speaking about natural sleep. So Jesus then told them plainly, "Lazarus has died."

"And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother."—John 11:19

"Jesus said unto her, Your brother shall rise again."—John 11:23

The early death of an only Brother may well share the sacredness of that spoken of in the former chapters.

This whole narrative has a halo of singular interest surrounding it. Perhaps there is no one single resort in the Savior's Divine pilgrimage on which sanctified affection loves so fondly to dwell as on the home and village of BETHANY. Many has been the weary footstep and tearful eye that has hastened in thought there—"gone to the grave of Lazarus to weep there!" With every reasonable probability we may infer, from the poignant sorrow of the twin hearts that were so unexpectedly broken, that he was, as just stated, a beloved and lamented only brother—a sacred, solitary prop around which their tenderest affections were entwined.

Included too, as he was, in the love which the Divine Savior bore to the household (for "Jesus loved Lazarus"), it may be that his spirit had been cast into much the same human mold as that of his beloved Lord; and that the friendship of Jesus for him had been formed on the same principles on which friendships are formed still—a similarity of disposition, some mental and moral resemblances and idiosyncrasies. They were like-minded so far as fallible nature and the nature of a stainless humanity could be assimilated. We can think of him as gentle, retiring, amiable, forgiving, heavenly-minded—an imperfect and shadowy, it may be, but still a faithful reflection and transcript of Incarnate Loveliness. May we not venture to use regarding him his Lord's eulogy on another, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit?"

As yet the home of Bethany is all happiness. The burial-ground has been untraversed since, probably years before, the dust of one, or perhaps both parents had been committed to the sepulcher. Death had long left the inhabitants an unbroken circle. Can it be that the unwelcome intruder is so near at hand?—that their now joyous dwelling is so soon to echo to the wail of lamentation? We imagine it but lately visited by Jesus. In a little while the dart has sped—the sacredness of a Divine friendship is no guarantee against the fatal missile. The sisters are bowed in the agony of their worst bereavement—the pride of their existence is laid low —"Lazarus is dead!"

The often-repeated lesson of these pages once more obtrudes itself—the uncertainty of earth's best joys and purest happiness—that the brightest sunshine is often the precursor of a dark cloud.

It is the touching record of the inspired historian in narrating Abraham's heaviest trial—"after these things, God tested Abraham." After what things? After a season of rich blessings, gilding a future with glad hopes. He would teach us—while we are glad of our gourds—not to be "exceeding glad"—not to nestle here as if we were to "live always," but rather, as we are perched on our summer boughs, to be ready at His bidding to soar away, and leave behind us what most we prize.

"LAZARUS IS DEAD!" What! Lazarus—the head and stay and comfort of two helpless females? The joy and solace of a common orphanhood—a brother evidently made and born for their adversities? What! Lazarus, whom Jesus tenderly loved? How much, even to his Lord, will be buried in that early grave! We might well have expected, if there be one homestead in all Palestine guarded by the overshadowing wings of angels to debar the entrance of the last enemy, whose inhabitants may pillow their heads night after night in the confident assurance of immunity from trial—it must surely be that beloved resort—that "arbor in His hill Difficulty," where the God-man delighted often to pause and refresh His weary body and aching mind.

Will not Omnipotence have set its mark, as of old, on the doorposts and lintels of that consecrated dwelling, so that the destroyer, in going his rounds elsewhere, may pass by it unscathed? How, too, can the infant

Church spare him? The aged Simeon, or Anna, we dare not wish to detain. Burdened with years and infirmities, after having obtained a glimpse of their Lord and Savior—let them depart in peace and receive their crowns. But one in the morning vigor of life—one so beautifully combining natural amiability with Christian grace—one who was pre-eminently the friend of Jesus—and that word profoundly suggestive of all that was lovely in a disciple's character. Death may visit other homes in that sequestered village, and spread desolation in other hearts—but surely the Church's Lord will not allow so valued a support prematurely to fall!

And yet, it is even so! The mysterious summons has come!—the most honored home on earth has been crudely rifled!—the most loving of hearts have been cruelly torn; and inscrutable is the dealing, for "Lazarus is dead!"

"He, the young, the strong, who cherished  
Noble longings for the strife,  
By the roadside fell, and perished  
On the threshold march of life!"

"Your way is in the sea, and Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps are not known!" (Psalm 77:19).

But let us be still! The Savior, indeed, does not now lead us forth amid the scene of our trial, as He did the bereft sisters, to unravel the mysteries of His providence, and to show glory to God redounding from the darkest of His dispensations. To us the grand sequel is reserved for eternity. The grand development of the Divine plan will not be fully accomplished until then; faith must meanwhile rest satisfied with what is baffling to sight and sense. There is an undeveloped future in all God's dealings. There is an unseen "why and wherefore" which cannot be answered here. Our befitting attitude and language now is that of simple confidingness—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" Listening to one of these Bethany sayings, whose meaning will be interpreted in a brighter world by Him who uttered it in the days of His flesh—"Did I not say unto you—that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

Our duty, meanwhile, is that of children, simply to trust the faithfulness of a God whose purposes of love we often fail to discover. All will be seen at last to have been not only for the best, but really the best. Dark clouds will be fringed with mercy. What are now "perplexing dispensations" will be acknowledged as wondrous parts of a great connected whole—the wheel within wheel of that complex machinery by which "all things" (yes, ALL things) are working together for good.

"Lazarus is dead!" The choicest tree in the earthly Eden may have succumbed to the blast. Some great light in the moral skies may have been extinguished. Some 'Great Heart' may have fallen on the very eve of life's battle, before opportunity were given to prove his armor, and help to share the moral victory over earth's baseness and sufferings and wrong. But God can do without human agency! His Church can be preserved though no Moses be spared to conduct Israel over Jordan—and no Lazarus to tell the story of his Savior's grace and love, when other disciples have forsaken Him and fled.

We may be calling, in our blind unbelief, as we point to some ruined fabric of earthly bliss—some tomb which has become the grave of our fondest affections and dearest hopes—"Shall the dust praise You? shall it declare your Truth?" Believe! believe! God will not give us back our dead as He did to the Bethany sisters—but He will not deprive us of anything we have—or allow one garnered treasure to be removed—except for His own glory and our good. Now it is our province to believe it—in Heaven we shall know it. Before the sapphire throne we shall see that not one unnecessary thorn has been allowed to pierce our feet—or one needless sorrow to visit our dwelling—or one unnecessary tear to dim our eye.

Beautifully does a distinguished French orator and philosopher say—"We are all of us like the weavers of the Gobelins, who, following out the pattern of an unknown artist, endeavor to match the threads of colors on the wrong side, and do not see the result of their labor. It is only when the pattern is complete, that they can admire at their ease these lovely flowers and figures—these splendid pictures worthy of the palaces of kings. So it is with us. We work, we suffer, and we see neither the end nor the fruit. But God sees it—and when He releases us from our task, He will disclose to our wondering gaze what He, the great Artist, everywhere

present and invisible, has woven out of those toils that now seem so sterile—and He will then deign to hang up in His palace of gold, the flimsy web that we have spun."

Be it ours to have Jesus with us and Jesus for us in all our afflictions. In the season of prosperity, if our homes and hearts be gladdened with His footstep, then, when prosperity is withdrawn, and is succeeded by the dark and cloudy day, we shall know, like Martha and Mary, where to rush in our hours of bitter sorrow—listening from His glorified lips on the throne to those same exalted themes of consolation which, for eighteen hundred years, have to myriad, myriad mourners been like oil thrown on the troubled sea. Jesus is with us!—"The Master has come!"—His presence will extract sorrow from the bitterest cup, and make, as He did at Bethany—a very home of bereavement and a burial scene to be "hallowed ground!"

## **THE EARLY GRAVE OF A KING**

"The righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace—they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." Isaiah 57:1, 2

"The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity; he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness." Isaiah 57:1-2

The early grave is not confined to any rank or station. "Both the small and the great are there" (Job 3:19). While "behold the Lord, the Lord Almighty takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff,...the prophet and the prudent and the ancient"—He ever and anon



rings the solemn warning-bell within palace halls—"Put not your trust in princes, nor in any man, in whom there is no help. When they breathe their last breath, they return to the ground. On that day their plans come to an end." (Psalm 146:3, 4).

On these last words the verse which heads this chapter is a significant comment. Young King Josiah, who ascended the throne of Judah at the tender age of eight, is considered, by most reliable commentators, to be "the Righteous one" here specially referred to. In harmony with Isaiah's prophetic instinct and anticipation, the youthful monarch proved himself to be the most godly of his royal race. Surely, no nobler eulogy could have been written than this—"Like unto him there was no king before him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might,...neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings 23:35).

At the age of sixteen he was brought, by means of the perusal of a copy of the Divine Law, under the fervid power of personal piety—and from that day onwards, during a memorable decade, he became priest and king in one. He commenced as an iconoclast, sweeping away from mountain and grove and valley every vestige and memorial of the idolatries sanctioned and encouraged by his apostate predecessors, and restored the purity of the Temple-worship—"repairing the breaches of the House." His acts of public devotion culminated in what may well be considered the eventful day of his reign, when, at the age of eighteen, he summoned his people to a great convocation in Jerusalem. In more than its former pomp and impressiveness, the old feast of the Passover was kept—"all Israel," as in former days, publicly renewing their covenant to their fathers' God. The longing prayer of the hidden 'seven thousand' seemed to have obtained a gracious answer—"Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?" (Ps. 85:6).

But, strange, mysterious dispensation! just when in the flower of his youth, and when his people were prospering in peace and piety under his kindhearted scepter, he is brought wounded and bleeding from the battlefield at Hadadrimmon, where he had gone to stop the march of Pharaoh—and he dies in his chariot before he can reach his palace in Jerusalem. It attests the depth and intensity of the national grief, that a

funeral dirge, composed by Jeremiah, was, for many years after, sung on the spot where he received the fatal wound—and the best choristers of Israel tendered annually their services in rendering the mournful strains.

We get but a snatch of these in the plaintive dirge of the prophet who wrote them—"Ah, my brother!...ah!, lord!—or, ah, his glory!" (Jer. 22:18). That it must, however, have been a scene and occasion of no common sorrow is farther evidenced when Zechariah uses it as a figure to describe the great future mourning and repentance of the Jews—"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon." (Zech. 12:11). "The righteous," says Isaiah (as by imparted foresight he sees the sudden eclipse of this bright star)—"The righteous (suddenly) perishes," and "merciful men" (or, as that word may be rendered—"the pious," "men of godliness and kindness"—those who are "good," fearing God and loving man) "are taken away."

Josiah's case is in some respects singular. From his public and exalted position, and the manifestation of singular virtues, the mystery we have already dwelt upon in ordinary examples, of early removal, seems intensified. For Jehovah to allow this "beauty of Israel to fall in high places," appears at first sight inconsistent alike with the Divine wisdom and power and love. It looks almost like the frustration of God's plans and purposes—a failure in His sovereign designs. In other respects the mystery is the same, whatever the rank or condition of life may be. It is the architect just completing his work—when that work comes with a crash to the ground. It is the sculptor putting the finishing-strokes of his chisel on the virgin marble—when the toil of months or years strews the floor of his studio. It is the gardener bringing forth from his green-house the choicest long-husbanded plants, in their freshness and beauty, to bask in early summer sun—when a frost or hailstorm unexpectedly comes, and in one night they have perished! It is the gourd of Jonah—the figure that has so often occurred to us—encircling some earth-bower of happiness; blighted, not, as before noted, when the noonday heat is over, or when the sun is westering, and when the shade could be dispensed with; but "in the morning"—when most needed; when, drenched with the night-dews, its growth was stimulated and its permanency seemed ensured.

To apply to those in regal positions what we have already done to those in ordinary stations, we can understand the removal of the hoary-headed kings "who made Israel to sin"—monarchs who had grown grey in iniquity. The land was well rid of such, for they lived only like the fabled upas-tree—to diffuse around them moral corruption and death. We can understand, too, the removal of the aged Israelitish patriarchs and rulers—veteran standard-bearers, who had fought their fight and finished their work, and gone to perpetuate lofty character and service in a better world—the Abrahams and Samuels and Davids who had "served their generation according to the will of God," and who, "well stricken in years," "fell asleep, and were gathered to their fathers."

But the Josiahs of early and brilliant promise—those who lived young lives of highest consecration, and diffused a hallowed influence in their age and sphere! Where is the wisdom, where is the love, in stripping the Temple of such pillars—"Beauty and Strength?" Hardly can their fellows spare them! Why is "the staff broken and the beautiful rod?" Above all (for such thoughts will, despite of better faith, force themselves on the crushed spirit—whether it be the roll of ancient Jewish kings and princes, or the everyday modern bereft British home)—WHY has God—the Great and the Good and the Loving—nurtured affections in the human bosom only prematurely to blight and destroy them? Why has He created tender ties only to be sundered? Why is the young athlete stricken down just when entering the race? Wherefore has God apparently thus made His noblest work in vain?

The words of Isaiah give a twofold answer to these questions and mysteries. The one negative, the other positive.

1. "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come." Utterly perplexing at the time, as we have now seen in the case of Josiah, was that sudden summons—"Thus says the Lord God—Remove the diadem, and take off the crown" (Ezek. 21:26)—just in the midst of his bright career, when he had inaugurated a new era of blessing among the thousands who owned his sway; a happy people rejoicing under the shadow of this young cedar of God. How strange, too, apparently, the recompense for all that pious zeal and youthful consecration, to be hurried away, in the twinkling of an eye, by the cruel shaft of an Egyptian bowman! Where was the Lord God

of Elijah and of the faithful and loyal-hearted among His Israel? "Is the Lord's hand shortened, that it cannot save?"

Such might be the musing of the mourning, patriotic band who bore their young King bleeding from the fray; such may possibly have been his own musings, as his life's-blood was ebbing, and when his eyes were dimming among the distant mountains of Samaria.

But ah! he and they were all in ignorance of the future. They had mercifully not revealed to them the impending invasion of the armies of Babylon, and the miseries which were to be entailed on his unhappy city and country! Well was it that God compassionately spared him these sorrows of siege and torture and captivity, plunder of holy treasure and firing the cities of his kingdom, by taking him away from the evil to come. Had his people, at the hour of his death, known of all that was about to befall their land, it would have moderated that loud wail of sorrow which rose from his death.

It is to this Jeremiah refers in the 22nd chapter of his Prophecies, when he thinks of Josiah peacefully sleeping with his fathers, in contrast with the wretchedness and humiliation which tracked the footsteps of his exiled successor. He addresses the nation of mourners, and thus would assuage their bitter grief—"Weep not for the dead (your dead King Josiah), neither bemoan him—but weep sore for him (his unhappy son) that goes away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country" (ver. 10). God Himself, the Lord whom the young monarch served, does not disguise from him the reason of his early departure. For this is the special message sent to him direct from Jehovah by the mouth of Huldah the prophetess, as recorded in 2 Kings 22:18-20—"To the King of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him...Because your heart was tender, and you have humbled yourself before the Lord,...I also have heard you, says the Lord. Behold I will gather you unto your fathers, and you shall be gathered into your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the evil ('the evil to come') which I will bring upon this place."

What was true of Josiah's early death is, we believe, applicable to most cases. Often when we can see no love or kindness or wisdom in these

early graves, it is because the morrow to us is mercifully veiled. God, who foresees all, graciously saves a heritage of sorrow or sin by an early removal. Better the brief loan, with all its hallowed, undarkened memories, than the prolonged life with its possible evils. Better the lamb early taken, than left, footsore and fleece-torn, to pine on blighted herbage and wander amid dry and deserted channels. Blessed, truly, in the beautiful, heavenly sense, are "the undefiled," who have, by early death, escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust; in the volume of whose heart the white leaves have their virgin purity unblotted and unstained; "taken" before impurity stirred the well of pure thought. More blessed and honored, in one sense, are those—and many such there are—who, by dint of resolute self-discipline and high principle, have bravely fought the long fight, and come out of it unwounded, unscathed; who with unabashed face can make the appeal to the great Heart-searcher, of a good conscience and a blameless life; but safer, at least, are they who, away from the sudden gusts and hurricanes of temptation, have soared early upwards, and with unsoiled plumage, unruffled wings, have sank into the clefts of the Rock forever. If they had been allowed to remain longer on earth, who can tell but some baneful influences might have blighted fair promise and belied fond hopes? But before the storm-cloud could descend, the Great Giver, in mercy, gave the summons.

Oh, what would thousand thousands give, who are now drifting as miserable wrecks on life's sea—health, innocence, purity gone—what would such give to be as they are, inheriting in all its grandeur that best beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"? Yes, and in the case of bereaved parents, how many a bitter tear-drop would be dried, and broken heart solaced and comforted, if, remembering all the perils of this world of sin and suffering, and with the bright retrospect of lives suddenly cut short, they would listen to the utterance of Isaiah, like a sweet chime wafted from the Temple of Heaven, "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come!"

But the words of the Prophet give also a positive explanation of the mystery of early death (ver. 2)—

2. "He shall enter into peace—they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." Rather, as it has been rendered, "each one

walking straight before him;" or, as Bishop Lowth translates it, "he who walks in the straight path."

Josiah, the youthful, the good, the pious, when he died, "entered into peace." It is a beautiful Old Testament evidence of the immediate blessedness of the departed righteous. His body rested in the tomb as in a 'bed' or couch; his spirit—the spirit that walked so 'uprightly' on earth, with no divergence from the path of duty and piety—continues, in a loftier state of existence, this elevated 'walk.' The work cut short in this lower world is not arrested; it is only transferred. In a higher and loftier sphere he still pursues active ministries of righteousness.

There is an evident contrast between these opening words of the chapter and the terrible refrain with which it closes—"There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked;" none in life, none in death. But "the righteous," thus taken away, "enter into peace."

Another thought, too, is brought out in the original which we miss in our translation, and which suggests the same assurance of immediate bliss. It occurs in the words just quoted—"The righteous is taken away." "Merciful men are taken away;" this in the Hebrew is, "The righteous, the merciful, are gathered"—gathered to their fathers—the same expression regarding Josiah which God Himself put into the lips of Huldah—"I will gather you to your fathers"—"You shall be gathered to your grave in peace." It is not 'taken away,' as if some violent seizure, a wrench from friendship and happiness, and from all association with living souls. No! it is rather a joining of the great company, a being gathered to the gathering of the sainted dead. The early death of Josiah, and such as he, is the morning chime which summons to the upper sanctuary, to unite in the worship of the great congregation. It is the vessel entering the haven of eternal rest; but that haven not in a silent, deserted shore, but a harbor crowded with the loving and the glorified; a world not of loneliness, but rather of fellowship and communion with the great and the good, and the true of all ages.

Reader, if the death of the young was annihilation; if the orb underwent eternal eclipse; if there were even a period of intermediate suspension of consciousness and active energy—then such removal would be

mysterious; the blank would be a blank indeed. But the sun has not been blotted out from the skies; it has only disappeared amid these western clouds to illuminate some other section of God's great world; lost to earth, it shines in Heaven. Yes, more; whatever path of uprightness the departed one followed below, he or she is following that path above. Heaven is but an expansion and development of the characteristic traits of earth—"He who is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he who is holy, let him be holy still."

We can stand beside the death-bed of the young believer, and as we are musing over that touching spectacle of baffled energy, paralyzed activity, premature decay of physical and mental power, early removal alike from earth's duties and earth's joys—while on the one hand we can take hold of the negative solace, that by so soon entering the haven he has been possibly spared many a "night and day on the deep"—we can rise to nobler and better and brighter assurances. We can listen as to the whispering of angels hovering around his pillow—"He shall enter into peace—he shall walk in his uprightness."

One other thought on early death may be suggested by these words. The body rests in the 'bed' of the grave, and the spirit has entered into peace in heaven; but while that spirit is there pursuing its onward path of bliss and glory, it has not, in the truest sense, bid farewell to its earthly sphere. If I revert to a thought already dwelt upon, it is because of its elevating comfort. The lips are silenced, the music of the voice is hushed, the blank of the absent is too painfully realized. But "the righteous" survive dissolution even in this world. In their deathless memories of goodness and worth, they continue to "walk." The 'uprightness' is not laid by with their funeral shroud, or merely carved in the epitaph on their gravestones. No! it lives. The sun has vanished, but the glow still reddens the mountain-tops and glorifies the evening clouds.

Josiah died! It was in one sense the last of him, when he was borne away on that bloody coffin from the valley of Megiddo; or, at all events, when, as in great pomp, they laid him in the tombs of the Kings in Jerusalem. It is said that "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him." But, in the noblest meaning of the words, he lived on for generations afterwards. We read in 2 Chron. 35:26, "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his

goodness (uprightness),...and his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah." They were written in a more enduring volume. They were written deep on his own nation's heart. They are written in imperishable memorial in the chronicles of the great and good of all time. He shines, this day, as a clear fixed star in the olden skies, and will thus shine on forever!

"Early death!" That "early" is a term only relative to the body—that which rests in the bed of the grave. The young life which has shone gloriously for God, though now a fallen meteor, has left a track of radiance behind it, for which parent and brother and sister will forever bless Him who gave the transient boon!

You who may, with sad heart, be often and again tempted to mourn those thus early removed—who read that promise of long life apparently broken and stultified on the letters of an early tomb, and who think the Psalmist's words most appropriate to trace on the marble, "He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days" (Ps. 102:23); be comforted! God measures existence—we cannot too often repeat it—not by periods, or by decades, or jubilees; with Him character is life, not years; goodness is life, not years. "The righteous," whether he has fallen at the very threshold of existence, or in the prime of youth, or in the glory of manhood, or survived to a green old age—"The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

## **A FIRST EARLY GRAVE**

"The firstling of his flock."—Gen. 4:4

"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love."—Gen. 22:2

"As one mourns for his only son."—Zech. 12:10



"As on whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you."—Isa. 66:13

Such a title, to many a child of affliction, is touchingly suggestive. Solemn is the present hour on which you have entered. The shadows of death, for the first time, are falling around you. Your dwelling has been entered and despoiled—not of the aged and decrepit and toilworn—but of life in its earliest prime. Often before have you heard of trial. You may have visited over and over again the house of mourning. You may even have dealt out lessons of comfort to others. The doors of neighbors and friends you have seen darkened, but the King of Terrors has until now passed you by. Your turn has at last come!—The invader has broken into your own fond circle. For the first time yours is a house of death—yours the bitterness of a First Bereavement. "Ah, what lessons our dear Lord is now teaching you—lessons which angels can never learn—teaching by heart what was only known before by rote!" (Lady Powerscourt's Letters.)

I know not what may be the special feature in this your early lesson in the school of trial. Possibly some darling child, who has imperceptibly been entwining its every heartstring around you, wrenched from your embrace.

The trial may have overtaken with appalling suddenness. The hurricane may have swept your loved one down in the midst of brightest sunshine. The summons may have come at the time when the joy of your heart could be least spared; when most prized, most needed. It may have been a cherished life, rich with the promise of usefulness to the Church or the world. It would seem as if some anticipated piece of music had scarce its prelude or overture played, when the voices in a moment ceased; the music is hushed, the lights are extinguished; the program only begun when ended. With the drooping and blighting of that tender flower, your present feeling is—

"There's not on earth the living thing  
To which the withered heart can cling."

How altered your feelings amid the world's familiar din and bustle! The unsympathizing crowd, all unconscious of what is transacting within your threshold, are hurrying by as before. They are exchanging with one another the same joyous recognitions, they are clad in the same gay

attire, the same merry chimes mark the passing hour; and yet, to you, all is sicklied over with enduring sadness; every scene and association which whispers gladness to others, wakes no response but that of sorrow in your heart. The silent chamber!—it echoes to your lonely voice. The happy fireside circle!—there is a vacant seat. The favorite walk—the cherished haunt!—the smile that made it so, is gone. Ah! life has indeed become like the "flat, bare, oozy tide-mud, when the blue sparkling wave, with all its company of gliding boats and white-winged ships, the music of oars and chiming waters, has gone down." Your mind is filled with ten thousand conflicting feelings, to which you dare not give utterance; the holy visions of the past flitting before you like shadows on the wall; the future all darkness and mystery. Your pining spirit, in the first gush of its bitterness, turns away, refusing to be comforted; the feelings of an old sufferer are too truthfully the transcript of your own—"Call me not Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). In one terrible sense is the Scripture saying expounded, "Old things have passed away, and all things have become new."

"Oh, you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," unschooled and undisciplined in these fiery trials—He who brought you into the furnace will lead you through! He has never failed in the case of any of His "poor afflicted ones" to realize His own precious promises. All is mystery to you now—nothing but wrecked plans and blighted hopes—a future of unutterable desolation. But He will yet vindicate His dealings. Even on earth He often leads us to see and learn "the need be." And if not on earth, at least in glory, there will be a grand revelation of ineffable wisdom and love in this very trial which is now bowing your head like a bulrush, and making your eyes a very fountain of tears. "He is in all providences," says Bunyan, "be they ever so bitter, ever so afflicting, ever so smarting, ever so destructive to our earthly comforts. Every bitter cup is of His preparing; it is Jesus, your best friend (O you poor, poor believers), who most dearly loves you, that appoints all providences, orders them all, overrules, moderates, and sanctifies them all, and will sweeten them all, and in His due time will make them profitable unto you, that you shall one day have cause to praise and bless His name for them all."

Though I have dwelt on the depth of your bereavement, I do not write to aggravate your sorrow. My design is rather to solace, and to lead you submissively to say, "Your will be done." Let me only throw out one or two simple reflections; and may "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations," make us able to "comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4)

A FIRST EARLY TRIAL!—Was it not NEEDED? The world may have been becoming too engrossing; alienating your love, dimming your view of "the better country." Commune with your own heart, and say, Was not this (sad though it be) the very discipline required? Less would not have done to wean me from earth. I was lulled in self-security—living in a state of awful forgetfulness of my God—insensible of His mercies—unmindful of His goodness—taking my blessings as matters of course—a secret atheism! More than this—of the magnitude of "things not seen" I had no vivid and realizing consciousness. I felt as if death could never disturb 'my dream of happiness'. He had been going his rounds on every side, but I never could anticipate the time when the spoiler could rush upon my beloved family circle and make such a gap as this!

If such be anything of a truthful picture, was it not love and kindness in Him who woke (though with a voice of thunder) from this perilous dream? He saw it needful, "by terrible things in righteousness," to bring back your truant, wandering heart, and fix once more its affections on Himself as their only satisfying portion. "Your Heavenly Father never thought this world's 'painted glory' a gift worthy of you, and therefore He has taken out the best thing it had in your sight, that He might Himself fill the heart He had wounded with Himself." (Evans.) The threads of life may have been weaved into a bright web. He gave you prosperity—but it was that awful thing, "unsanctified prosperity"—"because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

He would not allow you thus to be left alone, to settle in the downy nest of self-ease and forgetfulness. He has roused you on the wing; and pointed your upward soarings to their only true resting-place, in His own everlasting presence, and friendship, and love. "Ah! it is indeed humiliating," says the same devout man whose words we have last

quoted, "that we require so many stripes to force us, as it were, to God—when there is enough in Him to draw us to Himself, and to keep us with Himself forever!" But better surely all these painful stripes than to be left unchecked in our downward career. It has been well said, "The sorest word God ever spoke to Israel was, 'Why should you be stricken any more?'" This wayward heart was throwing out its fibers on every side and rooting them down to earth. He had to unroot them from things that are of "earth, earthy," and fasten them on Himself as all in all!

A FIRST EARLY TRIAL!—Had it not its GRACIOUS MITIGATIONS? At first sight this may appear a strange admission. There may seem no alleviating drop in your cup. But such there always are. "Have you ever marked," says a writer who knew well what the furnace was—"have you ever marked His gentleness when bringing a painful message? how He usually calls by name, 'Abraham, Abraham!' 'Moses, Moses?'"

Yes! I truly believe that there are few afflicted children of God but can echo the expression of the tried Psalmist, "I will sing of mercy and of judgment." (Mercy first, then judgment!) Let each of these mercies be a voice of comfort to you. Have there been kind friends sent to share the bitterness of your sorrow and give you the tribute of their valued sympathy? Ask those who, from peculiar circumstances, may have been denied this boon—who in their hour of trial have been left unbefriended to weep in silence and in solitude their first tears—if there be no mercy in this?

Again, your chief blessing may have been taken away from you; but many precious ties yet remain, and the loss you have sustained knits together the broken links in holier and more sacred bonds than before. Ask those who have carried their all to the grave—who have been left like a solitary tree of the forest, alone—if there be no blessing in having the voice of doubly-endearred survivors to mingle together common sympathy and recount the hallowed memories of the departed?

Or, better than all, Is the loss you mourn the eternal gain of the absent one? Oh! ask those who have to muse in silent agony over the thought of those gone unprepared to meet their God, Is it no mercy (no, rather is it not the most exalted of consolations—that which disarms death and

bereavement of all its bitterness) that "the loved and lost" are the crowned and glorified? "We may not here below," says Cyprian, "put on dark robes of mourning, when they above have put on the white robes of glory." "The birds are fled away, having outgrown our care, to fill a bough on the tree of life, and charm us on to follow after them." "I have had six children, and I bless God for His free grace that they are all with Christ or in Christ, and my mind is now at rest concerning them. My desire was that they should have served Christ on earth, but if God will choose to have them rather serve Him in heaven, I have nothing to murmur at; His will be done." (Elliot.) "All our dear relations that died in Christ," in the words of Bunyan, the great Puritan, "are in the highest heavens. While we are fighting, sighing, and sobbing here below, they are with blessed Jesus above, according to His prayer for them, seeing His glory and participating in it."

**A FIRST EARLY TRIAL!**—Is there not **A SPECIALLY LOUD VOICE** in it? You may have heavier trials and severer losses than this, but never will God's voice speak louder to you than now. It is the loudest knock that can be heard at the door of your heart! Felix might have heard another (perhaps even a more powerful) sermon from Paul "on righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come"—but I believe he would not have again trembled, as he did, when for the first time these appalling realities were presented to his mind.

So with a first bereavement—and therefore it has its solemn responsibilities! Let it not die away in fainter and yet fainter echoes, like the subsiding thunder. Let it be accompanied with the response—"Lord, what would You have me to do?" Seek to feel that God has some great end in view—some wise meaning to subserve—some gracious lesson to teach. Let it be as a 'warning angel' telling you to strike your tent and pitch it nearer heaven—"Arise and depart, for this is not your rest!" As we have seen the timid bird hopping from bough to bough until it reach the topmost branch, and then winging its flight to the sky; so is affliction designed to drive the soul from perch to perch, from refuge to refuge, higher and still higher, until at last it soars upward to the heaven of its God."

**THE FIRST TRIAL!**—Is it not the most befitting season either for a first,

or for a renewed CONSECRATION to God's service? Like a vessel driven from its moorings, you may be drifting unpiloted on a tempestuous sea. Let these raging waters lead you to take shelter in the quiet haven. "Build your nest upon no tree here; for you see God has sold the forest to death—and every tree upon which we would rest is ready to be cut down; to the end we may flee and mount up, and build upon the Rock." (Samuel Rutherford,) If at this season you are a stranger to the power of vital religion, uncheered by its precious, gracious promises, you are to be pitied indeed. There is no sadder spectacle than the unbefriended, orphaned, widowed, or withered heart—ungladdened by one beam of Bible consolation—the dark valley traversed with no ray of Gospel hope to pierce its shadows!

Equally mournful if the heart be unhumbled—if it refuses to bear the rod—if the death chamber only re-echo with your murmurings, and the chastened soul be unable to point to any "peaceable fruit of righteousness," as the result of the Divine dealings! There is a depth of meaning in what a son of consolation has said, as he mingles exhortations with solaces—"Unsanctified trials become deep afflictions."

On the other hand, if you are no stranger to Him who is "the God of all comfort," or if until the present a stranger, you are ready to avail yourself of the solitary solace in such an hour, what a hallowed experience yours is! With all the unutterable, untold depths of your sorrow, I know not a time fuller of more chastened joy than the mourning Christian's chamber—when the world is shut out, and he is alone with God! The sun of his earthly happiness set; but this only allowing the clustering constellations of Divine consolation to shine the brighter—the stars of Bible promise coming out, one by one, like ministering angels—the revelation of scenes which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived!"

As in a time of rain and cloud the distant hills look nearer, so do the everlasting hills of glory appear, in the cloudy and dark day, nearer, more glorious—sparkling with ten thousand rills of love and covenant-faithfulness. You breathe their bracing stimulating atmosphere as you have never done before! If thus cheered, yours is indeed an enviable experience. You have One by you and with you, who can fill all blanks and compensate for all losses; who can make your solitary chamber of

mourning a Patmos—bright as the Aegean Isle was to John, with manifestations of a Savior's presence and love. "If death did come alone to us," again says Bunyan, "it would be terrible indeed; its ghastly countenance would affright us. But here is the comfort—that Christ our dearest Lord will come with death to sweeten it to us, and support us under it....Though it be the King of Terrors in itself, and a grim porter, yet by Jesus' coming with it, it shall be the King of Comforts."

Remember, affliction has always been God's peculiar method of dealing with His own people. It is because He loves them He chastises them. "I have chosen you," says He, "in the furnace of affliction." As an old writer says, "He instructs His scholars in the school of the Law, and in the school of the Gospel, but He has a third class for advanced learners, and that is the school of Trial." A sublime dialogue between a saint on earth and a saint in heaven represents each member of the white-robed multitude as having graduated in this same school. "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where do they come from?" "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation." Rev. 7:13-14

Seek alike to exercise simple faith in the wisdom of God's dealings—the unswerving rectitude of His dispensations, and to magnify His name by the sweet exercise of the grace of patience. This is a grace peculiar to the saints on earth. It is unknown in heaven, where there are no trials to call it into exercise. Think what a drop in the ocean of suffering is your trial, in comparison with what the Prince of sufferers underwent for you, whose exceptional experience was this, "ALL Your waves and Your billows have gone over Me!" He could make a challenge to a whole world of sufferers, which to this hour remains unanswered, and ever will remain, "Was there ever any sorrow like unto MY sorrow?" Child of God! believe it, there is not one drop of wrath in the bitter cup you are now drinking. He took all that was bitter out of it, and left it a cup of love!

A little while and the night of weeping will be over, and a gentle hand in a tearless world will dry up the very source of tears. "There is no night THERE,"—no bereavement either to be experienced or dreaded! Every day is bringing you nearer that blissful reality, nearer reunion with the glorified—nearer Him who is now standing with the hoarded treasures of eternity in His hand, and the hoarded love of eternity in His heart! How

will one brief moment there banish in everlasting oblivion all the pangs and sorrows of the valley of weeping! "When you have passed," says a man of God who is now realizing the truth of his own words, "to the other side of that narrow river, to the which we shall so shortly come, you will have no doubt that all you have undergone was little enough for the desired end."

Meanwhile, return to life's duties with the spirit of "a weaned child," exhibiting meek acquiescence in the sovereign will of your God. Your trial was not designed to absolve you from earth's avocations. God has given you, indeed, a season of quiet calm and seclusion during these first overwhelming hours of sorrow. He has taken you, kindly and mercifully, out from the world's noise and bustle into the secret of His own presence, that no secular, harassing earthly thoughts or anxiety may obtrude themselves upon you. In His own beautiful figure, "Behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness (the silent place, the silent season), and will speak comfortably unto her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor (trouble), a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14).

You remember how Jesus dealt with His own disciples when He first startled them with the announcement of their greatest sorrow, that is, 'that He, their beloved Lord and Master, was to die a shameful death on the cross.' There was the cessation, for a whole week, of public teaching and miracle. He and they seemed to have spent that week of superhuman sadness in meditative loneliness and abstraction from ordinary duty. For it was "after six days," says one Evangelist, that the time of seclusion and silence was broken, and He took them up to the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28). Oh, glorious result of that season of soul-sadness—the announcement to the twelve of their impending desolating bereavement!—because it ended in what? In the grand and glorious result of all trial to God's children—seeing their Lord transfigured before them!

You may, like these disciples, at first, "fear to enter into the cloud." But you need not! He takes His people still, up from the valleys of trial and sorrow to be on the Mount of glory with Himself—giving them new manifestations of His grace and love—leading from the place of mourning



up to the very gates of heaven—"they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only." (Mark 9:8). Yet, carefully observe, that bright, transcendent, transfiguration-scene is not to last. The week of sorrow and its elevating experiences are at an end, and they are summoned once more down from the Sabbath mount to the old scene of trial and of conflict. Yes! return to life's duties! It is by no means the smallest part of your trial thus to go out to breathe the cheerless air of the world again—and mingle with a saddened and crushed spirit amid scenes where all is uncongenial. But impossible as it may now seem, "the waves of life," to use the words of a writer already quoted, "must and will settle back to their usual flow where that treasured bark has gone down. For how imperiously, how coolly, in disregard of all one's feeling, does the hard, cold, uninteresting course of daily realities move on! Still must we eat and drink, and sleep and wake again—still bargain, buy, sell, ask and answer questions—pursue, in short, a thousand shadows, though all interest in them be over—the cold mechanical habit of living, remaining after all vital interest in it has fled."

But "as your day, so shall your strength be." You know not, until you make trial of it, all the blessed fullness and truthfulness of this precious assurance. "You are about," says one deeply experienced, "to enter into realities of consolation you have never imagined to be in God." You have heard ten thousand broken hearts tell in no pretend words, what their experience has been. "We have been wonderfully supported." And what was the secret of it? Let the Apostle Answer—"The Lord stood by me and strengthened me!" He proportions grace to trial. Your extremity is His opportunity.

"They went through the flood on foot," says the Psalmist—"There did we rejoice in Him." Beautiful picture! or rather, glorious testimony to the sustaining grace of God; a firm footing amid the threatening waves—no, more, "THERE!" (when the billows were around us; in the very midst of our affliction)—"THERE did we rejoice in Him!" He will deal tenderly, wisely, lovingly with you. He does not "pour down waterfloods on the mown grass." He considers His people's case.

There is no Bible figure on which the Christian mourner dwells with such delight as that of the Refiner of silver sitting by the furnace of His own lighting—tempering its heat—regulating the fury of its flames—quenching

the violence of the fires—designing all, ALL—not to consume and destroy, but to purify and brighten. That REFINER, too, from deep-felt experience, knows your sorrows. "I have had a deep, a very deep wound," says Lady Powerscourt; "the trial has been very severe, but how would I have known Him as a Brother born for adversity without it?...He has gone through every class in our wilderness-school; He seems intent to fill up every gap love has been forced to make. One of His errands from heaven was to bind up the broken-hearted."

You can hear, as it were, the voice of the departed stealing down from the heights of glory, and thus, as Boaz said to Ruth, gently rebuking your fast-falling tears—"It is true that I am your near kinsman, howbeit there is a Kinsman nearer than I!" (Ruth 3:12). Though earthly ties have been severing, He still "lives and loves." "She was," said good old Philip Henry, when writing of Lady Puleston, who died in 1658, "She was the best friend I had on earth, but my Friend in heaven is still where He was, and He will never leave me nor forsake me."

"Whatever, whomsoever you have lost, you have not lost your Jesus, your best Friend. You have His eye, His tender, watchful, provident eye upon you still; you have His ear open to your cries still; yes, you have His everlasting arms underneath you to sustain you still, for else you would sink...To have a Friend in heaven, and such a Friend, so wise, so powerful, so faithful, so merciful, so sensibly affected with all our misery—so tender, so able, and so willing to bear and help us!—I say this is infinitely better than all the friends that ever we had or could have on earth." (Bunyan.)

Trust Him. He will "guide you (no, He is guiding you) by His counsel—and afterward"—"AFTERWARD!"—It is not for you to scan that word! It may be one of painful significance; it may be after much discipline; it may be after a rough and rugged and thorny road—trial upon trial. Remember what follows that "AFTERWARD"—"He will receive you into Glory!" Soon the last ripple of affliction will be heard, and then its sound will die away forever! Entering the triumphal arch of heaven, you will read in living characters the history of a sinless, sorrowless future—"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain—for the

former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

## SECOND CAUSES

"Then MARTHA said unto Jesus—Lord, IF you had been here, my brother would not have died."—John 11:21

"Then when MARY had come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him—Lord, IF you had been here, my brother would not have died."—John 11:32

At no time more than on the occasion of early deaths and early graves does the sad brooding over 'second causes' come into painful, and sometimes unworthy conflict with the Christian's better faith and loftier confidences.

The words of both the Bethany mourners, which head this meditation, the natural expression of their sorrowing spirits, may help to carry with them to the heart of the bereaved, lessons alike of tender rebuke and of patient resignation.

It is unnecessary again to rehearse the narrative, which has furnished us with the subject of a previous paper. Martha had already, in her interview with her Master, and her sister Mary now repeats in broken accents, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Often at a season of sore bereavement some one poignant thought or reflection takes possession of the mind, and, for the time, overmasters every other. This echo of the one mourner's utterance by the other, leads us to conclude that it had been a familiar and often-quoted phrase during these days of protracted agony. This independent quotation, indeed, on the part of each, gives a truthful beauty to the whole inspired story.

The twin sisters—musing on the terrible past, gazing through their tears on the vacant seat at their home-hearth—had been every now and then breaking the silence of the deserted chamber by exclaiming, "If He had been with us, this never would have happened! This is the bitterest drop in our cup—that all might have been different! These hot tears might never have dimmed our eyes; our beloved Lazarus might have been a living and loving brother still! Oh, that the Lord had delayed for a brief week that needless journey to Perea, or anticipated by four days His longed-for return; or would that we had despatched our messenger earlier for Him! It is now too late. Though He has at last come, His advent can be of little avail. The fell destroyer has been at our door before Him. He may soothe our grief, but the blow cannot be averted. His friend and our brother is locked in sleep too deep to be disturbed!"

Is it not, we repeat, the same unkind surmise which is still often heard in the hour of bereavement and in the home of death?—a guilty, unholy brooding over second causes—"If such and such had been done, my child would still be alive! If that means, or that remedy, or that judicious caution had been employed—this terrible overthrow of my earthly hopes would never have occurred—that beloved one would have been still walking at my side—that chaplet of sorrows would not now have been girding my brows—the Bethany sepulcher would have been unopened—my son, my daughter, my sister, my brother—would not have died!"

Hush! hush! these guilty insinuations—that dethroning of God from the providential sovereignty of His own world—that hasty and inconsiderate verdict on His Divine procedure.

"IF You had been here!" Can we, dare we doubt it? Is the departure of the immortal soul to the spirit-world so trivial a matter that the life-giving God takes no cognizance of it? No! Afflicted one, in the deep night of your sorrow, you must rise above "adverse coincidences"—you must cancel the words "accident" and "fate" from your vocabulary of trial. God, your God, was there! If there are perplexing accompaniments, be assured they were of His permitting! All was planned—wisely, kindly planned. Question not the unerring rectitude of His dealings. Though apparently absent, He was really present. The apparent veiling of His countenance is only what Cowper calls "the severer aspect of His love." It is not for us to dictate

what the procedure of infinite love and wisdom should be.

To our dim and distorted views of things, it might have been more for the glory of God and the Church's good if the poet's "beautiful bird of light," quoted in our last, had still "sat with its folded wings" before it sped so soon to nestle in the eaves of heaven. But if its earthly song has been early hushed—if those full of promise have been allowed rather to fall asleep in Jesus—be assured it was from no lack of power or ability on God's part, that they were not recalled from the gates of death.

Mourner! if the child whom you bewail is now in glory among the ingathered multitude, forever beyond reach of sinning and sorrowing, the turmoil and the battle—can you upbraid your God for his early departure? Would you weep him back, if you could, from his early heritage of bliss?

Fond nature, as it stands in trembling agony watching the ebbing pulses of life, would willingly arrest the pale messenger—stay the chariot—have the wilderness relighted with his smile, and the future radiant with the gleams which youthful intelligence and truth had promised.

But when all is over, and you are able to contemplate, with calm emotion, the untold joy into which the unfettered spirit has entered, do you not feel as if it were cruel selfishness alone that would divest that sainted one of his glory, and bring him back to grapple with earth's cares and tribulations?

Yes, "You have been here!" All has been ordered, arranged, appointed. Believer! how tenderly considerate is your dear Lord! Well may you make it your prayer, "Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are His mercies!" When a father inflicts on his wayward child the severest and harshest discipline, none but he can tell the bitter heart-pangs of yearning love that accompany every stroke of the rod. So it is with your Father in heaven; with this difference, that the earthly parent may act unwisely, arbitrarily, indiscreetly—he may misjudge the necessities of the case—he may do violence and wrong to the natural disposition of his offspring. Not so with a wise Heavenly Parent. He will inflict no unneeded chastisement. Man may err, has erred, and is ever erring. But

"The Lord is righteous in all His ways!"

## DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Oh, sad are they who can observe  
No higher God than destiny  
Ruling this world so fair;  
Who in life's loom the shuttles see  
Weaving their web capriciously,  
Without Craftsman;  
Their bark, unpiloted, astray,  
The sport of fitful winds and spray,  
Like self-abandoned castaway,  
Drifting they know not where!

## **ASLEEP IN JESUS**

"God will bring with Jesus, those who have fallen asleep IN HIM." 1 Thes.  
4:14

Bereaved parents! here is another glimpse which Faith, while seated in the valley, takes of "the land that is very far off," but which at times, too, is brought so very near! We may first state the special occasion of the words at the head of this meditation.

As the great Apostle was now at Corinth, living with Aquila and Priscilla, his beloved son Timothy had brought him from Thessalonica encouraging tidings of the Church he had there founded.

But in that good report there were mingled also tidings of death—among these, doubtless, young as well as old. The bereaved were, moreover, undergoing needless sorrow because the deceased had been removed

before the coming of Christ. The Thessalonians, in common with other of the infant Churches, entertained unfounded expectations regarding the imminence of the Second Advent. They imagined it so near at hand that they would live to behold it; and when they saw the beloved members of their families or fellow-Christians taken away, they mourned specially at their being deprived of sharing in the joy of welcoming a returning Lord. This Epistle, from which our motto-verse is taken, was written (among other reasons) to comfort and console the sorrow-stricken. It is interesting and remarkable that the first letter of Paul is thus a letter to the bereaved! It is an "afflicted man's companion." The Spirit of the Lord, by inspiration, was upon him. The Lord anointed him "to heal the broken-hearted."

And what says he to these drooping, saddened spirits? He tells them not to despond, but to rejoice. "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." 1 Thes. 4:13-14

There is no more expressive symbol of higher and diviner verities than the sleep of the body and the subsequent waking in the morning. It is beautiful to see the surging waves of daily life rocking themselves to rest—to note, say, in some vast city, when night has drawn its curtains around, light after light put out in the windows, the street lamps paying solitary homage to the stars as they look down from their lofty mansions. What a hush pervades the recent 'stunning tide of human care and crime!' Why? Because sleep is locking up ten thousand eyes of those who are dreaming away care and sorrow, fatigue and toil. But anon, as the gates of morning open, and when from the silent monitors of fleeting time the hour summoning to labor strikes, in a moment the ring of countless hammers breaks the trance of night. All is again astir. Sleep has refreshed the workman's wearied body; sleep has put new pith and sinew in that brawny arm. The whole world has arisen like a giant refreshed, and sleep has been the elixir that has soothed its wounds and healed its pains.

We need not wonder, then, that this priceless boon to the weary, has been

taken by God Himself to describe the quiet rest of His own people in the grave. David, the man after God's own heart, after he had served his day and generation, "fell asleep." Stephen, when struck down by his murderers, "fell asleep." In the beautiful words on the frontispiece of this volume—which we have there specially associated with the death of the young—"So gives He His beloved sleep!"

But what means Paul by this sleep? Is it the sleep of the soul? Is it that the spirit, at the moment of dissolution, falls into a state of torpor or insensibility, in which it remains until startled at last by the trumpet of God? No! Let us recur to the analogy of earthly sleep. We know that when the body is in a state of profound repose, when the eye is closed in seeming unconsciousness on the pillow, it is only apparently so. The mind is in a constant state of activity; all its powers are vigorous as ever. Memory is there, bringing up old and treasured scenes. Imagination is there, combining these in strange, fantastic medley. Gorgeous visions come and go—magnificent combinations, in comparison with which waking realities are dull, prosaic, and commonplace. So it is with the soul at death. While the body "sleeps" in its grassy bed, the spirit is expatiating in regions of activity and life. It departs "to be with Christ, which is far better."

The words of the verse we are now pondering may bear the beautiful rendering we have before alluded to (see Wycliffe, Cranmer, and Rheims Version), "Those also who are laid asleep by Jesus!"—a rendering which, among others, suggests two comforting thoughts—two most gracious whispers from these voices of heavenly consolation.

(1.) That the hour of our death is appointed by Jesus. We are laid asleep by Him. Just as the mother knows the best hour to lay her little one in its couch or cradle—undresses it, composes it to rest, sings its lullaby—and the cherub face, lately all smiles, is now locked in quiet repose; so Christ comes to all His children, of whatever age, at His own selected season, and says, "Your hour of rest has arrived. I am to take off the garments of mortality. Come! I will robe you in the vestments of the tomb." He smooths the narrow bed, composes the pillow, and sings His own lullaby of love, "Fear not, my child, for I am with you; sleep on now and take your rest!" Be comforted with this blessed truth, that the hour of death cannot



come a moment sooner than Jesus appoints. He knows the best time to bid you and yours the long "good-night." Interesting it is (and a Bible truth too) to think of troops of angels hovering over the death-pillow, and watching with guardian care the sleeping dust of the "Early Grave." But more comforting still, surely, is it to think of the Lord of angels closing the eyes and hushing to slumber—Christ Himself leading to the tomb—the robing-room of immortality—"unclothing," that His people may be "clothed upon," and that "mortality may be swallowed up of life."

(2.) A second suggested thought is, that the body belongs to Christ. The soul, indeed, is more specially His. It wings its arrowy flight up to the spirit world. Angels carry it into Abraham's bosom, and from that hour it is "forever with the Lord." But what of the material framework? What of the marble tenement? Is it left to crumble in dishonor and corruption? Now that the jewel is gone, is the casket to be disowned? Now that the vestal fire is quenched, is the temple left to moulder in oblivion? No, it is the body to which Paul in these words refers. It is the body that is "laid asleep by Jesus." Every particle of that dust of the sepulcher was purchased by His blood. The Apostle elsewhere speaks of "body as well as spirit which are His" (1 Cor. 6:20).

You who have cherished young treasures in the tomb, come and seat yourselves under this shadow of comfort. Rejoice in the assurance that these earthly tabernacles are in His custody. The loving hand of Divine parental love was the last to close their eyes; and, in the prospect of waking on an eternal morrow, you can go to their graves, and think of them as having migrated to the Better Land, away forever from the harsh jarrings and discords and tumults of this.

(3) Once more, connect this "blessed hope" with that which imparts to it alike its blessedness and its certainty—the Resurrection of Christ. That glorious Resurrection is the pledge and earnest of your own, and that of your beloved dead.

The pledges of the outer material creation are welcome and joyful. We hail with grateful spirit the first budding of early spring in grove and field, because in these we see the promise and pledge that soon nature will be arrayed in her full robes of resurrection beauty. With what feelings ought

we to stand by the sepulcher of our Lord, and see the buried Conqueror rising triumphant over the last enemy! Do we not behold in Him the harbinger of an immortal springtime, or rather a glorious harvest, when the mounds of the earth and the caves of the ocean shall surrender what they have held for ages in sacred custody—"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision"—when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality." "Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming!"

Mourners, think of this! In one sad sense, indeed, you have buried your dead out of your sight. "The house of their earthly tabernacle" is a "darksome ruin." Dust is resolved into its kindred dust. The constituent elements of the dismantled framework are incorporated with new forms of matter. We do not wish to strew the dismal path with flowers. Death, from the earthly view of it, is not irradiated by one gleam of sunshine. The slow and gradual wasting and decay, the wearisome days, the long night-vigils, the mind participating not infrequently with the wreck of the body, memory often a blank, the fondest look and the fondest name eliciting no response! Then the close of all—the knocking at the mysterious gates of a mysterious future—the empty chamber, where "echo slumbers"—the noiseless footfall, the mute crowd of mourners, the grave, the return to the silent dwelling, and the vacant seat. O Death, truly here is your sting—O Grave, truly here is your victory!

But the day is coming when all these memories of woe shall vanish, like the darkness before the morning sun—when the spoil of plundering ages shall in a marvelous way be all restored—when, as in the Prophet's Valley of Vision, bone shall come to bone, and sinew to sinew. The old loving smiles of earth will be seen again in the newly-glorified body—the drooping withered flower reviving, beauteous and fragrant with the bloom of perennial summer. "Why are you weeping?" was the question of the Risen Conqueror, as He gazed on a tearful eye at the Resurrection morn. The Christian's grave need be watered by no tears—for Jesus, who "died for our sins, rose again for our justification." "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of those who sleep." He has converted the tomb into the vestibule of heaven. How different from the mournful legends to be seen and read at this hour on heathen

Columbaria, as "to the final farewell" and "the eternal sleep!" How different from the inscriptions disclosed in the latest Assyrian excavations in the mounds of Kalakh; of which we are told—"In this temple were performed the mournings and lamentations for the yearly dying Tammuz, the 'Son of Life,' whom Istar went annually to recover from the House of Death, the Palace of 'The Land of no return!'"

The Christian traveler searches in vain, amid the ashes of Jerusalem's desolation, for any material tomb of his Divine Lord. But if the tomb be lost in the wreck of ages, the glorious, invisible inscription still remains—"Fear not—I am He who lives and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of the grave and of death;" and "because I live, you shall live also!"

## **GRACIOUS MITIGATIONS**

"He stays His rough wind, in the day of the east wind."  
—Isaiah 27:8

This is a comforting verse to those who, in a figurative sense, are exposed to the swoop of the desert simoom. Come, sorrowing one, and calmly meditate on the blessed promise, here given under expressive imagery, that God will never allow your trials or His chastisements to go too far.

It is the "rough wind" and the "east wind" that may now be visiting you. Seated in thought, or in reality, by your early grave, and musing on your blighted blossom, you can too truly say, "As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone!" (Ps. 103:15, 16).

The Almighty does not conceal that it is He who sends the tempest. It is

specially spoken of and designated by the prophet as "His rough wind." In the blighting of Jonah's gourd, the picture we have so often had occasion to refer to, we are told, "The LORD prepared a vehement east wind." In the bold and sublime language of the Psalmist, He is similarly represented as "walking on the wings of the wind." So too in moral hurricanes. "Who knows not in all these things, that the hand of the Lord has wrought this?"

But (and this is the more special truth which claims our attention), if that east wind blows, He will not allow it to sweep too vehemently—and when it receives its mission from Him, He will not allow "the rough wind" to be let loose at the same time from its chambers. He will moderate adversity. "He knows our frame." According to the common proverb, "He will temper the wind to the shorn lamb." He did not make Israel feel at once and at the same time lack of bread and lack of water. The manna had been provided when they were suffering from the deprivation of the other priceless boon.

Look at the first clause of the somewhat enigmatical words which form part of the verse which heads this chapter—"In measure you will debate with it." "In measure!" Or, as in another place, "I will correct you in measure" (Jer. 30:11). God has no capricious dealings. All will be scrupulously weighed. He CONSIDERS the soul in adversity (Ps. 31:7). "When He winnows," as Matthew Henry says, "He sends a gentle gale to blow away the chaff, not to blow away the corn."

Who cannot testify to the truth of the gracious assertion? Is it the hour of bereavement?—and specially the hour and experience, reader, which comes most tenderly and impressively home to you—the time when, above all others, the east wind may be said to blow, nipping early spring-buds or blighting tender blossoms? Who has not then to tell of amazing support? Some sweet solaces which have gone far to moderate the sweep of the hurricane, break the cruel blow, and disarm trial of much of its severity? Glimpses appear in the midst of the darkness—blue vistas are seen opening in the storm-wreathed sky!

We believe all can own and trace these tender mitigations—the prevention of the two winds from blowing simultaneously—God not

allowing the bruised reed to be broken, just because it was bruised—laying on with one hand, comforting and binding up with the other—sending whatever wind is needed to bring to the desired haven, not one blast permitted but what is needed. "He will not allow us to be tempted (tried) above that we are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). "Blessed be God," says Chrysostom, "who permitted the tempest; and blessed be God who has dispersed it and made it a calm."

Bereaved parents! we ask again, have you not been able—in some cases more perhaps than in others—to trace all this in the dying couches of your beloved children? The gracious alleviations of pain; the tender farewell words, sacredly garnered by you, which tended to reconcile to the pang of departure; the unexpected sympathies and solaces, it may be, of friends and fellow-sufferers; above all, those Divine comforts and consolations—stars of promise—never before seen in the light of garish day, but with which the dark night of sorrow has studded your skies?

Yes! and while owning the truth of the words of our meditation regarding your beloved dead, may you not transfer, by anticipation, their comfort to yourselves? When that supreme hour which has come to them comes to you—when you, too, are laid on your death-couch—when the tent is about to be struck for prosecuting the mysterious journey—death, the hour that thousands on thousands have shrunk from and dreaded—yes! the hour which none can contemplate without profound emotion; yet when it does come—when the house of the earthly tabernacle rocks and trembles under the blasts of that inexorable 'east wind,' be assured you will find the Great Promiser true to His declaration. The 'rough wind' is stayed. You may feel the rush of the final hurricane, but you will rise above it with the glorious compensating supports and comforts then given. In that solemn season the eyes of many of God's children, dimming to human smiles, have had revealed to them a Mightier Presence, which the gathering darkness only renders more visible. When those around can think, perhaps, only of the terribleness of grappling with the tempest which in a few moments will reduce to a heap of ruins; with their last breath they have risen above the storm, and in trembling accents given some such testimony as this—'Hush your fears! I am walking through the

Dark Valley, but HE is giving me dying grace for a dying hour—"He stays His rough wind in the day of the east wind!"

## **THE ETERNAL FOLDING**

"He will wipe all tears from their eyes—and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain! These things of the past are gone forever! He who OVERCOMES will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. For the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Revelation 21:4, 7 17

The valley of tears and the valley of death have been both traversed—Time's curfew-bell has been tolled, proclaiming that earth's fires have been put out and the flocks eternally folded. The bleak herbage of the wilderness—the brookless channels—the falling snows—the angry tempests—the roar of the ravaging wolves—are known no more. It is a glorious glimpse of unbroken sunshine—gleaming meadows—crystal clear waters—living fountains!

Note more specially this pastoral aspect of the vision which is now in the eye of the Apostle of Patmos. We have all the accessories of such a scene. First, in the words of contrast, where the picture of a flock is brought before us—bleating amid arid wastes—panting defenseless under the fierce rays of a burning sun—and turning often their languid eyes towards waterless courses—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat." And then observe his positive description of the bliss of the ransomed—those of all ages and from all ages—the sheep and the lambs—feeding on the heavenly meadows, and reclining by their perennial streams. They are "fed" on these abiding pastures—and "led" to "the living fountains of waters."

We look for the completion of the picture. We see the rejoicing flock browsing on the everlasting hills. But we gaze in vain for the great central Figure. We expect to behold the Glorified Shepherd seated on some sunny eminence overlooking "the multitude which no man can number." Jesus is there; we see Him. But, strange mixture of metaphor—it is not as a SHEPHERD, but as a LAMB He precedes His followers—feeding them and leading them! It is one of those singular, dreamlike transitions common in prophetic symbol—but which, when we come to examine them, are so significant and full of meaning.

We have in a previous apocalyptic vision (chap. 5.), a similar startling and remarkable figuration; startling from the same powerful (we had almost said violent) change of metaphor. The Apostle had been speaking of Christ as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," breaking the seals of the prophetic roll, and unfolding the destinies of the Church and the world. In magnificent language, he further describes all heaven, redeemed and unredeemed—"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"—gathered in to do homage to this August Being who had "prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." When we gaze, amid the throng, for the object of this adoration—lo! we are arrested by the sight, not of a Lion, but of a LAMB! It is the same in this pastoral vision. We lose sight, for the moment, of the Shepherd—the Evangelist at all events describes Him under a different symbol. It is the name which he himself knew so well—that by which the Great Shepherd was first pointed out to him—he loves it still—"Behold the Lamb of God!"

You who have "folded lambs" above, think of that Shepherd's name! We shall not pursue the thought; but let it be suggestive to you of that all-comprehensive glorified human nature of Jesus in its relation to the 'early taken' from the lower pastures and valley. It is the same unaltered and unchanging humanity which of old made little children smile unafraid in His arms, while He declared that the kingdom of heaven is peopled with such. The tender command He gave to an under-shepherd on earth, may we not well believe He will continue to give to Angel-Shepherds above, as He recognizes the place of glorified little ones in the eternal fold—"Feed My lambs!"

(1.) The words suggest to us one among many thoughts—that all the joys

of the ransomed flock, old and young, will be associated with the love and companionship of their Shepherd. He feeds—He leads—He wipes away all tears from their eyes—and in a previous verse (15), under a different figure, it is said, "He who sits on the throne shall dwell among them." Heaven would be no heaven without Jesus. Take Him away!—it would be to blot out the sun from the celestial skies—every star, great and small, moons and satellites as well as planets, would hide their faces—the angel would disrobe himself of his shining attire, and stand in sackcloth before the vacant throne! Take Him away! let the Shepherd leave His ransomed sheep and lambs—and you might give them heaven's choicest pastures—you might sentinel the heavenly fold with archangels—it would be no compensation for the loss. The long-forgotten cry would ascend amid the fairest landscapes of Paradise Regained—"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where YOU feed, where YOU make Your flock to rest at noon!"

But He, the Shepherd-King, whose invitation on the throne of judgment was—"Come, you blessed,"—will be true to His word. As He was with you, His mourning people, "in all places where you were scattered in the cloudy and dark day"—so, in the bright and cloudless day of glory, in all places He will still be with you. We may take the words of a beautiful parallel passage of Old Testament, and give them a heavenly meaning—"Their pastures shall be in all high places; they shall not hunger nor thirst—neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for He who has mercy on them shall lead them—even by the springs of water shall HE guide them." "Leading" them, "feeding" them. What figurative language could express nearer, closer, more intimate fellowship and communion?—the full vision and fruition of a Savior-God! The song lisped here, often with trembling lips and stammering tongue, will rise triumphant from an ever-present experience of its bliss—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "In YOUR presence there is fullness of joy!"

(2.) This description would seem to denote an infinite progression in the joys and felicities of the ransomed flock. This we have enlarged upon in a recent meditation; but it is a thought ever fresh and elevating, and is here presented to us under a new figure. The Shepherd is seen leading them from pasture to pasture, from fountain to fountain, from eminence to eminence—higher and yet higher up the hills of glory. As the loftier we



ascend a mountain, the wider is the landscape that is spread before us—so the higher the heavenly pilgrim mounts in his ever-upward ascent, the wider will be the horizon and circumference of his joys. He will be attaining ever-new views of God—new unfoldings, and revelations of the Divine purposes—new motives for the ceaseless activities of his holy being. And if that song were early stilled on earth, there will be no arrest of its harmonies in that long "forever!"

Such is the beautiful delineation here given by the Prophet of Patmos. The Lamb is represented first as "feeding" His flock. They lie down at His side, in restful repose, by the green pastures of His love. Next, He is represented as "leading" them. The rest is for the time over. He leads them farther and yet farther through these sunlit meadows, along these glorified valleys, to new living fountains of water—ever advancing, yet never reaching the plenitude of bliss—satisfied to the full, and yet always new satisfaction—pastures ever greener—waters ever clearer—the sun of their joy ever climbing the sky and never reaching the meridian.

(3.) The figurative language of the Evangelist once more indicates, that there will be an unfolding of the Shepherd's wisdom and faithfulness in His earthly dispensations. Not only is the Lamb to feed them with gracious views of the Divine dealings, and to lead them from fountain to fountain of wisdom, and goodness, and grace—but by a beautiful and most expressive symbol, God is represented as wiping away all tears from their eyes. As if, when they entered glory, some remaining tears were still there. As if the eye, suffused like yours, at the couch or grave of your early dead, had not recovered from the night of earthly weeping. But, before long, no trace or vestige of sorrow will be found. As in a forest, after a drenching thunder-shower, every bough, and blade, and leaf is dripping with rain; for a considerable time after the sun has shone out, and the sky is blue, and the birds of the grove are singing—the lingering drops gem the branches and sprinkle the sward.

But gradually, yet surely, his genial rays are drinking up the moisture—nature's tear-drops. One by one they evaporate, and the refreshed forest rejoices, and basks in the radiance of the great luminary. So with the Sun of Deity in heaven. One by one earth's remaining tears vanish before the radiance of that Sun of Wisdom and Love. Weeping can be no more—the

fountain of weeping, the memory of weeping, are gone forever!

Do you wonder, bereaved parent, at your Shepherd's dealings? Are you apt, with misgiving heart, to ask—why that desolation of the earthly fold? why that angry hurricane—that harsh night-wind—that pelting rain which maddened into foaming torrent the calm still water—sweeping loved ones down the resistless flood? Yes! and you may carry these tearful eyes with you as you enter heaven. But there is a gracious Hand waiting there to wipe each one of them away. These surviving drops will be crystal lenses, through which, as you enter glory, you will see in vivid manifestation the loving-kindness and faithfulness of your Heavenly Father.

Are you wondering why these springs and rills of earthly happiness were withdrawn or dried in their channels? It was to lead you to feel and to exclaim, 'O God, all my well-springs are in You!' Do you wonder now why this lamb and that lamb of the flock was so soon taken? He emptied your home, and your heart, and your fold on earth, that He might lead you and your to the better fold above. Following the steps of the all-gracious Heavenly Shepherd, as these early lost ones will be revealed to your sight, one here, one there, reposing in the celestial pastures—when you see to what a blessed land you had early sent your children—how will the once tear-dimmed eye have its every tear wiped away—and at the contemplation of God's wisdom and love, in what appeared at the time the dark providences of earth—the ever-deepening song will ascend, "So we Your people and sheep (we may add lambs) of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever!"

Your little children, or your youths of promise are in Heaven! Possibly, as here indicated, there may be a variety and diversity in its joys suited to their capacities. Observe, it is not to one fountain to which the Lamb is said to lead; they are "living fountains of waters." Like the four-branched river in the first earthly Eden, there will be, from the one great river of Deity, streams—and among these, 'little rills'—"which make glad the city of God." In their own distinctive ways, "the children of Zion will be joyful in their King."

We delight to think of the Flock of Heaven—sheep and lambs—each member of it perfect in the full measure of its own bliss; but each, under

the Shepherd's eye, thus following the pasture, or climbing the mountain-steep, or browsing by the streamlet, it most loves. Yet, all the Fold, in these separate and distinctive ways, combining to glorify their Savior God.

Meanwhile, let those who are yet out in the lower valley, overtaken by the cloud and the storm, rejoice in these hopes full of immortality. He has promised to give you "grace and glory." Grace—He will support and sustain you now in the midst of your trial. He will not leave you unsheltered to the sweep of the storm. "The Lamb in the midst of the throne" loves to stoop to weakness. The royal Shepherd of Bethlehem, who laid in the dust the giant of Philistia, could also weep tears of love and tenderness over a tiny, pining flower in his own palace.

So is it with the true David. He combines the might and majesty of Godhead with the tenderness of humanity. He who on earth loved children, knows the tenderness of your present sorrow. He may be leading you along the wilderness by a way that you know not, and by paths that you have not known. But trust Him—"He will feed and lead like a shepherd"—succouring the faint, carrying the weary, sustaining the burdened. This description of the people he led of old out of Egypt is still true of you, and of every member of His flock—"He found him also in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness—He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up her nest, fluttering over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings—so the Lord alone did lead him."

Make sure now of your personal and saving interest in His shepherd-love. Follow with unwavering eye His footsteps—repose on Him your burdens; confide to Him your misgivings and heart sorrows. Let life be a happy, peaceful reclining by His own green pastures and still waters. And then when the Valley of the Shadow of Death is reached, it will be like the Valley of Achor, spoken of in Hosea—"A door of hope." Achor was one of the entrance-ravines from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Death is the valley leading to that Promised Land, the true Heavenly Canaan. Let the anticipated valley-gloom be dispelled by a present and habitual leaning on the rod and staff of immutable promises—"And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory, that fades

not away!"

## **GOD'S WAY AND LEADINGS PERFECT**

"As for God, His way is perfect."—Psalm 18:30

"And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."—Psalm 107:7

There are times in the experience of not a few—and this is one especially on which you have entered—when, amid adverse and baffling providences, "the foundations of the world seem out of course," and all things appear to be rushing into wreck and darkness. The Divine, everlasting vigil seems to have ceased, and echo only answers to the wild cry of despair—"Where is now my God?" "Where is my God?"—creating affections only to wither them; severing me, in the twinkling of an eye, from those He had sent to be helpers of my faith, interpreters of His own goodness, and wisdom, and mercy—youthful priests in the domestic temple, whose removal leaves a silent, desolated altar, with incense unkindled and lamps put out, cherished memories alone surviving to read and reveal the blank! I was taught to imagine that His dealings to His own were those of a Father, not retributive or judicial, but paternal—that I could see no hand, and hear no lullaby but love. Why has the promised parental solicitude been superseded by the harsh voice and the rebuking rod? Why has the All-gracious belied His own saying, "As one whom his mother comforts?" "You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer; Your name is from everlasting...Where is Your zeal, and Your strength, the sounding of Your compassions and of Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?" (Isa. 63:15, 16).

Seek to repress these, and such like unworthy surmises. "As for God, His

way is perfect." This was a lesson impressively taught to pilgrim Israel, as suggested by one of the two verses which head this meditation. They, like many of Jehovah's people still, were tempted at first to misinterpret the Divine dealings. At the very outset from Egypt, the cloudy pillar appeared to mislead them. Instead of taking them the near and direct route to Canaan, it conducted them round "by the way of the wilderness." They had the Red Sea in front and their pursuers behind. The shout goes up from the Egyptian army—"They are entangled; the wilderness has shut them in!" Even Moses yields to the panic and despondency of the hour. "Why are you lying on your face?" were the words addressed to him as he crouched a skeptic at God's feet; "speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Forward they did go, under the guidance of the symbol of the Divine Presence; and what was the song with which they made the opposite shores resound? It was the adoration of the all-perfect ways of God; vindicating the rectitude of His procedure; "You in Your mercy have led forth the people which You have redeemed." "O Lord God Almighty, who is a strong God like unto You? You rule the raging of the sea—when the waves thereof arise, You still them!"

This loving and gracious Guide still "leads Joseph like a flock;" even although often, in a spiritual sense, He makes 'the depths of the sea' a way for His ransomed to pass over. You, too, may now be having your circuitous routes through the desert, your Red Seas of trouble, your Marahs of bitterness. His way may truly seem to be "in the sea, and His path in the deep waters, and His judgments unsearchable." But it is for you to listen in submissive faith to His sovereign mandate, and to follow, however mysterious, the guidance of the Pillar-cloud. It is not for us to judge of the reasons for apparent harsh procedure, hidden from our gaze, and known only to the Infinitely Gracious ONE.

"God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain."

"Why," says one of the saintliest men of the past generation, "Why are we not amply satisfied and acquiescing in the wise management of the Great Counselor, who puts clouds and darkness round about Him, bidding us

follow at His beck through the cloud, promising an eternal and uninterrupted sunshine on the other side?"

There is a beautiful saying in the 94th Psalm, "The Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance; but judgment shall return unto righteousness" (14, 15). Judgment often at times seems divorced—deflected from righteousness—never more than in sparing the ripe and taking the green. We can discern no righteousness, no mercy, no 'good' in such dispensations.

"Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." "Although you say you can not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust in Him." "You, O God, led Your people of old by the right hand of Moses, with Your glorious arm dividing the water before them to make Yourself an everlasting name" (Isa. 63:12).

"Awake, awake," on our behalf still, "O Arm of the Lord!" Finite wisdom has no place in Your dealings. Let us seek no other way, let us surrender ourselves to no other guidance; remembering that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." We may now be, like the panic-stricken Hebrews, confronting the barrier waves; the foe behind, the desolate wilderness around. But fear not! that sea will, in some gracious way, recede to make a dry-shod pathway; that wilderness on the other side, with dreary sand and beetling cliff, will be wilderness still; but it will provide spiritual resting-places with overshadowing palms and refreshing springs.

To the eye of sense, however baffling be the ways of the Supreme, however seemingly unlike His righteous wisdom, it is not for us to judge, and surmise, and conjecture—but to believe; not to question, but, like Job, to kneel and to adore. Not venturing presumptuously to arraign the faithfulness of dispensations the most inscrutable; but rather, in reverent submission to say, amid crossed wills and adverse providences, even when we see innocent infant smiles or youthful aspirations arrested, and many a joyous parental hope buried with them underneath the sod—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak." "I know that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me"—looking forward to the hour when, reaching "the city of habitation," the wisdom and love of

the 'perfect way' will be fully revealed—when, in the true resting-places above, we shall join in the triumphant ascription, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works."

"Soon," says one now experiencing the reality of her own words, "Soon our tale shall be finished; the history of our lives will be put by in the library of God as a volume of His faithfulness." Yes! and heaven will resound with the song, which on earth is often warbled with trembling lips.

The present life, in its conflicting relations, its discords and confusions, is the tuning of the musical instruments before the great Hallelujah chorus—the magnificent harmonies of eternity. Then that chorus, like the anthem of the myriads in the prophet's vision, will become a louder and yet louder ascription, deepening until its effluent waves of sound become "like the noise of mighty thunderings"—its everlasting refrain of praise—the sovereignty of God—"Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

## **THE LOVING CHASTENER AND SYMPATHIZER**

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."—Revelation 3:19

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted—He is able to help those who are tempted."—Hebrews 2:18

Let these two verses be conjoined; we shall see the reason as we proceed.

(1.) "As many as I LOVE I rebuke and chasten!" What! speak of loving dealings when "the axe is being laid to the root of the tree;" its ringing sound heard amid cherished earthly groves; the ground strewn with

lopped branches, scattered leaves, yes, too, and unspared, young saplings of promise! Yes! It is even so. "The wind passes over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more! But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:16, 17).

The words of this first of our motto-verses, moreover, observe, were spoken, not by the lips of Christ the Sufferer on earth, but by the glorified lips of Christ the Exalted King. They come wafted to us from within the Heavenly gates.

"No chastening for the present seems to be joyous but grievous!" This trouble from which you are now suffering may be utterly incomprehensible. Jehovah's name to you, as it often has been to His tried and afflicted children, may be that which He gave to Manoah—"Wonderful," "Secret," "Mysterious." But, be assured, that your present place and season of bereavement is the figurative "wilderness," where He "allures" His people (Hosea 2:14); rousing them from the low dream of earth, from the sordid and the secular, from busy care and debasing solicitude, to the divine and the heavenly—leading them to exchange the mess of earthly pottage for the bread of life, perishable substance for the fine gold of heavenly gain and durable riches.

Yours is the cruel blighting of young hope and pure affection—holiest ties formed, the memory of which is all that remains; the music of the streams and rivulets which once gladdened your pilgrim-way heard no more. The rills are dried by Him to lead to the great Fountainhead; the earthly links are broken in order that stronger and more enduring ones may be formed above; the breaches have been made in the house of clay, only to render more inviting "the building of God, the house not made with hands;" stimulating to live more for that world where all is perfection, where we shall stand "without fault before the throne."

A writer notes that migratory birds are carried high by contrary winds, and that, by being so carried, their flight is assisted. So is it with trial. "The wind is contrary," but it impels to an upward and a Godwards flight. It is often in the cloudy day that the mountains look near us; so often in the soul's gloomiest seasons the hills of God are brought nearest. Tribulation is the first link in the Apostle's golden chain. Dr. Trench, in



his "Study of Words," tells us that "tribulation" is derived from the Latin tribulum, which was the machine by which the grain was sifted. Tribulation is the process of sifting, by which God clears away the chaff and the golden grain is retained. See, too, the gracious result of this sifting process. "Tribulation," to use the comment we have heard in applying the reference, "works," what? We might have expected the natural result, "impatience." It is the reverse; by the imparted grace of Him in whose hands the sifter is, "tribulation works patience" (Rom. 5:3).

Suffering Christian! you may well trust Him who uttered the startling saying which heads this meditation—who gave the mightiest pledge of love He could give by giving His own life—that there is some all-wise "needs be" in the trial He has laid upon you. It is designed to bring you nearer Himself. It is one of His own appointed gateways, opening up and admitting to great spiritual blessings. He rebukes and chastens just because He loves; and, contradictory as the remark may seem, we believe never is His love more tender than when the rod is in His hand and the rebuke on His lips. The rebukes of other earthly friends are often mistimed; the result, it may be, of passion or caprice—"but He disciplines us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

"I do not ask my cross to understand,  
My way to see;  
Better in darkness just to feel Your hand,  
And follow Thee."

God our Maker is said to give "songs in the night." The birds of earth which sing among the branches are silent, except in the day. Not so with those perched on the Tree of Life, His true people. Their melody often most sweetly rises in hours of darkness. To change the figure, are they themselves "Trees of Righteousness"? Often in the gloom of sorrow their foliage may appear to be dripping with rain, when they are in truth laden with the night-distilled dews of heaven!

Had Christ, indeed, seen fit, He might have ordained that His people's pathway was to be without gloom or darkness, trial or tear; leading along sunny slopes, verdant valleys, and bright clusters of palm trees, with sunlit fronds. But to keep them humble, to teach them their dependence

on Himself, to make their present existence a state of discipline and probation, He has ordered it otherwise. Their journey; as travelers, is at times through 'mist and cloudland'; their voyage, as seamen, through alternate calm and storm. They are like the vessel building in the dockyard. The unskilled and uninitiated can hear nothing but clanging hammers; they can see nothing but unshapely timbers and glare of torches. It is a scene of din and noise, dust and confusion. But all will at last be acknowledged as needed portions in the spiritual workmanship, when the soul, released from its earthly fastenings, is launched on the summer seas of eternity. "Then shall we know," to use the words of an earnest thinker, "that the dark scenes were dark with light too bright for mortal eye; the sorrow turning into dearest joys when seen to be the filling up of Christ's; who withholds not from us His own crown, bidding us drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism; and saying to our reluctant hearts, 'What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter.'" "Glory to God for all," was Chrysostom's last saying.

No nobler result of trial surely than this, to lead the mourner to grope his tearful way more meekly and trustfully in search of a Savior's hand, seeking only to hear His guiding voice saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

(2.) Our second motto-verse follows the other in a comforting sequence. There can be no more gracious whisper in the ear of bereavement. What an infinitude of solace to every sorrowing one, including the sacred group of mourners for whom this book is more specially intended, is contained in the simple declaration, "In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted!" Jesus, the Incarnate God, yet "made in fashion as a man," had a mysterious identity of experience with His suffering and tempted people, so that nothing can happen to the members but what has happened to the Head. They can feel that no sorrow shades their souls but the same darkened His. "As He is," so are they "in this world" (1 John 4:17). He Himself—the thorn-crowned King—knows every thorn which pierces them, every pang of spirit and pang of body. The loss of beloved friends, temptations to distrust God's providence, to pervert and misapply His Word, to question the rectitude and reason of His dealings. What unutterable consolation, in every hour of earthly trouble, to look up to the Brother in our nature—"the Prince who has power with God," and

to say, "He has suffered, being tempted!" In His glorified state He still commiserates the case of each one of His heart-stricken woe-worn people! He tenderly feels their every wound, seeing that, as the Captain of their salvation, He was Himself "made perfect through sufferings."

Afflicted believer! rejoice that sorrow and suffering have (if the expression dare be used) assimilated Christ with you, and you with Christ, in this your trial-hour. With what a Divine significance, augmented and intensified by subsequent experience, can He say, "I know your sorrows!" If you are bleeding under some severe infliction of the rod, severe in its very tenderness, ready to say in the bitterness of your grief, "No one knows, no one can gauge the depth of my anguish"—He can—He does. "He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." With reverence we say it—God—the Omnipotent, Omniscient God—cannot, with all the infinitude of His nature, sympathize. He can compassionate; but He cannot sympathize in the way of feeling with us. Sympathy requires, as its two conditions, identity of nature and identity of experience. "We have such a High Priest;" One who is said to be (not touched with our infirmities), but "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

The beautiful verse which now presents itself, gives more comfort still. The words affirm not merely that Christ has identity of experience—a passive sympathy with His tried people—He is also the succourer of the tempted—"He is able to support those who are tempted."

If He be summoning any of you to bear some peculiarly heavy burden, or exacting from you some peculiarly heavy sacrifice, He will not allow the burden to crush, or the fiery trial to consume. He will keep you in the crucible as long, but no longer, than He sees to be absolutely needful to test your faith and purify your graces. All that concerns you and yours is in His hands.

As we see the Angels of Tribulation with their sevenfold vials issuing forth from the gate of heaven (Rev. 15:1), how blessed to know that they are marshaled, commissioned by the great Lord of Angels, the once suffering but now exalted Redeemer! In Zechariah's vision of "the man on the red horse" (1:8)—behind HIM were angels and providences—"the black, and

speckled, and white horses." But He is between them; ordering, regulating, appointing, all that befalls His people, trusting their persons and fortunes not even to an angel's care, without His own guidance, sanction, and direction.

Are you now called sorrowfully to picture and ponder the last hours of some loved one—perhaps the final conflict—the close of all—the silent death-chamber—the sadder sequel of the Early Grave? He—yes, HE—can say with the same exalted sympathy, "I know them all." To the living Christian in his season of affliction He can say, "I am He who lives." But to the dying Christian, or of the dying Christian, He can add, "I am He who was dead." I know well, through the memories of My cross and passion, that struggle-hour! I know what it is, O bereaved, to die! And because I know this, I can follow you to the brink of Jordan as well as in the wilderness! Fear not to think of what your loved ones have passed through. These buffeting billows of the Border river have swept over Me. And with the thought of Me as their precursor, you can take up for them, as one of your "Night Songs," or you can sing it as you anticipate for yourselves the same inevitable hour—"Behold, the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan!" (Josh. 3:11).

## **DIVINE TEARS OVER AN EARLY GRAVE, and THE SLEEP OF THE DEAD**

"Jesus wept!"—John 11:35

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps."—John 11:11

Let us turn aside for a little and see this great sight. It is the Creator of all worlds in tears—the God-man Mediator dissolved in tenderest grief. These tears form the most touching episode in sacred story; and if we are

in sorrow, it may either dry our own or give them the warrant to flow when we are told—Jesus wept!

Whence those tears? There is often, as we have remarked in a previous meditation, a false interpretation put upon this brief verse, as if it denoted the expression of the Savior's sorrow for the loss of a loved friend. This, it is plain, it could not be. However mingled may have been the hopes and fears of the weeping mourners around him, He at least knew that in a few brief moments Lazarus was to be restored. He could not surely weep so bitterly, possessing as He then did, the confident assurance that death was about to give back its captive, and light up every tear-dimmed eye with an ecstasy of joy. Whence, then, we again ask, this strange and mysterious grief? We have space only for two, among other reasons.

(1). Jesus wept out of sympathy for the bereaved.

The hearts at His side were breaking with anguish. All unconscious of how soon and how wondrously their sorrow was to be turned into joy, the appalling thought was alone present to them in all its fearfulness—"Lazarus is dead!" When He, the God-man Mediator, with the refined sensibilities of His tender heart, beheld the poignancy of their affliction, the pent-up torrent of His own human sympathies could be restrained no longer. His tears flowed too.

But it would be a contracted view of the tears of Jesus, to think that two solitary mourners in a Jewish graveyard engrossed and monopolized that sympathy. It had a vastly wider sweep.

There were hearts, yes, myriads of desolate sufferers in ages then unborn, who He knew would be brought to stand as you, reader, have lately been, and as He was then doing, by the grave of loved relatives—mourners who would have no visible Comforter or Restorer to rush to, as had Martha and Mary, to assuage their grief, and give them back their dead; and when He thought of this, "Jesus wept!"

What an interest it gives to this scene of weeping, to think that at that eventful moment the Savior had before Him the bereaved of all time—

that His eye was roaming at that moment through deserted chambers, and vacant seats, and opened graves, down to the end of the world! The Rachels weeping for their children—the "little daughters" that "lay dying;" the young men "carried out—the only sons of their mothers;" the Ezeziels mourning in the dust and ashes of disconsolate widowhood, "the desire of their eyes taken away by a stroke;" the unsolaced sisters brooding over a sad future, with the prop and joy of existence swept down—the light of their being eclipsed in mysterious darkness!

Think (as you are now perusing these pages), throughout the wide world, how many breaking hearts there are—how loud the wail of suffering humanity, could we but hear it!—those written childless and fatherless, and friendless and homeless!—Bethany-processions pacing with slow and measured step to deposit their earthly all in the custody of the tomb! Think of the Marys and Marthas who are now "going to some grave to weep there," perhaps with no Savior's unseen, yet graciously ever-present smile to gladden them—or the desolate chambers that are now resounding to the plaintive dirge, "O Absalom, Absalom! would God I had died for you; O Absalom, my son! my son!" Think of all these experiences at that moment vividly brought before the Redeemer's eye—the long and loud miserere, echoing dismally from the remotest bounds of time, and there "entering into the ear of God Almighty," and can you wonder that—Jesus wept?

Blessed and amazing picture of the Lord of glory! It combines the delineation alike of the tenderness of His humanity, and the majesty of His Godhead. His Humanity! It is revealed in those teardrops, falling from a human eye on a human grave. His Godhead! It is manifested in His ability to take in with a giant grasp all the prospective sufferings of His suffering people.

Weeping believer! your anguished spirit was included in those Bethany tears! Be assured your grief was visibly portrayed at that moment to that omniscient Savior. He had all your sorrows before Him—your anxious moments during the tedious sickness—the trembling suspense—the nights of weary watching—the agonizing revelation of "no hope;" the pulses of that young life ebbing; the fresh green sods of that early tomb. Bethany's graveyard became to Him a picture-gallery of the world's

aching hearts; and yours, yes! yours was there! And as He beheld it, Jesus wept!"

(2.) Jesus wept when He thought of the triumphs of Death!

He was treading a burial-ground; mouldering heaps were around Him—silent sepulchral caves, giving forth no echo of life. They must have significantly called to the mind of the Divine Spectator how sin had blasted and scathed His noblest workmanship, converting the fairest province of His creation into one vast Necropolis—one dismal "city of the dead"—the body, "so fearfully and wonderfully made," and on which He had originally placed His own impress of "very good," ruined, and resolved into a mass of humiliating dust! If the architect mourns over the destruction of some favorite edifice which the storm has swept down, or the fire has wrapped in conflagration and reduced to ashes; if the sculptor mourns to see his breathing marble with one crude stroke hurled to the ground, and its fragments scattered at his feet—what must have been the sensations of the Almighty Architect of the human frame, at whose completion the morning stars and the sons of God chanted a loud anthem, as He thought of that frame, now a devastated wreck, mouldering in dissolution and decay, the King of Terrors sitting in regal state, holding His high holiday over a vassal world!

In Bethany He beheld only a few of these broken and prostrate columns, but they could not fail to be suggestive of millions on millions which were yet in coming ages to undergo the same doom of mortality.

If even our less sensitive hearts are wrung with emotion at the tidings of some mournful catastrophe, which occupies, after all, but some passing hour in the world's history, but which has carried death and lamentation into many households—the sudden pestilence that has swept down its thousands—the gallant vessel that was a moment before spreading proudly its white wings to the gale, the joyous hearts on board dreaming of hearth and home, and "the many ports that would exult in the gleam of her mast"—the next! hurrying down to the depths of an ocean grave, with no survivor to tell the story!—Or the terrible records of war—the ranks of bold and brave laid low in the carnage of battle—youth and strength and beauty and rank and friendship blent in one 'red burial!'—if these and

such-like mournful tales of death, and the power of death, affect at the moment even the most callous among us, causing the lip to grow pale, and demanding the tribute of more than a tear—oh! what must it have been to the Omniscient eye and exquisitely sensitive spirit of Jesus, as, taking in all time at a glance, He beheld the Pale Horse with its ghastly rider trampling under foot the vast human family, converting the globe into a mournful Valley of vision; vessels freighted with immortality lying stranded on the shores of Time.

Yes! we can only understand the full import of these tears of Jesus, as we imagine to ourselves His Godlike eye penetrating at that moment every churchyard; the mausoleums of the rich—the lowly graves of the poor; the marble cenotaph of the noble and illustrious, slumbering under fretted aisle and cathedral canopy—the myriads whose only requiem is chanted by the bleak winds of the desert or the chimes of the ocean! The child carried away in the twinkling of an eye—the blossom just opening, and then frost-blighted; the aged father, cut down like a shock of corn in its season; the young exulting in the prime of manhood; the pious and benevolent, the great and good, succumbing indiscriminately to the same inexorable decree; the erring and thoughtless, reckless of all warning, hurried away in the midst of scorned mercy—as He beheld this ghastly funeral procession moving before Him, the whole world going to the same long home, and He Himself left alone the survivor—can we wonder that Jesus wept?

And yet to pass, before we close, from this scene of the Tears and the Grave—in another gladdening sense He could say, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps!" And with a still more glorious and exalted meaning than when He spoke them on His way to that Bethany burial-ground, does He utter the same to us regarding our beloved dead. Here it is that Christianity and Paganism meet together in impressive and significant contrast. The one comes to the dark river with her pale, sickly lamp. It refuses to burn—the damps of Lethe dim and quench it. Philosophy tries to discourse on death as a "stern necessity"—of the duty of passing heroically into this mysterious, oblivion-world—taking with bold heart "the leap in the dark," and confronting, as we best can, blended images of annihilation and terror.



The Gospel takes us to the tomb, and shows us Death vanquished and the grave spoiled. Death truly, too well do those whose eyes trace these pages know, is in itself an unwelcome messenger at their door. It is the dark event in this our earth—the deepest of the many deep shadows of an otherwise fair creation—a cold, cheerless thing, lying at the heart of humanity, freezing up the gushing fountains of joyous life. But the Gospel shines, and the cold iceberg melts. The Sun of Righteousness effects what philosophy, with all its boasted power, never could. Jesus is the abolisher of Death. He has taken all that is terrible from it. So complete, indeed, is the Redeemer's victory, that He Himself speaks of it as no longer a reality, but a shadow—a phantom foe from which we have nothing to dread.

"Whoever believes in Me shall never die." "If anyone keeps My words, he shall never see death." These are an echo of the Psalmist's most familiar words, a transcript of his expressive figure, when he pictures the dark valley to the believer as the valley of a "shadow." The substance is removed! When the gaunt spirit meets him on the midnight waters, he may, like the disciples at first, be led to "cry out for fear." But a gentle Voice of love and tenderness rebukes his dread, and calms his misgivings—"It is I! be not afraid."

Yes! Jesus dries your tears with the encouraging assurance, "Your dead shall live; together with My body they shall arise." "Let your Lazarus—your child, your son, your daughter, your loved and loving young companion or friend—"sleep on now and take their rest;" the time will come when My voice shall be heard proclaiming, "Awake, and sing, you that dwell in dust:"—"The winter is' past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in the land. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Soon shall the day-dawn of glory streak the horizon; and then, I shall go that I may awake them out of sleep!

"Therefore, comfort one another with these words!"

## THE POWER OF GOD

"He rules by His power forever!"—Psalm 66:7

The Power of God is a glorious theme—an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, in the season of trial. Perhaps especially, when stooping in parental sorrow over some life passed away, we turn, by instinctive contrast, from the drooping of the floweret or the bending of the tender sapling, to the strength and glory of the Tree of Life.

The Psalm from which these words are taken, is one of the many that were inspired by memories of the Sinai wilderness—the great drama of the Exodus. Our motto-verse is ushered in by the proudest of these memories, "Come and see the works of the Lord...He turned the sea into dry land. They went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in Him...He rules by His power forever." Varied are the figures employed by the sacred minstrel in describing the illustrious event. Jehovah had broken the meshes of the enclosing net (ver. 11). From the fire of Egypt's brick-kilns He had rescued them (ver. 2). Through the furnace they had emerged purified (ver. 10). Through the raging flood of the Red Sea He had conducted them (ver. 6). They had only to "stand still and see the salvation of God" (vers. 5 and 12). "For You, O God, have proved us—You have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction upon our loins. You have caused men to ride over our heads—we went through fire and through water; but YOU brought us out into a wealthy place" (vers. 10-12).

An emancipation effected from Egypt—the territory of the greatest and proudest of the old-world dynasties—an enslaved people, in the might of their God, rising in a night, breaking their chains, leaving every memento of bondage and degradation behind them; and after a miraculous march of forty years, at last entering triumphantly the promised land! All this could not have been accomplished without the cognisance of the surrounding nations. Hence the Psalmist, remembering these glorious "works of the Lord and His wonders of old," breaks out into a lofty appeal

to the kingdoms of his own age to recognize the hand of Israel's Jehovah. (Ver. 1), "Make a joyful noise unto God, all you lands—sing forth the honor of His name; make His praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible are You in Your works! through the greatness of Your power shall Your enemies submit themselves unto You...He rules by His power forever!"

What a glorious rock-shadow in which to take shelter! What an unspeakably comforting assurance, whether to nations or to individuals, that the same mighty hand which shattered the chains of the Hebrew slaves, and smote the tongue of the Egyptian sea, may be recognized in every event which befalls His people—every public calamity, every domestic heart-sorrow. Whether it be the bondage and deliverance of a nation, or the preparing and withering of a family gourd, we can write above all, "He rules by His power forever!" Whether He smites or heals, darkens or gladdens, gives or takes away, it is ours to say, in the words of this inspiring hymn (vers. 8, 9), "Oh, bless our God, you people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard—who holds our soul in life." Life is His. He kindles the spark, and, when He sees fit, He quenches it. Death is but the revocation of His own grant, the lapsing of the lease into the hands of life's great Proprietor. "He turns man to destruction, and says, Return, O children of men."

The Psalm is supposed by some to have been specially composed by David on the occasion of that great festival at the end of his reign, when, after having collected material for his projected Temple on Mount Moriah, "all Israel" assembled, at the summons of their aged king, and in response to his appeal "consecrated their service unto the Lord." What could be more natural than for the minstrel monarch, at such a time, to revert in the first instance to God's wonderful transactions with them as a nation ever since the hour of the Exodus; and then to pass to a personal retrospect of His dealings with himself throughout his chequered history, from the morning of his life in the valleys of Bethlehem until now, when the sun was westering and the shadows were falling? He too had to tell of varied sorrows. He too had to tell of 'early graves,' yes, and of sadder than early graves. He too had been "tried as silver is tried;" "brought through fire and through water," and had "affliction laid upon his loins."

But even in the mingled retrospect, in which all these figures of speech

met—the furnace, the net, the fire, the flood, the sackclothed loins—he could see mercy—rich, undeserved mercy, mingling with and tempering judgment. The dark clouds of his stormy life-career were alternated with glorious sunshine—the dreary spots of the wilderness were far outnumbered by the green. Sheltering palm trees stood conspicuous amid stretches of barren sand. And remembering how graciously God had heard his prayers in the past, supported him in trouble, and made his earthly trials conspire for the good of his soul, we can understand how appropriately he records his votive resolve in ver. 13, "I will go into Your house with burnt-offerings; I will pay You my vows which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble. I will offer unto You burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul." He gives to God all the glory of his past deliverances and triumphs. He takes none to himself. "Sing forth," he says, "the honor of His name—who does not allow our feet to be moved."

The Psalm and its many devout and instructive sentiments was designed for the Church of God and believers in every age. Its lessons are not local but universal. The safe and triumphant passage of Israel through the Red Sea and the Jordan of old, are pledges of covenant mercy to His people in all times and in all seasons of affliction. Through every sea of sorrow and trouble He makes a passage for them; gives songs in the night, takes off their sackcloth, and girds them with gladness. It is a striking assertion, which we have before alluded to in a previous meditation, but which we may once more note in its place in the triumphant Hymn where it occurs—"They went through the flood on foot"—(the place where we might have expected nothing but trembling and terror, anguish and dismay)—"there," says the Psalmist, "did we rejoice in Him."

How many there are who can endorse this as their experience, that "there," in their very seasons of distress and sadness, they have been enabled, as they never did before, to triumph and rejoice! How near their God in covenant is brought! how brightly shine His promises! In the day of their prosperity they cannot see the brilliancy of these. Like Jacob at Jabbok, it is when their earthly sun goes down that the Divine Angel

comes forth, and they wrestle with Him and prevail. It was at night, "in the evening," Aaron lit the sanctuary lamps. It is in the night of trouble the brightest lamps of the believer are often kindled.

It was in his loneliness and exile, that John had the glorious vision of his Redeemer. There is many a Patmos still in the world, whose brightest remembrances are those of God's presence and upholding grace and love, in solitude and sadness. How many pilgrims, still passing through these Red Seas and Jordans of earthly affliction, will be enabled in the retrospect of eternity to say—full of the memories of God's great goodness—"THERE"—in those dark experiences, with the surging waves on every side, deep calling to deep, Jordan, as when Israel crossed it, in 'the time of overflowing' (flood)—yet "THERE did we rejoice in Him!"

It was when the disciples were in their hour of extremity, during the storm on Gennesaret, giving themselves up to the hopelessness of despair, that, "in the fourth watch of the night," when darkness was deepest and danger greatest, the great Deliverer appeared on the crested wave—"Jesus came unto them, walking on the sea!" It was, as we have already seen, when the bereft of Bethany had, as they imagined, consigned the fond treasure of their affections to everlasting silence; and, as they were sitting in the pillaged home, wondering at the mysterious delay on the part of the One Being who could alone have arrested that winged arrow which had laid low the love of their hearts—at that crisis-hour the great Conqueror of death appeared, to revive the smouldering ashes of their faith, and reanimate the joy and prop of their existence! "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence!"

And even when He does not appear visibly to support; when some treasured comfort is withdrawn; or when deliverance from some threatened earthly trial or threatened evil is not given; when cradles are emptied and youthful voices silenced, it is in order that we may the more surely find our only and all-sufficient Portion in HIM. The shelter of the canvas tent is removed. But it only the more endears to us the shadow of the Great Rock. Observe the difference between the failing of the world's consolations and refuges and joys, and those of the true Christian—When the worldly man mourns his dried-up brooks, or his stripped and dismantled tents, he has lost his all—he has nowhere else to turn; there is

nothing left him but the waterless channel—the dreary outlook of blighted desert—the tear of despair—the broken heart—the grave! In the case of the believer, when one blessing is withdrawn, his God has other spiritual comforts for him in reversion. He may have too good cause to appropriate the words, as descriptive of his domestic joys—"And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up" (1 Kings 17:7); "Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment" (Jer. 4:20). But "happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

"Sing forth," then, to revert to the exhortation of the writer of this psalm, "the honor of His name, and make His praise glorious." There are, we repeat, seasons, those whose eyes fall on these pages only know too well, when we cannot tune this harp of broken strings—when the summons of the 5th verse is more appropriately ours, "Come, and see the works of God—He is dreadful in His doing towards the children of men;" when we have to say unto Him, "How dreadful are You in Your works!" But while justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, mercy and truth go continually before His face. While "God has spoken once, yes, twice have I heard this, that POWER belongs unto God; also unto You, O Lord, belongs MERCY." "We went through fire and through water, but You brought us out into a wealthy place!"

Occupying now the glorious place of security, which can alone be found in Christ and His finished salvation, let us commit the keeping of our souls, and of all near and dear to us, to Him for the future in well-doing; knowing that there will be no floods or fires sent but what He appoints; and, if sent, let us seek to be able to say, "Your will be done!" That so we may come at last to stand without fault before the throne, with every flood passed, every fire quenched, every tear dried. With room found for all whom death has severed from us in that "wealthy place" above; and confident then, at least, that the Divine dispensations and dealings were for our good, we shall be able to utter the invitation of this inspired minstrel, at the close of his song—"Come, and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul."



# THE CITIES OF REFUGE

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### THE GOSPEL REFUGE

## The Cities of Refuge

or, "The Name of Jesus"

A BOOK FOR THE YOUNG

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear!  
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away his fear."

My dear friends,



This little book contains, with a few additions, the substance of what was spoken one Sunday to a number of hearers of your own age. It may serve to recall to those that listened to it, and to unfold to those who did not, some simple and well-known, but precious gospel truths.

May He whose NAME it is designed to exalt—bless you in reading it, and enable you from the heart to repeat as your own happy experience, the well-known verse of the beautiful hymn I have put on the title-page.

"Then the LORD said to Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee.'" Numbers 35:9-11

When traveling lately through one of the great Alpine passes leading from Switzerland into Italy—I observed, close by the roadside, at regular distances, a number of plain, square buildings. On these (sometimes over the doorway, sometimes on the ice) were inscribed the words—"Refuge No. 1," "Refuge No. 2," "Refuge No. 3," etc. I think there were twenty altogether. I was told, on inquiry, they were intended as shelters for any hapless travelers who might be overtaken by the sudden storms which so often sweep down from the snow-white mountains bounding the prospect. These "Refuges," at the time I saw them, were empty, for it was in the beginning of summer, when everything, even in that elevated region, was looking bright and green. The Alpine rhododendron was blooming, with its pink blossom, the mountain sides; and growing up were lovely blue flowers, close by stray patches of winter's snow which were still filling the ridges and hollows in the higher parts of the pass. Seldom at this season are travelers exposed to any peril from an Alpine storm.

It is different, however, in winter or spring, when the avalanches come tumbling from the heights, or the snow is drifting in huge masses over that wonderful road. Many shivering wayfarers have fled with thankful hearts into these shelters. Some have been carried there, in a state of insensibility, by unknown benefactors, and on gradually awaking to consciousness, have blessed the kind hearts and hands which have saved them from certain death, and were now ministering to their necessities.

By others, alas! they have been reached too late. Rescued from the snows of the mountain, they have been conveyed to these 'refuges' only to die.

As I passed those Alpine "refuges," I could not help being reminded of the wonderful Cities of Refuge which God graciously provided of old in Palestine, for the unfortunate manslayer.

It sometimes happened, in the land of Canaan, as in our own country, that a Hebrew, without any evil purpose, would cause the death of a brother Hebrew. He did not intend to inflict any injury; it was the result only of unfortunate accident. But, nevertheless, to show God's detestation of the shedding of blood, he was liable, by the Levitical law, to be killed by the Avenger—the person nearest related to the murdered man. If he wished to escape with his life, his only chance of safety was to flee to one of these Refuge-cities. It mattered not what his age, or name, or station in life was. He might be young or old, prince or noble, priest or prophet, he was exposed every moment to death, unless he availed himself of the offered shelter. There was no time for delay. He must betake himself to instant flight. To linger might be to perish!

Do you not think with pity of the unhappy fugitive, obliged thus suddenly to leave his home and all that he most loved on earth? If at the time he caused the death, he was working in his vineyard, the pruning-hook must be left to rust on the branch. If he was ploughing with his yoke of oxen, they must be left lowing in the furrow. If he was busied in his harvest-field, the sheaves must be left unbound, and the reapers receive their wages from another's hands. If he was returning home fatigued at evening after the toils of the day, and longing for grateful repose, he dare give no "sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids." His child may be lying pining in sickness at his cottage, but it may endanger him to return to clasp that and his other little ones in his embrace, and bid them a fond farewell. He may have no time to change his clothing or take even his bag or pilgrim-staff. The avenger of blood may be in the adjoining street, or in the dwelling near by. Another hour may be fatal! "Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give for his life." (Job 2:4)

Off he speeds in breathless haste—now along the level road—now up the steep ascent—with his chest heaving, and drops of perspiration standing

on his brow. Friends may meet him, but with a wave of the hand, he rushes on with fleet footstep. Parched with thirst in the hot noonday, he turns a longing eye on the ripe grapes that are hanging in purple clusters on the wayside, or on the water trickling down the narrow ravine. But he dare not pause. Knowing full well that the avenger is in close pursuit, he hurries on with unabated ardor. Happy sight, when he sees at last, on some mountain slope, the longed-for city of refuge! Happy, when, weary and footsore, covered with dust, the portals of the city close him in. A few moments before, had he been overtaken on the mountain-top by his pursuer, he might have been heard to cry out, in the bitterness of despair, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Now, safe within the secure shelter, he can rejoicingly exclaim, even with the avenger standing close by, "My enemies have met their doom!" (Psalm 9:6)

These Cities of Refuge form one of the Old Testament PICTURES of the sinner, and of the coming gospel salvation. God often used such pictures to teach the Jewish people great gospel truths. Just as we know that youthful readers like a story-book all the better when it has pictures in it; so God taught the early church, when it was in a state of "childhood," by means of similar pictures or types; and the present was one of them. It represented, and still represents, the sinner who has broken the Divine law as pursued by an avenger, JUSTICE, following with drawn sword, exclaiming, "The soul that sins—it must surely die!" (Ezekiel 18:4) "Be assured that the wicked will not go unpunished!" (Proverbs 11:21)

This is a picture, too, which applies to everyone without exception, rich and poor, parent and child, master and servant; "for all have sinned—and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) But a glorious CITY, "salvation its walls and bulwarks," opens its gates. The sinner is exhorted to "escape there;" to "linger not in all the plain;" to "flee for his life, lest he be consumed!" (Genesis 19:17) That city is Jesus, the sinner's Refuge and the sinner's Friend. Once within its walls, no enemy can touch him—no sword can terrify him. He can triumphantly exclaim, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ!" (Romans 8:35)

Dear young friends, it is because I know this City of Refuge is open for the youngest of you, that I now write these pages. I love to read about a group of little ones who, eighteen hundred years ago, were gathered round its

gates, asking admission; and when others, with unkind words, were sending them away, He who held the gates in His hand, "who opens and no man shuts" (Revelation 3:7,) said, "Let the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." (Matt. 19:14) It is because I believe and know that many as young as you have obeyed the Savior's invitation, and have already entered this happy City, that I ask you to come and hear while I speak to you about it.

I believe and know that many such have learned to feel that they are sinners—and that they need a Savior. They have been taught by God's own Word and Spirit—that they have broken His holy law, and have thereby exposed themselves to eternal wrath. But they are now safe within the Gospel Shelter. The "enemy" is "stilled." The "avenger" has sheathed his sword. I think I can hear their youthful voices, as they march through the streets of the City, singing, "Because of Your adversaries, You have established a stronghold from the mouths of children and nursing infants, to silence the enemy and the avenger." (Psalm 8:2) "Blessed be the Lord; for He has showed me His marvelous kindness in A STRONG CITY." (Psalm 31:21)

## **II. THE SIX CITIES**

"The following cities were designated as cities of refuge: Kedesh of Galilee; Shechem, in the hill country of Ephraim; and Hebron, in the hill country of Judah. On the east side of the Jordan River, across from Jericho, the following cities were designated as cities of refuge: Bezer, in the wilderness plain of the tribe of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead, in the territory of the tribe of Gad; and Golan in Bashan, in the land of the tribe of Manasseh. These are the cities appointed for all the Israelites and foreigners among them, so that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there and not die at the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the assembly." Joshua 20:7-9

It is of these six cities here mentioned, I am now going to speak. The name of each of the six has something significantly to tell about THE NAME OF JESUS. They are six pictures of the Savior, hung up in the Old Testament picture-gallery. I am going to ask you to take a journey with

me to these towns of old Palestine. Before we enter their gates, I would like again to repeat the verse of the precious hymn placed at the beginning of this book:

How sweet the NAME of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear!  
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away his fear."

## **First City—KEDESH**

If you look far north in the map of Palestine above the lake of Merom, near the snowy peaks of mount Hermon and Lebanon, you will see where this Refuge-city lies. Recent travelers describe its ruins as still standing on a rocky ridge in the midst of green hills, surrounded with the remains of forts and castles built in the middle ages. It was situated within the tribe of Naphtali, and must have been a great town at the time when the old warrior Barak, who was born within its walls, marched from its gates to meet Sisera in the plain below with his nine hundred chariots of iron.

What does its name tell of Christ?

The Hebrew word KEDESH signifies "Holy." Jesus was "The Holy One." Not one stain of sin polluted His holy human nature. Angels in heaven, as they cast their crowns at His feet, cry, "Holy! holy! holy!" (Isaiah 6:3) Devils on earth were compelled to exclaim, "We know you who you are—the HOLY ONE of God!" (Mark 1:24) Jewish priests, as they spoke of Him of old by types, took "a lamb without blemish." (Ex. 12:5) Jewish prophets, as they spoke of Him in their predictions, called Him "The Righteous (or HOLY) Branch." (Jer. 23:5) Apostles, as they wrote about Him, said "He was HOLY, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Hebrews 7:26) When He was Himself on earth, He could challenge His bitterest foes, "Who among you can convict Me of sin?" (John 8:46) And when He came down, soon after His ascension, from His throne in the skies, we find Him proclaiming as His name, "The HOLY One, the True One!" (Revelation 3:7)

Reader, remember this. Jesus never could have saved you—unless He had been "glorious in holiness." If He had had one sin in Him—you and I must have been lost forever! Just as one leak in Noah's ark of old would have sunk it, so one leak of sin in Jesus, the true Ark of Salvation, would have plunged us all in the depths of eternal despair! Let us, then, love often to walk round the walls of KEDESH, and think of our "City of Refuge" as "The HOLY Child Jesus." (Acts 4:27)

And when you ponder His holiness—seek to be holy, just as He was. How he hated sin! How He loved to do His heavenly Father's will! How gentle, and good, and kind He was to all! He never was angry, or passionate, or revengeful. When a youth, at His early home in Nazareth, "He increased in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:52) Be like Jesus in His holiness! Let KEDESH be a word written on your young hearts! Whenever you are in trouble or difficulty, or temptation, always ask, "How would the HOLY JESUS have acted here?" Turn the words of your well-known hymn into a prayer. While you say—

"I long to be like Jesus,  
Meek, lowly, loving, mild;  
I long to be like Jesus,  
The Father's Holy Child!"

## **Second City—SHECHEM**

Shechem was situated at the edge of a valley among the hills of Ephraim. The famous mountains of Ebal and Gerizim rose on either side, from the slopes of which the blessings and the curses of the law were proclaimed in the ears of assembled Israel. If Jerusalem was the greatest and the grandest of the cities of Palestine, then Shechem was perhaps the most beautiful. It is still spoken of by travelers as one of the loveliest spots in the Holy Land, with its orchards of olives, figs, and pomegranates, and its flocks of singing-birds, which have made the inhabitants give to the graceful slope on which it looks down, the name of the "Musical Valley." I don't know if the streets in the olden time resembled what they are now. The following is the recent description of a traveler familiar with them: "It has mulberry, orange, pomegranate, and other trees mingled in with the houses, whose odoriferous flowers load the air with sweet perfume during the months of April and May."

You do not require to be told that Shechem is a very ancient city, and that many interesting events in sacred story took place in connection with it. The earliest mention made of it is when the patriarch Abraham slept under its oaks, when he came to Canaan from distant Chaldea, and erected his first altar under their shade; (Genesis 12:8) and one of the last Bible notices regarding it, is in connection with the woman of Samaria, when Jesus sat with her at "the well of Sychar," and spoke to her of the better fountain, "springing up to everlasting life." (John 4:14)

What does the name SHECHEM tell of Christ?

It is a word which means "SHOULDER."

Jesus, our Refuge, bore a guilty world upon His shoulder. The ancients had a fabled Atlas, who was supposed to carry the earth on his shoulders. Jesus Christ is the true ATLAS! "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!" (Isaiah 53:4) All the sins of all His people—Jesus bore forever away! Think of that heavy load which bowed Him down to the ground in the garden of Gethsemane, and caused drops of blood to

drop from His brow! No other one but Jesus could have carried such an awful load and burden as this. No angel or archangel could have done so. Jesus, being God, was alone "able to save unto the uttermost." (Hebrews 7:25) He is the only "sure foundation" that could sustain all the building. (Isaiah 28:16) With any other, it would have fallen into a mass of ruins.

But I love not only to visit the old city of Shechem, and to think of Jesus bearing the guilt of His people on His shoulders, but I like to think of Him as the true SHECHEM now. He is our Shechem at God's right hand. "The government is upon His SHOULDER." (Isaiah 9:6) The whole world is upheld by Him! All Christians are continually upheld by Him! Believers—the poorest, the weakest, the humblest—are on the shoulders of Jesus. He is bearing the weight of them all; loving them all, attending to them all, interceding for them all. All that befalls me—Jesus orders. Food and clothing, health and strength, friends and home—are gifts from Him! Every tear I shed—He knows it, He appoints it. If he sends me sorrow and trial—I will go and enter the gates of this city SHECHEM, and remember, "Jesus (Jesus, who died for me) bears me on his shoulder!"

Moses speaks of God conducting the children of Israel through the wilderness of old, as a kind father carries his weak and weary child on his shoulder. "You saw in the wilderness how the Lord your God carried you as a man carries his son all along the way you traveled until you reached this place." (Deuteronomy 1:31) And David says in an hour of trouble, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord carries me on his heart!" (Psalm 40:17)

I like to look at that New Testament picture—Jesus, the good Shepherd, carrying a sick sheep or young lamb on His shoulder, back to the fold. That poor wandering sheep had gone astray on the dark mountains; but the great and gracious Shepherd had gone after it "until He found it; and when He had found it, He laid it on His SHOULDERS, rejoicing. (Luke 15:5)

Christian reader, what perfect security and safety you have in Jesus, and in His Gospel City! Far, far more so than the manslayer had of old, in his city of refuge. I daresay, even although he was delivered from the avenger, the refugee could not help at times dreading lest the avenger might come upon him secretly. I daresay, at night, on his lonely couch, he



would sometimes dream of the avenger stealing in beside his pillow, and he would startle from his unrestful sleep at the scaring vision. Not so in the case of those who have fled to the "Gospel Refuge." They can say in sweet confidence, "I will lie down in peace and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe." (Psalm 4:8) He who is their "Keeper" says of them, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!" (John 10:28)

### **Third city—HEBRON**

Hebron is the most ancient of all the Cities of Canaan. After wandering about from place to place in the land of promise, pitching their tents and altars, it was here that the patriarchs had, for the first time, a settled home. We need not wonder at their selection of the old Canaanite city, on the peaceful slope of the southern hills, nestling amid olive-groves and terebinth trees, and looking down on one of the most fertile valleys in Palestine, with its orchards and grain-fields. On its eastern height is the spot which gives it to this day perhaps its most sacred interest—the cave of Machpelah, where the bones of the patriarchs has reposed for four thousand years. It must have been outside its walls that the angels appeared to Abraham, when he was seated at his tent door. The adjoining height is perhaps the place from which the patriarch saw the smoke of burning Sodom rising from its own deep valley. It was in Hebron that David was anointed king over Israel. It was amid its vineyards and mountain-slopes that John the Baptist grew up as a little boy, before he appeared in the wilderness of Judea, to tell of One mightier than he, "whose shoe-latchet" he was "not worthy to unloose." (Mark 1:7)

What does the name HEBRON tell of Christ?

In Hebrew, it means "fellowship" or "friendship." JESUS has brought guilty man into fellowship with God. On account of sin—we had forfeited this fellowship. We had not made God our friend—but our enemy! We were cut off from fellowship with all that is holy and happy. Angels, in their errands of mercy through the universe, passed by our world; they could hold no fellowship with those who had rebelled against their Creator. Can no one bridge this wide gulf which separates between earth

and heaven? Can no ladder from heaven be let down to sinful people, by fallen man may once more be raised up to hold "fellowship" with God?

JESUS is the true HEBRON—the true ladder of Jacob let down from heaven and reaching to earth. Jesus has "reconciled things on earth and things in heaven," (Col. 1:20) He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places." (Ephesians 2:6) We who were once "afar off" have been "brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13)

I trust many Christians who read this, will love often to visit in thought the old city of the patriarchs, and to dwell on its name and meaning, "fellowship." Think of what you would have been without Jesus, your Hebron-City of Refuge! You would have been a poor outcast from God, an alien from all that is holy and happy. But by Jesus—all is changed. God is your Father—Christ is your elder Brother. In Jesus, God loves you—the Holy Spirit teaches you—heaven is open for you. You are enrolled as a citizen of the great Hebron above—"the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Christ has made you to be members of the great heavenly family; so that the little child who loves Jesus, is brother or sister to those before the eternal throne of heaven! You may be deprived of human friendship and fellowship. The brother or sister, the father or mother, or friend you once dearly loved, may be laid in some silent grave. But rejoice! nothing can separate you from a better friend and more lasting fellowship. Though all earthly joys were to perish—you can always rush within the gates of that mighty Hebron of refuge, and say, "Truly our FELLOWSHIP is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ!"

"Earthly friends may pain and grieve me,  
One day kind—the next they leave me;  
But this Friend can never deceive me—  
Oh, how He loves me!"

## **Fourth City—BEZER**

Bezer was situated beyond the Jordan, in the tribe of Reuben. Although its precise site has not been discovered, we think that it was perched on

one of the many rocky heights on the great mount Nebo, from whose summit Moses was permitted, before death, to get a view of the Land of Promise. The northern portion of the waters of the Dead Sea would be seen from it, and the pastoral mountains of Judah in the distance. From its name, as well as from its being a border town, and subject to attack from the warlike tribe of Moab, Bezer would probably be strongly fortified—similar, perhaps, in this respect to the towns in the neighborhood, with which the Israelites were so amazed on their first approach to Canaan, with "their walls great and high, reaching to heaven."

What does the name BEZER tell of Christ?

It literally means "stronghold," or ROCK. Jesus is the believer's BEZER. The sinner is in danger everywhere else—but in Jesus he is safe. He is invited to "turn to the STRONGHOLD" as a "prisoner of hope," and once within its gates, "though an army encamps against him," he need "fear no evil."

What a mighty force does encamp against him! There is God's Holy Law, with all its terrible threatenings and curses. But sheltered in the true BEZER, he can triumphantly say, "Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the One who justifies!" (Romans 8:33)

There is Satan, with his deceitful schemes and countless temptations. He was once a bright angel himself. He knows what holiness and happiness are. But being now a wicked spirit—he would make others as wicked and unhappy as himself! He is spoken of in the Bible as "a strong man armed." (Luke 11:21) But Jesus is "stronger" than this strong man! If you have fled for refuge to this great gospel Bezer, seated within its secure bulwarks you can joyfully exclaim, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold!" (Psalm 18:2)

There is your own Wicked Heart, with its sinful thoughts, and vain imaginations, and deep corruptions; for a man's worst foes are those which are within him! One of these heart-foes will tempt you to tell a lie; another to swear; another to be dishonest; another to be selfish; another

to be angry; another to be unkind. But He who is for you—is greater than all those who are against you. Safer than in any earthly castle, you can take up your warrior-song, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower! The righteous runs into it—and is safe!" (Proverbs 18:10)

There are the Trials and Sorrows and Distresses of this world—those things that cause sad hearts and tearful eyes. But that blessed Savior—your Rock and Stronghold, "knows your sorrows," for He felt them. He marks your tears, for He shed the same himself. Fleeing to this true BEZER in the time of affliction, you can dry your tears and sing, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. Those who know Your name trust in You because You have not abandoned those who seek You, Lord!" (Psalm 9:9, 10)

And there is Death, the last enemy of all. But even over this King of terrors and Terror of kings—you can shout in triumph from your Divine shelter, "O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God, who gives me the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

And Jesus is a Stronghold for all who truly flee to Him. I have already spoken of the little children of old rushing to Him—and smiling fearless in the Savior's arms. He combines the majesty of Deity—with the tenderness of man. If He had been the great God alone, you might have been overawed at the thought of going to Him. But what does the prophet Isaiah say of this true BEZER? "A MAN shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." (Isaiah 32:2)

In one of the great strongholds that were besieged in our last Indian rebellion, the Christian mothers were accustomed to hush their children asleep by singing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble." My Christian friends, "as one whom his mother comforts," so is God will "comfort you!" Here is His word of comfort: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; He cares for those who take refuge in Him!" (Nahum 1:7) In the old Cities of Refuge, no weapons of any kind were allowed to be made. Those who possessed them had to surrender them. This is true in a nobler and better sense, regarding the Gospel Stronghold. There can be no deadly weapons forged there. Their edge is blunted: "There is no condemnation to those who are

in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Satan's armory has been plundered; the "Stronger than he" has "stripped him of his weapons, and carried off his belongings." (Luke 11:22)

I have said that the word BEZER means "ROCK" as well as "stronghold." "Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock!" (Isaiah 26:4) He is the true ROCK OF AGES. May you not well say, with your eye on this glorious "Refuge"—

"Dear NAME, the ROCK on which I build,  
My shield and hiding-place;  
My never-failing treasury, filled  
With boundless stores of grace!"  
"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

## **Fifth City—RAMOTH**

Ramoth was situated in Gilead, within the tribe of Gad, and somewhere near the banks of the brook Jabbok, where Jacob wrestled in prayer with the angel. It must have occupied a commanding position among the beautifully-wooded glens of Gilead. Like Bezer, it must have been strongly fortified, because of the many sieges it had withstood. Being a border town of Palestine, it was situated in the direct route taken by the invading Syrian armies, and must have been constantly exposed to hostile attacks.

You can think of Ramoth, then, among the hills and slopes on the other side of the Jordan, with their forests of native oaks, which the famous "bulls of Bashan" (herds of wild cattle) roamed at large; while more peaceful flocks browsed on the meadows which fringed the mountain-streams.

What does the name RAMOTH tell us regarding Christ?

Ramoth literally means EXALTATION. Jesus is the true Ramoth! He is "exalted to be a Prince and a Savior!" He was once lowly, despised,

rejected, crucified and brutally slain. He compares Himself to a poor outcast and exile amid these forests of Gilead: "Many bulls surround Me; strong 'bulls of Bashan' encircle Me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against Me!" (Psalm 22:12, 13) But having been exalted on the cross as a suffering Savior, He is now exalted on the throne as a glorious King! "God has highly EXALTED Him" (Phil. 2:9;) Angels exalt Him—seraphs adore Him—saints praise Him—the Church on earth magnifies Him—the Church redeemed in heaven will magnify and exalt Him forever and ever!

Christian reader, delight often to walk around the walls of Ramoth, and think of Jesus "exalted at God's right hand." He is there pleading your cause. Though exalted, He has not forgotten the lowliest or humblest of His people. He is the Greatest of all beings, but He is also the Kindest of all. The first time after His exaltation when He came down to earth to speak to the aged apostle John—John wondered if the glories of heaven had altered the love and tenderness of Jesus. He remembered how often before he used to lean on Jesus' bosom. When he looked, however, now, upon the glorious Being that stood before him in His glorious garment, with "His eyes like a flame of fire," "John fell down at His feet like a dead man!" But the same gentle hand touched him, the same gentle voice he was accustomed to hear so often in past years, said to him, "Fear not!" How sweet for us to think that we have exalted on the highest throne of the universe—an unchanged and unchanging Savior, an ever-living, never-dying Friend!

"Though now ascended up on high,  
He looks on us, with a brother's eye."

JESUS is exalted in heaven—and exalted by all the glorious family of heaven. But, alas! there is one place where He is often not exalted, but rather cast down, and that is the human heart. That heart has been too truly compared to the inn of Bethlehem, where there was room for every guest—but the Lord of glory! You who truly believe in Him—whom Christ loved so much on earth—whom He fondled in His arms of mercy; see that it is not so with you. "My son," He says, "give me your heart!" See that He is enthroned in your heart, as Lord of all. Exalt Him in everything: in your thoughts, in your words, in your deeds. Welcome Him, as the

children of the temple welcomed Him to Jerusalem of old. Take up their song, and sing, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

## **Sixth City—GOLAN**

Golan was situated in Bashan, in the tribe of Manasseh, among the shepherd hills north of the lake of Gennesaret. It formed the most northerly Refuge-Sanctuary on the east side of Jordan, as Kedesh did on the west; but there are no particular events connected with it in Bible story.

What does the name of this last City of Refuge tell us regarding Jesus?

GOLAN literally signifies JOY. Jesus is truly the GOLAN of His people; they may have many other joys—but He is their "chief joy!" Well may they call Him GOLAN; for not one true joy could have ever visited them—had it not been for Him. The world would have been to them, from first to last, a "valley of Baca," (weeping,) had not Jesus died for their sins, and saved their souls. Well might the angel say, when he came to the plains of Bethlehem to announce the Savior's birth, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of GREAT JOY!"

There is not one step the Christian takes—but Jesus is GOLAN to him—his "joy." He is straying, a lost sheep on the dark mountains, in search of peace—Jesus meets him, and says, "Your sins are all forgiven!" —and he is joyful at that. He is wandering a prodigal, far from his Father's house—Jesus brings him to his lost home, and calls him His own child—and he is joyful at that. He has to travel a long and dreary journey before he reaches his true home in heaven—Jesus gives him His arm to lean upon; and he "goes on his way rejoicing." He has many fiery trials—Jesus tells him not to think these "strange," but rather to "rejoice," inasmuch as He is "partaker with Him in his sufferings." (1 Peter 4:12, 13) He has, at last, to walk through the dark Valley of death—Jesus meets him there, and supports him there. He sees "the King in His beauty," and the land that is yet "afar off;" and, believing, "he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8) When Jesus beholds him from His throne in

judgment, what are to be His blessed words of welcome? "Enter into the JOY of your Lord!" (Matt. 25:21) And when, as a ransomed one, he enters the bliss of eternal glory, he will shout, "In Your presence, O Savior God, is fullness of JOY!"

Christian reader, love often to gaze on the walls of this City of Refuge. The sacred writer, in giving the list of these six cities, seems to have kept it to the last because it is a happy word, and speaks of the happy prospects of all those who sincerely love the Lord Jesus. Believe me, there is no true joy—but in God. The joy of the wicked is like that of a noisy stream—noisy because it is shallow. The joy, on the other hand, which Jesus gives—is like a great river—deep, calm, ever-flowing, overflowing—not full in winter and dry in summer—but full, and clear, and refreshing all the year long! It may be always truly said of Jesus, the great Gospel Refuge, and of those who have fled to Him, what was said of old about Samaria, "There was great joy in that CITY." (Acts 8:8) It was the object of all that Christ did and said on earth—to give you this joy. "These things have I spoken unto you," says He, "that my JOY might remain in you, and that your JOY might be full." (John 15:11) Love Him now, and serve Him now, and follow Him now—that you may come at last to the true Golan, in His glorious presence above, and "REJOICE evermore!"

"When this poor lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,  
I'll sing Your power to save!

### **III. THE GOSPEL REFUGE**

"We who have fled to Him for refuge—have a strong consolation."  
Hebrews 6:18

And now, my friends, we have finished the survey of our picture-gallery. We have wandered among these six cities in the old land of promise. I shall repeat their name once more, that you may remember them.

KEDESH — Holiness



SHECHEM — Shoulder

HEBRON — Fellowship

BEZER — Stronghold

RAMOTH — Exaltation

GOLAN — Joy

What a complete Savior! In Him "all fullness dwells." In the case of some of these Hebrew cities, "not one stone has been left upon another, that has not been thrown down." Owls are screeching amid their ruins, and jackals are prowling for their prey. But not so with Him of whom they were types and pictures. Jesus ever lives! He never changes. Time and decay cannot crumble the walls of the Gospel Refuge. Jesus is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" (Hebrews 13:8)

I want, in this last chapter, to say one or two additional things to you about the Cities of Refuge. Let me ask you to give me your earnest attention.

The first thing I wish you to remember is, that all the preciousness of that NAME of Jesus, and all the security of the Gospel REFUGE—is derived from the merits of His death for sinners upon the cross.

This is the greatest truth of all truths—and one most strikingly taught in these old types and pictures. If you read the Bible account, you will find that the manslayer had his liberty restored to him upon the death of the High Priest. (Num. 35:25) When the tidings of the decease of the High Priest—this great Head of the Jewish nation, reached these refuge towns, I daresay many of their citizens would be heard, with wailing cry, mourning the loss of God's faithful servant. But the news was very different to the captive Hebrew. It brought him joyful news! For that event enabled him to go forth from his banishment, and to terminate years of painful separation from all he loved on earth. The avenger could no longer injure him. He could return, happy and secure—to the comforts of his long-lost home.

So, dear Christian reader, it is the death of your great High Priest, which has purchased release from spiritual captivity. The Law of God can no longer hold you. Justice can no longer threaten you. You can go forth with the glorious liberty of a child of God, saying, "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died!"

You can picture to yourselves, on the death of the Jewish High Priest, the Hebrew captive going forth from the city, within whose gloomy walls he had long been enclosed. You can picture him, with merry heart, making the valleys through which he hurried to his native dwelling, echo with songs of joy! And shall not you O Christian, with happier heart and voice, sing this song as you journey on to your heavenly home, and see it gleaming in the distance, on the other side of Jordan—

"When from the dust of death I rise,  
To take my mansion in the skies,  
This all my hope—this all my plea,  
That Jesus lived and died for me!"

The second thing I want to say to you is, that God has made the gospel City of Refuge easy of access, and has filled it with rich provisions.

He made the way as plain as possible, to the manslayer of old. The cities themselves were generally on a height—so as to be seen at a far distance. The roads leading to them were carefully marked and maintained. They were broader than other roads in Palestine, (sixteen yards wide). The Jewish magistrates and judges went once every year to inspect them, and to order repairs. Where streams occurred, there were bridges built across them. Where there were crossroads, signs with "Refuge" on them were set up. And as there were no bridges across Jordan River, three of the cities were placed, as I have already mentioned, on one side of the river, and three on the other; so that all might easily get at them, and none might have any excuse for not fleeing. The nearest city could always be reached by the manslayer, in half a day.

Moreover, we are informed there were ample stores of provisions laid up in them in all these cities of refuge. They were supplied with wells of water, and Levites were placed in turn as porters or gatekeepers, to be

ready to welcome every fugitive into these homes of safety.

So God has done everything for you—to make the Gospel Refuge accessible. Your parents and ministers—your Bibles and churches and good Christian books—are all, just like these refuge signs, pointing away from the cross-roads and by-roads of human reason, and human error, and self-righteousness, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and saying, "Flee! flee! Flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you!"

Jesus, too, the true Gospel Refuge, is full of rich provision. "You are complete in Him." He, as the true Joseph, gives forth out of the storehouses in His "treasure-cities," to all His needy people. What are some of these provisions? There is pardon, peace, justification, adoption, sanctification, strength for the hour of weakness, grace for the hour of temptation, and the good hope of everlasting life for the hour of death. No wonder that he says to every poor sinner seeking admission within these gates, "I am the bread of life! He who comes unto me shall never hunger." (John 6:35)

As in the cities of Canaan—so in this glorious Gospel-City of which they were types—there is a Well of living water. What is this? It is the Holy Spirit. He is often in Scripture compared to water. "If any man thirst," said Jesus, "let him come unto Me, and drink. This He spoke of the Spirit." (John 7:37) This all-glorious well-spring, moreover, is not like those of the Palestine cities, which were sometimes dried up in seasons of drought, but the Gospel well "springs up unto everlasting life." Angels, too, are the porters—the blessed wardens who keep the gates of this Gospel-City. "Are not angels all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) They love to watch by these gates, and to welcome every wanderer. How gladly they give the word, "Open the gates, that the righteous (those made righteous through the righteousness of Jesus) may enter in!" (Isaiah 26:2)

It is delightful, moreover, to think, that just as the Jewish cities were easily gotten to from all parts of Palestine; so from all parts of the world, may people go to the Greater and more Glorious Gospel Refuge. Poor pagan of the far East! Cast away your idols; the gates of the Gospel-City stand ready to welcome you. Indian of the far West! Cast aside your

warrior spear and your offerings of blood, and flee to the portals of mercy and to the blood which cleanses from all sin. Eskimo of the far North, amid your polar snows! Negro of Africa, amid your burning sands! Rush to the provided shelter! There is salvation there for you. "The same Lord is rich to ALL who call upon Him." Happy promise! The time will come when Christians from the whole world will be found singing together the same song and uttering the same prayer, "Open unto us the gates of righteousness, that we may enter into them, and praise the Lord!" (Psalm 118:19)

The third thing I want to say to you is, that no OTHER Refuge can save us—but JESUS alone.

I would like you to take as your motto the simple and beautiful words which a Christian whom has lately gone to glory, wrote, "I am sure I may be very thankful to God for His great mercy toward me. I must just keep in mind that there is only one Refuge to flee to—and that is Jesus!"

There are many other refuges people try to take shelter in. They think they will be as safe in them—as in the ONE of God's providing; but these will never be able to stand—in that day which will test every refuge.

I have seen some making their own goodness their refuge-city. They imagined they were not as bad as others. They trusted in the falling Siloam-tower of their own righteousness!

I have seen some making God's goodness their refuge-city. They said to themselves, "God is kind. He surely will not deal hardly with sinners at last. Justice, the avenger, will not surely always pursue with her flaming sword. The love of God will surely get the better of his justice."

Don't let Satan deceive you! There are many of his refuges which appear to be safe enough, but on which God has written, "Refuges of lies!"

There were many other towns in Canaan of old, which appeared to be as good and as safe as those I have been speaking of. But no city could afford shelter to the manslayer, except one of the six which God had specially appointed.

What would have happened if the fugitive of old, in fleeing from the avenger, had said to himself, "What is the use of my going so far away as to Hebron or Golan? I would rather flee to a nearer place. I will go to Jericho, the old city of palm-trees; or to Bethlehem, in the hills of Judah; or, better still, I will go to Jerusalem, the capital of the nation, where the temple of Zion is, and the palace of the King. Surely I shall be far safer within its lofty walls and bulwarks—than in one of these little cities of the Levites. Is it not said that, God is known in all her palaces for a Refuge?"

If he had done so, he would undoubtedly have perished. Neither King nor Priest, nor Golden gate nor Beautiful gate, nor wall nor bulwark, could have saved him from the avenger's sword. The refuge-towns appointed in the olden time, may have been "the least amid the cities of Judah." But they were the cities of God's selection, and God's ordering—and that was enough. In them, and in them alone—was the manslayer safe from the avenger of blood.

And just so it is with our Gospel Refuge. "Neither is there salvation in any other!" Rejecting Jesus, we are lost forever. All other refuges, however good or great or strong as they may appear to be—will prove only to be Babel-towers, that will fall on the poor builders, and crush them in their ruins!

When God told the children of Israel to sprinkle their lintels and door-posts with blood, they might have been foolish enough to say, "No—we shall do better. We shall not be content with doing so trifling a thing; we shall rather build up great walls around our houses, so that the destroying angel may not get in." Do you think, if they had done so—that their first-born children would have been saved? No! There would have been death in every such household; their high walls would have proved useless. Nothing but the red blood-mark on the doorway of the dwelling would be of any avail in warding off the death stroke.

So it is with the sinner. All the walls which pride, and self-righteousness, and good works can raise—will do nothing to keep out God's sword of avenging Justice. Only the sprinkled blood of covenant mercy will; for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses (and alone cleanses) from ALL SIN!" (1 John 1:7)

I remember, many years ago, attending the deathbed of a young man. He told me, one day, he had dreamed of being in a shop which seemed to be hung round with weapons and coats of armor. A number of people in the shop were putting these on. But one man was standing with a drawn sword in his hand—slaying those who passed into the open street. One after another he cut down—their armor was no protection to them—their bodies were lying dead and wounded on the pavement. In great fear and terror, the young man said—as his turn seemed at last to come, when he, too, must try to cover himself with the same armor, and rush out into the fatal street, that he knew not what to do. In looking around him, he observed, in the uppermost shelf, something resembling a web of coarse white linen, lying apparently neglected. He resolved to take it down, and wrap himself in a portion of it, instead of the unavailing weapons of iron and steel. Covering his head and body, he darted out, following the footsteps of the others. The sword descended; but it bounded back again. It was unable to pierce the linen covering. He alone was safe in that crowd of dead and dying.

Beautifully did this youthful dreamer apply his own "vision of the night." It was: How vain are all the boasted armor of self-righteousness; and how safe and glorious is that "white linen" covering of the righteousness of Jesus! To the eye of reason, the armor of iron and steel seems the best, and strongest, and securest. Many will not "submit themselves to the righteousness of God," and persist in using this armor. But it will be a poor protection against the sword of God's avenging justice. Happy are those who have been led to look above for another righteousness, and who have listened to the Divine injunction, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ!" (Romans 13:14)

Reader, let me ask—is this your case? Don't think, that because you are young, and have committed few sins, that you are safer than those who have committed many sins—and that you have not the same urgent need to flee to Jesus for refuge. In Canaan of old, the manslayer was in danger of his life, whether he had killed one or several people. One single killing, like one single sin, exposed him to the fury of the avenger.

Also, the Hebrew fugitive might elude his avenger! He might manage, for days, or weeks, or years, to shield himself from his wrath. He might go, as

David did to avoid Saul, to some cave of Adullam; he might hide in the gloomy recesses of some forest—amid the oaks of Bashan, or the rocky cliffs of the Jordan, or amid the cedar-heights of Lebanon; in the words of Ezekiel, "dwelling safely in the wilderness, and sleeping in the woods." (Ezekiel 34:25) But it is different with the sinner and his Avenger, "Vengeance is Mine! I WILL repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19) Who can hide from His all-seeing eye?

"If I should find some cave unknown,  
Where human foot had never trod,  
Even there I could not be alone—  
On every side there would be GOD!

"He smiles in heaven, He frowns in hell,  
He fills the air, the earth, the sea;  
I must within His presence dwell,  
I cannot from His anger flee!"

The fourth thing I want to say to you is: That many young and old HAVE fled to Jesus, the Gospel City of Refuge, and have found themselves safe and happy there.

How delightful it is, year by year, to trace the footsteps of those, whether young or old, rich or poor, who have fled to that blessed shelter! I shall close this little volume by telling you of two such, now inhabitants of the better Celestial City. Very different they were in years, in country, in outward position. But they were alike in this—that they fled in life to the gates of the Gospel Refuge; and to both, the NAME of JESUS was specially precious.

The one was little girl thirteen years old—the age, I daresay, of some whose eyes are falling on these pages. I saw her when she was bright and happy in her adopted home in England—a sweet spot in the county of Kent, on one of those wooded heights which command an extensive prospect of the Thames River, as it winds along, bearing the commerce of the world. Little did any then dream, that that little life, so full of promise, was to be early taken—her sun going down before it was "yet day!" So, however, the will of God was; her summons "home" came

suddenly and unexpectedly. Her disconsolate parents saw "the desire of their eyes taken away by a stroke." The dear child herself was naturally of a timid, reserved disposition; she felt more than she said. Her kind, unselfish heart delighted in devising plans of usefulness and carrying them out. The entire of her pocket-money was spent in the purchase of Christian books for the Sunday school children—all of whom loved her much. She won the affections of old as well as young. "The young girl who used to speak so prettily to us," was the description given, with tearful eyes, by more than one of the villagers who had known her loving ways, and heard her loving voice.

In another neighborhood still more familiar to her, she used to go to the cottages with her Bible, and offer to read to the inhabitants who most needed it; always putting her little hands together first, to ask for God's blessing, and then making some simple remarks she thought might be of use. Those whose hearts most sorely mourned for her, had the fullest assurance that the grace of God had been early poured into their dear child's heart. After she died, her mother was taking the cover off her Bible, the two following letters dropped from it on the ground:

"My dearest Papa and Mamma,  
I am going to write this in case I should suddenly go to that happy land where sorrow is not known; and that you may have no fears about my soul. I know my state, and that my precious Savior has called me, and I humbly accept this glorious invitation as a poor WRETCHED sinner. I do not expect redemption by my own poor merits. I have no fear of death—as death is but as a passage from this wicked world—to a happy, happy home. Though I am by nature very wicked, it is all washed away by my Savior's blood! The Holy Spirit has taught me what to pray for, and how to pray. I hope all my dear friends will forgive me if I have been angry when they have spoken to me about my faults. I would like, dearest parents, whatever little money and things I have, to be given to the Church Missionary Society and the Bible Society. My dear Savior has forgiven me all my INNUMERABLE sins, and so, dear parents, you need not fear about my soul. I believe my Savior will not forsake me if I trust in Him, and I know that all my righteousness is as filthy rags."

The other paper that was found, was probably intended for her brothers



and sisters. It is as follows:

"When you are in trouble, go to God and tell Him all about it. The Savior who called little children to come to Him—will listen to you, no matter what the subjects be, if you are but in earnest and need His help. If you have a difficult lesson to learn, a hasty spirit to subdue, an unkind word to bear, a proud spirit to humble—whatever your difficulty, take it to God in the name of Jesus, and He will help you. If even we, who see so little beneath the surface, are not pleased with outward appearances without good qualities within, how much less is the great God who searches the inmost recesses of the heart? 'The Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.' What we require is a new heart cleansed by the Holy Spirit, full of all the graces mentioned in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 5:22. Oh! go then to JESUS and ask of Him in earnest prayer to pardon your sins, and to confer upon you the blessed gift of a new heart."

My young friends, have you fled like this young girl, to an all-gracious Savior? Is the "name of Jesus," so sweet to her, equally precious to you? Does it "soothe your sorrows," "heal your wounds," and drive your tears and fears all away? Can you say, in the spirit of her beautiful and comforting letter—

"Until then I shall His love proclaim  
With every fleeting breath;  
And may the music of His NAME  
Refresh my soul in death."

Having told you of one recently "fallen asleep in Jesus," who had early fled to the shelter of the Gospel Refuge; I shall now tell you of an aged servant of Jesus who has, more recently still, entered on her glorious rest.

She was a former parishioner of mine. Her home was a lowly cottage in one of the loveliest villages of Scotland. Poor in this world, and an almost constant sufferer—she was rich in faith. She was one of "Christ's jewels;" her life was "hid with Christ in God." If I could venture to name two peculiarities in her which distinguished her more than others, it would be these: Love for the NAME of JESUS, and a Life of PRAYER.

"His name," to her, was "like ointment poured forth." (Sol. Song 1:3) Often have I delighted to sit with her in her cottage, with her Bible on her knee, and hear her speak of "the name which is above every name" She had herself long before, in early life, fled to the Gospel stronghold. I think her favorite city would have been GOLAN, "Joy." Her heart seemed ever to be filled with "peace and joy in believing."

Doubtless much of this calm serenity and joy she derived from her life of prayer. It is no small matter for the writer of these pages to know, that there was not a day for more than sixteen years, in which he was not personally and specially remembered by this lowly saint at the throne of grace.

One afternoon during this past year, she had entered her cottage, carrying a pitcher of water down from the well in her garden. It was the last time she crossed her threshold. When her door was opened, she was found alone on her knees; BUT her spirit had fled! PRAYER, as it had been her ever fond delight in life, had been her solace and comfort in death. Her last act was drawing water out of the better "wells of salvation." She began with prayer, but ended in praise! She began her prayer on earth—and finished it with in heaven!

Reader! when you come to die, could you be equally happy, equally safe? Would you be able thus to rejoice and triumph in the name of Jesus? Could you declare, with either of these two glorified spirits, before God "took" them, "We HAVE a strong city. We are surrounded by the walls of God's salvation!" (Isaiah 26:1) Has the Holy Spirit taught you, as He taught them, that you are sinners by nature, and in a state of condemnation? Have you heard God's voice behind you, declaring that "He can by no means clear the guilty?" (Exod. 34:7) And are you able now joyfully to say, "I heard Your voice, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself?"

Are you, like them, really "hid" within the gates? The manslayer of old required to be within the refuge-city. Even if he were but one footstep outside, the avenger of blood could cut him down. It did not matter how near he was, if he was not inside the portals!

And so it will avail you nothing to know about Christ, and hear about Christ—to survey the strength of the city's walls, the glory of its battlements, and the beauty of its palaces. It is "the righteous who RUNS into it," who alone is "safe."

What more, in closing, have I to say, but to repeat the solemn word, "Hurry! Flee for your life!" Every hour you put off, the time is shorter; the avenger is nearer; the chances of escape are fewer. There is no time for delay. I say this to the very youngest. I say more. As young feet can run fastest—so it is with young souls. You will never go to Jesus so easily as now. Let nothing keep you back. It is said that on digging up the ruins of Herculaneum, (the city that was buried under the lava of Mount Vesuvius,) the body of a man was found in an upright posture, in the act of running out of the door of his house to escape destruction. He had a bag of gold in his hand. Others had escaped in safety. But this miser loved his gold more than his life. He had returned to fetch it, thinking he would have time enough to escape the terrible doom; but the burning stream overtook him. He was encased in a living tomb!

It was one, too, of the saddest incidents connected with these Cities of Refuge of old, when some poor, breathless, panting fugitive—just when he was in sight of the city—when he had almost reached the gate, sank exhausted. Or perhaps the case of some other who had lain down weary to sleep, but who had been awakened by the avenger at his side, and the drawn sword gleaming before his eyes!

But, oh, sadder, sadder far, for any, young or old, to perish within sight of Christ! To allow the love of sin, or the love of pleasure, or the love of the world, to make them "too late!" To be almost saved—but not altogether saved! To be cut down by the sword of wrath, or overtaken by the fiery stream—with heaven in view!

May God grant that this may not be the case with any one of you!

I shall conclude with a happier picture: The citizens in these Refuge-cities of old, were sometimes seen clustered on the top of the walls, watching the approach of the manslayer, and cheering him on when faint and exhausted. Just so, think of the happy citizens of the New Jerusalem:

Patriarchs, prophets, saints, departed friends, who are now safe within its gates, watching you from these glorious heights, beckoning to you not to tarry, but to be "followers of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises." "Truly I say unto you, There is joy in heaven among the angels of God over every sinner that repents."

We have been speaking of the "name of JESUS."

Read the motto over the gateway of all these six cities. Read the motto over the door of the Gospel Refuge: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other NAME given under heaven by which the sinner can be saved, but the NAME of JESUS."

Jesus, my Refuge! look on me,  
When weak and weary, worn, oppressed;  
I cast my every care on Thee—  
You are my REST.

Jesus, my Refuge! guide my way,  
Dispel the gloomy shades of night,  
Oh, please shine forth with cheering ray!  
You are my Light.

Jesus, my Refuge! storms may rise,  
Affliction sweep with tempest-shock,  
My spirit to Your shelter flies—  
You are my ROCK.

Jesus, my Refuge! legion-foes  
May seek to drive me from the field,  
But in Your strength I shall repose—  
You are my SHIELD.

Jesus, my Refuge! You in store  
Have happiness without alloy,  
Pleasures unmingled, evermore—  
You are my JOY.

Jesus, my Refuge! on the brink  
Of Jordan, in my latest strife,  
You will not suffer me to sink—  
You are my LIFE.

Jesus, my Refuge! oh, supply  
My every want. Whatever befall;  
Through life, in death, eternally,  
You are my ALL!





















# COMMUNION MEMORIES

The record of some Communion Sundays, with Meditations, Addresses, and Prayers suited for the Lord's Table

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## **The Grain of Wheat Falling into the Ground and Dying.**

"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12:24

To understand the scope and meaning of these words, we must connect them with the verses in the immediately preceding context.

Some Greeks, not Grecian Jews, but Gentiles—what were called Proselytes of the Gate—had gone to Jerusalem to worship with other pilgrims at the Feast of the Passover. They came to Philip of Bethsaida, probably attracted by his Greek name, with the request, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

The disciples could not fail to observe the profound emotion which the desire thus expressed produced on their divine Lord. When Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together told Jesus, it brought from His lips an utterance of strange triumph—"The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified!" Occurring as it did in that solemn season of Passion week, there was something in the petition and the petitioners alike remarkable. These Greeks were Representative men. In the eye of Christ, it was "a prayer," to use the words of Stier, "in the name of their nation and of all nations," to see the world's Savior. It was the heathen

(the "other sheep not of the Jewish fold") soliciting to be gathered in; yes, too, and the Jew introducing the Gentile. Need we wonder, that the Redeemer beholds in this, the first-fruits of a mighty ingathering—a pledge that the time was at hand when the covenant and uncovenanted nations would be blended and reconciled; the middle wall of partition broken down, and all the ends of the earth see the salvation of God? 'What!' He seems to say, 'Gentiles coming to My light! aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise! Men from Pagan shores, and that, too, from no vague curiosity, but with the intense earnestness and wistful longing of "watchers for the morning," uttering the cry of weary humanity, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" Then, the hour is come that the heathen are given for My inheritance; when men shall be blessed in Me, and all nations shall call Me blessed.'

But, His exclamation of triumph comes to an abrupt conclusion. All at once, by a singularly rapid transition, He changes the theme. That momentary glimpse of glory seems dimmed and clouded by the intervention of some troubled thought—"a prelude to Gethsemane." It is as if some bolt had suddenly darted athwart the azure sky; and He had called to mind that the way to glorification is by suffering and death. The Cross must be borne before the Crown can be gained. While in one breath, with an unusual gleam of joy on His countenance, He proclaims, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified," the "decease" He must first "accomplish" casts its dreadful shadow on His path; and He adds the similitude of our text—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone." You will observe, in the announcement and enforcement of a great truth, He goes, not to the Volume of Prophecy (this He might have done, and probably would have done, had He been discoursing to Jews alone). But in the presence of these Greeks, He turns to pages better understood by them; and allows Nature, through her simplest processes, to speak, and unfold the impending mystery. He brings before them the familiar parable of the seed-grain dropped into the earth—showing how life comes out of death—a new and more exuberant growth springing from the destruction of the inserted grain.

Dear brethren, the subject surely is specially appropriate in the prospect

we have of commemorating the death and sufferings of our divine Savior. Come, then, let us gather around the lowly emblem, and contemplate "Christ, THE GRAIN OF WHEAT."

In doing so, let me direct your meditations to these three points—

The Grain of Wheat abiding alone.

The Grain of Wheat falling into the ground and dying.

The Grain of Wheat bringing forth much fruit.

I. The Grain of Wheat ABIDING ALONE.

It is Christ's humiliation which we are mainly called in these words, as well as in our commemorative feast of today, to ponder.

But in order, by contrast, to bring out the wonders of that humiliation, let us, as here suggested, go back to a past Eternity, and contemplate that Grain of Wheat abiding alone.

Immensity a void. The mysterious Trinity in unity, pervading and filling all space. No need of worlds or angels to glorify them. Stupendous thought! To wing our way up the ascending steeps, with no planet for a resting-place—No created spots where we can breathe, and pause, and breathe again—Nothing above, below, around, but GOD!! No trill of an angel's song, to break the trance of everlasting ages—There was the Grain of Wheat abiding alone—The Eternal Son with the Eternal Father, in the glory which He had with Him before the world was!

Sublime indeed is it to contemplate Christ at this moment, as the Sovereign Ruler of His vast universe marshaling its hosts of stars; kindling up the Altar-fires of Heaven, "binding the sweet influences of Pleiades; loosing the bands of Orion; guiding Arcturus with his sons." But equally grand and magnificent is it to revert to the period before the existence of this wealth and munificence of power—when no forests were waving, no waters rolling, no planets circling in their spheres. To think of the great Center of all, then reposing in the solitudes of His own Infinite Being—no tongue of angel, redeemed or unredeemed, to hymn His praise

—yet ineffably glorious in His own blessed Nature!

Behold "the Grain of Wheat"—behold the Second Person in the Ever-blessed Trinity "abiding alone!"

## II. The Grain of Wheat FALLING INTO THE GROUND, AND DYING.

Impelled by nothing but His own free, sovereign, unmerited grace, Christ resolves not to abide alone. He has to come down to a ruined world in order to effect its ransom and salvation. Compassionating the wandering star which had broken loose from its orbit, plunging ever deeper and deeper into darkness—He resolves to replace it within the sphere of the divine regards.

But, how replace it? How, in other words, is this Redemption from sin and death to be effected? Is it by becoming incarnate in order to live a pattern-life, the embodiment and manifestation of all virtue and moral excellence; and thus exhibit in the sight of apostate men a model of unsullied purity, sublime unselfishness, peerless self-sacrifice, divine love?

He doubtless did so. He, the Infinite One, descended in the likeness of sinful flesh; and as He walked through a guilt-stricken woe-worn world, wherever He went He scattered the riches of His beneficence. Compassion beamed in His look; grace flowed from His lips; disease crouched at His feet; sickness at His touch took wings, and fled away. God the Father complacently beholding that sinless, Holy Being, proclaimed from the excellent glory—"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

But all this was subordinate to higher requirements—more dreadful responsibilities. "Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Regarding Him as merely the Ideal of Humanity, the manifested perfection of divine "Manhood," He could not, in that capacity, save us. Death (in this most majestic and solemn of all illustrations) must be the condition of life. The grain of wheat—to revert to the symbol in outer material Nature—may be perfect, a perfect specimen of its kind. No more, it has in it the germ of

vitality—the seminal principle of life. But if left by itself in the granary, it cannot fructify. It remains an inert unproductive thing—"it abides alone." It must first be sown, or, we may figuratively express it, be buried in the earth. But thus falling into the ground and dying, it comes up a verdant stalk, ultimately bearing fruit, the parent and progenitor of a thousand harvests.

So it was with Jesus, the Lord and Giver of life. How wondrously does Nature's lowliest page thus preach to us the great central truth of the Gospel—"Him who died for us, and rose again." As I go to the field where the husbandman is scattering his grain, I see in one of those tiny seeds a type and interpreter of that Mystery which angels desire to look into. It tells me that the way to the seed's multiplication and to Christ's glorification is the same—by the law of death. I see the grain of wheat, which abode alone in the barn, taken and cast into the ground; harrowed over; left during winter or in early spring to slumber under the insensate clod. Anon the field is flushed with living green—the one yellow seed has started up, multiplied thirty-fold. Out of apparent decay and dissolution there emerges prolific life and loveliness—"it brings forth much fruit." "I came," says the Great Antitype, and Interpreter of these nature-teachings, "that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

There are two words in our text, on which we may for a moment instructively pause. The one suggesting the necessity, the other the voluntariness of the death of Jesus.

(1) "EXCEPT a grain of wheat fall into the ground." "Unless."—There was no other possible way by which the world could be redeemed. Without the dying of the grain-seed—no life. Without the shedding of blood in the person of the Divine Sin-bearer—no remission.

This is not the place to enter on the consideration or explanation of theological difficulties and perplexities. The whole principle of Surety substitution is a mystery to us; though, too, abundantly exemplified and manifested, alike in the analogy of Nature and in human experience. But we may well believe, that had there been any other possible method, by which the vindication of God's law could have been effected and the sinner saved—the Grain of Wheat would to this day have remained (if we

can with reverence employ such a figure) where it had been from all Eternity, in its place in the Heavenly Garner. Christ would have "abode alone,"—God, the Being of infinite compassion as well as of righteousness, would never and could never have permitted unnecessary and superfluous suffering in the Son of His love. It was the one only means of restitution and safety. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their Salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10.) There was a necessity for all that He endured, arising out of the very Nature of God. The law, in the outer world, of the seed-growing, became a law to the Moral Lawgiver Himself.

(2.) We have the voluntariness of Christ's death here set forth. "If it dies!" "If." This same monosyllable He Himself repeats with similar emphasis a few verses further on—"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

It is a conditional particle of intense and momentous significance. It sets before us the perfect freeness and spontaneity of the Sacrifice—uttered at the moment it was, with the shadow of the Cross projected on His path—His hour of untold Suffering close at hand. May we not take it as revealing to us the human, in the divine Person of the God-man—for the instant shrinking at the anticipation of coming anguish? "If it dies!" As if He were casting up and pondering in His own infinite Mind, the possibility of evading the terrible necessity. "If it dies." For a moment, if I may so express it, appalled at the dreadful yet indispensable conditions Suretyship involved!

How full indeed is all this passage of His strong human emotions. A few verses succeeding He exclaims—"Now is the judgment," or, as some have rendered it, though we may challenge the accuracy of the rendering—"Now is the CRISIS of this world." But in reality it was so—the crisis-moment—the great turning-point in the world's salvation. Am I to save Myself—or save it? Am I (the Grain of Wheat) to fall into the ground and die, or am I to return, unsundered to death, to the heaven whence I came? Are the longings and hopes and aspirations of 4000 years to be rolled back again into the abyss of chaos and night? Or, is the debt to be paid, and earth's millions to be saved? "Now is the Crisis of this world."—

The Church of the past and the Church of the future are, as it were, hushed into silence, listening with arrested ear for the announcement of the resolve, which rests with the Divine Speaker. Is He to pause or go on? Is the cup to pass from Him, or is He to drink it? Is He to drop into the ground and become life for others; or, to "abide alone?" He Himself, at this same crisis-hour, prolongs the soliloquy—"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" "What shall I say?"—Shall it be, Father, save Me! Accept My past life of loving filial obedience! Father, let Me leave untasted this dire chalice of death. Let Me revoke My word of promised Surrender and Sacrifice, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death!" Father, let the world perish. Forego the world's harvest—take me to Yourself to abide alone, and forever?

We read in another place, regarding the great Harvest-home of the world, that "the Reapers are the Angels." A writer on this passage of a bygone age, has graphically pictured angel whispering in breathless interest to angel, as they look forward to this reaping time—"What will be the solution of this stupendous problem?" "What will He say?" Shall we have the joy of reaping our golden harvest—or, will the Grain of Wheat refuse to fall into the earth, and abide alone? What DID He say? "Father, save Me from this hour! nevertheless for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Your Name!" It is enough. In these last words He has given the sure "prelude of victory." He will save others, Himself He will not save! The angels are not to be bereft of their glorious reaping. This Man of Sorrows (His soul in trouble)—this God-man Mediator, going forth weeping, bearing in Himself precious Seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing His sheaves with Him.

We all recall the old Roman story, when, in obedience to the oracular response, a human life, by an act of heroic self-surrender, paid the demanded penalty, and the earthquake-rent was closed.

Christ, in a nobler sense, was that Victim. By the supremest of all deeds of self-sacrifice, because superhuman and divine, the yawning gulf between earth and Heaven has been filled up. The Prince of Life, the sinless Son of God, has given Himself for a ransom.

Like another Aaron, "He stood between the living and the dead, and the

plague was stayed." In the lowly emblem of our text, the Grain of Wheat dies, and becomes the life of a perishing world. This leads us—

### III. To the Grain of Wheat BRINGING FORTH MUCH FRUIT.

It was prophesied regarding the Redeemer, that He would "see His seed" (Isaiah 53:10). "This," says He, "is the Father's will who has sent Me, that of all whom He has given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). In that group of Hellenists—men from the shores of the most intellectual of the European nations—who now stood in His presence and had given the key-note to all this discourse, the Savior beheld the first "handful of grain on the top of the mountains, whose fruit would yet shake like Lebanon." The wise men had come from the East to worship at His birth—these Greeks had come from the West to worship before His death. The simple desire, "We would see Jesus," was, to Him who heard it, better than all gold and frankincense and myrrh. It was as precious ointment against the day of His burial. With the omniscient glance of Deity, He that moment foreknew that He was about to die. He (the Tree of Life) was to be felled to the ground; the axe was already laid to the root. But as many a noble inhabitant of the forest, coming with a crash on the sward, scatters its seed all around, and in a few years there starts up a vast plantation—So Christ, by dying, scattered far and wide the grain of spiritual and immortal life. The seed and the leaves of this Tree are for the healing of the nations. The divine Grain-Seed drops into the ground; a golden harvest waves, and Heaven is garnered with ransomed souls.

Brethren, it is surely delightful for us, on this Day of Communion, to connect the cross with the triumphal crown. We are about to contemplate the one solitary fact, the Grain of Wheat falling into the ground and dying. But the eye of faith is carried forward to that final harvest of the world, when the mighty Conqueror will be recognized and welcomed, as the Balm of all hearts, the Redressor of all wrongs. Seeing of the fruit of the travail of His Soul, He shall be satisfied—and surrounded with His spiritual Seed exclaim, "Behold I, and the children whom You have given Me." The cry subsequently heard from these same Greeks and their shores, "Come over and help us," will become the shout of nations. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."



Oh wondrous multitude which no man can number! A multitude growing ever since Abel bent, a solitary worshiper, in the heavenly Sanctuary, with his solitary song—the first solitary sheaf in these Heavenly granaries. Yes! the song is deepening; the sheaves are multiplying. The patriarchal Church swelled the store; the Mosaic Church added to its bundles of first-fruits, and its members prolonged the festal anthem. The strain was taken up by shepherds and fishermen of Galilee. It was echoed by Magi of Persia, and heathens of Greece. It spread along the shores of the Mediterranean; it rang in the halls of Caesar. It was taken up by the waves of the Western seas. It reached the shores of Britain, and from her sent its echoes round the world. India uttered it from her Pagodas. Iceland proclaimed it amid her eternal winters. Ethiopia stretched out her hands unto God; and this was the burden of the universal prayer, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

The song of the Church on earth is nothing to the song of the Church above. It has expanded into "the sound of much people, the sound of a great multitude, the noise of many waters, the voice of mighty thunderings." And what is its theme? It is the death of the Grain-Seed, and the resultant "much fruit." "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kingdom and tongue and people and nation."

Brethren, we come this day to present ourselves as an offering—living sacrifices on God's altar; as it were a portion of the fruits of the Savior's atonement—acknowledging, that if we have any life in us—it is as springing from that Grain of Wheat we have now seen (and are about through the more vivid emblem of His own instituted Ordinance to see) falling into the ground and dying. We come, joyfully owning and confessing, that all we have we derive from Him, as the life of our souls.

May not this appropriately form the closing practical thought—If He died for us, what have we done, what are we willing to do for Him? The lowly disciple of Bethany brought the best offering she had, with which to embalm her Lord on the eve of His decease. Are we preparing our tributes of affection?—our alabaster box filled with the choicest graces of humility, faith, repentance, new obedience—loving Him who has given us, as the

mightiest proof and measure of His love, that instead of "abiding alone" through the everlasting ages with the Father, He was willing to fall into the ground and die?

Spirit of God! consecrate our Communion Sabbath! Open the doors of the banqueting house! Unseal the Sacred mysteries! Let Your people leave the din of the world behind them, that they may come and "see Jesus!" With their hearts full of the lowly similitude of our text; with their footsteps turned to Gethsemane and Calvary—the cross and the grave—let them obey the summons, 'Come, see the Grain of Wheat laid in the furrow of darkness and death! Come, see the place where the Lord suffered; Come, see the place where the Lord lay—for He has swallowed up death in Victory!' May Angels, looking down upon us as we are assembled at the Holy Table, be able to say, "They joy before You, according to the joy in harvest; and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil!"

## **THE GREAT RESOLVE**

"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."—Micah 4:5

The Sacrament of the Supper is a votive as well as a commemorative ordinance. And these words may be appropriately taken as embodying a holy resolution, or rather a series of holy resolutions, on the part of those who have recently recorded their vows.

"The Name of the Lord," it is said, "is a strong tower—the righteous runs into it, and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). You who, as good soldiers, have anew attested your allegiance to your heavenly Leader, are represented as garrisoning this divine Stronghold—"Those who trust in the Lord shall be

like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever." It has its "places of defense"—fortified battlements. And we are now to invite you to "go about Zion, mark the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks and consider her palaces." The various Towers of this Great spiritual Fortress are nothing else than the titles and attributes with which, in His own Inspired Volume, God has seen meet to make Himself known. Of such there are six, more conspicuously presented to us, in Old Testament Scripture alone—

JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU. The Tower of Righteousness.

JEHOVAH-SHALOM. The Tower of Peace.

JEHOVAH- SHAMMAH. The Tower of the Divine Presence.

JEHOVAH-NISSI. The Tower of Defense.

JEHOVAH-JIREH. The Tower of Trust.

JEHOVAH-ROPHI. The Tower of Healing.

After a Sacramental Season, it is my privilege, as we survey these glorious munitions, to say to all believing communicants, in the words of the Prophet Zechariah—"I will strengthen them in the Lord; and they shall walk up and down in His name."

I. The First Tower we mention is JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU. "The Lord our Righteousness."

We were surely today specially invited to behold this Tower built on "the Rock of Ages." What was the main purpose of our gathering at the Holy Table, but to commemorate the Prince of Life working out for us, by His obedience and death, a righteousness not our own? Any shelter we can rear is a tower of sand—a citadel of bulrushes—that will leave us naked and defenseless in that solemn hour which is to try every man's work, and every man's righteousness of what sort it is. But, says Jehovah, "I bring near My righteousness" (Isa. 46:13). The salvation wrought out by His Eternal Son He has "appointed for walls and for bulwarks." And the believer's prayer who has fled to this Refuge city is—"Let Your hand be

upon the Man of Your right hand, on the Son of Man whom You have made strong for Yourself" (Ps. 80:17). He has finished transgression and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in Everlasting Righteousness (Dan. 9:24). Perish all else that would interfere with it. Let the giant deed—the triumph of divine sorrow and love which we have had before us in significant symbol—stand forth in its solitary grandeur. To attempt anything of our own by way of supplement or addition to the merits of the Divine Surety, would be seeking to gild refined gold; holding up the candle to help the sunlight; or listening to those who counseled the youthful conqueror of Goliath to cumber himself with useless armor, a helmet of steel, and boots of brass, and an untempered shield. Like him, let us cast them all aside, saying, as we stand panoplied in the great imputed righteousness—"Behold! O God, our Shield, and look on the face of Your Anointed."

Brethren and fellow-Communicants, think as you pace that Tower, with its memories of suffering and victory, how it has been crowded by the Saints in the past. You are walking where Abraham walked, when "he believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." You are treading what was consecrated by the footsteps of Isaac and Jacob—Moses, and David, and Isaiah—the blessed Apostles, the holy Martyrs, the members of the true Church throughout all the world and in every age. You are taking up, in the text, the strain chanted and sung by each of them in turn—"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God," and "this is His name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

II. A Second Tower is JEHOVAH-SHALOM. "The Lord my Peace," or "The Lord send Peace."

This Spiritual Tower of Peace stands side by side with the Tower of Righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace" (Isa. 32:17). "Being justified by faith"—faith in the finished work and righteousness of Christ—"we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). "Let him take hold of My Strength, that he may make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me" (Isa. 27:5). It is through Him, who is emphatically THE STRONG ONE, that we can have peace. "Having made peace, through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). The gifted author of the "Pilgrim's Progress" speaks

of the window of the chamber called Peace, in which Christian lay, as opening towards the risen sun. The window faces the Sun of Righteousness. It gets its very name from the "Brightness of His rising." Isaiah, in one of the beautiful emblems of his later prophecy, likens the believer's peace to the "flowing of a river" (48:18). How as of a river? Whence these tranquil streams—these still, deep-flowing waters? They cannot be fed from the low marshy ground of his own goodness—his virtues, or moralities; his fitful frames and feelings—but from the Everlasting Hills—from that Righteousness, which the Psalmist describes to be as "the great mountains" (Ps. 36:6). Like the glacier Alps, from which streams, melted by the sun, are flowing all summer long in the midst of drought, when every other channel is dry.

Walk up and down, as Christian sentinels, in this Name of the Lord—singing your watch-song, "You will keep him, O God, in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You!"

What a repose this Gospel peace gives amid all the petty troubles of life! The Apostle speaks of it as "the Peace of God, which passes all understanding," and which "keeps the heart" (according to the meaning of the word in the original), as in a citadel or garrison. What a calm elevation is imparted to the present; while the future can be contemplated undismayed! The chariot of peace in which the believer is seated rolls on; and life's troubles are but as the thin clouds of dust on the gusty highway. Yes, you who climbed so lately "the Hill of blessing," as you enter this Tower of Zion, and gaze from its loopholed window, see how, when God gives His beloved the gracious boon of peace, He makes all things look peaceful. All that belongs to the Christian; his duties; his engagements; his very cares and difficulties, are softened and mellowed with this calm tranquility; just as in nature the setting sun transforms and metamorphoses the whole landscape into gold. While from your Peace-Tower you thus look along life's valley, you can observe also, beyond the border river, the fields of the true Canaan "dressed in living green," and which this purchased peace has made all your own. With the present rest of grace in possession, and the rest of glory in reversion, we may well say of the Lord, "He is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer; my God, my Strength, in whom I will trust; my Shield, and the

horn of my salvation, and my high Tower."

Let us joyfully renew and ratify our vows; and with earnest heart and voice utter the resolution, "We will walk in THIS name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

III. A Third Tower is JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH. "The Lord is there,"—The Tower of the Divine Presence.

It is a blessed thing for the believer to bear constantly about with him the realized sense of the Divine nearness, and it is his peculiar privilege and prerogative to do so. God, indeed, is everywhere. The world, the universe has written on its every portal JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH—"The Lord is there." It is gleaming in starry letters on the nightly skies. It is carved in deep hieroglyphics on earth's lowest strata. It is inscribed on the brow of its loftiest mountains. It is written in mosaic on the floor of the sounding sea. Among the forest glades—the cathedral aisles of tangled wood—where neither hammer nor axe nor tool of iron has built a Temple, God is there. Amid the waste of desert sands; on the mossy bank; on the lonely shore, God is there. In the summer calm; the raging storm; the smiling harvest, God is there. Like one of those giant mountains whose base is furrowed with lakes and valleys, and its top pierces the clouds; so is the Ever near—the Omnipresent One. Heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. From among its lowliest insect tribes, up to the myriad ranks of Angel and Archangel—JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH—the Lord is there.

He is the living God also in Providence—alike in great things and in small. When we hear of kingdoms convulsed; nations reeling and trembling, The Lord is there. "Shall there be evil," says the prophet, "in a city, and the Lord has not done it?" (Amos 3:6). When we hear of death darkening the humblest dwelling; when we see the tiniest bud of earth's affection falling, as we think, prematurely to the ground, "The Lord is there," "Who knows not in all these things that the hand of the Lord has wrought this?" (Job 12:9). Yes, it is delightful and comforting surely, with the eye of faith, to see Jehovah thus riding in the chariot of Providence, reigning in (if I may so express it) at His sovereign Will its fiery coursers—the mighty wheels, like those in Ezekiel's vision—rather their complex movements,

wheel within wheel—revolving and evolving nothing but good—He guiding and supervising all; appointing every sorrow that is endured, and every tear that is shed!

There is yet a nobler and pre-eminent sense in which His covenant people can flee into this Strong Tower; and walking in the name of their God can say—"The Lord Almighty is with us—the God of Jacob is our Refuge,"—"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Oh! how it would hallow all life's duties, and take the sting from many of its sorrows, and fortify against its temptations, if we could ever regard ourselves as God's fortresses—our souls bearing the superscription on their living gates—"The Lord is there." Where the term we now speak of is used, Micah is gazing with prophetic inspiration on the future city of Jerusalem, and the Sanctuary which was yet to crown the heights of Zion. He tells us that although there will be the absence of the glory of the First Temple—no visible Shekinah—no visible cloud—yet that the presence of the invisible God will be diffused like an odor of sacred incense around; and the name of it shall be JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH.

Dear friends, today's watch-word, circulating from guest to guest at the Holy Table, was "Surely the Lord is in this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." Let us seek to perpetuate the blessings of a Communion-Sabbath by the holy resolve—"If Your Presence go not with us, carry us not hence." "You, O Lord, are in the midst of us, and we are called by Your name." "We will walk in this name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

IV. A Fourth Tower is JEHOVAH-NISSI. "The Lord my Banner,"—The Tower of Defense.

This reminds all of us who have given public testimony of our faith in Christ, that we are still in an enemy's country. You remember how Bunyan (to quote the great Dreamer again) represents Christiana and her children knocking at the Gate; while in a castle, near by, there were those who were assailing them. If any leave a Communion-table to return to the world in their own strength, they shall assuredly fall. But we go not a warfare on our own charges. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses,

but we will remember the name of the Lord our God," and He who is for us, is greater than all that can be against us.

Let our moral attitude be like the workmen on the walls of Zion in Nehemiah's time, building with the sword girded by our side; ever ready, when the missiles are flying thick and fast around, to flee to Him who is a "High Tower against the enemy," and who thus invites all weak and helpless ones—"Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you; hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isa. 26:20). This is the true Tower of King David, built for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men (Sol. Song 4:4). "Blessed is the people who know the joyful sound—they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name shall they rejoice all the day and in Your righteousness shall they be exalted. For You are the glory of their strength—and in Your favor our horn shall be exalted. For the Lord is our DEFENSE—and the Holy One of Israel is our king" (Ps. 89:15-18).—"We will walk in this name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

V. Our Fifth Tower is JEHOVAH-JIREH. "The Lord will provide,"—The Tower of Trust.

It is always desirable for a conquering army either to be near its supplies, or to keep up its line of communication. That broken, all is lost. The Christian has his promise of assured help—"My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). "The Lord will provide." Ah, that future! that unknown, sometimes dark and chequered future, how many a thought it costs! Who can forecast the varying scenes of changeable life? It is like walking up some sequestered dell; every turn in the path presents something new. A cluster of flowers here, a rotten branch or decaying tree there—now a flowing stream, now a quiet pool, now a sprawling cascade; now a gleam of sunlight, now the driving rain or muttering thunder. But each apparently capricious turn in life's way, all its accidents and incidents, are the appointments of Infinite Wisdom and "those who know Your Name shall put their trust in You."

Trust—trust in the goodness, and mercy, and faithfulness of God, is surely one at least of the great lessons which a Communion Season



inculcates. Looking to these symbols and pledges of unutterable love, you can confidently make the challenge—"He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). A child in the midst of the storm can muffle its head in its father's arms and fall asleep. God is your Father! Walk up and down in the strength of that Gospel Name. Every earthly father does in a small scale to his family what the Great Parent does on a large scale to all His people. From that glorious Tower on the Hill of Ordinances you can look through the embrasures behind, as well as before. Survey the landmarks of the bygone pilgrimage! Count up your Ebenezers—the providential interpositions of the past, and then say—taking these as pledges and guarantees for the time to come, "You have been my help—leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." The future, as we have already said, with all its vicissitudes, is in His keeping and ordering. You may work the loom—the shuttle may be in your hands but the pattern is all His—the intermingling threads of varied hue, even what are dark and somber. Talk not of a tangled web, when it is that of the Great Craftsman. Confide in that heart of Infinite Love. Shall we dream of being wiser than God? Shall we dream of correcting His Book of Sovereign decrees? of altering the building-plans of the Divine Architect? No! trust His loving heart, where sense cannot trace His hand. Trust is a staff not for level plains and smooth highways. It is the alpenstock, the pilgrim prop for the mountaineer, for the rugged ascent, the slippery path, the glacier crevasse.

As the El-Shaddai—the All-sufficient, God has said, "I will never leave you, I will (in the redundant emphasis and energy of the original) "never, never, never forsake you." He is a Rich Provider, a Sure Provider, a Willing Provider, a Wise Provider. JEHOVAH-JIREH! "We will walk in this name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

VI. Yet one other Tower remains to be noted. JEHOVAH-ROPHI. The Tower of Healing—"I am the Lord who heals you."

Among those who partook of the Holy Sacrament, doubtless there were not a few members of the ever wide family of affliction. Some, experiencing soul-sorrows—hidden, unspoken griefs, too deep for utterance or for tears. In the case of others, trials, the nature of which is

only too patent to fellow-worshippers and fellow-communicants, from the sable attire and symbols of mourning. It is blessed for you to think of Him whose love you commemorated, as Himself the King of sorrows—the Prince of sufferers—who, just because He was thus "acquainted with grief," is pre-eminently able to heal the broken in heart, and to bind up their wounds. He proclaims as His Name (and He suffered, and wept, and bled, and died, that He might have a right to say it) JEHOVAH-ROPHI, "I am the Lord that heals you." He is the true "Healing-tree," which, cast into your bitterest Marah-pool, will make its waters sweet.

Brethren, if other earthly portions have perished, cleave to Him who is unfailing and imperishable—whose Name survives, when prized earthly names have either faded in oblivion, or are whispered through tears. When, let me ask, is the name of God most comforting? "I have remembered," says the Psalmist, "Your name, O Lord, in the night" (Ps.119:55). It was at Jacob's fierce struggle-hour, as at many of our own, he was led to prompt the earnest question to Him who was wrestling with him, "What is your name?" And, as with the Patriarch, He blesses us there. That Name of God is like a lighthouse, with its six-sided revolving lamps, it shines brightest in the gloom of trial. If some of the loopholes of your Tower be darkened—if the sun has set; and the midnight sky be over and around you; be it yours to sing—"You will light my candle, the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness," "God our Maker gives songs in the night."

My closing communion wish and prayer is, that that Name, which is above every name, may be to all of you as "Ointment poured forth." "The name of the Lord!" it is spoken of as the badge at a more enduring Feast in the Church of the glorified. "His name," we read, "shall be upon their foreheads." No more; that Name is to form the theme of the saints' everlasting song. For what is the ascription of the Church triumphant—the ransomed conquerors beheld by John in vision, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God? "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify YOUR NAME?"

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Three in One in covenant for our salvation—Send us help from the Sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion! that the resolve following a transient season of Communion on

earth, may form at once the vow and the joy of Eternity—

"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

## PSALM OF THE PILGRIMS

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young—at a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God! How happy are those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. Happy are those who are strong in the Lord, who set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs, where pools of blessing collect after the rains! They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem."—Psalm 84:1-7

This is emphatically a Communicant's Psalm; and occurs appropriately today in our ordinary course of exposition.

Conjectures have been numerous and varied on its authorship and historical bearings. This would not be the time or place to enter at length on the vindication of any favorite theory. Enough to remark, that, while by very general consent it is regarded as a Psalm of the Jewish Pilgrims on their way to one of the annual Feasts, there is, to say the least—following not a few eminent authorities—a strong probability that it is not of David's but of Hezekiah's times; and refers to the gathering of festal worshipers during his occupancy of the throne. That pious monarch inaugurated his reign by a season of national humiliation, and by a subsequent purification of the Temple; ridding the latter of idolatrous objects which had clustered around it during the life of his apostate predecessor—cleansing its courts, regilding and restoring cedar-gates and porticoes—altar, and table, and candlestick—also reviving the ceremonial of music, in accordance with the Divine model appointed by David and Asaph.

Hezekiah, however, did not rest satisfied with this outer reformation and revival, noble as it was. On the completion of the task, he calls together all his subjects to make a consecration of a nobler temple still—that of their

own souls. Moreover, the same deep-seated religious zeal prompts him to decree a great sacramental season. A Passover is to be celebrated; and not for Judah only—but, with his patriotic heart sighing over the disruption and alienation of the ten tribes, he would once more endeavor to re-unite the dual kingdom in sacred fellowship and service—that, too, even though the period of the year was unusual, and the dark cloud of the Assyrian invasion was gathering in the north-eastern sky. He would have them forget for a time their differences, and meet together under the old roof-tree of Jerusalem's Sanctuary—around her hallowed altars; and under her anointed Priest and King, be one again. It was a beautiful conception; and one, surely, in all respects worthy and desirable; for indeed the Passover had not been duly kept since the age of Joshua. Oh! would not this be the answered prayer of another magnificent Psalm, most probably also of his—the sigh of the true-hearted over the crumbling of church and state—“Return; we beseech You, O God Almighty; look down from Heaven, and behold, and visit this vine!”

He allows no time to elapse in carrying the project into effect. No sooner is the Temple purged and re-decorated, and the old ceremonial revived, than messengers are despatched through the land “from Dan to Beersheba,” and especially to the Kingdom of Israel, to proclaim the approaching Paschal solemnity. They speed from town to town, from village to village; blowing up the trumpet in the new moon; announcing the time appointed—the solemn feast-day. As was quite to be expected (what alas! is found too often the accompaniment or result of ecclesiastical divisions)—the royal couriers in many instances met only with insult. The sacred enthusiasm of the king was traduced and misunderstood. Not a few forfeited the intended blessing—the dew that was to descend on the mountains of Zion; when “the good and pleasant thing” might have been revived, of “brethren” (brethren once, and who should have been brethren still) “dwelling together again in unity.”

Nevertheless, rejected by some, a considerable number from the more northern tribes responded to the call. The blare of the silver trumpets awoke the dormant religious patriotism; and before many days had elapsed, the great pilgrim road—the Jewish “Via Sacra,” untraversed with the same intent for ages—was again studded with travelers singing,

though with what has been well called "pathetic joy," the Songs of Zion.

We know not what these other songs may have been—but we have at all events presumptive reason to surmise, that the present Psalm was written, or in the case of too strong assertion—may have been written by the Korhites, for this resuscitated Passover of the King of Judah, to give embodiment and expression to the inward aspirations of the worshipping throngs. As such, let us now ponder it—as such, let us keep before our mental eye these scattered travelers; as from the distant Naphtali—the border-land of Lebanon—they emerge on their pilgrimage, until they stand within the gates of the elect metropolis.

May the sentiments of the Psalm be echoed by many lowly festive worshipers here. May we, too, as children of Zion, be joyful in our King.

Let us confine ourselves at present, to this one aspect of the Psalm, as containing a description of the Pilgrim's (or in our case the Communicant's) journey to the Feast.

This is contained in the opening portion selected—what may be more correctly called the first and second strophes. As the wayfarer commences his journey, or starts in company with a few fellow-Israelites, his heart kindles into emotion at the thought of once more worshipping the God of his fathers in the oldest of their sacred rites, and that too within the ancestral Shrine—"How amiable (how lovable, how beautiful) are Your tabernacles, O Lord Almighty! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God!" In our authorised version, these worshipers are represented as envying the sparrow or swallow who have built their nests in the eaves of the Temple, or under its altars. The figure, however, is very simple and expressive in its application, without having recourse to a somewhat strange and unnatural rendering.

The writer would seem rather to take the image of these two birds sinking into their woodland nest for repose, merely as an emblem of the blessed rest and peaceful enjoyment anticipated in entering within the Gates of the Sanctuary. "Yes, as the sparrow finds out a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; so," (with a significant

ellipsis) "so—Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God." The traveler pursues his way until we may suppose him to have reached a resting-place. As he pauses, leaning on his staff under some shady oak or terebinth, still they are anticipations of the festal day—the hallowed courts—which occupy his mental vision; and he breaks forth into the soliloquy, "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, they will be still praising You!"

But onwards he proceeds; or, it may be, we have already suggested, as one of a caravan. They have now come to a gloomier part of the road. The scenery around them wears a more desolate aspect, and tinges for the moment their own thoughts with sadness. They have reached "the Valley of Baca"—"the Valley of weeping" or "the Valley of the weeping trees"—a valley still pointed out on the way to Jerusalem—supposed by some to have been full of a peculiar moisture-distilling tree—"nature's tear-drops" falling from its pendent branches. At all events it was, to use a modern oriental word, a dry and somber desert—the sun above poured on their heads his burning arrows, and their lips were parched with thirst. But even here, their spirits rise and their songs ascend. The God of the pilgrims has made "the wilderness pools of water, and the dry land springs of water." He has changed that scorched "Valley of the weeping tree" into a Well. The clouds which had gathered gloomily on the hill-tops around—screening the sunshine—burst in blessing—and down the slopes the streams with their glad music descend. The welcome boon has already filled its waterless troughs and ridges. In the place they least expected, weeping has been changed into joy. Baca has become as Elim. God has sent a plentiful rain, whereby He has refreshed His heritage when they were weary. They can sing with joyful lips—"Happy are those who are strong in the Lord, who set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs, where pools of blessing collect after the rains!" Psalm 84:5-6

The Valley is at last traversed; and in due time there are indications that the journey is drawing to a close. The groups are increasing (v. 7). "They go from strength to strength," possibly, as that may be rendered, 'from company to company;' or 'from halting-place to halting-place.' Group is

added to group; larger and yet larger grows the caravan; louder and yet louder swells the song. And now, Temple and tower and Holy Mount rise conspicuous to view. Their glowing anticipations are on the point of fulfillment. The City of Solemnities is reached—its Gates open to the weary travelers—"Every one of them in Zion appears before God" (v. 7.) And, beautiful for situation (then as now), on the sides of the north, is "the City of the Great King!"

My friends, is there here, in any feeble measure, a picture of ourselves this day? As the Israel of God, can we enter into the ecstatic language of these pilgrims of old as they came up to Hezekiah's restored courts? Specially observe the keynote of their song—what it was that formed the burden of their intensest aspirations. It was to meet Jehovah—to "see God in His Sanctuary." Many a heart among these thousands doubtless beat high at the prospect of gazing for the first time on the Holy City, so full of lofty and sacred associations. But while there was much in the external glory of its Temple-Courts to thrill and solemnize; while they might well gaze with profound and reverential devotion on "the altar of God," it was "God, their exceeding joy," who formed the burning center of their desires and yearnings. The recorded promise uppermost in their thoughts was this—"There I will meet with you, and will commune with you from off the mercy seat."

See, how in our Psalm, the same longing is expressed and repeated! —"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God." "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house—they will be still praising You." "Their strength is in You." They appear in Zion, but it is "before God!" Is this the chief and most ardent aspiration in the heart of each worshiper and each communicant now before me? It is not attractive service, nor gorgeous ceremonial, nor external symbolism; no, nor formulated doctrine and dogma, the soul desires; but a living Being.

"I know," says Paul in words often misquoted, and in the misquotation their sense and beauty mutilated, "I know" (not in whom), but "I know Whom I have believed." It was not sects, nor creeds, nor churches, nor ecclesiastical organizations that this dying hero clung to in the hour of



departure as he had done in life; but the glorious Person of the divine Emmanuel; the living Presence of the ever-living Savior—the Brother, the Friend on the Throne, whom he had learned to love more dearly than all the world beside. Is it so with us? Is our prayer and longing, today, that of him who first celebrated the Hebrew passover, "I beseech You, show me Your glory"? Do the glowing words of another Psalm form the exponent of our feelings and desires—"O God, You are my God, early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see Your power and Your glory, so as I have seen You in the Sanctuary"?

A second reflection occurs. Diverse and manifold, we may feel sure, were the feelings of individual worshipers among the Hebrew throngs of old, as they pursued their journey along the Palestine highways. These only too truly and faithfully reflect our own varied and chequered experiences. Some there are among us on the hill-tops of gladness, the "Delectable mountains," Nature's spring-time clothing every valley, and making its pastures sing for joy. The early or latter rain coming down on flower and tree and meadow, and causing them to sparkle like gems in the radiant sunlight. With others, it is some Valley of Baca. Clouds have gathered. The moral landscape is not spring blossoms, but autumn leaves; bared stems; branches scattered with hail and storm. Some have to tell of blighted affections, narrowed family circles, the pride and prop of the homestead fallen—fellow travelers of bygone Paschal seasons no longer at their side—voices missed in the caravan. They could almost sit down under the gloom of these weeping trees, and hang their harps on the cypress branches.

But whatever be your experience, even though the sad and weeping one may predominate, you will have rich consolation in this appointed means of grace. May you have "the early rain" in coming to the Table, and "the latter rain" in returning from it—communion with Christ, who is Himself, in the manifold phases and revelation of His grace and mercy, as "Rivers of water in a dry place." O Happy pilgrims and Christian communicants, spoken of in this Pilgrim-psalm—how all-sufficient is your "strength!" Every pilgrim needs a staff, yours is a Savior-God. Your strength is in Him. As the sparrow and the swallow here spoken of, flee from the windy

storm and tempest, and sink in peace in their nests; so may you find increasing repose—it is ratified to you today, in the completed work of your glorious and glorified Redeemer—the true "Cleft" for God's hidden-ones. A communion-table is one of His own appointed resting places for His spiritual Israel, where He recruits their souls and opens to them wells of refreshment.

It was the custom of the Jewish paschal worshipers, in going to the City of Solemnities, to be arrayed in new attire—new garments adorned their bodies, new sandals bound their feet. Be it yours to have on, not for the transient sacramental season only, but as your habitual attire, the garment of holiness and love and new obedience—to have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; having a more single undivided trust in Jesus; a greater willingness to bear His cross—greater joy at the prospect of sharing His crown.

"The swallow a nest." The swallow—Is not that a bird of passage—here today, away tomorrow to sunnier climates? Be this your constantly realized feeling, that you are swallow-like; migratory; the present a state of transition. Soon you will be away from earth's wintry skies to your Heavenly home, to build your nest in the golden eaves of the Eternal Sanctuary!

Brother Pilgrims and Fellow-Communicants, how happy your prospects, alike present and future—for time and for eternity! Present—You have here the assurance and guarantee, in every stage of your appointed journey, that the Lord God will prove "a sun and shield"—a sun to gladden, a shield to protect; withholding from you nothing that is truly "good" (verse 11). Thus with His own blessing resting upon you; and under the guidance of the double name, "God Almighty, and God of Jacob" (verse 8)—whether "Bacas" of sorrow or "Elims" of delight be yours; whether you have to pass through valleys of weeping trees, or ways clustering with amaranthine flowers; you will, you must be blessed.

The Future!—Oh, if a day—one day—thus spent in God's courts is better than a thousand, what will be the Eternal day? No Valley or Valleys of tears; no vacant seats, no absent guests; a long forever! To take up the sweet refrain of this psalm which has trembled on our lips during the

services of an earthly Sabbath, and to sing it everlastingly—"O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in You!"

## **SPIRITUAL PROGRESS**

"Grow in grace."—2 Peter 3:18

Progress is a great law in the universe of God. Nothing either in the world of mind, or matter, is stationary—with One exception. In the midst of His vast material creation, and of the myriads of His spiritual intelligences, God alone never knew and never can know what progress is. He being infinitely perfect, is incapable alike of decrease or increase in bliss, knowledge, power, glory. It is well known that the familiar river of Egypt possesses this peculiarity amid its compeers, that during a course of more than a thousand miles to its delta, it is indebted to not a single rill or tributary. While the other rivers of the world, issuing as tiny streamlets from their mountain-bed or glacier-cradle, are swollen with innumerable such, before they reach the ocean; this father of earthly rivers, as he sweeps by the tombs of Memphis and the minarets of Cairo, has received no accession to his volume during all that vast distance he has majestically traversed.

So (with reverence we say it) is it with the Supreme Being, the great Father of all. While others, constituting His offspring, are susceptible of progress—of receiving fresh rills, fresh accessions of intelligence and happiness, He remains from everlasting to everlasting unchangeably the same. The angels who excel in strength, we believe are still more and more excelling—reaching higher and yet higher stages of advancement—nearer and still nearer to God; and yet, the nearer they come, feeling more the infinite and untraveled distance separating between Creator and created. The saints—the redeemed from the earth—will, we doubt

not, through all eternity be progressing in the divine life and likeness, growing in grace, climbing from height to height and altitude to altitude. But though approaching always nearer the infinite Brightness—that brightness still being "light inaccessible and full of glory,"—the confession ever made, as each new eminence is attained—"Between us and You, O God, there is a great gulf fixed!"

This, however, is growth in Glory. Let us descend for a little from the heavenward to the earthward contemplation to which the Apostle summons us; when, (speaking of progress in the Church below) he urges on his readers to "grow in grace."

We are met at once by similar analogies in nature. We cannot fail to note the constant manifestations in the outer world of this law of progress or advancement—that the Creator and Ruler does nothing suddenly; rather that His vast processes move on silently—slowly—imperceptibly. Let the heavens declare this "glory of God" in the grandeur of its progressive operations. We need no other illustration than the breaking of the morning light and its brightening into perfect day. If we sought more recondite testimony and illustration, we might find it in what astronomers tell us of the process in the great planetary system, by which, as was the case with our own earth, vast globes like Jupiter and Saturn, from "liquid seething masses of fiery heat," as they at present appear to be, are, in all probability, being gradually consolidated, until an outer crust is formed to fit them for becoming living habitations.

Is it the vegetable world? On a minuter but not less real scale, how gradual the development! First the blade, then the ear, then the full kernel in the ear. The inserted grain does not rush up all at once, and become immediately ready for the sickle—it is matured by the husbandman's laborious culture. After a long appliance of means—moistening rains, gentle dews, fructifying heat—that tender seed struggles upwards through the overlying clods of earth, to the gladsome light. Then comes a fresh conflict with atmospheric influences—But on it progresses. Spring nurses the embryo blade; Summer smiles on the bursting ear; Autumn opens her lap to receive from the sickle the full kernel in the ear. It is Nature's great parable on the law of advancement in the material world. May I quote the child-words—

"'Little by little,' an a kernel said,  
As it slowly sank in its mossy bed,  
'Little by little' each day it grew,  
'Little by little' it sipped the dew;  
Day after day and year after year  
'Little by little' the leaves appear;  
Until its branches are spreading far and wide,  
And the mighty oak is the forest's pride."

What grows suddenly, dies suddenly. The ever welcomed snow-drop rushes up from its bulb in a few weeks, but its life-time is as brief.

In animal life, we see the same law in operation. To take at once the highest type in sentient being. The Infant does not attain, in a moment, the full growth and dignity of manhood; like the ancient Greek's ideal of human perfection in the case of their patron goddess, said to have sprung at once, fully armored, from the head of Jupiter. It is a progressive development. The bones and muscles and sinews grow with the child's growth and strengthen with its strength; until the helpless arm that can scarce grasp the toy in its cradle, is, in the course of years, able to sustain the ponderous weight—it may be to ply the hammer, or guide the plough, and give, or ward off, the warrior's blow.

Turn to the world of mind—there is similar progressive development there. The lisping stammerings, the playful prattle of infancy, are succeeded by the buoyancy of childhood. This again merges into the thoughtfulness and high aspirations of hopeful youth. Then comes manhood, with its maturer judgment and experience and power—and every different and successive stage in that mental history is one of progress. Mark, yet once more, it is not by one vast bound that the mountain can be ascended and the summit reached; but by the same slow day-by-day, step-by-step process. By no fitful efforts, but by many an hour of toilsome application, have the great masterminds, who guide the destinies of empires and of mankind, been disciplined and matured. The statesman, the philosopher, the historian, the man of science, can traverse in memory those years of student life, when in the secluded chamber the midnight lamp met the hues of morning. When others were

slumbering, or pursuing the 'phantom of pleasure', there they were, storing the mental citadel with treasures which at some future day would make the earth they live in wiser and better.

Now in all these, and manifold other illustrations which might be given, is there no analogy in the spiritual and divine life? Yes. This law of advance and progress—exemplified in the outer world, and in the constitution and growth of our own bodily and mental frames—illustrates God's dealing in the higher economy. We speak of "the life of faith"—"life in the Soul." Here also is there an infancy, youth, teenage, manhood, maturity. Peter in his First Epistle speaks of "babes in Christ"—those who are to be fed on milk. They could not bear stronger nutriment. They are in the earliest, the incipient stage of the spiritual existence. A brother Apostle speaks of "little children," "I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father" (1 John 2:13); of "young men," "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you" (1 John 2:14); of "fathers"—saints grown grey in the service of their Heavenly Master—"I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning" (v. 14).

We find our blessed Lord Himself recognizing these same stages of advancement in the case of His own disciples—"Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known Me?" (John 14:9). And to the same effect, "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).—As if He had said, "There is a time coming—an ulterior stage in your spiritual existence, when you will be able to understand and appreciate these mysteries of the kingdom—but not yet!"

Perhaps in the case of none of the Apostolic band was this spiritual progress more perceptible and better illustrated, than in the case of Peter, who penned the words of our text. See him at first the "little child." As a child, petulant, fretful. See him in full manhood; attained to much, yet having much to learn; full of rash impulses—sensitive, impetuous. Venturing on the water, yet sinking; faithful, yet fearful; loving, yet doubting—and at last, frailest moment of all, when that devoted Master most needed his loyal adherence and sympathy, becoming unfaithful and renegade. But mark him in the mellowed sunset of his career. That sun had waded, during life's long day, through mist and cloud and tempest,

alternately brightened and obscured; how tranquil now is his "going down" behind the mountains of Israel! Calm as an infant that has been rocked asleep on its mother's lap, or as some well-known flowers fold their leaves when the night-shadows begin to fall! As we read of him in the gospels, we meet there with a bold, fiery, passionate soul—the grace and prayer of Christ alone between him and ruin—"Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat—but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). Thirty years after this, he wrote his Epistles. How changed the man! we scarcely recognize his personal identity. How grace has molded him, softened, subdued, chastened him! His every breathing in these letters is gentleness and love. He had himself felt the benefit of the purifying, refining furnace; and therefore thus he writes—"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).

See, as has been noted by more than one writer, how his humility appears in undesigned coincidences. We know that he had much to do in the writing of Mark's Gospel. What does he say of himself there? Everything is suppressed that would savor of self; everything brought in that would humble him and exalt his Lord. His walking on the water—suppressed; the special blessing Jesus gave to him as "Simon Bar-jonas," recorded in Matthew, suppressed; the word "bitterly," inserted by the first evangelist when he records the intensity of Peter's repentant sorrow when "he went out and wept," suppressed; and more than all, that dark sorrowful story of his denial is more fully recorded in this second Gospel than in any of the others.

Then see when he comes to die—What is the testimony of the man who was once afraid of death?—he who shook with terror in the water as he felt himself sinking—he who cowered with more than womanish fears when his Lord was buffeted, lest he might be dragged to share His cross and sufferings! Hear the old man speak! Hear the softened, calmed, heavenly-minded apostle, with his grey-hairs and furrowed brow—how he writes about death—that event so terrible to all. It has lost its dread. "I must put off," says he, "this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ

has showed me" (2 Peter 1:14). Christ showed him how he was to die. He had foretold the painful and ignominious manner of his decease—that he was to follow Him in crucifixion; meet the King of Terrors in his most revolting form. But how does the aged champion contemplate this?—He speaks of it as the laying aside of an old cloak (so the word may mean)—a useless outer garment! To speak so of death, and such a death, showed surely that this "righteous man"—once called by his Lord "fearful" and of "little faith,"—once a poor reed shivering in the wind, had now, by the power and growth of divine grace, become bold as a lion!

This spiritual progress, so singularly illustrated in the case of him who exhorts us in our text, is (must be) the distinguishing characteristic, more or less, of all God's true people. And as there were seasons in the life of the Apostle, so also are there in ours, when a gracious and salutary impulse is given to spiritual advancement. The Lord's Supper is intended to be a strengthening as well as a commemorating Ordinance. The nutritive and sustaining qualities in the natural elements of bread and wine are doubtless intended to be symbolic of a higher truth—that of feeding and stimulating the graces of the Christian character—promoting sanctification and holiness. Our Church will never be arraigned for any unwarrantable leanings towards what is known as "Sacramentarian efficacy." But a Standard whose authority we all own and reverence, leaves us no doubt what its compilers considered the relation which the Divine rite bears to our text today, as being one special means of fostering and promoting the life of God in the Soul. We are "by faith made partakers of His body and blood, with all their benefits to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace."

Yet, while, we trust, this divine growth may form the ardent aspiration, the grand practical result of our hallowed season, let no humble Christian, let no believing communicant, leave these sacred courts under a misapprehension. Let none go away cast down or discouraged, under some humbling conviction that with them there has been no such thing as advancement in grace—that relapse rather than progress—from weakness to weakness rather than "from strength to strength is and has been their mournful and saddening experience. Who among us, brethren, is free from the haunting suspicion, that if tried and tested by this spiritual



growth, we would have good cause, humbled and conscience-stricken, to evade the scrutiny?

But are there not many of God's true people who are apt, in this respect also needlessly, to write bitter things against themselves? We believe, indeed, that often the Christian may seem to himself to be retrograding, when all the while it is the reverse—no apparent continuity of progression, yet ultimately and really periods of advance. You may at times have stood on the sea-shore, and watched the incoming tide—wave after wave laving the beach; only to retreat into the bosom of the former wave. It seemed receding; murmuring for a moment at your feet—and then back again to nestle in its watery bed. As, however, the briny tears came sweeping over the sand or rock, you saw that the ripple-marks were gradually diminishing; that, despite of these refluxing waves, the tide was making, and the boat moored dry on the shore would be soon buoyant on the water.

So it is with the ebbings and the flowings in the spiritual life. You may be ever and anon in doubt and despondency. Temptation after temptation, like wave upon wave, may tell of nothing but apparent relapse. The tide of the divine life may appear to recede; while, in truth and reality watched by the unerring discriminating Eye above—it is rising—the old marks of sin are being submerged under the advancing waves. "The righteous shall hold on his way." "Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds him with His hand." "He gives more grace." "He who has begun a good work in you, will perform it unto the day of the Lord Jesus."

"Why is that plant"—ask this question of the experienced gardener—"making no advance? Though healthy in appearance, its growth seems arrested." "No—not so," would be his reply. "Externally, and to the outward eye, it makes no progress. But it does better—it is mooring its unseen roots all the firmer and deeper in the soil."

And now, what remains, in closing, but to exhort and encourage you, as God's votive and covenanting people, to aspire after increasing attainments. By startling providences, as well as by revolving seasons, we are solemnly reminded that our present fleeting opportunities will soon

be gone, and gone forever. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Time is rushing on, swift-winged to Judgment. He puts no arrest on his revolving wheels. He stops no grain in the diminishing sand-heap. Day follows day; Sabbath treads on the heels of Sabbath; Communion season on Communion season; and the sun, like a vast pendulum, as he swings from East to West, seems to proclaim—"Nearer Eternity!" "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." "Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap if you faint not!"

Members of the Sacramental host of the Great Captain of Salvation! be yours especially the noble resolution of the man, who exhibited on the vastest and grandest scale the practical power of the resolution of our text—"I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!"

"By the grace of God we are what we are." May we leave His courts today, feeling that by that same grace we may grow into something higher, nobler, holier, diviner still.

"Your vows renewed; go seek His mercy only,  
To arm the trembling spirit for the strife;  
You shall not fight the world's great battle lonely,  
Soldiers of Christ, you bear a charmed life!

"Go with sweet thoughts of Jesus, and in meekness  
Take up the cross and follow in His way;  
His strength shall be made perfect in your weakness,  
His GRACE shall be your comfort and your stay."

# THE EXALTATION OF THE HUMANITY

"What is man, that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor."—Psalm 8:4, 5

This Psalm, like many others, has a twofold application. No simple reader can have failed to be struck in perusing it, with a mingling up, throughout, of reference to "Man," and to some one Infinitely Greater. In the first verse of our text, the sacred writer turns from the consideration of God's wonders in the starry heavens, to the favored being on earth upon whom He has lavished such distinguishing tokens of His love. And yet, immediately after, he appears by prophetic inspiration to blend his contemplation of humanity in the creature, with the contemplation of humanity in the future Incarnate WORD. It would be superfluous to occupy time in showing that the passage is inapplicable to man alone; and how the expressions, "You have crowned him with glory and honor," "made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands," "put all things under his feet," have a higher and diviner signification. Any such proof is unnecessary, as we have inspired comment and authority, in the second chapter of Hebrews, in applying it to Christ.

In discoursing, therefore, with God's blessing, on the words, I would have you to bear in mind, as their most interesting feature, this somewhat remarkable dual reference; the identifying, so to speak, of the two humanities. Come, and let us with devout reverence meditate on the theme thus opened up; for it is that which we are to have set before us today, in visible sacramental memorial—"the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

Let our thoughts be directed to these successive views of the exaltation of the Humanity—

I. In the Divine purpose.

II. In the Incarnation of the Son of God.

III. In the Ascension of Christ.

IV. At the Day of Judgment.

V. Through all Eternity.

I. The exaltation of the Humanity in the DIVINE PURPOSE.

It formed the great Divine idea, so to speak, before the earth was made, and when God dwelt alone in the solitudes of infinite space.

Amid the countless worlds which were in future to throng His universe, there was one selected to become the scene of an unparalleled manifestation of love—the Almighty Creator Himself, condescending to assume the Human nature in union with the Divine, in order to exalt that nature, fallen and degraded, to glory and to honor. We have dim and obscure intimations of this sublime conception given us in Scripture. There are passages of light which burst upon us here and there, from the recesses of eternity, unfolding the grandeur of the human destiny, as contemplated before the birth of time.

Although on no account vindicating such an interpretation by any strong assertion, it has at all events been regarded by expositors as possible, that in a well-known Bible chapter, under the personification of Wisdom, Christ Himself may be regarded as announcing that "from everlasting, before the earth was, His delights were with the sons of men," as if coming down, while yet our globe was without form and void, to visit the great theater of His soul's travail and of man's salvation (Prov. 8:23-31).

In a still earlier Scripture, the Blessed Trinity, in their ineffable counsels, seem to intimate the development of some magnificent plan in connection with the world's creation—"Let us make man after our own image," words which have a primary reference to the formation of the former in a state of purity and innocence, and thereby a reflection of the divine Original, the uncreated God—but which can alone, in their full complementary significance, apply to Jesus the Great Ideal of Humanity, the Perfect Man—He who by distinctive pre-eminence is "THE Image of the Invisible." If we have reason to believe that the new-born Earth

arrested the interested contemplation of other Orders of Intelligence— little at all events would they dream of so surpassing an honor in store for it—how the first speck of new-born light which appeared, penetrating chaos, fell on the realm an Incarnate God was to redeem—in which He was to assume the nature of a finite creature and therein enshrine the Infinite. As it gradually became more luminous, the brooding darkness dispelling, the sun shining on its fresh verdure—well might the Morning Stars, in joyous jubilee-strains, sing together, and all the Sons of God shout for joy!

Let us contemplate—

## II. The exaltation of the Humanity in the INCARNATION of the Son of God.

"Manifest in the flesh!" How magnificent does fallen nature appear, even in its ruins, in thus becoming the very sanctuary and residence of Deity. The traveler visits with emotion places consecrated as haunts of the mighty dead. He reverently lingers amid the broken columns and capitals of antiquity, associating their very desolation with illustrious sages and heroes—names traced imperishably on the tablets of history. How sublime, we may almost say awe-inspiring, the thought, that every man has within himself a Temple with associations, no, with realities, incomparably grander—that the Human spirit, wrecked by sin, is the very habitation in which Deity dwelt for three and thirty years of humiliation on earth! "Destroy this Temple," said Christ, "and in three days I will raise it up. He spoke of the Temple of His body."

His body! It was a fleshly tabernacle like yours and mine, with this exceptional characteristic, that it was "yet without sin." By Him Humanity was ennobled, hallowed, consecrated, in its every phase and condition. He consecrated infancy, by Himself becoming the Babe of Bethlehem. He consecrated poverty, by Himself being emphatically "the houseless One," "having nowhere to lay His head." He consecrated bereavement, by the tears shed at Bethany's grave, and the words of comfort spoken in Bethany's darkened household. He consecrated suffering and pain and trial, by the wave on wave that swept over His own guiltless head, until His mangled body was left, like a wreck on the desert

shore. He consecrated death itself, when the walls of the Temple collapsed, wherein dwelt the ever-blessed God. Yes, He consecrated Humanity's last resting-place—the very grave cannot be dissevered from the earthly tabernacle which the great Lord of heaven condescended to occupy. Unspeakable honor to put on the nature of a fallen being!

Glorious indeed might have been the exaltation of Humanity if Adam had remained staunch in his allegiance; and the nature he received pure and spotless from his Maker been transmitted uncontaminated to his posterity. There would have been the beautiful spectacle of a world tenanted by sinless creatures; every bosom filled to the brim with love to its Creator, and no room for one shadow to dim or darken. But, more glorious and wondrous far, that exaltation, when "very God of very God" deigned to convert a ruined haunt into His own presence-chamber, and transform it into what is divine! If condescension be a relative term, and increase in proportion to the distance and disparity between its objects—where is there condescension equal to this?

We have read of kings on earth visiting the beggar's hovel—there is condescension here. But what is such after all? One finite being visiting another finite being, one mortal visiting another mortal. But we have presented to us in our present contemplation, the God seated on the throne of the universe, coming down to the outcast and the perishing! Brethren, we cannot estimate the wonders of such condescension, because there is no scale by which it can be measured. There are certain existing relations between everything else in creation. There is a certain relation and proportion between the giant mountain and the grain of sand. There is a certain relation and proportion between the drop of water and the boundless ocean. There is a certain relation and proportion between the sun and the tiny candle which glimmers into nothingness in his beams. There is even an imaginable relation and proportion between the seraph before the throne and the insect whose lifetime is a brief hour, for they are both creatures, though at the opposite extremities of being.

But there can be no measurable—no possible relation or proportion between the Great God and the vile sinner, between Deity and dust! When I think that in a bodily framework like my own, only untainted by evil, there dwelt the Adorable Jehovah, "the high and lofty One who

inhabits Eternity,"—that "He took not on Him the nature of angels," that He selected, not the angelic form or condition to ennoble and exalt, but "the seed of Abraham," well may I exclaim with the Psalmist in devoutest amazement—"What is man, that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, You have crowned him with glory and honor!"

### III. The exaltation of the Humanity in the ASCENSION of Christ.

Our human nature occupies the Central throne of Heaven—If great be the mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," we may with reverence add as a counterpart, "Great is the mystery of godliness"—Man manifest on the throne of God! If it be an amazing truth, Jesus bore our suffering nature on earth—it is a verity, surely no less marvelous, Jesus bears our glorified nature in the upper sanctuary. When "the gates lifted up their heads," and the King of Glory traveled through the burning ranks, it was before Humanity in union with Deity, they bowed as He passed. It is in that glorified Human nature He there still lives and loves.

Take one among several kindred visions of the Apostle of Patmos—that of the white-robed and palm-bearing multitude. The central figure in that inspired picture of pictures is THE LAMB in the midst of the throne, leading them, and feeding them—conducting them from pasture to pasture and from fountain to fountain. What is this, but the blessed assurance, alike to His Church triumphant and militant, of the Redeemer's undying Manhood; that though reigning as King of kings—God over all, blessed forever—He still retains the Brother's eye, and the Brother's love, and the Brother's heart?

No more, as Head and Representative of His people, His glorified Humanity forms the pledge of their own ultimate exaltation. He, the first sheaf in the harvest presented in the Heavenly Temple, is the pledge of myriad sheaves that are to follow. Where He is, His people also are to be. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." "His glorious body!" or as it is rather rendered, "the body of His glory." It is the mighty mold into which our fallen nature is to be recast. It is the divine model after which the defaced and mutilated block is to be shaped into eternal symmetry and beauty. It is the glorious

Archetype, in conformity with which the mirror, shattered in a thousand pieces in Eden, is to be completely reconstructed—each broken fragment, each ransomed sinner—the lowliest, the humblest—like a piece of polished glass, to reflect a perfect image of the Lord!

My friends, what an exaltation is this, to the nature of Humanity —alike present and future? Present. "Christ the first fruits,"—His divine human form, once pierced with thorns and racked in torture, now, in language of lofty metaphor, wearing many crowns! In prospect—the multitude which no man can number, ransomed with His own precious blood; now, it may be, despised, dishonored, disesteemed; but who shall then be raised from obscurity and scorn, "set among princes; and made to inherit crowns and thrones of glory." Oh! with what a grandeur is the lowest and poorest child of Adam thus invested; if within his clay-walls, as a child of God, he is a partaker of the Divine Nature—that nature elevating the human to a pitch of greatness which leaves all earthly distinction immeasurably behind!

#### IV. The exaltation of the Humanity at the DAY OF JUDGMENT.

"The Father has given Him authority to execute all judgment, because He is the Son of Man." "He has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He has ordained." Here, again, it is Humanity exalted, on the throne of final reckoning—The Man Christ Jesus.

Who can unfold the glory which will then accrue to our nature, when "every eye shall see Him?"—the irreversible sentence going forth from the lips of glorified Humanity. My hearers, be it yours to exult in the anticipation, that there will be seated on that majestic tribunal, not a Being of dreadful, inapproachable majesty—whose presence would blind and dazzle and confound—but, once more, a Brother in your own nature! The cry of Jewish mockery and Gentile scorn which resounded of old around His cross, will then form your note of triumph—the secret of your joy when gazing on His throne—"Behold the Man!"

Behold the representative Man! Behold the once-suffering Man! Behold the righteous Man! Behold the sympathizing Man! Behold now the



exalted and the crowned Man! "We know," says the beloved disciple, in a transport of holy joy, "that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." From the same lips which in trembling accents on Calvary once called him "Son," he will hear the benediction and welcome, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." On that great and alarming day, when the wrath of God shall sweep away all refuges of lies, the designation given Him by the prophet, so cheering to the tempest-tossed soul on earth, will lose none of its comfort then—"A Man" (A MAN!) "shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!"

#### V. Contemplate the exaltation of the Humanity THROUGHOUT ALL ETERNITY.

Christ's mediatorial reign, with regard to His enemies, will end at a Day of judgment; for we read, "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet," and "then shall He deliver up" (that part of His kingdom) "to God, even the Father." His sovereignty with regard to them, shall be merged into that of God absolute. But of the increase of His mediatorial government "there shall be no end." The Humanity He wore on earth will continue evermore on the throne! The divine Father, by immutable covenant, invested Him, as Mediator, with "length of days forever and ever." Unto principalities and powers in heavenly places will be made known by the Church (under her Great Representative Head), "the manifold wisdom of God."

Let me ask you, dear friends, are you prepared, after these imperfect meditations, to echo the exclamation of the Psalmist? Will it be that which will circulate from heart to heart while you surround as guests today the Table of communion, "What is man, that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him?" Rise to a sense of your distinguished, your peerless privileges in Christ! Oh, if such be the dignity bestowed on human nature in the Person of the Adorable Head, need we wonder at the pre-eminent and surpassing honors set forth in Scripture as in store for the members? Angels are sons of God by creation; but ransomed man becomes a son of God by filiation, adoption—union with his glorified Lord. From being at the base of the pyramid, lying among

the debris and ruins, see where redeeming love has placed him! "To him who overcomes, will I grant to sit with Me on My throne; even as I also overcame, and have sat down with My Father on His throne."

Having this hope in Him, (the hope of seeing Him as He is) are we purifying ourselves even as He is pure? "Wherefore, brethren," says the Apostle, "partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." "Consider!" It is an emphatic word. Literally "gaze" on the Lord Jesus. It is the artist copying, line by line, and feature by feature; not expecting the transcript to be perfect here (for that it cannot be), but seeking to approximate if he can do no more; looking forward to that blessed time when, without one speck of sin and sorrow to mar or blemish, "we shall be transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

Let us go, meanwhile, to His holy Ordinance, with the earnest determination and the recorded vow—"This God shall be our God forever and ever!"

## **A FLIGHT OF DOVES**

"Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"—  
Isaiah 60:8

The whole of this chapter of the great evangelical Prophet is replete with sublime imagery. It forms in itself a unique Poem, a gallery of successive pictures delineating the golden age of the Messiah. His Church, resplendent with the glories of her King, is represented as growing and expanding, age by age, until a whole world is seen hastening to lay tribute offerings at His feet, and to welcome Him to the throne of universal empire!

Several of its verses, taken by themselves, might form befitting themes to sum up the sacred services of a Communion Sunday. We need indeed go no further than the opening exhortation, "Arise, shine," sounding as it does like a clarion-note, a herald trumpet in entering again the battle of life with refurbished armor, and the renewed vow of allegiance on the lip. "Let your light so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in Heaven."

But we have been led, in preference, to select a different but equally expressive metaphor—the sight which revealed itself to Isaiah, as he gazed down the vista of ages on the Church of the future. It is that of a flock, or rather flocks of doves, on the wing to their cotes. Jesus may well be regarded as the true House of safety—while Communicants, His covenant people, like these silver and golden plumaged doves, flee to Him for shelter, trust Him for shelter, abide in Him for shelter. May God help us to some appropriate meditations, in harmony with the simplicity of the emblem.

(1.) The first thought which the verse suggests, in connection with our Communion services, is that of blissful association. Can we fail to think of the Prophet's figure as symbolizing what has occurred among us in this vast city today?—varied churches and varied denominations engaged in celebrating the same sacred rite. We have, in and through its significant symbols, been looking and fleeing to the one only Savior. As the dovecot may have its different openings; so, each church retains its own denominational entrance. But the Glorious meeting-place, the spiritual Shelter, is the same. The windows are diverse, but there is a blessed identity in the hallowed haunt itself. The summoning bells have rung their varied tones—but there is a sweet harmony and concord in the responsive chime of consecrated hearts—"Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood!"

Clothed, we trust, in the one glorious plumage, and with wings bearing in the same direction, may we not imagine angels exclaiming, as they look down on the multitudes in this and in other places throughout our land, hastening to the figurative sacramental Ark—"Who are these that fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows?"

(2.) In connection with our sacred rite, the emblem of our text suggests a public profession. The Prophet is arrested; or possibly, in the poetical imagery here employed, a chorus of spectators—in which he veils his own personality—are arrested by the spectacle. The doves are not spoken of as flying under screen of night or darkness; neither were they beheld winging a solitary or circuitous flight, as if dreading and evading observation. But the mid-day sun looked down on a whole cloud of them, their golden iridescent plumage flashing in his beams.

Dear brethren, it is no unimportant or insignificant feature in your divinely-appointed Ordinance, this open dove-like flight to the Covenant Ark. In these times, when there is so much unworthy shame in espousing Christ's cause, ranging ourselves under His banner, and unfurling it before the world—it is a noble thing, or rather a joyful privilege, to come boldly forward and avouch the Lord to be our God—making the public unhesitating avowal, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," like the man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, who, before all the multitude, went forth "walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:8). "Those who honor Me, I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30). Doubtless Jesus will regard with a special delight, those who have, with willing, loving obedience, responded to His own dying command, and in the words of another verse of this chapter, "glorified Him in the House of His glory."

Yes, as He looked down and saw this day, those who are the fruit of the travail of His soul—as He beheld His people winging their flight to His Sacramental Table; may we not, with reverence, suppose Him joining in the angelic interrogation, and saying in the gladness of His own infinite heart—"Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

(3.) The cloud of doves, as here represented, betokens the character of Christians and of Christian communicants. They are, or ought to be, dove-like. The Dove has these among other characteristics—

First. It is the complex symbol, in sacred poetry and art, of peace and love, of meekness and gentleness, purity and harmlessness (Cant. 1:15, 6:9, Matt. 10:16). I may add, in the crude early Christian symbolism of the Roman catacombs, the Dove, as the bird of hope, is generally

represented in connection, variously treated, with the olive branch. What a lesson for us all as believers in Jesus, and specially in rising from His Holy Supper, to carry away the resolution of imitating more than we have yet done, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," His kind, loving, unselfish, peaceful spirit! If, in the retrospect of past months, it may be of past years, we have to mourn the cherishing or the exhibition of unholy tempers and resentful feelings—unworthy passions that have held guilty sway over us—let us form the determination, in God's strength, that henceforth we are to be more Dove-like—more like Him who was "meek and lowly in heart,"—"who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously."

Moreover, recalling the Dove as the bird of hope; either perched on the branch of peace or bearing it in its mouth, what more befitting benediction to carry with you as you leave this sacred ground—"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13)?

A Second characteristic of the Dove is, that it is swift of wing. The Prophet saw them, not sailing like a cloud, or drifting like a cloud, but flying; borne along with whirlwind speed. The carrier dove is well known for the swiftness—the length and steadiness, of its arrowy course, surpassing the proverbial flight of the eagle. An Oriental writer mentions regarding it, that it never pauses; that when its wings are weary, it poises itself on one, while the other droops for a little by its side, and when rested, the unremitting flight is resumed. This, coupled with Isaiah's figure, surely suggests the activities of the Christian life. The believer is swift of wing to do God's service. The religion you profess, and to which many have set their seal today, is not only a being good, but a doing good. Be always, like the dove, soaring. In a spiritual sense it is a safeguard and preservation against sin, not to remain with wings folded, but to mount on ministries of active service. It matters not what these services may be; for there are also, in this respect, many windows in the Ark—many outlets of usefulness—diversities of gifts and consecration. Only "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might."

To be on the wing is to be safe. To have the wings folded, sunning in the

glaring light, is often to be in peril. It is a striking and beautiful verse in Proverbs, "Surely in vain the net (of temptation) is spread in the sight of any bird," or, as it is rendered in the margin of your Bibles—"in the sight of that which moves on the wing." Moving; resting not; making no perch of the world; but in the pure cloudless ethereal regions of faith and love and holiness, soaring ever higher to the home in the hills of God. "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

(4.) The figure of the Dove fleeing to its window reminds and suggests, that it is a bird which requires a safe shelter. It does not, like some others, hide in hedgerows or furrows. The wild pigeon may build its nest on the forest tree; but the tame one seeks its secure dovecot. The eastern dove, which had no artificial home, had its equally secure dwelling in the rock-clefts—"O my dove, which is in the clefts of the rock" (Sol. Song 2:14.) A little way from the northwest shores of the Lake of Gennesaret there is a recess in the hills called the "Wady Hyman," or "Valley of Doves," the sides of which are perforated with their retreats.

You who are Communicants have been fleeing anew today for refuge to the "Rock of Ages." You have come for a little season into this Ark of Ordinances, from work and duty, from roaming the needful fields of every-day occupation—shall we say to bathe afresh your ruffled, soiled plumage, in the Fountain of Salvation? Rather, you have desired, in one of His own appointed Sacraments, to hold nearer, dearer, and more confidential fellowship with Christ—realizing more devoutly that in Him you have your best, securest, and happiest Home. Away from earth's troubles and anxieties, its sins and sorrows—in this glorious Rock-cleft you have been folding your weary wings. An earthly communion is the foretaste and foreshadow of a safer and more enduring shelter; the pledge of a happier and more blissful Sabbath, when you will sink into the crevices of the true Rock forever!

It is a special characteristic of the Dove, that, however far it goes—though at a distance of hundreds of miles—it will fly back with unerring aim, sureness, and safety to its abode. So with "the dove of Christ." Every true believer, born of God—born from above, and for above, through every cloud and tempest, will reach at last the true Home on high. "The spirit shall return unto the God who gave it."

(5.) The cloud of Doves on wing to their windows, reminds one of young communicants. In the Septuagint, the words of this verse are remarkable, "Who are these that fly like doves with their young?" The doves fly to their dovecot, but not alone, they have their offspring with them.

Not the least beautiful thing about a Communion-Sunday is the spectacle of young doves; those who have just risen from their early perches, the perches of the morning of life, and are winging their way, bright and unsoiled, to the Rock! If old communicants may be likened to the doves, whose wings the Psalmist speaks of as covered with "yellow gold" (golden with age); may we not compare young communicants to those wings, described in the same verse, as covered with silver; silvered over with the white shining of early piety and youthful consecration.

"Who are these that fly like doves with their young?" If a father or mother ever in their lives experience a sacred and hallowed joy, it surely is at the hour when their young ones are found by their side at the sacramental table. Fleeing together; wing touching wing; nearing together the same Ark—together in the clefts of the same Eternal Rock. Yes, for parents to feel, when in the course of nature they are constrained, with aged and disabled pinion, to drop out of the flight; or rather, when they come to enter finally the windows of that Dovecot from which there is no return—that they will leave behind them those who will pursue their way, year after year, to "the Ark of the testimony."

Oh! my dear young friends, you who are the young doves today, in this glorious flight, be true and faithful to your God. Keep your plumage untainted. Let no feather be soiled with sin. Many wings among us would have been swifter, more buoyant, more soaring, if they had not been broken or blemished by some former falls.

The cloud of doves spoken of in this verse, were ever getting nearer their windows. May this be so with you in a nobler spiritual sense; and may the familiar words be alike your prayer and your experience—

"Still all my song shall be  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee!"

(6.) One other thought is suggested, by the remembrance of a large class of those who are always to be found at the Sacrament of communion—I mean the afflicted.

This image of doves flying to their windows reminds of storm. They were seen flying; drifting along like a tempestuous cloud. The dove flies to its dovecot, or to the rock-clefts, when the storm is brewing; perhaps were it not for the tempest it might linger in the open field, and get entangled in the snare or trap of which we found the Wise man speaking. But the black cloud is in the heavens! the thunder is heard—the tempest moans—the rain torrents descend. On the wings of the tempest the timid creature directs its flight to the sheltering covert.

Sorrowing, afflicted ones! and especially any who, as communicants, partook of the sacred emblems in heaviness of spirit, bewailing the loss and absence of "those who are not," may not this be your sanctified experience of the Divine dealings? Has not that desolating storm, which tore down your cherished earthly dovecots and shelters, only led you to speed more swiftly, steadily, persistently, to the only Refuge that never can be assailed by the hurricanes of dire misfortune, or the darker, gloomier tempests of bereavement and death? Yes, mourning dove! this day too faithfully noting blanks amid the flock of living wings around you—whether the silver-plumaged dove of youth missing the golden one of age, or the golden plumaged ones of age missing their young—rejoice if that "windy storm and tempest" has brought you closer to Jesus, driven you from the perishable to the Imperishable, and attuned lip and heart more for the song of a sainted Minstrel—

"I flutter, I struggle, I pant to be free,  
I feel me a captive while banished from Thee:  
A pilgrim and stranger the desert I roam,  
And look on to Heaven and long to be home!  
Ah, there the wild tempest forever shall cease,  
No billow shall ruffle that haven of peace—  
Temptation and trouble alike shall depart,  
All tears from the eyes and all sin from the heart."

It is by affliction God has always prepared His doves for flight and for heaven. Without affliction, they might be grovelers forever. It is by the



thorn in the nest He drives them to the wing. They might otherwise have been content with a poorer portion. It is one of the finest of the old Assyrian myths or legends, that when their great Queen Semiramis, the founder of their empire, died, she was changed into a dove. How often does death—the death of beloved friends—work a similar transformation on bereaved souls! imparting to them the dove-like spirit, and the upward soaring!

God grant that many among us, young and old, may have had the longing prayer answered today—"Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!" (Ps. 55:6). From our present theme of meditation, with its pictures and suggestions of shelter and repose; from the emblems and tokens of redeeming love at the Sacramental Table; from all that our eyes have there seen of the Word of Life; from Him who has tuned our hearts, inspired our thoughts, and given significance to our vows; from His dying lips on the Cross, from His glorified lips on the throne—we hear His own blessed, dove-like balm-word, stealing on the breath of eventide as a chime from the upper Sanctuary—"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST!"

## **CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES AT THE LAST SUPPER**

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray Me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Lord, is it I?"—Matthew 26:20-22.

"Sanctify yourselves, for there is to be a feast of the Lord!"

Such was the customary summons to the Jews of old on the occasion of their solemn festivals. The silver trumpets sounded, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel," and blessed were the people who knew the joyful

sound. With the prospect we have before us, today, of keeping the New Testament Sacramental memorial, I have selected these words as an appropriate theme for meditation. Let us gather with sacred interest around this scene in the upper chamber of Jerusalem, and may God the Holy Spirit direct, inspire, and sanctify our thoughts.

Let me speak of these four points—

The rite celebrated.

The company assembled.

The announcement made.

The manner in which the announcement was received.

I. THE RITE. It was the Passover Supper. It would be altogether out of place here to examine a question which has given rise to conflicting opinions, whether the meeting of our Blessed Lord and His disciples described, was the actual commemorative Jewish feast; or whether, as from a comparison of dates there seems some grounds for surmising, it partook rather of the nature of a private observance in anticipation of another on the 14th day of the month Nizan; that date being held, with greater chronological accuracy, to have fallen on the following evening, corresponding with our Friday. The preponderating arguments, supported by most reliable authorities, seem to incline to the long accepted view that it was the actual Passover feast, the same that was being celebrated universally that night in Jerusalem. If so, it was the close of what must have been in all respects a remarkable day in the City of Solemnities. Within the walls, supplemented by tents or booths in the Valley of the Kedron and on the slopes and in the green hollows of Olivet, it is computed that two million people were assembled to keep the annual festival. Each family had to provide itself with a lamb, and take it to the Temple for sacrifice. Relays of priests were there standing in a row, with gold and silver basins, into which the blood of the animal was poured, while its carcass was returned to the owners, and by them prepared for the evening meal. At eventide came a hush of silence after the busy day—a day noisy with the tramp of the multitudinous pilgrims, the bleating of

the sacrifices, the festal songs of Levites and worshipers, and the blare of the silver trumpets. Now, each house-door was shut, each tent-curtain drawn; and, save for the strains of the Hallel, a sacred silence pervaded the scene, while the immemorial feast was kept. It was the grandest and most impressive of all the types of the ancient dispensation. Though unrecognized by few in that vast assemblage, the Great Antitype Himself was there; the true Paschal Lamb about to take away the sin of the world.

"The evening had come," the last evening He was to spend in peaceful communion with His disciples. In the mysterious appropriate twilight, when the full moon was rising over Jerusalem, He had crossed from the hamlet of Bethany, and gathered the chosen apostles in a small room on Mount Zion; possibly the same apartment that had been hallowed to Him on many previous similar occasions, when He accompanied His Mother and "the multitude that kept holiday" from Nazareth—a room moreover, that more likely was soon to have a new consecrated association, as the scene of the joyful benedictions of Easter Evening. The Jewish memorial was now to be merged in the Christian. Not that the national commemoration was to be altered for something diverse in kind and significancy. The two rites were each sacramentally expressive of the same peerless gospel truth. The testimony of Jesus, the one prospective the other retrospective, was the spirit of both ordinances. The older is to be interwoven with higher, diviner mysteries. If change there was, the change has been likened to that in a tree when the blossom drops off to make way for fruit. And though "the Lord's Supper" is never to be superseded by any other rite on earth, it may itself be regarded as a transition Ordinance, which will attain its full consummation and perfection in the sublime Heavenly Festival; where, with no traitor and no betrayal to interrupt its celebration, we shall, as glorified guests, "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God."

II. THE COMPANY ASSEMBLED. The MASTER and His disciples—the Shepherd, and the flock that are so soon to be scattered.

The Passover Supper was essentially a gladsome family gathering. Relations and friends living in distant and diverse parts of Palestine, were enabled once a year—in this the loveliest season, when the land was in its full wealth of floral beauty, and its skies undimmed with a cloud—to meet

at the sacred festival and renew suspended communion. Jesus, who habitually and scrupulously accorded with all innocent traditional usages and customs, was not likely to make any exception in the present case. We might naturally have expected Him, therefore, to regard it as a fitting opportunity of gathering (shall we say, not in the limited apartment of a house, but within some commodious tent of Galilean pilgrims on the Mount) all that were nearest and dearest of His family and friends, "His cousins and brethren." Would not the Marys of the Lakeside be there; and the Bethany sisters, with their restored brother; besides many other intimate friends and recipients of His grace and mercy? Above all, would not the dear earthly Mother, whose love and presence must have been vividly associated, as we have just remarked, with many such previous anniversaries, have had her special summons? No! Every one of these we have named are conspicuous by their absence. They receive no invitation. It is to be a sacredly private and confidential meal with His own chosen disciples. The specific words of the invitation are in every way remarkable. "With desire have I desired" (with great desire) "to eat this Passover with YOU, before I suffer." And when Peter and John, at their Lord's bidding, track the footsteps of the water-carrier to his house, they deliver this as their message—"The Master says, My time is at hand; where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?"

Solemn convocation! Monarchs of the earth were that night sitting on thrones of state or dreaming of conquest. But what was all the glory encircling them, compared with the undying interests which center in that little band?

Imagine the scene. The Divine Lord had just performed, in their presence, an act of unparalleled humility. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had committed all things into His hands, and that He came from God and was going to God." "Came from God!"—At that moment, with the full consciousness of His underived glory—in His hand the garnered treasures of the universe. "Was going to God!"—With all the prospect of His approaching triumph over death and the grave, and His ascension to His Mediatorial Throne—yet then, He undid His loose upper garment, took a towel and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet. Going

from couch to couch on which they were reclining, carrying in His own hand the bronze laver, and stooping to this menial office "as one who serves!"

Having resumed his white festal robe, He invites them to partake of the provided Feast. But in doing so, He renews the significant intimation of what was before them and Him. It was a feast preliminary to His own "suffering." We need not have wondered if this theme of suffering, like a somber keynote of plaintive minor, had run through all His discourse; if the shadow of the morrow's cross projected on His path had occupied and engrossed His mind to the exclusion of all else. But see His unselfishness! With the anticipated agony—the surcharged clouds gathering more ominously and ever nearer around Him—the gleam of the torches and the flash of the swords at hand, the buffeting and the ignominy—sadder than all, the consciousness of the desertion of His own tried and trusted disciples—still He seemed to have no thought for Himself or about the brimming of His own cup.

His tenderest sympathies and longings and anxieties are for them. He has assembled them in this quiet guest-chamber, to breathe farewell words of comfort and peace—"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Further, in order that they might retain these valedictory utterances in visible and permanent memorial, He proceeds to institute the sacred Ordinance—a keepsake and legacy of love, which would be treasured by them when He Himself would be visible no more. Yes, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end!"

In all the other homes and within all the other tents of the City of solemnities that night (it was a very distinctive feature in the ceremonial observance), there was delivered, by the presiding head of the family, a narrative or rehearsal of the flight from Egypt and the subsequent wilderness journey to Canaan. In His opening valedictory discourse in the 14th chapter of John, Jesus, as it has been well said, "elevates and transfigures past historical events by transferring them to Himself and speaking of His own 'Exodus.'" (Dr. Maclear)

We may even expand the thought, and note how, as if under a series of

new gospel metaphors, He rehearses the wilderness wanderings of His people to the end of time; comforting in the first instance the Pilgrim Band around Him, as He points them to "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," unfolding Himself before them as the wondrous Tree which will sweeten their bitterest Marah-pools—the true desert Rock, from whose smitten sides the waters of everlasting consolation flow in a perennial stream—the true Elim, with its stately palms of refreshment and wells of consolation—the true Joshua, conducting them at last in peace and triumph through the dry channel of Jordan, until landed in the Heavenly Canaan—the Father's House with its many mansions, which He was going before to prepare for them!

Let us pass for a moment, in this rapid reference, from the Master to the GUESTS. It is interesting, in the prospect of our own Communion, to note the variety of character surrounding that supper-table. Each member of the company has his own individuality, different mental and moral, as doubtless they had varying physical features—yet all, with one exception, are loving and beloved. In several—it may be diverse ways—they manifest their attachment and devotion. Outspoken, impulsive Peter, full of words, yet genuine, ardent, sincere. Silent, meditative John, wrapped in contemplation, in restful affectionate confidence leaning on his Lord's bosom. Calm, intellectual Thomas, and others of similar temperament; not saying much, or professing much—rather battling with doubt—cast down because unable to show the same vehemence of love which some of their more enthusiastic fellow-apostles exhibited. In this respect they were types of the variety of guests that would in all future ages assemble round the same sacramental Table. They were representative communicants; representatives of that diversity of character which must ever distinguish God's true people, on similar solemn occasions.

Some, of ecstatic frame and feeling, souls burning with ardor—others, fearful, distrustful, rejoicing with trembling; yet, though in a different way, equally conscious of love to their Lord—equally owned and recognized by Him, "who accepts according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not." Some, who I may venture to call, without for a moment implying or intending disparagement, demonstrative

Christians, who can at once show what they are—unfurl their banner and display it—others, like the Mother of our Lord, who "kept all these things in her heart." God will not reject because the one is devoid of the complementary gifts and graces of the other. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit."

III. THE ANNOUNCEMENT MADE. The Paschal meal and its attendant ceremonies were over. The cup of blessing and thanksgiving, we may suppose (according to olden custom), had four times gone round. The great Hallel—the closing psalm of praise, had been at least partly sung. The new rite is about to be instituted. But before it is so, there is something of sorrowful import burdening the mind of the loving Master. He has, until now, kept it from the guests; He can do so no longer. He reluctantly adds new drops to their cup; but the sad story must be told. All in a moment, with startling abruptness, their hour of hallowed communion is broken by the communication, "Truly, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." How every word—syllable by syllable—must have gone like fiery arrows to their hearts! "Verily I"—I, your Lord and Master—I, the gracious One who called you from your homes in Gennesaret, and honored you to be my confidential friends. I, who during three years of hallowed converse have given you proof of nothing but pure, unselfish love! "Truly, I say." Too well do I know the sad truth. It is no perhaps, no surmise or contingency—something regarding which I may have been mistaken or misinformed. As the omniscient Lord, I can certify the painful reality. It is my own betrayal! I am to be ignominiously delivered up for crucifixion and death. By an act of secret treachery, my life has been compassed, and the assassins are already prowling on my path.

Worst of all, it is "one of you" that is to be the guilty agent in consummating the foul deed. It is not an enemy, then I could have borne it—but he that dips with Me in the dish, eats with Me at table, the man I have received—welcomed—honored as a brother and friend, "has lifted up his heel against Me." A wicked bribe is to conquer and cancel the memories of much recent kindness. Need we wonder that another Evangelist should tell us, in a parallel passage, that "as Jesus testified these things, He was troubled in spirit." It was not the nail and spear of

Jew or Roman which now entered His soul. It was the thought of injured goodness and unrequited love on the part of a faithless disciple. It was Sinless Purity incarnate, wounded in the house of His friends. He wept over a whole city; now His mighty soul is bowed in sorrow by the base conduct of one Apostate, and the keen anguish seems too deep for tears!

Oh! let that single unhappy traitor tell us, what one sin, trifled with—tampered with—can do! His name, "Judas," means "praise of God." We have every reason to believe that he was once as earnest and faithful as his brother Apostles—as unselfish in his motives as they, in joining Christ and the Disciple-band—God's candle shining on his head. But covetousness—the base and degrading love of money—assailed his better nature. In an evil hour he dangled its forbidden gold and silver chains, and they became fetters to bind him. The master-passion by degrees took full possession of his soul—dominated his will and affections—crushed every lofty aspiration—all that once was fair and lovely and of good report, and left him, at last, a blighted blackened ruin, demon-haunted and defiled!

The most dreadful sin that ever stained the catalogue of creature guilt, came to brand his name and memory with infamy. As we see him leaving abruptly the supper-table, and from the lighted room plunging into the dark streets with a deeper darkness in his soul; from no one figure in all sacred story comes there so terrible a lesson—a lesson that may well be enforced by the inspired monitory words—"You, therefore, beloved, beware lest you also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." "Who can understand his errors? cleanse me from secret faults."

#### 4. THE WAY IN WHICH THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS RECEIVED.

"They were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I?" What, rather, might we have expected? Surely that the disciples, after a first moment struck speechless with shame and amazement, would have united in an instantaneous disavowal—spurned and repudiated the incredible imputation, saying—"Lord, it cannot be that villainy so base can possibly be ours. We could not be such disloyal renegades towards One so kind and indulgent as You!" Or, if not this, that



each would look with a suspicious eye on his neighbor, or cast an uneasy glance on Judas. But, they were too busy with their own untrustworthy spirits to have time, or thought, or room to fasten accusation on others.

Instead of the query passing from lip to lip, "Is it you? every eye was turned to their injured Master as they inquired, through anguished tears, "Lord, is it I?" As much as to say—'Fearful beyond words is such an impeachment—yet we cannot, we dare not say it is impossible. We know too much of the wickedness and waywardness of these hearts of ours. We have proved weak and cowardly in the past—broken reeds. We know too well, if left to ourselves, Satan would desire to have us, that he may sift us as wheat—"Lord, is it I?"' Was that apprehension—that unconscious self-distrust and misgiving—unwarranted? Never were these disciples, we believe, more touched with the love of their Lord, or more conscious of the sincerity and loyalty of their own, than now. Yet, they all, a few hours later, forsook Him and fled!

Brethren, it is well for us, in our seasons of devoutest consecration, to cherish a sense of our own frailty the fickleness and fitfulness of our best frames, the instability of our best purposes. Even on the holy ground we tread today, be it ours to avow, in profound humility and godly fear, "Lord, it is Your grace alone which keeps me from being another Judas. I cannot trust this traitor-heart. I shall go to Your table, uttering and deeply feeling the confession, by the grace of God I am what I am!"

Yet, let me add, on the other hand; as God's appointed ordinance—if partaken of in a spirit of lowly, earnest faith, it cannot fail to prove a quickener in the divine life, stimulating to new and more devoted obedience. Though in many ways our hearts may condemn us, He who is "greater than our hearts" will accept our offerings, and give us strength equal to our day. The very approach to Him, through His special means of grace, will secure its own pledged and covenanted blessing—"You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness; those that remember You in Your ways" (Isaiah 64:5). "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing—and I will cause the shower to come down in his season there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezekiel 34:26).

Doubtless, on many a future dark and perplexing day, when their Master

was gone, and they had to fight single-handed the battles of the faith, would the Apostles revert to this hallowed hour of a first Communion. May He, whose presence and blessing now, as then, gives to the solemn Ordinance all its preciousness, make Himself known to us in the breaking of bread—revealing the mystery of His suffering love, the completeness and glory of His final victory; and fulfill in our experience His assured promise—"In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you and bless you."

## **THE GREAT FESTAL GATHERING AND SONG OF HEAVEN**

Then I looked again, and I heard the singing of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus—

"The Lamb is worthy—the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:11-12

What an anthem is this!

We have, today, been assembled at Christ's Sacramental Table, contemplating the memorials of His dying ever-living love. The sublime passage just read contains also a superb description of a Communion. But the place of convocation is not a Temple on earth, but Heaven—the fellow-guests, not a few perishable mortals, but a glorified multitude which no man can number. It may form no unbecoming theme, surely, for this evening's service, to connect our sacrament below with the Supper of the Lamb above—The eternal festal Sabbath; no mock kiss of pretended friendship to mar—no anticipated hour and power of darkness to ruffle the deep rapture of its joy. How profoundly interesting the thought that we have here depicted what is now transacting in the Upper Sanctuary.

How delightful to reflect, that in ourselves ascending the Mount of Ordinances, we have been identified with the redeemed around the Throne; that the Church militant and the Church triumphant are associated in the same grand commemorative rite. Lo! as faith catches up the echoes of the Heavenly minstrelsy, it tells that our theme and our song are one—"The Lamb is worthy—the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" In their connection with the previous and succeeding context, let me advert to a few consolatory truths with which the passage is replete. We may learn—

(1.) The delight with which Christ looks back on His own Atoning work and sufferings. It was predicted, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied," and it would appear from the text, as if this were to be a perpetual sight and ever new satisfaction. If, even on earth, when the appalling prospect was before Him of treading the winepress of the wrath of God; when, at hand, was the gleam of the midnight torch, the assassin-band, Gethsemane's hour and power of darkness, and other deepening shadows beyond—if, even then, anticipating the results of Redemption, He could say, as if longing for the final triumph—"I have a Baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!"—now, when His work is completed, the vision informs us with what holier satisfaction He regards the retrospect of His agony and endurance. Rejoicing still to talk with His redeemed, as He did of old on the Mount of Transfiguration, of "the decease accomplished at Jerusalem," beholding on every side the evidences of His conquest—living trophies in their robes of light and with palms of triumph—contemplating the influence His death has exercised, not on the family of earth only, but on the varied orders of intelligence throughout the universe; what an attestation to God's immaculate holiness, His unimpeachable rectitude, His burning purity, His boundless mercy!

Shall the record be allowed to perish, or be henceforth an unknown and unpondered theme in Heaven? No—exceptional as it is, there shall still be one everlasting memorial there of anguish and suffering, in a place where pain never enters and suffering is unknown. Accordingly, when the Redeemer puts the coronation anthem into the lips of His worshipers, He

reveals Himself, not in the glories of Godhead, but as a slain Lamb, wearing the marks of humiliation. He tells them to make Calvary still their meditation, and His Cross and Passion the great Sacrament of eternity. The print of the nails in His hands, and the spear-mark in His side, are not the mementoes of shame but of victory—remembrancers of a love whose depths the ages cannot fathom.

The vision of the text thus becomes the mightiest of preachers, replete to the hosts above with the Story of grace. There is a tongue in every wound of the glorified Sufferer, silently but expressively proclaiming, "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh!"

(2.) The Vision of the slain Lamb would seem symbolically to point to the perpetual efficacy of the Savior's sacrifice. "Christ was once offered to bear the sin of many." "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified." By that one oblation He has made the bestowment of love and mercy compatible with every demand of justice and every requirement of righteous law. Nearly nineteen centuries have rolled by, since those wounds were opened and that blood shed. But the power and sufficiency of the Atonement are undiminished—still is He "able to save to the uttermost." And what is His plea when, as the ever-living Intercessor, He bears the names of His covenant people on His heart in every approach to the Throne? It is the plea of His own precious blood-shedding. He appears as "the slain Lamb." He points to the mute but expressive traces and symbols in His own adorable Body, as the grounds of His Advocacy. The live coals in the censer of the true Aaron (the fire of suffering) give the odor-breathing incense of His merits all its fragranciness. By His death He wrought out atonement; by intercession He perpetuates it and renders it forever efficacious; so that in the noblest of senses it may be said of Him, "He being dead, yet speaks." When on earth He poured out His soul in strong crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, "He was heard in that He feared." In heaven He pleads in silence. He is heard in that He suffered.

(3.) The Vision informs us of the continued identity of Christ's Person as God-man Mediator. It assures His people that He is the same Savior now that He was on earth. "Behold the Lamb of God!" said John, when pointing out the Man of sorrows in this valley of tears. "Behold the Lamb

of God!" exclaim myriads in the Heavenly Sanctuary, when gazing on the exalted Savior. It is indeed a glorified humanity He now wears; but it is humanity still—His risen Body a human Temple enshrining the Shekinah of Godhead. As the slain Lamb He proclaims that the same heart which throbbed in anguish on the Cross still beats on the Throne—that He is still the elder Brother, "the living Kinsman," the Almighty Friend; still feelingly alive, exquisitely sensitive to every pang which rends the human soul. What were the comforting words which the angels, on the Mount of Ascension, addressed to the disciples as they saw the bright cloud hearing their Lord to Heaven? "This same Jesus." Precious assurance! Jesus unchanged and unchangeable—"this same Jesus"—of Bethlehem and Nazareth, of Jerusalem and Galilee—"this same Jesus," who mingled His tears with the widow at the gate of Nain; who wept over the memory of a cherished friendship, and was melted in a flood of tenderest compassion over a fated city and an apostate land—"this same Jesus," who breathed balm-words of comfort on the very eve of His own agony, and in the midst of it welcomed a dying felon to Paradise—is now, with a heart of unaltered love and sympathy, wielding the scepter of universal empire!

And He will continue "this same Jesus" until these clouds be once more parted, and the celestial gates once more opened, that He may "come again and receive us unto Himself." This is, and ever shall be, His name and memorial, "I am He who lives and was dead." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

(4.) We may yet further infer from the Vision, that Redemption is the grand theme of adoration for unredeemed angels, as well as for the redeemed family of God. It is a mighty throng of worshipers the text discloses. It is not one company alone. We have angels, "living ones," and elders—redeemed and unredeemed. No harp is unstrung, no voice silent. One strain thrills on every tongue—"Worthy is the Lamb, the Lamb who was slain!" It is only one of the many ranks who may be said to be personally interested in the subject-matter of the anthem; and yet the whole celestial hierarchy would seem to dwell with devout and delighted amazement on the marvel of marvels. We may picture them exclaiming in turns, as they gaze on the significant symbol of sufferings, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" How spotless His righteousness! How

inexorable His justice! How unsearchable His wisdom! How infinite His love! How He hated sin, yet loved the sinner! How He magnified the law by showing He could by no means clear, and yet how He has 'cleared, the guilty!'

Dear Friends, it is surely an elevating thought, that you have been this day associated in your Sacramental feast, not with the Church triumphant alone, ransomed sinners who have exchanged the pilgrim warfare for the pilgrim rest, but with the whole Family of God, from the archangel nearest the throne to the least in the kingdom. Though requiring not, as we do, the personal application of the blood of sprinkling, they love to assemble as spectators at the Great commemorative rite, and make it the theme of devoutest contemplation; for, we read, "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God." When they search for the richest displays of the Divine character, where is it, we are told, they direct their gaze—with what do they task their immortal energies? With folded wings they bend over Gethsemane and Calvary, and exclaim, "The whole EARTH is full of His glory!"

(5.) The Vision of the text informs us, of the preeminent dignity and bliss of the ransomed saints. The Evangelist heard the voice of many Angels round about the throne, and round about the living ones, and round about the elders. What does this unfold, but a succession (so to speak) of concentric circles encompassing the all-glorious and glorified CENTER; and that the innermost circle—those standing nearest the slain Lamb, permitted the nearest glimpse of His Presence—are "Elders," that is, the Redeemed from the earth. It was the white-robed multitude, with crowns and palms, who in a subsequent vision were beheld "before the Throne," God sitting on the Throne and dwelling among them. They would seem (to use the language of the old divines,) as if reckoned the blood-royal of Heaven—"Kings and priests unto God," "sitting with Christ on His throne." Wondrous spectacle! the ranks of cherubim and seraphim, angel and archangel, making way, that redeemed sinners may take the station nearest "the excellent Glory," and pour in their own special chorus, in which no unredeemed tongue can join—"He was slain for us!"

(6.) We learn further from the Vision, the unity which pervades the

heavenly ranks. "Angels," "Living ones," and "Elders." No discordant voice to disturb the symphony. Not only so, but among the elders themselves (the ransomed from earth) there is blessed harmony. We read of the whole aggregate Church triumphant, "the four-and-twenty," symbolizing the varied churches of Christ gathered from "every kindred and tongue and people and nation," singing in sweet concert the new song, and falling down in blissful accord at the feet of Him who lives forever and ever. However different on earth, there, at least, variance ceases. No jarring sound—no party or separating shibboleth. The trumpet of discord mute. All seeing eye to eye and heart to heart. Then (alas! for the first time) that which is often spoken of as so beautiful in theory in the Church militant, will be realized in the Church glorified, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

The only ambition amid the mighty convocation will be, what harp will yield the richest melody, what tongue the loftiest tribute of grateful and adoring homage to "the Lamb—the Lamb that was slain!"

(7.) Finally, let us draw one other concluding lesson. The vision seems intended to prepare the Church on earth for her own sufferings, and reconcile her to her approaching tribulation. The scene is placed near the beginning of the Apocalypse; a preliminary to the pouring out of a succession of vials on the nations. But, before the thunders awake, the Church receives a wondrous vision of consolation. What is that? It is the sight of an Almighty Fellow-Sufferer! What can better reconcile her to have her own vestments dipped in blood, than looking up to the crimsoned vesture of her Adorable Head? How can she repine, when she looks to heaven and beholds the once Crucified Savior—reminding her that in her struggles she can fare no worse than her Master and Lord—that if persecutions be appointed, what are they, when she sees on the Throne the visible memorials of suffering, in comparison with which all her experiences of scenes and ages of agony would be but as dust in the balance?

We know nothing more consolatory for the child of God, in the midst of sorrows too deep for utterance and tears, than to take the vision of the text and dwell on its profound teachings. Afflicted believer! trial upon trial, like wave after wave, may have been rolling over you—deep calling

unto deep. But is there not a voice from that Slain Lamb proclaiming—"I am a Fellow-Sufferer," and may you not well be mute under the unanswerable challenge—"Was there ever sorrow like unto My sorrow?" Precious vision! it tells me, when my heart is overwhelmed and in perplexity, that there is One at the right hand of God who can say, from identity of experience, "I know your sorrows," for as the Slain Lamb, the Man of sorrows, He has felt them all Himself. Ah! it is a Lamb too, the token and emblem of innocence. Can I, a guilty sinner, repine at my afflictions, when this spotless, sinless, innocent Lamb of God was mute before His shearers? Is there not a voice stealing from that glorious and glorified One, addressing every child of tribulation, 'O bleeding heart, look at My wounds, and then say, can you murmur?'

Men and brethren, we have celebrated another high festival on earth; and as we descend the Mount, let us do so with the anthems of glory we have now been considering sounding in our ears. Lo! the immortal ranks (to repeat our opening sentence)—are busied with the same festive rite as ourselves. They echo back the motto and watchword as their own, which has ascended from not a few spirits among us today—"God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." O Lamb of God, who did so freely shed Your blood; we entreat that that blood may plead mightily for us!—that when we bid farewell to Communion here, and rise to the everlasting festal Sabbath in Heaven, it may be to prolong and perpetuate words which have been now uppermost in our hearts; which form our rejoicing while pilgrims on earth; which will compose our death-song and smooth our death-pillow; which will be our passport at Judgment and our triumphant anthem through Eternity—"Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb, the Lamb who was slain!"



# THE OBLIGATION OF CHRISTIANS TO OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER

"Therefore let us keep the feast."—1 Cor. 5:8

These words (which are selected more as a motto than a text), I desire, with the utmost simplicity of thought and language, to take as the theme of appropriate meditation on this Sacramental Sunday morning. Our subject is—the solemn and imperative obligation resting on Christians to keep the sacred Feast of Communion.

There are not a few, regularly and devoutly worshipping God in His Sanctuary—"not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is," who yet leave their places vacant on the recurrence of the Holy Ordinance of the Supper. As the professing servants and followers of a great and good Master, I would desire to bring home to all here present who have arrived at a mature age, the privilege and duty of making this avowal of their faith in Christ and of consecration to His service. Let me proceed to state one or two reasons, why the Communion Service ought to be devoutly observed, by every one who bears the Savior's name.

I. The Lord's Supper is to be observed, because its obligation rests on the Redeemer's dying command. An injunction is always rendered more binding and imperative if it has these two, among other considerations, to enforce it—

(1.) When it comes from the lips of One we love, and who has shown a deep interest in our welfare. We naturally pay a respectful deference to the request of a neighbor or acquaintance; but what is this, in comparison with the command of a parent? How supremely obligatory to every right-thinking child is the wish emanating from a father or mother, and with what joyful alacrity is it obeyed! The son going to a distant land has a Bible put into his hands, as the last gift of doating love, with the sacred promise exacted and given, that night by night in the adopted home he will never fail to use it. The request might be sacred for other reasons; but doubly so would it be, when he regards it as that of his dearest earthly

friend.

When, in the desert wasteland, or in solitude, memory travels back to the parental hearth, and remembers the devotion which so often and so willingly submitted to self-sacrifice—the hands which smoothed the pillow of sickness, and the voice which solaced in the hour of sorrow—if he ever proved traitor to his trust—if that hallowed souvenir should be ever left to gather dust on the neglected leaves, we know whose image would be the first to give the upbraiding look of injured love, and lead him with remorseful tears to unclasp it once more.

The observance of the Lord's Supper is the solemn injunction of One, who has proved Himself to be infinitely more than the best and fondest on earth. Even a mother's love—noblest type and ideal of supreme human affection—pales before His. All our tenderest and most endearing relationships, individually and combined, form but a feeble image and emblem of the devotion of this Parent of parents—this Brother of brothers—this Friend of friends—"He that does the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my mother and sister and brother." It is from the lips of such peerless LOVE the command is addressed, to "keep the Feast!"

(2.) Another consideration which makes such a request specially obligatory, is, if it is conveyed at some exceptionally solemn or momentous season. Surely if there be a time in the history of any human being more sacred or impressive than another, it is at the hour of death. How sacred must have been the dying adjuration of the last of the Patriarchs, when he "made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones!" How filially and loyally was this injunction obeyed—all the more so, just because it was a dying one. The bones of Joseph were not allowed to repose in Egyptian sarcophagus or under Egyptian pyramid. They were religiously guarded and kept unburied by his children's children, until, borne in the longest funeral procession the world ever saw, they were laid, in obedience to his last injunction, in the mausoleum at Sychar.

Take a New Testament illustration. Timothy would feel at all times imperative the wishes of his great spiritual father. But when the latter was "such an one as Paul the aged," "ready to be offered," sinking under the

weight of years and suffering in his dungeon home, how devoutly would the younger disciple respond to his injunction, even to the request about his winter cloak and parchment writings left in Troas! And, when the noble champion of the faith was gathered to the Church triumphant, how specially would every dying word listened to in that Mamertine prison, remain engraved indelibly on the survivor's heart.

What shall we say of the circumstances in which the parting command—the great farewell injunction—was given, of a Greater than the greatest of Apostles, that of the Divine Savior of the world? "Do this in remembrance of Me" has, as we well know, the special significance and impressiveness attached to it, of being uttered the night before death. It was, as much as the "Peace I leave with you," His dying legacy. He left on it the impress of His dying lips; yes, too, when His agony and bloody sweat, His Cross and Passion, and all their fearful accompaniments, were vividly portrayed to His omniscient eye. If John felt that the hallowed bequest of his Lord had a double obligation, because uttered by the faint lips of the Crucified in the supreme moment of suffering love—"Son, behold your mother—Mother, behold your son,"—if, just because it was spoken with dimming eye and paling countenance, that disciple regarded the direction and trust all the more sacred, from that hour to take the bereft mourner to his own home—with what profound reverence ought not we to accept and ratify the valedictory command of Jesus, to show forth His death in His own appointed Ordinance?

Yes! If I love the Savior; and so loving Him, if there be preeminently sacred music in His dying words; then surely no evasion of what is alike a duty and a privilege can be pleaded regarding our solemn Feast day. "If you love Me," says He, "keep my commandments." You are my friends if you do whatever I command you." Blessed Redeemer! to Whom we look for every hope for time and for eternity—in the great crisis-hour of Your work and sacrifice, You did not only institute this precious Memorial, but did lay upon Your Church the solemn injunction to perpetuate it for all ages—"Therefore, let us keep the Feast."

II. I would observe, under our second general head, that an obligation rests upon us to celebrate the New Testament Ordinance, because it is a befitting public declaration of our Christian profession.

Beautiful must have been the spectacle of that ancient mountain gathering, when the tribes of Israel assembled to give public testimony of their allegiance to their fathers' God, on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim. More solemn and interesting still, what we have on other occasions referred to in connection with our Sacramental seasons—when, year by year, the valleys and highways of Palestine were vocal with the songs of Pilgrims, as they went in company to celebrate the appointed feasts. Jehovah required them thus, year by year, to make mention of His name in the City of Solemnities. It was not enough for Jewish parents, by oral instruction, to impart His will and unfold His testimonies to their children, "talking to them when sitting in the house and when walking in the way—when lying down or rising up"—thus faithfully inculcating in the homestead the observance of private and domestic religion. "The Lord loves the Gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Jerusalem was the place where He recorded His Name, and where He promised especially to meet His chosen people. Hence every true and warm-hearted Israelite, when he came of age, considered it alike a duty and delight to take part in the holy convocation, and "subscribe himself by the name of Jacob." "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord."

Brethren, "let us keep the Feast"—our New Testament Passover—as a blessed opportunity of testifying, in presence of our fellow-Christians and before the world, our obligations to the Savior, and that we are not ashamed of Him and His gospel. Observe, the Psalmist (himself a devout worshiper) puts special emphasis in paying his vows "in the presence of all God's people." "In the courts of the Lord's House, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 116:14, 19). Let none of us be guilty of false shame, shrinking from an open declaration of the infinite debt of gratitude we owe to Redeeming Love. Even the soldiers of pagan Rome were not ashamed to pay their religious vows along with their comrades. They gloried in ascending the steps of the Capitol to the Temple of Victory, with their votive offerings, swearing by the gods of Olympus allegiance to their Imperial Master. And shall we, Christians, be found cowards to the true Jehovah and His Christ, when the heathen did public fealty to mute

idols?

If such unworthy feeling be deterring any from approaching that Holy Table, let them remember the righteous upbraiding which will meet them at the Great Day, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and my words, of Him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels." No, no; may this rather be the avowal that rises spontaneously to our lips, "We will rejoice in Your salvation, and in the Name of our God we will set up our banners." God helping us, we shall not, like the recreant children of Ephraim, "carrying bows, turn back in the day of battle." The servant may desert his master—the beggar may refuse to recognize his benefactor—the restored may pass unacknowledged the physician that cured him—the soldier may absent himself from the ranks, or basely disown his brave and trusted leader—but God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. "You have given a banner unto those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of Your truth." "Therefore, let us keep the Feast!"

III. We are under an obligation to keep this feast, because by not keeping it, we incur spiritual loss. We never can be careful enough in discarding the false and unscriptural idea, that there is any peculiar grace or virtue in the Sacrament—any mystic charm to pacify conscience—or that the mere act of communicating earns some claim or title to God's favor—in some mysterious way condones transgression, and cancels bygone guilt. We can entertain no such modification of the Roman Catholic dogma. As little could the mere act of communicating have power to take away sin, under the new dispensation, as had the blood of bulls and of goats under the old. All grace and mercy, pardon and acceptance, flow, not from the sacrament, but from Christ. This Ordinance is no more than one of "the golden pipes" spoken of by Zechariah in his beautiful and instructive vision, as conveying the golden oil from the Heavenly reservoir (Zech. 4:12).

But neither, on the other hand, must we undervalue the Ordinance, as a mean of grace. It is doubtless one of the Divine channels for the conveyance of spiritual good—one of the aforesaid golden pipes which transmit needed and promised grace to the soul. God could have fed His Temple-lamps miraculously, without aid or intervention. He could have

nourished them by some mysterious supernatural process. But in this, as in other things, He works by instrumentalities; and if we neglect those of His own express appointment, we cannot expect otherwise than to suffer spiritually.

Would the Pilgrim host of Israel have sustained no deprivation if they had omitted to quench their thirst and fill their leathern bottles at the wells of Elim? Would Elijah have suffered no loss if he had rejected the offered food, in whose strength he braved the barren desert for forty days and nights? And how can we expect otherwise than to incur loss and detriment if we pass by this Well of Living Water dug for us in the Valley, without partaking of its refreshment?

We would confidently appeal to many who, in obedience to their Lord's command, have come again and again (using the expressive word of an old writer), to this gracious "Trysting-place" and surrounded His Table. Have you not found it a precious means of advancing the work of grace, and of fostering spiritual growth in your hearts? Can you not, as you look back to these "Delectable mountains," with their hallowed memories, exclaim, "It was good for me to be there"—"I will remember You from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar"? How many have there received some unexpected tokens of blessing—gracious revelations of the Savior's character and work—new unfoldings of the Savior's love—some more intense and quickened longings after divine fellowship—some more realizing and energizing views of the unseen and eternal?

Ask such, if they regard this Day of Solemnity as an empty form—a mere periodical accordance with a conventional religious custom, from which they expect no fresh and stimulating impulse to faith, and love, and holiness? They will tell you far otherwise. "I have food to eat which the world knows not of." "His Flesh is food indeed, and His Blood is drink indeed." "You have put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their harvests and their wine increased." We take no undue or exaggerated estimate of His ordinance when we say, that it is the choicest and most strengthening meal provided by the Master for His spiritual Israel, in the House of their pilgrimage—"Lord, evermore give us this Bread!"

These remarks may appropriately be closed by a simple reference, and no more, to a DIFFICULTY. This difficulty is occasionally felt and expressed as twofold, on the part of those who remain away from the Lord's Table, and forfeit a personal share in the blessing of which we have spoken.

(1.) 'We are not warranted to approach the Table of Communion, because we are not prepared for it.' My answer is—The same reason which makes you unfit for the Communion, is equally valid, equally pertinent, in rendering you unfit and unready for Death. Unfit for the Communion Table in the Church below, can you be fit to sit down at the Supper-table of the Church above? Unworthy! Oh, is it not because we are sinners, and unworthy, that we are invited to come to the Feast, and there to celebrate the infinite worthiness of "the Lamb that was slain?"

(2.) It is further and not infrequently urged—'We cannot go to the Sacrament of Communion because we know that some venture who have no right to be there.' 'Hypocrites,' say they, 'frequent this hallowed ground—those living in known sin and spending disreputable lives. We shall not, we cannot go, where the cup of fellowship is mixed with the cup of devils—to talk of it as a "Communion" would be a brand and stigma on the name.' I reply—Your duty of obedience to your Lord's command is independent of any such intruders. You are not responsible for the sin and presumption of others. If hypocrites there be, to the Lord they thus mock, and defy, and crucify afresh—not to you—are they answerable. It is a disputed question, whether the betrayer himself dared to partake of the consecrated elements on the night of Institution. If he did, John and Peter and James were assuredly not responsible for the sacrilege—the defiant crime of the Apostate putting his lips to that sacred cup. And of every Judas who ventures with unhallowed footstep among disciples still, we can only say—"To his own Master he stands or falls."

Jesus bids all His lowly followers welcome. "Blessed are those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Why stand excluded from the gracious privilege by the intervention of any needless barriers and impediments unrecognized by the Master? If in any degree conscious of love to Him who first loved, and so loved you, and cherishing a humble

yet earnest desire for its increase—do not delay this public manifesto of your allegiance. Rather, in response to His invitation, "Come, for all things are ready,"—be it yours to say, even while deeply feeling your unworthiness and infirmity—

'Just as I am! Your love unknown  
Has broken every barrier down;  
Now to be Your, yes, Your alone—  
O Lamb of God! I come!"

We cannot more appropriately close, than by simply repeating our text, and the words of the immediate context—"Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast!"

## **BEAUTIFUL WITH SANDALS**

"How beautiful are your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter!" —Solomon's Song 7:1

I am well aware of the purely secular treatment of the Song of Solomon has received at the hands of not a few scholars in these modern days.

I shall not, however, be deterred by any schools or tenets of theology, from utilizing a precious Book of the sacred Canon for the highest spiritual instruction. This, too, on no "accommodation theory,"—deflecting it from a poor earthly meaning, in order to engraft pious thoughts and lessons it was never designed to furnish or suggest. Grant that it has a historical basis; grant that its primary and original purpose was to serve as a 'Marriage Song', or that its literary structure assumes the form of a romantic epic—still, these are but the setting of a more



precious Jewel. It has a truer intrinsic value than that of being merely a choice product and specimen of Hebrew pastoral poetry. Its chapters have been, to tens of thousands of God's holiest and best, from Origen, and Jerome, and Theodoret among the Fathers, down to our own Samuel Rutherford, like "Apples of Gold in pictures of Silver," It has been called by one of them "The Holy of Holies of the Bible sanctuary." At no time do the themes of the Great Allegory seem more befitting and appropriate, than when forming part of the service of a Communion Sabbath.

In a remarkable passage immediately preceding our text, Christ is figuratively regarded as coming down to "the Garden of nuts" (the Church on earth) to hold communion with His members—they transporting their chariots of faith and love up to the Gates of Heaven to quicken His approach—"before I ever knew it—my soul bore me (margin) on the chariots of a willing people" (6:12).

The Great Redeemer, the Heavenly Bridegroom, is now represented under the leading emblem of the Book, as surveying the beauties and excellences of His betrothed bride. "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you." Amazed at His condescension she replies—"What will you see in the Shulamite?" "What, O my Savior, will You see in me?" by nature lost, by daily transgression incurring Your displeasure; my love so weak, my resolutions so feeble—"What will you see?" Nothing but a divided heart; "the company of two armies." Grace on the one hand, corruption on the other; faith on the one hand, sight and sense on the other; the remains of the carnal mind still enmity against God, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.

And did You not "cover my head in the day of battle"—fight for me the good fight of faith; restrain my foes and curb my wavering affections; I would long ago have been able only to tell of one army; that I was leagued on the side of Satan against You; the helpless victim of my own legions, my present tyrants, my future tormentors. Even now, with all Your wondrous mercy and gracious forbearance, I feel too often and too mournfully the tendency of the evil heart of unbelief. Self-abased, and self-condemned, alas! I need no other lips than my own to attest the humbling reality—You see nothing but "as it were the company of two armies" (2:13).

Her Lord replies in the verse of the text. The whole chapter is an apostrophe to her. She is in herself full of conscious unworthiness—blemishes and shortcomings which seem to mar her best services and highest consecration. But He sees her clothed in the bridal attire of His own righteousness, having "neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing," and instead of upbraiding her for avowed imperfections, He begins with the words—"How beautiful are your sandaled feet, O Prince's daughter!"

Let me this evening speak, with God's blessing, on these two points.

I. The Church's or the Believer's NAME—"Daughter" and "Prince's daughter."

(1.) She is called "DAUGHTER." This points to the tender relation subsisting between Christ and His people. When Jehovah in the Old Testament speaks most endearingly of His ancient Church, He calls it "The Daughter of Zion." He employs, indeed, manifold figures, all indicative of strong and ardent attachment. "As one whom his mother comforts." "Can a woman forget her nursing child?" "Like as a father pities his children." "I will be a Father unto you."

How graciously, too, does He adapt Himself to their special circumstances and diverse experiences! He came down to Abraham (the pilgrim and sojourner) in a tent. He came to Moses (when Israel was in the furnace of sore trial) in a burning bush—burning, yet not consumed. Joshua was fighting—a man of war; his Lord came to him with a sword drawn in His hand. Zechariah was in a deep midnight of national trouble—the horrors of internal feud and bloodshed impending; his Almighty Defender appeared to him by night, as "a man riding on a red horse," with the ensigns of battle and pledges of deliverance.

In the text the believer needed gentle dealing. The Shulamite, represented in the lowly garden or valley of nuts—the valley of humiliation, is compared to a budding pomegranate (6:11); graces feeble; requiring the gracious influences of sunshine, or the balmy zephyrs of the south wind previously invoked (chapter 4:16). It was necessary to express the tenderness of God's pardoning mercy and purposes. He will not treat as a

son—requiring bolder, harsher correction, the severer tokens of parental discipline. But He will manifest and bestow all forbearance and love. He calls that honored believer "Daughter!"

(2.) But again, she is a "PRINCE'S daughter." He reminds her of her pedigree. It is no ordinary birth. She is one of the adopted children of the "King of kings,"—those who, by virtue of their spiritual relationship to the Prince of the kings of the earth, their Elder Brother, are themselves "made Kings and Priests unto God." Their glory is His glory. Their lives are, through this mystical indissoluble union, "hidden with Christ." He feels what is done to them as sensitively as if it were done to Himself. Oh wondrous thought! God not only recognizes them as His children, but includes them in the same paternal affection which He bears to His own dear Son. And Christ, the Brother in their nature, regards them with a like measure and intensity of love—"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you."

The concluding words of His memorable Valedictory prayer are among the most marvelous in the Bible—"That the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them!" Well may we echo the challenge—"Who is a God like unto our God, who pardons iniquity and passes by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage?" "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the ash-heap, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory!"

Would that we could realize the full grandeur of these royal privileges which have been ratified to us today at the Sacramental Table. I repeat, let us not regard the language of the verse we are now considering as a mere figure of speech of oriental poetry, but rather as a glorious divine reality—and those into whose hearts God has sent forth His Spirit, enabling them to cry "Abba, Father," know it to be so. Heavenly blessings in Christ in possession—and, in reversion, the prospect of being ushered into the presence-chamber of the King; according to the description in Psalm 45—the King's daughter "all glorious within," her clothing of "wrought gold" (the golden texture of a spotless righteousness not her own), arrayed in "clothing of needlework" (the graces of a divine life and character inwrought and inweaved by the Holy Spirit in the soul); "the virgins her companions following after," rank on rank of attendant angels

—ministering ones to the heirs of salvation—ushering her with gladness and rejoicing into the Heavenly Palace; there, as princes, and prince's daughters, to reign forever and ever!

How all earthly greatness dwindles into nothingness before the honors and blessings of God's purchased people! What is the mightiest king or prince of the earth?—a robe of ermine or a crown of gold conceals, underneath, a body corruptible as others. A breath may overturn the most towering fabric of earthly happiness. The vile worm refuted Herod's divinity. In an unexpected moment the revelries of Belshazzar were stilled in death, and his diadem plucked from his brow. One mandate from the throne of Heaven converted Sennacherib's tented field into a sepulcher, and scattered the pride of Assyria like chaff before the whirlwind. What is the history of earthly empires and kingdoms? "Ichabod! Ichabod!—the glory has departed!" an alternation of rise and fall—a proud capital one day, the next century a pile of ruins. The laurels of victory and empire one day fresh; another, withering and fading with the brow that wears them. But, believers, yours are imperishable crowns—palms ever green, robes ever white. The leaves of your coronation diadem are leaves plucked from the Tree of Life; yours an inheritance "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away!" "Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

Let us proceed now—

II. Her Lord's SUBJECT OF COMMENDATION—"How beautiful are your sandaled feet."

I would observe (1.) The sandal, in ancient times, and in oriental countries, was the badge of FREEDOM and HONOR. The crouching slave never wore a sandal. The lack of shoes—the unsandaled feet—was the badge and mark of slavery, if not of degradation. When the Lord, therefore, in the text speaks of His betrothed Bride's feet being "beautiful with sandals," what is this but to proclaim that she—type of every believer—is translated from the bondage of corruption into "the glorious liberty of the children of God?" Free from the condemnation of a broken law; free from the accusation of a guilty conscience; free from the terrors alike

of temporal and of eternal death. "Thus shall you eat it," was the address to pilgrim Israelites of old—assembled, as you have been today, at their Paschal feast—"with your loins girded, with the shoes on your feet" (Ex. 12:11).

It was the anniversary of their emancipation—the celebration of their national birthday, which brought them forth from their land of bondage and terminated their thralldom. You come forth from a Communion Table, wearing the sandals of freedom. God has anew, in that blessed sacrament, sealed to you your divine liberty. Its significant symbols of love and suffering recall that you "are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Computing in some feeble measure the amazing ransom-price paid for your redemption, you can say with the Roman officer, as he addressed Paul in the castle of Jerusalem—"With a great sum obtained I this freedom." The Son has made me free, and I am free indeed!

In that beautiful festal Psalm where the worshiper is heard declaring, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord," he is represented as adding—"O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant and the son of Your handmaid, You have loosed my bonds" (Ps. 116:16).

I remark (2.) Sandals were emblems of JOY—while the lack of these was equally recognized and regarded as a symbol of grief and sorrow.

David, you will remember, when compelled to leave his throne and capital, and take flight to a land of exile, went up Mount Olivet barefoot. On the other hand, upon the occurrence of glad seasons—whether great national ovations, or social feasts and entertainments, where mourning was turned into dancing—the guests were supplied with sandals. Such, in the Parable of parables, was the case with the hunger-stricken prodigal, on his return from the far country to his forfeited filial privileges—within paternal halls and walls; the rejoicing father proclaiming it to be an occasion for making merry and being glad.

And is not the Christian called to be joyful? Yes, God's children are

indeed, really, and in truth, alone of all, in this sin-stricken world, entitled to the epithet of "happy." Never say that gloom and despondency are the conditions and accompaniments of the believer's creed and the believer's life—that sadness of countenance is the badge and penalty of godliness. Who can forget that the God of nature is the God of Christianity? Never tell me, that He who gave the lily its beauty and the sky its delicate blue, and the sun golden wheels to his chariot and golden arrows of light for his quiver, could ever intend the soul to be draped in sackcloth.

So long as we continue to be strangers to the covenant of promise, living in neglect of the great salvation—then our figurative description is that of men barefoot; our appropriate emblems those of melancholy and sorrow; for happiness, in its highest and noblest phase, must be unknown in the bosom where God is a stranger. But the moment a man is united by faith to the Lord Jesus as his ever-living Redeemer—the moment he obtains the assurance of sin forgiven—the blessed sense of adoption into the Divine family, he is "girded with gladness," the shoes, not only of liberty but of holy joy, are put on his feet. Like the Ethiopian of old, in the desert of Gaza, having found what he had so long sought in vain, he goes on his way rejoicing.

"The daughters of Jerusalem," the band or chorus of singers in this allegory, may appropriately name the Bride of the text "SHULAMITE," that is, "peaceful." She is filled with "the peace of God which passes all understanding." The sacramental rite of today, when partaken of by those who can, with humble confidence, justify their claim to the title, "children of the King,"—may well be called "Eucharist," or "Feast of Joy."

(3.) Once more. The sandals on the feet speak of activity and duty, and preparedness for Christ's service. They point to the nature of the journey the believer is pursuing. Though a pleasant road, and a safe road, and a road with a glorious termination, it is at times rough; a path of temptation and trial. Unshod feet would be cut and lacerated with the stones and thorns and briars which beset it.

The figure, moreover, suggests, that there can be no loitering or lingering on the way. Impressive must have been the scene that night, to which we

have already referred, at the first Paschal Feast in Egypt. It was not the solemn calm which so distinguishes our Communion celebration—the elements handed slowly and reverently from guest to guest in a hush of hallowed silence. As we see the old Hebrew family, or cluster of families, gathered together, every movement betokens celerity. They stand girded—"harnessed." They eat the appointed Supper, not only with shoes on the feet, but, it was an added injunction—"in haste," as it were, by snatches, like men who have not a moment to put off—delay may be fatal. When we hear the voice of our "Beloved" saying, "How beautiful are your sandaled feet!" we are reminded that these shoes are given not for ornament, but to be worn—they are given that His true Israel may walk, yes, "run in the way of the divine commandments," ready to follow the Great Captain of salvation wherever He sees meet to guide them; seeking, with the true pilgrim ardor, to be ever advancing in the heavenward, homeward way; listening to the old monition, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." The path of the just is compared to the sun in the skies, traveling in the greatness of his strength; glowing with intenser brightness until he reaches his meridian—or, like the eagle in his soaring—his nest on the earthly rock, but his home the skies. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles."

We may all take to ourselves here the apostolic injunction—"See that you walk circumspectly." In the quaint but expressive phrase of an old divine on this passage, "Many are content to walk slipshod." They go with a halting pace; with meager faith, and satisfied with a low standard of grace and holiness. They have shoes on their feet, but they are the sandals of a flimsy profession that cannot stand the rough parts of the road; and when affliction or tribulation arises, immediately they are offended. Beware, and specially those who have recently renewed their vows at the Holy Table—beware of the first symptoms of spiritual declension—that drowsy, sleepy, lukewarm condition so forcibly described in a preceding chapter of this same Song—where the believer, stretched on the downy pillow of self-security, listens—but it is only with languid indifference—to the knockings of the Savior at the door of the heart.

How tenderly, how gently, how urgently He importunes—"Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled—for my head is filled with

dew, and my locks with the drops of the night!" (v. 2). What is the cold reply of the slumberer? Mark how she invents excuses. She has cast off the sandals of a close and holy and habitual walk with God, and replies—"I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Ah, if the feet had been shod as they ought to have been; if she had been on the alert, ready for duty and obedience, her Pilgrim-Lord would not have been repelled from the door, or left unwelcomed amid the falling, drenching dews. If she had been careful then to have been ready for His presence, she would not have been driven, as we find she was, out amid the dark streets and crude watchmen of Jerusalem, seeking Him with plaintive wail, and bleeding feet, and anguished tears.

This subject suggests to us a lesson of a different kind. Another befitting fragment may be gathered from it at the close of our Sacred Feast. The shoes (the beautiful shoes) seem to indicate, not only the believer's personal activities in the matter of his own high calling, they point to him also as a messenger to others. The Church in each of her members must be, or ought to be, shod as "a ministering one." It is noticed by an excellent commentator, that the translation of our text in the oldest Bible is, "How pleasant are your treadings with shoes, O Prince's daughter!" Hers should be treadings in the world's thousand pathways and byways of duty and kindness and mercy. It is a law in all God's moral government that "the elder should serve the younger,"—the higher minister to the lowlier natures. He who is at the summit of all Being ministers to the needs of angel and archangel. Christ, the Incarnate God, came "not to be ministered to, but to minister."

The angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation." And, as God ministers to angels, and angels to man; so, surely, man, in a higher social station, ought, in accordance with this great law, to minister to those of his fellow-beings occupying a lowlier one. "We who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." The family, surrounded and dowered with many domestic blessings, should be the willing almoners of God's bounty to others—aiding and succouring the orphan and fatherless, the poor also, and him that has no helper. Blessed is that church which sends its messengers



"shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," and whose advent is thus hailed by the perishing in the world's darksome valleys—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings!"

In Isaiah's temple-vision of the six-winged seraphim, while the 'pose' of a double pair of these wings was indicative of reverence—the contemplative and devotional element in the Christian character and life—with the remaining pair "he did fly," the symbol of joyful activity, ever ready to speed on behests of unselfish love and mercy. Nor is this the duty and the privilege only of the influential few. All in their varied ways—(with many it may be a very humble and lowly way) may become such ministering angels of kindness. You may receive, for that little, but a small recompense of praise from man. But the Great Recompenser, who does not forget even the cup of cold water, may be heard addressing you—"How beautiful are your feet,"—how pleasant are your treadings "with sandals, O Prince's daughter!"

Let all who have put on afresh their festal sandals today, seek in this, as in other ways, to follow Christ—to "walk, even as He walked." May it be said of you, "These are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." He may at times take us by a rough road, narrow and difficult; full of crosses and hardships and losses; but He will not conduct us over a path harder than our shoes can bear. He will lead us by the right way to a city of habitation.

When we think of the lessons more especially taught us at His Memorial Ordinance; how His feet were transpierced, that the sandals of salvation might be put upon ours; when we think that there is not the path of sorrow which the treadings of the Man of Sorrow knew not; nor the pang of woe which His bleeding heart felt not; shall we refuse to follow Him in any way He may choose to appoint? The ruggedness of this and every other tortuous and thorny road will be all forgotten, when our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Dare I close without one other urgent thought, which seems yet to claim a concluding sentence? Should there be any here, to whom the symbols of the Holy Table have been all unmeaning, who are still strangers to Christ and His Salvation—walking unshod—slaves, for they have no real

freedom; joyless, for they have no true joy—leading a selfish, aimless, profitless existence; living in unconcern and sin—their own souls in unrest, and others around them uncared for and unblest—Let any such arise, and go to their Father. He welcomes every prodigal's return. There are shoes—jeweled sandals—awaiting in the long-lost home. Oh! how many has that Lord of love and tenderness watched in the hazy distance! How many a drooping penitent, with ragged dress and tear-dimmed eye, has He met at the threshold; and stripping off the tattered clothing, given orders to the attendant servants—"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and SHOES ON HIS FEET."

## **THE PASSOVER IN EGYPT AND ITS TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE.**

"Wear your traveling clothes as you eat this meal, as though prepared for a long journey. Wear your sandals, and carry your walking sticks in your hands. Eat the food quickly, for this is the Lord's Passover. On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and kill all the firstborn sons and firstborn male animals in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the Lord! The blood you have smeared on your doorposts will serve as a sign. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. You must remember this day forever. Each year you will celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord." Exodus 12:11-14

The Passover, in its earliest celebration, is perhaps the best known of all Old Testament types. But it is with it, as with most familiar things—if they are interesting and impressive, they can well bear restatement and repetition. With the observance before us today of our own Gospel Feast, we may appropriately and with profit take the Jewish rite as our theme of meditation.

We are transported in thought to that memorable night when, under the guidance of their trusted leader, or rather under the strong Hand and outstretched Arm of the God of the Pillar-cloud, the oppressed race are to leave their home of exile forever. Let us endeavor, by individualizing a domestic group, to form a mental picture of the scene.

On the 14th day of the month Nisan, an Israelite family are gathered for the last time in their Egyptian dwelling. The door is shut; the father's face is lighted up with joy as he addresses his assembled household with words of encouragement; for he knows that they are about, in some mysterious way, but with very real certainty, to bid farewell to their bondage. 'Fear not,' we may imagine him saying, 'before the morrow dawns, Jehovah is to do mighty wonders! yet another hour, midnight will be here, and then a great cry will be heard amid the darkness; for the Destroying Angel is to speed through every dwelling in the land, and leave its firstborn dead—son of king and son of slave. Yes, even the firstborn of beasts too. Egypt's animal-gods, which our oppressors in their base superstition have worshiped, will share the doom, and the Lord God of Israel, our God, shall be glorified.' If the father observes, meanwhile, any of those present betokening alarm—possibly hearing them exclaim, 'Alas! shall not we also be involved in this terrible destruction?' 'No!—dismiss your fears,' would be his reply. 'Did you not see, a few hours ago, how I besprinkled our lintels and doorposts with the blood of a lamb? That mark, wherever it is made, will ensure to every Hebrew house and household immunity from the Destroyer. Only keep, as we are now, within the walls. To venture outside would be exposure to certain peril. Here we are safe!'

At that moment, may we give further license to imagination, and suppose, by a bold metaphor, that there is heard outside a sound as of rustling wings! It is the dreadful Messenger of vengeance. But that Angel's eye falling in the present case on the appointed blood stain, he passes by the dwelling unscathed. Not so with the habitations of others. Plaintive wail follows plaintive wail, as the discovery is made in every Egyptian home that there is a dead eldest-born! The frantic cries increase. Mothers, beating their breasts, rush from their houses in the delirium of despair. They seek Priest and Temple. They cry wildly to Osiris and Mnevis to be

up and save them! But these oracles and deities are dumb. "They have ears, but they hear not."

And now the hour of longed-for emancipation has arrived. 'Up! let us be going'—Hebrew calls to Hebrew. 'Let our tears and chains be henceforth nothing but a doleful memory.'

It is done. Amid the darkness of night—relieved only by the light of the moon, and the silence broken only by the cry of the bereft Egyptians, the country scarred with the marks of the recent plagues, the palm-trees struck down and blasted with the hail of God—the march begins. "Not a hoof is left behind," Israel is free! The mighty army of liberated slaves have begun and effected their Exodus.

Brethren, let us gather around these significant emblematic teachings. If no passage in this ancient story of God's acts is more familiar, none is fuller or more suggestive to us of the Great Redeemer. With the utmost simplicity of thought and treatment, for the subject will admit of no other, let us view "Christ, our passover, sacrificed for us,"—"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

In doing so, we shall briefly recall—or, if I may use the expression—'outline'—and that in the order of the inspired narrative, the leading points in the olden type.

(1.) The first feature which strikes us is concerning the PASSOVER, is that the Rite was of DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

This significant Hebrew ceremony would never have been thought of by an Israelite himself. It would have been the last thing that would have suggested itself, on the concluding night of bondage, to kill one of the members of their flock and sprinkle doorpost and lintel with its blood.

The method of the Great divine Expiation for the sins of the world was pre-eminently God's devising. What human mind would ever have formulated such an idea, as that the Eternal One would send to this apostate earth of ours, the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory, in order to effect, through a death of self-surrender and suffering, the emancipation

and final salvation of His people? Surely if, in any respect more than another, God's ways are not our ways, nor God's thoughts our thoughts, it is that He should have "so loved the world, as to give His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but might have everlasting life."

(2.) Let us note next, the name and nature of the appointed victim—a LAMB. The animal of all others that seems to suggest the idea of innocence and meekness. In the lion's whelp, with all its playfulness, there is early discerned the incipient fierceness of untamable years. But a lamb, as it browses on the mountain side or by meadow and stream, is the recognized picture of gentleness and patience. Expressive emblem, surely, of "the Lamb of God!" It seems to us a poor reason which some have given for the selection of the Paschal offering, that it was what could most readily be furnished by the shepherds of Goshen from their herds. Let us see, rather, in this first simple element in the typical significance, what the writer of an after age calls, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." "HE was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

(3.) As a further expansion of this thought, the selected Paschal lamb was to be WITHOUT BLEMISH.

Plague-mark or disease or infirmity dare not attach to it. No animal would be accepted with torn fleece, or broken limb. A maimed member of the flock would be an insult to Jehovah, and would have vitiated the offering. The besprinkled blood of such would have failed to arrest the footsteps of the Avenging Angel.

Christ was "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." He "offered Himself without spot to God." As one flaw or vein in the marble fatally damages the sculptor's work—as one speck in the lens of microscope or telescope destroys its use and demands a recasting—as one leak would inevitably submerge the noblest vessel that ever rode the waters—so, one leak in the Mighty Ark of Mercy—one flaw, one stain in the nature of the Divine Surety—the Image of the Invisible God—would have been fatal to His qualifications as a ransom for the guilty. Blessed be His name, the Lamb "slain for us," was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from

sinner." What a host of witnesses conspired on earth to testify to His immaculate purity! His very foes were compelled to own and recognize His blameless, stainless life. The traitor who sold Him had to avow—"I have betrayed innocent blood," the judge who condemned Him had to wash his hands, and declare, "I find no fault in Him at all." His own beloved Disciple, in after years, beheld Him in vision "girded with a golden belt," "glorious in His holiness."

(4.) The Paschal Lamb was not only without blemish, but "a male of the first year," that is to say, had attained its full growth. It was the choicest of the fold. It was, in its lowly way, the type of absolute perfection.

Behold again, a yet additional attestation to the All-perfect Sacrifice! It may appear to some a very accidental and subordinate feature; but we think it cannot be overlooked, that the expiation for sin was consummated by the Great Antitype at the very age when manhood reached its prime. Vain is the attempt, save from unauthorized traditional sources, to form any definite conception of the outward appearance—the human form and likeness—of the Divine Son of God. We may each have our separate imaginings and surmises regarding what has been unrevealed. Chief perhaps among these, that just as with the best and noblest on earth, we generally find worth, purity, integrity, sympathy, and kindness, unmistakably reflected in face and feature—so it may have been with Him "whose countenance was as the sun which shines in his strength." May it not reasonably be conjectured, that whatever was most attractive and beautiful in man, was unfolded in the outer aspect of "the Altogether Lovely one"? It surely adds to the touching thought of His death, that it was just when the adorable Savior had attained all that was complete as the Ideal of humanity, that "He was taken out of the land of the living."

The Heavenly Flower was cut down, not when in early incipient bud, but in amplest blossom. The pure white Lily bowed its head, not when the latent beauty was undeveloped, but when it had fully revealed its "calyx of gold." The Divine Tree of Life succumbed to the axe, not in the early spring when its branches were unclothed and the fruit unformed; neither in late autumn, with the leaves seared—but in the full summer of its glory; when every bough was laden with verdure and hanging with richest

clusters. The magnificent Temple fell, not when half upreared, nor yet when toil and suffering had left their lines and furrows on the gleaming marble; but rather, just when the top stone had been brought forth with shouting, and the cry arose, 'Grace, grace unto it!' If we venture to use human language, it was when this "Fairer than the children of men" was 'at His noblest and best,' that in divinest sacrifice He poured out His life-blood for us.

From this conjunct emblematic view of Christ as "a Lamb," "a Lamb without blemish," "a male of the first year," let us take comfort. It required perfection—the perfection of Deity and humanity, to make Him all that we need as a Savior. An Angel has a perfection of his own, but an Angel cannot redeem. His perfection is at best only the perfection of a creature—the borrowed derived glory and luster of the satellite. They "veil their faces with their wings" in token of conscious unworthiness. The perfection of Christ is underived—His the alone perfection that can be accepted as substitute for imperfection, and by reason of which He can thus address His Church—"I who speak in righteousness, am mighty to save!"

(5.) The Paschal lamb was SEPARATED from the flock and kept alive four days. This formed a further Divine injunction, as you will find by reference to the detailed instructions in the opening of the chapter from which our text is taken. (Ex. 12:3, 6.)

Christ, as we have already seen, was designated for His atoning work and sacrifice in the counsels of the Father from the foundation of the world. Before the true Paschal Antitype was slain, the world was left 4000 years (four millennial days, as an old writer expresses it) to work out the problem of its own self-restoration. God seemed to say, I will set apart the Great appointed Sacrifice for these specified eras, to let the nations test their ability to save themselves—to solve, if they can, by their own intellect and reason; by their laws of progress, their astute philosophies, their "moral consciousness," the all-momentous question, "How can man be just with God?" The solution of that problem, after the long period of waiting and probation was—"The world by wisdom" (its own boasted wisdom and civilization; its moral codes, its political expedients and scientific theories) "knew not God!" Then, the fullness of the time came,

and God sent forth His only begotten Son.

(6.) The Paschal Lamb, after being presented "on the fourteenth day of the first month, at full moon, between the evenings,"—was slain. At the celebration of the rite in Egypt, with which we are now especially concerned, the head of every household officiated as sacrificing priest. But when they reached Canaan, and in subsequent times, each offerer seems to have brought his separate lamb to the Tabernacle or Temple, where it was killed by Levites. The blood was poured, at all events in the Temple service, into gold and silver basins. These were handed along a row of officiating priests, until they reached the altar upon which the blood was finally cast. In either case the Paschal Lamb was a sacrificial offering—a propitiation.

Brethren, here is the foundation truth of the gospel; "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Yes, the "sprinkling," for observe, that under the varying forms of observance in earlier and later Jewish times, this expressive action was rigidly preserved. Not enough for you or for me is the slaying of the Lamb—in other words, the mere historical fact that the Divine-human Victim died. There must be the saving application of that blood to the conscience—a personal individual interest applied for and found in the great salvation—"He loved me and gave Himself for me."

Vain for us will it be to sit down at our great New Testament Feast unless conscious that the lintels and doorposts of our hearts, as a great spiritual reality, have been marked with the covenant token, and that we are resting in Christ as our only Savior. We have seen that nothing but the sprinkling of the blood could have saved from the Avenging Angel. The Israelite might have piled buttress on buttress, pyramid on pyramid, to effect exclusion. He might have strengthened his dwelling with bars of brass and pillars of iron, lintels and doorposts of cunning workmanship. The Destroyer's weapon would have cleft them in sunder.

"Neither is there salvation in any other." The work of Jesus must stand alone in all its solitary grandeur and sufficiency. "When I see the blood"—"the blood," says God—"I will pass over you."

Omitting several additional interesting typical lessons on which time



forbids to speak, I shall conclude with one other reference—the final injunction to the Hebrews regarding their offering; that is, that after the carcass of the victim was "roasted with fire," it was to be eaten—the whole of it was to be eaten, nothing was to be left.

In the modern Samaritan celebration of the rite, no part would appear to be more strangely interesting, than the guests, under the light of the full paschal moon, gathering around and consuming the carcasses of the slaughtered lambs. There is, moreover, the same rigid adherence to the old command, that nothing was to be unconsumed; so that if any morsels remain, they are carefully gathered up and placed on mats and burned. Fires and candles are lighted, and the ground searched in all directions, in case of any fragment being overlooked. "You shall let nothing remain until the morning, and that which remains until the morning you shall burn with fire."

What, among others, is one great spiritual lesson here inculcated? That it is not enough to rest satisfied with the initial act of pardon and forgiveness through the blood of the cross. Christ must not only be looked to by simple faith, but in His own expressive but much misunderstood and misinterpreted words and simile, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except" (in a lofty, spiritual sense) "you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God; you have no life in you."

In a very especial manner, dear friends, is that typical feature brought before us today. You recall the words of Institution uttered by the Great Master of the New Testament Feast. These are not "Take, look," (this would have been sufficient had it been a commemorative occasion and no more); but He significantly says, "Take, eat." It is a covenanting, strengthening, grace-imparting, nourishing Ordinance. By partaking of the Sacramental bread, and drinking the Sacramental wine, there is expressed, in the outer act, the necessity of what the old divines call "appropriating the Redeemer and all the benefits of His purchase." The ordinance, received by faith, not only "does signify, but seal, our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's."

Brethren, "Let us keep the Feast!" and as we "go to the altar of God, unto

God Himself our exceeding joy," let us do so with the cherished, familiar litany on lip and in heart—"O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!" "O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us your peace!"

## **SUNDAY AFTERNOON—CONCLUDING ADDRESS**

"There shall be a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute to come to the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel."—Isaiah 30:29

"But the people of God will sing a song of joy, like the songs at the holy festivals. You will be filled with joy, as when a flutist leads a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem—the mountain of the Lord—to the Rock of Israel."  
Isaiah 30:29

In the previous solemn services of today, our minds were directed to the typical significance of the first Passover in Egypt; which we endeavored to connect, by many remarkable particulars, with our own New Testament celebration.

I have thought I could not more appropriately wind up and close our sacramental meditations, than in the words just read from the great evangelical Prophet. They have reference to an interesting custom in the keeping of the Paschal Feast during subsequent ages of Hebrew history; when, year after year, every Israelite went up to Jerusalem. The multitudes which thronged there from all parts of Palestine were in the habit of traveling by night as well as by day—proceeding in bands or companies; cheering one another with the voice of psalms and sacred songs, or with the simple music of flute or tabret.

What a rush of thought must have filled the bosoms of these Pilgrims, as, under a clear passover moon, and making the valleys resound with their melodies, they drew near the City of Solemnities, to commemorate the mightiest epoch in their national history! Many and varied, we may suppose, would be the voices composing these night-strains, from the tremulous accents of the aged patriarch, who had traversed often before with hardier step the same journey, to those of the youth, who was now, at last, to have the ardent longings of boyhood realized, personally to be spectator of the glorious things spoken of the City of God.

We may imagine, as the secluded villages and hamlets, from the slopes of Lebanon to the borders of Idumea, poured out their groups, how many and pleasing themes of converse there would be by the way. Some, who, it may be, from varied causes had left their homes in sadness, disconsolate and desponding, would be cheered and invigorated by the sympathy of congenial minds. It would be a season of holy fellowship meetings between Israelite and Israelite. The voice of united prayer would mingle with that of praise—while the one object of their journey, the one keynote of their song, would cause every heart to thrill with gladness, "Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem!"

But in due time, the solemnities are ended. The highways of Palestine are again thronged with the returning worshipers; these highways, lighted up with the waning passover moon, and its troop of attendant stars. The dead of night, once more, resounded with the Songs of Zion.

How many fresh thoughts must have crowded the minds of these wayfarers! How varied the feelings with which they would muse on the now ended festival! How brief (would not one of their reflections be)—how brief has been the joyous season. It seems but yesterday we were entering with bounding hearts within the Temple of our Fathers, and here we are again bidding it farewell. We looked forward for a long year to this festive meeting. It has come and gone. The vow has been made—the votive offering rendered. The sacred Gates are closed; and we are retraversing the road to our distant mountain and village homes!

Brief, is our experience also, are earth's best and most hallowed seasons of festal joy. We eat our paschal supper, as if, like the old Hebrews, with girded loins and sandaled feet and pilgrim staff—all indicative of pilgrim haste. The everlasting, uninterrupted, unending Festival is above; where the guests are assembled and associated, not for a fleeting hour, but for eternity!

The thought most appropriate to us, at this part of our service, is, that these Jewish wayfarers returned to their several homes to resume their usual occupations—the customary routine of everyday common life. They had been for days—perhaps weeks, unfamiliar with scenes of worldly toil. The laborer's busy task had been suspended. The vinedresser had laid

aside his pruning-hook, the husbandman his plough—the fisherman's nets were spread on the shores of Galilee, and his boat slept on its shadow as it was moored to the rocks of Capernaum. A deep, unworldly solemnity had reigned within Jerusalem, as the nation, at the bidding of its God, kept its high holiday. But the hallowed Portals are shut—The Feast is over—the old heritage of work must be undertaken—the festive and holiday garments must be exchanged for the ordinary attire and as the groups hasten back to their homes along the highways, and by the plains and valleys, they see the tiller of land again in his field—the shepherd again with his crook in the midst of his flock—the Hebrew sailor has started afresh with his Tyrian cargo, and the fishermen on Gennesaret are again preparing for a night of toil.

So it is, brethren, with us. After the most sacred festal and sacramental seasons, the world's business and cares necessarily reassert their claims. Its din and bustle must again be heard and entered—and labor, God's own appointment—yes, gracious appointment—resumed.

BUT—think we, would these old Jewish worshipers (those who were worshipers indeed) in casting off their holiday attire, cast off also their holiday and festive spirit? In the midst of the coarse contacts of daily existence, would the recollections of the Jerusalem Festival no longer linger in their memories? No, rather, would not these Songs of Zion still haunt their ears and hang upon their lips?—would not the shepherd be heard chanting them in the midst of his fleecy charge by green pastures and still waters? would not the fisherman warble them in his nightwatch on the Lake? and the sailor as he bounded over the Great Sea, and the dim mountains of his Fatherland were receding from view? would not the cottager, as he reached his home among the hills of Kedesh or on the spurs of Hermon, evening after evening, in returning from his toil, gather his little ones by his knee, and rehearse to them the joyful remembrances of the holy season?

Be it ours, dear friends, while we leave the New Testament Feast, and engage—as engage we must—in our daily avocations, to carry the hallowed memories of it along with us. These Communion seasons, though only brief pausing places in life's pilgrimage, are intended too as Arbors for spiritual refreshment and revival in the ascent of the "Hill

Difficulty"—to brace and strengthen for the everyday road which is again to be traversed, the steep and rugged mountain again to be climbed. While anew wearing the world's dress, and grappling once more with cares and duties, forbid that we should know, with regard to spiritual things and holy resolutions, the world's oblivion power—that we should suffer its engrossments to sweep our solemn impressions away—as the ripple marks on the sand are effaced and obliterated by the first rising tide!

Rather, in resuming our varied tasks and employments, let it be, with our hearts overflowing in gratitude to Him who summoned us to the place of solemnities, to ratify His covenant and give us festive pledges of His love. As we leave the banqueting-house, be it ours to take up in spirit the very strains which hung on the lips of returning Hebrews—and with heartfelt devotion, mingled with resolutions of new obedience, to say, "What shall I render unto God for all His benefits?" "The Lord has been mindful of us—He will bless us—He will bless the house of Israel—He will bless the house of Aaron—He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great."

"Those who fear the Lord, both small and great."—Among the multitudes of Jewish wayfarers resuming the familiar road to their native homes, none does imagination follow with deeper and kindlier interest than the young worshipers—those who had gone up to Jerusalem to gaze for the first time on the City of the Great King—to render their first offering, and pay their first vow. Many mothers in distant localities of the land would doubtless, during his absence, follow with prayerful emotion her son's earliest journey, and wait with trembling solicitude to hear the impressions of a never-to-be-forgotten pilgrimage. Are we wrong in thinking, that the character of not a few youthful Israelites would be permanently molded and influenced by that momentous era in opening life—that, with regard to not a few of them, the words of their great Psalmist were happily fulfilled—"Of Zion it shall be said, the Lord shall count, when He writes up the people, that this one was born here"?

And surely, if there be, among those who have come up today to our Gospel Passover, any whose circumstances are more interesting than others, it is those of young communicants.

How solemn and important this step in your spiritual history! One cannot but feel, with regard to most of you who have encompassed for the first time your Lord's table, that your characters too are just forming; that it depends much on the resolutions which you have now taken, and the manner you carry them out, what your future is to be. You have put your hand to the plough—see that you turn not back. Oh, endeavor to act out, and pray out, and live out, the firm resolve, that "whatever others do, as for you, you will serve the Lord." Be life's vista long or short, may you never cease to cherish a lively remembrance of your earliest Passover vow—that it may be with you as with the young Hebrews who, in leaving Jerusalem after their first festival, cast a lingering tearful glance on the Gates that were closing behind them—"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill upon the harp. May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I fail to remember you, if I don't make Jerusalem my highest joy." Psalm 137:5-6

To all here present, young and old, would I repeat the benediction which has more than once been breathed upon you—that in "peace you may go from the Table of the Lord, and that the God of love and of peace may go with you!"

Among many other reflections which occurred to the Hebrew Pilgrim when the feast was over, and he found himself returning again to his home, would not this assuredly be one—'Shall I be spared to be there again?'—shall I ever again tread these hallowed courts? It may be, this is my last Passover. Before another such season comes round, I may be laid in the sepulcher of my fathers. My next Passover!—It may be in the New Jerusalem. I may be called to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven!

My brethren, many of our former Communion feasts, as well as today's, have reminded us of the precarious tenure which binds us to earth's best blessings; and can we suppose it will be different in those that are to come? Or rather, will not new, solemn, warning bells be tolling in our ears? Oh, let this be the home question with each and all of us, as the Sanctuary doors are about to be closed—If today I have registered my last communion vow, prayed my last communion prayer, sung my last

communion song—if the summons, before another Sacramental Sabbath comes round, were heard by me, which once fell on a patriarch's ear, "Get up and die,"—would I be able to respond "I am ready!" and looking, by faith, within the portals, on the great Communion Feast and Sabbath of Eternity, to say, "Open to me the Gates of Righteousness, I will go in to them, and I will praise the Lord"?

Meanwhile, let us return to our several homes, with new and more devoted purposes of obedience, with a higher ideal of what Life—may I even add, what Religion—should be? that it dare not, cannot be restricted to Sunday hours or Communion Seasons—that it is not a thing of the lip—of talk, or theory, or dogma, or barren speculation—neither is it expressed by moping countenance, or sullen and moodish divorce from the world's duties and business, its smiles and joys—but a great abiding, permanent principle of action. It is full of deeds. It shows on the character. It proclaims its presence and power by gentleness, and meekness, and patience, and unselfishness; by benignity and kindness; willing if need be to make sacrifices for Jesus, with the ever-present remembrance of the sacrifice and the cross which He so meekly accepted and endured for us.

As on this winding up of a Communion Service many years of solemn responsibility lie behind us, uttering their thousand conflicting echoes of hope and joy, of fear and sorrow—let the recording Angel stay his flight, until, once more, the one supreme message finds its fit parting utterance, and we are permitted yet again to urge upon one and all of you, old and young, rich and poor, to close with the free, full, glorious offers of a Great salvation. In that divine Master's name, around whose Table we have gathered this day—I adjure you, by all the bliss of heaven; by all the solemnities of judgment; by all the realities of eternity; by all the love that we have been commemorating; by Calvary's Cross and Calvary's Savior; by His agony and bloody sweat—by His Cross and Passion—by the spear that pierced His wounded side and the thorns that wreathed His bleeding brows—flee, oh flee to that most gracious Redeemer—flee, oh flee "from the wrath to come!"

Though it should be the last sentence I ever utter, the last proclamation I ever make—let that blessed Name be in it. Let it be enshrined in all its unspeakable and unutterable preciousness—Jesus only—Jesus wholly—



Jesus first, last, all in all! Hark! does not the ear of faith even now listen to a song stealing down from the Church triumphant? It is from the guests within the veil!—the white-robed multitude at the great Communion Feast and Sabbath of glory. We have been identified and associated with them this day throughout every portion of our holy service. The same song has been thrilling on our lips, the same Name has been weaved like a golden tissue in our mutual anthem, "Unto Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood—and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father—to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!"

"From these blessed hours we borrow  
Music that shall linger long,  
And the labors of tomorrow  
Shall be cheered by holy song—  
Followed still by chanting voices,  
We may tread life's rugged way,  
Ever in our hearts repeating  
Anthems that we sing today."

## **Private Meditations Preceding Communion**

### **#1**

"The Master has come, and is calling for you." (John 11:28).

These familiar and memorable words were spoken at Bethany on a very different occasion from that of a Communion Season. But they may be warrantably and appropriately adapted as a summons and invitation to the Great Feast of love.

Jesus at all times is invisibly near to His own people. As doubtless, though unseen, He marked every tear of sorrow in that Bethany home during the mysterious "tarrying days" beyond Jordan—so on His throne in Heaven is He still ever imparting and manifesting, by His grace and Spirit, the comforting sense of His presence. But there are times and seasons when He draws especially near; and at no time nearer, or more graciously, than at this His own blessed Sacrament of Communion. In these memorials of His bleeding love, He is evidently and impressively "set forth crucified and slain." In the preaching of this blessed Gospel I hear of Him. In the Holy Ordinance of the Supper I am privileged emblematically to behold Him. There, as in the case of Mary and Martha, He summons me to His feet, to listen, on that hallowed ground, to utterances of love and promises of glory. He takes me, as He did them, to a Grave—but it is that of no human friend. It is the Sepulcher into which He Himself entered as my Surety and Substitute. It is to see the Grave-stone rolled away forever; and over these symbols of suffering to hear Him proclaiming, as He did to the Bethany sisters, that He is Himself the Resurrection and the Life, and that because He lives, His people shall live also.

How does the summons sound in my ears? "The Master has come." Do I—can I—respond to the Name? Am I able, experimentally, to rejoice in Him as 'Rabboni, my Master,'—an all-sufficient Savior—whose blood has purchased a full, free, everlasting remission of my sins; and whose intercession is so prevalent at the right hand of God, that I am warranted, as I meet Him at this Bethany-gate of love, to say in the words of Martha's first utterance—"I know that even now whatever You will ask of God, God will give it to You"? Yes! that mourner of Bethany presents me with a divine watchword, a golden key for the Table of Communion. The riches and promises of grace are to be there, in visible emblem, spread out before me—the garnered blessings of Salvation "hidden in Christ," and whatever be my trial, or weakness, or infirmity, I am encouraged to behold the Scepter of the Heavenly King stretched forth, with the challenge and invitation—"What is your petition, and what is your request?"

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak—He will speak peace unto His

people." I will go to His appointed Ordinance, and there unburden and unbosom to Him all my needs and necessities. He will not send me empty away. "Jesus wept."—He wept tears of sorrow as He stood before Martha and Mary in the Bethany graveyard; but this day He is to manifest Himself, in significant symbol, as shedding, not His tears, but His blood. He gives me the blessed pledge and assurance that He will, after the greatest of all boons and blessings—the gift of Himself, freely dower me with every lesser mercy. The Table is about to be spread; the Feast is prepared; the oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. As, in the name of the rich Provider, I listen in thought to the summons, as if from some herald-angel—"The Master has come, and calls for you," be it mine to respond—"I will go into Your House with burnt offerings, I will pay You my vows." Lord, to whom can I go but unto You, You have the words of eternal life! Bring me to Your Banqueting-house, and let Your banner over me be love! Hide me in this Cleft of the Rock, and let all Your glory pass before me!

## **Private Meditations Preceding Communion**

### **#2**

"Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him. I am like a green fir tree. From me is your fruit found" (Hosea 14:8). The whole of this precious chapter—a jewel among the Minor prophets—consists of a dialogue between a penitent and his God; and seems peculiarly suitable as a theme for thought and reflection, in the prospect of this day's solemn Ordinance. May I seek devoutly to commune now, alike with my own heart and with the great Heart-Searcher. Be it mine, with the docility of a little child, to say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears!"

God Himself begins the conversation—He is the first to address overtures of mercy to backsliding Ephraim. We might have expected words of

threatening, and upbraiding, and retribution. But there is no terror in His voice. They are rather the tender breathings of a fond father over his erring and wayward children. The marvelous entreaty and admonition break upon our ears—(v. 1, 2) "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words, and return to the Lord—say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips."

The invitation is obeyed. Humbled and sin-stricken, yet overpowered by a sense of the divine forbearance, they pour out a full confession of their guilt. Hitherto, they had been trusting to an arm of flesh; but they now recognize where their true strength lies—(v. 3) "Assyria will not save us—we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods; for in You the fatherless finds mercy." The Lord hearkens. He gives ear to the penitents' breaking of heart, and replies—(v. 4) "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel—he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Even Ephraim, the apostate and obdurate—we might have deemed irreclaimable—listens to the gracious pleadings. As the scales are falling from his eyes and the chains from his soul, he feels the desire rising within him to give himself to this God in whom compassions flow. As he awakes from his sleep of death, the past, with all its record of sins, passes before him. He gets a glimpse into the chambers of his spirit. He sees they are thronged with idols—usurpers of Jehovah's rights. Amazed that so long, in guilty unconcern, he should have surrendered himself to these, he exclaims, in words of unqualified renunciation—"What have I to do any more with idols?"

Taking this one verse for my present meditation, let me note, as an intending communicant, these three points—The Penitent's resolution. The Divine recognition. The added Promise.

(1.) Is this my vow and resolve, in the prospect of meeting God at His Holy Table—"What have I to do any more with idols?" In my case, as in that of Ephraim, it may well be a resolution evoked by the contemplation of God's wondrous, unmerited love. Guilt and unworthiness have been met with patience kindness. How often have I fainted and grown weary of

Him; yet He has never fainted nor grown weary of me! What determination can be more fitting, when about to stand, so to speak, under the shadow of Calvary's Cross—contemplating alike the mightiest manifestation of God's mercy and the mightiest testimony against sin? With such affecting memorials and symbols before me of my own transgressions, and of the dreadful price demanded for their remission, may I be enabled firmly to resolve, that all which dishonors and displeases Him shall be dethroned, saying, 'O Lord my God, other lords beside You have had dominion over me. But this God shall be my God forever and ever.'—"What have I to do any more with idols?"

(2.) But the conference—the dialogue—does not end here. The verse admits us further into the secrets of the audience-chamber. We have, next, the Divine recognition—"I have heard him and observed him."

What can be more touching? No earthly auditor may have listened to Ephraim's breathings of self-reproach. The penitential sighings of his broken spirit may have fallen on no human ears except his own. But One eye, though not of earth, marked these tears. One ear listened to the groanings of the travailing soul. The Almighty Spectator and Hearer now discloses Himself—"I have heard him and observed him!" Beautiful picture, surely, of the interest God takes in His children! His concern for their peace and happiness; the delight, above all, with which He hears the still small voice of penitence—the wail of conscious yet sorrowing estrangement—longing through tears for restoration—"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" He is watching these feeble pulsations. The tear wept in secret He has registered in His Book. The cry heaved in solitude has been borne to His Throne, and entered with acceptance into the ear of God Almighty. "I am poor and needy," said the Psalmist, when he was himself buffeting the waves in a midnight of gloom—but he adds the experience of Ephraim—"Yet the Lord thinks upon me" (Ps. 40:17).

(3.) This, however, is not enough. With my foot about to stand on holy ground, I cannot help forecasting, with trembling anxiety, the future. So it was with penitent Ephraim. He remembers how frail he is. Even with the consciousness of new love and fresh consecration, he recalls past backsliding and declension. He is filled with desponding fears for the days that are to come. Memory cannot obliterate the just upbraiding and

reproach for former treachery and unfaithfulness—"O Ephraim, your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away" (Hosea 6:4). No strength in himself, the tender sapling dreads the hurricane. Help he needs; where is this help to be found?

God meets his case and mine, with a twofold promise of Protection and Grace. "I am like a green fir (or cypress) tree. From Me is your fruit found." The cypress-tree—alike so beautiful and so common in Eastern lands, with its long, tapering, graceful form and its dark clothing—was one of the precious woods employed in the Temple of old; and forests of them are still to be found in the less frequented parts of Lebanon. From its undying verdure, owing to a perpetual supply of sap, winter and summer—so dense, moreover, and strong in foliage, as to afford shelter and nesting-place even for the stork (Ps. 104:17)—it forms surely an appropriate type, in inanimate nature, of the sheltering protection, safety, and security, the believer has in God!

If I am now self-distrustful—troubled with misgivings for the days to come—let me be cheered with the assurance of Him who has promised to be a shelter from the storm and a covert from the tempest. He reveals Himself here to me as an Almighty Friend; who will fortify against all temptations; unravel all perplexities; and overrule all providences for my well-being. He will impart strength in the hour of weakness, and courage in the hour of despondency, and peace in the hour of trouble, and victory in the hour of death.—"I," says a protecting God, "am like a green fir-tree." "As your days, so shall your strength be."

May I not further think of that green fir-tree, as pre-eminently the emblem of my gracious Redeemer—the God-man Mediator—"the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden"—its roots struck in the soil of humanity; its top reaching to heaven—the "Brother-born," yet "mighty to save"? He makes known, elsewhere, the secret of continued support—"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat—but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). "I have prayed for you." A sinking disciple, a praying Master—Satan tempting, Christ upholding—"From Me is your fruit found!"

Let me, take, as the motto and watchword for an unknown future—"I can

do all things through Christ who strengthens me,"—"By the grace of God I am what I am." By the aid of that promised grace, may I be enabled specially to keep close underneath this Heavenly Fir-tree—to live near to Jesus. The tribe of Ephraim, whose soliloquy I have been pondering, was selected and honored to follow immediately behind the Ark in its way through the wilderness. Let this be ever my coveted position—not on high Communion Seasons only, but all through the pilgrim-journey—to be close to Him whom that Ark symbolized, as my Protector and strength and salvation. Let the song of the many thousands of Israel be mine today; let it be mine from week to week and from year to year, until Grace is merged in Glory—"Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!" (Ps. 80:2).

## **Private Meditations Preceding Communion**

### **#3**

"Blow the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast-day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob." (Psalm 81). The 81st may be called "The New Moon Psalm," or "The Psalm of the Silver Trumpets." While these trumpets were blown every morning, at daybreak, in preparation for the morning sacrifice, they were specially sounded at each New Moon. There was one occasion, specially designated "The Feast of Trumpets," which took place on the 1st of the seventh month, the holy month of the Jewish year—when, instead of the one matin blare, their sound was heard all day long, accompanying the eucharistic and expiatory sacrifices. A longer preliminary blast summoned the worshipers to prepare for solemn service. They are reminded in this Psalm of the divine Institution and authority of the Feast—"For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob." One among other designs of this Jewish Festival, was to prepare the hearts of the people for the celebration of the Great Day of Atonement.

The silvery tones of the Gospel trumpet are sounding in my ears its herald notes for today's Gospel Feast. How solemnly and vividly is the Jewish

great Day and Feast of Atonement recalled, with its wondrous typical significance; when the High Priest of the nation sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat! He disrobed himself of his gorgeous dress, his tiara of gold, his ephod and sparkling jewels—and was arrayed in a simple garment of spotless white. Fit emblem and prefiguration surely of Him, who divested Himself of His eternal glories, and came into our world attired in the pure white vestments of a holy humanity, to suffer and die—Antitype alike of priest and victim. Alone He went into the most Holy Place, the divine presence chamber; alone He carried the censer; alone He sprinkled the blood—"I have trodden the wine press alone!"

I am to see all this, today, in impressive symbol—the blood sprinkled on the Mercy-seat and before the Mercy-seat. In the blood cast, or sprinkled on the pavement "before the Mercy-seat," I behold a type of the blood of Jesus speaking peace to His people on earth—"above the Mercy-seat," speaking peace from before the Throne, where He now pleads as Intercessor. "For Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

I would seek to hear the preparation-trumpet calling me to devout thought and meditation in the prospect of the great Gospel Festival—"Blow the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed; on our solemn feast day." It was a universal belief of the Jews of old, that on this their Feast of Trumpets, Jehovah seated Himself on a Throne, and that His people "passed before Him as a flock of sheep before their shepherd." In the presence of a heart-searching God, let me listen to the New Testament exhortation of the Great Apostle, as he too, in a spiritual sense, sounds the herald note—"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." Let my feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, as now the summons is heard—"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

Yes, "your God." This is His own message to me, and to each intending communicant. Let me hear it addressed in this Psalm (verse 10th), "I am the Lord YOUR God—open your mouth wide and I will fill it." He will there—at His own appointed ordinance—reveal Himself as my God in Covenant; and, if I 'open my mouth wide,' that is, if I go with longing



desires after Him and longing earnestness for His help and blessing—He will not mock my approach by sending me away unblest. "He satisfies the longing soul with goodness." True to the closing promise of this new-moon Psalm, He will feed me with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock—with spiritual treasures hid in Christ, the true Rock of Ages—will He satisfy me (v. 16).

## **Private Meditations Preceding Communion**

### **#4**

"Come, you yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark 6:31). The hour of noontide rest was a special one of old in Palestine—when the laborer suspended his toil; when the oxen were unharnessed from the yoke, and the ploughshare reposed on the upturned furrow; when the Caravan of Pilgrims, as they may be seen to this day, gathered under the shade at some well, eating bread and fruit, with their burdened camels moored around. In a diviner spiritual sense that noontide rest is about to be mine. "Come," is the Savior's gracious invitation, addressed to His disciples of old—"Come, you yourselves apart, and rest awhile." "This is the rest with which He causes the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." Let the world be for a little time shut out—its cares hushed, its duties and business suspended; as with my fellow-communicants I repair to the Well of Living water, the Fount of Gospel mercies "springing up unto everlasting life," and there "rehearse together the righteous acts of the Lord" (Judges 5:11).

Let me note, as its chief and divinest feature; it is rest in the fellowship of the Great Master. It would have afforded little joy or refreshment to His disciples if they had been sent away to that desert place alone. This brief season of suspension from work would have been divested of all its blissful peace and holy gladness, had they been unaccompanied by their Beloved Lord. The consciousness of that Presence and Love and Sympathy was all in all to them. They did not heed the passing away of the splendid vision of the Transfiguration Mount, when in their descent

in the grey mists of early morning, "they found no man, save Jesus only" (Matt. 17:8). The summons from the Table of sweet communion on Zion, to the mysterious gloom of the Kedron and the Olive Garden, had sufficient music and heart-cheer to them, from one word embraced in it—"Arise, let us go hence." "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out (together) to the Mount of Olives." A subsequent night of unrecompensed toil on the Sea of Galilee was all forgotten in the morning's joyful recognition—"It is the Lord!"

So is it with Master and disciple still. That Feast of love has its holiest, sweetest, most consecrating thought in this, that it is "the Lord's Supper." It is the presence of the King which makes it, in the truest sense, a Communion. "There," is His own promise, "I will meet with you and commune with you from off the Mercy Seat." If Your presence, O Savior God, goes not with me, carry me not hence! May I be able to say, both in the prospect and retrospect, "He brought me to His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

We have need of such "quiet resting places" in the Pilgrim journey; breathing-times amid the din and turmoil and harassing cares of the world. Let me now leave its soiled garments, its coarse wearing drudgery, behind me in the outer court; and unembarrassed and unencumbered, enter with sacred footstep to be 'alone with Jesus.' Many are the circumstances and seasons when the choicest of all His sayings is applicable—none more so than regarding this "Feast in the desert,"—"Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

## **Private Meditations Preceding Communion**

### **#5**

"Awake, O north wind; and come, you south wind; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His

garden, and eat His pleasant fruits" (Song of Sol. 4:16). Come! Blessed Spirit, in all the plenitude of Your gifts and graces—and as I am about, this day, to go to the sacred Feast, breathe upon me and my fellow-communicants, and say, "Receive you the Holy Spirit!" Come, as the North wind bringing with it conviction of sin—my own sin—seen in the light of my Savior's Cross and sufferings. Come, as the South wind—with all soothing, comforting, sanctifying influences—bearing on its wings the Beloved's own balm-words of mercy—revealing the wonders of His love—the tenderness of His sympathy—the riches of His grace. Let the spices—the fragrance of a grateful heart filled with all joy and peace in believing—flow out.

One of the most sublime prayers on record, is that of the Apostle, for the special bestowment of the Holy Spirit preceding the dwelling of Christ in the soul—a beautiful and befitting prelude-utterance to a Communion season and service—"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." "He shall glorify Me," says the Redeemer Himself, "for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Awake, then, O North wind! come, you South wind, blow upon my garden! Make this sacramental season—one in which heaven and earth seem to touch one another—an occasion of hallowed and blissful intercommunion between my soul and Jesus. Yes, 'intercommunion.' The joy of this permitted fellowship, delightful to His people, would almost seem, with reverence be it spoken, as if shared by His own Infinite heart. The Beloved comes into His garden "to eat His pleasant fruits."—"I am glorified," says He elsewhere, "in them." Who can ever fail to be struck in the Gospel narrative, with the intense—the vehement earnestness of the Savior's longing to meet His own disciples at the first institution of the Supper, immediately before His death? His own soul was—I was about to say—strangely engrossed with the preparation and arrangement for it. "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The disciples, knowing and noting how singularly that Festive hour seemed to fill their Lord's thoughts, came to Him and said

—"Master, where will we go to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" When they met the man bearing the pitcher of water, they address him thus—"The Master says, my time is at hand, I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples." Moreover, when the Feast itself was being partaken, the season of hallowed and confidential fellowship proved evidently to Him a sweet "song in the night"—a gleam of joy amid the gathering, thickening darkness—"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." It is the same now as it was then. While to all disciple-guests it is primarily a blessed occasion and opportunity of unburdening their inmost thoughts to their divine Lord; of having faith strengthened—love deepened—misgivings lulled—troubles healed—they may exult in the assurance that it is distinctively also a season of complacent joy to the Redeemer Himself. The blessedness, felt and realized by His covenanting people, is most deeply shared by the true Solomon—It is "the day of His espousals, the day of the gladness of His heart" (Song of Sol. 3:11).

As the Great Master of assemblies, He there sees of the fruit of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. "Satisfied!" wondrous thought! as if His own intensest joy were in the happiness of His redeemed people. "Father," He said, on that same betrayal night, when fresh from the Institution of the New Testament Passover, and when the shadows of His own Cross were projected on His path—"Father, I will,"—(what is this mighty boon which Omnipotence is about to invoke at the close of His intercessory Prayer? It forms the climax of His pleadings; as if He had reserved the crowning solicitation to the last)—"Father, I will,"—(with what does He fill up the formula?—He knows that He can write under it what He pleases—what then is the great yearning, filial wish—the richest reward and recompense of His soul-travail?)—"Father, I will, that those whom You have give me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory!"

May that glory—the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—may the distant rays of it, at least, be revealed to me, today, on the holy ground of Communion. May the meeting in the earthly Garden prove a blessed pledge and foretaste of that diviner communion and fellowship in the better Garden above—that Garden in which there is no sepulcher, no funeral spices, no "why are you weeping?" whose

precincts can be invaded and saddened by no sin—no sorrow—no broken vow or forgotten resolution—no Lebanon storms to dread; no "lions' dens or mountains of leopards" (Song of Sol. 4:8), but where disciple and Master, and that forever and ever, shall rejoice together with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

## **Prayer Before Communion**

O Lord, I beseech You to draw near to me this day in Your great mercy. I have the near prospect of approaching You at Your gracious Sacramental Ordinance. As You are preparing for me a table in the wilderness, do prepare me for the table. O send forth Your light and Your truth, let them lead me—let them bring me unto Your holy hill and unto Your tabernacles. Then will I go unto the Altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy. May it be my experience within the gates of the Sanctuary, and while partaking of the Sacred Feast—"This is none other than the House of God, this is the Gate of heaven,"—"I have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Fill me with a humbling sense of my own demerits and shortcomings. I am not worthy to eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's Table; how much less to be seated at the banqueting Table itself, and to enjoy the blessedness of near and endearing fellowship with You. Come, Lord, and search me—Come and try me—Come and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting. Impart, above all, an inspiring and elevating sense of Your great and infinite love to me in Christ Jesus. At this, His own commemorative Ordinance, may I have a realizing apprehension of all that mystery of agony and suffering He so willingly endured for me. May the near sight of Gethsemane and Calvary give me deeper and intenser views of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, as that which filled His cup of anguish. May I be enabled, as I go afresh to this covenanting ground—not only to confess my sins, but to have the

heartly desire and resolution to forsake them; and to live, in the time to come, not unto myself—but unto Him who loved me and gave Himself for me, that He might redeem me from all iniquity, and purify me unto Himself, as one of His own peculiar people, zealous of good works.

My earnest prayer is, to be brought more constantly and habitually under the constraining influence of redeeming love—that the life You have preserved by Your mercy, and which You have ransomed at such a price, may be henceforth consecrated to Your praise. May the blessed Feast prove a hallowed means of strengthening within me every Christian grace, and of confirming every good resolution. May this be my earnest aspiration, 'Lord, evermore give me this Bread.' Like Your servant of old, in the strength of that food, may I go on, from day to day, until I reach the true mount of God above.

Bestow Your blessing on all my fellow-communicants. There is bread enough in our Father's house and to spare. May those who through sickness and other restraints of Your providence, are unable to go to the Courts of Your Sanctuary, know that You are not confined to temples or to tables made with hands—that wherever there is a true worshiper, there, there is a prayer-hearing—a prayer-answering—a covenant-keeping God. May those who tarry at home divide the spoil.

Bless Your ministering servants who are to be this day the dispensers of the Holy rite. As they deal the Bread of Life to others, may their own souls be abundantly satisfied. Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your saints shout for joy. The Lord bless the House of Israel—the Lord bless the House of Aaron—both small and great that fear the Lord, do You surely bless them. So may this appointed Ordinance prove, to each and all of us, a season of reviving and refreshing from Your own immediate presence.

And all I ask, or hope for, is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, my only Lord and Savior. Amen.

## Address to Aged Communicants

Each returning Sacramental Sabbath emphasizes the thought to us all, that we are nearer eternity. These sacred seasons are shadows moving across the dial-plate—or as if another hour were tolled on the great clock of Time. With special solemnity and impressiveness does this reflection come home to aged communicants. Some of you can look back, through a long vista of years, to the hour when you approached for the first time the Holy Table. How many who then gathered with you are left? The pastor who dispensed to you the mystic symbols—gone! The father and mother who looked with proud and tender interest upon you; following you with prayers and tears to the hallowed ground—gone! Those who shared with you in receiving the Bread of life, and talked over the sacred service on the Sabbath eve—many of them—most of them—gone! It is a tale that is told. Yes, to some, there are many more remembered faces of that old throng amid the congregation of the dead, than among the worshipping living!

And the time will come—(must come) sooner or later—who need dread it if they are living prepared for the supreme moment and the irrevocable summons?—when others will pronounce our names, and say of us, 'They are no more!' Who can tell, but that the Master may this very day have, all unknown, been whispering in the ears of this one and that one, grown grey in His service—"You shall henceforth no more drink of this fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom!"

Aged friend, you have been permitted to wait once more, on God, in His own Ordinance. Spiritually, may He renew your strength. He has 'latter rain' as well as 'early rain' to bestow—a blessing on those girding for the fight—a blessing for those unbuckling their armor. The Temple-lamps in the Jewish Sanctuary were lighted 'at evening.' If the night-shadows of your life be falling, and with you the day be far spent, may you be able to say, "YOU will light my candle, the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness." Beautiful is the promise—"Ask of the Lord rain in the time of THE LATTER RAIN—so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain" (Zech. 10:1). May you be privileged to go on—in what still remains of your pilgrim way, rejoicing—leaning, as a staff for

very age, on the faithful promises of a covenant-keeping Jehovah—preserving the torch of faith and love and holiness undimmed to the last.—So that you may be able, like the weary exhausted runners in the Grecian games of old—to hand it, undiminished in brightness, to younger athletes, who are waiting to bear it—as witnesses for God and His truth, when you are gathered to your fathers.

Go in peace, from His table; and may the God of peace and of love go with you. Amid dimming memories and diminishing friends, "He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." May your holy approach to the holiest Ordinance of earth, be to you the foretaste and foretaste of the eternal Feast and rest which remains for His believing people. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disturbed within me? Hope you in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!"

## **Address to Mourning Communicants #1**

"Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, "What are you looking for?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are You staying?" "Come and you'll see," He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about the tenth hour." (John 1:35-39).

We had our meditations directed, today, to this beautiful incident in the early Gospel narrative—the two fishermen friends and companions from Bethsaida of Galilee—having pointed out to them, by the Baptist, a Greater far than he—"Behold the Lamb of God!" They are at once attracted, in some mysterious way, by HIM who had just returned to the banks of the Jordan from the temptation of the wilderness, where, for



forty days, He had been without home or shelter. They hesitate to intrude—not venturing to address Him or to disturb His meditations—still they follow His footsteps, in the direction of His temporary dwelling—a dwelling probably, like that of the other pilgrims who had gathered around the Desert Preacher—some leafy tent close to the river side or under the shadow of a rock, made of interlacing boughs from the adjoining woods. "Rabbi, where are You staying?" was their simple request, full of humble yet confident faith and trust. His response was immediate, a word of kind welcome—"Come and see."

His voice, His look, His demeanor reassure them. It was the truth of a future saying anticipated and illustrated, "Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out." That long afternoon and evening were spent in loving fellowship with that Gracious Master, whose devoted consecrated servants they were ever after to be—enjoying an immediate three years of blissful personal communion, and when that was terminated and His visible presence withdrawn, believing, they still rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

What the themes of meditation were, during these thrice hallowed hours, we cannot tell. May not their thoughts naturally have grouped themselves around the Baptist's suggestive exclamation—"Behold the Lamb of God!" John was undoubtedly one of these two disciples. And we know that these words lingered in his ears like a strain of heavenly music, and filled his most seraphic visions fifty years afterwards, when he wrote the Apocalypse. How the divine emblem seemed almost to absorb his recollections! Thirty times is Jesus there spoken of as a LAMB. Retaining that first never-to-be-forgotten glimpse of his divine Redeemer, the writer seems to have lived, and suffered, and died, beholding "the Lamb of God!" How long, moreover, this interview in the valley at Bethabara lasted, we are not informed. Probably it was far on towards midnight before they departed. The bright stars and paschal moon may have been shining on the white cliffs and foaming waters when the two disciples came forth, at the close of the most momentous day of their lives. Who can doubt, that they would return to the distant Bethsaida—home with their souls filled with the one wondrous theme and thought—"We have

seen the Lord!"

Our experience today has been identical with that of these favored disciples. We have received a gracious invitation to partake of nearer and more confidential communion with our divine Redeemer. "Master, where are You staying?" You Son of the Eternal God, yet the Divine Brother-man—alike the Taker-away of sin and the Remover of burdens from laden-hearts—where are You staying? that we may come and unburden our heavy secrets—and, like these two disciples of old, away from the din of the multitude, sit at Your feet and behold You as the Lamb of God?

"Come and see!"—has been the gracious response. We have obeyed the summons. We have beheld, in impressive emblem and memorial, the Great Propitiation, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The leafy tent or covert of the Jordan has still its glorious spiritual counterpart and reality. "There shall be a tabernacle (a tent) for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." "A MAN shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and as a covert from the tempest,...as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land!" Afflicted communicant!—Pilgrim of sorrow—you have resorted to your Lord's Bethabara-dwelling, at His own gracious summons, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But while your season of fellowship has doubtless been hallowed and comforting; when you come forth from it now, it is, like these same two disciples, to face the dark night again—the dewy tear-drops on the dank grass—the cold moonshine—the glimmering stars and the roll of Jordan. Yes, 'the roll of Jordan,' with the saddened memories it may be of those who, in the familiar and accepted figure, have recently crossed it; and whose companionship is gone for the forever of time. You walk along, pensive and sad, to mingle, once more, in the noise of the wilderness tents—back again tomorrow to Bethsaida, to your smitten home—to gaze on the vacant seat—to miss the old voice and the sympathetic ear, into which you could have told how your heart burned within you, while He talked to you by the way, and you sat under His shadow with great delight! Ah, perhaps it was the very smiting of that earthly home which drove you, today, to ask, with more intense fervor and more impassioned prayer, as you missed the earthly friend, "Master,

where are You staying?" 'My best earthly prop is gone. Oh, Messiah Jesus, I come to You! I come now to Your own appointed dwelling-place, that I may unfold all my grief, and get these heart-storms lulled with Your Omnipotent "Peace, be still"!'

As you now pursue your saddened way, let not the darkness blind your eye to this day's sight and vision. Let not that roll of Jordan dull your ears to this day's exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Suffering one! fix your gaze on that Sufferer of sufferers—that wounded, bleeding Lamb of God. Think of that wilderness of temptation from which He had just come! See Him, there, assaulted with hunger, thirst, cold, weariness; tempted in body, assailed in spirit; and this by the arch enemy of all. Yet He meekly endures! He is the Lamb "silent before His shearers!" Say, can you murmur where He murmured not? Seek, rather, to honor Him more and more by a closer following of His divine footsteps. Go forth, even in the dark, with the fretted waters at your side, and star after star of earthly hope expunged from your skies, meditating on His faithfulness and love, even "in the night-watches!" Rest assured, if, as you journey on, you try to utter through your tears, "though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him,"— He will, as with the Bethsaida disciples, give you glorious surprises—meeting you, now on the distant lake—now in the busy city—now in "the high mountain apart," until, from these chequered earthly experiences, He takes you across the true Bethabara ("the house of passage") to be with Himself in the tearless land forever!

## **Address to Mourning Communicants #2**

"Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?" (Job 12:9)

God has been addressing a twofold voice today to those who have gathered at His Holy Table.

To some, He has been speaking in prosperity. New gourds have been given—new fountains of blessing opened. The dreaded cloud, big with disaster, has passed. The financial loss has been compensated. The shaft of death has been turned aside—the dear one hovering on the confines of the dark valley has been restored. The chair in the family circle has not been emptied. You have been spared the dreadful word which falls on the heart like the crash of a descending avalanche.

To others—to you—He has been speaking by adversity; by crushed hopes and blighted joys—early and unlooked-for graves.

Afflicted one! if your sorrows are great, have you not had today vividly brought before you, in touching symbol, the memorial of sufferings, in comparison with which, your deepest and intensest are light indeed. In the contemplation of these, you have not only the revelation of the Heart of a loving, sympathizing Savior, but the pledge and assurance that the God who gave His Son would not, and could not, visit you with one needless pang, or put one unnecessary thorn into your wreath of woe. Be assured, it is for the spiritual good of His children that He sees fit, ever and anon, to put a scar, so to speak, on His people's most treasured earthly joys.

It is said in a striking passage of Isaiah—"The day of the Lord Almighty shall be upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures" (Isaiah 2:12, 16). Yes, on these "pleasant pictures" He deems it meet, at times, to stretch forth His hand, and sweep the portrayed vision of gladness away—He may have seen it was eclipsing and dimming His own likeness on the soul. You may remember the great Artist who painted the lofty ceiling of the Roman Basilica. High up on the giddy platform, his eye is on some 'pleasant picture,' on which he is just putting his finishing touches. Absorbed in the triumph of his genius, he has left his position, in order to obtain a broad, general view of the gigantic work. But he has forgotten his danger. He is stepping back, and yet farther back, to the edge of the scaffolding. A few inches more, and he will go reeling down to the marble pavement, a hundred feet beneath.

What can save him? It is a moment of thrilling suspense. Life is trembling in the balance—verily there is but a step between him and death. One who was assisting sees, at a glance, the imminent peril. With the speed of lightning, his determination is formed. On he dashes towards the work of the Master, and, with apparently presumptuous hand, plants a deep scar on the moist fresco. The Artist rushes forward to avert the blow. It was enough—all the other needed—It destroyed the painting, but it saved the more valued life. How often is this God's method of dealing! He sees us on the world's giddy eminences—going back, back, back, to certain ruin. He hastens to the rescue. He places a seemingly remorseless, destructive hand on our most cherished objects of pursuit—blurs and scars life's loveliest visions. He breaks our hearts, that He may save our souls! "The day of the Lord Almighty is on all pleasant pictures!"

Seek to honor Him by un murmuring submission to His holy will. Let your chastisements, for the present not joyous but grievous, lead you to live nearer Heaven and nearer Him. So that, if, at some subsequent Communion season, you too should have your place vacant at the Sacred Feast, your name may, like that of one mourned today, be missed by your fellows, and never mentioned but with the sigh and the tear.

Ah, if this be a day on which we are compelled to take count of blanks in the flock—sheep, that were used to pasture with us, no longer to be found in the earthly fold; it is surely the most elevating of Communion thoughts—(the word 'Communion' has no more hallowed interpretation)—to behold them, with the eye of faith, up in yonder realms of bliss, fed by the living fountains of waters in the presence and love of the Heavenly Shepherd—their voices falling in soft music on our ear, and charming us to follow after!

### **Address to Mourning Communicants #3**

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our

weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Afflicted one—We cherish the hope that you have been able today to have your own sorrows soothed by close and endearing fellowship with the Man of Sorrows. We trust that Jesus, the Prince of Sufferers, has met you at His own Table, and solaced you, alike with the assurance of His exalted sympathy and with hopes that are full of immortality. Yes, even though the very sacredness of the Table of Communion—the sacredness of its associations with the 'loved and lost,' may have made, for the time, your sadness deeper, and the blank more real—yet, like the two disconsolate Marys, hurrying from the spot dearest to them on earth, have you not been met by your Lord in the way? Has not Jesus, the Prince of Consolers—the peerless Comforter—been found standing, as in their case, on the very path of your trouble, ready to dry your tears and hush your sadness with the old joyous salutation—"Don't be afraid!" He, the thorn-crowned King, whom you have seen through expressive symbol evidently set forth crucified, has been soothing your sorrows by pointing you to His own. His own! What a cup of suffering was that! filled to the brim! anguish which had its exponent in "the great drops of blood" and the Eloi cry! There are generally some mitigations in the case of the severest earthly afflictions—some drops of comfort mingling in the bitter draught. In His case there were none. "All Your waves and billows have gone over me." In that solitary, unsolaced hour, He could plaintively echo the prophetic utterance, "I have trodden the wine-press alone!"

But, blessed lesson to gather under the shadows of Gethsemane's Garden and Calvary's Cross—"In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to support those who are tempted!" Blessed lesson, moreover, to have learned at that Holy Table, that, under life's darkest experiences, there is a Brighter than the brightest material Sun to dispel the gloom; yes, and that after earth's longest and dreariest night-watches, there is a "breaking in the Eastern Sky," a joyful morning at hand, whose Sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself, but where the Lord your God shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

Leave, then, the Communion Table behind you, with the vision of the

Crown rising above the Cross—taking up this as your 'Song in the night'—"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

"Fainting and footsore toil we in the way;  
No manna glistens in the desert sod;  
Yet here, to earnest souls that kneel and pray  
Is given—the Bread of God.  
Resting beneath His Shadow cool and sweet  
We gain fresh strength for conflict with our foes;  
Here the lone desert, with its sultry heat,  
Does blossom as the rose.  
And though these earthly shadows, dark and dim,  
Veil from our sight His blessed presence now;  
Yet faith, exulting, lifts her eyes to Him,  
And sees the thorn-crowned Brow!  
Waves from the ocean of His mighty love  
Break in rejoicing on the expectant shore,  
Whispering sweet voices of the Land above,  
Where storms shall be no more."  
—R. H. Baynes

## **Private Meditations after Communion #1**

"And they drew near unto the village where they went, and He made as though He would have gone farther; but they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us—for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent" (Luke 24:28, 29).

Words spoken by two wayfarers, in all probability disciples—not apostles—lowly men who were slowly retracing their steps amid struggling

emotions of sorrow. It was, too, on their return from the City of Solemnities, at the close of the Great Jewish Paschal Feast, that Jesus met them.

The verses are surely appropriate for my own afterthought and meditation at a similar hour—and as it is the retrospect of a Communion season, I may well include in these thoughts my fellow-guests. The services of the Holy Table are over; but, 'Lord, abide with us!' It is 'toward evening.' The sun is westering. The gates of the Banqueting House are closed, and the Festal worshipers have dispersed—'Lord, abide with us!'

'Toward evening'—In another sense this may be true with some who partook of the sacred Ordinance. Night is the emblem of sorrow and trial. Their walk today with their beloved Savior may have been an eventide one—the darkness may have been gathering, the earthly sun setting or set.—Let this be their prayer—'Lord, abide with us!' It is 'toward evening;'—with others the day of their life may be shortening—their sun is past its meridian; the lengthening shadows portend approaching nightfall. In the prospect of the final and solitary hour, they too may breathe the invocation—'Lord, abide with us!' We are all of us, however diverse our age and experience, advancing on the pilgrim journey; the milestones are decreasing; the grains in life's sand-glass diminishing—Eternity is nearing. Every returning Sacrament; every month, every day, every hour, may well deepen the solemnity of the prayer, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent!"

How am I best to fulfill the vows and perpetuate the blessings of a Communion occasion? It is to take Jesus with me from His Holy Table—the living, loving Brother on the Throne, as my abiding Friend; to have the habitually realized consciousness of His presence and nearness. "He who abides in Me, and I in Him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." What is the strength and safeguard of voyagers in the midst of the storm? Is it not when the pilot is known to be trustworthy—when they can gaze with confidence on the serene undaunted countenance at the wheel, and the brawny arm steering securely through the roaring surge? If in going out from the peaceful quiet haven of a sacramental hour, perhaps recalling former experiences, I am dreading the power of temptation and my inability to meet it, let me



look to my Heavenly Pilot. Abiding in Him, and He abiding in me—a living union with a living God—I am in safe keeping. Heart and flesh may faint and fail; earthly refuges may fail me; earthly refuges may become refuges of lies. But He will be the strength of my heart and my portion forever—the only unfainting, unfailing Friend, in a failing, varying world.

Oh, blessed be God, there is more than one Emmaus journey. I have been privileged to traverse that road today. Though no longer in bodily Presence, as when He trod this earth—though now surrounded with myriads of glorified spirits, and worshiped as Lord of all, the Savior's heart knows no change—His name is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." He still loves to make Himself known to His people, as to these disconsolate wayfarers on the way to their village home, "in the breaking of bread."

The thought often occurs, in connection with cherished earthly friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus—and I believe most of all at the hallowed sacramental hour—are these "loved and lost" permitted still to hold communion with those they have left behind on earth? When the mysterious tie is snapped which binds soul to soul in sweet fellowship here, is there no invisible communion prolonged and perpetuated with the sainted and glorified? May we not be allowed to entertain the pleasing idea—that they hover still around us, and watch with tender interest our communings at this Feast of love—the Sacramental Table a Bethel-ladder for the unfettered union of spirit with spirit—"the bridal of the earth and sky?"

Who can tell? This, however, we do know, that what possibly may be a vain illusion with reference to the departed, is a sublime and glorious reality in regard to Jesus. The mysterious Stranger on the way to Emmaus is no Stranger at His own Holy Ordinance. How many can tell as their experience of that hallowed ground—"HE brought me to His Banqueting House, and his banner over me was love!"—or, like the disciples on the great Easter eve, "We have seen the Lord." If such be my retrospect today, I would plead with an ever-deepening, reverential earnestness—'Blessed Jesus! Divine Master of assemblies—Abide with me from morning to evening; and from evening to morning again; for without You I cannot live; and without You, I dare not die!'

## **Private Meditations after Communion #2**

"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). Such were the musings of the same two solitary disciples after pursuing the way to Emmaus in company with their Beloved Lord. Can I, in some feeble measure, endorse them and rehearse them? In my own case, and that of my fellow-guests, what may some of these musings and reflections be, in the hallowed retrospect of today's service?

(1.) Did not our heart burn within us, with a deep sense of the evil nature of sin? At the Holy Table, and in its impressive memorial-symbols, I followed in thought the Adorable Sufferer to the garden of agony.

I beheld Him prostrate there, amid the chills and dews of that midnight hour—drops of perspiration mingled with blood flowing down to the ground—the interpreters of superhuman anguish. The presence of an angel from heaven is needed to strengthen Him. We can see no farther than the rim of the thundercloud—we cannot penetrate the midnight of terror. Well may the Greek liturgy speak "of all the sufferings of Christ known and unknown." "Now," said He Himself, in entering on these, "is the hour and power of darkness." Bewildered, fearful, panic-stricken, trembling, in a thrice repeated fervor of prayer He entreats that the mysterious cup may be allowed to pass from Him. Three times, as He seems to approach the brink of some dreadful precipice, He cries "Father, save Me from this hour!" His soul is "sorrowful," "exceeding sorrowful"—"even unto death."

I farther ponder the dread successive scenes of ignominy which followed Gethsemane, and had their climax on Calvary—

"Lo! a face to heaven in agony stealing,

Stained of sorrow, but, soiless of sin,  
Sweat that in blood is breaking and streaming—  
Praying for those that do strip Him and scourge Him,  
As a cross on His quivering shoulders they place.  
'Neath its burden He sinks while they mock Him, they urge Him,  
They crown Him with thorns, they spit in His face.  
They are lifting Him, bruising Him, piercing Him, nailing Him  
To the cross that is dyed in a red crimson flood.  
See, the sun hides his head, see the vapor envailing Him:  
Hark, the earth and the skies in the darkness bewailing Him,  
Who dies for those that are shedding His blood."

Why all this? Nothing of retributive punishment could there possibly be in that unparalleled endurance. "In Him was no sin,"—He was the spotless Lamb of God. It was, as our Surety-Substitute—that the Lord laid on Him (or as these words literally mean, 'the Lord caused to meet upon Him') the iniquities of us all. "He was made sin for us." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being Himself made a curse for us. He was the true spiritual Atlas bearing on His shoulders the transgressions of the world. No other—no less a cause, will suffice to explain the dreadful inner meaning of the "horror of great darkness," and of that bitterest wail that ever arose from earth to heaven—"My God! my God! why have You forsaken me?" "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

Have I not seen, today, in these visible significant symbols—the broken bread and the poured out wine—what an evil thing that must have been, which brought the beloved Son of God—the Prince of Life—from the Throne in heaven and nailed Him to the Tree?

(2.) Did not our heart burn within us, with sincere and poignant sorrow for our own sin? My sin formed some drops in that cup of anguish—"He gave Himself for me." For me He descended to these depths of humiliation—for me He bared His head to the pitiless storm, and traveled on that blood-stained path—a spectacle to devils and angels and men! My sins against light, and love, and warning, and mercy—my many faintings and backslidings—my tamperings with temptation—my murmurings

under trial; my guilty repinings under providential dealings—how do their vileness and ingratitude stand revealed under "the Cross and Passion" of the Almighty Sufferer! Well may I be subdued and softened and saddened at the retrospect; and resolve with a deeper, more unqualified and unwavering resolution, to hate in all its forms what was, in very truth, the crucifier of the Lord of Glory.

My sin—yes, my sin helped in evoking these most dreadful words that ever broke the trance of eternity—"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man who is my Fellow, says the Lord Almighty—smite the Shepherd" (Zech. 13:7).

(3.) Did not our heart burn within us, with a lively apprehension of His great love? The word of the Beloved disciple, spoken at a later time, could not fail to come, like a strain of holy music, at the Holy Table today—"Herein is love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That divine love is revealed and manifested elsewhere. Creation teems with its memorials and illustrations. It is warbled in every grove. It is whispered in every breeze. It is pencilled in every flower. It glitters in every sunbeam. The volume of Providence proclaims the same—"The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." Yet, at times, there occur, in both volumes, dark and perplexing passages that we cannot understand—and where the only earthly explanation is—"Your judgments, O God, are a great deep!" But—"herein is love." Question as I may that love elsewhere—looking, as I have been permitted to do this day, at these memorials of suffering and anguish, beholding in visible manifestation the grace of the Lord Jesus—who though He were rich—rich in all the plenitude of the Divine perfections, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich—I can surely exclaim in adoring transport—"The love of Christ which passes knowledge!" It will form the theme, the confession, the mystery of eternity—and yet the ever renewed and baffled avowal will be—"Oh the depth!"

(4.) Did not our heart burn within us, with an earnest desire to yield Him a new and more devoted obedience? Is this, tonight, my devout aspiration and resolve—that whatever others do, I will serve the Lord? that my existence henceforth, more than it has been, shall be a continued walk

with Jesus, a life-long Emmaus journey? As He, in His infinite love and condescension, invited me to come to His Banqueting-Table, and in expressive sacramental symbols, ratified all the blessings of the everlasting covenant, so may I be ready, with the responsive vow—'Lord, here is my heart; take it; make it Your own forever. I am Yours by creation; I am doubly Yours by redemption.' May all the varied discipline of Your providence—all Your appointed ordinances and sacraments and means of grace, only serve to bring me "nearer to You,"—and lead me more habitually to recognize the obligation thus stated by the Apostle—"He died for all, that those who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them."

(5.) Did not our heart burn within us, with the blessed hope of His second coming? At the very moment when He took bread and blessed it, and broke, and gave to these wondering men of Emmaus, we are told, He suddenly "vanished out of their sight." But it was only for a little time. The two privileged and delighted guests hastened back to the upper chamber and the gathered disciples in Jerusalem; and lo! the Lord re-appeared with the salutation, "Peace be unto you!"

"A little while," says Jesus, "and you shall not see me; and again a little while and you shall see me, because I go unto my Father." The first little while of the "not see Me" will, to His Gospel Church, soon be past; and the second great while of the "you shall see Me" will before long be here. The gracious Feast of today is, above all things, the Feast and pledge of the Second Advent—"You shall show forth the Lord's death until He comes!" Oh, blessed prophetic memorial! which, like a luminous rainbow, thus connects the cross with the crown—one arc of that rainbow resting in the first festal chamber by the Kedron Valley; the other on the golden steps of the Great White Throne! "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

(6.) Did not our heart burn within us, with longing desires of spending an eternity of fellowship in His loving presence? If this rill—this rivulet—of the sacred Ordinance I have been privileged to partake of today be so refreshing, what must be the great Fountain-head? If the Pisgah-view be glorious, what must be the Promised Land itself? If I have been listening by the shore to a few waves murmuring, 'God is love,' what will it be to bathe in the ocean of that Eternal love? Here, at the earthly Communion

Table, I only see the Beloved "behind the lattice." He meets me on the Emmaus road, but it is "as a wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night." I go, as a guest; but it is, at times, too, with tearful eye, as I note fellowships that are no more—missing the music of voices that used to cheer, alike in going to the Feast, and when the Feast was over. What will it be in that Glory-Land where nothing can intrude to mar the bliss of uninterrupted communion—no note of discord to disturb the harmonies of the everlasting song—no veil of sin or sadness to intercept the vision and fruition of an ever-present Savior?

I love at times to dwell on that picture of His Resurrection-life, when, early in a Palestine morning—all nature clad in spring's resurrection attire, a solitary Figure stood by the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, and addressed some weary midnight toilers as 'Children.' They were well-known accents of tenderness. The joyous word of recognition passed from lip to lip—"It is the Lord!" The day is coming, when 'that same Jesus,' in the morning of immortality, will be seen standing on the Heavenly shore, with the look of affection and the word of welcome—the region where no night darkens, no tears dim, and no shadows fall. Let me join with my fellow communicants, in looking forward with bounding heart from the banquet on the earthly shore, to the eternal Heavenly one—where, with the plighted love of today as the master passion of our souls, we shall each be able with unhesitating sincerity to repeat the avowal made of old with trembling lip—"Lord! You know all things, You know that I love You."

### **Private Meditations after Communion #3**

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I was dead, but look--I am alive forever and ever!"  
(Revelation 1:17-18)

The Apostle John, left alone in Patmos, away from all congenial fellowship with loving human hearts, had doubtless often longed in his

rocky solitude, for some token or manifestation of his Redeemer's personal Presence. When he called to mind the former privileged bliss of near and endearing communion with the Lord he loved, but which in a visible form he enjoyed no more—the prayer of his lonely heart and lonely spirit must frequently have been—

"Oh for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still!—

That sigh—that prayer was not in vain. The vanished hand and the stilled voice were again felt and heard—He laid His right hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I was dead, but look--I am alive forever and ever!" The tears of his banishment were dried. He was made to forget the absence of a beloved brotherhood of disciples and saints, in the presence of "One who sticks closer than a brother!"

The same gracious words have been breaking on my ears today. This Holy Table is one of the special places and occasions—a spiritual Patmos—where Jesus loves to record His name, and where He commands the blessing, 'even life for evermore!'

"I was dead!"—This solemn, mysterious truth I have been permitted significantly to recall through the symbols of His own appointment. But now, as the Table is left, He seems, in this still hour of reflection and retrospect, to bequeath for meditation the glorious counterpart assurance—a glad watchword surely in renewing the beaten paths of life—"but look--I am alive forever and ever!"—or, as that might be better rendered, "I am THE LIVING ONE,"—He who was dead "dies no more—death has no more dominion over Him!"

How blessed to be able to look up to the right hand of God, and behold, seated there, as my Advocate and Intercessor, not a stranger, but an ever-living, never-dying Friend—with a heart beating responsive to human sympathy. Not only, as God, able to save, but, as Man, able to compassionate—feeling what is done to His people, as sensitively as if it were done to Himself. When I think that into the hands of this God-man Mediator has been committed universal rule and sovereignty—that He directs all that befalls me—that it is He who sends prosperity—who gives the gourd and the sunshine—that it is He who appoints the blight and the

shadow—that every trial is ordered by Him, and every tear permitted by Him—I may feel sweetly assured that all is well. He has renewed to me, today, at His Sacramental Feast, the pledges of His love and tenderness—so that this may well be a balm-word and a heart-cheerer alike in all time of blessing and in all time of tribulation—a support and solace in every vicissitude of this mortal scene; hallowing joy, consecrating sorrow, dispelling my fears, lightening my darkness, and at last smoothing my death-pillow—"I know that my Redeemer LIVES!"

The words of a Brother Apostle seem like a comment on the above divine vision and voice of Patmos—"When Christ who is our LIFE shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory." "The glorious appearing" of THE LIFE—in other words, the second coming of his Lord, was the special theme and revelation of the Apocalypse. That mystic Book has well been called "the Book of the Coming One." It begins, in its opening chapter, with "Behold, He comes with clouds!" It ends in its closing chapter, with a thrice repeated blast of the same silver trumpet—"Behold, I come quickly!"

The Sacrament of Communion may, with equal propriety and emphasis, be called—"The Feast of the Coming One." I have just been commemorating Him, in His first Advent, as the Dying One; when He came in humiliation—the Man of sorrows, despised and rejected—and bowed His head on Calvary's Cross. But while a Feast of remembrance, it is equally a Feast of anticipation. Every returning celebration is giving augmented power and reality to the divine words—"Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away!"

Even His own people are prone at times, through wavering faith, to ask—"Where is the promise of His Coming?" There is no sound of His footstep. The wheels of His chariot are tarrying—and outer nature, in her majestic unvarying sequences, seems to countersign the doubting thought, "All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." From this Mount of Ordinances the chimes of the Advent Bell break on the listening ear. "Ever since, has this blessed Institution lain, as the golden morning light, far out even in the Church's darkest night, not only the seal of His presence and its pledge, but also the promise of the bright day of His coming."



I have recently been privileged to stand, so to speak, on a divinely-built watch-tower, looking for that day-dawn—"the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the Great God our Savior."

"Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." That Advent season has its date in a yet unrevealed future. Meanwhile, be it mine to be so living and acting, that the cry can never be heard too soon or too suddenly—"Behold, the Bridegroom comes!"—Ever ready to hail Him with exulting welcome; and so at last, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and the festal throng of the glorified, in my Father's Kingdom.

## **Private Meditations after Communion #4**

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God" (Ps. 71:16). The Feast is ended—but let me solemnly feel that the vow remains. The pledge to the Great Redeemer has been given—the fulfillment is to come. All the sincerity of this fresh consecration is yet to be proved—all the fidelity to the Heavenly Captain—all the loyalty to the Heavenly King. Will He who walks in the midst of the candlesticks—the Blessed Master of assemblies, be able on the next similar sacred occasion to say of me, as He did to the Church of Philadelphia of old—"You have kept my word, and have not denied my name"?

My position recalls that of the old Hebrew Paschal Pilgrims, which formed the theme of meditation today—as the silver trumpets proclaimed that the feast was ended—and caravan by caravan, company by company, were seen retraversing the familiar highways to their several distant homes. The imperious call of work summoned them again to their appointed labors. Nor was there any incongruity between the two. Work—everyday work—the drudgery of brain and hand and sinew was a divine thing then as now. The Passover was not appointed, or designed to be, a

perpetual Feast all the year round. Rather—(one at least of its purposes was, apart from its commemorative object), to fortify and invigorate for the duties of a busy world. These Israelites would doubtless carry back to their homes and their toil many hallowed festal memories. Their cares would be lightened—their sorrows soothed, their faith quickened; their devotion to the God of their Fathers deepened and intensified, by all they had witnessed in the City of Solemnities.

In common with my fellow-communicants I now leave the New Testament Passover Feast to retrace the beaten paths of life; to return, some of us to its green pastures and still waters, and the sunshine slopes of its 'Delectable Mountains;'—others, to its 'Hill Difficulties,' its Marah pools and valleys of Baca. But, along with higher and diviner verities there taught, may we all feel it, as it was designed also to be, a strengthener in the discharge of daily duty—the old tribal blessing and beatitude of Israel's God resting upon us—"Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents." The Lord God our Sun and Shield—grace given us in this world, and the the promise of glory in the next (Ps. 84:11).—Happy is that people that is in such a case, yes happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

This suggests a similar lesson from a different portion of God's Word, which also formed subject of recent contemplation. It is the beautiful vision of the girded angels given in the Book of Revelation (15:6); and to whom the words were addressed by the Great Voice out of the Temple—"Go your ways." These angels had been listening with rapt reverence to the song of the Harpers by the glassy sea. But the hour of duty had come. Forth they go to the world beneath them, to execute the behests of their divine Lord.

Am I leaving the "Temple of the Tabernacle of the testimony," like them, "clothed in white and pure linen, and girded with golden belts"? Am I about to return to my daily avocations with the blessedness of the pure in heart who have seen God? resolved, in a strength greater than my own, to keep my garments clean—"unspotted from the world," having my loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness—desirous to follow the path of obedience whatever that may be—filling my earthly sphere for His glory and my neighbor's good—ready, when my

task is finished, to bring, angel-like, the emptied incense bowls of service, and lay them at the Master's feet, saying—'Lord, I have sought, however unworthily and imperfectly, to do Your holy will'?

"Go your ways," says God. What the ways before me may be in this uncertain world, I cannot tell. Be this my comfort, that the summoning Voice is His. "The Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." There is elsewhere given the promise and assurance—"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

It is not the resolutions of a Communion season I must trust to. Rather, it is the going out into the world which will test and try their reality. Who has not read of the Roman legions of old, in pursuit of their Parthian foe, how they stood most in danger, not in the glow and excitement of triumph, but in following up the victory! The Parthian bowmen on swift horses, ever and anon wheeled round in their retreat, and emptied their quivers on the pursuing enemy, strewing the march of the conquerors, even more than the battlefield, with their slain. "When you think you stand," is the farewell monitory word which may well be heard in the name of the Great Master of the Feast—"take heed lest you fall." "Beware lest you also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace."

"The holy rite is o'er—the blessed sign  
Is given to cheer us in this earthly strife:  
The Bread is broken, and outpoured the Wine,  
Symbols of better life.  
O Touch our wayward hearts, and let them be  
In stronger faith to Your glad service given—  
Until in the city of the crystal sea  
We sing the Song of Heaven."

## Private Meditations after Communion #5

"It is finished!" (John 19:30). I have listened today in thought, at the Holy Table of Communion, to this victorious cry. Glorious is the fulfillment of the prophetic words—"He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." A FINISHED work—and so finished and completed, that, in the retrospect, the divine-human lips could say with complacency, yes proclaim with unhesitating triumph, "I am satisfied!" Satisfied!—It was the very dignity and divinity of the majestic Speaker, which gave such singular meaning and emphasis to the assertion. The higher our aim, the more refined and elevated our views and attainments—the less are we satisfied with our own ideals. A little thing will satisfy a little mind. It requires a great thing to satisfy a great mind. The child is satisfied with a toy or bauble; the savage with the trinket—the gaudy bead, or piece of painted glass—while the civilized and educated art, in very proportion to their culture, fastidious—swift to detect the literary blemish, or the faulty note in music; or the crude touch of color on the picture—the flaw in the otherwise breathing marble. What pleases the unlettered villager will look poor in the eyes of the man of science.

And so, the higher we ascend in the ranks of being. What must it require to satisfy the mind of an angel—what must it be to satisfy the mind of God? Him whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom—whose glory is set above the heavens—whose power is boundless, His wisdom infinite; His life-time eternity! Oh, what a work that must be, over which this all-wise and all-perfect Deity, in contemplating it, can say—"It is enough; I have reached my own divine Ideal. I am satisfied." "Father, I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work You gave me to do!" In that moment of all moments, when His eyes were about to close in the sleep of death—a gleam of radiance breaks from His eclipsed soul. He could wish no more—the world's battle is won. With the smile of ineffable love and satisfaction on His lips, He cried, and cried "with a loud voice," as if He would wake the echo of all the ages, in order to proclaim the completion and the completeness of His victory—IT IS FINISHED!

"Satisfied"—"Finished"—blessed pillow for me to repose on in the retrospect of today! He has done all, and suffered all, and procured all for

me. I see every attribute of the divine nature magnified. Justice exulting in the sublime vindication. Truth hastening to meet Mercy and Mercy meeting Righteousness. Let the rich man glory in his riches—let the strong man glory in his strength—let the wise man glory in his wisdom—but God forbid that I should glory, but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

One other thought occurs in my contemplation of that mystery of darkness—that superhuman soul-struggle; ending though it did in so triumphant a victory. Yet vain, surely, is the question that has been asked, 'Could not less have satisfied? Could not anguish less dreadful in its accompaniments have sufficed? Could none of the ignominy and agony of that bitter path and that bitter cross have been dispensed with?' The analogy of nature would seem to tell that there is no useless nor unnecessary expenditure of agency even in the smallest of the works of God. If it be so with the lowlier divine operations, much more may we conclude that there will be no superfluous or unnecessary agency demanded in 'the work of works,'—the work of Redemption. From the first pang of Bethlehem's Babe in the cradle, until the Great Surety trampled Satan under His bleeding feet on Calvary, all was necessary. There was not an unnecessary leaf in that chaplet of sorrow which the Man of Sorrows wore!

I have been testifying today, through these significant memorials, to the sufferings of Christ; let me connect them with the glory which is to follow—anticipating that everlasting communion Sabbath, when the sufferings and the glory shall be sung in one blended strain by the ransomed. I have heard the sound of the Bridegroom's feet today; I have listened to His festal summons to the Feast on earth; let me be so living, and walking, and watching, and working, that the great final cry and summons to the Festal Hall of heaven may be met with the glad response—"Lo, this is our God—we have waited for Him!"

## Private Meditations after Communion #6

"Your vows are upon me, O God; I will render praises unto You—for You have delivered my soul from death" (Ps. 56:12, 13). This musing of the Psalmist is surely most befitting and appropriate for me on a retrospect of today's approach to the Holy Table. But he does not stop with this treble assertion. He adds a fervid appeal, a votive prayer—if I may so call it—to the God he has covenanted to serve. May I not endorse it also as my own earnest pleading in this votive hour—"Will You not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Ps. 56:13).

Let me note that it is when under the deepest and most solemn consciousness of his covenant engagement—"Your vows are upon me, O God"—he anticipates the possibility of his feet stumbling. In the hour of elation and victory he contemplates the certainty of fresh encounters with spiritual foes. The past deliverance and the present vow are no guarantees against the seductive wiles of temptation. At the very moment when he has that votive resolution on his lips, and the hymn of praise on his tongue—when his bark is on placid waters and no cloud disturbs his sky, he dreads and forecasts the storm. He would be forearmed as well as forewarned; and looking to the God who had put his vow on record, he cries—'Lord! in this very hour of my strength, I feel the reality of my weakness! You have delivered my soul from death—(that is my present rapturous theme). But the future—that unknown and often treacherous deceitful future!—will You not—who has promised "as your days, so shall your strength be"—will You not help me in it?' "Will YOU not deliver my feet from failing?" Communion and Sacraments cannot keep me. The most sacred vows may be broken like airy spider webs. But hold You me up and I shall be safe. With Your voice behind me saying, 'This is the way,' I may, in the expressive words of Israel's singer—"walk before God in the light of the living!"

And what is this, but the lesson and resolution of 'new obedience'? What a befitting season, by God's grace, to adopt fresh resolves, and to aspire after a higher standard of life and duty! Not to mystify so solemn a subject with figure—If, in looking back on past months, or past years, I am conscious of the dominating influence of some evil temper, some

ungodly passion—some flaw in Christian consistency—some neglect or omission of well-known duty, either regarding myself or with respect to others—what an appropriate season is this to initiate and inaugurate a new and better life—to turn over, as the common saying is, a new leaf—to make this renewed votive service today, a fresh starting-point for eternity as expressed in the words just quoted—"I will walk before God!" What a sure preservative against sin, to walk with the consciousness of His pure eye upon me! Seeking to go only where He leads—to love only what He loves—His paths my paths—my longing aspiration and aim the coinciding of my will with His! This is obedience. No "snare for the falling feet" successful then. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov. 1:17). Rising on the wings of faith, and prayer, and love, and new obedience—these wings bathed in the light of God and heaven—they will be kept from being soiled by the degrading contacts of earth—"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

## **Prayer after Communion**

O Lord, I beseech You to follow with Your rich and effectual blessing, the solemn service of this day. May Jehovah hear me in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend me; send me help from the Sanctuary, and strengthen me out of Zion—may the Lord fulfill all my petitions. I bless You for all that my eyes have seen, and my ears have heard, and my hands have handled, and my lips have tasted of the good Word of life. I bless You that I have been enabled, through significant symbol

, to listen to the dying cry, 'It is finished'—proclaiming the great redemption complete; Satan's power overthrown; the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers. I would set up anew my Ebenezer of gratitude and thankfulness—my stone of remembrance, and write upon it the inscription, "The Lord has helped me!" What am I, that You should bring me to Your own banqueting-house; giving me angels' food—the Bread of life; and that mine should be the blessedness of those that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb? Wash me after supper. Were I to be

tried by my best hours and services, how would I stand condemned. I bring the iniquity of my holy things to be sprinkled with the blood of Atonement. Lord Jesus—O great Intercessor within the veil—let down Your censer filled with much incense, that therein I may place, along with Your people, my polluted services and vows and covenantings; that mingled though they be with much imperfection and sin, yet perfumed with Your adorable merits, they may ascend with acceptance before the Throne.

Impress on me the solemn thought, "Your vows are upon me, O God!" May I feel it to be in no empty or formal manner that I have anew consecrated myself—all I am and all I have—to You this day. Strengthen me with might by Your Spirit in the inner man. Hold me up, and then alone I shall be safe! May the needful warning voice follow me from the Holy Table into the duties and occupations and temptations of life—"when you think you stand, take heed lest you fall." Realizing in the past my own weakness, may I lean more confidently on Your Omnipotent arm, and trust more unswervingly Your Omnipotent grace.

While I have been led this day, through visible emblems, to look more especially to Jesus as my Surety-Savior—may I be enabled to look to Him also as my Great Example—to walk more closely in His holy footsteps, and to reflect more faithfully His holy image—seeking more fully to realize my covenant position and calling, as no longer my own, but bought with a price, and bound to glorify Him in my body and my spirit, which are His. May His love be enthroned more as the ruling passion in my heart, and may His glory be more the great end of my being. May it be with joyful alacrity that I say, 'Blessed Savior, where You go I will go; where You dwell I will dwell—Your people shall be my people, and death itself shall not separate between You and me.' Thus may I go up, and on, through the wilderness, leaning on the arm of Him who is the Beloved of my soul; and then, though an army should encamp against me, my heart need not fear. You who are with me, and for me, are greater far than all that can be against me.

I pray for my fellow-communicants. Bless the young—those who have today made a first public surrender and consecration of themselves to You. May they have the ever-increasing conviction, that they have chosen



a blessed service and a blessed Master—and be enabled to live under the sovereignty of that lofty motive, to walk and act, so as to please You. May their arms be made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob; and may their hearts be fixed, trusting in the Lord.

Bless Your aged servants. If heart and flesh do faint and fail, may God be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. May they know the truth of Your own promise, 'those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.' And if opportunities are becoming fewer in the Church on earth, for their partaking in hallowed communion of the fruit of the Vine, may they rejoice that the day is approaching when they shall drink it new with their divine Master and Lord in the Father's kingdom.

Lord, bless us all. Give us the benediction which makes rich and which adds no sorrow with it. Now, in descending the mount, may the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit attend me hence. May the pillar of Your presence ever go before me. As communion season after communion season passes by, do impart to me more and more the spirit of a pilgrim and a stranger. May my eye be more upwards and my footsteps onwards—having the girded loins and the burning lamps and the ever-vigilant watchfulness, and being like those who are waiting for the coming of their Lord. And so, when all sacramental times, and sanctuaries, and means of grace are ended, may it be mine to have the promised abundant entrance ministered into the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven.

Now unto Him who alone is able to keep me from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy—to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.



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