





BIBLE PICTURES.

"RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM GIVES SCOPE FOR ALL THAT IS MOST PROFITABLE IN FANCY, SPECULATION, OR THE GREAT DRAMATIC ELEMENT THAT IS IN EVERY MAN."— ECCE DEUS.



BIBLE PICTURES;

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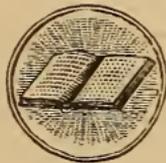
Life-Sketches of Life-Truths.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "BATTLE ECHOES," ETC., ETC.

"Without a parable spake he not unto them."—MARK iv. 34.



BOSTON:
GOULD AND LINCOLN,
59 WASHINGTON STREET.
NEW YORK: SHELDON AND COMPANY.
CINCINNATI: G. S. BLANCHARD & CO.

1867.

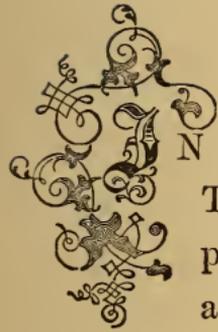
BX6333
IA B5

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1867, by
GOULD AND LINCOLN,
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STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
ROCKWELL & ROLLINS,
122 Washington St., Boston.

P R E F A C E .



IN studying the Discourses of the Great Teacher nothing more forcibly impresses us than their illustrative character. We seldom find in them didactic forms or abstract statements. Truth comes forth from His lips, not in her hard, naked lineaments, but draped in such pictorial garniture as may best commend her to human acceptance and sympathy. The parable, the allegory, the narrative, the incidents of common life, the scenes of Nature, the changing aspects of earth, and sea, and sky, furnish the attractive and ever varying dress in which He presents her. Thus, the analogies of the outer world become the robes of the inner and the spiritual.

A belief in the effectiveness of this method of expressing Christian thought, and in its suitability to all periods and circumstances, has led to the publication of the following pages. The de-

lineations which they contain were sketched at different times, and without any special regard to consecutiveness of subject, or logical order. And the same feature has been retained in their present arrangement. Each chapter is treated as complete in itself, and is intended to be a picturesque reproduction of the Scriptural scene or incident to which it relates. How far this design has been accomplished the reader will be able to judge.

The author has materials for other volumes, similar in execution, but with a stricter connection of topics — "Bible Pictures, or Scenes in the Life of Christ," and "Bible Pictures, or Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles." If this prove acceptable, those may follow.

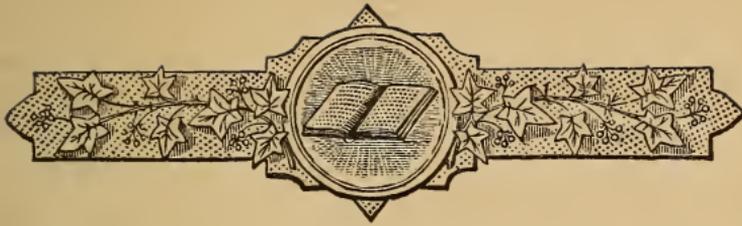
Should these efforts contribute, in a degree however humble, to impart a fresher interest to the study of the Inspired Word as a Book, not of the dead Past, but full of lessons for the living Present, the highest aim of the writer will be attained.

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BIBLE PICTURES.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE OF THE SOUL.

“BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK; IF ANY MAN HEAR MY VOICE AND OPEN THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN TO HIM, AND WILL SUP WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME.”—*Rev. iii. 10.*

PASSING along a street the other day, I saw a man ascend the steps of a house and ring at the door. No one came to admit him. He stood awhile with head bent down as if listening, and then rang again. Still the summons was unanswered. Again he waited and listened, until his patience was at length exhausted, and he went away, looking grieved and disappointed. The incident awakened in my mind a train of interesting reflections. Who can tell, I mentally said, how much that family may have lost by not admitting the visitor? He may have been the bearer of good news, of kind counsel, of help greatly needed, or

of some message of remembrance and love from dear ones far away. And why did they not admit him? Perhaps they were careless or asleep, and did not hear him. Perhaps they were busy, and did not like to be interrupted. Perhaps some of them recognized, through the windows, the countenance of an injured friend, and wished to avoid an interview.

This occurrence, as I have described it, suggested the words of the text, and the spiritual history which they imply. So, methought, does a heedless and slumbering world treat the visits of its merciful Redeemer. He comes, with His hands filled with blessings, and knocks at the hearts of sinners — knocks often and loud — knocks by His Providence — knocks by His Word — knocks by His Spirit. Denied admittance, he does not go away. He *stands* and knocks. Oh, the depths of human ingratitude! Oh, the wonders of Divine condescension, that He who *sits* on the throne of heaven, worshipped by all its shining hosts, should *stand* unregarded at the doors of men, and submit to see those doors remain bolted against him! Alas! we have all put upon Him this indignity. Even they by whom He has been welcomed long kept Him knocking and pleading without. And what multitudes are there who still refuse to listen to His voice, and whose bosoms are as adamant to His appeals!

In dwelling on the words before us, I propose to describe the House of the Soul; its original perfection; the sad change that has passed over it; and the methods which its Maker and rightful Owner employs to regain it.

The house of the soul is a double house, corresponding to the twofold nature of its occupant. Its Architect, infinite in wisdom and in skill, designed it with two fronts; the one having a terrestrial view, the other looking away to the bright hills of Immortality; thus answering to the temporal and to the eternal relations which man sustains. Both parts were arranged with equal care, and with equal adaptation to their purpose; for the Builder intended both to be inhabited.

In the earthward side He constructed five rooms, with five windows, one window to each room. These He designated the windows of the Five Senses, under the respective names of Sight, Hearing, Touch, Taste, and Smell. They were so contrived as to give each its own impression of outward things, and each its separate enjoyment. And the external objects which they commanded were precisely adjusted to their several uses. Ignorant or careless gardeners sometimes lay out grounds without any reference to the windows of the dwelling. But God fashioned the surroundings of man's earthly home with a wise regard to the windows of the soul.

Oh, beautiful was the world then! — No blight of sin had marred its loveliness — no curse of avenging justice smitten it with sterility and desolation. Standing at the window of Sight, one might behold a fair and smiling landscape, stretching away in ever-changing variety and boundless prospect — interspersed with forests and plains, sparkling rills and broad rivers, green valleys and sun-lit mountains — all fresh with the bloom of Eden, and over-arched by a sky whose deep azure no storm had ever vexed, and from which the orb of day and the constellations of night looked down with serene radiance on the virgin Earth, herself as serene and stainless as they. At the window of Hearing he might drink in the melody of Nature's many-voiced hymn — the glad song of birds — the music of brooks and waterfalls, of whispering winds and waving woods; or, moving to another and then another, be regaled with the fruits of Paradise, and the perfume of unfading flowers. Clear were the windows when the house was first built — bright the scenes on which they opened — and happy the being who, himself yet unsinning, communed by their means with a world yet unfallen.

Still more exquisite was the perfection which the great Maker gave to the heavenward side of the house, and still more profuse the munificence with which He adorned it. Here also He formed five

rooms, each with its own window — the room of Understanding, the room of Conscience, the room of Faith, the room of Hope, and the room of Love. In all He hung bells, connecting them by wires with the door leading into this division of the building; so that whoever wished to communicate with the inmate of any particular room, had only to pull the wire attached to the bell in that room. And how accurately suited were the views from these rooms to excite and gratify the spiritual faculties residing in them. A wide lawn of living verdure, clustered with trees bearing celestial fruit, and ambrosial plants that grew from ethereal seed, extended onward and onward till it was lost in the uplands of Immortality. And so softly and imperceptibly did the blending take place, that you could not tell where Earth ended and Heaven begun. Beyond, in a series of sun-bathed and flowery ascents, rose the Mount of God; and where its highest elevation seemed to melt into the sky, the Eternal City might be seen — its sapphire walls and battlements, its golden pavements and its gates of precious stones, refulgent with the glory of the Divine Presence, and flashing as with the beams of seven-fold day. Around it were the Blissful Fields and the Bowers of Amaranth, the Crystal Sea, and the River of Life, and the forms of glorious ones walking beside it. And ever and anon these glorious ones would

cross the invisible boundary, and move about on the lawn, or come up to the house, and bring Heaven's greeting to its inhabitant.

In the contemplation of such objects what raptures must the soul have found! And what noble employment was there here for its noblest powers! Understanding, looking forth from its window, could take in the mighty revelations which everywhere met its eye. Conscience could recognize their authority and sacredness—Faith give them form and substance, and bring them near—Hope anticipate their fuller unfolding—and Love rejoice in them, and in their Infinite Author.

Such was the house of the soul as it came from the hands of its Creator. Inside and outside it was perfect. Its structure, its arrangements, its furniture, its environs, met the approval of their Omniscient Designer, and united to render it the fitting abode of Holiness and Peace. And here the soul dwelt, occupying both parts of the house, and happy in both; for in both God and Innocence were with her.

Oh, that this blessed state had been perpetual! But, alas! in one fatal hour all was changed. Innocence was driven from the mansion; Beauty and Joy fled with it; and guilt, deformity, and ruin took their places.

While the soul was at rest in its happiness, there

came to the earthly side of the house a stranger, of angelic form, but differing widely in mien and garb from the heavenly visitors that had been wont to frequent the precincts. He was worn as by long travel, and scarred as by the stroke of thunder. His eye glowed, not with the calm light of benevolence, but with the lurid fires of hatred and despair. And though majesty sat enthroned on his haggard brow, it was the majesty of desolation. He was a rebel against the government of Jehovah; and rebellion had converted the archangel into a fiend.

Disguising his Satanic purpose — professing to have come as the friend of God, and as the instructor of God's newly-made offspring — he surreptitiously gained entrance, and at once commenced his work of treachery and death. His first movement was to darken the windows that looked toward heaven, under the pretence that they let in too much sunshine. Having thus dimmed the perception of eternal things, he drew the soul to the terrestrial front, and leading it to the window of Taste, directed its attention to a peculiar tree in the garden, whose fruit had been interdicted. It was the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. While man was allowed free access to all the other trees which in countless numbers were bending under their delicious burdens — of this his Maker had forbidden him to eat, and had impressed the prohibition by

the sanction, "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This interdict, intended only as a test of obedience, the tempter seized as an occasion for corrupting and seducing his victim — representing that the consequence of transgressing it would not be death, as the penalty threatened, but a higher life and wisdom — the life and the wisdom of gods; that the Creator knew this, and that to debar His creature from such advancement was His sole object in publishing the decree. Oh, falsehood framed in hell, and worthy of its origin! Oh, ambition, how deadly was thy first uprising! The soul, perverted by the wiles of the Destroyer, delirious with the inrush of new and unholy desires, believed the lie, and broke the commandment. This was a simple act, and in other relations, or standing by itself alone, might perhaps have been comparatively unimportant. But, committed as it was in violation of a law ordained expressly for trial and probation, it became at once fundamental and representative in its character — fundamental as involving the authority of God and the allegiance of the creature — representative as comprehending in its results the whole human race.

It did its work instantly and terribly. The entire nature of man was hurled by it into wreck and disorder. His purity was lost, his intimacy with God destroyed, his mind darkened, his affections de-

based, his body made subject to disease and mortality. The fair world created for his home shared in his fall. It was Paradise no more. The foul breath of sin passed over it, withering its bloom, tarnishing its loveliness, and dooming it to barrenness and decay. Thus stood the house of the soul—a ruin surrounded by ruin.

But the most disastrous effects of man's transgression were visible in the direction of eternity. On that side its fellest power was expended. There the destruction was utter. The smooth green lawn, with its flowers of supernal birth and its fountains welling from heaven, had become an expanse of black, smouldering lava, heaving with infernal fires; and where, without break or barrier, it had met the immortal fields, now flowed a broad, deep river, which no mortal foot might cross. Dense, angry clouds covered the Celestial Hills, and the vision of Glory was blotted out. The angels were all gone, and in their place dread forms appeared waving swords of flame. Fear, Darkness, and Despair reigned supreme, where Hope, Light, and Peace had gilded all things with their rejoicing beams.

The crime was finished. The catastrophe was complete. But the soul, given up to the power of the Deceiver, instead of endeavoring to repair the mischief by a penitent return to God, determined to make the most of its altered circumstances; and,

since good was lost, to seek its portion in evil. With the aid of its remorseless foe — now become its more dangerous ally — it closed all the heavenward windows with thick and strong blinds, that not a glimpse of the devastation without might be seen — double-locked and bolted the front door — shut up all the rooms — and broke all the bell-ropes, except that of the bell of Conscience, which, hidden within the walls, and running down through the foundations of the building, could not be reached without demolishing the building itself. This done, the soul, under the same infernal guidance, withdrew to the earthly apartments, with the intent of living there altogether, and forgetting, amid the engrossments of present things, its happy Past, and its awful Hereafter.

Henceforth Satan's influence was without a check. There was nothing to dispute his authority or resist his sway. He was master of the situation — lord of man's heart and of man's doings — "the god of this world." Henceforth he bent all the resources of his vast intellect, and all the arts of a duplicity equally vast, to strengthen his hold upon his captive, to lull him into carelessness, and drown every whisper of regret or alarm. With this view, he stored the chambers of the Senses, in which alone the prisoner now dwelt, with manifold means of carnal indulgence — with all that could minister to "the lust

of the eye, to the lust of the flesh, and to the pride of life." Enticing pictures adorned the walls. Meretricious products of the chisel decorated the passages. In one room was grouped whatever of rare and cunning device could please the sight. Another was redolent with costly odors and spices of the East. In another were heard the din of traffic and the clink of gold. Another echoed with strains of lascivious music and sounds of bacchanalian revelry. In another were spread tables loaded with rich and various dainties. And in another were enacted scenes of bestial debauch which, like the chambers of imagery beheld by the prophet, were too vile to be described. Wealth and splendor, and luxury and show, and mirth and riot, were all there, ever treading their mazy rounds, that the soul, intoxicated by the ceaseless whirl, and wrapped in terrene dreams, might never think of God or of heaven more.

In adapting to the same end the outer world — his world now — the prince of Evil displayed equal skill and dexterity. Its original beauty he could not restore; but human toil and enterprise, inspired and controlled by him, effected great changes; many of them valuable in themselves; but all bearing, in their purpose and execution, the prints of the Devil's fingers. The soil, cursed for man's sin, yielded to man's painful cultivation. Harvests

covered the land. Treasures were dug from its bosom. Continents were peopled. Huge cities sprung up as by magic, full of the temples of idolatry, resounding with the bustle of commerce, and reeking with the filth of licentiousness. Empires were founded and overturned. Thrones rose and fell. Wars raged. Embattled legions shook the earth. Science and civilization, invention and discovery, grew apace. Ships ploughed the seas. Bridges spanned the rivers. Railways tunnelled the mountains. The harnessed lightning encircled the globe. Material development, political revolutions, social progress, the ceaseless ongoing of terrestrial things, however important to the interests of the present life, were made, through the agency of the universal Spoiler, to extrude and banish the life to come.

Thus, in every age, has the god of this world kept the mighty panorama of its affairs moving and shifting before the eyes of men. From the epoch of the apostasy down through all the centuries, he has been busy at this work, varying the exhibition to suit each particular time, but always finding in it the chief instrument of his success. And never has this instrument been more powerful in his hands, never has he wielded it with more potent effect, than in our own land and day. With what a rush and roar the tumult of the vast Babel sweeps by

the windows of the soul! How absorbing is the influence of mundane concerns! The pre-occupations of business, the excitements of speculation, the struggle for wealth and place, the shock and carnage of battles, the swift succession of startling events, the jar and noise of the great social machine, the hurry and turmoil of earth, so rivet the mind's gaze as to leave it no power of upward vision. Thought and feeling, hope and anxiety, energy and resolution, are all concentrated below. "The strong man"—armed with these secular weapons, backed by this overwhelming array of inward lusts and of outward appliances for their gratification—"keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace." There is no disturbance, no resistance. The soul surrenders itself a willing vassal to "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

But there is deliverance for the soul, self-ruined though it be, and led captive by the Devil at his will. The Almighty Builder of the house has not renounced His rights of ownership in it, nor will He abandon it to the lasting possession of Satan. In the riches of His mercy, He has developed a plan by which the foul intruder may be expelled, and the desecrated palace restored to more than its primeval splendor. And the carrying out of this plan He has committed to His only-begotten Son. Joyfully

has the Son accepted the stupendous trust; and already has He accomplished whatever was needful to prepare the way for its consummation. He has removed the barriers which Divine justice opposed to the going forth of His grace. Assuming the nature of fallen men, and putting Himself in their place, He has vindicated the dishonored law by bearing in His own body the death-penalty which they had incurred; and has wrought out, through His obedience and sacrifice, a method of acceptance by which God can be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth.

And now, having crossed the dark, bridgeless river, and risen victorious from its waves, He comes to the house of the soul on His errand of salvation. He approaches it on its heavenward side. All there is silent, cold, and stirless. The shutters are closed; the avenues blocked up with weeds and rubbish. There is no sign of life or habitation. Making his way over the crumbling fragments of columns and arches that strew the ground—mementoes of a glory departed—He reaches the door, and stands and listens. The stillness and gloom of the sepulchre reign in this part of the dwelling. The deserted chambers give forth no sound. But, from the other side, He hears the noise of merriment and feasting—the uproar of Satan and the sinner in their revels. He calls—there is no answer. He tries

the door—it is bolted. He tries the bells—appeals to the Understanding—to Faith—to Hope—to Love; but the wires are broken, and the bells voiceless. As He is omnipotent, He might break open the door, and force an entrance. But He comes to deliver, not to enslave; and it is essential to His purpose that He should be admitted by the free choice of the soul. All other means having failed, He takes hold of the wire leading to the room of Conscience, and gives it a strong and urgent pull. Instantly the great bell rings with a deep and awful reverberation that shakes every timber in the building. The sinner starts up affrighted. “What is that!” he exclaims. “Who is ringing that bell?” “Don’t be a fool,” the Devil replies—“no one is ringing it—it is only fancy or the wind—sit down again, and you will hear it no more.” The sinner believes him, and returns to his vanities. But he is ill at ease; and scarcely has he resumed his interrupted worldliness, when again—toll—toll—toll—goes the great bell of Conscience. Satan tells him not to mind it; and he strives to follow the advice. But he cannot help minding it. The dreadful sound is in his ears, and he cannot shut it out. Endeavor as he may not to hear it, or to disregard it, still—toll—toll—toll—toll—goes ever the great bell of Conscience, growing louder and more importunate with every stroke. The agonized

man can endure it no longer. The fearful tones pierce brain, and heart, and nerves, and rend him with torture. He starts up once more, crying, "Oh, that bell, that terrible bell! There is surely some one at the long-closed spiritual door; and I must see who it is, and stop his ringing or die." Satan attempts to prevent him; ridicules him—calls him a coward—assures him that if he lets any one in on that side of the house, his worldly enjoyments will be at an end; and asks if he is ready to exchange the delights of sense for the gloom and the self-denials of religion. But all the while he is plying his sophistries, the great bell continues to peal out its thunders, and the sinner dares not delay. Finding him determined, the Devil follows him; and as the sinner is about to unlock the door and draw the bolts, his pertinacious tyrant makes one more effort to retain his usurped dominion. "Hold, hold!" he cries; "they are robbers; if you admit them, they will plunder you of all your pleasant things—perhaps murder you." "Ah! it is no robber," the sinner answers. "My heart tells me who it is. It is the long-forgotten Owner of the house—He who built it, and put me in it, and commanded me to keep it, and to keep you out of it. He has come to claim His property. He may destroy me, or send me to prison, for my wicked contempt of His orders; and I deserve whatever He may

inflict. But open to Him I must, and open to Him I will.”

The baffled seducer departs ; and the sinner, freed from his control, approaches the door. Half shrinking from his resolve, distracted by doubts and apprehensions, afraid to go forward, and still more afraid to go back, he applies the key of Prayer, and with trembling hands shoves back the bolts one after another, till he reaches the main bolt — the bolt of the Will. This, always a hard bolt to push, has become so fixed in its groove by the rust of long disuse, as to resist all his exertions. He tugs and struggles at it, but it will not move. He grows discouraged — thinks he can never get the door open, and had better give over the attempt. But at this moment the unresting bell sends forth a clang more threatening than ever. With the strength of desperation, he seizes the bolt — it yields, the door flies open, and, helpless and terror-stricken, he falls prostrate on the threshold, expecting to see before him a Face of wrath, and the vision of outraged Majesty, brandishing the sword of justice. But, instead of these, what does he behold? A Form like unto the Son of Man — a countenance beaming with pity and tenderness ; a brow godlike indeed, yet bearing the marks of its thorny crown ; a body glorified now, yet pierced with gaping wounds ; hands laden with gifts, yet showing where the nails were driven

home. And as he looks and wonders, he hears a voice, sweet as Mercy's own, saying to him, "These wounds I bore for thee, these gifts I bring to thee; I come, not to condemn, but to save." The sinner feels his heart melt; that heart, so hard, so dead, so despairing, overflows with penitence, gratitude, and love; and, clasping the feet of his Deliverer, he exclaims, "My Lord, and my God."

Invited and welcomed by the soul, the Redeemer enters the mansion. He passes through the several apartments, and at once throws open the shutters, and lets in the light. Oh, what a spectacle is then revealed! If you go away and leave your houses shut up even for a few weeks, you know how rapidly dust accumulates in them, and how soon damp and mould stain the walls, and soil the furniture. But these rooms had been closed ever since the far distant hour in which the soul forsook its God. During all that dreary interval not a breath of heaven's air had visited them, not a gleam from on high had penetrated their darkness. The foulness engendered in them by the first transgression had never been removed; and to this original impurity had been added the manifold abominations of succeeding years. Here, as in a secret receptacle, the sinner had deposited all the pollution of his outward life. And now, as these hidden iniquities are disclosed, what festering uncleanness everywhere ap-

pears ! Ruins of the fall, heaps of refuse, the dirt of worldliness, the reek of evil passions, the filth of evil deeds, litter all the floors, discolor all the ceilings, infest every corner, and fill the rooms with putridity and death.

Appalled at the sight, the penitent seizes the broom of good-works, and begins to sweep. But this only raises a dust that blinds and smothers him. The Saviour checks him with the assurance that mere moral sweeping, however useful elsewhere, is powerless here ; and then, dipping a bunch of hyssop into a vessel filled with His own blood, He sprinkles the chambers of the soul. Suddenly, at the touch of that blood, all their defilement vanishes ; and they become sweet with the fragrance of heaven, and glorious in the beauty of imparted holiness. As damp, mephitic vapors, that, in the chill night-time, envelop mountain and lowland in their malarious folds, sullying the fair face of nature, are exhaled and dispersed by the beams of day, so does the blood of Christ, applied by the eternal Spirit, purge the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God.

Having thus cleansed and purified the apartments, the loving Saviour conducts the soul to the now open windows, and bids it contemplate the prospect. How wonderful the renovation ! The lawn is restored to a brighter than its pristine verdure.

Trees and plants are again growing in it, resembling the paradisaic in form and fruit, but with a richer sap, and a more indestructible vitality. The angels have come back. The clouds are gone from the Heavenly Hills, and the City of God stands out in clear vision. The dark river is still there; but a bridge has been thrown across it — a new and living way consecrated by the blood of Christ; and, rising from its hither end, a rainbow spans the passage, and lifts its luminous arch high over the shining mountains and the throne above. With what new-born delight the believer looks forth for the first time on this celestial landscape! As he goes from window to window, he catches at each new aspects and fresh attractions. But it is at the window of Hope that he loves best to linger; and while gazing thence along golden vistas opening into far realms of blessedness, he gives utterance to his joy in the sweet words of the old hymn: —

“My willing soul would stay,
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss.”

But, at present, there is other occupation for him. His relations to time as well as to eternity must be sanctified. The whole house is not yet reclaimed. And hence the Divine Master and His new disciple now turn their steps to the earthly rooms — the

rooms in which Satan and the sinner so long held carnival. All of them exhibit mournful proofs of the vile uses to which they have been subjected. Every closet, every passage-way, is full of infection and rottenness. The slime of greed, the taint of selfishness, the trail of vicious habits, the relics of sensual orgies, are everywhere to be seen. But the grace that has renewed the heart can reform the conduct. The power that could renovate the spiritual side of the house is able also to renovate the secular. At the behest of Christ the work is commenced; through the strength of Christ the work is achieved. The remains of the old godless life, the remnants and the instruments of its wickedness, are cast out and burned. The rooms are swept and garnished, consecrated by prayer, perfumed with righteousness, adorned with beneficence; and then the crowning finish is given by writing on all the doors, "Holiness to the Lord."

The Saviour having thus come in, and the entire mansion having been set in order for His reception, the promised supper now begins. In this Jesus, though entering as a guest, acts the part of host. The prodigal, just redeemed from bondage and beggary, has nothing. Christ must find all. He leads the soul to the banqueting room, spreads over it the banner of His love, provides the repast, presides at the board, dispenses the living bread and the new

wine of the kingdom. And there they sit — the God-man and the saved man — supping with each other in intimate and holy fellowship. Great is the joy of both — on the one side the joy of happiness conferred, on the other the joy of happiness received. And that joy travels beyond the immediate scene of their communion. Waiting angels catch it up and bear it to the skies. And so there is joy on earth and in heaven over the House of the Soul Recovered.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS.

“AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST, PRAISING GOD, AND SAYING, GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD-WILL TOWARD MEN.”

— *Luke* ii. 13, 14.

WE often see, when thick clouds overspread the horizon, a rift suddenly opening in their dense masses, and a streak of clear sky gleaming through, and touching their dark edges with golden sunshine. This beautiful fact finds a striking moral resemblance in the occasional flashes of light from heaven which shone on the earthly life of our Lord.

The object for which He visited this mortal sphere required that His sojourning in it should be marked by abasement and suffering. He came not to exhibit the splendors of His kingly state — not to awe the nations by displays of celestial power — but, by uniting the Divine with the human, to achieve, in the two-fold nature, the part of a perfect Mediator between God and men. To accomplish this merciful undertaking, He must lay aside the outward manifestations of Godhead, disrobe Himself of the glory which He had worn from eternity, assume the

garb of flesh, and descend to its infirmities and privations. From the very design of His coming, His residence below was necessarily one long sorrow — one continuous scene of ignominy.

Nevertheless, the thoughtful student of His history cannot but observe that, whenever His humiliation seemed the deepest, and the earth-cloud in which He dwelt wrapped its shadows most darkly round Him, some outbursting of almightiness, some radiant testimony beaming down from the upper world, broke through the gloom, and asserted His majesty. How brightly, and at how many points, these revealings of Deity blaze along His pathway of wondrous travail! At His baptism, though nothing of earthly grandeur distinguished Him from the common throng, yet no sooner had He risen from the wave, than the windows of heaven were opened, and the dove-like Spirit descended upon Him; while the voice of the Everlasting Father proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." When, fatigued by the severity of His labors, He cast Himself down "in the hinder part of the ship," and, amid the rocking of the billows, sunk into the sleep of utter weariness — who that had looked upon Him as He lay there, pale, worn, exhausted — His head pillowed on a locker — the sky His covering — would have recognized in that prostrate form the Maker and Lord of earth and

sea? But when, awakened by the cry of His disciples, He rose from His hard couch, and looked forth on the angry surges, and stretching out his hand over them, pronounced those calm words of conscious power, "Peace, be still!" the Omnipotent stood disclosed; and the hushed winds, and the shining stars, and the glassy waters, and the saved vessel speeding to the shore, bore witness to His presence. More distinct and impressive still were these attestations in the hour which consummated His atoning sacrifice. On the cross, the cup of scorn which He was to drink was filled to the brim. In that death of shame, He reached the lowest depth through which He was to pass. But where His glory was most obscured, there also it was most declared. The quaking earth, the shrouded skies, the shuddering universe, paid homage to the dying Redeemer.

As the mission of Jesus ended, so it began, amid supernatural confirmations. True it is that no material tokens signaled His arrival. This fallen planet rolled along its orbit, undisturbed by the visit of its Creator. Human affairs moved in their wonted course. The whole circle of terrestrial things gave no hint that the mightiest event of the centuries had just taken place. There were no preparations to receive Him—no stir of the elements, no greetings of men, to hail and welcome Him.

The dwellers in Bethlehem slumbered on, unconscious that their lowly hamlet had been made memorable for all the ages as the birth-spot of the Hope of the ages. Even the descendants of David assembled there knew not that David's Son and Heir, the long-expected King, had entered on His reign. But though the world which he came to save slept in its darkness, unheeding, unresponsive, Heaven was not silent. Its joy swelled over the empyreal battlements, and swept, in rapturous hosannas, down to earth.

Eastward from Bethlehem lies a region of hills and deep gorges, which from the earliest times has been devoted to pasturage. Here the youthful David kept his father's sheep, and in his frequent contests with the prowling tenants of those wild glens acquired the valor and hardihood which rendered him in after years the most renowned warrior of his race. In the same locality, on the night in which the Saviour was born, shepherds were guarding their flocks; and to them seraphic voices brought the glorious intelligence. They were awake, while all others were locked in forgetfulness; and it is to the wakeful only that communications of grace are sent.

It may, at the first glance, strike us with surprise, that the angels should have proclaimed their message in so retired a scene, and to men who,

from their solitary life and humble calling, were so little likely to spread it abroad, or to win for it belief. We might think that the announcement would have been far more commanding and effective had its celestial bearers gone, with their train of dazzling light, to the Holy City, and, pouring forth their triumphant song from the pinnacle of the temple, electrified the sleeping multitudes below with the news of Messiah's birth. But such a mode of publication would have been utterly at variance with the character of Christ's future ministry. He shunned ostentatious display — never seeking the public gaze — never courting the wonder of crowds. He moved among the abodes of men only as a Divine Teacher and Healer, coming forth but to succor and bless, and withdrawing into solitude when His work was done. The lonely mountain-side, and the shore of the silent lake, were His favorite resorts; and there, remote from noise and tumult, He passed the still hours in communion with His Father. And hence the proclamation of His appearance in the thronged streets of Jerusalem, or under any other imposing circumstances, would have been in violent contradiction to His whole spirit and conduct.

Nor would a procedure of this kind have suited well with the purpose of His coming. That purpose was to bring peace — peace to the soul, peace to the

nations. But peace harmonizes best with the quiet and seclusion of rural surroundings, and is alien to the turmoil of the world's great centres. This thought a celebrated painter has worked out with consummate skill. Taking for his theme the return of peace after the uproar and carnage of war, he has pictured a soft, green meadow, dotted over with grazing sheep—a broken cannon lying on the ground, and a lamb, led by a little child, licking its dumb mouth. There is truth as well as beauty in the conception. Peace loves the deep woods, the grassy vales, the calm river, the voiceless hills, the hush of night, and the placid heaven overarching all. There is her chosen retreat, her appropriate home. There her truest votaries have ever been found. Fitly indeed did the angel messengers select such a scene, when they left the ethereal realms to make known to men the advent of the Prince of Peace. The time, the place, the tidings, the listeners, were all in unison.

We cannot doubt, moreover, that these lowly watchers in the wilderness were better prepared than the denizens of the Jewish metropolis to comprehend and welcome the message. Their silent converse with Nature and with God had awakened in them an earnest longing for “for the Consolation of Israel,” and a perception of the spiritual bearings of His office, unknown to the frequenters of the

Temple and the Synagogue. The priests and rulers, the teachers and expounders of the Law, who gave tone to religious opinion, cherished, it is true, the expectation of a Messiah, and disputed much about the time and manner of His appearance. But their views, however divergent, were altogether carnal. They looked only for temporal benefits — for a Hero-King, — coming in pomp and power to release them from the yoke of their foreign oppressors, and set up an earthly sovereignty that should dominate the world. The shepherds, on the other hand, dwelling apart from the speculations of the schools, had obtained a deeper insight into the meaning of the Messianic Promise, and profounder ideas of the Deliverer whom it foretold. They belonged to the devout few, scattered over the land — mostly poor and illiterate — whose receptive souls God had taught, and who were waiting in pious hope for His salvation. No wonder that the angel-heralds, turning away from the worshippers of their own wisdom — from Scribe and Rabbi, from the palaces of the unbelieving great — carried the burden of their joy to the simple keepers of flocks, out in the lone fields. It was in accordance with the method of Divine dispensation. It has always been so. It is so now. The things of Christ are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. The same worldly bias and intellectual pride, which so often

indispose the rich and cultured of our own times to receive the Gospel, were equally active among the Jews. The educated classes were either infidel Sadducees, denying a future state, and man's moral need; or self-righteous Pharisees, steeped in tradition and ritualism. But these wanderers in the mountains were of a nobler strain, with minds less warped by prejudice, less fettered by material prepossessions, more teachable, more serious, more pervaded by a sense of personal guilt, more ready, therefore, to accept Christ in His highest character as a Redeemer from sin. Heaven is nigh to the humble and sincere in heart; and from it now comes, to souls prepared and waiting, the glad assurance that the mercy so fervently desired has been fulfilled.

Let us imagine the scene, and endeavor to sketch it in its living reality. In some quiet glade, bright with fresh verdure, skirted with olives and sycamores, and watered by a murmuring brook, the shepherds have chosen their watching-place for the night. Their flocks are collected about them—some feeding, some lying down in groups, some straying up the sides of the ravine, or along the avenues among the trees. The sky is cloudless; and the full moon, rising above the distant heights of Moab, sheds its mild beams upon the landscape, making every brown crag, and gnarled trunk, and

leaf, and dew-drop, quiver and glisten in the silvery sheen. Slowly the hours wear on; deep midnight is over the earth; yet those faithful guardians yield not to slumber. Reclining on a green bank, whence they can survey their charge, they converse together on the subject dearest to their hearts — the promised redemption of Israel — meditate on the predictions respecting it, and ponder the signs which betoken its near approach. While they thus speak and muse, suddenly a flood of celestial radiance is poured around them, dimming the stars with its lustre, and bringing out into distinct view cliff and valley, mountain and plain, stream and forest. Astonished and appalled, they start to their feet, and gaze upward; when, lo! above them, hovering with outspread wings, appears a shining form, looking down upon them with eyes in which the soft light of love and sympathy blends with the majestic glance of the immortals. But before they can express their terror, from the lips of the glorious visitant come words whose music, strange till then to human ears, the redeemed shall echo forever, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Oh! the blissful news! Oh! the wondrous story! Can they believe it? Has the long-deferred day of Mercy dawned at last? How

their souls dilate as they take in the mighty truth, and catch glimpses of its import to themselves, to their countrymen, to all the kindreds of the earth! Little time, however, is allowed them for such thoughts. In an instant, another marvel meets their sight, and renews their amazement. There is no longer one bright form above them, but many. The luminous air is full of heavenly harpers, and all alive with their melody. As often in earthly anthems a single voice introduces the performance, and is followed by choir and orchestra in a grand burst of harmony; so Gabriel opens the Hymn of the Nativity with his magnificent solo, rehearsing the birth of Jesus; and then the whole seraphic host breaks forth in the exulting chorus, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; good-will toward men." Never before have mortals heard a strain like this. Rich and joyous were the hosannas which the sons of God shouted over the new-born world. Sweet to the homeless and the captive were the notes which the Jubilee trumpet pealed along the hills of Palestine. But richer, sweeter far, falls the angel-song on the hearts of those midnight watchers, and on the ear of a listening universe. It celebrates the ushering in of the new Era of light and happiness. It tells of sin expiated and forgiven; of harmony restored between earth and heaven; of God magnified on high; of man redeemed below.

And it is the prelude to songs yet loftier and more entrancing, which, in the realms of bliss, will be chanted by ransomed millions through eternal ages.

The chorus of the angels distributes itself into three parts, corresponding to the three-fold aspect of the Mediatorial economy. Glancing down the vista of the ages, it surveys the progressive development of that economy, and sings its triumphs as they appear in the fuller unfolding of the Divine perfections, the restoration of peace to a disordered world, and the establishment of that new order of moral administration in which the favor of the All-Holy can be extended to sinful men. Over the inauguration of issues so momentous well might the angelic lyres ring out their loudest pæan; and well may we, whose all for time and eternity is embraced in those issues, take up the theme, and strive to catch something of its spirit and import.

In the redemptive work of Christ the glory of God finds its highest expression. The essential glory of God, like His nature, is absolute and incapable of change. No force of circumstances, no concurrence of events, can increase or diminish it. As He is ever the same, — perfect, all-sufficient, infinite, — His glory must ever remain immutable and complete. But that glory as it is unveiled to His creatures — as it is seen in the outgoings of His agency — may appear in lights clearer or more ob-

scure, according to the forms of its manifestation. In this respect, and in this alone, can we speak of it as greater or less.

The glory of Jehovah is displayed in all the operations of His hand. Every forthputting of His energy is radiant with it. In the domains of creation and of providence — in the formation and continued upholding of all worlds and of all beings — His power, wisdom and beneficence are revealed in characters so distinct and emphatic, that no eye can fail to read their lesson. On every part of the vast temple of nature that lesson is inscribed. Every order of existence, animate or inanimate, echoes it. It is the hymn of the universe — the tribute which all life sends up to the Giver and Preserver of all life. The heavens declare His glory. Sun, and moon, and stars, and planets, sing it in their courses. Each rolling orb, each blazing meteor, is vocal with it. From the City of the great King — the centre and capital of His dominions — to the farthest globe that skirts the empty void, the whole circle of created things proclaims the praise of the One Maker and the One Sustainer. And even this lower sphere, on which the deep shadows of sin have fallen, obscuring the Divine munificence, and arresting its outflow, bears nevertheless no feeble witness to the glory of Him who clothed it with its original brightness, and who, in its degradation, still governs and

blesses it. Shrouded as it is in moral darkness, and scarred as it is with the marks of righteous judgment, the honor of the Almighty is yet the prevailing exhibition throughout its mingled scenes, and the grandest refrain of its multitudinous voices. The seasons in their change repeat it. Day unto day uttereth speech of it, and night unto night showeth knowledge. Stormy winds are its trumpeters. The thunder peals it. The ocean swells it with its solemn bass. The breeze whispers it. Hills and valleys, rocks and trees, shimmering leaves and blushing flowers, babbling rills and gliding rivers, are all tuneful with it; and earth, though outcast and a wanderer, joins her unfallen sisters in showing forth the greatness and loving kindness of the universal Father.

But these revelations of the Divine character in the realms of matter, and on the platform of providential superintendence, however striking in themselves, do not bring out all its effulgence, nor give to it the noblest exemplification of which it is susceptible. The glory which they unfold is not "glory in the highest." When Omnipotence has fashioned the worlds from nothingness, and Wisdom has balanced them in their orbits, and Benevolence has peopled them with conscious being, and Bounty has poured out its stores to supply the needs of its unnumbered pensioners, and an Eye all-seeing and

a Hand all-controlling have directed the complex mechanism of creation to its appointed ends, there yet remains a grander, loftier manifestation — the going forth of all these attributes for the rescue of the lost. God is glorious, unspeakably glorious, in the emanations of His life-giving power with which He has strewed immensity; in the overflowing fulness that feeds His dependent offspring; in the love that rejoices in their happiness; in the omniscience that guides the affairs of His boundless empire. But in devising a method by which men, who have broken away from their allegiance to Him, may be recovered and saved, He has set forth His perfections in their most resplendent and wondrous aspect. Redemption is His sublimest work. It has depths which no finite line can fathom, heights to which no angel's wing can soar, breadths which no glance but His own can take in. Here we see the Eternal Sovereign delivering to death His Only Begotten Son, to open the way of life to those who, by their contempt of His authority and their abuse of His goodness, deserved to perish. Here is the triumph of Grace — here the victory of Love. Here the claims of Justice, and the rights of Majesty, and the inviolability of Holiness, are all guarded and vindicated; while Mercy, accredited and sanctioned by atoning blood, is free to sound abroad her proclamation of amnesty, and proffer the blessedness of

heaven to every sinner that believeth. Oh, the riches of God's remedial scheme! Oh, the abysses of glory in the great Propitiation! Before the marvel of the Cross all other marvels are dwarfed. Compared with its splendors, all other splendors grow dim. It stands amid the moral universe, the radiating centre of light, and hope, and joy, illustrating whatever is dark in the Divine economy, and attracting to itself the supreme regards of the intelligent creation. And when the power of that Cross shall have wrought its final results — when the spiritual transformations which it achieves shall infold every tribe and kindred of our race — when this sunk planet shall have been lifted by it from the gulf of rebellion, and hung once more to its Maker's throne — how transcendent the glory which will then be ascribed to "God in the highest!" It will be the glory of a world recovered — the glory of multitudes which no man can number raised from guilt and woe to everlasting purity and happiness — a glory that, in the heaven of heavens, will constitute the theme of that mighty symphony — never ceasing, ever new — of which the Bethlehem song was the first opening measure.

But not alone in its celestial relations do the angels contemplate the Redeemer's birth. They hail it as the dawn of "peace on earth" — the entrance upon this arena of conflict of a great reconcil-

ing force, by which the disorders of humanity shall be repaired, and repose and harmony succeed to the dissonance of strife and the turmoil of passion. This beautiful world, over whose virgin face God breathed His holy calm, sin has converted into a scene of fierce discord and tumult — a wide battlefield of moral antagonisms. There is war between man and his Creator; there is war between man and nature; there is war between man and society; there is war in man's own heart. The whole domain of mortality, like the ocean when the tempest bursts upon it, is convulsed and upheaved by the collisions of interest, the struggles of ambition, the clash of rival lusts, the greed, the hatred, the violence of beings who, in forsaking their God, have forsaken all rest. How dreadful have been the consequences of transgression! With what dire evils and direr fears has man's depravity surrounded man's terrestrial abode! Want, and crime, and perturbation, and sorrow, encompass him below; while above him frowns an angry Heaven, portending retribution!

Upon this dark and troubled state Jesus comes to shed peace. To the carrying out of His gracious purpose, the demands of the broken law, and the alienation of the human heart from God, oppose a double barrier. But the might of His atonement removes every obstruction. By taking upon Him-

self the sins of men, and suffering the penalty which they deserved, He has honored the justice of the Most High, and satisfied all its requirements. And the subduing power of His death, brought home by the Holy Spirit to the consciousness of the believing soul, melts its estrangement, and changes its enmity into love. Thus, by faith in Christ, the sinner finds the peace of acceptance and pardon. No longer roaming in the unrest of guilt and condemnation, he draws nigh to the Divine Source of peace, and drinks health and gladness from its living fountains. He is at peace with God, and God with him. The wall of righteous displeasure on the one side, and of depraved aversion on the other, is broken down; and the offended Father and the offending child meet in a blissful reunion. He is at peace with himself. A new principle of life — the heaven-born element of love, and hope, and joy — has been enthroned within him; and its presence stills the uproar of the carnal affections, the agitations of remorse, and the forebodings of doom. At peace with God through the justifying merits of the Saviour — at peace with himself through the cleansing grace of the Sanctifier — his whole being is bathed in a tranquillity kindred with that of the blessed. An atmosphere of peace envelops and pervades him. Above, around, within — all is peace. The heavens smile peace; the earth is full

of peace ; the air breathes it ; the brooks murmur it ; the trees wave it in every rustling bough ; the mountains shout it to each other ; and land and sea, the beaming arch of day, the starry vault of night, the myriad voices of Nature, respond in sympathy, when the Judge of all pronounces peace, and the witnessing Comforter seals it to the soul. Oh ! where, in all the world, shall peace be found so rich, so perfect, so enduring as that which the Gospel gives ? There is peace when the roar of battle has died away, and the slain lie pale and cold under the pitying skies. There is peace when the storm is over, and the wrecks strew the shore. There is peace when the hurricane has passed, leaving havoc and ruin in its pathway. There is peace when some dread hour in life's conflict has gone by, though the clouds may return after the rain, and the struggle be renewed to-morrow. But how empty, how transient are these, in comparison with the peace which the Lord of Peace confers on all who receive Him ! The peace which Jesus brings is pure, solid, lasting, independent of outward circumstances, disturbed by no hostile influence ; a peace which, while it elevates man's temporal condition, meets the deepest yearnings of his spiritual nature, and gilds all the scenes of his wayfaring with the pledge of eternal peace hereafter.

This peace is the great want of our suffering race.

Let it only become universal, and the woes with which human wickedness has so long scourged the world will disappear; selfishness and wrong, oppression and war, will cease; order will spring out of confusion, violence give place to love; and the golden bond of Christianity unite in one vast brotherhood all the nations of the earth. And this delightful anticipation will yet be realized. The prophecy of the angels was not a poetic dream. It is to be fulfilled, fulfilled literally, fulfilled in its completeness. "Peace on earth"—hitherto a prediction, a hope—shall, in God's own time, be a glorious fact. He, whose purposes cannot fail, has decreed it. For this end Christ lived and died. For this end the Holy Spirit has come down. For this end the word of truth has been given. And all things are tending onward to its consummation. The march of events, the beckonings of Providence, the promises of Scripture, the covenant of redemption, the might of the Cross, point, with no doubtful meaning, to the arrival of that crowning epoch when the peace, begun at Bethlehem, shall reach all hearts, and cover the globe.

“Down the dark future, through long generations,
The echoing sounds grow fainter, and then cease;
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say ‘Peace!’

“Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of war’s great organ shakes the skies!
But beautiful as songs of the immortals
The holy melodies of love arise.”

“Good-will toward men” was the closing strain in the heavenly anthem. This is the climax of the whole — the key-stone in the all-embracing arch of Divine Mercy. Here is the source and fountain-head of salvation. The dispensation of Grace, like the river of life which the apocalyptic seer beheld gushing out from beneath the throne of God and the Lamb, has its origin in the depths of Everlasting Love. It was because the heart of the All-Father yearned over His rebellious offspring, that He took thought for their recovery, and provided the means of its accomplishment. The compassions of Deity inaugurated the system of reconciliation developed in the mission of Jesus, and in the restoring agencies which it brought into action. By this exercise of sovereign benevolence, men are placed under an economy of good-will and favor; a new order of relations is established between them and the Just One from whom they have revolted; and on the ground of those relations overtures of forgiveness and amity may now go forth through all the length and breadth of our apostate humanity. And thus from God’s loving kindness proceeds that apparatus of redemption which, in its ultimate work-

ings, shall fill heaven with His glory, and earth with His peace.

The song is finished, and the celestial singers soar upward to their home; while their mortal listeners, recovering from the wonder and awe in which they have been held, say one to another, "Let us go now unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass." What sight awaits them there? A kingly child, born in a palace, clad in costly garments, a divine nimbus encircling its head, and troops of angelic ministers guarding its repose? No — a kingly child indeed, but housed in a manger, wrapped in coarse swathing bands, and attended only by the Virgin Mother and the faithful Joseph. Would the wise men of Jerusalem have recognized their Messiah in a form so lowly, and in circumstances so unimposing? But these heaven-instructed seekers, looking beyond the outward and the carnal, behold in that obscure babe, cradled in want, un-honored, unknown, the Anointed of the Father, and with joyful reverence worship the Redeemer of the world.

Let us go with the shepherds to Bethlehem. He who lies there is our Saviour as well as theirs — the Lord of Jew and Gentile — the Hope of all ages and nations. From His abasement learn the depth of our own fall, since, to reach us, the Son of the Highest must stoop so low. Read in His humble

birth the condescension and love which brought Him from the throne of eternity, and made Him one with us and one of us, that by His suffering life and vicarious death He might raise us to His own holiness and blessedness. Welcome Him, embrace Him, adore Him. Bring to Him the offerings most precious in His sight—penitent and believing hearts, and living obedience. And then shall we see Him at last in the glory to which He has returned, and share that glory forever.

“When from thy beaming throne,
 O High and Holy One!
 Thou cam’st to dwell with those of mortal birth;
 No ray of living light
 Flashed on th’ astonished sight,
 To show the Godhead walked His subject earth.

“Thine was no awful form,
 Shrouded in mist and storm,
 Of seraph, walking on the viewless wind;
 Nor didst Thou deign to wear
 The port, sublimely fair,
 Of angel-heralds, sent to bless mankind.

“Made like the sons of clay,
 Thy matchless glories lay
 In form of feeble infancy concealed;
 No pomp of outward sign
 Proclaimed the Power Divine;
 No earthly state the Heavenly Guest revealed.

“Thou didst not choose thy home
 Beneath a lordly dome;
No regal diadem wreathed thy baby brow,
 Nor on a soft couch laid,
 Nor in rich vest arrayed,
But with the poorest of the poor wert Thou!”

CHAPTER III.

THE YEAR-SABBATH.

“IN THE DAY OF ATONEMENT SHALL YE MAKE THE TRUMPET SOUND THROUGHOUT ALL YOUR LAND.”— *Leviticus xxv. 9.*

AMONG the social institutions of the Hebrews, none were more significant and beautiful than the Year of Jubilee. By the ordinance of God given to Moses, every fiftieth year was to be set apart as a Sabbath — a season of hallowed repose and freedom — in which every debt was to be cancelled, every bondman released, every alienated inheritance restored. However important this arrangement may have been in an economic and temporal point of view, there cannot be a question that it was appointed chiefly as a type, foreshowing the spiritual redemption of men by the Gospel. Our Saviour accordingly began His public teaching on earth by declaring that He came to proclaim “the Acceptable Year of the Lord,” and that in the Salvation which He published was fulfilled all that the ancient Jubilee had prefigured.

It is the design of the present sketch to delineate this period under its evangelic aspects.

In the very circumstances that attended its ushering in, there was a clear looking forward to the epoch of Messiah. The grand intent of the Levitical Economy was to remind those on whose behalf it was instituted, that they were transgressors against the Divine Law, and, therefore, stood in need of mercy. For the inculcation of this great truth, many impressive ordinances and symbols were appointed. Prominent among these was the offering of animals in sacrifice, as a means of expiating guilt, and propitiating the favor of God. In addition to the daily and ordinary sacrifices, it was enacted that a special sacrifice should be presented once every year for the sins of the whole people. It was at the close of this annual atonement that the Jubilee was to commence; and the ceremonies heralding its introduction were marked with peculiar solemnity. The high priest, having presented sin-offerings for himself and for the congregation, went with his censer and incense into the Holy of Holies—the inner Sanctuary, where dwelt the Shekinah, and where were the Cherubim and the Mercy-Seat—and there sprinkled the blood of the victims in the immediate presence of Jehovah. Having thus performed the two-fold work of atonement and intercession, he arrayed himself in the most splendid robes of his office, and coming forth before the assembled multitudes, pronounced on them the ben-

ediction of the Lord. The priests and Levites, who had been waiting his return, when they saw him appear, and heard the blessing from his lips, gave a blast with their trumpets, as a signal that then had begun the glad Year of Release — the Sacred Sabbath of the land.

We cannot even glance at these observances, without perceiving how strikingly they set forth the office and work of the Redeemer, and the manner in which His Gospel was introduced to the world. In the arrangements of that Better Covenant, under which it is our happiness to live, Christ is at once the offering High Priest, and the atoning Victim. "By His own blood, He has entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." And when on the cross He bowed His head, and cried, "It is finished," He proclaimed to the universe that the mighty struggle between wrath and mercy was past, and the curse due to transgression forever removed.

It is not unimportant to notice here, that the period at which our Lord suffered, was the very year, and the very time of the year, assigned for the opening of the Jubilee; a circumstance which clearly shows that this institution had been intended to shadow forth that long-expected era, when the "High Priest of our profession," having made an end of sin by the one offering of Himself, should

enter into the invisible Sanctuary of Heaven, into the presence of His Father and our Father, there to exhibit the memorials of His sacrifice, and plead for the pardon of an apostate race. On the day of Pentecost, He came forth from the secret shrine of His glory, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed His blessing on the people. And then His Apostles took up the trumpet of the Gospel, and began to sound that spiritual Jubilee, whose publication shall never cease, till the triumphs of mercy are complete, and the song of salvation shall ascend from a ransomed world.

How emphatically do the facts which have been described indicate the absolute necessity of the expiatory work of the Mediator, in order to prepare the way for the promulgation of pardon and peace. As the Jubilee could be proclaimed only on the Day of Atonement, and as it could be ushered in only by sacrifice and intercession; so the glad tidings of redemption could never have been announced to men, had not Christ died for our offences, and risen again for our justification. The whole testimony of Inspiration declares this to be an immutable law of the Divine procedure. To cherish any hope of salvation apart from the atoning merits of Jesus, is to contravene the fixed appointment of the All-Governor. Had not the blood of the great Propitiation been carried into the presence of Eternal

Majesty, the gates of Mercy would have remained forever closed. Before the awful veil that shut them out from God, the multitude must have waited unblessed. No trumpet peal of deliverance could have broken upon this world of sin and woe. Every voice would have been silent, every hope withered, every human being abandoned to condemnation; and over the whole sphere of mortality Death and Despair would have reigned without limit and without end. But the Sacrifice has been offered. The Intercession has prevailed. The Blessing has been spoken. The year of Jubilee has come; and on every side the heralds announce its arrival, and summon the outcast children of earth to share the immunities which it brings.

The great Year-Sabbath carried with it many important advantages and benefits, that belonged to no other period; and it is interesting to observe how accurately they all symbolized the blessings conferred by the redemptive work of our Emmanuel.

One of these was the universal extinction of debt. The Hebrew code ordained that at every seventh year, and at every fiftieth, the creditor should freely relinquish all pecuniary claims against a brother Israelite. The operation of this beneficent law must have brought to vast numbers unspeakable relief. Debt! How oppressive is its burden! How keen the anguish which it inflicts! What corroding care

and fear, what painful humiliation, must weigh down the man who, with any feeling of independence and self-respect, finds himself struggling under obligations which he has no power to throw off! This experience, so common and so bitter in our own times, was little less common, and none the less bitter, in the days of old. Human nature changes not its instincts with the changing ages, nor with difference of country and of occupation. To the Hebrew, tilling his few mountain acres, or tending his scanty flock of sheep and goats, thirty centuries ago, the fetters of pecuniary embarrassment were as galling as they now are to the merchant prince whose ships traverse every sea, and whose warehouses groan with their fulness. Perhaps his habits of life, and the intense love of freedom which they fostered, rendered him even more sensitive to the pain of such circumstances than any one can be in our more artificial civilization.

Let us, then, go back in thought to the time of Samuel or of David, and, mingling in the home life of the Tribes, watch the working of this ordinance in a state of society so simple and natural. Here is a man who has inherited from his ancestors a narrow strip of land on the rocky slopes of Mount Ephraim. He cultivates a small vineyard on the hillside, sows a few patches of wheat and barley, and has a few cows and bullocks grazing in his little meadow.

With health, and good seasons, he could supply the modest wants of his household, and escape the necessity of debt. But calamities have befallen him. For several years, the harvests have been unfavorable. Hot, rainless summers have dried up his fields, and withered their products. Winds and tempests have destroyed the fruit of his vines. Accidents and distempers have ravaged his herds. And to these disappointments severe domestic affliction has been added. Sickness has invaded his home, prostrated his own strength, and borne some of his loved ones to the grave. Under the pressure of his needs, he has been compelled to contract debts, hoping that more auspicious days would enable him to discharge them. But those days come not. His creditors grow stern and exacting, demand immediate payment, and threaten to eject him from his heritage, cast him into prison, and sell his children into slavery. Still he struggles on. It is hard to leave the spot where he was born, where his fathers dwelt, where his kindred lie buried — hard to see his family houseless, and himself an outcast. Yet, toil as he may, he cannot master the difficulties that environ him. The incumbrance is too heavy; the danger too near and too pressing. But just as he is on the point of giving up all further effort, and resigning himself to despair, the morning of the Jubilee breaks over the land. The

joyful acclamations, that welcome its coming, swell out on the air, and reach him among the hills. Blessed sounds are they to him! They tell him that his trials are ended, his home secure; and that, by the benign decree of Israel's God, he may now go forth to his daily labor, safe from the peril that has menaced him so long.

Go with me to the debtor's jail in Jerusalem, and look at another on whom adversity has dealt blows still more terrible. Liable to claims which he could not meet, he was stripped of all that he possessed. There was no kinsman rich enough, or generous enough, to redeem his property, or become surety for his person; and his creditors, having the power, shut him up in prison. Many years have passed since then. He was brought here a young man, strong and active; he is now old, white-haired, and feeble. During all the dreary interval that he has languished in confinement, no word of sympathy has met his ear, no voice of friend or relative cheered his solitude. His wife, crushed down by sorrow, died long ago. His children are scattered, he knows not where. Whether they still live, or have followed their mother to the realm of silence, no tidings have come to tell him. In his long exclusion from the outer world, his former life appears to him like a dream — a dim, far-off light, which he can faintly descry across the wide, inter-

vening expanse of darkness. He has lost all reckoning of time — has forgotten to note the slow years, as they drag wearily by him — forgotten that the hour of deliverance is drawing nigh. The day of Atonement dawns in the heavens, but he knows it not. The sounds of gladness and rejoicing that greet its arrival, arrest not his attention. He hears the loud trumpets proclaiming the Year-Sabbath, without any thought of their meaning. The door of his cell is thrown open; he is told that the Jubilee has come, and that he is free. Rising listlessly from his bed of straw, he looks round amazed and stupefied. The truth at last flashes upon him; and with a low, trembling cry of thanksgiving, he goes forth to tread the green earth once more, to feel the soft breath of Spring, and exult in the bright sun and sky.

Call to mind how many cases, analogous to those now supposed, there must have been in Israel at each recurrence of the Year of Release, and you will be able to form some conception of the blessings connected with that sacred season. Nor can you fail to perceive with what force and beauty the feature which we have considered illustrates the grace of the Gospel. The Scriptures frequently describe our spiritual condition under the figure of indebtedness. We are represented as owing ten thousand talents, and having nothing to pay. By

our numerous and aggravated sins, we have come under tremendous liabilities to the justice of God, and have incurred an amount of obligation which no human arithmetic can compute, and no human efforts can liquidate. Judgment has been entered against us in the court of Heaven, execution issued; and the stern messenger, Death, only waits the Divine signal to bear us away to the dungeons of Hell. But in this fearful exigency, the Saviour has interposed for our rescue. By faith in His atoning sacrifice, our mighty debt is cancelled; the uttermost farthing is paid; the demands of the law are satisfied; and through the suretyship of Him who died for us, we stand exonerated before the tribunal of Infinite Holiness. "By Him all that believe are justified from all things." "He hath forgiven us all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, that was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross." Who can measure the depth of mercy involved in this free remission of our sins? What rich thing, or costly thing, is there in all the world, that can equal its preciousness? To be forgiven by Him who might have held us to a strict account; to be absolved by Him who might have condemned us; to hear that very Voice, which might have thundered forth the inflexible demand, "Pay me what thou owest," speak to us in the melting accents of

compassion, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee" — what thought can conceive, what words express, the value of a blessing like this? Oh, what a burden is lifted from the soul, when it receives the grace that acquits it for eternity! And this grace is proffered to all who will come to the altar of Propitiation, and plead the merits of the accepted Mediator. No debt can be too vast, no guilt too enormous, to be taken away by that "Blood of Jesus," which cleanseth from all sin. He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

In the Year-Sabbath there was an end of bondage. Among the Jews, as well as among other oriental nations, the personal services of an insolvent debtor, and those of his children, were often sold to meet the claims which he was otherwise unable to pay. Other causes also frequently led to a loss of freedom; so that many were in the condition of bondmen. Hebrew slavery, though of the mildest form, was slavery still, and subjected its victims to much privation and hardship. For such cases, the institution of the Jubilee contained a most benevolent provision. Liberty was then proclaimed throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof; and every Israelite who had been reduced to servitude, was released, and sent back to his own family, and to the possession of his fathers.

Transport yourself to the age and to the theatre of this law, and mark the going forth of its merciful power. See that slave delving and sweltering in the hot cane-fields of Jericho; condemned to toil through the long summer day under a burning sun, without rest, and without reward. His childhood was passed on the breezy heights of Carmel, among bosky glades, babbling brooks, the singing of birds, and the odor of flowers. There he grew up, a bold, free-hearted youth, erect and tall, with an eye keen as the falcon's, and a foot fleet as the roe which he chased on the mountain side. But misfortune, swifter still, overtook him. A ruthless claimant, to whom his parents were indebted, seized him, and doomed him to bondage. He was torn from the haunts which he loved, from father and mother, from brothers and sisters, from the maiden to whom he was betrothed — never to see them more. Since that mournful day, he has served many masters, and lived in many places, but always a stranger, always homeless, with nothing that he could call his own but his woes. Look at him now. Slavery has bowed his strong frame, and stiffened his elastic limbs, and on the brow, once so joyous, sits hopeless gloom. As he bends to his task, what sad memories are busy within him! He thinks of the dear ones far away — of his happy boyhood — of all that he might have been — of the hard lot that has

been his instead — and tears, bitter tears, are on his bronzed cheek. But while he thus muses and weeps, his ear catches the distant note of a trumpet. Now it is nearer, louder. It comes rolling down the gorges of the wilderness in the way toward Jerusalem, bounding from cliff to cliff, and pouring its jocund waves upon the plain below. Others take up the strain, and send it from wall and house-top, from crag and valley, till the very air seems alive with it. For a moment he listens uncertain; then shouting, "The Jubilee, the Jubilee!" tears off the badge of his servitude — stands up a freeman — and with the stride of a giant, journeys back to the scenes where his heart has ever been.

The inauguration of the Year-Sabbath was thus, to myriads in Israel, the starting-point of a new life. We have just seen, in our own land, the chains of enslaved millions burst asunder, and the curse of bondage lifted from a whole race. And though the emancipation has sprung, not from the calm bosom of Philanthropy, but from the black womb of Civil War — born in battle, and baptized in the blood of our sons and brothers — yet we have rejoiced in it, and have rightly hailed it as a most wonderful development of that overruling Providence, which "out of seeming evil still educes good." Shall we not, then, acknowledge both the wisdom and the benevolence of that statute of the Almighty which,

not with the rush of contending armies, but by the peaceful majesty of organic law, broke every shackle, and let the oppressed go free? And, especially, must we not recognize in it a most expressive emblem of the silent yet resistless energy with which our Divine Liberator strikes from us the darker tyranny of Evil?

By nature, we are all the subjects of a moral thralldom as grinding as it is criminal. We are the slaves of our own depravity, "sold under sin," and "led captive by the Devil at his will." But the Cross of Christ touches our chains, and they are shivered into fragments; His grace rends the servility from our spirits, and we walk forth in the joy of a blessed emancipation. The freedom which the Gospel gives, consists in deliverance from the condemning sentence of Heaven's law, and from the despotism of our own corruptions; in the renewal and sanctification of our hearts; in breaking our affections away from sense and earthliness, and raising them to eternal things; in the possession of high spiritual privileges and immunities; in admission to fellowship with God; and in the hope of a blissful immortality. This is the liberty with which Christ makes His people free—this the glorious manumission of the sons of God. We venerate civil liberty, and deem it the fairest flower that can grow on the soil of nations; and the spots where

heroes have planted that flower, sheltered it by their might, and watered it with their blood, are to us holy shrines, whither our hearts ever turn in reverence and worship. But what is the noblest enfranchisement which patriotism in its grandest outgoings has wrought, compared with that which our Redeemer achieved for us on the battle-ground of Calvary, amid groans, and agonies, and streaming gore? Political freedom can reach only the body, and is in its very nature precarious and uncertain, liable to be overthrown by invasion or anarchy, and changing with the ceaseless change of all terrestrial things. But here is liberty for the soul — liberty which no enemy can destroy — liberty which will survive the shocks and revolutions of ages — liberty which confers on all who receive it the rights and franchises of citizens of heaven, and crowns them with the heritage of glory.

“He is the free man whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides.”

The Jubilee brought with it the restoration of property. At its coming, possessions which had been alienated by reason of debt or other unfortunate circumstances, reverted to their original owners. As we glance over the brief record of this arrangement in the Sacred Volume, its importance may not awaken particular attention. But let us

pause for a moment, and consider the vast amount of happiness which it must have produced. Picture to yourselves an Israelite, thrust out by adversity from the inheritance of his ancestors. He has struggled hard to keep the old home; but losses have fallen heavily upon him, and he must depart. The roof beneath which he was born, the streams by which he has walked, the fields he has tilled, the trees in whose shade he has reclined, the graves where his fathers sleep, all must be left, and left, alas! in the keeping of strangers. He casts one long, farewell look on the scene which he loves so well, and then, with wife and little ones, goes forth an exile. Years pass on. Farther and farther he wanders, finding no resting-place, and "dragging at each remove a lengthening chain." But, hark! a trumpet-blast breaks upon the air. It is caught up and repeated from city and hamlet, from hill-top and glen, from highways and byways, till the whole land rings with the joyous echo. The wanderer hears it. His heart knows and feels it. It is the Jubilee signal. Oh, with what rapture does he now hasten back to the home once more his own! Old friends greet his return; old familiar faces smile upon him; hands that he grasped in youth now grasp his in happy welcome. The days of his exile are over. He is among his kindred again. Again he dwells where his fathers dwelt; again he sits

under the vines and olives which they planted; again he tills the fields which they tilled, sowing where they sowed, reaping where they reaped, till he is laid by their side in the sepulchre. Thousands of such instances must have occurred in Palestine on every return of the Sacred Year. In all directions, similar groups might be seen hurrying, with exulting steps, to take possession of the homes from which poverty and reverses had ejected them. Oh, what a thrill of gladness must that event have sent through the land!

And what an image is there here of our own restoration by the Gospel to the heritage which we have lost! Our condition, as fallen creatures, resembles that of the beggared Jew, driven out from his birthright. Our sins have stripped us of our all. The original holiness of our nature, the likeness and favor of God, our kindred with angels, our title to a blessed immortality, are gone, and gone beyond our power to recover. But the mercy of God has provided for us a Jubilee. By believing in His Only-Begotten Son, we receive back, aye, more than receive back, our alienated inheritance. We are again invested with a glorious property, and made rich with a wealth which empires could not bestow. We are not, indeed, permitted to return to the scenes of earth's pristine beauty — to bask in the sunshine of Eden Restored — breath-

ing its fragrant airs, canopied by a sky that knows no cloud, conversing with angels, and listening to the voice of God. Our possessions lie not in this mortal sphere. Would you learn what they are? Unroll the charter, and read, "Unto us are given exceeding great and precious promises." We are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." We are "begotten again, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "All things are yours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Such is the property which faith in Jesus confers on us; such the unsearchable riches with which man, once outcast and destitute, is endowed by the free mercy of the Gospel—riches which dignify and bless him forever.

The Year-Sabbath was intended to be a season of harmony and repose. During its continuance, the land was to rest, the implements of husbandry to be put away, and labor to cease, that social intercourse and kindly feeling might be cultivated without restraint. There was to be no strife, no oppression; all disputes were to be laid aside, all contentions abandoned; and society, in every rank, was to present one unbroken scene of brotherhood and peace.

How beautifully does this feature of the Sacred Year prefigure the results which Christianity cou-

templates. Its design is to impart to all who truly embrace it, a peace which comes from heaven, and is the earnest of heaven; and then to unite them to each other in one harmonious and holy fraternity. All its elements, all its tendencies, are those of union and love. It represents the redeemed of all ages and countries as forming one Body, animated by one Spirit, having "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." And this glorious ideal, once realized in the infancy of the Church, shall be realized again in her consummated maturity. The day, of which prophecy has so sweetly sung, is rapidly drawing on, when the Gospel in its purity shall be universally diffused, breathing wherever it comes concord and peace. Standing together on the platform of primitive Truth, the watchmen of Zion shall see eye to eye, and all her children be of one heart and of one mind. Error shall be banished from her borders, and theologic hate and sectarian division distract her no more. Throughout all her branches, in every clime, and under all forms of social development, she shall be inspired by one soul, and actuated by one purpose — the glory of her Master, and the welfare of the human race.

And as there shall be peace in the Church, so shall there be peace everywhere — peace in the home, peace in the neighborhood, peace among

nations, peace throughout the world. Mankind shall become one great family. Public and private animosities, the jar of conflicting interests, the opposition of classes, the insolence of the rich, the overbearing of the strong, shall be remembered only to excite wonder that they could ever have been. Every chain shall be broken. War shall be a forgotten trade. The thunder of artillery, and the uproar of battle, shall be exchanged for the hum of industry and the bustle of traffic. arsenals shall be converted into school-houses; battle-fields into sheep-walks. Cannon shall be melted into railroad iron, swords beaten into ploughshares, muskets into telegraph wire, bayonets into spinning needles. Soldiers, like the Man-eaters of old, will become an extinct species; and through all the wide expanse of society, there will be none to hurt or destroy; "for the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." Then will be the Jubilee of the Creation, the great Sabbath of the world. Over the face of humanity, long agitated by wrong, and struggle, and sin, shall come a holy calm; like the quiet of a still eventide after the turmoil of a tempestuous day, when the winds have gone down, and the clouds disappear, and the blue sky breaks forth, and the setting sun sprinkles gold over the smiling land and the sleeping waters. And this universal peace on

earth will be the prelude of everlasting peace in heaven.

One more evangelic analogy of the Year-Sabbath may be traced in the extent and fulness given to its proclamation. "Ye shall make the trumpet sound throughout all your land." The manner in which this was done, was very interesting and suggestive. As the time for proclaiming the Jubilee drew on, a company of priests was stationed at the door of the Tabernacle or Temple, each with a silver trumpet in his hand. The Levites in the cities and towns, and every householder in the nation, were also furnished with silver trumpets. When the hour had arrived, the company of priests sounded the appointed signal. Those in their immediate neighborhood repeated it. It was answered by the Levites and the inhabitants of the next town. And thus it was sent on from dwelling to dwelling, from city to city, from mountain to mountain, from tribe to tribe, till the farthest borders of the land echoed and reëchoed with the glad music.

The sounding of the silver trumpets was unquestionably a symbol of the proclamation of the Gospel. The ministers of Christ are commanded to publish redemption by His blood, and to invite the disinherited and the ruined to return to their Father's house. And in the work of spreading this message all the people of God are to bear part. The tidings of

mercy announced by the priests and Levites, are to be taken up by private Christians, and carried out into all the walks of life. At the fireside, in the Sabbath-School class, in the social circle, in the resorts of business, the trumpet is to be sounded. Neighbor should sound it to neighbor, village to village, city to city, land to land, until the most * distant and secluded spot on the globe has been penetrated by the joyful summons. And the hour is at hand when this blessed consummation shall be realized. The purposes of God, revealed in His word, assure us that the trumpet of the Christian Jubilee shall be heard through all nations, reverberating from empire to empire, from continent to continent, from hemisphere to hemisphere — wherever man is to be enlightened and saved. The Greenlander shall hear it amid his everlasting snows, and his heart shall grow warm at the sound. The down-trodden masses of Europe shall hear it, and shall rise up from under their burdens, and stand forth free in Christ. The thralls of Popery shall hear it, and shall hurl down "the Man of Sin," and trample on the shackles with which he has so long bound them. Our own Continent shall hear it, resounding from the icy homes of the Esquimaux, to the sunny glades of Mexico; from the populous commonwealths of the Atlantic, to the young settlements on the shores of the Pacific. The vast regions

of Spanish America shall hear it, echoing from the peaks of the Andes, swelling over the mighty plains of the Amazon, and floating far away under the beams of the Southern Cross. The millions of Asia shall hear it, and emerge from their darkness and degradation into the light of salvation. The African shall hear it, amid the foul orgies of his Fetish-worship, and shall put off his savage nature, and stand up in the dignity of a civilized and Christian man. Every island that gems the ocean shall hear it, and put on a richer loveliness. And "they that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in the great waters," shall hear it, mingling with the watch-bells, and sending its cheering notes far out over the listening main. Farther and faster shall spread the call, sweeter and louder shall grow the strain, till the whole earth shall be redeemed, and the voice of an emancipated world shall send up one universal hymn of praise to its Maker and Restorer. Who will not speed it on and on? Who will not put the trumpet to his lips, and sound and prolong the blast, till, like the walls of Jericho, every barrier shall fall, and the human race shall bow to the sceptre of the Prince of Peace?

Disciples of Jesus! Followers of Him who gave His life a ransom for the lost! behold the work which He appoints you. He has redeemed you

from guilt and ruin, and made you partakers of His salvation, that you might be witnesses of that salvation to the darkling and perishing. Fulfil His high behest. Publish, at home and abroad, the story of His Cross. Spread it through the length and breadth of your own land. Cause it to sound forth, as in other days, from the old sanctuaries among the mountains, where its last feeble echoes are now sinking into the silence of desolation. Tell it along the valleys, and by the rivers, where Trade and Industry have fixed their busy centres; and let its heavenly utterances swell out full and clear, above the noise of mundane toil, the clatter of the wheel, and the whirr of the spindle. Over the teeming West, over the war-wasted South, pour its life-giving truths, dispelling the moral gloom that shadows the one, and the Devil's Gospel that has dominated the other. To every clime and race make known the saving message; and join the chorus of the Church universal in bearing the Name of the Crucified over all the earth.

Angel of the Apocalyptic Vision! whom the rapt prophet of Patmos beheld flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to all the kindreds of men—hasten thy glorious flight. Peal out, O Trumpet of Redemption! along our storm-swept skies, ringing over land and

sea, proclaiming the end of sin, the end of travail, and heralding the birth of the new spiritual creation in which dwelleth righteousness.

“ Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true ;
Ring out the ages dark and base,
Ring in the ages crowned with grace.

“ Ring out the want, the woe, the crime,
The wrong and falsehood of the time,
The chains that hang on limb and mind ;
Ring in redress to all mankind.

“ Ring out the waning power of night,
Ring in the coming reign of light,
Ring in the world's long Jubilee,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEAK HOUR OF ELIJAH.

“WHAT DOEST THOU HERE, ELIJAH?”—1 *Kings* xix. 13.

 STRONG internal evidence of the Divine inspiration of the Bible may be drawn from the manner in which it describes the characters of good men. Were it a mere human production, its authors would doubtless have sought to give it credibility, by attributing the utmost excellence to the worthies whose lives they recorded. All their portraits of saints and prophets would have represented them as perfect without a fault, and immaculate without a stain. And this they would have done, lest the sins and failings of the persons whom they exhibited as the faithful servants of Jehovah should be employed as an argument against the truth of their system.

But how widely different is the method of Scripture! In its narratives of the righteous, it delineates them as indeed the friends of God, walking in His fear, and supremely devoted to His will. Yet, at the same time, it sets forth, with the most entire impartiality and truthfulness, their defects as well

as their virtues, and claims for them no exemption from the infirmities to which humanity is subject. Thus it evinces its harmony with facts, and with universal experience; and furnishes a clear proof of its origin from that infinite Being who is perfectly acquainted with the frailty of our nature, even after it has been renewed by His grace, and who knows that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

An instance illustrative of these remarks is presented to us in the history of the prophet Elijah. The Sacred Writers have portrayed few characters more distinguished for pure and lofty qualities. He was evidently a man of the most fervid zeal, of vast energy, of indomitable courage and constancy; displaying on all occasions an absorbing concern for the honor of God, and the interests of true religion.

The period in which he lived was one of great darkness and moral degeneracy. Ahab, the most wicked of Israel's kings, and Jezebel, his still more wicked queen—the daughter of a pagan prince, and herself a pagan—had employed all their royal power and authority to introduce and establish among their subjects the idolatrous worship of Baal. In this impious attempt they were but too successful. Almost the whole mass of the nation was corrupted by their influence; and the ordinances of Jehovah were well-nigh banished from the land.

Amidst this wide and deep apostasy, Elijah was called by God to lift up his voice of awful rebuke and warning. He uttered many predictions, all of which were strikingly fulfilled, and wrought numerous miracles in proof of his inspired commission. Instructed from on high, he caused all Israel to be gathered together at Mount Carmel, and summoned thither the priests of Baal whom Jezebel supported, in order that the pretensions of their deity to divine honors might be tested in the presence of the assembled people. And the method of decision which he suggested was so manifestly just, that his opponents could not decline it. Baal was held by his votaries to represent the element of fire, which they regarded as the principle and origin of life, and supposed to reside in the sun. His worship was thus a form of the Sun-Worship then so dominant throughout the East. When, therefore, the prophet proposed that two altars should be prepared — one for Baal, one for Jehovah — a slain bullock placed on each, but no fire applied; and that the God, who answered by sending fire to consume his own sacrifice, should alone be acknowledged as the true God — all assented to the fairness of the test. It was proving Baal on his own ground, and by his own element.

In this trial God signally sustained His servant, and vindicated His own claims to supreme homage.

While no miraculous flame descended on the altar of Baal, notwithstanding the protracted importunities and self-lacerations of his priests, on the altar of Jehovah which Elijah had reared, the fire of the Lord fell, consuming the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones on which it was laid, and even the very dust, and licking up the water that had been poured profusely over all, to render the event more clear and significant. Awed and convinced by this overwhelming manifestation of Divine power, the people fell on their faces, and exclaimed, "The Lord, He is the God, the Lord, He is the God." And then the prophet, fired with holy indignation, commanded all the priests of Baal to be seized, before the very face of the apostate king who had been their protector; and bringing them down to the brook Kishon, slew them there, in obedience to that statute of the Almighty which required that they who taught or practised idolatry should be put to death.

Now, it might well be supposed that the man who had dared all this, and who had witnessed such an amazing proof of God's presence and support, would never more quail before the frown of opposition, or the menace of infuriated wickedness. And yet what strange inconsistencies — what moments of weakness and defection — do the stanchest champions of truth and holiness sometimes exhibit!

When Jezebel heard what Elijah had done to her impious priests, she sent him a message, swearing by all her false gods to visit the same fate on himself before another day should close; and this heroic soldier of Heaven, this brave defender of the true religion, fresh from the field of victory, was frightened by the threat of a woman, who was then as powerless as she was base. Amid the clearest evidences of success—in the very hour of his most signal triumph—a feeling of faintness and of fear came over him, obscuring his faith, weakening his strength, and chilling the ardor of his courage. Under the impulse of this sudden and paralyzing terror, he abandoned the struggle with ungodliness, withdrew from the scene of conflict, and sought a hiding place for his life in the remote depths of the wilderness. How strong and overmastering must have been that onset of despondency, which could thus vanquish one habitually so bold, uncompromising, and faithful!

But God does not forsake His servants, even when in seasons of doubt and gloom they seem to forsake Him, and to give over their activity in His cause. As the weary prophet lay and slept under the shade of a juniper tree, it was not from its fruit, nor from the cool screen of its foliage, that refreshment came to him. An angel touched him, and showing him a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse

of water at his head, said to him, "Arise, and eat." A second time the celestial visitor appeared; and a second time was the miraculous food dispensed. So the Christain, cast down in spirit, and faltering in the battle with inward and with outward foes, often sinks into slumber beneath some earthly refuge, and hopes for rest in its shadow. But not in carnal resorts can he find true comfort. If any real support reaches his fainting soul, unseen hands from heaven minister it. Some glimpse of a promise flashing through the darkness—some drop from the River of Life falling on his parched lips—cheers and revives him. Oh, how invigorating is even a little bread prepared by God's fire, and a little water dipped from God's fountain! In the strength of that meat, Elijah went a long and toilsome journey, traversing, for forty days and nights, the wild gorges and rugged hills of Judea, and the vast stretches of the desert beyond, till he came to Horeb—the Mount of Divine Manifestation—where Jehovah talked with Moses, and proclaimed His law to Israel.

Yet, however impelled by a sense of need and dependence to seek the place where God had revealed Himself of old, he was still in no frame of mind to address the Holy One, and invoke the succor of Omnipotence. He was too despondent to pray; too full of earth-born tumult to venture

on communion with Heaven. Shrinking from the Divine Presence, he withdrew to a cave in the mountain, and there, amid its sombre depths, found a congenial lodging. What a picture is here of the doubting and tempted believer! Though his yearning heart may bring him to the spot where the Father of Mercy has recorded His name, and Jesus waits to hear and bless, yet, instead of drawing near and speaking out his wants, he shuts himself up in the cavern of silence, and sits brooding in its gloom, dark, cold, and joyless.

But when man is too despairing to speak to God, God speaks to man. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah, and said, What doest thou here?" Here, in this dumb, dismal hiding-place? "Go forth, and stand on the mount before the Lord." Come out into the day and into the sunshine, and from the high ground of faith behold the glory of my power and of my grace. Obedient to the summons, the prophet ascended the eminence made sacred for all the ages by the footprints of Deity. There a most impressive display of the might and awfulness of Jehovah met his startled vision. "The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord" — the Lord whose condescension could dispel his fears — "was not in the wind. And after the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord"

—the Lord whose faithfulness could remove his unbelief—“was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, came a fire; but the Lord”—the Lord whose love could melt his despair—“was not in the fire.” These exhibitions of Almightyness, however they might awaken wonder and dread, could not touch his heart, and inspire affection and confidence. They were forerunners and adumbrations of God—of God in His greatness and majesty; but they bore no tokens of God in His benignity and tenderness. Another manifestation followed, showing the real character of God, and attesting His presence. While the prophet stood trembling and amazed at the spectacle which had just passed before him, there came to his ears “a still small Voice”—the Voice of the Ever-Good and the Ever-Merciful—repeating the question, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” Kindness and gentle reproof were mingled in its low, thrilling tones. It seemed to say to him, “What trial, what sore pressure of need, brings thee hither? I commanded thee to declare my statutes, to defend my worship, to preach repentance to a sinful land, and denounce my judgments on Ahab and his idolatrous court. Why hast thou left thy work? Why art thou here?” “And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle,” as an expression of his humility and adoring reverence. He who had

looked, with awe indeed, yet with form erect, and brow uncovered, on the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, bent his veiled head in lowliest homage before those mild accents of a Father's rebuke and a Father's pity. As the soft breath of spring dissolves the chains of winter, and sets free the imprisoned flowers, so did the sweet whisper of God's love break from his spirit the fetters of distrust, and unbind the outgoings of faith and prayer. His lips were now opened. In answer to the inquiry so touchingly addressed to him, he poured forth the secret sorrow of his soul, and laid down at the feet of Infinite Compassion the burden that oppressed him. "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; for the children of Israel have broken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

The all-gracious One, the Captain of our Salvation, our Defender and Upholder, never breaks the bruised reed, nor turns away from the cry of our infirmities. With divine sympathy, He consoles and strengthens His servant; assures him that the prospects of true religion were not so desperate as they seemed; that the reign of apostasy was not universal; that there were still left seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal; that so far from standing alone, "faithful among the

faithless" multitudes thirsting for his blood, he had numerous companions and helpers; that while the great, and the noble, and the time-serving had gone over to the prevailing idolatry, in many an obscure hamlet and lonely cottage hidden among the hills, might be found the friends of Abraham's God — homes in which His altars still stood — hearts in which His worship yet lingered; and that, in His own ordained hour, the omnipotent Sovereign of heaven and earth would arise to deliver His people, overthrow His enemies, and establish His cause in triumph. Having by considerations like these invigorated his faith, and restored his drooping courage, He commands him to return to the scene of conflict, and renew the fight for God and truth. Comforts are sent down to us from Heaven only to prepare us to struggle more earnestly in the service of Heaven; and whenever the words of the Lord bring hope and peace to the soul, they are always accompanied by the behest, "Go, return on thy way to the Wilderness" — to the trials there appointed — to the work there unfinished.

Re-animated by communion with God, with what a bounding step the prophet goes back to the field of his former exploits! Fearless and undaunted as if the fire of immortality were in his veins, and the strength of angels in his arm, he rushes to the encounter. Follow him through all his after history.

See him, with the light of the Holy Mount yet beaming on his brow, bearing aloft the standard of Jehovah into the thickest ranks of His foes; maintaining His institutions; vindicating His honor; and proclaiming His law in the very face of sceptred impiety and throned licentiousness. Amid the loudest din and uproar of the battle, he hears ever that "still small Voice," whispering hope, inspiring resolution; and onward he marches—on through neglect and isolation—on through privation and want—on through toils and perils—on through environing hosts raging for his life—on, still on—never fleeing, never blenching more—till his task is done, and—overtaken not even by Death that has tracked him so long—"the chariots of fire and the horses of fire" carry him up to his crown.

This striking incident in the life of Elijah is full of instruction to the children of God in our own day. Though living under the better dispensation of the Gospel, and favored with its clearer revelations of Divine grace and succor, they nevertheless experience similar trials of their faith, and pass not seldom through similar hours of faintness and dejection. The power of the Present over the Future—of the Seen over the Unseen—has not been weakened by the lapse of centuries. Nor has the propensity of pious men to forget, in their moral conflicts, the promise of Almighty aid, been oblit-

erated by all the myriad instances in which the Christian ages have witnessed the fulfilment of that promise. Emphatic, therefore, and pertinent to ourselves, are the lessons which our narrative suggests.

In the struggle with inward depravity, the believer is often tempted to despond. He looks into his own heart, and sees how corrupt it still is — how prone to unbelief and earthliness — how alive to all that is carnal — how dead to all that is spiritual. He perceives that sinful thoughts and feelings spring up in his bosom spontaneously and without effort; while the conscious presence of holy affections is painfully acquired by prayer, by vigilance, by labor; and is lost whenever these appliances are withdrawn. He thinks how often and how sincerely he has endeavored to overcome this internal enemy — to conquer his besetting sins, subdue his unsanctified proclivities, and give the victory to the new nature within him; and yet, in almost every instance, has found "the law in his members" warring successfully against "the law of his mind," and bringing him into captivity. And then the palsy of doubt and apprehension creeps over him, chilling the enjoyments of piety, and benumbing its vital forces. He fears, either that he has no religion, or that his religion will die out and be utterly extinguished amid the hostile elements that encompass

it. And so he grows weary in the combat — ceases to pray, to watch, to wrestle — and retreats into the wilderness of apathy and inaction.

But what doest thou here, Christian? Is this fighting the good fight of faith, to which thy Master calls thee? Is this holding fast thy profession without wavering unto the end? In such a position, what canst thou achieve for God or for thy own soul? Will supineness lessen the power of indwelling corruption? Is not this the very state of mind in which its dominion may be expected to become most complete and absolute? Wilt thou abandon the contest altogether, and no longer strive against the evil principles that would enthral thee, and hold thee back from heaven? This is to surrender thy interest in Christ — to cast from thee the hope of glory. And this thou durst not do; this the Spirit of Grace, that yet struggles in thy heart, will not let thee do. Oh, hasten to the Mount of God! Betake thyself to prayer. At the Mercy-seat unbosom thy spiritual distresses, pour out all thy anxieties. And, listen — through the “great and strong wind” of temptation, through “the earthquake” of insurgent passion, through “the fire” of moral trial — comes to thee, distinct and clear, the “still small voice” of thy pitying Saviour, saying, “Fear not; my grace is sufficient for thee.” Armed with strength from on high, go back to the battle,

and never falter in it more. The victory is sure. In the name of thy prevailing Advocate and Intercessor, and by the effectual energy which He will ever supply, thou shalt trample down, one after another, the lusts that now war against thy peace. Unbelief and pride, carnality and worldliness, whatever in thy heart or in thy life is not of Christ, shall be gradually weakened, overpowered, bound in chains. Every day a fresh triumph shall be won—every day some new trophy erected—until thy warfare is accomplished, and the last relic of depravity, like the mantle of Elijah, falls from thee in thy passage to glory.

The Christian is not less exposed to discouragement in contending with the outward foes which constantly beset his pathway. Satan assaults him with all the weapons of craft and malice by which he labors to ruin the soul—plying him, at one time, with cunning devices, ensnaring suggestions, lures to entice, wiles to entrap, and, at another, with fiery darts, bitter accusations, open wrath. The world assaults him—now with the blandishments of riches, honor, and pleasure—now with contumely and scorn; now attempting to seduce him from the way of holiness by smiles and promises, and now to drive him from it by hatred and opposition. Under the combined attacks of these sleepless antagonists, the child of God is often dismayed,

and faint of heart. They throng around him, they press upon him, they threaten to tread him into the dust; and, staggered and appalled by the violence and pertinacity of their onset, he is ready to exclaim, "I shall surely fall by the hands of mine adversaries!"

But what, O trembling believer! doest thou here? Is the race to the swift, or the battle to the strong? Go to the Mount of God, and there learn that more are they that are with thee than they that are against thee. On thy side is the omnipotence of the Father, the all-sufficiency of Christ, the ever-present help of the Spirit. What to these is the leagued array of earth and hell? In the Love that redeemed thee, in the Grace that hath called thee, there are supplies for every need, resources for every emergency, weapons for every conflict. Clad in Heaven's own panoply — your loins girded with Truth — Righteousness your breast-plate — your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace — lifting on high the shield of Faith, wearing the helmet of Salvation, Prayer on your lips, and in your hand the all-conquering sword of the Spirit — why should you fear defeat, or shrink from the strife? God will bruise Satan under thy feet shortly. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even thy faith.

Similar misgivings not unfrequently come over us

in our efforts to build up the Redeemer's kingdom. We think how slowly His cause advances in the world—how numerous and seemingly invincible are the obstacles that oppose its progress. We contemplate the position and bearing of the Powers of Light and of Darkness as they confront each other. Under the banner of the one, we see but a small and scattered band, timid, irresolute, wavering—under the banner of the other a dense host, alert, bold, and confident. We look at the soldiers of Christ. Weak as they are in numbers, their divisions and their want of ardor weaken them still more. Many are straggling from the ranks—many loitering in the rear—few prepared and willing to take part in the struggle. We look at the champions of ungodliness. They are countless, compact, eager for the fray. We see how difficult it is to make any impression on their serried lines—how wedded men are to their sins—how hard it is to bring even one over from the side of irreligion to the side of righteousness. From this view of the conflict as it is going forward in Christian lands, we look away to other climes, and see how God's little army is outflanked by the long array of false religions covering with their mighty columns more than half the globe. And then a feeling of despondency settles upon us. We lose nerve and heart. We imagine that this terrible front of rebellion can

never be broken — these myriad legions brought into subjection to the Prince of Peace — this world in arms against its Maker reclaimed to His sceptre. We are tempted, therefore, to give up an undertaking which seems to us to be hopeless; to retire from all active share in the battle; and let the impenitent crowds around us go down, if they will, to the perdition which they have chosen.

But what do we here? Is this a place for those who have sworn allegiance to Heaven? Is such pusillanimity worthy of men whose names are on the muster-roll of Christ, and who stand pledged to follow their Leader unto death? Oh, let us go to the Mount of God, and hear that "still small voice" of promise say to us, "The gates of Hell shall not prevail." "As I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory." In the illuminations there received, in the comforts there bestowed, the film of doubt will be cleared from our eyes, and assurance breathed into our souls. We shall see that, however wickedness may now appear to dominate the world, its final overthrow is certain; that in the encounter of Right and Wrong, the former is sure to triumph at last; and that all the movements of the Gospel, and all the ongoings of Providence, and all the heavings and tossings of the nations, are tending, irresistibly, inevitably, to usher in that predicted epoch, when the reign of the Crucified

shall be universal among men. The combat may be long and arduous. We may be summoned from the field while the turmoil is yet at its height. But others will come and stand in our places; and the great battle of the Lord of Hosts will go on—on through generations and centuries—on over empires and continents—never receding, never resting—on, ever on in its career of mercy, converting sinners, recovering the lost, lifting up the fallen, enlightening all that is dark, dispelling all that is false, sanctifying all that is impure, till wickedness shall be driven from the earth into the prison below, and God shall turn on it the key of His power, and lock it forever from the sight of His redeemed creation.

Thus it is that the believer, in his visits to the Mount of Divine Manifestation, gathers new strength for the conflicts of the spiritual life, and fresh incentives to steadfastness and perseverance. And thus it is that difficulties and dangers which, out in the dusty arena of the strife, may seem to us insurmountable, are shorn of all their terrors, when surveyed from the hallowed eminence of communion with Heaven.

Oh, Mount of God! High Place of Prayer! Horeb of Faith! on whose gleaming summit the soul stands and sends her gaze away to the Throne of Grace above—what words can speak the blessed-

ness of those who know thy refuge! In thy sacred retreats God talks with man, and Jesus unveils His love, and the Comforter whispers consolation, and a gladness not of earth invigorates the soul. Shelter of Prophets! Chosen Resort of Saints in all the ages! May we never forget thee — never leave untrodden the way that leads to thee. Worn with toil, hemmed round by foes, borne down under sorrows, may we flee to thee for rest. And when our work is done, from thy sunlit brow may we soar upward to the Heavenly Hills, and dwell in the Mountain of the Lord forever.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO BUILDERS.

“THEREFORE, WHOSOEVER HEARETH THESE SAYINGS OF MINE, AND DOETH THEM, I WILL LIKEN HIM UNTO A WISE MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON A ROCK. AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT UPON THAT HOUSE; AND IT FELL NOT; FOR IT WAS FOUNDED UPON A ROCK. AND EVERY ONE THAT HEARETH THESE SAYINGS OF MINE, AND DOETH THEM NOT, SHALL BE LIKENED UNTO A FOOLISH MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON THE SAND. AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT UPON THAT HOUSE; AND IT FELL; AND GREAT WAS THE FALL OF IT.—*Matthew vii. 24-27.*

WITH these striking words our Lord concludes His memorable Sermon on the Mount. Having, in that matchless summary, set forth the Gospel which He came to teach, declared its great truths, pointed out the breadth and spirituality of its precepts, and unfolded the wealth of its promises and benedictions, He brings the whole to bear directly on the consciences of His hearers, by a personal application as appropriate as it is impressive and solemn.

This application is contained in the passage which forms the groundwork of our present remarks. To

comprehend the significance and pertinency of the comparison which our Saviour here employs, it is necessary to place clearly before our minds the physical aspects of the country in which He dwelt, and the customs of the people to whom He spoke. Viewing it merely in the light of our own experience, we might be inclined to pronounce it inapposite, destitute of meaning, and at variance with actual facts. Were we to judge only from what is familiar to ourselves, there would seem to be little propriety in describing as wise the man who should build his house upon a rock, or in branding as foolish the man who should rear his upon the sand; since, so far as our observation extends, no special safety is gained in the one case, and no special peril incurred in the other. But however true this may be in the scene of our abode, it was quite otherwise in that of Christ's earthly ministry. There, the formation of the land and the nature of the climate alike contributed to give point and emphasis to His illustration. The surface of Palestine is, for the most part, extremely rugged and uneven, broken up into steep cliffs and abrupt eminences, and intersected by narrow and precipitous ravines. In the summer, during which rain seldom falls, these ravines are the dry beds of torrents that have been exhausted by the long drought and the parching heat; or if in any of them streams still flow, they

are reduced to tiny rills which the eye can scarcely see, and which a single step may cross. But when the winter storms set in, and the mighty rains descend on the heights, the waters, rushing down the mountain gorges, swell these rivulets into roaring floods, that carry terror and devastation in their track.

It was from scenes of this description — scenes which His listeners had often beheld, and examples of which were doubtless visible from the spot where they stood — that our Divine Teacher drew the imagery of the text. He introduces two individuals as proposing to erect dwellings for themselves in a locality such as I have described. It is the early summer; and all is calm and peaceful. The sky is cloudless. The winds are silent, or only whisper in soft breezes that ripple the growing corn, and just stir the young leaves of the vine and olive. The rough slopes of the glen are covered with verdure and gay with flowers; and along its pebbly bottom a little brook glides and sings. There is nothing to indicate danger or suggest precaution. Yet one of these men, taking into account the hazards of the situation, and knowing how soon and how suddenly the deluge may come, adapts his measures to the circumstances, and carefully provides for what the future must bring. With thoughtful foresight, he selects for his foundation the smooth face

of a rock which former inundations have laid bare ; or, if no such site can be found, then — as stated in the parallel passage of Luke — he “digs deep” till he reaches the underlying rock ; and there, on the solid granite, erects his home. The edifice thus supported, and built wholly of stone — as the houses of the Jews generally were — possesses a strength and stability that bid defiance to all the vicissitudes of the seasons. And this man the Redeemer pronounces “wise,” because he rightly estimates the requirements of his undertaking, and shapes his plans and regulates his conduct in accordance with them.

The other man, wanting in sagacity, or impelled by sheer recklessness, pursues a course that leads to widely different results. Deluded by present appearances, and fearing no evil to come because none is manifest now, he puts his house on a bed of drifting sand, which previous overflows have washed up along the border of the stream, and ventures all that he holds dear in its treacherous keeping. Christ calls him “a foolish man,” inasmuch as, in a matter involving treasure and security and life itself, he ignores the exigencies that are sure to arise, and violates every law of prudence and forecast. And his folly is as inexcusable as it is gross. It does not spring from imperfect knowledge. Unless he rejects all evidence, he cannot be unaware of the nature of the ground on which he builds,

and the severity of the test which his work must undergo. But indolence, self-will, pride of opinion, a propensity to overlook perils that are not immediate, and the insane hope, either that the threatened catastrophe will not occur, or that he shall find some way of escape, conspire to uphold his confidence, and to embolden him in his purpose. His fatuity is thus the product of presumption and fool-hardiness: and when the fearful end shall undeceive him, he can charge the loss and the ruin only to himself.

For a time, however, all may seem to be well. While the season of fair weather and bright skies continues, and halcyon days and starry nights follow each other in unbroken succession, the house on the sand may appear as safe as the house on the rock. And perhaps its owner ridicules the care and painstaking of his neighbor — laughs at his anxiety about his foundation — and taunts him with a needless expenditure of means and labor in guarding against the inroads of an insignificant brook that is fast drying up. And so the long rainless summer passes away, and the months of the freshet and the hurricane draw nigh.

On a quiet evening, the inmates of both houses close their doors, and prepare for their wonted rest. They notice, as they retire, no unusual indications that danger is near; for though autumnal blasts have begun to sweep, at intervals, down the hills,

and to moan fitfully among the trees, the heavens are yet serene, and the earth tranquil. But at midnight, a terrible change awakens them. The tempest is abroad in its wrath. They hear the wild winds howl and rage, and the fierce rain hurtling against roof and wall; while, more appalling than either, breaks on their startled ears the roar of the swollen torrent pouring down the gorge, submerging the lowlands, foaming up the hillsides, and becoming each moment deeper, swifter, more resistless.

The storm assails both houses with equal violence. But it cannot shake the house on the rock. Fixed on its immovable foundation, it remains steadfast and secure amid the dashing waves and the furious war of the elements. Not so with the house on the sand. Its inhabitant is roused at last from his carelessness, but only to find that all hope of deliverance is gone. It is too late to save himself by abandoning the endangered dwelling. The angry waters environ it on every side; and no raft or boat could live an instant in that tossing, rushing current. His escape, or his destruction, rests solely on the question whether the frail structure in which he has trusted shall stand or fall. No other reliance is left him. Oh, that in the days of sunshine and repose he had given more heed to his foundation! But vain are regrets now. The past

cannot be recalled. He has chosen his refuge, and must abide the result. As he listens fearfully to the shrieking gale, the pouring deluge, the swash of the billows surging round his flimsy shelter, and feels it totter and reel at every shock — his strained senses catch another and more awful sound, that freezes him with terror. It is the creeping and gurgling of the waters, as they stealthily work their way through the loose soil beneath him. They cut deep channels in the yielding sand. More and more they encroach upon it — faster and faster they wash it away — until, almost with the quickness of thought, the whole fabric is undermined, and house and owner are swallowed up by the seething tide.

Our Saviour refers to the difference in the character and in the fate of these individuals for the purpose of illustrating the momentous lesson which He sought to convey. To the one, He compares the man who hearkens with reverent docility to the announcements of the Gospel — receives, as transcendent realities, its unfoldings of guilt and ruin, of atonement and redemption — and, by embracing them with sincere faith and obedience, builds on their impregnable truth his hope of salvation. By the history of the other, He represents the madness and the doom of him who hears the message of Mercy with apathy or scorn; who sets at nought its claims and obligations; despises the bliss it

proffers; disregards its warnings; and casting behind him all its appeals, presses on in his career of sin and impenitence. And thus, with one graphic touch of light and shade, the Divine Limner has sketched the two great classes of believers and unbelievers — of doers and neglecters of His words.

We are all builders, and builders for eternity. A world of never-ending retribution lies before us; and, consciously or unconsciously, we are preparing our abode in that world, and giving form to the destiny that awaits us there. However we may confine our aims and efforts to the boundaries of sense, this is the real result which our life is working out — this the necessary bearing of every thought and action. By vital union with Christ, by the transforming power of His grace, by the cultivation of practical godliness, we are rearing a spiritual edifice that shall be our everlasting defence and joy; or else, by following the devices of our corrupt hearts, we expend our energies upon a refuge of lies, that will crumble at the breath of the storm, and sink with us into the abyss. Each day, each hour, contributes to the one or the other of these stupendous issues. Every movement of our inward being — every circumstance of our outward history — all that we feel — all that we do — helps forward the house that shall endure, or the house that shall perish.

In the fulness of His compassion, Jehovah has provided for the lost children of earth an unfailing basis of happiness. Long ago He declared by the lips of His prophet, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner-Stone, a sure Foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." This purpose of Infinite Love has been fulfilled in the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. The Only Begotten of the Father has taken our nature upon Him, put Himself in our place, suffered the penalty of our transgressions, and wrought out that great Propitiation which insures to its contrite receivers pardon and eternal life. Here, in the atoning work of the God-Man, is inviolable security — a firm ground of trust — to which the sinner may commit his immortal interests without fear of disappointment.

On this foundation the believer, enlightened and guided by Celestial Wisdom, reposes the welfare of his soul. Casting aside the superincumbent strata — the rubbish of self-confidence and self-righteousness — he goes down to the naked Rock — to the broad, life-giving, all-upholding truth — "None but Jesus" — and there lays the ground-tier of his religion. Joining the building to the foundation by the strong clamps of faith, he carries it up, stone upon stone, course after course; "adding to his faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance,

to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness charity ;” and cementing all by Redeeming Blood. Living Stones upon a Living Rock ! What tempest can overturn a structure so constituted, so sustained ? The merits of the Son underlie it ; the faithfulness of the Father encircles it ; the rainbow of the Covenant overarches it ; the graces of the Spirit pervade it ; and the downshinings of Heaven infold it with a radiance which no earthly darkness can dispel. Oh, wise are they, and only they, who thus build !

Alas ! what multitudes are there whose hopes are not planted here ! How many do we daily meet — how many are with us now — who reject the Only Foundation ! They may differ in other respects — differ in character, differ in their religious opinions, differ in their chosen sources of trust ; but all agree in this, that they build not on Christ, and lightly esteem the Rock of their Salvation. They rely on human strength, human counsels, human expedients, human safeguards, and not on that vicarious Expiation which God has set forth as the only refuge of a fallen world.

Here is one who endeavors to rear, in the bleak waste of Infidelity, a home where he may give scope to his depraved appetites, unchecked by the thought of accountability, unvisited by the dread of

punishment. Discarding the clear, authoritative teachings of Revelation, he substitutes in their place the obscure hints and vague conjectures of human reason. The confused mutterings of antichristian philosophy, the shallow objections of earth-born science, are deemed more worthy of credence than the Voice which speaks from heaven. Darkened in his understanding by the blinding power of sin, he has no perception of moral subjects, or sees them only in false lights. Good and evil, guilt and holiness, are in his view mere arbitrary distinctions; immortality a fiction; future recompense the dream of bigots; and God, the All-Maker and All-Ruler, but an impersonal, unintelligent principle diffused through the material universe, taking no cognizance of the doings of men, and exercising over them no retributive government. In such a position, and out of such empty imaginings, he constructs his system of Unbelief, and looks to it for rest. But the ground is hollow, and the entire fabric a lie, from corner-stone to pinnacle. It is ever threatening to fall from its own weakness; and its occupant is compelled to resort to every species of sophistical prop, to keep it from coming down altogether. Oh, skeptic! thou art not at ease in thy house. Thou dost not feel safe there. In thy secret soul, thou knowest how insecure it is. There are tremblings underneath—there are bulgings out in the

walls — there are swayings to and fro, that affright thee with omens of disaster. But if thou art thus fearful in the time of Divine forbearance and long-suffering, when no tokens of wrath are abroad, when God holds back His thunder, and death and judgment appear to be distant, where will be thy confidence when the fires of the last day shall blaze; when the Almighty One, whom thou deniest, shall come forth to vindicate His insulted majesty, and the eternal state, which thou strivest to believe a delusion, breaks upon thee in all its reality and awfulness? “If in the land of quietness they have wearied thee, what wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

Another builds on the shaking bog of Universalism. He labors to persuade himself that God is too merciful to doom the wicked to perdition; that the sanctions of His law reach not beyond the grave; and that, however unrighteously men may live, and however impenitently they may die, the salvation of all is alike certain. But the hypothesis is too heavy for its foundation, and its incongruous materials will not hold together. As the swampy soil yields under the pressure, the parts settle away from each other, leaving wide and fatal openings. And so he gropes about in the mire, and covers himself with filth, in a bootless effort to close up these gaps with guesses and assumptions, and by

thrusting into them mutilated texts of Scripture, torn from their connections. Yet, with all his mending and filling, the gaps are there still, proclaiming unsafety, presaging overthrow.

Another, more fastidious, attempts to raise a fortress for his soul on the shifting sands of Liberal Christianity. But the loose dust, blown about by ever-veering winds of opinion, gets into his eyes, and so blinds him, that he cannot see how to build, or what to build. At least, he is unable to give to his work any definite shape and proportion. The utmost that he can do is to heap up a formless pile of fragments — broken doctrines, half-truths, discordant theories, transcendental speculations, interspersed with here and there a moral precept, and all jumbled together in strange confusion. His erection is far less remarkable for what it contains, than for what it leaves out. There is nothing positive in it. It is a mass of negatives throughout. And its builder appropriately writes on it the characteristic inscription — No creed — no atoning Saviour — no renewing Spirit — no need of man that man's resources cannot meet.

Influenced by opposite tastes, another puts his house on the dead flat of Churchism. He bases his expectation of being saved — not on the acceptance of Christ by faith — not on the experience of a new spiritual birth — not on the conscious working of

gracious affections in his soul — but on the fact that he has passed through a certain process of outward initiation into the visible kingdom of God. His religion is a thing of form and ceremony. To sacraments and ordinances alone he looks for pardon and sanctification. Ritual observance usurps the place of piety; the water of Baptism is substituted for the blood of Jesus; and idolatry of the Church thrusts out of sight the worship of her Lord. Thus he has a name to live while he is dead. Under all his conventional religiousness lurks an unregenerate heart, and a dominant carnality. Oh, how little can formalism do for its votaries in that hour, when the voice of Christ on the judgment-seat shall interpret the words of Christ in the flesh, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!"

There are many who build on their morality. Ignorant of God's righteousness, they go about to establish their own. They glory in the fancied uprightness of their lives — parade their imaginary virtues — count up their good deeds — and deem it fanatical and monstrous to affirm that all these will avail them nothing in the day of decision. Keeping out of view the corruption that rankles within them — hiding even from themselves their real character as enemies of God and strangers to all heavenly aspirations — they cherish the fatal

deceit, that outward proprieties can atone for the absence of inward grace, amiable dispositions compensate for the want of spiritual endowments, fidelity in their relations to time counterbalance neglect and supineness in their relations to eternity. Their social qualities, their domestic charities, the fairness of their dealings with men, are brought forward as an offset to rebellion against their Creator, and denial of the Lord that bought them. And thus they fondly dream that the beauty with which they adorn the outside of the sepulchre, will more than make amends for the foulness that festers within. So confidently, so laboriously, they rear their stronghold, and hedge it about with the bristling chevaux de frise of self-esteem and self-flattery. Yet, perfect as they strive to think it, it does not quite satisfy them. Misgivings of its power to stand the inevitable trial disturb the complacency with which they regard it. Gloss over the fact as they may, they cannot but see its lack of strength and cohesion. Hence, they seek to confirm their good opinion of it, by keeping prominent its best points, and concealing the weak ones under thick coats of white-wash. But, in spite of patching and varnishing, it remains a baseless, disjointed, staggering thing, ready to topple into ruins when the finger of God touches it.

A still more numerous class set up their taberna-

cles in the dream-land of Future Repentance. The position which they now occupy they admit to be full of exposure. They acknowledge that they are sinners; and that in Christ alone they can find refuge from impending wrath. But they do not intend to continue always in their present abode. It is their purpose to use it merely as a summer residence, and, long before the season of storms, to establish themselves on the Rock. Yet, with all this confession of danger, they still hesitate and delay. The sunny days invite them to linger. The balmy air drops slumber from its wings. They are indisposed to the exertion and sacrifice of an undertaking which they look upon as arduous. They think the hour of peril remote, and can see no occasion for haste while the earth is so green, and the sky so bright. And thus they remain, waiting for a convenient season — postponing their escape, though weeks and months glide swiftly by — ever resolving to repair to the Saviour, but never doing it, till the dark winter of the grave shuts in upon them.

To enumerate all the false foundations in which the ungodly confide, would be an endless task. They build on Wealth, on Reputation, on the Quicksands of Doubt, on the Steeps of Presumption, on the barren heath of their own Works, on the land-slides of Procrastination — everywhere but

on the Rock of Ages — everywhere but on the Only Name given among men, whereby they must be saved.

Now, if the summer could always last, this folly, flagrant as it is, might not be utterly without extenuation. Were this world our final rest — were life to go on with us forever as it does now — did no great change, coming with ceaseless step nearer, ever nearer, cast its shadow over us, and no voices, foretelling reward and doom, call to us from the spirit-realm — then, though there would still be sin and loss in turning away from the offers of the Gospel, yet some apology for it might be found in the comparative unimportance of its consequences. True it is, that even here the pure joys of faith outweigh unspeakably the feverish delights of unbelief and earthliness. So that, viewing the question simply in its temporal aspects, we must pronounce the Christian wise, and the worldling foolish. Nevertheless, it is in connection with eternity that the antagonism between them stands out in fullest prominence. When, therefore, we trace this antagonism to its ultimate development in the world of retribution, how manifest is the wisdom of the one, how glaring the madness of the other!

The summer will not always last. The period of serenity and careless ease will not be perpetual. Probation is wasting, and the hour that is to decide its issue is speeding on. The stormy months are at

hand. The rain will fall ; the winds will blow ; the floods will rush down, and overflow this Valley of Mortality in which we have erected our hopes. Adversity will come, and sickness will come, and death will come, and the awful reckoning will come, and the everlasting award will come. All these are advancing upon us to try the value of our confidences, and the solidity of their foundations. What a contrast of character and of destiny will the trial disclose !

In every event, under all assaults, the house on the Rock will stand firm. Fast anchored on the oath and covenant of Jehovah, what power of earth or hell can drive it from its moorings? Sheltered within it, the believer can look out upon the wild commotion, and take up his parable and sing, " God is our Refuge and Strength. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled ; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." Amid the blasts of temptation, amid the waves of sorrow, amid the convulsions and upheavals of all terrestrial things, the protecting might of his Redeemer never forsakes him. Even when his mortal tabernacle is dissolved, he suffers no wreck. The arm of Omnipotent Love bears him upward from this valley of conflict and change, to the mountain of the Lord —

to the land of unbroken repose; and there — beyond the tempest, beyond the whirlwind, beyond the floods — awaits him a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

But the house on the sand — Oh, who shall portray the fearfulness of its overthrow! The man who puts his trust in carnal reliances, has no promise of happiness even in this life; while, for him, the life to come is shrouded in the blackness of darkness. Destitute of an interest in Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world, how can he meet the storms that will beat upon him? He has no forgiving Father, no atoning Mediator, no renewing Comforter, no “title sure to mansions in the skies.” What can support him in affliction? What can be his stay when expiring nature sinks, and all earthly helpers fail? The tempest shatters his frail dwelling; the torrent of Death overwhelms it, and sweeps him away — away from the shores of time — away from all that he loves and enjoys — away to the Judgment — away to condemnation — away forever, out upon the boundless ocean of Despair!

“It fell; and great was the fall of it.” Well might our Lord so describe it. Great, beyond conception, must be such a fall; for it is the fall of a soul — of a soul endowed with vast and ever growing capacities of happiness or of misery — of a soul

for which redemption was provided — a soul for which Christ died — a soul that might have been saved — a soul that is lost. The distance from the heights of glory to the dungeons of woe can alone measure the depth and greatness of this fall. And it is an irrecoverable fall. If material structures are overturned, others stancher and better may replace them. But if the house of the soul goes down, it can be raised up again never more. Earth is our building-scene — time our work-period; and if we have built unwisely, we shall find in the future world no space and no opportunity for repairing the error. "There is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge in the grave." "As the tree falls, so it must lie." Eternity has no probation. Oh, what is the crumbling of towers and palaces, of gorgeous temples, and proud cities, of the noblest architectural triumphs that man's genius has ever achieved, compared with the fall of those spiritual erections which infold the infinite Hereafter!

Builders on the Rock! Hold fast to the foundation. Let no seeming absence of danger, no blandishments of sense, no stress of secular care, no scoff of the unbelieving many, tempt you to forsake it, or to question its sufficiency. To the power and grace of your Redeemer commit the present and the future. Make Him the Ground of your trust, the Source of your happiness, the Centre of your life. In Him

garner up all the riches of the soul. Draw from Him every element of your character, every motive and inspiration of your conduct. Go to Him for righteousness, for sanctification, for wisdom, for guidance, for strength, for comfort—for all you need below—for all you hope for above. Thus “building yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Builders on the sand! Awake from your delusions. Be not deceived by the quietness that now surrounds you. Heed not the promise of safety, which Satan whispers, and your sinful hearts echo. It is the song of the Siren luring you to destruction. Were your eyes but open, you would perceive, under all this fallacious tranquillity, a constant disturbance and unrest, heralding the day of wrath, as the ground-swell of the yet sleeping ocean presages the bursting of the tornado. There are tremblings in the earth. There are warnings in the air. There is thunder in the sky. Revelation and Conscience—foreshadowings without and forebodings within—bear witness of the gathering tempest. Soon, how soon you know not, the hail will sweep away your refuges of lies, and the waters overflow your hiding places. Oh! ere that awful moment comes, flee to “the munitions of rocks”—to the founda-

tion of the Gospel. "Turn ye to the Stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." "While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain," seek shelter in the bosom of Everlasting Love. Cast yourselves on the Great Atonement. Go to Christ in contrition and prayer; and by believing in Him, link your guilt and weakness to His holiness and might. Building on that only Ground which the billows of Divine Justice cannot undermine, you will be safe in life, safe in death, safe in the Judgment, safe in that House of many Mansions which no evil can invade; where the rains never descend, and the winds never blow, and the floods never come; where Security is perfect, and Peace eternal.

CHAPTER VI.

GOING BACK TO BETHEL.

“LET US ARISE, AND GO UP TO BETHEL; AND I WILL MAKE THERE AN ALTAR UNTO GOD, WHO ANSWERED ME IN THE DAY OF MY DISTRESS, AND WAS WITH ME IN THE WAY WHICH I WENT.”—*Gen. xxxv. 3.*

THE power of particular scenes to call up trains of thought and feeling that have become associated with them, is a familiar fact in human experience. What a flood of emotions, for instance, is awakened by a visit to one's birthplace! Years may have passed since the wanderer left it. He may have seen many fairer and richer lands. He may have made for himself a more luxurious home. But still the dwelling that sheltered him in his infancy, humble though it may be, has for his heart a charm which no other can claim. The bounding step with which he went forth on his career, may now be slow and feeble. The locks, once thick and dark as the raven's plumage, may have grown thin and white. Yet, as he stands once more under the old roof-tree, and clambers up the hill-sides, or roams through the woods, and by the streams, which his childhood knew, that

childhood comes back to him in all its freshness. He feels as he then felt. Memories, half obliterated by time and absence, are revived. He hears again the voices of his playmates. He mingles again in the family group. He sees again the faces of father and mother, brothers and sisters. He is a child again. The past has become the present; and the interval which divides them, with its labors, and cares, and disappointments, is for the moment forgotten.

Similar, though far purer and holier, are the feelings of a Christian on returning to his spiritual birthplace. The spot where he first bowed his knees in prayer; the hour when the Spirit first breathed peace into his soul; the place where he first uttered the vow of consecration to the Saviour — are connected in his mind with the dearest and most hallowed reminiscences. Nor is it possible for him to look at that scene again, or to recall it even in thought, without impressions fitted to strengthen at once his humility and his gratitude.

Sentiments of this kind appear to have animated the patriarch Jacob, when he announced to his household his intention of going up to Bethel, and building there an altar to the Lord. Bethel was the place most sacred in his recollections. There, as he went forth a fugitive from his father's house, God met him with assurances of protection and

favor. There heavenly communications first greeted his soul. There he entered into solemn covenant with Jehovah. And there, beyond question, was the starting-point of his religious life—the epoch of his transition from darkness to light. Many years had gone by since that memorable hour. He had been a sojourner in a distant clime. He left his native land poor and solitary; he was now restored to it, rich in worldly goods, with a numerous family around him. He had experienced many changes, encountered many temptations, witnessed many proofs of the Divine care and bounty. Much had he to be humble for in his own conduct; much to be thankful for in the providence of God. How interesting and solemn, then, must have been his reflections, as he again drew near the spot where Jehovah first revealed Himself to him, and acknowledged him as his own!

In the life of every true believer there has been a Bethel—a time when God met him, and made him a partaker of His grace. To this period it is profitable for him often to go back in thought, and, reviewing the engagements into which he then entered, and the way in which he has since been led, to erect altars to the Lord, and offer on them the tribute of penitence and of thankfulness.

A leading motive that impelled Jacob to re-visit Bethel, was the desire of calling up in his mind the

vows which he made while resting there on his outward journey. Having witnessed in a vision signal tokens of Jehovah's regard, he "vowed a vow, saying, If the Lord will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." Here was a promise of unswerving allegiance to the Most High, and of entire devotion to His will. And the wish to revive that solemn engagement, and stamp it anew on his soul, was largely active in inspiring his present purpose.

Vows even more sacredly binding have been made at Bethel by the people of God in every age. All of us who have passed through that scene of the open Heaven and of descending Mercy, have taken upon ourselves obligations as comprehensive as they are inviolable. One of these was the vow of full and cordial faith in Christ. It was through Christ that God was manifested to us in the endearing aspect of forgiveness and love. Through Christ He made Himself known to us as our Friend and Father. The atonement of Christ was the celestial ladder by which the Divine communications of pardon, grace and peace came down to our souls. Faith in Christ, therefore, as our Substitute and our Redeemer, and as the Source of all our spiritual life, must have been one of the earliest and most prominent exercises of our renovated nature. En-

lightened by the teaching which is from above, we saw Him to be a perfect and infinite Saviour, suited to all the necessities of our case. We felt that we had no hope but in Him. We abandoned every other refuge. We cast our souls beneath His Cross. We received Him as our Prophet, Priest and King, and committed our everlasting interests into His hands. In that act of surrender, we bound ourselves to repose in Him an implicit and never-failing trust, and to look to Him, through all our future course, for light to direct, grace to sanctify, and strength to uphold us.

Standing once more at Bethel, how freshly do we remember that vow, and with what searching impressiveness is the question brought home to us, in what manner we have kept it! How have we fulfilled our promise to the Saviour? Have we not often lost sight of Him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of our Salvation? In the hour of trial have we not doubted Him; in the season of prosperity forgotten Him? Have we not neglected to apply to Him day by day for those supplies of holiness and comfort which He has been ever able and willing to bestow? Have we not, times without number, turned away from the Fountain of Living Waters, and vainly tried to slake our thirst at the streams of earthliness and sense? Have we not sought happiness in the business, the connections,

the amusements of the world, more than in communion with Christ, and devotedness to Him? Oh! as we look back on our religious history, what cause have we to deplore the weakness and instability of our faith! How often have we grieved the Saviour by our unbelief and mistrust, our want of confidence in His promises, and our slowness to seek the blessings which He alone can give! On the altar which we build let us lay the offering of a broken and contrite heart, for having lived at such a distance from Christ, and for having confided in Him so little.

Renouncement of sin was included in the covenant which we made at Bethel. No man ever experienced genuine conversion, without having been led to abhor his corrupt propensities, and to put forth earnest efforts for their subjugation. In an unregenerate state, we may be insensible to the depravity of our hearts, and think lightly of the outward transgressions of which it is the spring. But when light from heaven shines in upon the soul, our moral perceptions are rectified, and iniquity appears to us in its true colors. We see the majesty and holiness of God; the purity, perfection, and spirituality of His law. We see that our whole lives have been one prolonged act of disobedience to that law, and of rebellion against its glorious Author. We perceive that in us there dwelleth no

good thing; that our nature is polluted to its very core; and that in affection and in conduct alike we have been alienated from the Father of our spirits, and the Giver of all our mercies. Overwhelmed by such views of the goodness of God, of the righteousness of His claims, and of our own criminality in disregarding them, we prostrate ourselves before His throne, and cry, "Unclean, unclean!" In deep contrition of soul, we loathe our guilt, and ourselves on account of it. We look on sin as that abominable thing which has not only destroyed our own peace, but insulted the Holy One, and brought His Only Begotten Son to the Cross. We hate it. We abhor it. We renounce all friendship and alliance with it. We resolve, in the strength of God, to give it no harborage and no quarter forever. These feelings and this determination are inseparable from real conversion. Repentance of all past sins, and a firm, conscientious purpose to avoid sin in future, are among the first elements of piety, and lie at the very entrance of the Christian life. And if we have ever been at Bethel, we have recorded such a vow. How, then, have we kept it? Have we not, in a thousand instances, forgotten or broken it? Have we not often yielded to temptation, often neglected duty, often conformed in spirit and in practice to an ungodly world? Have we not allowed our former evil propensities — our vanity,

pride, envy, covetousness — often to come back into their old seats, and resume their power over us? If so, let us return to Bethel, and pronounce the vow again, and pray for grace to keep it more faithfully during our remaining years.

At Bethel we dedicated ourselves to the service and glory of God. One of the strongest feelings of the new convert is a sense of obligation for the unmerited grace conferred upon him. He reflects on the astonishing mercy of God in providing for him a Saviour, calling him out of darkness into light, and making him an heir of heaven. He thinks of the amazing love of Christ in dying to atone for his sins, and in procuring the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify his nature. Animated by impressions like these, he cheerfully consecrates himself, body, mind, and soul, to the cause of his Maker and Redeemer. He feels that he is not his own; that, having been ransomed from condemnation and guilt at an infinite price, he belongs henceforth to Christ, and is bound, by every tender and constraining motive, to obey His commands, and seek the extension of His kingdom. He sees the glory of God in the salvation of sinners to be the great centre on which all his desires should be fixed, and to which all his aims and efforts should tend; and he longs to make it the controlling influence and the grand purpose of his life.

Thus we once felt. Thus, subdued and melted by the free, boundless compassion of our God and Saviour, we gave ourselves wholly to him, engaging to live for His praise and glory alone. But how have we redeemed that pledge? Have we met it fully, constantly, decidedly? Have we made the service of Christ, and the advancement of His cause, the main object of our existence — the point to which our warmest zeal and most active exertions have been directed? On the contrary, have we not too often lived as though we had no higher purpose than the gratification of our own selfish wishes? In our eagerness to secure the prizes which the world holds out to its votaries, have we not frequently suffered ourselves to become indifferent to the honor of God, the success of the Gospel, and the wants of our perishing fellow-men? If we are in any degree chargeable with such unfaithfulness, let us go back to Bethel, renew our covenant with God, and determine, through His strength, to devote all we have and all we are to extend His reign on earth.

Oh, vows made at Bethel! How soon does your influence decay! How quickly is your hold on our unstable hearts weakened or broken! How often is the goodness from which ye spring transient as the morning cloud and the early dew! To how many is the very memory of the feelings that called you

forth only as a half-forgotten dream — the faint looming of a distant shore, dimly descried across the wide, tossing sea of wordly care! The pillars of stone which, like the patriarch, they set up, as your perpetual memorial, have been overturned by the rush of secular events, and ground to powder under their rolling wheels; while the symbolic oil with which they were consecrated has been dried up by the winds of temptation, or washed away by the deluge of business or of pleasure.

Vows made at Bethel! Ye may be neglected and disregarded here. The lips that once pronounced you may pronounce you no more. The bosoms in which ye were once written may retain scarce a trace of that writing now. But ye are registered in heaven. Your record, though dust-covered and obliterated on earth, is transcribed, clear and full, into the Book of God's Remembrance; and will be read out, in every syllable and in every letter, before assembled worlds, at the great reckoning Day.

Another and a chief reason assigned by the patriarch for his desire to revisit Bethel, was that he might there "build an altar to God, who answered him in the day of his distress, and was with him in the way which he went." In other words, he wished to make a public and visible expression of his gratitude for past deliverances and mercies. In

the hour of his deepest extremity, when he fled from the vengeance of his incensed brother, and knew not whither to turn for shelter, God interposed for his rescue, and cheered him by the promise of constant support and protection. And during all his subsequent exile, God had been with him as his Friend and Upholder, consoling him by His gracious visits, and blessing him with numerous tokens of His bounty. In view of such manifestations of the Divine favor toward him, well might he wish to build an altar to the Lord, and to offer on it the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Your own history, Christian reader, furnishes equal cause for gratitude and praise. God has answered you in the day of your distress. You remember well the time when you first awoke from the slumber of unbelief and carelessness to a sense of your condition as a guilty and lost sinner. Your eyes were opened to perceive the fearful peril in which you stood, and the utter misery to which you were exposed. You saw yourself an outcast from your Father's house, a stranger to the Covenant of Promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. The broken law pealed its thunders over you. Behind you flamed the sword of the Avenger; before you yawned the abyss of doom. You had no power to deliver yourself, and no mortal arm could bring you succor. On every side you looked for

help, but met only Despair. Oh, it was an hour that you will never forget — an hour of distress and perplexity — an hour of darkness like the shadow of death! And then it was, when cut off from all human aid, that you prayed in agony to Him who alone can save. Out of the depths you cried unto the Lord, and He heard you from His Holy Hill, and stretched forth His hand, and delivered you. He took your feet from the horrible pit, from the miry clay, and established your goings upon a rock. By the atoning Sacrifice of His Son, He washed away your sins, and absolved you from punishment; and by the energy of His Spirit, He broke the power of your corruptions, and breathed into your soul a new element of holiness and peace. From the waste, howling wilderness, He brought you into His banqueting-house, made you His child, and spread over you the banner of His love. Oh, what a moment was that when God thus met you! What a Bethel was that where you first heard His voice whispering to your hushed and listening heart, "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" You saw heaven opened. You saw let down the mystic ladder of Christ's mediation. You saw descending by it pardon, peace, and salvation. Once alienated and condemned, you were reconciled to God by the blood of His Son, justified and accepted through His merits, and invested with a title to all the hopes and

privileges of the Gospel here, and to eternal life hereafter. Thus God answered you in the day of your distress.

And ever since He has been with you in the way that you have gone, and has made you the object of His special care and kindness. He has been with you as your Guide. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." "The meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way." By His Word and Spirit, He has taught you His will, and pointed out the path in which He would have you walk. He has directed all your goings. Through whatever scenes you have been called to pass, whether of joy or of sorrow, it was His wisdom that appointed your course, and His hand that led you in it. He has been with you as the Source of your strength. Whatever power you have had to resist temptation, to bear the toils and sacrifices of the Christian life, has been supplied from His infinite fulness. He has been with you as your Defender and Comforter. In danger He has shielded you; in darkness He has been your light; in trouble and affliction He has consoled you. Everywhere and always He has been by your side, sustaining you by His presence, cheering you by His promises, succoring you by His help, and causing all the vicissitudes of your earthly lot to work together for His glory, and your own highest good.

And never will He leave or forsake you. He is drawing you up to Himself by the golden chain of His love. That chain can never be severed; and the links which you have already felt and seen are an earnest that the remaining links, in all their bright succession, shall yet be displayed to you. Mercies past are the pledges and forerunners of mercies to come. The power that converted shall preserve you. The grace that recovered you when lost, shall keep you when found. The eye which sought you out in the wilderness, will watch over you in the fold. The hand which brought you through "the strait gate," will uphold you in "the narrow way." And the staff, on which you have leaned hitherto, shall be your stay in every onward scene, down into the dim vale of age, and across the dark river of death. Thus, in all the way that you have yet to go, will He guide and sustain your steps, till He bring you in triumph to His own right hand in heaven.

Can you, then, withhold from Him the tribute of praise which He deserves? Will you not build an altar, and offer on it the sacrifice of a grateful heart? In view of the grace and mercy which He has manifested toward you, will you not dedicate yourselves afresh to His service, and resolve that all your future days shall be sacred to His glory? Oh! when you think how He has answered you in

the day of your distress, and followed you with never-ceasing benefits; and then reflect how unfaithfully you have lived, how often you have departed from Him — must not your soul overflow with mingled emotions of penitence and thankfulness? And must you not feel every claim of duty and every bond of love constraining you to a life of more earnest and entire obedience? Let each one who is conscious of having in any measure declined from the way of the Lord, be conjured to return without delay, and to give himself with new zeal and activity to the work of his own salvation, and that of the perishing multitudes around him.

There are some who have well-nigh forgotten Bethel. They retain but little of the feeling which they cherished at the time of their conversion. The altars, which they then erected in the closet, in the family, and in the place of social prayer, are now broken down and deserted. Their fires have gone out, and have left only the ashes of extinct faith, and zeal, and love. The purposes of devotedness to the Saviour, which they then formed, have been overborne and swept away by the force of temptation and worldliness. They have left their first love; and communion with God, and delight in His service, are with them now things of memory rather than of present experience. Oh, ye whose consciences testify that you have thus forsaken the

Lord, return to the footstool of His mercy, and seek once more the light of His countenance ! Arise, and go to Bethel. Build again the altar which has fallen down. Offer on it again the sacrifice of lowliness and contrition. God waits to receive you there. His compassions are not exhausted by all your waywardness and disobedience. The ladder between earth and heaven is not yet drawn up ; and communications of grace are as free to you now as when the Lord first met you, and filled your heart to overflowing with the joy of His salvation. Oh ! why will you continue to live at such a distance from Him ? The world cannot make you happy. It is empty, delusive, transitory. In the Lord alone can you find solid and lasting peace. Go back, then, to your forsaken Saviour ; call up the resolutions which you have broken ; resume the duties which you have neglected ; give yourself to God anew ; and hope and comfort shall once more spring up in your heart ; and the spot, where you thus bow your knees in holy surrender, shall be to you again the very gate of heaven.

Some there are who have never been at Bethel. They have never met God, and He has never met them. They are yet in their natural state of estrangement from Him in whose hands their breath is, and with whom are all their ways. Heaven has not been opened to their view. Eternal realities

have never come nigh to them, and taken hold of their hearts. They have never had a spiritual perception of the way of access to God through Christ. Surrounded by the light of the Gospel, they walk in darkness. Upheld by Jehovah's providence, and daily feeding on His bounty, they are still living in fatal ignorance of His renewing and sanctifying grace. Oh! ye impenitent and worldly, prodigal children of a forgotten Father, how mournful is your condition! You have no union with God; no refuge from the sentence of His violated law; no home and no hope beyond the fleeting scenes of time. You have never entered into covenant with the Almighty; you have not owned Him as your King; you have not obeyed Him as your Father; and He, therefore, will not acknowledge you as His children, when you stand before his judgment-seat. Live no longer in this guilty, this dangerous state. Renounce the sins which separate you from the Fountain of life and happiness. Make God your portion. Go to Him by that new and living Way which has been opened through the blood of His Son. Embrace by faith the Reconciliation offered in the Gospel, and you shall be no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-heirs with the saints to all the immunities of fellowship with God now, and to the heritage of glory in eternity. The whole earth shall become to you a Bethel. Jehovah will

meet you, and converse with you, as a man with his friend. He will be with you, as your unfailing Companion and Helper, through all the scenes of your earthly wayfaring, till He bring you to His own presence on high, where there is fulness of joy, and to His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS.

“LORD, REMEMBER ME, WHEN THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM.”

— *Luke xxiii. 42.*

EVERY circumstance connected with our Saviour's death is full of interest and instruction. Yet in that series of events, the most momentous which the earth has ever seen, there is perhaps nothing more suggestive and affecting than the incident to which the text relates. Though but an episode in the great drama of the Crucifixion, it possesses a beauty and a pathos that cannot fail to arrest the dullest mind. Occurring in the very shadow of that Cross, on which the redemption of a world was wrought out, it seems to be pervaded by its power, and to reflect its glory. The place and the hour give it peculiar emphasis, and render it living and eloquent for all the ages. Let us recall the scene, and ponder the lessons which it conveys.

The narrative opens amid the awful transactions of Calvary. Our Divine Substitute is bearing in His own body the punishment of an apostate race. The malice of His foes has triumphed. He has

been seized by a ruthless band of conspirators, dragged before the Sanhedrim, condemned by the Roman governor to be crucified, borne by brutal soldiers to the place of execution, and nailed by their pitiless hands to the accursed tree. But He is not alone in His agony. With the view of heaping deeper shame on His sacred head, two convicts, infamous for their offences against human law, are associated with Him in suffering. And there, under the astonished heavens, they hang—the Holy Victim for sin in the centre—the foul perpetrators of sin on either side—alike in doom, but oh, how unlike in character! And around them on that memorable hill, densely thronging all its slopes, stand the mocking priests, the remorseless Pharisees, and the ribald multitude, hurling scoffs and railings at their dying Messiah! How shocking the spectacle! No wonder the shuddering earth quaked to bear it, and the shrouded skies refused to behold it. So utter was the humiliation to which our Sacrifice submitted, that He might take away our iniquities.

For a time, both of the criminals join the insensate crowd in pouring obloquy on the Son of God. But over the spirit of one of them there comes a sudden and wondrous change. He ceases to rail. He admonishes and rebukes his companion in wickedness. He confesses his guilt and the justice of

his punishment. He implores mercy. He obtains assurance of pardon and salvation.

To what source are we to attribute a transition so instantaneous and so complete? The most unreflecting observer cannot but perceive that the dying thief, in the new principles and emotions to which he gave utterance, must have been acted upon by an influence far higher and mightier than any mere impulse of natural thought, or of natural conscience. There is no faculty of the human mind whose unaided workings can account for such a change. In the recorded history of this individual, we have before us two states of moral being directly opposite to each other. At one moment, his soul is black with despair, and convulsed with hate and rage; while from lips quivering with mortal throes he belches forth curses and blasphemies upon the Divine Sufferer at his side. A brief interval passes, and that same soul is subdued, humbled, melted into contrition and love; and those same lips overflow with expressions of trust and worship. The transformation thus effected — a transformation rapid, thorough, comprehensive — can be explained only by the fact, that at this solemn crisis of his being, as he hung on the brink of eternity, with the gulf of perdition opening beneath him, the Omnipotent Renovator touched his heart, and brought him from condemnation to acceptance, from the power

of Satan unto God. He was born again — saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. A mystic word was spoken — a mystic energy went forth — and the wild tossings of depravity within him were laid to rest, and his whole immortal destiny changed. Well may we believe that the God-man had looked on him with yearning compassion, as they trod together the painful road to Calvary. Well may we believe that in that merciful pleading for His murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," there was a special intercession for the obdurate one who shared His torture, but not its support. And now, in fulfilment of the Mediator's prayer, celestial Grace descended into the depths of that polluted soul, dispelling all its darkness, purifying all its affections, pervading all its recesses, and diffusing holiness and peace, where before guilt and desperation reigned alone.

Of the truth of this statement ample corroboration will be found, if we examine more particularly the frame of mind which he manifested. Even a cursory analysis will show it to have been such as can exist in fallen man only through the operation of the quickening Spirit, and such as furnishes, wherever it is displayed, conclusive proof of His presence and agency.

Among the sentiments which he expressed, we

notice a warm and affectionate recognition of the Saviour's innocence. The strength and fulness of his conviction on this point appear in the significant reproof which he addressed to his companion. "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." This confidence in the blamelessness of Jesus was in many respects eminently remarkable. At the moment when he proclaimed it, the whole surrounding multitude regarded Christ as an infamous criminal, righteously doomed to death. The fickle and maddened populace of Jerusalem, led on by their priests and rulers, looked upon Him as a sacrilegious blasphemer, who had assailed their national religion, traduced their Holy City, and threatened the destruction of their Temple, and of their entire ecclesiastical state. The Roman soldiers, who were the immediate instruments of His execution, probably knew not, and cared not, with what offense He was charged. But as he had been condemned by the proper civil tribunal, they took it for granted that He was some vile instigator of sedition, and joined their voices to swell the tide of general execration that was poured upon Him. Those of His disciples who were present were indeed well aware that He was wholly guiltless of the crimes imputed to Him. Nevertheless, fear kept them

silent ; and however deeply they may have mourned His fate, there is no account that they uttered a single word in justification of His character. In all the vast throng that encompassed His cross, the only expression of pity for His sufferings and abhorrence of His unjust doom, fell from the lips of the poor, expiring felon by His side. No angelic champion asserted His holiness. No apostle stood forth to declare it. Not even the women, who watched His agonies from afar, ventured a syllable in His defense. The sole advocacy of the world's best Friend, in the hour in which He gave His life a ransom for the world, was left to a nameless thief. And this advocacy, brief as it was, and spoken amid the thick-coming pangs of death, clearly evinced that, in reference to Christ, the feelings of him who professed it had undergone a total change. No longer viewing Him as the object of merited reproach and scorn, he could not bear even to listen to the insults which others were casting on the Immaculate One. In the fervor of his new convictions, he rebuked the impious utterances of his associate, and tendered to the Holy Sufferer the tribute of his own veneration, sympathy and sorrow.

What produced this marvellous revolution of temper and conduct? It is not probable that he had any knowledge of Jesus till he met Him on the way to the cross ; or if, perchance, that despised name

had ever reached his ear, it was only as the synonym of imposture and baseness. He took part at first in the universal contempt of the Nazarene, and manifested a hatred of Him bitter as that shown by the rest. What was there in the circumstances around him — in the jeering crowd — in the fiendish shouts of malice and derision — in the aspect of the silent, unresisting Victim — to overcome this enmity, and substitute for it emotions of tenderness and love? Could any human influence work so great and vital a change? The influence was not human — it was Divine. The effect was wrought by that all-revealing Spirit, whose office it is to open the eyes which sin has closed, and display to the darkened soul the excellence and beauty of Christ.

The language of the dying malefactor breathes confession and penitence. The sympathy which he expressed for the Saviour prepared the way for the vivid perception and the contrite acknowledgment of his own guilt. A spiritual apprehension of Christ, of the loveliness of His character, and the expiatory nature of His sufferings, always leads the soul to a sense of its sinfulness and ruin. It was so in the instance we are considering. Glancing back upon the iniquities of his life, he exclaims in behalf of himself and his fellow-culprit, "We receive the due reward of our deeds." It cannot be doubted that

his words indicate genuine contrition. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he was now the subject of that "repentance unto life" which is indispensable to reconciliation with God. His former history rose to his view in all its appalling blackness. He sought not to extenuate it, or to justify himself for it. Under the convincing light that now shone within him, disclosing to the soul's gaze the soul's defilement, his emotions were like those of Job when he said, "Behold, I am vile; what can I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"—like those of David when he said, "I acknowledge my sin, and mine iniquity have I not hid"—like those of the publican when he smote on his breast, and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus from the cross, where he suffered the justice of man, went up to heaven the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart.

What awakening monitions does his experience address to ourselves! How impressively does it remind us that we must have the same consciousness of guilt, and the same sorrow for it, or be forever shut out from pardon! Our own transgressions are manifold and aggravated; and however free we may deem ourselves from the outward vices with which his life was stained, yet, in our inward character—in our relations to God's law and to God's grace—we may bear a deeper criminality than

was possible to him. He sinned in ignorance and in darkness. We sin in the full blaze of Christian light and knowledge. He never heard of a Saviour till he stood with Him on the mount of Crucifixion; and in that first and only interview he cast his soul on the merits of His atonement. We have neglected the blessings which He offers, while all our lives long He has been walking by our side in His word and ordinances. Every one who remains impenitent under the invitations and warnings of the Gospel, is in the sight of Heaven a greater sinner than the felon on the cross. And as he was exposed to the justice of the tribunal on high, as well as to the retribution of earth, so are we liable to that eternal wrath which Jehovah has denounced upon all who hold fast to their estrangement from Him. It becomes us to confess the equity of our condemnation; to deplore our unrighteousness; and to flee for refuge to the great Propitiation. And if we refuse to do this, then as certainly as the crucified thief expiated the violation of human law, so certainly shall we expiate, in everlasting torment, our violations of the Divine.

One more element in the language of this penitent sinner, was believing prayer. "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Under the teaching of the Divine Enlightener, how rapid was his progress in spiritual things! Like

the morning of a tropical clime, it flashed from darkness into day. His last utterance embraced only the sinlessness of Christ. Now he calls Him Lord. Now he adores Him as a King, swaying, even upon the cross, the sceptre of heaven and earth. Now he pleads for an interest in His redemptive work, as the alone requisite to salvation. Oh, how much was implied in this one sentence, pronounced by such lips, in such circumstances! It involved belief in the Deity of Jesus — belief in the vicarious expiation of Jesus — belief that in Jesus was the only refuge of a sinful soul, and that on Him must the trembling spirit rely for present cleansing, and for final glory. How strong and earnest, moreover, is the tone of this testimony, and how indescribably sweet and touching the petition which it breathes! "Remember me!" Did ever perishing mortal gasp out a prayer more simple and yet more comprehensive than this? What want of undone man does it not include? What grace of regenerate man does it not express? "Remember me!" What a sense of unworthiness the words speak! He asks only remembrance from Christ. What far-reaching faith! He feels that to be remembered by Christ carries with it every other blessing. What confidence! He commits his happiness to one who, in outward appearance, is a dying criminal like himself. What love! He longs

for a place in the memory of this branded, crucified Friend more than for the homage of earth's greatest and best. What hope! From the gloom and horror that environ him, he looks away to the heavenly world, and sees the Redeemer in the glory of His kingdom, and trusts that even he, the vile outcast here, will be remembered there.

And who will not join in his prayer? Who will not say, in a spirit equally earnest, "Lord, remember me"? Christ is our only hope. There is no other name by which we can be saved. He invites us to come to Him, and repose our eternal welfare in His hands. If we obey His voice, we shall find that not in one lonely instance will He forget those who look to Him for succor, and desire a home in His kingdom. Oh, then, let each of us make this petition our own. Aged man, standing on the brink of the grave, and shrinking back with dread from the eternity so near thee—cry, "Lord, remember me." Thou man of toil, harassed with care, and given up to terrene pursuits, seek a higher good—cry, "Lord, remember me." Thou afflicted one, bereaved of human love, and weeping over the crushed hopes and joys that strew thy desolate path—cast thy bleeding heart on the bosom of Jesus, and cry, "Lord, remember me." Thou vain youth, panting for pleasure, and roaming in the delusive quest of worldly delight—turn from thy

fatal course; give thy heart to the Saviour; and laying at His feet the bright gifts of life's morning, cry, "Lord, remember me." And thou little child, clinging yet as a fair bud to thy mother's breast, learn this prayer from her lips, and kneeling by her side, say in thy infant tones, "Lord, remember me." In this brief petition is comprehended all that we can need for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. If Jesus remembers us, it matters little who else forgets us. If Jesus remembers us, He will supply us with all grace for the conflicts of time, and with all the blessedness of immortality.

Having thus spoken out the longing of his soul, the suppliant is silent, listening with strained ear and throbbing heart for the answer. Nor is that answer delayed. He who came to seek and to save the lost, welcomes with Divine joy this fruit of His atoning travail, and, amid the agony of that travail, sends forth the response, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." The prayer was accepted, the mercy assured.

Contemplate the scene of this promised happiness. In the New Testament, the word Paradise is employed to denote the state of the redeemed while separate from the body. That such a state exists, Revelation has affirmed with a clearness that precludes doubt, and in instances too numerous to be cited. Often and most decisively is the solemn

fact announced, that the world of retribution begins at the grave; that being, not annihilation, life, not death, conscious activity, not forgetfulness, await the soul immediately on the dissolution of its mortal framework; and that they who die in Christ enter at once into blessedness — blessedness full and perfect as the powers of the disembodied can contain. And to this allotment of the saved, which precedes the crowning beatitudes of the last day, when the glorified spirit shall inhabit the glorified body, the Evangelic Writers give the name of Paradise. It is important to observe, that the term is not used to indicate a different region from heaven, but only to mark the particular circumstances of departed saints, previous to the resurrection. That Paradise is heaven, is evident from the fact that St. Paul uses both words to describe the same place. He says that he was caught up into the third heaven — the special seat of God's presence, the peculiar abode of His glory; and then, in repeating the statement, he says that he was caught up into Paradise — manifestly applying both designations to one and the same locality. Heaven is the general name given to the scene of immortal felicity, considered in reference to all its inhabitants, whether angels or the spirits of justified men; while Paradise is the specific term employed to describe the condition of glorified souls, which, though dwelling in heaven,

and happy to the extent of their present capacities, yet, being separate from the body, have not attained to the fulness of bliss which they will enjoy, when their whole nature, complete and perfect, shall walk the celestial fields.

Such was the beatific home to which the dying Christ invited the dying malefactor. Of that glorious abode Jesus has the keys; and by the efficacy of His propitiation, He was then opening the gate to the spirit trembling on the verge of the boundless unknown. In consequence of its new-born faith in that propitiation, the soul, which but a moment before was just ready to plunge into the abyss of woe, was now established on the Rock of Ages, and soon to be borne upward to its mansion in the skies.

To that mansion the Redeemer was to lead the way, and meet the disciple there. This it was which made the promise of salvation so rich in joy. To the believer on the cross, a heaven without Christ would have been no heaven. The absence of his Deliverer would have rendered even Paradise a land of exile. And similar are the feelings of all who have been the subjects of recovering grace. The heart, whose chief trust and love are fixed on Jesus, can find no perfect happiness where He is not. There might be a world all bright and fadeless, inaccessible to change and grief and sin, glow-

ing with immortal sunshine, and inexhaustible in its sources of delight; but if Jesus were not there, it could be no heaven to a Christian. "Forever with the Lord"—"with Me in Paradise"—these are the words which unveil to faith its most satisfying object, and quicken hope to its loftiest flight. And how emphatically does Christ Himself speak of His perpetual presence in heaven, as constituting the principal felicity of His people, and their highest reward. In describing the final recompense of those who live for His cause, He sums it up by the single expressive statement, "Where I am, there shall my servant be." "I go to prepare a place for you, and will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Companionship with Christ is thus held out to us as the very crown and climax of future blessedness—imparting to the inheritance of the saved its sweetest enjoyment, and its noblest honor. Nor will this language appear too strong, if we consider what it is to dwell with Jesus in glory, and how much it involves. It is to be admitted into unbroken communion with Him who has delivered us from sin and death and hell; to gaze, with unclouded eyes, on the beauty of His holiness; to contemplate the perfections of His character, and the beneficence of His works, in their grandest manifestations; to rejoice in the constant outgoings of His love; and

through eternity to draw from His fulness fresh supplies of wisdom, purity, and joy. He is the Fountain-Head of all excellence, all triumph, all delight; and there is not a conceivable element of the heavenly state, which does not flow from His unveiled presence. Oh, happy are they, and only they, who can say of that presence, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire!"

And how near at hand was the time when this promised bliss should be conferred! "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The entrance into glory is not placed amid the distant scenes of the Judgment, after centuries of dreamless slumber, but is declared to be present and immediate. It is as if Christ had said to the suppliant beside Him, "Before the sun shall set that now hangs pale and lurid in yonder sky, and before the night shall cover with its shadows the earth from which we go, thy spirit, led by Mine, shall tread the far-off land where the blessed dwell." Thus is the general truth clearly brought out, that the passage of the soul from time to eternity is instantaneous. No intervening state, no period of dull and blank oblivion, enwraps for a season its conscious powers, and holds in abeyance its final destiny. Without the delay of a moment, the disembodied spirit enters the world of retribution. How cheering to the believer must be the thought, that soon as his eyes close upon

earth, they open upon heaven ; that soon as the last breath is drawn, and the last pulse has ceased to beat, the soul wings its way to Paradise, and passing through the golden doors, gazes on the face of Christ ! You linger around the corpse ; but the spirit is with its Lord. You bedew with tears the broken casket ; but the jewel it enshrined is now sparkling on the breast of the Saviour. You follow the body to the grave ; but the ethereal essence, which so lately animated it, has gone to join the ranks of the redeemed, and to feast at the banquet of immortality. Oh ! when the good are dying, and to earthly on lookers thought and feeling seem locked in unconsciousness, the silence and the insensibility are but the stillness of the soul, as it listens to those words of loving welcome, whispered down to it from "The Better Land," "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

The narrative gives us no intimation of the manner in which this promise was received by the expiring convert. But it is easy to imagine the effect which it must have produced upon him. We can readily picture to ourselves his parched lips trembling with gratitude, his dim eye kindling, and his wan face lighting up with the glow of seraphic hope, as he thought of the blissful portion so soon to be his own. He lived to hear, amid the preternatural darkness of the ninth hour, the voice of his Master,

uttering the shout of victory, "It is finished!" and to see Him bow His head, and give up the ghost. And then he, too, went forth on his heavenward journey, and the Saviour and the saved met in their empyreal home.

How rapid, in his case, was the work of mercy, how speedy its result! In one day, he was enlightened, regenerated, pardoned, sanctified, conveyed to glory. The morning saw him a hardened criminal; the evening saw him a saint. The morning saw him in chains; the evening saw him invested with the freedom of the sons of God. The morning saw him writhing on a cross; the evening saw him rejoicing in Paradise. The morning heard his first sigh of penitence; the evening heard his first hymn of praise. When the rising sun looked on him, he was a degraded and brutal wretch, never lifting his thoughts above the dust in which he grovelled, foul with infamy, and about to close an ignominious life by an ignominious death. When the setting sun beheld him, he was a purified immortal, soaring on radiant pinions to the Mount of God. And there, in the vision of faith, we see him now, basking and exulting in his Redeemer's presence; while wondering angels point to him, and cry, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?"

May we all follow him to that happy world! The

grace by which he was rescued is equally needful for ourselves. We, too, must seek shelter in Christ, and come under the power of His renewing Spirit — or perish for evermore. “He that believeth not shall be damned.” An awful truth! yet spoken in mercy; for He said it who saved the thief on the cross. And He is as willing now, as then, to save the sinner who goes to Him for deliverance. The vile, the abandoned, the prodigal, the felon, the most lost to virtue and to hope — all the earth’s out-cast family — dissimilar in circumstances, but alike in ruin — may draw nigh to His feet, and pour out their woes before Him, and feel the glance of His pitying eye, and hear from His lips the words of forgiveness, and find in His love peace here, and eternal redemption hereafter. Oh! who, as he looks from the Cross of Calvary to the Throne of Intercession, and onward to the Judgment-Seat, where the endless state of all shall be decided, cries not from the depths of a yearning, trusting heart, “Lord, remember me!”

CHAPTER VIII.

JONAS, AND THE GREATER THAN JONAS.

“THE MEN OF NINEVEH SHALL RISE IN THE JUDGMENT WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SHALL CONDEMN IT, BECAUSE THEY REPENTED AT THE PREACHING OF JONAS; AND BEHOLD A GREATER THAN JONAS IS HERE.”— *Matthew* xii. 41.

THE Gospel of Christ, when taken home to the heart in accordance with the design of its Author, is the most precious boon which the mercy of Heaven has ever conferred on mankind. It raises the lost sons of earth from their natural state of sin and misery, absolves them from the sentence of Divine wrath, gives them unspeakable joys in this life, and endows them with the heritage of immortality in the life to come. But if it be neglected and spurned— if it be regarded with indifference or hostility instead of submission and love— all these blessed ends are frustrated; and it becomes a source of heavier condemnation and of deeper woe. Thus an Apostle affirms of himself and of his fellow-laborers, that they were “a savor of life unto life in them that are saved, and of death unto death in them that perish.”

It was with the view of impressing this truth on

those who rejected His ministry, and scorned the proffers of His grace, that our Lord uttered the declaration of the text. His words clearly teach the general doctrine that men are responsible to God for the use which they make of their religious privileges ; and that the misimprovement of these privileges will serve to swell their guilt, and to increase their punishment.

In order to develop and illustrate this idea, we propose to consider the character of Jonah, the nature of his preaching, and the manner in which it was received by the people of Nineveh ; and then to contrast with these the character and preaching of Christ, the reception He met from the Jews, and that which His Gospel still meets at the hands of ingrate men.

Of the history of Jonah we know nothing beyond what is contained in the single prophetic book which bears his name. From the brief and incidental sketches which it presents, he appears to have fallen far short of that high moral excellence which generally distinguished the ancient servants of God, and which seems essential to the office he bore. Not only did he manifest all the frailties and imperfections incident to our nature even when regenerate ; but, superadded to these, he evinced a disobedient spirit, a want of reverence for the Divine authority, a waywardness of temper, and a self-seeking, which

we should scarcely be prepared to expect in a pious man. We believe him to have been a child of God, and a true prophet; but of all on whom the mantle of Inspiration fell, he was, beyond question, the least affected by its sanctifying influence. This feebleness of the gracious principle within him may have been partly owing to the peculiarities of his mental organization. Every step of his career shows us a mind constitutionally so morbid and irascible as to amount almost to insanity. His disposition was dark and moody; like a lake which mirrors in its waters the thunder-clouds that overshadow it, and flash across its sullen waves a momentary gleam. These characteristics will come out more distinctly, as we glance at the moral indications respecting him which the narrative furnishes.

He belonged to the Tribe of Zebulun, and lived about eight hundred years before Christ, in the reign of the Second Jeroboam, king of Israel. At this period, Nineveh, the capital of the empire of Assyria, had reached the epoch of its highest power and splendor. It is described by ancient geographers as one of the largest and most important cities which the world has ever seen. Situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris, in a wide and fertile plain, favored with a salubrious climate and unequalled natural resources — from a few insignificant villages planted by colonists from Babylon, it grew

to be a mighty metropolis, outstripping the mother city in wealth and population; enclosed by lofty and massive walls sixty miles in circuit; filled with gorgeous palaces and crowded marts of traffic — the centre of oriental magnificence, and the seat of a dominion stretching from the Nile to the Indus, and from the Mediterranean to the shores of the Caspian and the Persian seas. Commerce, in two great streams — the one from Western Asia, the other from the realms of spices and gems in the far East — poured its riches into her bosom. Opulence brought in arts, luxury, and the refinements of high civilization; while the military ambition of her kings constantly extended her domain by conquest, until she sat in her pomp and pride throned mistress of the world. But, as usually happens in human history, material prosperity had been followed by gross corruption of morals, and the wickedness of the inhabitants had gone up to heaven. Provoked by their sins, the sovereign Ruler alike of Jew and of pagan, of individuals and of nations, resolved to vindicate His authority, and announce to the guilty city the vengeance which He held in store for it. And this embassy of wrath He commanded Jonah to fulfil.

Here, however, we are met, in the outset, by a startling exhibition of the contumacious and refractory spirit with which the prophet was imbued. He ventured to disobey the summons of Jehovah.

What motive incited him to a procedure so daring, we have no means of ascertaining with any degree of definiteness. It could not have been pity for the people of Nineveh, and an unwillingness to be the messenger of their doom, since his subsequent conduct evinced very little solicitude for their safety. Perhaps he shrunk from the labor of so long and difficult a journey. He dreaded, it may be, that he should fall a victim to the fury of the multitude incensed by so terrible a denunciation. Possibly, too, he thought it derogatory to him as a Jew, and a worshipper of the true God, to officiate amongst idolaters, and mingle with a foreign and hostile race. Or, as his own confession would seem to imply, he feared that the doomed city might repent, and that God would thus be moved to spare it; and so, in foretelling its overthrow, he should expose himself to the reproach of having uttered a false prediction. For these, or other reasons equally unworthy, he refused to comply with the Divine requirement. But he was ill at ease. By day and by night, at home and abroad, in solitude and in public, the inexorable mandate sounded ever in his ears, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it." He could not silence the unwelcome voice. He could not shut it out, nor thrust aside its never-ceasing remonstrance. In the hope, therefore, of escaping from the presence of God, and from the

sense of violated obligation which continually haunted and tortured him, he determined to abandon his native land, and flee to some remote spot, where he might forget conscience, and be at peace.

With this intent he went down to Joppa, and embarked in a ship for Tarshish, a celebrated Phœnician colony in Spain, known in the times of the Romans by the name of Tartessus. He seems to have taken this step under the supposition that by thus putting the whole Mediterranean sea between him and the scenes of his former life, he should get as far as possible from God, from duty, and from Nineveh. Infatuated man! Did he imagine that the Omnipresent was nowhere but in Israel, or that His authority and His power could be evaded by a change of place? Apparently he thought so; for, having secured his passage, he descended into the sides of the ship, and there, as if safely hidden at last from the Eternal Eye, quietly resigned himself to slumber. But the Almighty was on the sea as well as on the hills of Zebulun; and His arm lifted up the waves, and threatened to engulf the staggering vessel. The mariners in their affright cried every one to his god, and cast forth their merchandise into the deep. It was an awful hour—the tempest careering over the waters—the winds howling through the creaking cordage—the strained ship groaning in every timber—strong men par-

alyzed with terror, and expecting every moment to be swallowed up in the abyss.

But where was Jonah during all this fearful scene? Down in the hold, asleep! What monstrous insensibility must have seized him! Well might the shipmaster as he awoke him say, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" In haste he is conducted on deck. There the lot, heaven-guided, points him out as the culprit against whom Heaven's wrath is directed. And now, as he looks forth on the wild uproar, and comprehends the imminence of the peril, remorse and contrition seem roused at length in his stubborn heart. The prayers which he hears the despairing sailors offer to their dumb deities that cannot save, remind him of the living and all-powerful One, from whose presence he has sought to flee. The spirit of prophecy, dormant in the days of his rebellion, comes rushing over his soul. He confesses his sin; acknowledges himself a servant of the God of heaven, and a fugitive from His commands; and declares that as his presence in the ship had caused the storm, so nothing but the casting of him into the sea could allay it. We here perceive the only alleviating feature in the recorded conduct of Jonah — the solitary exhibition of manly dignity and true nobleness of soul which the narrative attributes to him. Smitten with compunction in view of the fatal consequences of his course, he

proposes that his own death should make atonement, and save the innocent lives which his folly had imperilled. But the crew, though shocked at the revelation of his guilt, are unwilling to surrender him to the rage of the billows. With a compassion strongly in contrast with the hard-heartedness which he afterwards displayed, these heathen Phœnicians employ every means in their power to preserve, along with themselves, a prophet of Israel's God, whose disobedience had brought them into such extremity of danger. Moreover, the dread might of this unknown God, as manifested in the war of the elements around them, fills them with awe, and conspires with natural pity to restrain them from any act of violence to His servant. But no mortal strength or skill can avail to save the ship with Jonah on board. And after battling against the increasing fury of the tempest till all hope is gone, they are compelled reluctantly to commit the now penitent offender to the yawning deep.

Instantly the winds subside, and the sea grows calm. With grateful hymns and sacrifices the mariners pursue their voyage; while the prophet goes down into the depths, wheré only the eye of the All-seeing can follow him. But the Hand that is strong to punish, is equally strong to deliver. A miraculous refuge awaits him in the bowels of "a great fish" which God has prepared to receive

him. From that living tomb his prayer comes up into the ear of the Ever-Merciful; and on the fourth day he is thrown out upon the dry land. But it is only to hear again the same imperative behest. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it the preaching that I bid thee." No longer daring to disobey, he goes to Nineveh — prophesies against it — and then retires without the city to await its doom.

And here his course of action develops still darker qualities than any we have yet traced. He shows himself cruel, malignant, unmoved by human suffering — the slave of a selfishness so intense as to be well-nigh incredible. When God accepted the humble repentance of Nineveh, and, in answer to the supplications of its inhabitants, withheld the threatened blow, "it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." "And he prayed, and said, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew Thee, that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." What a state of mind is here indicated! How unbecoming in one set apart to proclaim the universal Father, and teach the world His love! How alien from that religion whose pervading spirit is good-will to men! He gave way to the most violent envy and

rage, because the Almighty did not lay waste with the sword, or desolate with pestilence, or swallow up by an earthquake, or consume with fire from heaven, a huge and crowded metropolis, among whose population were a hundred and twenty thousand infants that had committed no sin. And what reason did he assign for such malevolence? Why, he had foretold the destruction of Nineveh; and hence, if it were spared, he might incur the danger of being accounted a false prophet. The hatred which, as an Israelite, he doubtless felt toward the Assyrians, the enemies and oppressors of his nation, may have combined with this overweening jealousy for his own reputation, and served to render it more exorbitant and engrossing. On grounds like these, he was willing, nay eager, that this immense multitude of men in their strength, women in their beauty, children in their innocence, should perish by an untimely death, and be hurried unprepared into eternity. No sympathy for the expected sufferers seems to have visited his soul. Day after day he sat in the shadow of his booth on the east side of the city, watching with longing eyes for the consummation of his prophecy. And when the period set for its fulfilment had passed, and he saw that the people of Nineveh were not then to die, he was so carried away with vexation, that he prayed

to die himself, and said that he did well to be angry even unto death.

Such was the character of Jonah — a character which, for the honor of humanity, we believe could have been produced only by the spirit of distorted Judaism, acting on the bitterness of a morose and misanthropic nature.

From this survey of his personal defects, we pass to consider his preaching. It was not attested by miracles, as were the messages of many of the other prophets. There is no record that he performed any mighty work to demonstrate his Divine mission. No voice from heaven, no descending minister of light, no exhibition of supernatural power, bore witness to his appointment from on high. At least, nothing of this kind would seem to have occurred within the observation of those to whom he was sent. The events which befell him on the voyage to Tarshish were undoubtedly miraculous; but they took place at so great a distance from Nineveh, that there is no reason to suppose its inhabitants had any knowledge of them. So far as they were concerned, his communication apparently rested on no authority but his own. He came alone — unheralded, unattended. There was nothing imposing or remarkable in his appearance. He was only a plain, unpretending traveller; and all the evidence he gave that his prophecy would be fulfilled, was

his own simple statement that God had sent him to announce the destruction of Nineveh. In these circumstances, would it have been strange had his prediction been regarded as the raving of insanity? Should a person, with no more outward marks of celestial authority, proclaim through the streets of New York or Boston, that, within a given time, it would be sunk by an earthquake, would he not at once be deemed a madman, and be treated as such?

The preaching of Jonah consisted wholly of denunciation. Its only theme was the menace of total and inevitable ruin. No notes of mercy were mingled with the stern proclamation of wrath. There was no intimation that the sins of those to whom it was addressed would be pardoned even if they repented. No directions were given for escaping the threatened doom; nor was there the slightest hint or implication that to escape it was possible. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed," was the single and unqualified announcement. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed," was the whole of this brief but awful sermon. And as the harsh, relentless preacher entered the gates of the city, and passed along its thronged and busy thoroughfares, he repeated ever his fearful text, sounding it in the ears of high and low, prince and beggar; as he met the bustling merchant, the votary of pleasure, and the cavalcades of the noble. Who,

in our day, would listen to a teacher of religion that should denounce speedy and unavoidable perdition on every one he met, whatever the place or occasion, and whatever the character of the persons he addressed? Would not all regard him as a fierce and malignant fanatic?

But what was the conduct of the men of Nineveh? On the reception of this abrupt and offensive message, did they revile or insult the prophet? Did they gather round him in idle curiosity; or contemptuously point him out to their companions as a crazed and wandering enthusiast? Did they scoff at his warning, and treat his mission with scorn? Provoked at length by his pertinacity, did they arrest him as a disturber of the peace of their city—a bitter and malevolent Jew, who, in prophesying their destruction, merely gave vent to his own malice? No, “they repented at the preaching of Jonas.” Even at this preaching, so imperfect, so unauthenticated, so menacing and repulsive, so fraught with elements calculated to diminish its credit and influence, they repented. “The people of Nineveh believed God.” Though before sunk in idolatry and sin, forgetful of the Almighty, and dreaming only of safety and pleasure, their slumbers were now broken. A deep conviction was wrought in their minds that the words to which they listened came from Jehovah. They saw the

enormity of their guilt, and felt assured that, without immediate and thorough reformation, the predicted judgment would be speedily inflicted. They, therefore, humbled themselves before the Lord; "and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least. And the king himself came down from his throne, and laid aside his robes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes, and published a decree throughout Nineveh, that neither man nor beast should taste anything, nor feed, nor drink water; but be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God, and turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in his hands; for, peradventure, God would thus repent, and turn from His fierce anger and save them." They had, indeed, no promise or even intimation that their supplications would be of any avail. The doom announced by the prophet was positive and unconditional. Yet they remembered the merciful character of the Most High; and, instead of abandoning themselves utterly to despair, sought to avert His displeasure by penitence, humiliation, and amendment of life.

This repentance of an entire people is one of the most singular events in sacred history. From the brevity with which it is narrated, its wonderfulness may escape our notice. We need to pause over it, to go back in thought to the dark and corrupt age

of the world in which it took place, to recall all its circumstances, and ponder the facts which must have conspired to render its occurrence improbable, in order to reach a just conception of its surprising character. Picture to yourselves a heathen city, larger in extent, if not in population, than London or Paris—the capital of a mighty empire—the home of commercial enterprise, and of military power. Imagine it decorated with numerous magnificent structures—lofty towers—the mansions of the great—costly fanes and temples dedicated to Baal and Ashtoreth. On all sides you see the tokens of a wide-spread and unbridled worldliness. Artisans are plying their trades, merchants their ventures. The bazaars are full of buyers and sellers. The streets are crowded with passengers—here a festive procession—there battalions marching in the pride of glorious war—yonder, the trains of satraps and viceroys from the provinces, bearing tribute to Assyria's king. Everywhere you perceive the presence of a civilization as gorgeous as it is sensual and wicked. Everywhere there is carelessness, revelry, debauchery, violence, crime; while over all dominates the foul Sun-Worship of the East, whose deity was lust, whose rites were pollution.

Walking amidst these thoughtless multitudes, you observe a plain old man, whose locks and beard are

white as snow. His look and mien are unimpressive; his garments coarse and stained with dust as from long travel. What startles yonder group of pleasure-seekers? There are no portents in the sky — no tremblings in the earth — no invading hosts at the gates. The old man is speaking. He says the proud and bloody city, with all its splendor and luxury, is reserved for a swift and terrible vengeance. Why should they be disturbed? He says this in the name of the God of Israel — a Divinity they do not worship, of whom they have never heard, or heard only to despise, as connected with a nation which they have often defeated and ravaged. But the message, destitute as it is of external support, is believed. It spreads from lip to lip, from street to street, from one quarter of the city to another — carrying fear and dismay to all hearts, sobering the giddy throngs, stilling the noise of bacchanalian riot, arresting the voluptuary and the murderer in the very commission of their guilty deeds. At length it reaches the palace, and through the cordon of guards and eunuchs penetrates to the chamber of the monarch. He, too, receives it with the same mysterious faith. Overwhelmed by a conviction of its truth, he comes down from his throne, lays away his crown, puts off his royal robes, clothes himself in the vesture of woe, and proclaims universal humiliation and prayer. The terrified inhab-

itants respond to the edict. All business ceases. Every implement is laid aside. The voice of mirth and the din of traffic are hushed; and throughout all ranks and classes no sound is heard but the cry of a whole people confessing its sins, and imploring mercy from Him who alone can save. What a sublime spectacle! How strange and how rare! Could sudden panic have so bowed these idolaters before the God of heaven? The narrative refutes the supposition. Their contrition was evidently sincere, for God accepted it, and Christ in the text recognizes its genuineness. Nor was it transient. Its influence lived during the life of that generation. And it was not till the next generation that impiety resumed its reign, and proving incorrigible to the warnings of a later prophet, drew down the long-suspended blow. A fact so striking, so unique in the annals of the Gentile world, could have been produced only by the direct power of the One Father, who holds the hearts of all men in His hand, and whose Spirit can work alike in every age, and under every form of social development.

Let us now bring into contrast with the part of our subject that has been presented, the character and the preaching of Christ, and the treatment which He received, and which He still receives, from those whom He came to redeem. Our Lord is unquestionably speaking of Himself when, as a reproach

to the Jews for their unbelief and impenitence, He tells them that they were favored with the personal instructions of one greater than Jonas.

To compare the blessed Redeemer with this weak and capricious prophet is as absurd as it is irreverent. It is like comparing the noon-day glories of the sun with the pale glimmer of a marsh-light. It is more—it is comparing the Infinite with the finite. The prophet was but a man, and a man in many respects most imperfect. Christ is God as well as man, possessing, in union with His human nature, all the attributes of Divinity. In Him all created and uncreated excellences combine. He is exalted far above all principality and power—King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is “the Everlasting Father”—“the Prince of Peace”—the “true God and Eternal Life”—“the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, which is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty.” By Him the universe rose into being; by Him it is upheld and governed. Him the elements obey. Him the celestial legions adore. Before His feet seraphs cast their crowns, and gaze with awe upon His glory. He is the Sovereign of angels and men—“God over all, blessed forever.”

The prophet's departures from rectitude were numerous and flagrant. The life of Jesus on earth was free from every stain. Even His most preju-

diced opposers could find nothing against Him. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. The prophet was guilty of disobedience to the Divine command. The language of Christ was, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God!" He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The prophet was petulant and severe; Christ gentle and forbearing. When reviled, He reviled not again. He gave His back to the smiter, and His cheek to him that plucked off the hair. He returned blessing for cursing, prayer for railing, forgiveness for injury. The prophet was unfeeling and cruel, insomuch that he preferred to see myriads of his fellow-beings swept away by sudden death, rather than forego the indulgence of his own selfish passions. But Christ so loved the world, that He left the throne of heaven, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and made Himself of no reputation, that He might restore men to holiness and God. To expiate human guilt, and open the way of life to the outcast and the condemned, He calmly bore indignity and scorn, and submitted, without a murmur, to the shame and agony of crucifixion. Had His spirit been like that of Jonah, He would have summoned the universe to attest His innocence. He would have collected all the angels throughout His boundless dominions to resist

His murderers; or, by one omnipotent word, have blasted them into nothingness. But no! such was His compassion for sinners, that He cheerfully endured for their redemption all that the malice of earth and hell could inflict. Survey His whole history. Follow Him from His lowly birth in a manger to His mournful exit on Calvary, and you will witness at every step the most touching displays of love to the human race. How attractive, how perfect was the character of Christ!

His preaching, also, was in the highest degree fitted to excite attention, and to produce belief. There was given to it every possible attestation which Heaven could furnish. Type, symbol, vision, prophecy, all combined to foreshow His coming. His advent was announced by angels, hymning the tidings down to earth. God Himself declared Him to be His "Beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased." All the resources of Infinite Power were placed in His hands. He commanded the winds and the waves, and they obeyed Him. He cured the most inveterate diseases by a word. Demons bowed to His control, and came forth at His bidding from the bodies of the possessed. At His voice, the dead rose up from their graves. Angels from above ministered to Him. Hell from beneath, acknowledged His sway. Devils in their seats of darkness trembled at His name. The sea, the

earth, the air, paid Him homage. The whole creation, animate and inanimate, owned Him as its Lord, and gave witness to His words. A message, supported by such irresistible evidence of its Divine authority, could not fail, it would seem, of securing universal regard.

The subjects embraced in this message are, moreover, wonderfully suited to awaken the interest of men. Pardon and eternal life are the themes on which it dwells. The Gospel of Christ is emphatically glad tidings. It discloses truths of infinite importance to human welfare. It teaches that God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but that, through Him, the world might be saved. It opens to the ruined children of earth a way of escape from guilt and misery. It shows us that we are all by nature under the curse of the law, and exposed to everlasting punishment; but that deliverance is proffered to us through the grace of Jesus Christ, who has become the Propitiation for our sins. It contains ample directions concerning the way of salvation, marking out the path to heaven so plainly that none but the wilfully blind can mistake it. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." These are its simple and unequivocal instructions. And these instructions it enforces by appeals and motives most tender and

impressive. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, let him come, and buy wine and milk without money and without price." It promises forgiveness, acceptance with God, support in affliction, hope in death, and glory in heaven, to all who embrace its overtures. Thus is it throughout a proclamation of Mercy, speaking peace to the penitent, and denouncing wrath only on those who obstinately continue in unbelief. It might well be supposed that a Gospel so full of blessings, so adapted to the condition of man, so able to meet all his wants for time and for eternity, must have been hailed with one wide burst of thankfulness and joy.

But what was the real fact? Did the Jews, to whom the message of Christ was first delivered, receive Him gladly? Were they convinced by His miracles that He was the Son of God? Were they moved by His teachings and His works to welcome Him as their Saviour? Alas! far different was the reception which He met at their hands. Instead of believing on Him, they shut their eyes to all the proofs of His Messiahship, derided His claims, rejected His doctrines, cast from them the eternal life which He offered, and consummated their guilt by nailing Him to the cross. Vain to them were the

attractive beauties of His character; vain the importance and tenderness of His message; vain the breathings of His compassion; vain His words of love; vain His deeds of almighty power. They resisted all argument, all admonition, all entreaty; and by imbruing their hands in His blood, entailed on themselves wandering and desolation in this world, and in the world to come an eternity of torment. With what emphasis, then, might our Lord declare to them that the men of Nineveh, who had repented under light far less clear, and amidst privileges incomparably inferior, would rise up in the judgment to condemn their aggravated stupidity and hardness of heart!

The principle laid down by our Divine Teacher, applies with even more force to our own times, and to the dwellers in Christian lands. There is amongst us One greater than Jonas. True it is, that we are not permitted, like the Jews, to behold the Son of God face to face. We hear not from His own lips the words of invitation and of warning. But though we see Him not, He is here — here in these Lively Oracles in which His discourses are recorded — here in the messages which He has commissioned His heralds to proclaim — here by that Holy Spirit whom He has sent to give efficacy to His truth, and carry forward His cause on earth. We have every possible evidence of the heavenly

origin of His Gospel, and every conceivable advantage for making its blessings our own. We have line upon line, precept upon precept. We are taught by mercies, taught by judgments, taught by sermons, taught by example, taught in public and in private, taught by our own consciences, and by outward appeals. Every Sabbath Christ preaches to us. Every day He meets us with instruction and reproof. Wherever we are, whatever we do, He is constantly by our side, plying us with the solemn command, "Follow Me."

Yet are there not many among us who have never obeyed His voice, and surrendered their hearts to His grace? In defiance of all the admonitions we have received, are we not still impenitent and worldly? If, then, we continue to disregard the mercy of Christ, and die unconverted and unpardoned, will not the men who repented at the preaching of Jonas, rise up as witnesses against us for refusing to listen to the Greater than Jonas?

How solemn the thought, that when we stand before the great tribunal, if we stand there without an interest in the blood of Atonement, those who died long centuries ago will start up from forgotten graves to testify against us! "The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation" — the generation of to-day — this God-neglecting generation — this Christ-despising generation — this

generation of worldlings raving after gold, but careless of heaven. Oh, hearken to the words of Jesus! Repent and believe the Gospel. Then, in the day of decision, the Judge Himself will witness in your favor, and pronounce on you the sentence of acquittal and salvation.

CHAPTER IX.

HEAVEN'S JOY OVER THE SAVED.

“THERE IS JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH.”—*Luke xv. 10.*

CHILD lost in the forest!” Such was the cry which startled the inhabitants of a remote and thinly-peopled district in the wilderness. On a bright summer morning, a little boy belonging to a family residing in the outskirts of the settlement, left his home to gather flowers along the banks of a neighboring stream. Absorbed in his sport, and enticed on, now by a bed of cowslips, and now by a hillock blushing with violets, he strayed farther and farther, heedless of the distance, until he had passed beyond the clearing into the deep, pathless woods that environed it. Here he soon became completely bewildered, and, in his fruitless endeavors to retrace his steps, wandered away among the wild solitudes that stretched unbroken to the distant mountains.

At noon his parents missed him; yet, as he was often thus absent, the circumstance occasioned no special concern. But when the shadows of evening

began to settle upon the valleys, they grew anxious, and went forth to seek him. Unable to discover him anywhere in the open ground, they were forced to admit the agonizing fact that he was lost in the tangled depths of the forest. The alarm was given, and every neighbor came at the summons. After a search of three days the child was found, faint and famished, and well-nigh dead with weariness and terror. With songs and shouts they bore him back in their arms, swift runners going before, and crying, "FOUND, FOUND!" The entire hamlet was stirred by the tidings, and broke forth into thanksgivings. All participated in the happiness of the parents; and though there were a hundred children in the settlement, more joy was felt that night over the one little wanderer rescued from death, than over the ninety and nine that had been exposed to no danger.

This touching incident well illustrates what Christ tells us in the text respecting the joy of angels over the penitent. To fallen creatures like ourselves, with all the powers of earth and Hell leagued to destroy us, how full of comfort is the declaration that the hierarchies of heaven sympathize in our danger, and exult in our deliverance! How assuring is it to know, on the word of the Faithful One, that celestial spirits feel a compassionate interest in the salvation of our sinful race; that they watch with

benevolent solicitude the issue of our probation ; and that every instance of conversion to God sends a thrill of rapture through all the ranks of the blessed ! Nor is this announcement less wonderful than it is cheering. That those glorious intelligences which compose the retinue of Jehovah, bask in the light of His countenance, and drink immortal bliss at the Fountain-Head of all felicity, should bestow any attention upon us, the polluted children of men ; and, especially, that their happiness should be increased by the increase of ours, would appear so improbable to human reason, that we might well deem it the beautiful day-dream of enthusiasm, were it not revealed by that Omniscient Saviour who is the Lord of the invisible world, who is perfectly acquainted with the feelings of its inhabitants, and who is too wise to err, too good to deceive us, in the representation which He has given of their character.

Resting the fact, therefore, on the authority of Him who, by way of eminence, is denominated "the Truth," let us endeavor to set forth, so far as we are able to discover them, the reasons which render the repentance of a sinner an occasion of joy to angels.

Angels rejoice when a sinner repents, because an enemy of the Divine Government is then reconciled to it. From Scripture and from observation alike,

we learn that vast multitudes of the rational creatures of God are in a state of rebellion against Him. Once, indeed, this appalling fact had no existence. In the remote ages of a past eternity, all worlds and all beings yielded a cordial submission to His will. The Powers and Principalities of Heaven, the Cherubim and Seraphim that filled His court and ministered before Him, poured forth, from bosoms unsullied by guilt and untouched by sorrow, the homage of supreme devotion. Every planet that wheeled through infinitude was vocal with the praise and radiant with the love of Him who hung it on its axle. The whole creation was one immense altar, from whose every part the ceaseless incense of gratitude and adoration ascended to its Maker and Governor.

But this scene of universal peace and holiness Satan disturbed. Occupying the rank of a high archangel, he became, as Revelation informs us, inflated with pride, threw off his allegiance to the Blessed and Only Potentate, and, for aspiring to the dominion of the skies, was hurled into the abyss of night. Nor did he fall alone. "The angels that kept not their first estate" — the partners and abettors of his conspiracy — were involved in the same fearful ruin. Under the auspices of these revolted spirits sin commenced its reign; and ever since it has waged relentless war against the supremacy of God, and toiled, with insatiate malignity, to blight

all that is fair and pure in the universe. Whether it has effected a lodgment in any other province of Jehovah's empire, we know not; but in that which we inhabit its devastations have been wide-spread and terrific. It has alienated the whole family of man from their rightful Sovereign, and filled the earth with disorder, misery and death.

But as here has been the field of its triumph, so here also shall be the field of its overthrow. God has appointed His Son to "destroy the works of the devil," and reduce this apostate world into obedience to His law. And this commission the victorious Saviour is now fulfilling. He has shed His blood to satisfy Divine Justice, to expiate transgression, and unlock the fountains of Mercy to the penitent and believing. And to give effect to this wonderful provision of redeeming Love, He is causing it to be proclaimed throughout all lands, sending down His Spirit to dispose the hearts of men to accept it, and putting forth the energy of His truth and grace to vanquish sin, and erect on its demolished throne the kingdom of perfect and universal righteousness. Our world has thus become the theatre of a mighty moral conflict. The antagonistic powers of Light and Darkness have here met to decide the momentous question whether the cause of Heaven or of Hell shall prevail; whether the rights of infinite Rectitude and Majesty shall be maintained, or be

surrendered to the proud demands of a selfish, disloyal world.

Now, between these contending forces repentance forms the separating line. It is the boundary which divides a state of allegiance to God from a state of insubordination to Him. It is the peculiar livery of the redeemed — the badge that distinguishes the friends of Jehovah from His enemies. They who truly exercise it have bowed, with cheerful and unreserved subjection, to the sceptre of the King of kings; while, on the other hand, all the impenitent, whatever may be their external character, are in heart opposed to God, and ranged beneath the fell standard of revolt. Repentance is the act by which the transgressor detaches himself from the service of sin, comes out from the ranks of its votaries, lays down the black flag of rebellion at the foot of the Cross, and enlists for time and for eternity under the white banner of Peace and Holiness and Love. With sincere contrition he abhors and renounces the iniquities of his past life; assents to the justice of his condemnation; acknowledges the equity of the Divine law in all the strictness of its precepts, and in all the solemnity of its sanctions; embraces the pardon offered in the Gospel as a free and unmerited favor, and willingly consecrates himself to the obedience of faith. From that moment, he makes a transition from death to life spiritual and

eternal. From that moment, he begins to act from new motives, in accordance with new principles, in pursuit of new ends. From that moment, Satan loses a vassal, and God reclaims a subject.

Considered in this point of view, such an event, it is obvious, must afford unspeakable joy to the heavenly hosts. It brings a new servant to their Lord. It is the accession of a new individual to that holy kingdom, of which God and His Christ are the Head. The interests of this kingdom are to them infinitely precious. They feel unmingled complacency in the rectitude of its principles, in the wisdom of its arrangements, in the benevolence of its designs; and regard it as the imperative duty of every rational being to venerate and obey its requirements. To aid in its advancement is the object of their earnest desire and of their incessant efforts. They know that just in proportion as the sphere of its influence is widened, the honor of Jehovah and the welfare of His intelligent creatures will be promoted. They see the safety of the Eternal Throne, and the happiness of unnumbered worlds, identified with it. And they look forward, with eager expectation, to the period when its universal spread shall diffuse light and purity and bliss over all the territories of the Most High.

Entertaining such views of the glory of that reign of grace which God has established through His

Son, must they not contemplate with intense delight every instance in which a repentant soul surrenders to it, and conforms to its laws? When an earthly monarch sends out his armies to subdue an insurgent province, with what transport do his faithful subjects at home hear of the success of the expedition! As tidings arrive, that one detachment after another of the rebel faction is submitting to their prince, and one strong position after another falling before his forces, how does the very ecstasy of exultation thrill and convulse the realm! Similar, though infinitely more pure and elevated, is the rapture which pervades the bosoms of the blessed spirits above at the repentance of sinners upon earth. And these raptures will continue to be felt with increasing frequency and power, as the triumphs of the Cross thicken and multiply, and the Redeemer goes forth in the greatness of His strength, conquering and to conquer, until all nations shall receive Him as their King; and "Victory! Victory!" shall resound from earth to heaven, and be echoed back from heaven to earth.

Angels rejoice when a sinner repents, because it affords a new display of the glory of God in Redemption. To the inhabitants of heaven, the character of Jehovah is the subject of unceasing study and delight. He is the centre of their thoughts, their affections, their worship. They dwell with concentrated and

ravished attention on the exhibitions which He is continually making of His attributes; and as one perfection after another is developed and brought into action, or set forth in new and more commanding lights, their bosoms expand with fresh and augmented rapture. Thus, though from the first moment of their being they had been the possessors of pure and consummate happiness, yet when God exerted His power in the work of creation; when He garnished the firmament with shining worlds, and hung the earth on its axle, adorned it with beauty, and stored it with all that could render it the fit abode of men — “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” at this new manifestation of the resources of infinite Wisdom and Omnipotence. In like manner, they ponder the developments of Providence, and trace the progressive unfolding of that system of government which God administers over the world; and, as in the course of events it is presented in fuller and more interesting points of view; as its mysteries are solved, and its seeming inconsistencies cleared up; as order and harmony come forth from apparent confusion, and benevolence and wisdom are seen in every appointment — their admiration and their bliss are constantly increased.

But it is in the scheme of Redeeming Grace, that they most clearly perceive and most reverently

adore the perfections of the Godhead. The apostasy, there can be no doubt, spread amazement and horror through all the ranks of angelic existence. They must have paused with wonder and awe amid their seraphic hymns, and hung silent over their harps, to see what line of conduct the Holy and Just One would pursue in this dreadful, and, to them, unlooked-for emergency. Pity for the rebel would prompt them to desire his pardon and restoration. But abhorrence of his crime, aggravated as it was by the high favor conferred on him, a deep sense of the claims of insulted Majesty, and a conviction of the danger to the well-being of the universe, should such transgression pass unnoticed — would seem to blot out all hope, and render forgiveness impossible. When, therefore, Jehovah Himself solved the mighty problem, and brought forward the plan of reconciliation through the sacrifice of Christ, by which, while the Divine authority was guarded and honored, ample provision was made for the salvation of the sinner, joy unfelt before must have swept over the legions of the skies. The character of God was now to be displayed to them in an aspect hitherto unknown. They had seen His benevolence in their own creation and happiness. They had seen His holiness and justice in the punishment of the rebellious angels. They had seen His power and wisdom in the building of the worlds. But they were now

to see all these combined with Mercy, in one glorious exhibition, for the rescue of ruined man. With what interest must they have watched the preparations for this remedial undertaking, and its gradual unfolding by symbol and type and prophecy, until, "in the fulness of time," the long-promised Redeemer came, and from the cross on which He wrought out the great Propitiation, proclaimed, "It is finished!" And now, as sinners one after another are led by the grace of the Holy Spirit to embrace that Propitiation, and welcome the refuge which it offers, who can measure the ecstasy which they feel? In every individual thus converted and saved, they behold a living manifestation of Divine Mercy; and over each instance as it occurs they pour forth from their myriad lyres the song of ever-growing praise.

Angels rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, because it brings fresh glory to Christ. The adorable Saviour, however despised by ingrate mortals, is regarded by celestial intelligences with the highest reverence. They cast their crowns at His feet, and vie with the spirits of the just made perfect in celebrating His praises. True it is that their relations to Him differ in some respects from those of the redeemed. He has not taken their nature as He has that of men. Their blissful seats were not purchased by His sufferings; nor is their enjoyment of the Divine favor the result of His mediation. But

although they are not personally the objects of His sacrifice, their affection and their homage are not, on that account, less deep or less fervent. They love Him for His character, His offices, His works. They behold Him adorned with every attribute that can command the veneration of holy minds. They recognize, in the radiance that invests Him, the express image of the Father — the visible and embodied presentment of the Unseen One in whom they live, and from whom all their blessedness proceeds. In the atonement which He has made to vindicate the Divine honor, and harmonize its claims with the freest exercise of clemency, they behold the great central fact in the history of God's moral government, the noblest theme of heaven, and the only hope of earth. Viewing in this light what He is, and what He has done, they cannot but feel a sacred and intense delight at whatever illustrates the efficacy of His expiation, and swells the tide of His glory. Such is the result when a sinner repents. In every case of true conversion, Christ sees of the travail of His soul. In every such case, a new proof is given of the life that springs from His death — of the power of His Spirit to subdue the human heart — of the sufficiency of His intercession to procure peace with God. In every such case, a new trophy is erected in the temple of His praise — a new jewel added to His mediatorial crown — a

new star lighted up in the firmament of His glory. And because it is so—because each sinner reclaimed, each sinner saved, exemplifies the grace and exalts the renown of the Saviour—"there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Angels rejoice when a sinner repents, in view of the misery which he escapes, and the happiness on which he enters. No teaching of Scripture is more decided than that they who live and die without repentance and faith in Christ, will be consigned to utter and everlasting despair. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Equally explicit is the testimony that they who exercise godly sorrow for their sins, and seek pardon through the merits of the Redeemer, however desperate may have been their former state, or heinous their guilt, shall receive forgiveness and peace here, and eternal salvation hereafter. "He that believeth, hath everlasting life." "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

Now, however we may assent to the truth of these statements; however firm may be our belief that heaven and hell are stupendous realities; and that the holy shall forever rejoice in the one, and the

unholy mourn forever in the other; we are yet far, very far, from having any adequate conception of either the bliss or the wretchedness involved in issues so overwhelming. We have not seen heaven — we have not looked into hell; and, therefore, our ideas alike of the raptures of the saved, and of the woes of the lost, must be dim and feeble.

But the views of the angels on these great verities are clear and vivid. They know what heaven is; for they dwell in its bright mansions, bask in its fadeless light, and drink full draughts of gladness from its perennial streams. They know what hell is; for they have gazed down from their celestial abodes into its dungeons of darkness, and have seen the tormented tossing in the gloom and weltering in the flame, and have listened to the groans and blasphemies that ascend forever from the prison-house of the damned. They know what it is for a soul to be lost; for they have seen lost souls in perdition — souls once dwelling on earth — souls once favored with the means of grace and with proffers of mercy — souls for which the Spirit strove and Jesus bled — such souls they have seen, banished eternally from God and happiness — with all their vast capacities filled, and ever to be filled, with giant anguish — the victims of self-accusation and hopeless remorse — scarred with the lash of avenging Justice — and doomed to suffer, without pause and

without end, the gnawings of the worm that never dies, and the burning of the fire that never shall be quenched. They know, too, what it is for a soul to be saved; for they have seen the saved in glory. They have seen, and constantly see, mingling in their seraphic companies, participating in their employments, and sharing in their happiness, the spirits of the just made perfect — human spirits, once fallen and polluted, but now redeemed and purified by the blood of the Lamb. They see, standing by their side, clothed in robes as dazzling as their own, millions that have been gathered from this outcast world, and made conquerors over sin and death and hell. They see them treading the same glittering heights with themselves; making the same progress in divine knowledge; approaching as near to the Eternal Throne; serving God with powers as great, and zeal as fervent; their songs as sweet, their natures as holy, their forms as glorious, their bliss as perfect. And they know that it was by repentance at the cross of Christ, that these ransomed multitudes began the upward course that has brought them to fulness of joy, and pleasures for-evermore. Must not the conversion of sinners, then, be an object of supreme desire and satisfaction to angelic minds? Seeing what they see — knowing what they know — witnessing in the lost the horrors of damnation — feeling in them-

selves the overflowing glories and transports of a blessed immortality — can we wonder that when even one of our ruined race is emancipated from sin, and prepared for their own happy society, they should burst forth in triumphant hosannas, and make all heaven ring with their outgushing joy?

We may illustrate this by an incident which occurred in connection with the wreck of the ill-fated steamer, *Central America*. A few days after that startling event, which sent hundreds to a watery grave, and plunged the nation in grief, a pilot boat was seen, on a fair, breezy morning, standing up the Bay of New York. The very appearance of the vessel gave token that she was freighted with tidings of no common interest. With every sail set, and streamers flying, she leaped along the waters as if buoyant with some great joy; while the glad winds that swelled her canvas, and the sparkling waves that kissed her sides, and urged her on her way, seemed to laugh with conscious delight. As she drew nearer, an unusual excitement was visible on her deck; and her captain, running out to the extreme point of the bowsprit, and swinging his cap, appeared to be shouting something with intense earnestness and animation. At first, the distance prevented his being distinctly understood. But soon, as the vessel came farther into the harbor, the words, "*Three more saved! Three more saved!*"

reached the nearest listeners. They were caught up by the crews of the multitudinous ships that lay anchored around, and sailors sprang wildly into the rigging, and shouted, "*Three more saved!*" They were heard on the wharves; and the porter threw down his load, and the drayman stopped his noisy cart, and shouted, "*Three more saved!*" The tidings ran along the streets; and newsboys left off crying the last murder, and shouted, "*Three more saved!*" Busy salesmen dropped their goods, bookkeepers their pens, bankers their discounts, tellers their gold, and merchants, hurrying on the stroke of the last hour of grace to pay their notes, paused in their headlong haste, and shouted, "*Three more saved!*" Louder and louder grew the cry — faster and faster it spread — along the crowded piers of the Hudson and the East River — up by the graves of Trinity, the hotels of Broadway, the marble palaces of the Fifth Avenue — over the Heights of Brooklyn — across to Hoboken and Jersey City — away, away, beyond tower and pinnacle, beyond mansion and temple, beyond suburb and hamlet — till a million hearts pulsated with its thrill, and above all the sounds of the vast metropolis, mightier than all, hushing all, rose the great, exultant shout, "*Three more saved! Three more saved!*"

If cold and selfish men will thus stop short in the eager quest of gain or of pleasure, to let the voice of

humanity speak out, and to express their joy that three fellow-beings have been rescued from the ocean depths, shall we deem it an incredible thing that the holy and loving denizens of heaven should rejoice when a sinner repents, and is delivered from the abyss of hell? Events analogous to that which I have described, though unseen by mortal eye, and unheard by mortal ear, are continually taking place in our world. Angel messengers — blest pilots from the haven of eternal peace — are ever visiting the earth on missions of mercy. They come, not to note the changes in secular affairs, the ebb and flow of temporal weal, the vicissitudes of politics, and the revolutions of states; but to watch the conflict of God's Spirit with impenitence and sin. Wherever that conflict is going on, thither they bend their flight, there they fix their steadfast gaze. No matter whether the individual in whose bosom it is waged be high or low, rich or poor. He may be a prince or a peasant, a Dives or a Lazarus, a lord in his hall, a beggar in his garret, a slave in his chains. Whoever he be, he has a soul, an immortal soul, a soul for which the Powers of Heaven and Hell are battling — and that is enough. With absorbing interest they observe the struggle. While they look, kingdoms may rise and fall, statesmen win and lose, fortunes spring up and crumble, financial disaster stride through the nations, and gaunt famine scare

the world. But they heed it not. A soul, a soul is in the crisis of its destiny; and that is infinitely more important in their view than any crisis of commerce or of empire. On that soul they fasten all their regards. They see it resisting. They see it wavering. They see it shaken and convulsed. They see it conquered. They see it fall prostrate before the Cross. They see the tear of contrition drop from the eye. They hear the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," burst from the heaving breast. And then their golden wings rustle. Up, up, toward heaven they mount with the joyful message, "*One more saved!*" Other celestial bands, returning from similar errands, join them on the way, and help to swell the shout, "*One more saved!*" Up, up goes the shining squadron — by stars and planets — beyond suns and systems — up, up to the great capital of the universe — ever chanting as it goes, "*One more saved!*" The watchers on the crystal battlements catch the news, and proclaim it to the listening throngs within. They publish it in turn. Angel tells it to angel, prophet to prophet, apostle to apostle, martyr to martyr, saint to saint. Choirs of harpers sing it to each other from the hill-tops of glory. On, on the tidings fly — over the flowery plains — along the banks of the River of Life — along the sapphire pavements — by the emerald palaces — through glittering ranks of

Cherubim and Seraphim—up to the very throne of Divinity itself—till all heaven echoes and throbs with the mighty anthem, “*One more saved!*” And thus “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

And there should be joy, joy deeper and more emphatic still, on earth. The sinner who repents is our brother, allied to us by the bond of a common nature. We, like him, are guilty and condemned. The same spiritual change which he has felt we must feel, or be undone forever. The same Saviour who has died for him has died for us. To the same heaven, to which he is going, we may also go. And in the same hell, which he has escaped, we must take up our everlasting abode, if we die impenitent. Oh! how strange it is that an event, which fills the glorified above with ravishing delight, should be unnoticed by men below, or be regarded with indifference and contempt! And stranger still is it, that they who profess to have repented themselves, should manifest so little interest in the repentance of their fellows, and put forth so few exertions to promote it! Disciples of Jesus! imitate the angels. Rejoice, as they rejoice, when a sinner is converted to Christ. Long, as they long, that multitudes may be brought to accept His salvation. And, in the strength which God giveth, pray and labor for the coming of the day, when

both they and you shall lift up the song of thanksgiving over not merely one sinner, but a world of sinners, repenting.

Dear impenitent friends ! if angels so desire your conversion, and would so rejoice to see it accomplished, ought you not to desire it yourselves? You have a far deeper concern in it than they. Their happiness will remain unimpaired, if you are not converted ; but yours will be forfeited forever. And should not the fact that they feel such solicitude for your conversion, teach you that conversion must be of unspeakable importance to you? They must be right. And if they did not know that without repentance you will perish eternally, they would never be so anxious that you should forsake your sins, and turn to the Lord. Oh ! believe not your own deceitful hearts ; but believe the angels — believe the Saviour — believe God, when He tells you that, "Except ye repent, ye shall perish." Come at once to Christ. Put away your transgressions by righteousness, and look to the Blood of Atonement for pardon and cleansing. Angels wait for your coming. A Greater than the angels waits for it with all the yearnings of infinite compassion. Yield, O yield to the invitation. And let the spirit-messengers that hover round you while I plead, bear back to their companions in glory the tidings of one more — two more — three more — hundreds more — repentant, converted, saved.

CHAPTER X.

THE STRONG SPOILED BY THE STRONGER.

“WHEN A STRONG MAN ARMED KEEPETH HIS PALACE, HIS GOODS ARE IN PEACE; BUT WHEN A STRONGER THAN HE SHALL COME UPON HIM, AND OVERCOME HIM, HE TAKETH FROM HIM ALL HIS ARMOR WHEREIN HE TRUSTED, AND DIVIDETH HIS SPOILS.”—*Luke xi. 21, 22.*

AMONG the many miraculous acts by which our Lord demonstrated His Divine mission, few were more striking than the casting out of devils. In that age, evil spirits, subordinates and emissaries of the Prince of Darkness, were mysteriously allowed to enter into the bodies of men, inflicting on them preternatural maladies, whose outward signs were repulsive and terrible. By His sovereignty over the demon-world, the Saviour expelled these foul intruders from the abodes which they haunted, and restored their victims to physical and mental soundness.

It was a miracle of this kind that led Him to utter the address in which the words before us are found. “He was casting out a devil; and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake, and the people wondered.” But

among the witnesses of this amazing event, there were some hardened and insensate ones, who, with an impiety as illogical as it was daring, said, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the Prince of the devils;" implying that the power which He wielded was delegated from Hell, and that, in the extrusion of demons, He was but exercising authority over His own servants! This blasphemous insinuation the great Teacher triumphantly refutes. "Every kingdom, divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and a house, divided against a house, falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?" In other words — if in forcing unclean spirits to depart from men, I act, as you wickedly affirm, by an infernal commission, then there is presented to you the strange spectacle of devil opposed to devil, and fiend warring with fiend. Is this credible? Is Satan so stultified as to turn his weapons against his own agents, and set free his own captives? "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." These wonders are a conclusive proof that I am sent from Heaven to overthrow the empire of Evil, and erect on its ruins the empire of Holiness. And it is the earnest and foreshadowing of this work which you now see.

From the particular achievements thus adverted

to, He proceeds to a broader view of the conflict which, as the Rescuer of a fallen race, He was carrying on against Satan. Demoniactal possession was but one of the many forms of influence, which the Power of Evil had gained over men. With that influence, wherever found, and however exerted, He came to contend, and to accomplish for the human soul a glorious emancipation from guilt and misery. And this merciful office He sets forth by a metaphor as significant as it is sublime. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

In the graphic picture which the Divine Limner has here sketched, the "strong man armed" represents Satan. The "palace" is the human soul, which he has seized, and which he "keeps" and guards with jealous power. The "Stronger than the strong man" describes the omnipotent Deliverer who comes to wrench it from his grasp. And the whole scene is intended to portray the struggle between them for its possession.

Helpless and lost indeed is the state of the soul before this struggle begins. "The strong man keepeth his palace." Strong in the resources of his diabolic nature, mighty in intellect, invincible

in will; armed with the dread panoply of satanic malice and satanic wiles; using the heart's own passions to perpetuate its own thralldom; and employing to the same end all the subsidiary allurements of sense—he maintains his fell occupancy with a vigilance that never slumbers, and an array of force which nothing finite can vanquish. He is never off his guard, never lays aside his weapons, never withdraws his sentinels from the ramparts, never relaxes watch or ward, never loosens his hold. Such is the moral tyranny that has fastened itself upon every unregenerate man. So utter is his subjection to “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

But whence originated this enslavement of the soul? We know that such was not its primal condition. It was not always under the sway of the relentless captor who now claims and holds it as his own. God made the soul pure and upright, endowed it with noble faculties and holy affections, and consecrated it as the habitation of His own glory. And so long as it retained that character, devoting all its powers to the will of their Author, it continued to be His property, His dwelling-place, His delight. But when man sinned, and thus alienated himself mentally and morally from his Creator, he passed into the tenure of another master,

and was brought under the control of the dark Spirit of the abyss. Through the temptation of the Arch Deceiver, the first parents of our race were seduced from their allegiance. In consequence of their representative character, all their posterity were involved in their fall, and inherited its results. Thus was the fatal victory won. Then did the human bosom become the abode of its foul Conqueror; acknowledging his ownership by admitting and cherishing the corrupt principles which he inspires. Then were the gates of the palace flung wide open for the strong man to enter; and he marched in, with all his dire and fearful train, barricading every approach with the engines of his power, and setting up in every chamber the insignia of his authority. Here was the origin of Satan's empire over the soul. It commenced in a daring invasion of the rights and sovereignty of God.

The reign of the Destroyer, thus begun and perpetuated, is characterized by all those attributes of unmixed evil, which belong to his own moral nature. Let all who have not been emancipated by redeeming Grace, ponder the dread features of the dominion to which they bow.

How pitiless is this dominion! How complete the bondage which it inflicts! The "goods" of the strong man "are in peace" — in a state of absolute subjugation, secure from inward revolt, and from

outward reprisal. With what literal exactness does this imagery describe the actual condition of irreligious men! Over their minds and over their hearts the tyrant wields unrestricted sway, and holds them in utter vassalage. They may, indeed, seem to themselves to be free. They may fancy music in the clank of their chains, and so forget their grinding. They may even boast of their exemption from moral restraints, and glory in the marks of their thralldom, as proofs of their independence. And it is the policy of Satan so to delude them, and prevent them from perceiving that they are enslaved. Nevertheless, the servitude is real and total. "Peace" — the peace of abject submission — reigns throughout the palace of the soul. Not an insurgent voice is heard; not a faculty stirs in resistance. The intellect, the imagination, the will, the conscience, the affections, all share in the bondage, and become, by the arts of the usurper, instruments of perpetuating that bondage. To this mournful truth the human race furnishes not a solitary exception. The entire history of our world, from the first apostasy downward, verifies the inspired declaration, that men are "led captive by the devil at his will."

What can be more debasing than this infernal mastership? We are wont to associate degradation with slavery. But there is no slavery that can, in

this respect, be compared with the slavery into which man has been brought by sin. In all other slavery, however deep and galling, the mind may be free. The fetter that shackles the limbs, cannot bind the thoughts, nor restrain their outgoings. But here the iron enters into the soul. The chain is on the heart, depraving and crushing whatever is noble in our nature. The true dignity of an intelligent being consists in its moral resemblance to Him who is the Fountain of all excellence, and the Centre of all perfection. Whatever, therefore, produces unlikeness to God must necessarily debase the nature on which it acts. How fully is this truth exemplified in the case of Satan himself. Though his form may not have wholly lost its original grandeur, nor appear less than archangel ruined; though he may still possess vast intellectual capacities, and stupendous powers of achievement; yet, in all that constitutes real glory, how low has he sunk beneath the sphere in which he once moved among the sons of the morning! And as men share his wickedness, they share also his degradation. True it is that humanity retains even in its ruin many traces of its former greatness, and often sends forth flashes and sparklings of the splendor with which its Maker adorned it. But these, like the ghastly lights that flicker up from charnel-houses, emanate from death, and serve only to show the putrescence beneath.

So fatally has the spoiler succeeded in blackening the soul with his own dishonors. Dragging it down from its equality with angels—from its high alliance with God and heaven—to a level with the tenants of the pit, he gloats over its pollution, and exults in the depth of its fall. Oh, how forcibly does Inspiration express the utterness of that descent, when it characterizes the natural man as “earthly, sensual, devilish!”

To be under the dominion of Satan is, moreover, as destructive as it is disgraceful. On all who obey his will the sentence of Divine condemnation is resting. Every being that sins is necessarily exposed to the penalty of God’s violated law, and in danger of its everlasting infliction. The powers of the nether world, though permitted to exercise a mysterious lordship over the realms of humanity, are themselves undergoing the pains of that law, and are waiting, in the prison of darkness, a yet more awful award at the judgment of the great day. The guilt of man renders him liable to the same doom. And his punishment will be equally just. His rebellion, in its commencement, and through all its subsequent stages, has been his own act. He has been placed under no compulsion—under no invincible necessity of sinning. He cannot charge his fall upon God, nor even upon the agency of Satan; for that agency would have been powerless

without his own consent. His transgressions are the product of free will and voluntary choice. In the emphatic language of Scripture, "he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed." Hence, as he has, of his own accord, associated himself with devils in character and in conduct, it is equitable on every principle of righteousness, that he should be associated with them in destiny. And this the word of God most distinctly and solemnly teaches. His wrath is revealed from heaven against the iniquities of men. If they die impenitent, they will be consigned, in the future world, to "the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." O ye careless ones! ye slaves of sin and Satan! behold the end to which your master is leading you, and which you will surely reach at last, if you turn not from his guidance. He has entered the palace of your soul, only that he may plunder and destroy it. If he be not overcome and driven out by One mightier than he, that noble structure, once so bright and fair, so worthy to be the shrine and home of Deity, will be shivered by the thunderbolt, and hurled into the lake of fire.

But there is hope for the defiled and imperilled mansion. A Stronger than the strong man has arisen to deliver it from his power, to repair the ravages which he has made in it, to cast from it its

impurities, and pervade it with the sweet odor of holiness, and the song of salvation.

The Author of our rescue from Satan is the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the worlds were made, the eternal Father, looking forward to man's thralldom and ruin through the arts of the Tempter, set apart His Only Begotten Son to inaugurate and carry out that Scheme of Mercy, by which the palace of the soul is to be given back to its rightful Proprietor, "the captives of the mighty taken away, and the prey of the terrible delivered." This purpose of Infinite Love was announced to the first transgressors of our race, as they left the bowers of their forfeited Eden, and went forth to their long exile. From that time onward, the Promised Redemption became the chief end of Divine Revelation, and the grand object of human hope. Prophecy foretold it. Symbols shadowed it. Sacrifices prefigured it. The march of the centuries, the ebb and flow of terrestrial affairs, the birth and death of empires, the painful travail of the darkling generations, the whole system of God's dealing with men, all bore relation to it, all tended to prepare the way for it. At the appointed hour the Deliverer came, assumed the fallen nature, and in it wrought the blessed triumph. Thus was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Behold our Emancipator! How preëminently

was He furnished for the fearful battle that lay before Him! "Stronger than the strong man" — clothed with loftier attributes, girded with vaster power, wielding more resistless weapons. What though He took upon Him the form of a servant, and made Himself of no reputation? What though He lay a helpless babe in the manger of Bethlehem? What though He was "the Man of Sorrows," and wandered homeless in the world which He came to save? What though He suffered a death of shame? These were but voluntary submissions. In their lowest depth, all the energies of Divinity were still His. The arms that were stretched out upon the cross upheld the universe. He was still the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express Image of His Person. He was still "God over all, blessed forever;" the Almighty One, who spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast; who hung the globe on its axle, and poised the stars in their orbits. Oh, He was strong, infinitely strong — stronger than Satan's devices, stronger than man's frowardness, stronger than the wrath of Justice! But we need not fear His power, for it is all controlled by Mercy. It is the power, not of the earthquake or the tempest, but of the sunbeam and the rain-drop — the power to enlighten, to vivify, to redeem.

Here, then, the great struggle between the Agen-

cies of Light and of Darkness opens before us. We see the one side represented by the incarnate Son of God, clad in the might of His sufferings and of His love; the other, by the Prince of Hell, backed by all his infernal legions, and by all his earthly auxiliaries. To these champions the fortunes of the strife are committed. Our world is the arena; and the prize to be striven for is, on the part of Christ, the recovery of the soul to the use and glory of Him who formed it; on the part of Satan, the retention of his influence over it, and its final perdition. Waged for such a stake, the combat absorbs the regards of Celestial Intelligences. Heaven watches it; the abyss is moved; the universe is in suspense. And shall not we, whose immortal weal or woe is involved in the issue, survey it with an interest yet more intense, and study its movements with fixed and eager gaze?

What is its method? How does the Stronger than the strong man conduct the assault? Of the manner of His procedure an apt illustration may be taken from the ordering of the dread civil war, in which our Government lately put forth its strength to uphold its authority, and bring back to their allegiance the revolted States of the South. In the capture of the numerous strongholds which our forces wrested from the rebels, the principal fortification was not ordinarily at once assailed. There

were many preliminary manœuvres. Outworks were to be demolished; strategic points were to be secured, to serve as bases from which the final operations were to be carried on, and the main attack developed. Precisely similar is the course which the Captain of our Salvation has adopted. He did not inaugurate the conflict by a direct onset upon the palace, whose conquest was His ultimate end. To open the way for this, previous achievements of the most arduous nature were necessary. The stern barrier of Divine Justice opposed the going forth of Mercy; and to effect its removal, a march of agony must be made, a terrible campaign of humiliation and sorrow undergone. In the merits of His atonement a vantage ground was to be gained, from which to push forward the advance upon the soul; and to reach such a position, severe battles with Satan must be fought outside the walls of his castle, and among the intrenchments that defended the approaches to it.

One of these battles took place in the field of the Temptation. As it was here that the Seducer had vanquished the first Adam, it was requisite that here he should be met and overcome by the Second. And it is of moment to observe that the weapons which Satan employed were the same in both cases. He triumphed over our first parents by enticements appealing alike to bodily appetite and to mental

ambition; and it was by instigations of a kindred character that he attempted to deceive and draw into sin their glorious Seed and Representative. But in the form that now confronted him, there dwelt, not the facileness of a weak woman, but the unblenching resistance of the God-man, the impregnable purity of the Holy One. In vain was the prospect of bread presented to His fainting humanity amid the hunger and thirst of the desert; vain the solicitation to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, in presumptuous proof of His Divinity; vain the phantasmagoric panorama of the world's pomp and glory, conjured up to induce Him to worship the Impersonation of Evil. The Son of God could not be corrupted; and at the calm, firm words from His lips, "Get thee behind Me, Satan," the Tempter fled baffled from the encounter.

They grappled again — the Strong Man and the Stronger — on the arena of Miracles. In many a human tabernacle, the Arch-fiend had quartered his fell troops, as a sign at once of his authority, and of his resolve to keep possession of his victims. But at the voice of Christ, the demons were driven out from the tenements which they defiled and tortured; and were compelled to confess His power, now in silent, trembling obedience, now with moanings and howlings, crying, "We know Thee, who

Thou art, the Holy One of God." Here the Strong Man was foiled again.

There was another and yet more decisive battle on the Hill of Calvary. Satan, having incited the Jewish priests and rulers to put the Redeemer to death, looked on with malign joy, while their murderous hands accomplished the deed. But did he deem this a victory for himself? Did he think the cross was to stand through all the ages a monument of his own triumph, and of Heaven's final defeat? Never was imagination so false, hope so baseless. No, no. In that very culmination of infernal malice—in that seeming overthrow of Christ—the dominion of Hell received a crushing and fatal blow, from which it can never recover. Then was wrought out, amid the gloom of the shrouded skies, and the quaking of the astonished earth, that amazing Propitiation, by which the power of Evil shall be ultimately banished from the universe. Here, too, the Strong Man was foiled.

They met again at the Sepulchre. If Satan could have prevented the resurrection of Jesus; if the stone, the seal, and the watch could have held the body of the Crucified a prisoner in the cold embrace of the grave—the supremacy of the Destroyer would have been assured. The Sacrifice of the Son, unaccredited by the witness of the Father, would have been shorn of all efficacy. It could

have procured no pardon — opened no way of deliverance to a fallen world: and the despotism of sin would have remained unbroken forever. But futile were all the precautions, and futile all the endeavors, both of devils and of men, to keep Messiah back from His glory. By the energy of His Godhead, He burst the bars of the tomb, and came forth triumphant over death, and him that had the power death — thus adding to His atoning work the crowning sanction and anastation of Heaven. Here also the Strong Man was foiled.

They met once more on the Mount of the Ascension. And when the risen Christ went up, through the bright, expectant skies, to His throne on high, He led captivity captive. How sublime was the scene, as the Conqueror — His vesture dipped in blood, and the keys of Death and Hell at His girdle — mounted the chariot of Victory, dragging behind Him the fettered tyrants who had so long dominated our race! Well might the angelic sentinels, watching on the walls of the Celestial City, inquire as they saw Him approach, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bauriah — this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" And well might He answer, "I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." And well might the trumpets ring out the welcome, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be

ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in." And well might the seraphic choirs, in responsive chorus, ask and reply, "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord mighty in battle; He is the King of Glory." He passed through the golden portals; laid His trophies at His Father's feet; sat down at the right hand of Power; and became thenceforth Head over all things to His church.

The Redeemer, having triumphed in these preparatory conflicts; having occupied the commanding points, and removed the obstructions from His advance—now marshals His forces for the grand end, the conquest of the palace itself. Thither the Strong Man has retreated; and there, as in the very heart and citadel of his empire, he waits the attack, vigilant, resolute, confident. But vain are his wiliest contrivances, vain his boasted munitions, vain his utmost efforts, to repel the Stronger Antagonist who comes to dislodge him. On the broad, all-overlooking platform of His Atonement, the God-man plants the artillery of His Word, and sounds the signal of battle. Aimed by the Holy Spirit, the siege-guns of the Gospel thunder upon the fortress. The steel-pointed shot crash against scarp and parapet, rampart and tower, sweeping every traverse, enfilading every embrasure. The earth-works are knocked away from the Under-

standing; the bastion of Unbelief falls; and the dead wall of Conscience is laid open. Satan himself cannot stand such a fire. His cannon are dismounted; his defences riddled and shattered. Still the terrible hail pours on, driving him, from covert to covert, into the bomb-proof of the Will. Even there he finds no protection. The blazing bolts, forged in heaven, and instinct with its power, tear through and through the thick casemates, and rend them into fragments. He has now found "the last ditch;" and, as a final resort, he offers to give up a part of the castle to Christ, on condition of being permitted to retain the rest. But no such terms can be accepted. He must surrender and evacuate the whole. Jesus will have all or nothing. Meanwhile the assault is pressed with increasing vigor. The batteries are brought nearer, and hurl their living missiles with more irresistible effect. At length, the gates are beaten down — the omnipotent Victor enters — strips the Strong Man of his armor — casts him out of the palace — and sends him, raging with the shame of defeat, to "his own place."

In this manner the Saviour reclaims the soul from the usurpation of Satan. By dispelling its unbelief and carelessness, enlightening it to see its own bondage, blotting out its guilt, and breaking down the predominance of corruption within it, He takes from its ruthless Enslaver the very weapons on

which he chiefly relied for keeping it in subjection. The depraved principles and inclinations of men are the instruments by which the Devil reigns. With these he binds his captives; with these he makes his power secure; with these he supports his throne of iniquity in the world. When, therefore, these perverted faculties are transformed, by renewing grace, into servants of righteousness, the agencies in which he trusted are turned against himself, and become aids in his discomfiture and expulsion.

Once more in possession of the temple which He built for Himself, and which he has redeemed at such cost, the Divine Restorer proceeds to renovate and beautify it. Its foulness is cleansed; its dilapidations are repaired. The broken arches are renewed, the fallen pillars set up. Its vile occupants — the impure affections, the carnal proclivities, the sinful habits, that have harbored in it so long — are cast forth and banished; and the elements of a heavenly life, penitence, faith, love, holiness, are installed in their places. The breath of the Spirit pervades all the apartments, filling them with the fragrance of its graces; and instead of the uproar of passion and riot with which they once resounded, are now heard words of peace and good-will, the voice of prayer, the rejoicing of hope, and hymns of thanksgiving.

Thus is the palace of the soul recovered, purified,

inhabited. God dwells in it again, irradiating it with the light of His presence, and enriching it with His favor. A result so delightful gives joy to heaven and earth. The Father rejoices over his regained treasure. The Son rejoices over His finished work. The soul rejoices in its deliverance and freedom. And thus the spoils of the vanquished Strong Man are divided. To Christ belongs the glory of his overthrow; to the soul, the salvation that follows it. Man receives the blessing, God the praise.

The great spiritual change, which has been described as effected in the case of a single individual, is but an epitome of what our glorious Champion has achieved for multitudes in the centuries that are past — of what He is achieving for multitudes now — and of what He will achieve for yet larger multitudes in the ages to come. Never will He give over the warfare with Satan, never cease to liberate his bondmen, till humanity is enfranchised, and the dominion of evil rooted from the earth.

How clearly does this conflict reveal the estimate which, in other worlds, is put on the human soul! O careless one! thou mayest think little of the immortal jewel which God has lodged within thee, and mayest even forget or deny that such a jewel is thine. But not so is it regarded by Higher Powers. For its possession Heaven and Hell are struggling.

The Monarch of the Pit deems it his proudest achievement to crush and destroy it; while all the energies of Divinity are called forth to snatch it from his grasp, to wash away its stains, and set it anew in the diadem of its Maker. Oh, how precious must that spirit be, for which such combatants contend! How noble, beyond expression, the palace around which the Hosts of Light and the legions of Darkness meet in deadly encounter! And how unspeakable the madness of the man who is unconcerned, while the question is being decided in whose hands he shall be for eternity!

Some of you may have seen the celebrated painting by Retsch, in which, with wondrous skill, he has portrayed a game of chess between Satan and a young man, who has staked his soul on the issue. The truth and vivid power of the representation; the different expression in the faces of the players; the gay, heedless look of the young man, all unconscious of his peril; and the cunning, hellish leer of the Fiend, as the chances seem to turn in his favor — can never be forgotten by any who have once beheld them. But how much more graphic and solemn is the scene which the Divine pencil has drawn — Christ and Satan battling for the soul of man. Nor is it picture merely; it is real. The contest is actually going forward, going forward now, going forward in your own spiritual history.

Intrenched within your heart, "the Prince of the Power of the air" plies all his weapons of falsehood, and delusion, and worldly enchantments, to maintain his fatal mastery over you; while, at the door, stands the crucified One — pity in His eye, and salvation in His hands — summoning you to thrust out the Deceiver, and yield the palace to the sweet control of His love. Which, in your case, shall be the victor?

CHAPTER XI.

TEARS AMID TRIUMPH.

“AND WHEN HE WAS COME NEAR, HE BEHELD THE CITY, AND WEPT OVER IT.” — *Luke xix. 41.*

THE sun of the cloudless Orient is flooding Jerusalem with its noonday splendors. Its beams shimmer on wall and tower, roof and gable, dome and pinnacle, and float in golden waves along the ridges of the environing hills. It is the Passover Week; and the venerated metropolis of Hebrew worship is clad in festal attire, and throbs, through all its arteries, with eager life. The sacred places are crowded; the streets echo with the tread of countless feet; while at each open gate fresh throngs pour into the city, or may be seen hastening towards it by every road and avenue. From all parts of Palestine, and from utmost lands whither the Jews have been scattered, they come — here in long caravans, there in isolated bands — to celebrate this highest solemnity of their national religion.

On one of these approaching groups let us fasten our attention. There is nothing remarkable in its appearance. It displays no outward magnificence,

no parade of wealth and power, to attract the gaze of the casual onlooker. Its numbers are indeed imposing; but they are chiefly the common people of the country, plain in garb, lowly in station, unheeded by the proud and great. Nevertheless, the broad earth, with all that it boasts of grand and noble, shows not, at this moment, another spectacle so truly sublime — none so important to the world — none so worthy of universal regard. In this obscure company walks One on whose character and office rests the redemption of the human race — One who is “the Brightness of the Father’s Glory,” God manifested in flesh. He wears no crown; no royal garments invest Him. His bearing is meek and gentle; and in that face of heavenly beauty are traces of mortal pain, and the foreshadows of agonies still more terrible. Yet, through all the reserve and concealment of His humiliation, the indwelling Divinity streams forth, and declares itself in every look and utterance. Worn and travel-stained, He is going up for the last time to the Feast which prefigures His own expiation for sin, and which is soon to receive its highest interpretation in the Sacrifice of the Cross. He knows well the dread travail which that interpretation will cost Him. But instead of shrinking from the hour whose darkness is fast gathering over Him, He presses forward to meet it, exclaiming at every

step, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

Intent on the atoning work now so near, He has left His retirement beyond the Jordan, and turned His steps toward the capital of the nation, where that work is to be consummated. He has passed the night at Bethany, in the house of His friend Lazarus, at whose grave the mightiest of His miracles was lately performed. Here the concourse around Him is greatly increased by visitors from Jerusalem, who have come to see the raised one sitting by the side of the Wonderful Quickener whose voice called him back to life. In the morning Jesus resumes His journey; the vast train of festal wayfarers encompassing Him on every side, and listening to the words of grace that fall from His lips. As they climb the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, and reach a point in the ascent opposite to the village of Bethphage, there is a pause in the upward movement. A transaction full of Messianic significance is now to take place. To foreshow the wide dominion that awaits Him as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the exalted honors which shall compensate His sufferings, the Redeemer proposes to enter the scene of those sufferings in the manner of a Sovereign and Conqueror. But where are the external conditions befitting such a purpose? where the appliances which it demands -- the kingly

robe, the triumphal chariot, the princely retinue, the august insignia? The riches of earth and heaven are His. At His behest, celestial glory would clothe His form, the diadem of Godhead rest on His brow, angelic legions muster round Him, and chariots of fire and horses of fire come rushing down the skies to bear Him on His way. Yet He summons none of these. Out of all the universe which He owns, an ass's colt, brought by His disciples from yonder village, and caparisoned with their dusty garments, is alone chosen to grace His ovation. Well might an ancient prophecy, looking forward to this event, and to the amazing condescension which it involved, proclaim to the Daughter of Zion, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee; just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." Outward pomp can add nothing to the majesty of the Divine; and these simple preparations are far more in accordance with the character of the Prince of Peace than any gorgeous emblems of wordly might and dominion.

Thus humbly furnished, the God-man begins His Symbolic March to the City and Temple of His Father. Again the attendant crowd moves on; many, in their zeal to honor Him, stripping off their cloaks, and spreading them as a carpet along the rugged way. Soon they are met by another multi-

tude hurrying up from Jerusalem. The Paschal pilgrims assembled there, profoundly impressed by the fame of Jesus, and learning His approach, pour out from the city to behold and welcome Him. Passing down the Valley of the Kidron, they cut branches from the clustering palm trees that skirt its sides, and hasten upward by the usual caravan road round the southern shoulder of Olivet. On the rocky plateau beyond the summit, the two human streams unite in one immense confluence. Those from the city, turning round, precede the Saviour, strewing their palm branches in the path before Him; while the still larger numbers from Bethany follow after, with equal demonstrations of joy and homage. In this manner the procession sweeps onward, till the crest of the ridge is passed, and its western descent commences. The Temple, and the sections of Jerusalem contiguous to it, are yet hidden by the jutting slope of Olivet on the north; but Mount Zion, the ancient city of David, the renowned seat of Hebrew royalty, comes into full view below them. Memories of Israel's glory — of the old days of theocratic power and splendor — waken and glow at the sight. Gazing on the spot where the Hero-Bard ruled and sung, and fired by the expectation that his fallen throne is about to be set up anew by his greater Descendant, the excited throng shouts forth its enthusiasm in the grand Messianic chorus,

“Hosanna to the Son of David ; blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

The living mass once more advances ; and as it winds round the protruding angle of the mountain, suddenly the entire circuit of the Jewish metropolis, with its golden-roofed Sanctuary rising in the midst, its massive towers, its sumptuous palaces, its myriad homes of wealth and luxury, its walls of strength girding it on every side, and the broad sweep of gardens and orchards and vine-clad hills beyond — all beaming and flashing under the bright sky of the East — bursts on the eye in a vast panorama of loveliness. A vision so endeared to the Hebrew heart — so hallowed by mighty recollections and by mightier hopes — deepens the exultation of the beholders, and intensifies its utterance. They believe that the hour has come in which Jesus is to reveal Himself as the Promised King of Israel ; that the design of His present visit to the city is to proclaim His sovereignty, and demand the allegiance of the rulers ; and that He will now place Himself at the head of the nation, and, by His miraculous power, inaugurate a secular dominion that shall subdue all lands, and make Jerusalem the mistress of the world. Full of these patriotic anticipations, and looking upon Christ as the anointed Champion and Uplifter of their race, they press round Him

with rejoicing acclamations, and wave their palm branches before Him in token of His future triumphs.

Doubtless there are some among them who unite with these carnal views a higher conception of His mission, and who recognize in Him a Divine Redeemer from sin, as well as the Restorer of prostrate Judaism. Yet none — not even they who perceive most clearly the spiritual nature of the deliverance which He is to bring — have any true idea of the manner in which that deliverance is to be accomplished. All imagine that He will fulfil the purpose of His coming — not by submitting to ignominy and death — but by putting forth His omnipotent energies to overwhelm opposition, and establish the Messianic empire throughout the earth. And supposing such a consummation to be near at hand, they hail Him as a conqueror moving on to power and victory.

But He, who is the object of all this homage and felicitation, partakes not in the general joy. Amidst the hosannas of the multitude, the soul of Jesus is stirred by a deep and overmastering sorrow. He looks down, as they do, on the Holy City spread out in its glory beneath Him. Very different, however, are the emotions with which He beholds it. They survey it with delight as the pride and crown of Israel — the chosen residence of Jehovah — illus-

trious in the past, and destined to become still more illustrious in the future. He sees it foul with crime, forsaken of God, and rushing to its doom. They see in it the theatre of His own approaching honors, and of Divine favor toward the Jews eclipsing all former displays, and to be continued through untold centuries. He sees in it the scene of His crucifixion, and of swift coming retribution. And as He sits there, and contemplates its beauty and splendor, its noble structures, its busy thoroughfares, its swarming population, and thinks how soon those streets will be stained with the blackest deed which the earth has ever known, that population accursed for all time, and those structures hurled down by a terrible vengeance, the depths of infinite compassion are moved within Him; and with gushing tears — the tears of unavailing tenderness and regret — He pours out the lamentation, "Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes!" "He beheld the city, and wept over it."

"There she stood —
 Jerusalem — the city of His love,
 Chosen from all the earth; Jerusalem,
 That knew Him not, and had rejected Him;
 Jerusalem, for whom He came to die!"

How the sight unlocks the fountains of His grief,

and centres every thought and feeling on the fearful woes which His omniscience associates with it! Forgotten is the scene around Him. Unheeded are the gratulations of the Disciples, the plaudits of the crowd. He sees only Jerusalem, the loved and lost; and, in view of her guilt and overthrow, all else is disregarded. Never before in His life of humiliation has He stood so high in popular esteem. Yet at this moment of His greatest triumph, when His following is the largest, and the acclaim the loudest, He turns away and weeps. His attendants, comprehending only the present and the outward, rejoice; but He, the All-Knowing, the All-Comprehending, weeps. Instructive contrast! ever real and ever repeated. In all lands and ages men exult and shout where Divine prescience pities and laments.

But what were the peculiar circumstances in the case of Jerusalem, which rendered its impending fate so afflictive to the heart of Christ? Other great centres of civilization and power have perished amid the horrors of siege and slaughter. Yet Scripture gives no hint that their fall was signaled by any such remarkable mourning. Why was Jerusalem so distinguished? What special facts of its history called forth the tears of the Son of God?

He wept over it in view of what it had been.

For more than a thousand years it had held to Jehovah a relation as singular as it was sacred and blessed. He had selected it out of all the world as the place of His earthly dwelling, the seat of His worship, the visible type of His invisible Church, the terrestrial counterpart of His glorious Capital in the Heavens. There the Ark of His Testimony, after its many wanderings and migrations, found a permanent abode. There His Tabernacle rested. There the august Temple, the wonder of all lands, was reared and consecrated to His honor. There He recorded His name. There He manifested His presence in the Flame-Cloud of the Shechinah. There His arm was often revealed to defend and succor His heritage. There divinely appointed priests ministered to Him, and inspired poets chanted His praise, and holy prophets spoke His words, and pious kings upheld His law, and guarded the purity of His service. There, too, amid the dim shadows of the Elder Covenant, the ever burning altar of sacrifice, and ever smoking incense, had prefigured the Great Propitiation now ready to be offered; and there, from age to age, the momentous truths which underlie it had been brought into fuller and more luminous development.

All this Jesus saw as he gazed down on the city. His mind travelled back over the long generations, in which the peopled hills below Him had been the

solitary refuge of true religion on the earth; and had gleamed with the only light from heaven which broke the darkness of world-wide Heathenism. That light was indeed imperfect. It was not the Day which He came to usher in. But it sprung from the same Source as the Day. It heralded the Day. It was the precursor of the Sun — the Star of Promise — the Star of Hope — and, while it shone, the lone Star in the otherwise blank horizon of our outcast globe.

Well may we believe that such a retrospect of the moral position of Zion in the olden time rose now, with vivid force, on the consciousness of Christ. He thought of her ancient faith; of her holy dead; of the radiance which she had shed over the nations; of the epochs of Divine power and mercy which marked her earlier history; of the far distant period when the Almighty walked among her tabernacles; and when He Himself, as the Angel of the Lord, frequented her precincts, conversed with her seers, guided her counsels, sheltered her children under the wings of His love. Oh! dear to Immanuel was Jerusalem the favored — Jerusalem the fallen — dear for the fathers' sake — dear for her ancestral truth, vanished but remembered — dear to Him as the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the Chosen Seed. Alas! how sadly at this hour He recalled her former preciousness, and mused on all that she

had been to Heaven and earth, to God and to man !

From the regretted past of the Holy City He turned to her revolting present, and wept over her for what she then was. And the change of view deepened His anguish. The living Jerusalem was a far more painful spectacle than the departed. It teemed with tokens of universal and fatal degeneracy. Lapse and deterioration were everywhere. In outward seeming there was no falling away from the sanctities of other and better days. There stood the Temple revered and cherished as of old. There were its spacious courts filled with worshippers — robed priests officiating in their courses — the smoke of burnt offerings floating on the air. The sacrificial victims, the sprinkled blood, the chanted prayers, the hymns of the Levites, the whole pomp and ceremonial of Judaism — all were there. Never were the show and observance of religion more ostentatiously paraded ; and never was the mere letter of the Law more strictly expounded, or more rigorously applied. The empire of ritualism was complete. It ruled in every domain of thought ; in every custom and pursuit of life.

But the appearances of devotion thus pervading all things were utterly false. The piety which they represented was exterior, artificial, conventional. It was a body without a soul — a ghastly putrefy-

ing corpse, laid out in state, and surrounded by the hideous decorations of death. Whatever of truth, of heaven-born energy, of power to renovate and purify, might once have vitalized it, had long since fled, leaving in their place only empty forms and vapid mummeries. Even the external respect paid to the institutes of Moses was a mere sham and mockery. Ceremonial requirements, tithes, fasts, ablutions — whether prescribed by tradition or originally commanded — were observed with a scrupulousness as minute as it was inflexible; while the living statutes of Jehovah, justice, mercy, and charity, were ignored and spurned. Hypocrisy, unbelief, bigotry, earthliness, reigned supreme.

The God-man, whose omniscient glance read all hearts, knew well the dominant vices of Jerusalem, and the spiritual foulness that lurked under the veil of outward sanctity. He knew that its vaunted religiousness was vain and hollow, covering unfathomed depths of guilt and baseness and pollution. He knew that the flagrant sins of the nation, its materialism, its worldliness, its pride, its moral insensibility, had their chief seat in the metropolis, and flourished there in rankest luxuriance. He knew that from its ecclesiastical authorities and its ruling sects had come the principal opposition to the Gospel which He taught. He knew that they had persisted in denying His claims against all the

light that blazed alike from His works and from His doctrines; and that, urged on by implacable hate and malice, they were ready to imbrue their hands in His blood. He knew that in the very Temple of His Father the leaders of the people were at that moment gathered plotting His death; that in the lordly palaces on which His eye rested dwelt His future murderers; and that along the pavements beneath Him would rush the brutal populace, hurrying Him to the cross, and revelling in His agonies. Alas! He also knew that among the multitude now encircling Him, and shouting hosannas to His name, were many who, when they found that their carnal expectations were not to be realized, would join as loudly in the infuriate cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" and mock Him on Golgotha as they now glorified Him on Olivet.

Such was the dark picture which Jerusalem presented to the vision of our Lord. Once the chosen of God, the city of His love, it had become vile and abominable — the home of Pharisaic self-idolatry and of Sadducean sensualism; and soon to be the arena of the most awful wickedness which humanity has ever perpetrated. Thus He beheld it; and it was because He so beheld it, and knew how returnless was the abyss into which it had plunged, that He wept over it. Its blinded population, following their blind religious guides, had rejected the Hope

and Consolation of Israel. Vain had been all the concurring voices that proclaimed His Messiahship ; vain the announcements of prophecy ; vain the testimony of the angels ; vain the witness of the Father ; vain His wonder-works ; vain His words of more wondrous grace. Infatuated by the dream of an earthly kingdom, they shut their eyes to every proof of His Divine authority, and thrust from them the redemption which He proffered. The Deliverer promised to their fathers had appeared, and had sought their affiance. Incarnate Love had stood amongst them, inviting them to the living waters of holiness and happiness. But they knew not the time of their visitation. They scorned to enroll themselves as the subjects of a Prince invested with no material grandeur, and whose throne was only in the hearts of men. Their choice was deliberate and final ; and the hour of mercy passed from them forever. The measure of their iniquity, long filling, was now full ; and the fiat of doom went forth. By refusing to accept Christ as their Redeemer, they cut themselves off from the only refuge which Heaven had provided, and broke down the last barrier between them and destruction. Henceforth, the presence of God was withdrawn from the Sanctuary of Judaism ; the blessings of His Covenant were transferred from the Church of the Old Dis-

pensation to the Church of the New ; and Jerusalem the apostate was given over to vengeance.

What anguish must have swept over the mind of Jesus as He pondered this mournful fact ! He was a Jew, and felt all the characteristic reverence of a Jew for the sacred city of the nation. How intense, then, must have been His sorrow at its guilt, how deep His pity for its doom ! How must the Shepherd of Israel have bewailed these myriad wanderers from His flock, whom even His voice could not call back, and whom His loving hands would never fold ! While, in His Divine consciousness, He viewed with holy complacency the justice of His Father's dealing ; yet, as the Son of David, and as the Son of Man, His compassions gushed out toward the incorrigible ones, whom grace and peace were to visit never more !

He wept over the city in view of what it might have been. True it is, that the disownment of Messiah by his countrymen, and His violent death at Jerusalem through the machinations of its rulers, had been distinctly foretold as important circumstances in the expiation which He was to offer. Nevertheless, the methods of God's purposes, and the predictions respecting them, are not arbitrary, but conditional, and readily adapt themselves to the conduct of the human actors involved in their fulfilment. They are based, indeed, on a foreknowledge

of that conduct; but they do not so necessitate it by an unchangeable law, that men could not do otherwise even if they would. There was nothing in the Divine plan of atonement — nothing in the ordained manner of bringing it to pass — which compelled the Jews to reject and crucify the Saviour. The unbelief and hardness of their hearts alone prevented them from embracing His Gospel, and coming under its redeeming power. That they might have done this, and so escaped the terrible condemnation which fell upon them, is manifest from the touching apostrophe in which our Lord upbraids their unwillingness to receive Him. “Oh, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” *Ye would not!* Here was the obstacle, and the only obstacle, which shut out the reprobate city from the Fountain of Life. Her own frowardness, and not the decree of Heaven, decided her course. She might have welcomed her Messiah, and found in His sheltering love a safeguard against every peril. Oh, had she done this, how changed had been her destiny! The Sun of Righteousness would have swept the thunder-clouds from her sky, and shed salvation over her present and her future. Walking in His light, her children would have

inherited peace here, and eternal blessedness hereafter. Consecrated anew by the great High Priest, she would again have become the peculiar residence of God; the Shechinah would have returned to her Temple; and Jerusalem the Holy, Jerusalem the Christian, would have been, through all the ages, the cynosure of the Gentiles, and the glory of the world.

But these blissful possibilities were now lost, and lost beyond recovery. The things of her peace were hidden from her eyes. Never more would she see the Incarnate One standing in her rapt assemblies, dispensing cures for the body, and healing balm for the soul. Never more would she look on that countenance of unearthly majesty and sorrow — never more hear that voice of celestial sweetness — never more listen to its tender pleadings — never more be invited by it to the Helper of the weak, and the Rest of the weary. Never more! Never more! Saddest of all words, expressing the saddest of all facts! Oh! it was this which drew forth the tears of Jesus, as He fixed His lingering, yearning gaze on the city, and thought of all that she might have been, of her wasted privileges, her forfeited mercies, her heaven-sent opportunities, now gone from her sight, to come back never more — never more!

Along with this glimpse of the bright history once

possible to her, there rose before Him the appalling vision of what she would be. Whatever side of the picture He surveyed, this was the awful back-ground which gloomed on His view. His all-reaching ken took in every incident of her darkling career down to its close. He saw her God-abandoned leaders carrying out their schemes for His arrest and crucifixion. He saw her savage masses rushing to Calvary, thronging round His cross, feasting their malice with His dying throes, insulting and reviling Him, while the earth rocked under their feet, and the heavens hung black above them. He saw her persecuting and murdering His followers, until the Gospel left her borders forever, and the echoes of its retreating footsteps were heard far away in the regions of Paganism. And then he saw her fearful end. He saw the woe and the horror gathering deeper and coming nearer. He saw the Roman legions enveloping her round about, and casting up a mount against her. He heard the din of battle, the hurtling crash of engines on rampart and tower. He heard, in all her dwellings, the moan of disease, and the wail of famine. He saw her sects and factions slaughtering each other — daggers flashing everywhere — brothers falling by the hands of brothers. He saw her streets blocked up with unburied corpses; and heard the cry of her perishing thousands appealing in vain to the Just One who

had ceased to pity them. He saw her fortifications broken down, her inhabitants slain with the sword, her precious things given up to pillage. He saw her wrapped in flames and destroyed — her glorious Temple, her regal mansions, her walls, her very foundations laid low, till not one stone remained upon another. He saw Jerusalem the bloody, Jerusalem the felon of the centuries, a heap of ashes; and her children exiles in every land, without a home, a country, or a God forever more. So was her earthly sentence fulfilled.

But there was another retribution, reserved for another world—a retribution invisible and spiritual — of which the visible calamities suffered here were but types and foreshadowings. To this His mind glanced forward, and contemplated the souls of the impenitent population undergoing it for eternity. While their day of mercy yet lasted, He had said to them, “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins — and whither I go, ye cannot come.” He now saw that saying verified. He saw them dying in their sins, unrepentant, unbelieving, unpardoned; excluded by their very character from the heaven in which He was to reign; and consigned hopelessly to the realms of the lost; there to expiate in everlasting punishment their rejection of the Only Saviour.

Such are the several points of view in which we

have ventured to represent our Lord as surveying the doomed metropolis of His nation. As when we see a noble manhood wrecked and ruined, we think with equal sorrow of its former excellence, its present degradation, its unused capacities for good, and the deeper gulf that lies before it; so under the similar aspects of what it had been, what it was, what it might be, what it would be — all mournful — the compassionate Jesus “beheld the city and wept over it.”

In what an affecting light does the scene which we have drawn set forth the sympathy and love of Christ! Here the heart of our Divine Brother is laid bare before us. There is no feeling of wounded pride, of defeated ambition; no anger against those who have repaid His kindness with contempt; no hatred of the monstrous criminals who are about to steep their hands in His blood. Pity for their blindness, regret at their obduracy, and anguish in view of its fatal consequences to themselves, are the emotions which fill His bosom. And He has carried the same tender, forgiving, merciful heart up with Him to His throne of intercession. He weeps not now; for earthly weeping cannot invade the serene height where He sits in His glory. But with a compassion fervent as that of old, He still regards the neglecters of His grace. As He looked from Olivet on sinful Jerusalem, so from the Hills

of Blessedness He looks down on this world rolling beneath His eye — this world which He spoke into being — this world for which He died — this world which derides His name, casts off His law, and tramples on His salvation. With what sleepless concern He watches the struggles of His cause! And how must He almost feel Himself crucified afresh, when He sees the perversion of His doctrine, the corruption of His Church, the baptized ungodliness of many who outwardly own Him as Lord, the carelessness, the impenitence, the unbelief of millions whom He has redeemed, and whom He longs to bring to His inheritance above! O, backsliding one! O, unconverted one! The soul of the risen Jesus yearns over thee. He loves thee. He commiserates thee. He would save thee. Go to Him with sincere faith and lowly contrition. Confess thy waywardness, thy disobedience, thy ingratitude — all thou hast done to grieve Him. Joyfully will He receive you, and bestow on you the peace and hope and eternal life which His sorrows have purchased.

The tears of Christ could not avert from Jerusalem the overwhelming judgment which her sins drew down. Her destruction came surely and speedily, though the Son of the Highest wept to behold its coming. Nor will His pity for the impenitent of our own day prevent their final condemnation, if

they persevere in setting Him at nought. He is unwilling that you should perish. He laments your guilt and your danger. But the lake of fire and the worm that never dies will be your portion all the same, unless you repent. His blood, applied by his Spirit, can alone redeem you from death, and prepare you for heaven.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STONE UPON THE GRAVE.

“TAKE YE AWAY THE STONE.”—*John xi. 39.*

THE isolation of Jesus was one of the most remarkable circumstances in His life of sorrow. Doubtless, the nature of His atoning mission required that He should tread the wine-press alone; but the fact is none the less surprising and painful. That He, who was man's best Friend, should Himself have had almost no friends; that He, whose Divine heart was full of love for all, should have been loved by few in return — is so singular, so unlike the ordinary outgoings of human affection, that we are at a loss with which to be most impressed, its sadness or its mystery.

It is, however, consoling to know that amid the general hatred which the Saviour experienced, there were some hearts sincerely attached to Him, and here and there a home in which His presence was welcomed as a hallowed joy. One of these homes was in Bethany. It was no lordly mansion — the abode of some proud hierarch or rich Pharisee — but a plain cottage, quietly nestled among its em-

bosoming vines and fig-trees. Here dwelt Lazarus, and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Simple in their tastes, content with their own little domain, they sighed not for the pomps and luxuries of the great city so near them. A loftier aspiration, a Hope rising to heaven, shut out its terrene ambitions from their hearts, as the intervening brow of Olivet hid its towers and palaces from their sight. They were Christians. They had heard the words of the Lord. They had seen His miracles. They accepted Him as the Messiah. They adored Him as the Son of God, and the Redeemer of Israel. Their greatest pleasure was to entertain and serve Him; their highest honor, to be accounted His friends.

To this humble dwelling our Lord made frequent visits, and found rest and sympathy under its peaceful shelter. And so strong was His regard for its inmates, so marked His interest in them, that it is emphatically said, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Happy home, where the Saviour has been a guest! Happy household, where His love abides! A blessing and a glory are yours, more precious than all the treasures of earth can bestow.

But there is in this world no spot, however sacred, which affliction may not invade. Even the threshold over which the God-man had trodden was no bar to its entrance. Disease, fell and unsparing,

smote the brother of this cherished family. While Christ was prosecuting His work of mercy in the regions beyond the Jordan, the prayerful message of the sisters reached Him — as often similar prayers now reach Him in heaven — “Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.” Touching and urgent as the appeal was, He did not immediately answer it. The delay, however, arose not from any want of solicitude for the sufferers, or of ability to succor them, but from the counsels of Infinite Wisdom and Benevolence. In the Divine arrangements for demonstrating the truth of the Gospel, the sickness and death of Lazarus held an important place. They were designed to furnish occasion for a transcendent display of the Redeemer’s power, for confirming the faith of His disciples, and giving to all the ages a proof of His Messiahship, which no criticism can shake, and no sophistry evade. To allow scope for this purpose, the compassion of Jesus must be kept in abeyance till the appointed hour. Lazarus must die, that the Son of God might be glorified. So, when our own supplications for help and deliverance appear to meet no response, the seeming refusal is but the folding of Jehovah’s arm, till the emphatic moment in which our need shall be the greatest, and in which His interposition will inspire the most thankful praise.

When the time for Him to work was ripe, Jesus

with His disciples returned into Judea, and found, on His arrival at Bethany, that Lazarus had already laid four days in the grave. As He drew nigh to the town, Martha came out to meet Him, and gave vent to her feelings in words expressive, not only of grief, but of regret, almost of reproach. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Still her confidence in Him was not wholly destroyed. Amid the cry of doubt, and the breathings of complaint at what seemed to her like neglect on His part, the accents of faith broke forth, trembling yet clear. "But I know that even now whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee." To develop and bring out this sentiment of trust that struggled in her heart, the Saviour uttered the animating promise, "Thy brother shall rise again." And when she answered, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" — intimating that she looked for no earlier rising — He added the sublime announcement, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live again;" — thus affirming that, as the Author of all being, and Lord of the spirit-world, He could call back the departed when and how He pleased. The faith of Martha was greatly strengthened by a declaration so encouraging. To the question of Jesus, "Believest thou this?" she at once responded, "Yea, Lord, I

believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." Having said this, she went her way. And well she might. She had said all. With the utterance of such a conviction, she could leave her case in His hands, relying on His wisdom to determine what was best, and on His power to perform it.

Comforted herself, she hastens to her mourning sister, that she also might be comforted. Mary, not having yet heard of the Saviour's approach, was still sitting in the house, absorbed in her affliction; while condoling friends strive in vain to cheer and sustain her. At the thrilling message, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee," she rises up, in all the eagerness of her quick and impressible nature, and flies to Him, swift as a wounded dove speeds to its sheltering nest. No sooner does she reach Him, no sooner does her eye rest on His adored face, than she is at His feet, bathing them with her tears. One wail of anguish for her dead brother — one touching lament at her Lord's absence — and she is silent. She has found her Refuge. Her Master has come, and all must be well. How, she knows not, asks not. Enough for her that Christ the Compassionate, Christ the Omnipotent, stands before her, that she can clasp His knees, and lay her burden at His feet. Her tears still flow, but they are no longer bitter. Submission, reli-

ance, hope, mingle with her sorrow, and take away its sting.

The soul of the Redeemer is deeply moved. He who had conversed calmly with Martha, is overpowered at the sight of Mary's tears. "Jesus wept." Though He knew that His word would soon recall the buried one to life, He could not suppress His own grief at his death, nor restrain the outpourings of pity for the dear disciple on whom that death had brought such woe. What a proof is here that our great High Priest is Human as well as Divine; that He shares in all the sinless affections of our nature, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities! And what a striking manifestation of His wisdom in adapting consolation to the peculiarities of individual sufferers, may be seen in His interviews with the two sisters! The different manner in which He receives them is precisely suited to the difference of their characters. He reasons with the practical, passionless Martha; weeps with the loving, weeping Mary. Great words of truth are His medicine for the one; sympathy, His balm for the other.

Melting with compassion for the distress around Him — shaken by the waking Deity within Him — the God-man groans in spirit, and asks, "Where have ye laid him?" At the reply, "Come and see," the sad march to the sepulchre commences.

Strange procession! The wailing Jews, the sorrowing sisters, the groaning Christ, going with travail and pain to the home of corpses, to seek Life in Death! What a type of the journeyings of His Church along the track of the centuries towards her final inheritance! Onward she moves, age after age, host after host, through toil and tribulation, through battle and tears — onward to the Grave — to the Resurrection — to Immortality! And how cheering is the thought that, as in this procession Christ was the Central Personage, so with every band of mourners carrying a believer to his rest, He still walks unseen, and pronounces over the place of corruption the conquering word, which, inaudible now, shall be heard and obeyed when the last trumpet sounds.

The weeping group comes to the tomb. "It was a cave" — a chamber hewn in the rock — "and a stone lay upon it," closing the opening. At the command of Jesus, "Take ye away the stone," the wonted unbelief and earthliness of Martha, kept down for a time by higher views, spring up anew; and forgetting the gracious purpose of her Lord, she protests against the impropriety of exposing remains that had been so long buried. The authoritative rebuke, "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" silences her misgivings, and renders her

quiet and trustful again. There is a brief pause. All is hushed expectation and wondering awe. The Son of God gathers His power; lifts a reverent, confiding eye to heaven; whispers a low, grateful prayer to His Father; and then the Almighty Voice, which spoke creation into birth, and shall yet unlock the charnel houses, breaks out in thunder-tones, "Lazarus, come forth!" That Voice pierces the dull ear of the dead; the spirit returns to the mouldering frame; the life-blood courses through the shrivelled veins; the limbs heave and stir; and the late occupant of the sepulchre appears at its mouth, with his burial garments about him—his pale lips opening with thanksgivings, and his glazed eye kindling with light, as he raises it in adoring homage to the face of His Deliverer. Loving hands unwind his grave-clothes. Loving arms fold him in a warm embrace. Loving hearts welcome him back to earth. Mourning is changed to joy. The dead is alive again!

There is a particular circumstance in this narrative, which it may be instructive to ponder. It will be remembered that when our Lord saw the stone lying upon the grave, He said to the attendants, "Take *ye* away the stone." Why did He require this? Was not the energy which could reanimate the dead, mighty enough to remove the barrier that shut in the sepulchre, without a resort to human aid?

The slightest motion of Christ's hand, the lifting up of a finger, a word, a look, a thought, would have cast it into the depths of the sea. This would have been a far lighter thing than what He actually did do; and the greater miracle might easily have included the less. For what reason, then, did He adopt a different course? We recognize here the working of a general law in the Divine administration. *God never does what man can do.* They who stood around the grave of Lazarus could not raise him from the dead. But they could take away the stone; and had they refused to do it — had they declined the facile achievement that lay within their power — who shall say that Omnipotence would have wrought the stupendous one which lay beyond?

This principle is of universal application, pervading alike the domains of nature and of grace. The husbandman cannot order the seasons, nor command the rain or the sunshine, nor cause a germ to shoot, a flower to expand, or a fruit to ripen. But he can till the ground, and sow the seed, and watch the growing harvest; and if he neglect to do this, God will not do it for him. Thus also in spiritual things, along with Divine agency, there is a human agency demanded and employed. While it is the province of Deity alone to renovate the hearts of men, and give efficiency and triumph to the Gospel, there are

preparative and subsidiary processes which belong to us. These are not the real power, but necessary preliminaries to the putting forth of that power; not the great result, and yet are indispensable to that result. We cannot speak with the voice of the Spirit, and wake dead sinners into life; but we can take away the obstructions which lie between Him and the souls He would save. Until this is done, we cannot hope to see the outgoing of His might. God's work begins where man's work ends.

The world is full of moral sepulchres — a wide Valley of Tombs — where countless multitudes are sleeping the sleep of death, buried in guilt and condemnation, with every spiritual faculty suspended, every holy affection extinct. And over each one of these sepulchres a stone is laid, shutting out the light of truth, and the sweet breath of heaven. We see the lost millions of unevangelized lands heaped together in the huge grave of Heathenism, covered by the great Stone of Darkness. Ignorance of God, of Christ, of the only Way of Salvation, presses them down, and bars from them the visitations of Mercy. In countries where the Gospel is known the graves are also very many. Everywhere, among rich and poor, high and low, cultivated and rude, in all ranks, all places, they stand thick and crowded — the graves of the unbelievers, the graves of the impenitent, the graves of the godless. There are stones upon them

all — stones, which the professing church has placed there, and keeps there, by her supineness, her worldliness, her inconsistencies, her dissensions, her want of active consecration to her Master's cause. In this vast scene of moral putrefaction, by these sealed tombs of the unregenerate, Jesus stands, ready to display His grace, and cries to His people, "Take ye away the stones." Remove the obstacles that impede the victories of my cross. Be holy, be zealous, be prayerful. Labor to save souls. Preach my Gospel to the unconverted at home. Send it with liberal hand to the benighted abroad. Thus prepare the way, and my Spirit shall go forth conquering and to conquer.

Followers of the Saviour, is there anything in your temper or practice — anything which you have done — anything which you have not done — that tends to deepen the slumber of the irreligious, and render them more inaccessible to the appeals of conscience and of God's word? "Take ye away the stone." Christian husbands, Christian wives, may there not be somewhat in you — some defect, some inconsistency, some lack in faith or prayer — that lessens the influence of religion on the minds of your impenitent companions? "Take ye away the stone." Christian fathers and mothers, are you conscious of any failure in precept or example, that may serve to harden your children against the truth,

and confirm them in their carelessness? "Take ye away the stone." Christian workers, Christian givers, after all you have done and are still doing, is there not some withholding of labor or of means, some shrinking back from your whole duty, that delays the conquests of Divine Grace? "Take ye away the stone."

Oh, Church of the Redeemer, bought with His blood! How long shall He wait for thee to fulfil His behest? How long shall His banner stay for thee to get ready for the battle? How long shall He groan in spirit over the buried nations, yearning to see the travail of His soul? Awake! Do thy work! Then Christ will do His; and the voice that broke the sleep of Lazarus will break the sleep of a world.

CHAPTER XIII.

SINNERS WEIGHED.

“THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES, AND ART FOUND WANTING.”—*Dan.* v. 21.

ONE principal cause why men are so ignorant of their real standing before God, and, therefore, so indifferent to its consequences, is, that they very seldom inquire, with any degree of seriousness, into their own spiritual condition. But this is not the only cause. Another, equally operative and fatal, may be found in the fact that they estimate themselves by false standards. There are many who try their characters only at the bar of human law. If they infringe none of its requirements, they imagine that the claims of the Divine Law are equally answered, and that the righteous and all-seeing One, to whom they are responsible, pronounces on them the same sentence of justification which they pronounce upon themselves. Another numerous class judge of their conduct solely by the maxims of society. If they violate no established custom; if they do what is usually done by persons in their situation; if they

observe the social moralities prescribed by the circle in which they move, and, in the worldly sense of the terms, are faithful to their domestic relations, honest in their dealings, correct and orderly as citizens — they are satisfied with their state, and fondly dream that their eternal welfare is secure. Others, again, examine themselves by the code of gentility. They belong to a class which boasts of its refinement and social elevation, and with which meanness and want of fashion are the only crimes. If, therefore, they shun whatever is, in their opinion, low and degrading, abstain from all coarse and vulgar sins, and practise only such as are accounted respectable and decorous — they deem this amply sufficient either for their reputation here, or their safety hereafter.

Thus do the great mass of men, by the use of erroneous tests, acquire views of their moral condition and prospects that are utterly groundless. In the expressive language of an Apostle, “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, they are not wise.” They arrive at no just conclusions respecting their own character in the sight of God, or their position in reference to the awards of the eternity that lies before them; but amidst all the light which Revelation pours around them, and flashes into their souls,

they continue shrouded in a deep and ruinous self-ignorance.

And hence it is, that while the voice of Inspired Truth thunders in their ears the startling declaration, that they, in common with our whole apostate race, have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; that their hearts and all their ways are estranged from holiness; that, in their unregenerate state, they are exposed, without one solitary exception, to the penalty of eternal death; and that, unless they repent and believe in Christ, they must inevitably suffer that penalty — they yet remain deaf to the announcement, and heedless of the awful facts which it proclaims. Hence also it is, that while the merciful Redeemer invites them to come to Him for salvation; offers them the blood of Atonement to expiate their sins, and the energy of His Spirit to renew their polluted natures, overcome their corruptions, and lead them, in safety and triumph, to the mansions of everlasting Life — they still live on in unconcern, disregarding every warning and every entreaty, under the vain persuasion that their transgressions, even if they have committed any, have been few and trivial, and are more than compensated by the numerous virtues of which they conceive themselves the possessors.

It has seemed to me, therefore, that I cannot render you a more necessary service, than to assist

you to break away from these delusions, and to form a correct and Scriptural estimate of yourselves as you appear in the view of that omniscient Being with whom you have to do. Such shall be my present endeavor. To attain this end, we must lay aside all those false methods of judgment which you have been accustomed to employ, and which can only deceive you to your undoing, and bring forward, in their place, "the Balances of the Sanctuary" — the true criterion of moral character, — which God has made known in His Word, and by which He will determine our final destiny. These Balances were made in heaven; and they possess all the accuracy and truthfulness which belong to that perfect world. The results which they give are certain — their decisions infallible. And that none of us might be ignorant either of their existence or of their nature, they have been clearly described in the Sacred Volume, as the standard by which we are to try ourselves now, and according to which, in the great day of account, our Sovereign Judge will deal out to us the recompense of endless happiness or of endless misery. The Divine Government — a government founded in absolute right, and extending over all beings and all worlds — is the golden beam from which these balances hang; Truth and Equity are the scales; and the Law and the Testimony of God are the weights by which the

question of worth or of demerit, of acceptance or of condemnation, is to be decided. Nor can there be any deception in the process, or any mistake in the issue; for "a just weight and balance are the Lord's."

Many people find a sort of fascination in being weighed. You may often see groups of persons, especially of the young, collected in places where the requisite apparatus is kept, stepping one after another upon the scales, and receiving the result, as it is announced, with laughter and merriment. I invite you, my dear readers, to come and be weighed. Weighing the heart and the life may not be as amusing an operation as that of ascertaining the gravity of bones and muscles. But it is not on that account the less important and needful. To know how much your bodies weigh is of little moment compared with knowing the weight of your souls; how you stand in God's reckoning; and in what manner your course in this world is bearing on the retributions of another. Let me, then, call up one by one several prominent classes, and subject them to the test of these Celestial Balances.

Come hither, thou dead professor, and be weighed. In outward belonging, thou art a member of the Household of Faith. Thou hast received the sealing waters of baptism, and the vows of a public consecration to Christ are upon thee. But thy whole relig-

ious history gives mournful proof, that thou hast no other union with Him than through the church-books. There has been, perchance, an epoch in your experience when, for a brief season, your mind was slightly awakened to eternal realities, and you felt something of "the powers of the world to come." These stirrings of conscience or of natural fear were interpreted by you as evidences of a change of heart; and, under this delusion, you believed yourself a Christian, and assumed a place among the people of God. But that transient excitement faded long ago; and ever since, your spiritual being has been as silent and lifeless as the Sea of Gomorrah. It is a cold, drear, stagnant expanse, broken by no wave of holy emotion, ruffled by no wind of anxiety, rippled by no flow of sanctified desire, gilded by no sunshine from heaven. There is not in your bosom any conscious working of love to the Saviour and compassion for perishing men — nothing of that welling up of gracious affections which is always present when piety has its living fountain in the soul. You never manifest any active power of faith and zeal. Your daily walk witnesses no efforts to glorify your Master by leading sinners to His Cross. The closet and the family altar know you not, or know you but as an infrequent and formal visitor. Your face, though often seen in worldly gatherings, would scarcely be rec-

ognized in the place of social devotion. In the house of God itself you are almost a stranger, coming as seldom as a regard to appearances will permit, and often absenting yourself for months together, from indolence, or caprice, or some paltry difficulty about a seat. This is your religion — at least, this is the religion you exhibit — and we are authorized by Scripture to infer that the religion which comes out of a man is of a piece with that which stays in him.

Now, I take this religion of yours, and put it in one scale, and in the other I put against it this weight from the Testimony of God, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" and then this other; "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." And to both I add one more. "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" If Christ were in you, would it be possible for you so to hide Him that not even the hem of His garment should ever appear? Would not some partial glimpses of Him break forth at times through the thick incrustations of indifference and apathy! Any one can see the worldling in you; but who sees the Christ? There is no Christ in your life; and well may you fear that there is no Christ in your heart. Your profession of godliness is proved by the trial to be light as air, and empty as a summer cloud; and the finger of Inspi-

ration writes out the result. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Oh, how many there are whose portraiture has now been given — "trees without fruit" — clouds without rain — members of the Church, but not members of Christ — disciples in title, but wanting in all the vital principles and characteristics of disciples indeed! May God in mercy awaken them to a perception of their real state, and bring them to the knowledge of true and saving grace, before the revelations of the Judgment shall burst upon them, and they are summoned to a scrutiny, from whose verdict there is no appeal, and from whose condemnation there is no escape!

I next call up the man with a secret hope. Here let me say, however, that I do not wish the wrong person to come. There are two classes of individuals, broadly distinguished from each other, to which the designation I have used may properly be applied. We often meet with those who entertain a trembling persuasion that they have passed from death unto life; but who cannot feel sufficient confidence in the reality of the change to venture on its public avowal. They are penitent, sincere, humble. They place no reliance on any merits of their own. They see and believe that the only refuge of a sinner is in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus; and they often feel their hearts drawn out

toward Him as their only trust, and their highest joy. But they are so full of doubts and self-questionings as to their interest in Him — so diffident of their own steadfastness, and of their power to resist temptation — that they hesitate to profess His name before men. They shrink from taking up His Cross, not because they dread its burden, but because they fear to dishonor it. They love the assemblies of the saints, and linger with a fond though sad sympathy around the scene of their hallowed communion. But they dare not become personal participants in that communion, lest they should profane it by their unworthiness. There are many such — and some such are doubtless before me now. They are Christ's own, however uncertain their adoption may appear to themselves. Instead of seeking to increase that self-distrust, which in their case is already too great, I would address to them words of assurance and consolation, and direct them to that compassionate Redeemer, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, and who sees, and will in His own time strengthen and bring out the grace, which the fearful heart trembles to acknowledge.

But here is one of altogether another stamp. He too has an unproclaimed hope — a hope which he keeps concealed, not from any doubt of its genuineness, but from a want of interest in spiritual

things, and a controlling preference for the world. Doubt as to the genuineness of his hope! He never doubts. Enough there is to make him doubt. No onlooker would ever suspect him of being pious; and in his whole spirit and conduct he can find no warrant for thinking himself so. Yet he does think so. He does imagine himself to be a child of God. And this imagination it is that blunts the edge of conscience, and turns aside the arrows of truth. Speak to him about the welfare of his soul, the need of conversion, and the importance of seeking it without delay. He will draw himself up, and complacently tell you, that he has been converted; that at some misty, perhaps remote period of the past, he believes that he experienced religion, and has retained that belief ever since. If you ask him why he has never owned the Saviour by uniting with His people, he answers, with a careless toss of the head, "Oh, a man can be as good a Christian out of the church as in it." Were he honest, he would say that the true reason of his not making a public profession was, that he wished to avoid the obligations to self-denial and holiness which it involves, and to live a life of irreligion and carnal ease, under the soothing expectation that his hidden hope will wake up at death, and give him a sure passport to the mansions of blessedness.

Bring that hope here, and cast it into the scale,

and you will soon see what it is worth. Ponder the weights which I place against it. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "He that is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will I be ashamed before My Father and His holy angels." "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Tried by such tests, what is your hope? It is a spider's web, a dream, a phantom, that will vanish, and leave you succorless in the hour when you need it most.

Stand forth, thou self-righteous man, and be weighed. Collect in one mass all the meritorious qualities and deeds in which thou confidest, and bring them to the proof of God's unerring balance. Oh, what a bundle! You carry a load of goodness huger than the load of sin which clung to the shoulders of Bunyan's pilgrim. But, before we proceed to weigh this bundle, let us open it, and see what it contains. Here is a whole web of Honesty. With your permission, we will unroll it, and ascertain its character. At the first glance, it looks very fair. The threads are fine, the texture apparently firm and even. But stop! what is this? Here is a

wide cut right in the middle of the cloth ; and close beside it, I read, in glaring capitals, "Sharp Bargains." Investigating further, we perceive that the entire fabric is frayed and torn, and defaced with stains and blemishes, which, as we survey them more narrowly, shape themselves into words like these: "Tricks in trade"—"Scant measures"—"Light weights"—"Adulterated articles sold for pure"—"Government taxes charged to the customer." That is enough. Your honesty is not immaculate.

Here is another piece, labelled "Upright Conduct." This, too, judging from the outside, seems to be all right. But let us unfold it, and examine it in a better light. As the world goes, it is not bad. There is no trace of flagrant crime—no soil from theft and robbery—no blood-stain of murder—no foul pollution left by drunkenness and debauchery. Ah! there is a dirt-spot. That is where you told a lie. There is a hole. That is where you swore. There is a broad rent. That is where you broke the Sabbath. And there it is all snarled and twisted up. That is where you got in a passion, and put your whole household in a coil. With nothing that tells of outrageous guilt, your boasted uprightness is defiled throughout by little sins, improprieties, defects, omissions, short-comings,

which render it utterly worthless as a claim for justification with God.

But what have we here, right in the centre of the budget? A monstrous bladder, inflated to its utmost tension, and marked "Self-conceit!" We need not untie it. We know what is in it—air, nothing but air. No wonder your bundle looked so large! But puff it up and swell it out as you may with the breath of delusion, and the gas of falsehood, you cannot deceive that omniscient Eye which watches all your doings. Why, such goods would not impose even upon the dull optics of an army inspector. They are shoddy all through. And dare you subject them to the gaze of that Holy and Heart-searching Judge, whose glance pierces all disguises, and whose holiness will tolerate no imperfection? Have you considered what you must do, and what you must be, in order to be saved by a righteousness of your own? Does not Scripture assure you that, "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all"? And is it not clear, from the whole tenor of Divine teaching, that you can be accepted on the basis of human merit, only by presenting, at the bar of Infinite Purity, a heart perfect toward God and man, and an obedience spotless in motive, and complete in act? Can the good works, in which you trust, endure such a criterion? If you still deem them of

value, and insist on their being weighed, lay them in the scales. There is no lack of means in God's storehouse by which to try them; for, as Solomon tells us, "all the weights in the bag are His work." Here is one. "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, but is not washed from its filthiness." Here is another. "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." And here is another. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Hear, then, the decision which the Supreme Arbiter gives forth. "All thy righteousnesses are as filthy rags," and "thy goodness extendeth not to Me."

Yonder is one who expects to be saved because he has a good heart. Pass up that heart, and let us weigh its excellence. Well, it surely is a fine heart, round, large, full of grand impulses and activities — a noble heart — would there were more such in the world. It has, you perceive, an earthward and a heavenward side. Let us look at its earthward side. How warm and living is all here! And what a record may one read here of the admirable qualities yet remaining in our fallen nature! Deeply stamped on its surface, you may see the

names of father, mother, brother, sister, wife, child ; and, underneath, the quick blood of affection and kindness gushing and playing ; while every nerve and artery is instinct with high aspirations, with generous sentiments, with scorn of meanness, with sympathy for the poor and the oppressed, with the throbbings of honor, manliness, and truth. Turn we now to the heavenward side. Alas, it is blank ! There is no God, no Christ, no spiritual longings, no celestial tendencies. The outer covering is dry and hard ; and within, no vital fluid circulates, no pulse of holiness beats, no emotions of penitence and faith and love are ever felt. It is a heart alive to man, but dead to its Maker — a heart, pure and bright as it looks to time, but leprous and dark as it looks to eternity.

Such a heart was once brought to the great Master Weigher, when He sojourned in flesh. A young man, of amiable disposition and praiseworthy deportment, came to Him, inquiring what he should do that he might inherit eternal life. "And Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest — go, sell all that thou hast, and come, take up thy cross and follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Here was the touchstone. He drew back, sorrowful yet determined, from the proposal to surrender the possessions of earth for the rewards of immortality ; and that

heart, so faultless in its human relations, was found to be torpid to all spiritual impressions, and antagonistic to every influence from above. And so it is with your heart. Can you, then, still call it good? Destitute as it is of every element of grace — void as it is of all love to your Creator and your Redeemer — can it merit, in the slightest degree, the approval of Him, whose first and highest command is, “My son, give *Me* thine heart”? Oh, no, no. “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Thou hast not been born again — thy soul has not been quickened and energized by power from on high; and, therefore, however rich in natural endowments, it is unprepared for the preternatural and divine glories of the upper world.

Let us, finally, place in these Divine Scales the pretensions of that vast multitude who build their hope of final safety on the fact that God is so merciful. It is a glorious truth — a truth made known in the Gospel under every form of expression, and proclaimed with the utmost emphasis, that the Most High is tender and pitiful to the children of men, and has no pleasure in their misery. Yet it is also a truth, revealed not less distinctly, and asseverated not less solemnly, that He has been pleased to set apart a particular method for the manifestation of

His mercy, and has ordained that it shall flow forth to our fallen race only through the propitiation of His Son. He has appointed Him to be our Mediator and Substitute; and it is an irreversible law of His administration, that pardon and eternal life shall be dispensed to those alone who become partakers of Christ by repentance and faith. To such He is indeed merciful. To all others He is a God of justice, and a consuming fire.

But the persons, of whom I now speak, rest on the mercy of God as an independent attribute of His nature, separate from the provisions of the atonement, and irrespective of all moral conditions. They expect to be saved, not because they are contrite for their sins, and have fled to Jesus for refuge, but simply because God is merciful. Whether they admit or deny the need of an atonement — whether they admit or deny that an atonement has been offered — is in their view of little account; it is not on the atonement that they rely, but on the assumption that the Almighty is too full of compassion ever to doom them to wretchedness. They may believe that Christ died as a sacrifice for sin, or they may regard the whole story of human redemption as a fable and a myth; they may assent in theory to the doctrine of future retribution, or they may reject it altogether — still, under every phase of misbelief or of unbelief, their argument,

their defence, their shelter, is always the same —
“God is too merciful to punish us.”

Now let us bring this hypothesis to the proof. You say that a God, whose loving-kindness is infinite, can never suffer the souls which He has created to be lost. I lay that assertion in the Balance of Inspired Truth; and I test its correctness by these declarations from the lips of God Himself. “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.” “He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only Begotten Son of God.” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby they may be saved.” “The wicked shall be turned into hell.” They “shall go away into everlasting punishment.” They “shall be cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” They “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.” How baseless does your confidence in the abstract mercy of God appear, when confronted with an-

nouncements like these! O man! whoever thou art that hopest for salvation out of Christ, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

It is needless to expose further the multiform and countless delusions by which the impenitent heart attempts to allay its fears, and to find peace in its guilt. The trial in every case would give the same answer. Whether men are sinners within the church or sinners out of it; whether they are grossly profane or decently moral; whether they are afloat on the wild sea of Infidelity, or, while still mooring themselves to a speculative faith in the Gospel, neglect all its invitations and all its commands—they are alike under condemnation; and the rotten and ever-shifting materials with which they strive to build up a foundation of lies, will be as stubble when God shall lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet.

Once more we resort to these Sacred Scales, but with a momentous change in the ingredients and relations of the process. Let us heap together, in the one side, all the demands of God against the sinner—His Holy Law broken and dishonored—His majesty insulted—His authority disregarded—His love despised—His grace rejected. A fearful pile! What mortal strength must not be crushed under its burden! Let us now place in the other

side everything which the sinner can bring to offset this tremendous bulk of Divine claims and penalties. But what has he to bring? In his whole inward and outward history, what is there that can have the slightest influence on the decision at issue? Nothing — absolutely nothing. A few rags of natural virtue — a few fragments of works, all foul with the depravity from which they spring — a few resolutions forgotten as soon as made — a few groundless and insincere excuses — what are these with which to meet the dreadful array that stands opposed to him? The upshot is certain; and the universe watches, with a shudder, the trembling scale, expecting, the next instant, to see it fly upward, and to hear the irrevocable doom pronounced that is to consign the soul to perdition.

But at this moment of awful suspense there appears upon the scene a form, born of heaven though dwelling on the earth, clad in robes newly washed, white and clean. There is a shadow on her countenance as from peril escaped, and a tinge of sorrow as for sins repented and forsaken, yet remembered still. But her eye, far-seeing and uplifted ever to her native skies, is bright with hope, and over every feature spreads the calm radiance of holy trust. Her name is Faith. She bears in her hand what seems a gem, clear, pure, and shining with the red lustre of the ruby. Small, and unimposing in as-

pect, it has the weight of a thousand worlds. It is Blood — the Blood of Atonement — the Blood of the Lamb. She casts it into the scale of the sinner — and, lo! all is changed. The great mountain of man's guilt and of God's wrath melts away. The claims of Eternal Rectitude are satisfied. The mighty debt of sin is cancelled. The scales hang at an even poise. And Justice, who presides over the trial, relaxes his stern brow, and with a smile sweet as the face of Mercy, writes upon the golden beam above — BALANCED.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOLLOWING CHRIST AFAR OFF.

“BUT PETER FOLLOWED HIM AFAR OFF.”—*Matt.* xxvi. 58.

IT is a striking circumstance, that we may find, among the original Disciples of our Lord, the type and representative of nearly every variety of character which His professing people have since exhibited. In Judas, who through his love for the wages of unrighteousness betrayed his Master, we perceive a mournful resemblance to that numerous class, who, influenced by worldly gain and advantage, sell the Lord that bought them, violate their most sacred obligations to Him, and abandon His bleeding cause to the malice of its enemies. In James and John, when, incensed at the hostility of the Samaritans, they desired to call down fire from heaven to consume them, we discover a likeness to those hot and reckless zealots, so abundant in our own times, who, if they cannot convert the world in a day, or compass great moral revolutions by a mere wave of the hand, are ready to thunder forth anathemas against all whom they

imagine to stand in their way, or not to come with sufficient promptness to their aid. In the two Disciples, who sought from Christ that they might sit the one on His right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom, we have a picture of those ambitious spirits, whose opinions and measures must always be followed, and who can never be quiet in a church, if they cannot rule there. The incredulous Thomas, who would not believe that his Lord was risen from the dead, unless he could see Him with his eyes, and put his finger into the print of the nails in His hands, and the mark of the spear in His side — resembles but too closely the great body of professors at the present day, who walk by sight, not by faith; who can repose no confidence in the promises of God without sensible proof; who can have no enjoyment in the absence of impulse, and manifestations, and visions; and who cannot be induced to put forth a single effort for the prosperity of Zion, except under the excitement of overwrought and abnormal feeling, or the stimulus of immediate success. And especially does the conduct of Peter, referred to in the text, who, on the night of the Saviour's arrest, "followed Him afar off," indicate most accurately the moral position of vast numbers that bear the name, and have assumed the responsibilities, of Christ's disciples. On every side may be seen multitudes who, though they have sworn alle-

giance to the Saviour, and solemnly engaged to walk in His steps, yet keep, in all their principles and practice, at a deplorable distance from Him, and pursue a course so devious and uncertain as to render it doubtful whether they are following Him at all.

To describe the characteristics of this state, and the evils to which it leads, is my present purpose.

The first characteristic of those who follow the Lord afar off, is a dim and distant view of His atoning sacrifice. This was very clearly shown in the language and conduct of Peter a few days before the Saviour's crucifixion. When Christ informed His disciples that He must suffer death, and be raised again the third day, Peter "rebuked Him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." In this protest, a personal regard for his Master had doubtless no small share. Yet we cannot but perceive that it betrays a very indistinct conception of what Christ came to do, and of the necessity that He should seal the Covenant of Redemption with His blood. Had his views on this point been full and clear, no degree of love to his Lord could have induced him to give utterance to such expressions. However deeply his affectionate feelings might have been shocked at the prospect of the Saviour's sufferings, he would have bowed in silent submission to the will of Heaven,

and rejoiced, even amidst his grief, that thus sin was to be expiated, and the Fountain of Mercy unsealed to a perishing world. And it was, beyond question, the imperfection of his faith in this respect which led to his subsequent misconduct. Having no strong and definite impression of the great truth, that the Redeemer could triumph only through the Cross, — when he saw Him in the hands of His enemies, he regarded His cause as lost, and gave up every hope connected with His mission. Still, he was too sincerely attached to his Master to desert Him altogether; and, therefore, he followed Him afar off, afraid to cleave to Him closely, and yet unwilling wholly to forsake Him. Oh! had he but seen that the humiliation of Christ was only the dark and painful process, by which the salvation of men and the glory of God were to be wrought out, how differently would he have felt and acted! He would have remained fast by the side of His Lord when he was apprehended. He would have entered with Him into the presence of the assembled rulers. And at His crucifixion, he would have stood beneath His Cross, gazing with a calm though sorrowful eye upon the awful tragedy in which Divine Justice was vindicated, and Redemption secured.

As it was with Peter, so it is with those in the present day who follow the Lord afar off. Their minds are not properly impressed with the impor-

tance and indispensableness of the work of Atonement. At the period of their professed conversion, they had no adequate sense of the evil of sin, the holiness of God, the purity of His law, and the absolute impossibility of pardon and justification, except by the merits of a crucified Mediator. Hence they did not firmly embrace the Propitiation of Christ as their only hope. Their conviction of sin being slight, they realized but feebly their need of the Saviour, and reposed in Him a faith vague in its nature, and partial in its influence. It is only through a deep, vital consciousness of its utter corruption and ruin, and of the sufficiency of Christ alone to meet its necessities, that the soul can be brought to cast itself unreservedly into His arms, and to cling there in intimate and living fellowship with Him. And as this consciousness was awakened in them but imperfectly at first, and has not been strengthened since, their religious life began, and so has continued, at a melancholy remove from Him who is its vivifying Centre. Like those remote planets, whose orbits, though within the sphere of the sun's attraction, are too distant to feel the fervor of his beams; so they revolve in a wide circuit around the Sun of Righteousness, — held by a faith too strong to allow them wholly to depart from Him, and yet too weak to draw them into that blessed proximity, where the warmth of His re-

deeming love would fill their hearts with light, holiness, and joy.

A second characteristic of the class we are describing, is self-confidence. When Peter was forewarned by his Lord, that "Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat," instead of manifesting any sense of his danger, or of his liability to fail in the conflict, he boldly replied, "I am ready to go with Thee into prison, and to death." Alas! he little thought how soon experience would prove his weakness, and the vanity of his best resolutions, when the supporting presence of His Master was withdrawn.

A similar spirit is often exhibited by careless and negligent professors in our own times. They fear not the wiles of the Adversary. They have no dread of temptation. They imagine that no pressure of trial, no severity of sacrifice, no force of solicitation, will ever cause them to blench from the path of Christian consistency. Hence they are not watchful over their hearts, nor circumspect in their lives. Their religious feelings may decline almost to extinction; but they see it not. Their outward conduct may approach the very limits of immorality; and yet they are unconscious of peril. Reckless and confident, they roam amidst the mazes of the world; exposing themselves to all its snares; adopting its principles; fraternizing with its vota-

ries, and following in the wake of its dissipations — as if to show how near they can go to the edge of a precipice, without falling over it.

Now, if this feeling of security arose from a simple trust in the Saviour, and a well grounded, scriptural persuasion that He will guard and uphold them through all the dangers which beset their path — that feeling would be itself a pledge of safety. But it is, in their case, the offspring of carnal presumption, and of proud dependence on themselves; and so is a proof, not of nearness to Christ, but of distance from Him. Nearness to Christ gives us a just sense of our own poverty and emptiness, and enlarged views of His fulness, grace, and mercy. We see how great, good, and powerful He is; how vile and feeble are we; and, with humble and child-like reliance, we look to Him for all needful help and protection. But, living afar from Christ, we become inflated with pride, and an overweening opinion of our own wisdom, strength, and sufficiency. As when the sun is lowest, and most remote from us, our own shadows appear the largest, while they contract under his mid-day beams; so, with Christ far down in our spiritual horizon, our virtues expand into unreal dimensions, but are dwarfed, forgotten, lost, as we stand, rapt and adoring, beneath His full-orbed, meridian brightness.

Those who "follow the Lord afar off" are usually characterized by a worldly temper. This was prominently displayed in the case of Peter. When His Master was arrested, he cried out, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" — and without waiting for an answer, drew his sword, and smote off the ear of the high priest's servant. There spoke and acted the spirit of the world — the spirit of resistance, retaliation, vengeance. What multitudes of professing Christians now manifest the same disposition! Backward and sluggish in all that relates to their own spiritual improvement or to that of others, they are prompt and active in everything that has to do with strife and division. Let discord arise in a church, and who will be most busy in fanning the flame? Those whose aid and sympathy have most cheered the pastor; whose presence and labors have most enlivened the Sabbath School and the circle of prayer, and whose efforts and contributions for the spread of the Gospel, at home and abroad, have been most liberal and constant? By no means. Such are now "weeping between the porch and the altar, crying, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thy heritage to reproach." Or, if they come forth, it is only to pour oil on the troubled waters. But the men who, at such seasons, walk boldest amid the storm, and seem most at home there, are the very men who are never seen or heard of when any

good is to be done. Out of their place, and out of sight, whenever "the sacramental host" is to invade the powers of darkness, they are always on hand when that host makes war on itself. Deserters when Christians fight the Devil, they are heroes when Christians fight each other.

And the spirit which they show in their connection with the church, they carry out into all the relations and intercourse of life. You will find them morose, petulant, easy to take offence, vindictive, censorious, and far more ready to believe evil than good of their brethren. In short, their whole character bears a worldly stamp. The natural man lives and triumphs in it throughout, in all uncharitableness, and bitterness, and envy, and covetousness, and solicitude for temporal things, and indifference to those which are eternal. What could more strongly mark the distance at which they follow Christ?

Another characteristic of the state we are delineating, is moral cowardice. Why did Peter follow his Lord afar off, keeping aloof, and skulking out of view like a guilty thing? Because he was afraid or ashamed to be seen in his Lord's company. He dreaded the danger, the loss, or the reproach, to which he might be subjected, if recognized as a disciple of the Saviour. And why, in our own day, are so many who bear Christ's name so reluctant to

avow and maintain Christ's cause? For the same reason — they want courage to be decided. They shrink from the cost of following Him fully. They know that entire consecration to Him would involve the surrender of much that they are unwilling to renounce, and the doing of much that they are unwilling to perform. They are aware that they must mortify their most cherished passions, and give up their dearest carnal hopes; that they must relinquish the pleasures and gayeties of the world, and part with its emoluments and ambitions; that they must dedicate to the Saviour every faculty and affection of their nature, and hold all they possess or can acquire as subject to His disposal, and sacred to His glory; that they must incur for His sake opposition, hatred, scorn; and taking up His cross, and bearing it into whatever path of duty or of trial His example may lead them, pass their whole life in self-denial, in prayer, in watchfulness, in holy labor — looking for their reward, not on earth, but in heaven. Such sacrifices they cannot bring themselves to endure. The burden seems too heavy, the race too difficult, the prize too remote. And thus, trembling in view of the conflict which they are called to wage, they linger at the outposts, while they ought to be in the front of the battle, carrying the banner of salvation into the thickest

ranks of the enemy, and storming the very citadel of his power.

The individuals we are portraying evince a great want of resemblance to Christ in their habits and conduct. How unlike was Peter to His Master, during the mournful scenes to which the text introduces us! Christ, seized and bound as a criminal, is borne away by armed and brutal men. Peter follows Him afar off, at his ease and unmolested. Both enter the palace of the high priest. Where is Christ? In the judgment chamber, cold, alone, friendless, before the implacable foes that thirst for His blood. Where is Peter? In the servants' hall, warming himself by the fire. What is Christ doing? Submitting patiently to the bitter malice of His persecutors; meekly replying to their ensnaring questions; receiving, without a murmur, the mocking scoff and the cruel buffet; and, though having all power in His hands, refusing to defend Himself, or to check, even by a word, the steps which are conducting Him to that ignominious death, by which a world is to be redeemed. At this same dread hour, what is Peter doing? Denying his Master, and then cursing and swearing to back it up. Oh, how unlike was Peter to his Lord!

But not greater was his unlikeness to Christ at that one moment of weakness, than that which large numbers among ourselves habitually display. Look

at that professed disciple of a crucified Jesus. Where is he? At the card table, in the dancing party, in the resort of fashion and folly, forgetting his religion, and dishonoring his God. Where is he? On change, taking advantage of the straits of others, shaving notes, and getting fat by usury. Where is he? In his shop, cheating his customers, and chuckling at his success. Where is he? In his counting room, reckoning up his gains. The ledger gives a most gratifying result. There is a large surplus which he knows not how to use; and he is studying in what way he can invest it with the greatest safety and profit. Hark! A knock at his door startles him. He eyes suspiciously the visitor who enters, thinking that he does not look like one out of whom rich bargains can be made. It is Christ, in the person of one of His servants, who claims from him a small portion of his accumulations, for the promotion of His cause, or the relief of His suffering poor. Instantly the ledger reverses its tables. His losses have been very heavy; his profits nothing; and he really finds it difficult to support his family, and carry on his business. It is the Lord's Day,—and where is he? In his parlor, reading. What?—the Bible, that tells him of Christ and salvation? No, the newspaper that tells him the rate of stocks, the price of merchandise, and the ever-shifting phases of politics. It is the

hour of worship, — and where is he? In the house of God — asleep. In the house of God? No, he is seldom there. He has not religion enough even to do his sleeping in the sanctuary — but spends the hours of hallowed time — hours to him vapid and tedious — in dozing at home, or strolling abroad.

Brethren! have you never seen the original of this picture? I do not ask whether you can trace its features in any of your own number; for, delinquent as you may be, I would fain hope that there are none among you to whom it could be fully applied. But have you not found, in the great body of professed believers, some, aye many, to whom it corresponds in all its intensity of coloring? And can there be in such characters any resemblance to Christ crucified? There may be, in their inward life, far down among the principles and feelings which their worldliness has overlaid, some faint traces of His image; but the lines are so faint and so obscure, that only the eye of Omniscience can discover them.

One more characteristic of the class we are describing, is a low sense of Christian obligation. We cannot believe that Peter, while acting in the manner we have noticed, had any just impression of what was due from him to his Master. And as little can we believe that they who now imitate his

conduct, are influenced by any adequate feeling of their indebtedness to the Saviour by whose name they are called. If they duly considered who Christ is, and what He has done, could they prove so unfaithful to Him? Did they suitably realize that it is He who by His own blood hath delivered them from the curse of the law, and the condemnation of hell; that it is He who awakened them from the fatal slumber of their unregeneracy, and quickened them by His Spirit; that His grace now sustains and guides them; that His intercession procures for them all their mercies; that from Him comes every blessing that gilds the gloom of earth, and every hope that points to the blessedness of heaven — Oh, did they truly feel all this, could they manifest such indifference to His claims, and so little gratitude for His benefits? No, no — it is impossible. Penetrated, melted by the truth, “Ye are bought with a price,” they would recognize the further truth, “Ye are not your own;” and every bond of duty, and every drawing of love, would constrain them to live, not to themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again. Christ, in His character and in His offices, would become to them the great Centre of attraction, the chief Object of all their affections and purposes and desires; and ravished by His beauty, they would press after Him, with eager longings to be conformed to His likeness.

Having thus noticed the characteristics of the state described, let us now proceed to consider the evils which result from it.

It is attended by a loss of happiness. How miserable must Peter have been while following the Lord afar off! His gracious and loving Master has been taken from him by violent hands, and he, His sworn disciple, has not had the fidelity nor the courage to stand by Him, or to suffer with Him. Observe him as he pursues his lonely way along the path by which Jesus has been borne. The darkness of midnight is around him; but there is a deeper midnight in his soul. Every breeze that whispers among the olives of Gethsemane seems to echo the reproaches of his own heart. Every star that glimmers above that scene of agony seems conscious of his shame, and to look down rebukingly upon him. As he leaves the garden, and enters the city, the very sounds of his footsteps, as he walks the deserted streets, seem converted into voices of accusation. And when he reaches the palace, and mingles with the groups in attendance there, every eye seems to pierce through him, and to read the story of his perfidy. Oh, what a wretched man was Peter at that hour!

And thus is it with all who walk in his steps. Sensible of the claims which their religious profession has on them; knowing that they ought to live

near to Christ, in spiritual communion, and holy obedience; and yet unwilling to incur the self-denials which such a course demands—they are the constant subjects of inward strife and dissatisfaction. Their judgment and conscience are perpetually at war with their worldly inclinations—the shadows of time, and the realities of eternity—the solicitations of sense, and the incentives of the Gospel—contend for the mastery over them; and, in the struggle, their hearts are torn and divided, tossed about by opposite currents, and acted upon by antagonistic influences. They are like a ship where two tides meet, or contrary winds blow against each other. Now a celestial breeze fills their sails, and they seem to be speeding onward to the haven of peace. Anon, a dark gale from the Pit strikes them, and they are taken all aback, or driven dead on the lee shore of doubt and unbelief. In such a state, they can derive no real enjoyment from anything. They have too much religion to be happy in the world, and too much of the world to be happy in religion. The waters of earth, mixed with the waters of heaven, furnish the most unsatisfying draught that mortal lips ever tasted. Oh, how many sorrows do they entail on themselves! How much of happiness do they lose! They might be filled with the fulness of God. They might possess the solid peace and hope, the abounding

comforts and consolations, which Christ imparts to those who follow Him fully. But, remaining at a woeful distance from Him, they see only enough of the light of His glory to render visible the darkness of their own souls.

The state we have described involves a great loss of usefulness. How much good Peter might have done by keeping near to his Lord, we cannot tell; but certain it is that he did no good by following Him afar off. On the contrary, he destroyed his own peace, wounded the heart of Christ, discouraged His friends, and gave His enemies occasion to exult and triumph.

In like manner, they who are now guilty of similar unfaithfulness, accomplish little for the glory of God, and the welfare of their fellow-men. Instead of seeking the advancement of Christ's kingdom, and feeling that for this they were created and redeemed, they devote their time and talents to the interests of this fugitive world. The service of God is with them an incidental matter, to which the fragments of their leisure, and an occasional pittance of their property, may be given; while the main business of their lives is to accumulate wealth, to acquire reputation, or to secure their own ease and indulgence. Alas, how has the Church of Christ been enfeebled and paralyzed, her energies wasted, her resources crippled, her victories retarded, by

the prevalence of such a disposition among her children! Had all who, in former times, bore the Redeemer's name, been true to His cause, what a different aspect would our world now exhibit! And were all who profess the Gospel at the present day, to come up fully to their obligations, what a new impulse would be given to the triumphs of the Cross! How powerful would be the influence of religion in Christian lands, and how rapidly would the Saviour's conquests extend through the benighted regions of Paganism! All this, so far as it is connected with human instrumentalities, is interrupted and delayed by the fact that so many follow the Lord afar off.

The state referred to is one of great exposure. It was emphatically so to Peter. Had he remained by the side of his Lord, there is no reason to suppose he would have fallen into the dreadful sin of denying Him. But by giving way to doubt, to indecision, and to a dread of personal sacrifices, he was in just the state of mind to yield to the temptation when it was presented.

Our path through this world is encompassed by many dangers. The Adversary of our souls "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The seductions of pleasure, of riches, and of honor, are constantly around us, ready, at each unguarded moment, to entice us into their toils.

And we carry in our own hearts a traitor, that is always on the watch to betray us. In such circumstances, our only safety lies in a close adherence to the Captain of our Salvation who goes before us, and who has promised to defend His obedient followers from every snare and foe. To those who tread in His footsteps, imitate His example, and make His precepts the rule of their lives, He imparts grace for every emergency, succors them in the onset of evil, strengthens them to resist the illusions of sense, and spreads over them the wing of His omnipotent protection amid all the perils by which their course is beset. Having their loins girded about with truth, and their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; wearing the breast-plate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation; and wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God—they pass securely through all the thick and hostile legions that oppose their progress. But no such guardianship is extended to the careless and negligent soldier of the Cross. He may loiter on his march, or turn aside to gather the flowers that bloom at his feet, or wander into the green fields which smile invitingly around him. But he will find every inch of the ground filled with lurking enemies, and may expect, at each step, to fall into an ambush. The only safe place for him is near the banner of his

King. If he leave the ranks, or linger in the rear, he is almost sure to be cut off, and taken captive. Satan is always on the lookout for stragglers. Oh, could we trace the inward history of those children of God who, by their lapses into grievous sin, have dishonored His name, and pierced their own souls with many sorrows, we should find that the Tempter made his successful assault at some moment of indolence or heedlessness, when faith had grown weary, and vigilance was lulled to sleep, and duty was forgotten, and prayer neglected, and the feet, ceasing to follow Christ, were roaming in the by-ways of earth. Who would dwell in such enchanted ground?

The state we have been considering is sure to be followed by remorse and sorrow. Who can tell the anguish of Peter's feelings, when, after his Lord looked upon him, he went out, and wept bitterly? Oh, what a tide of harrowing thoughts must have rushed upon his mind, as he stole away into some lonely retreat, there to give vent to his grief! How did the recollection of his Saviour's love and tenderness and forbearance, and of his own base conduct towards Him, thrill his bosom with intensest agony! How must the glance of that Divine eye, about to be quenched in death, have burned like fire into his heart! The impression of that hour was never effaced. The memory of that upbraiding,

sorrowful, yet pitying look, never left his soul. And although he truly repented, and knew that his Lord had forgiven him, he never forgave himself. Through all his subsequent labors and successes as an Apostle, down to his dying day, he carried with him the remembrance of his shameful delinquency. And we are informed by Eusebius, that when, in the persecution under Nero, he was sentenced to crucifixion, he requested of the officers that he might not be crucified in the ordinary way, but with his head downward; affirming that he was not worthy to suffer in the same posture in which his Lord had suffered, because he once denied Him. Thus on the eve of martyrdom, with its glittering crown full in view, he could not cease to reproach himself for his ingratitude to his Saviour.

Similar sorrows await all lukewarm and backward professors. If they are indeed the people of Christ, He will not let them always live careless and at ease. He will one day *look* on them with the searching eyes of His word and Spirit, or with the piercing glance of His judgments, and awaken them to a sense of their forgotten obligations. And oh! what bitter pangs will attend their awaking! What regrets will they feel for their past remissness! How will the recollections of privileges misimproved, time wasted, opportunities of usefulness lost, souls neglected, a Saviour dishonored, throug

like spectres around them! And though, by applying afresh to the blood of Atonement, they may find a healing balm for their wounds, they will yet bear the scars of them to their very graves. Oh, who would thus surround his dying bed with the memories of a misspent life?—memories which, even amid the consciousness of pardon and restoration, will dim the beams of faith and hope, and hang heavily on the wings of the ascending spirit!

Brethren! Are any of us following the Lord afar off? Let us renounce at once a conduct so ungrateful and criminal. Let us strive constantly for a closer walk with Him, a more full conformity to His example, and a more zealous performance of His blessed will. Let us often contemplate Him in His life, in His character, and in His works. We shall find Him worthy of our warmest love, and of our most active consecration. If we are, indeed, His disciples, He has redeemed us by His blood, and kindled within us the light of His grace, however sadly that light may be now obscured by worldliness and sin. Oh, then, let us seek His face anew, and follow Him unreservedly, devoting to Him our all for time and eternity. So shall we best promote His glory, our own happiness, and the spiritual good of our fellow-men.

But if it be thus an evil and bitter thing to follow the Lord afar off, how much more must it be so not

to follow Him at all! The truly converted, however slow may be their progress, and unsteady their steps, are yet in the path to the heavenly Zion, and will ultimately reach it. The self-deceived, the unbelieving, the impenitent, are walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Some of them may fondly dream that they are travelling towards the Celestial City; but their whole spirit and practice give mournful evidence that their faces are turned the other way; while the avowedly irreligious tread, without disguise, the open thoroughfare of rebellion against God. My dear friends, let me entreat you to forsake the fatal courses of the world, and turn to the Lord. Come to Christ by faith and repentance. Cleave to Him with full purpose of heart. Confide all your interests to His hands, and dedicate all your energies to His service. So shall He be to you a Saviour nigh at hand through the changing scenes of time, and your all-sufficient Portion in eternity.

CHAPTER XV.

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS OWN.

“HAVING LOVED HIS OWN WHICH WERE IN THE WORLD, HE LOVED THEM UNTO THE END.” — *John* xiii. 1.

IN the affection of Christ for His disciples, there was a generosity, a self-oblivion, which challenges the admiration of every thoughtful mind. The hour of His final anguish was now close at hand; that hour in which He was to be assailed by the Powers of Darkness; that hour in which the supporting presence of His Father was to be withdrawn from Him; that hour in which, deserted by His followers, He was to stand like a lone rock amid the billows of an ocean of sorrow. And yet, even at such a moment, when His every thought might well have been engrossed by the sufferings that awaited Him, we find that He forgot Himself in His deep regard for His people; and that His very consciousness of the approach of these sufferings led Him to concentrate His anxieties still more intensely on the cherished ones from whom He was so soon to be separated. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

With what a moral sublimity does this statement invest the closing scene of the Redeemer's life! Behold Him, on the eve of that fearful tragedy which creation shuddered to witness! From the omniscience, which pertained to Him as Divine, He was aware of the full violence of the storm that was about to beat upon Him. He knew every bitter ingredient in the cup of trembling which He was to drink. He saw before Him the mournful shades of Gethsemane, the bloody sweat, the mysterious agony, the midnight arrest, the chain, the scourge, the crown of thorns, the cross, and its death of ignominy. All these were vividly present to His view. But, instead of filling Him with dismay at the pains which He himself was to endure, they only served to increase His solicitude for those who had attached themselves to His cause, and whom He was to leave behind Him in a world of hostility and danger. As the shipwrecked mother, when the vessel is sinking, and the waves rush through the riven planks, presses her babes more fondly to her bosom, and, in her concern for their safety, heeds not the roar of the tempest — so the Saviour, as the terrors of the crucifixion thickened around Him, gathered His disciples more closely to His heart, and fixed on them a tenderness deepening to the last; — a tenderness that death itself could not extinguish; but which, ascending with Him to the

Throne of Intercession, now glows as fervently as in the days of His flesh, towards all who believe in His Name.

In endeavoring to set before you this love of Christ, as it is presented in the text, I propose to consider the character and condition of those who are the objects of it; and the qualities by which it is distinguished.

And may our Heavenly Father so unveil to our view the treasures of Grace in His Son, that our hearts shall be filled with devout and adoring gratitude. May He be present to refresh us with the declarations of His mercy. May He enable me so to speak, and you so to hear, that we shall derive from His word new strength and confidence to pursue, through labors, and conflicts, and perils, the ever-brightening path which conducts to that City of Habitation, whose Builder and Maker is God.

Let us consider the character and condition of those who are the objects of the Saviour's love. They are described, in the passage before us, by the brief, but significant expression, "*His own.*" In what manner, then, is this language to be understood? To whom may it be correctly applied? There is unquestionably a sense in which it may be said that all men are the property of Christ. He is the Author of their existence. "All things were created by Him, and for Him." He is their Pre-

server, upholding them continually by the word of His power. His mediation procures for them, while in this state of probation, unnumbered blessings which otherwise they could never have received. And by His death on the cross, as a propitiation for sin, He has opened a way for their return to holiness and heaven. On all these accounts, He claims, and justly claims, the dominion of this entire world of immortals. And as He is the rightful Sovereign of the whole human family, so He feels for all, even for the rebellious, a deep and unslumbering love. His mercies are over all His works; and there is not a sinner upon earth, however debased and guilty, on whom He does not look with yearning compassion.

But while all men may thus be considered as belonging to Christ, and participating in His benevolent regards, it is not, I apprehend, in this wide extent that the language of the text is employed. From the connection in which it occurs, as well as from numerous parallel expressions of the Sacred Writers, it manifestly refers, not to those who are dear to Christ simply as the recipients of His creating and sustaining goodness, or as the subjects of His mediatorial government; but to those who, by the sanctifying power of His grace, have been brought into that new, spiritual relation to Him,

which is the peculiar privilege of His regenerate people.

Such were His Apostles and immediate followers. They were emphatically "His own." He chose them from the mass of their unbelieving countrymen, illumined their dark minds, purified their hearts, and endowed them with miraculous gifts, for the express purpose of making them the companions of His earthly course, and the appointed heralds of His Gospel, when His own labors should be finished. They were, therefore, in an eminent degree, the objects of His kindness and sympathy. The declaration we are examining is not, however, to be limited to the personal attendants of our Lord. On the contrary, it extends to all the truly converted, of every clime, and in every period of this world's history. Our Saviour, in that memorable prayer with which He closed His ministry, declared to His Father, that He prayed, not for those only who were then His disciples, but for all who in future times should believe through their word. That prayer stretches along the line of the ages; and in this our distant day, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, it reaches, in all the fervor of its tenderness, and in all the efficacy of its intercession, to us who believe in His name. And if the word, "*His own*," characterized the objects of His love while He actually dwelt upon earth, that word

is still the distinctive title of all who cordially embrace His salvation.

To the really pious, therefore, of every age and country, the appellation in the text belongs. They are, in a special sense, the Redeemer's "own." They constitute the blood-bought heritage given Him by His Father, as the reward of His obedience and sufferings. In their deliverance from guilt, and their elevation to eternal felicity, He sees the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. For the joy set before Him in achieving their redemption, He gladly endured the cross, and despised the shame. And to accomplish His designs of mercy in their behalf, He has sent His Holy Spirit to awaken them from the slumber of sin, to renew their polluted natures, to form His image within them, and, by the production of repentance and faith, to bring them into a vital union with Himself. Thus His seal has been impressed upon them, His love shed abroad in their hearts. Drawn by the sweet attractions of His grace, they turn their hearts to Him, as the flower turns its rejoicing petals to the morning sun. They feel that they are not their own. They know that their Saviour has purchased them with the sacrifice of His most precious life; and, melted by His goodness, they bow, with a pleased submission, to His will, and dedicate their all to His service. Henceforth they live, not to them-

selves, but to Christ. His law becomes the rule of their conduct, His glory their aim, His approbation their chief joy. All that they are, all that they do, manifests their consecration to Him. In their endeavors to promote His cause; in their desires to be conformed to His likeness; in their earnest longings after communion with Him; in the heavenward reachings of their renovated spirits—they exhibit the legible signature of Him who “hath set apart the godly for Himself.”

Such is the character of those who sustain to Christ the peculiar relation adverted to in the text. And, oh, how intimate, how tender is that relation! How full of meaning is the term by which it is described! “*His own!*” What endearing associations cluster around that word! We are accustomed to connect with it all that is pleasing in the ideas of possession and enjoyment; and whatever we can call “*our own,*” acquires, on that account, an additional value in our esteem. Thus the man returned from long travel gazes with eager delight on his home, and sees in its woods, and streams, and green hill-sides, a loveliness far dearer to his heart, than all the scenes of beauty and grandeur which he visited in his wanderings. Similar are the feelings with which the Redeemer contemplates His people. They are to Him bright, sunny spots, reclaimed from the waste of our fallen

humanity, and lit up by the beams of His grace. On them His eye complacently rests. He views, with gratified interest, the fruits of His own Spirit within them. Sweet to Him is the sigh of their penitence, the voice of their prayer, the incense of their praise; sweet their temper of lowliness, and patience, and charity; sweet their struggles against sin, and their efforts after higher holiness. With sleepless vigilance He watches every step of their progress; spreads over them the broad shield of His power to protect them from danger; succors them in temptation; guides them in difficulty; comforts them in affliction; and through all their pilgrimage looks down upon them, waiting with fond desire for the hour when, having completed their salvation, He shall receive them to His own blest abode, and place them, as imperishable jewels, in the diadem of His glory.

But the text alludes also to the condition of those who are the objects of the Saviour's love. They are "in the world." This might be deemed a strange place in which to look for the property of Christ; for here the Prince of Evil maintains his usurped dominion, and holds the multitudes of earth as his willing vassals. Yet amid this scene of widespread rebellion—in this wilderness of sin, and gloom, and death—the people of Christ are to be found; and the circumstances of trial and peril in

which they are thus placed constitute the precise reason which calls forth His anxiety on their account. He prayed for them, not that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from the evil. Their state is, at present, one connected with time, and with a sphere in which holiness is despised, and iniquity exalted; in which the good walk in sackcloth, and the wicked in lordly purple. Nevertheless, he knows their path, for He has travelled it before them; and where they see the print of His feet, they are to set their feet also. They are now, like their Master in the days of His humiliation, encircled by foes, surrounded by sinners, acquainted with calamity and peril. Their journey lies through a desert land. Many are the rugged ways along which they have to pass; many are the obstacles which they have to surmount; many are the tears which they have to shed; many are the conflicts which they have to encounter. But though their condition here is one of trial and sorrow, they are not always to remain in it. The place that now painfully knows them, will soon know them no more. They will pass onward, and pass upward. Their lot is to be a counterpart of the lot of their Redeemer.

“ Made like Him, like Him they rise,
Theirs the cross, the grave, the skies.”

As He has completed His earthly sojourn, and ascended to His Father, so they also are to terminate their wanderings. The path along which they are moving by God's direction, leads to a city of habitation. It has a definite aim—a definite limit. They are not to be pilgrims forever. Their Master knows the duration of their wayfaring. Its course is marked out by His hand; and when it is finished, they will pass beyond the boundaries of sin and suffering to that "House of many mansions," whither the Saviour has already gone to prepare a place for them, that where He is, there they may be also. His happiness is not a solitary happiness. He will not be satisfied with the results of His mediation, nor feel that His redeeming work is consummated, till He shall see the whole multitude given Him by His Father, with thrilling hearts of gratitude and joy, ascribing, in His own presence, "salvation unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever."

Having shown the character and condition of those who are the objects of the Saviour's love, I proceed to consider the qualities by which that love is distinguished.

It is disinterested. In the passage before us the subject of His love is mentioned in connection with His own violent departure from the world. The very thoughts which occupied His mind at this mo-

ment were of that agonized and parching death which He was to endure on the Cross. He was to be an atonement, a sin-offering; and in order to realize this design, He was to experience sufferings, whose intense and aggravated nature no language can describe, or imagination conceive. Yet such was His affection for "His own," that, to secure their happiness, He cheerfully bowed Himself to the baptism of anguish. Oh, there is a magnanimity in the love of Christ that has filled heaven with astonishment! "God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son" to die for it; and that Only Begotten Son so loved His people, that He joyfully consented to this death.

Well does it become us to contemplate with greater frequency and attention this attribute of our Redeemer's love. We had no claim to his favor. In ourselves there was not only nothing to attract, but everything to repel, His kindness. It was while we were yet sinners, guilty, perverse, self-destroyed, that He made for us the wondrous manifestation of love displayed in our redemption. It was, therefore, a love which had its exclusive source in His own undeserved, spontaneous goodness. There is in our world but one type of this love; and even that is in comparison feeble and imperfect. It is the love which a mother feels for the infant she has brought forth. In that help-

less object of her regard there is nothing of dignity, nothing of beauty, nothing of intellect, nothing of virtue, nothing of any quality that is fitted to excite intense emotion. And yet with what melting tenderness does her heart yearn towards it. The fountain of a mother's love is in her own bosom. It is an irrepressible instinct. Free and self-moving as a living spring, it gushes up from the depths of her nature, without a thought of the worthiness of the being on whom it is bestowed. Now, it is this very affection which inspiration has selected to illustrate the love of Christ to His people. He passed by, and beheld them, "like an infant cast out into the open field," lying in their guilt, and weltering in their blood. He saw in them nothing on which His eye could rest with complacency. They were vile, they were corrupt, they were loathsome. But they were miserable. They needed His pity. His bowels moved over them; and, in the exercise of His own sovereign, unmerited grace, He said unto them, "Live." He assumed their nature. He bore their sins in His own body on the tree. And, having risen triumphant from the grave, He now sends down His Spirit to work their renovation, and prepare them for the bliss of His presence. Oh, base must be the heart, and sordid the mind, that can think of a love like this, and not swell with mingled emotions of wonder and gratitude!

The love of Christ to His people is a holy love. Why is the declaration of the Saviour's love connected in the text with an allusion to His death? Might not one reason be to show the holiness of that love? He could not manifest His compassion for our fallen race in any manner that should compromise the perfections of God, or lead any subject of His government to question the purity of its administration. No; the rights of Infinite Sovereignty must be respected; the claims of moral obligation must be sustained; the integrity of the Divine Law must be preserved. To secure these ends in conjunction with the honorable exercise of clemency, it was necessary that He should make, in the view of the universe, such an expiation for sin, that God could be just, and yet justify the believing transgressor. And this He has done. By His atoning Sacrifice, He has opened a channel by which the stream of mercy may flow to the penitent, without impinging against any of the abutments of Justice, or shaking a single pillar of Jehovah's throne. There is, therefore, a holiness in the love of Christ. It is not an undue partiality, an overweening fondness, that sacrifices principle, and is reckless of consequences. It is a righteous love. It is a love worthy of His Divinity. It is a love that bears upon it the very stamp and impress of the Godhead. It is a love which, while it pardons and

saves the repenting sinner, sacredly guards all the attributes of Deity, and spreads a salutary awe through every rank of accountable beings.

The love of Christ to His people is a wise love. Of this we have a striking illustration in the chapter from which the text is taken. We read that when the Supper was ended, our Lord took a towel, and girded Himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet. I refer to this as conveying to my mind a signal exemplification of the wisdom of Christ's love. He was now to be removed from these objects of His solicitude, and could no longer impart to them His advice and counsel. He was, therefore, desirous of improving this occasion to instruct them in a particular point which they most needed to know, and which was specially important to their welfare. That point was humility. There is no lesson, even to the Christian, more difficult than this. To be conscious of his own insignificance — to cherish a subdued and docile temper — to feel that no duty is beneath him — to realize his weakness, and to hang with a complete dependence on the grace and strength of God — is a frame of mind most essential to his spiritual progress, but one which he is most reluctant and slow to acquire. Hence, our Lord appears to have selected this precise moment — a moment around which memory would afterwards linger with peculiar interest — in order

to communicate His instructions respecting humility in a manner the most impressive, and the most likely to be recalled. He took the servant's place, and began to wash the disciples' feet. And He intended by this action, not only to teach them emblematically the great truth that no man is cleansed from sin until he is washed in the blood of Christ; but also to show them by His own example, that they should be meek in their pretensions; unassuming in their intercourse with each other; condescending to the lowest offices of kindness and charity; and regarding it as their highest honor to be ministers of consolation to the unhappy. His love was, then, a wise love. A wise instructor embraces favorable seasons to inculcate the lessons he wishes most deeply to impress. And thus our Divine Teacher evinced His wisdom by choosing the fittest opportunity to record His deep sense of the value of that lowliness of spirit, which is the native element of piety, and in which only it can flourish, and produce its fairest and most precious fruits.

The wisdom of the Saviour's love may also furnish a key to much that is mysterious in His dispensations towards His people, during their earthly pilgrimage. Why is the state of Christians here one of trial and conflict? It is because the love of their Master is a wise love. He is too wise and too

good to allow them any indulgence which would be inconsistent with their real welfare. In this world partial fondness defeats its own end, and is often the occasion of ruin to those on whom it is lavished. But in the love of Christ there is no such weakness. While it designs the true happiness of its objects, it labors to promote it by a recourse to that moral treatment which their present circumstances demand. Hence the fact that the pious are so often afflicted, crossed by so many disappointments, bowed down by so many sorrows, heart-struck by so many bereavements, exposed to so many foes, encompassed by so many perils, is in itself a proof that the love which the great Shepherd feels for them is as wise as it is tender. He subjects them to such a discipline, because He sees it to be necessary to the development of their religious character. They are now in a state of pupilage, training up for the occupations and the beatitudes of heaven. For that blessed world they are as yet but partially fitted. Their knowledge is inadequate; their experience is immature; their principles are defective; their affections are low and sensual. They need the constant application of the Master's hand to improve what is begun, to ripen what is crude, to soften what is rough, to strengthen what is feeble, and to give to their piety the highest degree of completeness of which in this imperfect scene the

renewed nature is capable. And in the carrying on of this sanctifying process, affliction is His chief instrumentality. There are some graces, indeed, which nothing else can bring out. Patience, submission, fortitude, detachment from the world, and unwavering trust in God, are not flowers of the sun. They do not grow in the sheltered garden. They are not fanned by balmy breezes. They are planted on the beetling cliff. They are watered by the spray of the ocean. They bloom amid tempests and hurricanes. There are lessons which cannot be taught in the smiling valley. They must be learned in the frowning desert, where the sky is hung with gloom, and the earth is clothed in mourning. And it is for the sake of these lessons that the All-wise Disposer of our lot spreads the shadows of adversity around those whom He loves. Viewed in this light, every aspect of severity vanishes from His providence. Its dark lines become radiant with mercy; and the calamities which so frequently befall the righteous appear, what they really are, the expressions of unerring kindness and benignity. They are designed to wean them from the vanities of time; to fix their thoughts on heaven; to teach them penitence, resignation, self-distrust, and confidence in their almighty Guide; and to lead them, by all the troubles of life's wilderness, to value and

enjoy that Canaan of eternal rest, where every tear will be wiped away.

O Christian! think you that generous Saviour who gave Himself as your ransom, would withhold from you any earthly boon, if He saw it to be consistent with your spiritual interests? No; it would cost Him far less to give you a world than to do what He has done for you. It is only because unbroken sunshine would make you love the present scene too well, that He brings His clouds over you. But while He is thus constrained now to correct His people, with what intense satisfaction does He look forward to the period when His chastisements will no longer be necessary; when He can pour a full tide of bliss through their hearts, and they shall be safe under the pressure of that glorious prosperity! The hour is coming when He can give full scope to His bounty, without any fear of injuring the piety of His servants. It is reserved for that brighter world, where no temptation can enter, no infirmity betray, to furnish a perfect manifestation of the riches of His goodness. There happiness can be enjoyed without danger. And there will the munificent Redeemer be seen in the midst of His sanctified ones, diffusing around them a flood of blessings, which they shall contemplate and possess forever with increasing humility and gratitude.

The love of Christ to His people is an unchang-

ing love. In this world we are familiar with instability. There is here nothing firm, nothing permanent, nothing secure. Everything around us is evanescent and mutable as the hues of evening. Even the friendships of earth are fragile structures, which the winds of adversity may throw down. But in the love of Christ there is a constancy on which the weary heart may repose without fear of change. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." There was much in these objects of His affection to grieve and alienate Him; much perverseness, much irresolution, much unbelief, much inconsistency. But as His love arose, not from any excellence in them, but from His own free grace; as He had taken the full gauge, not only of human woe, but of human depravity and waywardness, He was prepared to love through all these obstacles, and to love unto the end. How forcibly do the Scriptures portray the faithfulness of Christ by a reference to those images of strength and fixedness which Nature furnishes! "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy upon thee."

It is the perpetuity of the Redeemer's love which insures the salvation of His people. Oh, could His

mind waver! Could there be in Him any shadow of turning! Could the least possibility of failure be predicated of any of His promises! Could imperfection or ingratitude in His chosen divert His regards from them! — then would the ground of the Christian's confidence be destroyed; then could the bark of his hopes find no anchorage, but must drift over the troubled ocean of uncertainty, and wander forever from the Port of Peace. But, blessed be God, His purpose in Christ standeth sure. The Lord knoweth them that are His; and the love which He bears them is, like Himself, immutable. It is not a summer torrent from the mountains, which, swollen by sudden rains, may run full and strong for a time, and then is dry. No; it is the deep, settled current of the ever-flowing river. It is measureless as infinitude, fathomless as the sea, fixed as Heaven's throne, lasting as eternity; and the fact that it is so, is the sheet-anchor of the universe.

Permit me, in closing the subject, to exhort you, my Christian brethren, to meditate often on the love of the Saviour. The more you thus meditate, the more will your own love to Him be increased; the more earnest and unremitting will be your endeavors to serve Him. Oh! it is a sense of the love of Christ which nerves the mind for active obedience! When His fulness is not seen — when

the eye is turned away from His ever-present and all-powerful aid — it is then that the heart staggers, and the purpose is irresolute. But let the believer humbly and devoutly ponder the unsearchable riches of the Gospel; let him spread out before him its varied promises, and expatiate, with freedom and joy, over the boundless field of its consolations; let him explore, under the guidance of the Blessed Comforter, the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge; let him encircle himself with it as with an atmosphere, and baptize his spirit into its living element; — then shall his soul gather fresh courage; his heart shall assume a firmer and a nobler attitude; he shall address himself to duty with an energy of resolve and a strength of perseverance, that will enable him to break from many a shackle, which has hitherto impeded him in the ways of God; and he shall know, by happy experience, those holy victories over sin, and passion, and worldliness, which the power of the Redeemer can even here achieve for His people. Ye are not straitened in Him; ye are straitened only in your own narrow conceptions of His grace. Endeavor, then, by fervent prayer for the teachings of the Spirit, to raise your low views of Christ to the high level on which He has presented Himself to you. Oh, think of Him as He is! Think of Him in the

unchangeableness of His nature, in the plenitude of His compassions, in the exhaustless efficacy of His atonement, in the omnipotent prevalence of His intercession. Then shall your weeping eye turn from your own deficiencies to His all-perfect merits; from the pursuing vengeance of the law to the sure refuge of His cross. Then amid the sorrows of life your heart shall be glad. You will see in the severest privations the marks of His wisdom and kindness; and, through all the fluctuations of your earthly lot, you will look forward with unfaltering faith to the day, when all that He has promised shall be realized to you; when grief and sin shall invade you no more; when, basking in His eternal smile, you shall serve Him with no interruption of obedience, no abatement of zeal, no ending of love; and falling at His feet with adoring reverence and praise, shall ascribe "grace unto Him who hath loved you to the end."

With you, my unconverted friends, who have never given your hearts to Christ, I would briefly, but most earnestly, expostulate. How infatuated is your present choice! What can you find in this scene of shadows and illusions, to compare with the ineffable blessing of a Saviour's love? For what empty and fleeting pleasures do you barter the sublime and unperishing hopes which the Gospel holds out to you! And will you continue to refuse His

overtures! Will you remain insensible to His claims, unaffected by His kindness, unsoftened by His pleading agonies? Think, what must be your condition, if you die without an interest in Him, with no repentance in view of His sufferings, no reliance on His grace, no faith to link your perishing souls to His all-sufficient righteousness! Into the heaven in which He dwells you cannot enter. You must go away into everlasting punishment. Who can describe the misery of such an exile? To be banished eternally from His presence; to be consigned to that land of darkness which the smile of His love never irradiates; to know that the bosom, which once bled for your salvation, no longer feels for you; to see that Eye, once beaming with pity, now fixing on you the stern glance of inexorable justice; to hear those blessed lips, which once sweetly invited you to come to Him, pronounce the sentence, "Depart"—Oh, what hand can be strong, what heart can endure, when such a doom enwraps the conscious spirit! Alas, how many are there now before me, who are treasuring up this wretchedness for themselves, and over whom the dreadful imprecation of the Apostle is hanging, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha."

Dear hearer! flee from that descending curse. Hide yourself beneath the wing of Eternal Mercy;

in the arms of that Saviour who ever lives to intercede for you, who is ready to forgive, and mighty to save—say of His bosom alone, this is my refuge, here will I rest. He waits to receive you. His voice of melting entreaty is heard amid the pauses of this world's storm. Oh, listen now to that gracious call, lest, wearied by delay, He turn from you forever!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VICTORIOUS RIDER.

“I SAW, AND BEHOLD, A WHITE HORSE; AND HE THAT SAT ON HIM HAD A BOW; AND A CROWN WAS GIVEN UNTO HIM; AND HE WENT FORTH CONQUERING AND TO CONQUER.”—*Rev. vi. 2.*

BRILLIANT and imposing are the deeds of war. In no other field do men reap so grand a harvest of renown. They carry with them a parade, and pomp, and splendor, which fascinate the imagination, and insure to their performers the richest rewards, and the amplest meed of glory. Nor is this tribute, great as it is, always extravagant or undeserved. Victors in a just war are justly honored. When, like Washington and Garibaldi, they draw the sword in defense of their native land, and win its freedom; or when, like Grant, and Sherman, and Farragut, they crush a ruthless oligarchy banded to destroy that freedom — their achievements merit all the applause which the verdict of the ages accords to them. How vast is the debt which this nation owes to its brave soldiers who, in the hour of its dread peril, went forth to battle against the Treason that assailed its life! Well may a grateful people

confer on them its noblest guerdons. Cherished be the living ; sacred the memory of the dead.

Not so is it with the champions of an evil cause. They who exert their prowess on the side of despotism, who fight for ambition, for wrong, for the overthrow of liberty and justice, deserve only the reprobation of mankind. Their career is one of bootless carnage. Humanity has no interest in their successes. Their laurels are stained with the tears of the helpless and the blood of the innocent. And the wail of subjugated lands proclaims their infamy to the heavens and the earth.

In the Sacred Records, however, we may trace the history of one Conqueror whose triumphs were won at the expense of no blood but His own — triumphs that involved no sufferings save those which He Himself endured — triumphs that shall issue in universal peace and joy. Who is this wondrous Victor, whose power is so benign, and whose pathway is so bright with mercy? It is Christ, the Divine Subduer and Restorer of the world. In the views which Scripture gives of His redemptive work, He is often described as going forth, clad in the habiliments of war and the august insignia of dominion, to contend against His puissant and numerous foes ; driving them before Him like the dust of the summer's threshing-floor ; winning from them field after field and fortress after

fortress, until He accomplishes their utter defeat, amid the rejoicings of the universe.

One of these representations, as witnessed by the rapt seer of Patmos, is set before us in his own graphic words. "I saw, and behold, a white horse; and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him; and He went forth conquering and to conquer."

We need not explain at large the whole series of prophetic adumbrations to which this scene belongs. It will be sufficient to remark that the "Book sealed with seven Seals," introduced in the preceding chapter, and bearing directly on the revelations of this, is symbolic of the Divine purposes; and that the successive loosing of the seals denotes the successive unfolding of those purposes to the end of time. Immediately upon the opening of the First Seal follows the vision of the text — a vision not limited to a single period of the Divine government, but exhibiting a compendious foreshowing of the work of Christ in every age, till the mystery of God shall be finished.

With this view of the connection in which the words occur, I proceed to consider, as naturally suggested by them, the Enemies, the Weapons, and the Victories of Messiah.

The going forth of Christ as a Conqueror, clearly supposes that there are adversaries arrayed to resist

His progress. Among these the Powers of Darkness, comprehending the various orders of fallen angels ranged under the banner of Satan, may be deemed most potent and formidable. The same inspired Volume which reveals the existence and the character of these apostate spirits, represents them as maintaining a fierce and perpetual struggle against the cause of Him who came from heaven to demolish their fell empire over the hearts of men. A foreshadowing of this conflict was given in the sentence which God pronounced on the Arch-Deceiver, at the mournful hour when the blight of impurity first dimmed the lustre of the new-made earth. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." From the first announcement of redemption, the Promised Deliverer became the chief object of Satanic hostility. Never discouraged, never relenting, that hostility pursued Him through all the centuries that preceded His advent—through all the sorrows of His manifestation in flesh—till its utmost rage was poured out in His death on the cross. Not even then did the malice of Hell lose aught of its bitterness. It has shown itself ever since in one ceaseless effort to thwart the Redeemer's purposes, and impede the extension of His kingdom. The wickedness that dominates the

world, the discords that convulse it, the thickening battle between Right and Wrong, no less than the authoritative testimony of Scripture, bear witness to the fact that diabolic agencies are still at work to oppose the onward march of Messiah — agencies whose resources are vast, whose endeavors are incessant, but whose overthrow is sure.

All unconverted men are the adversaries of the Son of God. In consequence of the original apostasy, man possesses a moral nature utterly hostile to the character and the will of Christ. No truth is more strongly asserted in the Bible than that every human being, while unrenewed, is in a state of alienation alike from the one Father and the one Mediator. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be." And all in whom its influence remains unbroken are charged with the fearful guilt of "hating both the Father and the Son." Nor can we even glance at the plan of Redemption without perceiving that in every part it distinctly assumes the absolute and universal estrangement of the human heart from its Creator. This view of our spiritual position admits of no abatement and of no limitation. Its dread comprehensiveness takes in every nation, every period of time, every class, every condition, every unsanctified individual of earth's fallen family. The whole multitude of the

unregenerate, led on by infernal Powers, are lifting the black flag of rebellion, and waging a deadly warfare against that supreme and merciful Saviour, before whom every knee should bow, and to whom every tongue should confess.

The depravity of man has, moreover, given birth to various systems of falsehood and delusion, which interpose new obstacles to the spread of Messiah's empire. These systems overshadow the earth, and hold in their baleful thralldom untold millions of its population. And everywhere they rear up stern barriers to the ongoing of Divine truth; everywhere they marshal countless forces to arrest the conquests of the Cross. Wherever we turn, we meet their bristling front. On whatever side we cast our eyes, we see their huge columns drawn up for attack, stretching over continents and hemispheres; and, however differing in titles, colors, organizations, all moving under the great central banner of the Pit — Opposition to God and His Christ. In one direction, we see the long alignment of those corrupt forms of Christianity which, while they arrogate its name, are alien from its nature, and traitors to its cause. Here muster the followers of those philosophic unbeliefs, which deny the Divinity of the Mediator, the vicarious virtue of His sacrifice, the need of the Spirit's office and the Spirit's work; and which regard all religions as of mere earthly origin,

and confined in their influence to the present life. Here range the adherents of that monstrous dogma, which scoffs at the retributions of eternity, and teaches the final happiness of all men, whatever character they bear in this probational stage of their being. Here, too, are found the deluded devotees of Formalism, worshipping a dead ritual, and trusting for salvation in the efficacy of perverted sacraments. And, close beside them, the vast power of Romanism displays its serried ranks, tramples God's Word in the dust, lifts on high the standard of Antichrist, and blazons on its gory folds a Harlot drunk with the blood of saints. In another quarter, we see the motley hordes of Infidelity, toiling with remorseless zeal to overturn the Christian Faith, and brand its Author as a cheat; to sunder the bonds of moral obligation, unchain the wild passions of men, blot Hope from the horizon of the soul, and sink the Promise of Immortality in the gulf of Nothingness. Farther on, stands embattled the fierce Mohammedan Imposture, which has established its sway by rapine and slaughter, and whose iron feet have trodden into ashes the fairest provinces of the globe. And beyond, in the dim distance, where the shadow of death lies unbroken upon the nations, appear the mighty phalanxes of Heathenism, vile, besotted, impious, and given up, body and soul, to idolatries whose nameless pol-

lutions debase their votaries to a level with the brute.

In all these forms of darkness and corruption there is the deepest and most rancorous hostility to the Son of God. Look where we will, this fact startles us by its prominence. In lands evangelized as in lands pagan, among peoples refined as among peoples rude, we find civilizations, governments, institutions, laws, public and private life, everywhere pervaded by a spirit of bold and active resistance to the authority of Heaven. The whole world is in arms against its Maker and Redeemer. On every hand we witness the manifestations of rebellion. All along the ranks of the insurgents we hear the stir and din of preparation. The gates of the cities are closed; the sentinels are moving to and fro on the ramparts; from every crag and hill-top frown the batteries of forts and castles; while, in the open plain, myriad hosts unmask their long and deep array, waving the ensigns of revolt, and shouting defiance against the King of kings and Lord of lords. How fearful the spectacle! What stupendous energies, inspired by what implacable malignity, are there! Can aught but Infinite Power vanquish such a mass of evil, and retrieve it to holiness and Heaven?

Against these combined and multitudinous forces the God-man is represented as going forth; and

this leads us to notice the Weapons which He employs. The Sacred Limner has pictured Him to us riding on "a white horse," and armed with a bow. The phraseology is, of course, figurative, and is intended to mark the majesty, the preparation, and the vigor with which He addresses Himself to the combat. Oriental princes and commanders, when engaged in martial expeditions, were wont to ride upon white horses, as a sign of authority and pre-eminence. And hence the description of Christ as thus borne onward in His spiritual campaigns indicates His office as the King in Zion, the Captain of Salvation, and Leader of the assault on the legions of ungodliness. Moreover, in the language of Scripture, the horse is a symbol of swiftness; and when Messiah is portrayed as a mounted champion rushing to the encounter, the image denotes the rapidity with which He pushes forward His conquests. To this end His Providence ministers, by the facilities it has furnished for the wider circulation of the Gospel, and for quick and easy communication with all parts of the world. The Press scattering abroad the leaves which are for the healing of the nations; Discovery and Commerce opening up highways over all the earth; the traffic that visits every clime; the sails that whiten every sea; steamships defying wind and tide; railways spanning continents; electric wires girdling the globe—

these are the fleet steeds that bear His name and His power to remotest lands.

The bow was also a weapon very common and very effective in ancient warfare. Its use is ascribed both to God the Father and to God the Son. Of the Father, it is said, "Thy bow was made quite naked, even Thy word;" of the Son, "Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under Thee."

The symbolic language of the text, therefore, was designed to show that our Immanuel carries forward His triumphs through agencies which He has chosen for the purpose; and by which He will finally overcome all opposition, and universally establish His cause. What, then, are those agencies?

The Saviour goes forth to subdue His enemies by the publication of His Word. In providing for the spread of His Gospel, it was His gracious appointment that the facts which compose that Gospel, and in the supremacy of which over the hearts of men His victories consist, should be placed before the eyes of all in the most luminous and impressive manner. Hence He has caused them to be clearly written out in His Living Oracles. That heaven-indited Volume contains the record of His own infinite condescension to our fallen race — of His mediatorial work, His atoning death, His resurrec-

tion, and His enthronement in glory. In it is set down every verity which He came to make known, every doctrine which He came to teach, every precept which He came to inculcate. Throughout its wonderful narrative, Jesus Christ appears again in His mission of love, lives over again His life of humiliation and sorrow, repeats His deeds of mercy, is crucified afresh, triumphs anew over the grave, soars upward before our eyes to the seat of eternal Majesty. Wherever this blessed Book circulates, to whatever clime or kindred it comes, with its revelations of truth, and grace, and salvation, the Son of God goes with it, travelling, in the history of His own matchless compassion, from heart to heart, from dwelling to dwelling, from nation to nation. And so shall He continue to go forth, till by the diffusion of His Word the knowledge of Him shall be dispersed through all the tribes and habitations of earth.

Superadded to this, and in close alliance with it, He has employed the oral preaching of the Gospel. He has set apart a distinct order of men to be His heralds in all time, and with living voices to proclaim to their fellow-men the message of salvation. At the close of His own ministry, when He was about to ascend on high, He gave to His Apostles the momentous commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

That commission reaches down through the line of succeeding centuries, and is as authoritative now as in the hour when it was first uttered. And the same promise of success attends it. The ordinance establishing a special connection between the preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners, covers all the ages. The Cross of Christ, borne aloft in the hands of its ministers, ever has been and ever will be the chosen instrument of Grace.

In this manner it is that Messiah advances to the subjugation of His foes. As the steed of the warrior bears him over the field of battle, so the Redeemer rides abroad on the wings of His Word, wielding the bow of His Truth, and scattering far and wide its victorious arrows. Thus He goes forth amidst our rebellious race, to confront their hostility, to vindicate His own glory, to recover and rule the world.

Now, the proclamation of the Gospel, as a means of conquest, is eminently adapted to its end, and to the constitution of the human mind. In the great realities with which it deals, it possesses the fullest resources for controlling the corrupt propensities of our nature. It unfolds the grandeur of the Divine character, and the spirituality of the Divine law. It exhibits the obligations which man owes to God as his Creator, Preserver, and Judge. It displays the exceeding heinousness of sin, and the sure and

terrible wrath which has been revealed from heaven against it. It unveils, moreover, that wonderful system of Reconciliation devised in the councils of eternity, and consummated in the Atonement of the Cross, by which God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And it assures us that all who repose a vital faith in the Saviour's righteousness shall be absolved from guilt, restored to the Divine favor, and made heirs of everlasting life. In such a combination of truths and motives there is, on the one hand, everything to alarm; and, on the other, everything to encourage. While its announcements of condemnation and punishment are suited to awaken fear, its amazing discoveries of mercy are no less calculated to inspire hope; and in this double appeal there resides a most potent charm to soften the human heart, and win it back to God. How evident, then, is it that the preaching of the Gospel is an instrument skilfully fitted to promote the achievements of the Gospel, and that it is, indeed, the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation!

The Son of God goes forth to vanquish His enemies by the agency of His Spirit. It is a fact as startling as it is mournful, that notwithstanding the adaptation alike of the Gospel and of its ministry to subdue the hearts of men, yet so obdurate is

their depravity, and so invincible the hold which unbelief has on them, that never would they yield to the message of love, were it not energized by an almighty Influence sent down from heaven. Who knows not that throughout the Gospel-history, whatever work is attributed to the word of God is attributed to the power of the Spirit accompanying that word? This great truth underlies and permeates all the New Testament Writings. They everywhere set forth the Spirit as the Author of conviction, the Author of repentance, the Author of faith, the Author of all renovating grace and of all celestial blessings. In the economy of redemption, this glorious Agent, while possessing all the attributes proper to Deity, is placed in subserviency to the work of the Son, with a view to the advancement of His triumphs. And what wonder is it if at His bidding the tumults of human rebellion are hushed into silence! What wonder if before His might all the powers of Hell tremble and shrink away! What wonder if through His energy the cross of the despised and rejected Nazarene receive the homage of a world!

Such is the panoply with which the Saviour goes forth. Oh, how unlike the weapons which earthly conquerors employ! Here is no sword to destroy, no fire to ravage and lay waste, no engines of wrath and havoc to spread devastation over provinces and

empires. Around the path of the white horse and its crowned Rider no charging squadrons whirl, no sabres flash, no murderous cannon roar. In place of war's stern excitements, the commotion, the wild fury, the clash of arms, the death-grapple, mangled corpses, and garments rolled in blood, what do we see? Heralds of Mercy, bearing her white banner, and dispensing words of peace to the apostate; while the gracious Spirit renders those words effectual in melting, purifying, and saving every soul into which they find entrance.

From this view of Messiah's weapons, let us pass to consider Messiah's victories. "A crown was given unto Him; and He went forth conquering and to conquer."

The victories of Christ are legitimate. In the history of the world, military successes have often been hideous wrongs. Fired with the lust of dominion, the demigods of battle have invaded realms to which they had no claim, and have extended their power only by the law of the strongest. But the moral conquests of Jesus are based on absolute and unimpeachable right. "A crown was given unto Him," as a sign that He was entitled to reign, and as a sign that all things had been committed to His hands. This crown is not to be regarded as a symbol of the sovereignty which belongs to Him as Divine; for that, being original and underived, is

incapable of increase. It is His authority as Mediator which is here indicated. In the sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, He laid the foundation of that spiritual empire over which He now presides, and which is to continue through all time. Revelation accordingly assures us that, in compensation of His sufferings, He has been invested with the government of all beings and of all worlds. He Himself declared after His resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." And St. Paul, speaking of His humiliation and of its resultant glory, says, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."

His ascension to the right hand of the Father was the hour of His coronation — of His public entrance upon the Lordship of the universe. Hence, in the sublime vision of Isaiah, the angels that throng Heaven's battlements are represented as beholding Him on His return from the field of His conflict, and inquiring with mingled wonder and adoration, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?—this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" And the voice of the triumphant Immanuel is heard in answer, "I, that speak in righteousness, mighty

to save." Again, in the same scene, the spirits that keep guard without the golden portals of the Eternal City, are described as saying, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in." The hosts within inquire, "Who is this King of Glory?" And they without reply, "The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord mighty in battle — He is the King of Glory." The Being, at whose approach all the ranks of celestial Intelligences were thus moved and transported, was the conquering Messiah coming to take possession of His empire. It was Christ triumphing over principalities and powers, and making a show of them openly. It was Christ, "bearing the scars of honor in His flesh, and the joy of victory in His eyes." It was Christ — His vesture dipped in blood — the keys of Death and Hell at His girdle — ascending with these memorials of His sacrifice, to claim, by the worth of that sacrifice, His appointed supremacy in the kingdom of Grace. The claim was admitted. He was crowned — enthroned. And now He is "exalted far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet; and is made Head over all things to His Church, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Jesus is thus anointed

King over the realms of Providence and of Redemption. This whole world belongs to His royal domain. He purchased it, He owns it, He governs it; and He has, therefore, an unquestionable right to conquer back from the clutch of the Usurper every inch of its still alienated territory.

The triumphs of Messiah are ever growing. "He went forth conquering and to conquer." The thought is that of continuity — of a progress in triumph, always moving on, without check or pause, to its grand and final consummation. How accurately does this conception illustrate the career of our Divine Commander! From the battle ground of the Crucifixion, where He gave to the Powers of Evil their first great defeat, down along the track of epochs and ages, His march has been one constant victory; and so shall it be in the eras to come, till the last enemy is destroyed, and the last vestige of rebellion swept from the earth.

Of the early victories which He achieved over the prejudices of the Jew and the idolatry of the Gentile, we are furnished with numerous and most striking proofs. He went forth with the Apostles and Evangelists, in whose hearts and on whose lips yet glowed the Pentecostal flame; and wherever they published the story of His Cross, there rattled His exhaustless quiver, there sounded His all-conquering bow. The swift hoofs of the white courser

rung out on the rocky hills of Palestine — along the temple-studded coasts of Asia Minor — along the Tigris, along the Euphrates, along the immemorial Nile, by the Pyramids, by the crumbling cities of the Pharaohs, by the tombs of forgotten generations — across the isle-gemmed Ægean — along the historic shores of Greece — along the classic porticoes of Athens — along the pavements of imperial Rome — away, away, faster and farther, over land and over sea — away, away, to the utmost bounds of the peopled earth — grinding into powder fane and shrine, gods and goddesses; scattering to the winds old mythologies and effete superstitions; and waking the slumbering nations to a new life. Oh, glorious was the going forth of the sceptred Rider! The fishermen and tent-makers that formed His retinue, followed Him like conquerors in a triumphal procession, ever chanting the exultant strain, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Grandly was the battle fought, and grand were its results. The temples of Idolatry were smitten to the ground. Systems of falsehood, deeply rooted, and fortified by the homage of ages, were overthrown. The Cross rose above the dust

of forsaken altars, and the ruins of thrones. And the last champion of Heathenism, slain on the field where he vainly strove to restore its fallen power, confessed the issue with his dying breath, "Galilean! thou hast conquered."

But not then alone did Messiah conquer. He has conquered since; and He still goes forth to conquer. Behold His victories in modern times. He went forth and conquered with that solitary monk, who came out from his convent in Germany, and sent over all Europe the cry of a renovated Christianity. He went forth and conquered with the Pilgrims, who, fleeing from prelatie oppression in the fatherland, planted on New England's rocky coast a free worship and a pure Gospel, and lighted up a flame that shall never be quenched, and never grow dim, till it is merged in the brightness of the latter day. He went forth and conquered with the venerated men, who founded on these shores the churches of our own faith, restoring the ordinances of God's house, and erecting a standard of primitive purity, around which all true believers will at length gather and unite. He has gone forth and conquered in those great religious awakenings which have distinguished our own age and country, and in which we perceive the beginnings of that mighty movement of the hearts of men, that is to usher in the conversion of the world. He has gone forth with the mission-

aries who have carried His Word to the burning climes of Asia and Africa, to the solitudes of the frozen zone, to the islands of far off seas; and He has conquered there. Nations have cast away their idols; and on the scene of infernal rites and human sacrifices have risen the temples of the living God. He goes forth still, in the plenitude of his subduing grace, wherever His servants scatter the seed of the kingdom, whether in the sanctuaries of a Christian land, or among the neglected and destitute in the forgotten retreats of the wilderness, or on the desolate shores where darkness and the shadow of death spread their starless gloom.

And yet He shall go forth to conquer. Never will the mystic steed relax its swiftness — never will the bow strung in heaven cease to ply its arrows — while sin dominates one lone spot, or one lone heart, for which Jesus died. The march, the battle will go on with wider sweep and more decisive triumphs — on from generation to generation — on over empires and continents — on from the young West to the old East, from the icy North to the blazing South — on, on, still on, never receding, never resting, till Messiah shall have put all enemies under His feet. And this crowning end is certain. All the beckonings of events, and all the foretellings of prophecy, and all the movements of the Gospel, and all the pledges of Divine faithful-

ness, point forward to an era when every tribe and kindred and people shall own the Redeemer's sway. Oh, it is coming, it is coming! Babylon, the Apostate, will sink like lead in the mighty waters. Infidelity will be driven back to the abyss from which it issued. The Crescent will waste away and disappear from the moral heavens. Heathenism, which stretches its fearful shroud over three quarters of the globe, shall live but in the memory of the past. The aspects of the time, the direction of human thought, the uprising of God's children, the spiritual agencies at work, the spiritual revolutions in progress, are pregnant with tokens of a brighter epoch than the earth has ever seen. All things portend the speedy birth of the new creation, the advent of the world's great Sabbath.

The victories of Christ are conducive to human happiness. In this respect, what a striking contrast may be traced between the Conqueror presented to us in the text, and those by whom that character has been sustained among men! The world has had its Alexanders, its Cæsars, its Napoleons, who have swept like fierce tornadoes over its loveliest realms, leaving behind them wasted fields, plundered cities, depopulated countries, the wail of sorrow, or the silence of despair. But look at Him, who with His weapons of ethereal temper goes forth to invade the empire of depravity, and the strong-

holds of delusion and imposture. Blessings rich and manifold spring up wherever He comes. He never lifts His hand but to confer a boon. He never opens His lips but to utter a promise. He never strikes a blow but to break the chain of a captive. His power is exerted, not to destroy, but to save. The kingdom which He seeks to establish is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. He condemns the sword to the scabbard. He lays aside the instruments of destruction, hushes the thunders of vengeance, and with messages of love, and the soft yet resistless drawings of His Spirit, moves on in His bloodless career, prostrating before Him the sturdiest foes, erecting His throne in human hearts, and gathering His trophies from the evils He subdues and the souls He regenerates. And thus shall He continue to advance till His victories encompass the earth.

On the arrival of that predicted day when His conquests shall be complete, and all nations shall have bowed to His sceptre, what will be the appearance of our globe? Lands red with carnage? Plains strewed with the dead? Provinces ravaged, cities stormed and sacked, habitations deserted and silent, or resounding only with the voice of woe, and the shrieks of the dying? Oh, no, no! Far, far different will be the scenes which this emancipated world will then present. The curse which

has so long burdened and disfigured it will be removed, and primeval freshness and beauty mantle its entire expanse. "The wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion together; and a little child shall lead them." In all the redeemed earth there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. Strife and violence and wrong and sin and sorrow shall be banished forever. God shall come down, and fix His dwelling among men, wiping away all tears from all faces, creating all things new, and spreading universal holiness and bliss over this long scourged and revolted planet. It is thus that Messiah will accomplish the vision, and bring into actual experience the blessedness which it foreshadows.

With what solemn urgency do these thoughts invoke the followers of Christ to labor for the extension of His kingdom! Soldiers of the conquering Jesus! hear you not the summons which comes to you from earth and heaven, to gird on your armor, and hasten to the combat! As the bearer of my Master's standard, I unfurl it amidst the sacramental host, and conjure you to rally round it, and go forth to the great battle of Jehovah with the powers of ungodliness. The field of conflict is before you. See the hostile forces confronting each

other in dense and dread array. Watch the preparation, the evolutions, the suspense, "on the grim edge of perilous war." Listen to the words of command, the call of the trumpets, the shouting of the heralds. Hark! the battle din comes rolling on. God's saints are rushing to the encounter. March! march! to swell their onset, and share their victory. In the words to which many a hero's bosom has lately thrilled, "Go where glory awaits you"—not the glory of earth's battle-fields, but of heaven's—the glory of rescuing the lost,—the glory of striking off the fetters from the enslaved—of leading the captives out of the prison house, of ministering to the joy of angels over sinners saved, and hastening the period when the sons of men, with one acclaim, shall celebrate the liberty with which Christ has made them free.

Fear not repulse. Falter not at the numbers and strength of the foe. He who leads you on is infinite in wisdom and in power, and cannot be defeated. Where the strife is thickest, where the uproar is loudest, where the shock is deadliest, there is the "white horse," and its resistless Rider, with His crown on His head, and His bow in His hand. Above all the turmoil and confusion shines that glittering crown, directing the struggle, and deciding its issue. The crowned One must conquer.

We may fall before the fight is done. But the

vision remains to be fulfilled, and it shall not linger. Soon the final charge will be made, and Evil, driven from all its positions, be hurled into the lake of fire, to vex the world no more. Then the noise of battle will die away. The whole earth will be at rest, quiet as a loving child under its Father's smile; and amid the hush, and stillness, and holy peace, and serene joy of a restored creation, the voice of the triumphant Christ will proclaim, "It is finished."

"All hail! the age of crime and suffering ends;
The reign of righteousness from heaven descends;
Vengeance forever sheathes the afflicting sword;
Death is destroyed, and Paradise restored;
Man, rising from the ruins of his fall,
Is one with God, and God is all in all."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERMON AT NIGHT.

“THE SAME CAME TO JESUS BY NIGHT.”—*John* iii. 2.

THE day, one of the high days of the Passover, is now closed, and darkness has settled down upon the Holy City. The voice of prayer, the hymn of praise, the smoke of sacrifices and incense, no longer rise from the Temple, and from its hallowed precincts. The sounds of festivity have ceased; and over the motley crowds of Jews and proselytes gathered from all lands, slumber stretches its silence-distilling wand.

Worn with labor, and grieved at the unbelief and obduracy of those for whose good He toiled, Jesus has retired with His disciples to some secluded spot — perhaps to Bethany, ever His favorite retreat — there to rest His exhausted frame, and draw from lonely communion with His Father new strength for the atoning work that lies before Him.

And now from one of the most sumptuous dwellings of the great city a man is seen to come forth. His stealthy step, and the furtive glance which he

casts around, would seem to mark him out as bent on some deed of crime or shame. But the nobleness of his bearing, and the clear, though troubled, expression of his eye, forbid such a suspicion. His garb and demeanor evidently indicate that he occupies a position much above the common class. He is, indeed, no ordinary person. He belongs to the sect of the Pharisees, the members of which were held in high repute for religious knowledge and sanctity of life, and were revered by all ranks as guides and instructors. But a still greater dignity is his. He is "a ruler of the Jews," a member of the Sanhedrim, the supreme court of the nation; and, if profane records are to be trusted, few of his countrymen are more wealthy, learned and eminent than he.

But what does he here in the silence and darkness of night? What occasion for such caution and secrecy? Why does he look so anxiously on every side, as if fearful that some prying eye should rest upon him? All day, and perhaps for several days, he has listened to the heavenly truths that have fallen from the lips of Jesus, and witnessed His wonderful works. His judgment is persuaded that He, who utters such precepts, and exhibits such power, must be "a teacher sent from God," and may be the long-promised Messiah. But the lowly and unpretending form in which Jesus of Nazareth

appears, the character of His mission and of His preaching, so different from the sensual expectations of the Jews, rouse all his prejudices, and stagger his new-born convictions. Ashamed to acknowledge his belief in One whom his haughty and self-righteous associates deride as an ignorant Galilean; too proud to seek instruction from Christ openly, and yet afraid wholly to reject Him, lest he should thereby cast away the mercy of God—he resolves on the expedient of visiting Him by night; hoping thus to consult at once his worldly standing and his religious safety. And yet, as he goes forth to execute this purpose, by what fears and misgivings is he beset! While moving along the streets, he starts at the echo of his own footsteps, and seems to see at every corner the gaze of some proud Pharisee fixed scornfully upon him. As he passes the gates, he imagines the very keepers look as if conscious of his errand. And when he climbs the Mount of Olives on his way to Bethany—though all is quiet and solitary in its deserted groves—he yet trembles at every rustling leaf, as if it betrayed the presence of some hidden spy, watching his movements.

What a picture is this of a stubborn, self-righteous sinner, inflated with the idea of his own consequence, unwilling to confess before men his need of the Saviour's grace, and his determination to seek

it; and still, with the truth burning on his conscience, and the Holy Spirit plying him with ceaseless remonstrance, unable to find comfort or rest! How long will he struggle before he takes any step toward securing his salvation! And when at last he does in some measure yield to his convictions, how partial is the surrender! What a compromise does he endeavor to make between his pride and his religious impressions! How does he strive to skulk into the kingdom of heaven! And how do shame and the fear of man dog him, like pursuing demons, at every step! Few are they who, thus setting out to go to Christ, ever reach Him.

It would have been just had the Saviour declined to admit to His presence one so undecided in his feelings, and so selfish in his motives. But amidst the worldly views and feelings which still held the mastery over him, there seems to have been a real, though timid and feeble, desire to know the truth; and our compassionate Lord, who never "quenched the smoking flax," nor refused to impart instruction to any sincere inquirer, however doubting and hesitating, graciously welcomed his approach, and sought to guide him to the light of eternal life. How should this encourage the most wavering and irresolute to draw near to Christ for mercy! The clouds of earth and sense may overshadow your spiritual perceptions; but if there be in the soul a

single spark of feeling in reference to your immortal welfare, go at once to the Saviour's feet, and He will enlighten your darkness, and bring you to the knowledge of His grace.

The address of Nicodemus to Christ, while it was respectful, indicates the hesitation of his mind as to the real character and office of our Lord. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." That Jesus bore a divine commission was manifest from His works. But was He the Messiah, the Son of God, the Prince and Saviour of Israel, whose coming had been so long foretold and so ardently desired? The wonders of mercy and love which he wrought, and the celestial wisdom of His teachings, pointed Him out as bearing this glorious character. But if so, where were the outward appearances, the high descent, the pomp and grandeur, the marshalled hosts, the victories, the symbols of temporal dominion, which the carnal Jews had associated with the advent of their promised Deliverer? It was this absence of worldly power, so contrary to all his preconceived ideas, which caused Nicodemus to doubt whether Jesus of Nazareth were the Christ. And it was with a view to the solution of this difficulty, that he sought the interview which forms our theme.

The reply of our Saviour may appear, at the first

glance, not only inappropriate, but exceedingly abrupt. A little reflection, however, will show that it was precisely the answer which the mental state of His inquirer needed. The mind of Nicodemus was beclouded by the Jewish dream of an earthly Messiah, and a secular kingdom to be established by Him. Hence it was necessary, in the outset, to dissipate this illusion, in order to prepare the way for higher views, and more spiritual conceptions. The Saviour, therefore, opens His discourse with the startling announcement, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Thus, without preface or circumlocution, He declares the spiritual nature of the kingdom which He came to set up, and the solemn fact that none could become members of that kingdom but by a spiritual birth from on high. It is as if He had said — You, and the class to which you belong, misunderstanding the prophecies, and giving a carnal hue to the glories which they unfold, are looking for a temporal prince who shall overthrow your political enemies, and exalt the Jewish nation to universal empire. But the kingdom which I have come to found, is not of this world. It is a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of truth and righteousness, the kingdom of God; a kingdom whose attributes are holiness and peace, and whose triumphs will consist, not in the downfall of civil dynasties, but in the

overthrow of falsehood, sin, and wrong; a kingdom whose subjects shall be made such, not by natural birth, or hereditary right, but by moral qualities — by the reception of a new life from above. Without this, none can enter my kingdom here, or be admitted into that kingdom of final purity and blessedness in heaven, of which the kingdom of grace on earth is the preparation and the type.

To remove still further the darkness that yet hung over the vision of His wondering listener, the Divine Teacher proceeds to state the Agent by whose power this new creation should be accomplished. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit” — of the Spirit as the Author of the inward change, of water as the outward symbol of that change — “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” The children of humanity, in their natural state, are earthly, sinful, and wholly unfit for heaven. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The children of the Spirit are regenerate, justified, sanctified, meet for the celestial world. “Marvel not that I say unto thee, ye must be born again.” The change is, indeed, mysterious and inscrutable. But this abates nothing either from its reality or its indispensableness.

Under the warm sky of Palestine, they were doubtless conversing in the open air; and at that

moment the night wind was heard rustling among the branches of the surrounding trees. In accordance with His usual custom, Christ seizes upon this natural fact to illustrate the great spiritual fact which He was presenting. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is invisible. No mortal eye can trace its form. Its existence is known only by its effects. But you hear the sound of its moving breath. You see the forests bowing, the grass waving, the waters rippling at its touch; and you know it is there. So no human thought can scan the way of the Spirit. But His presence is manifested by His works. You see the proud humbled, the corrupt cleansed, the dead in sin pervaded by the life of holiness; and you may know He is there — there in His renewing and saving energy.

In answer to the question of Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" our Lord proclaimed the authority by which He spoke, and the sure ground on which He affirmed the certainty of the great truth He was propounding. "We speak that which we do know, and testify that which we have seen." I speak of heavenly things; of the purity and happiness of the celestial world, and of the spiritual birth by which alone the fallen sons of earth can inherit

its glories. How shall blind and sensual men comprehend this? "No man hath ascended into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." You, ignorant of the nature of heaven, may question the necessity of any moral transformation to fit men for it. But I have been in heaven. I belong to heaven. I came from heaven. I know what heaven is. I know its spirituality, its holiness, its pure society, its lofty employments; and I know — I know, that no unregenerate man can by any possibility obtain a share in that kingdom of blessedness. In the face of such declarations from such a source, what folly is it for impenitent men to imagine that they shall go to heaven, though they live and die strangers to the renewing influence of the Spirit!

To show the provision of Divine Mercy for this spiritual revolution in the characters of men, the Saviour brings forward the grand fact which underlies the whole system of agencies for the recovery of our race — the atonement for sin which He was to offer on the cross. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Here, then, was the great central truth in the economy of Grace, which the Spirit was to employ in renewing the hearts of men. It was by pressing home upon

them the death of Christ as a sacrifice for their sins, that He was to subdue their rebellion, eradicate their corruptions, and implant the love of God in their souls. And it was through the merits of that sacrifice, applied by the Spirit, that the believer was to receive pardon, justification, and life everlasting.

Thus, examining the instruction which our Lord gave to Nicodemus, we find it not only appropriate, but most significant and suggestive, containing in a brief compass the whole essence of the Gospel. The fallen and sinful state of men by nature; the absolute necessity of a moral change in their character, so complete as to be denominated "a being born again," in order to prepare them for admission into the kingdom of God; the Divine Agent to whom this work is committed; the Blood of Atonement through which He is to effect it; the salvation of all who embrace the Redeemer; the perdition of all who reject Him — are here compendiously set forth by the lips of Him who spoke as man never spoke.

Who can describe the emotions of the astonished listener, as truths so new, so startling, fell on his ear? In the earlier stages of the conversation he evinces doubt — objects — questions. But as the discourse proceeds; as the Divine Preacher unfolds His mighty theme; lifts the veil of eternity; speaks

of Himself as having descended from its mysterious abodes; and points to the cross on which He was soon to suffer for the sins of a world — the mind of Nicodemus is pervaded by strange and unwonted sensations. He asks no more questions. Doubt and incredulity die within him. Subdued, awe-struck, he listens while those words of eternal import flow on, and the voice of the God-man alone breaks the surrounding stillness. At length, that voice is silent; and there they sit, in the deep hush of night, under the watching stars — the Heavenly Teacher looking down with pity and love upon the earthly learner at His feet; and the learner looking up, with dawning faith and reverence, into that Divine Face, so meek, so gentle, so full of yearning tenderness, yet so stamped with Deity in every line.

And so they parted — the Teacher retiring to His lowly rest — the inquirer going back to his lordly home in the great city. But it is a different man that now treads the moonlit paths of Olivet. The germ of a new life is struggling in his soul. A new faith is beginning to break through the clouds of his unbelief. A new star of hope is rising before his spiritual eye. The gracious principle within him is yet feeble, and is environed by a mass of worldly elements, by a host of carnal prepossessions and prejudices, that may for a time smother and overpower it. But “the seed of the kingdom” has been

planted, and it shall at last come up to the light through every obstruction, and bear fruit unto life eternal. From subsequent facts recorded in the New Testament, we cannot doubt that Nicodemus was a sincere believer in Christ. And though from the fear of persecution, and the malign force of secular influences, he did not openly declare his convictions, nor publicly join himself to the company of the disciples, there is yet satisfactory evidence, that from the hour of his memorable interview with Jesus, he had in heart recognized Him as the true Messiah. In several instances we find him boldly defending Jesus against the injustice and rage of the Sanhedrim. And after the hatred of the rulers had culminated in the crucifixion of the Saviour, Nicodemus, in company with Joseph of Arimathea, brought costly spices to embalm His body, and assisted at His burial; thus paying the tribute of grief and love to the sacred remains of Him whose Divine words, spoken at night in the solitude of Bethany, first woke in his soul contrition for sin, and unveiled to the eye of his faith the hope of salvation through a suffering Redeemer.

From this interesting narrative we learn that the beginning of true religion in the soul is often weak and undecided. For a time, it appears to be hidden and well-nigh lost amid the hostile influences which environ it. Instances of conversion there are

in which the germ of faith bursts at once into full flower and fruitage. But such sudden development is rare in the annals of Christian experience. Here and there one, like Saul of Tarsus, may be struck by a flash of light from heaven, and brought in a moment to a clear perception of the claims of Jesus, and an entire consecration to Him. Examples of this kind are, however, peculiar and exceptional. The case of Nicodemus has been far more frequently reproduced in the history of the church than that of Paul. As on a morning of clouds, the sun, shorn of its brightness, struggles upward through encompassing mists, so the uprising of grace in the soul is ordinarily beset with hindrances, obscured by the fogs of unbelief, and overshadowed by doubts and temptations. Like the "little leaven," to which our Lord compared it, it may seem wholly inadequate to pervade and transform the vast bulk of inert material by which it is surrounded. Nevertheless, it is vital, expansive, aggressive. It can never die. Oppressed and kept down by inactivity and worldliness, it may develop slowly; but fostered by the same Divine Hand which planted it at first, it will grow and gather strength, until it exerts a controlling influence over the entire character and life. The very conflicts which it has to meet are among the agencies by which it is to be established and confirmed. As bleak winds cause the tender tree

to strike its roots more deeply into the kindly soil, check its luxuriance of wood and leaf, and harden it for the climatic changes that await it; so the misgivings and struggles which often impede the early progress of piety, serve to render that progress more careful, more stable, and ultimately more complete.

Abandon not courage and hope, therefore, because the power of the new life within you is yet immature and feeble. If that life has, indeed, been kindled by the Holy Spirit in your heart, its final victory is certain. The work which He begins can never fail. The renovation that comes from Him is deathless as its Author. Nurtured by prayer, by vigilance, by self-denial, by the living Bread of Heaven, the principle of holiness will shoot up into steadfastness and vigor; the dimness of your spiritual perceptions will pass away; your trembling hope become strong; and the dawn of salvation, now faintly gleaming amid darkness, doubt, and fear, burst at length into the perfect day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEEP FISHING.

“LAUNCH OUT INTO THE DEEP, AND LET DOWN YOUR NETS FOR A DRAUGHT.”— *Luke* v. 4.

IT is sunrise on the Sea of Gennesareth. The sky is flecked with gold and vermilion; the mountains are steeped in a ruddy glow; and the still waters, stirred by the breath of morning, wake into rippling life.

Worn with labor, Jesus comes down to the shore, seeking quiet in its solitude, and vigor from its refreshing breezes. He finds there four of His disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, who, after a night of unsuccessful fishing, have given over their efforts, and brought their boats to the land. While He is conversing with them, the multitudes that, in their eagerness to hear His words and to witness His miracles, had thronged Him during all the preceding day, follow Him to the beach, and again gather round Him with an interest more absorbing, and in greatly augmented numbers. So compact is the mass, and so intense the anxiety to catch every syllable from His lips, that not only

is there no standing room left from which He can address them, but He is even in danger of being pressed into the water by His crowding listeners.

In these circumstances, He beckons to Peter to bring his boat to the spot; and entering it, and requesting its owner to push out a little way from the land, He seats Himself in the stern sheets, and thence discourses to the people. How simple, yet how sublime the scene! The blue heaven above, the blue depths beneath, the green hillside and its vast congregation before Him—every eye fixed, every ear attent to drink in the divine music of His voice! There is a solemn hush, a brooding silence—and the tones of the God-man alone are heard, going forth over sea and shore, telling of the love of the All-Father, of mercy for the guilty, of hope for the fallen, of salvation for the lost. Lowly pulpit! Glorious sermon! Never have the pillared aisles of earth's proudest cathedrals echoed with utterances so sweet, so majestic, so full of grace and power, as those which now ring out upon the charmed waves and listening heights of the Galilean Lake!

At length, those words of eternal Truth cease to flow, and the rapt auditors retire slowly and musingly to their homes. Our Saviour, as mindful ever of the wants of the body as of the soul, of temporal as of spiritual concerns, and knowing that the

disciples were dependent for support on the fruits of their occupation, determines to recompense them for the ill fortune of the night, and the ready obedience of the morning. Peter has converted his boat into a pulpit for Christ; and now Christ will pay him for its use in a manner which he little expects. With this intent, He commands him to launch out into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. The future apostle is already a firm believer in the wonder-working energy of Jesus, and has seen too many instances of its forthputting to question its reality or its amplitude. Hence, his answer, so far from implying hesitation and doubt, expresses a faith that can trust and be strong even against adverse experience. "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net."

His confidence, however, undergoes a harder trial when he perceives the direction in which the Saviour is leading him. The basin of the Gennesareth is of volcanic origin, and is only a lower depression of the great Jordan Valley which stretches from the foot of Lebanon to the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and lies, through its whole course, many hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean. In consequence of this formation, the central portion of the lake is often very deep, and inaccessible by any ordinary methods of the pisci-

tory art. The apparatus employed by the fishermen of our Lord's time was extremely simple, consisting, in most cases, of a small casting net, thrown and drawn by the hand. They had no seine whose vast length could sweep the abysses, and drag forth their finny inhabitants; and were, therefore, compelled to pursue their calling near the shore, and in waters comparatively shallow. Of this Peter was fully aware. Born and reared on the borders of the lake, and skilled by long practice in the secrets of his craft, he was familiar with all the localities deemed most favorable to its prosecution, and knew well that in the soundless depths over which his vessel was then gliding no fisher had ever dreamed of casting a net. Nevertheless, so complete was his trust in the supernatural guidance under which he acted, that he rowed on without question till he reached the ground indicated by his Master, and, in a spirit of childlike obedience, let down his net where net had never gone before.

Meanwhile, He who is Sovereign of the waters and of the dry land, had been providing for the result which He contemplated. The miracle which He wrought on this occasion was not one of creative power. His omnipotence did not at that instant bring into being the fish necessary to His purpose. They were already existing in the lake; and His Divine authority was manifested in collecting them

at the requisite place, and thus rendering unconscious creatures subservient to His will. "The sea is His, and He made it." He has dominion over all its tribes; and in their ceaseless movements to and fro, they but obey the laws which He appoints. Yet, while there is here no suspension of the regular operations of nature — no entrance upon her domain of a new and unwonted agency — the occurrence is lifted into the region of the supernatural by the all-directing Hand which caused these operations to fall in with the specific word and design of Christ. The denizens of the deep roam through its territories as their instinct prompts them. But now there is put into that instinct a divine impulse which draws them to the point where their Maker needs them. That impulse they all follow, certainly, though involuntarily. None can escape it, none resist it. Here is a mighty carp, there a giant pike, and yonder a stupendous bass, that have long flourished in their secret haunts, secure from baited hook and meshy snare; yet at the behest of Christ they must come forth. From coral caves, from rocky clefts, from mossy beds, from submarine bowers, from all parts of the watery realm, heaven-led, they troop, in countless schools, straight for the spot where Peter's net is to go down.

The disciple, having thrown out his net in obedience to the command of the Lord, and seen it

quietly sink in the clear waves beneath, waits the accustomed time, and then attempts to draw it. But he is amazed to find in it an enormous weight that defies all his strength. He turns to Andrew for help; yet their combined exertions can only raise it far enough to enable them to see that it is completely full, and strained to its utmost tension. And here a new difficulty meets them. Their tackle is fitted only for small fry and shoal fishing; and the immense number and size of the captives now enclosed, and their fierce struggles to get free, threaten to burst the frail meshes, and rend the entire fabric in pieces. In this dilemma, they signal their partners, James and John, who are at some distance in the other boat, to hasten to their aid. The two boats are brought together, and their united crews take hold of the net. Still, they dare not lift it out of the water, lest it should break with its wondrous burden; but are constrained to transfer the fish from the net to the boats. Even these are so overloaded as to be in peril of sinking, and are kept afloat only by the most careful handling.

The miraculous spoil is at last safely landed; and the disciples, as they gaze upon it, filled with astonishment by an event so unexampled in their experience, rise to a higher conception of the power and glory of their Master. But this feeling develops itself most strongly in the mind of Peter, and finds

in his impulsive mood the most ardent expression. Overwhelmed by a sense of the greatness of Christ, he falls at His feet, exclaiming, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Whenever Divine might and holiness are revealed to the soul, they awaken in it a deep consciousness of its own vileness, and of the infinite moral distance between it and the All-perfect One with whom it is brought into contact. Awe-struck and guilt-smitten, it shrinks back from the dazzling radiance, and cries out with the convicted patriarch, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The merciful Redeemer dispels the fear of his trembling servant, and assures him that the manifestation of omnipotence which he had beheld was intended, not to appall and terrify, but to point out to him a nobler function, a grander life-work, than his present pursuit; that as he had cast his net into the untried deep of the sea, so he should hereafter cast the net of Salvation into the black deeps of Humanity; and that the same sovereign Will, which led the funny host to the one, would gather unnumbered souls to the other.

Our Lord's own language, therefore, authorizes us to regard this display of His Divinity, not merely as a suggestive prelude to the calling of the Apostles, but as a symbolic adumbration of the future

triumphs of His Gospel, and a pregnant showing forth of the manner in which that Gospel is to be carried into the dark places of our outcast world. Viewed in this aspect, how significant and impressive are the lessons which it conveys !

The voice of the risen Christ has assigned to His people the high province of making known His redemption to all the families of men. But in fulfilling this sacred vocation, they have too often followed a course analogous to that pursued by the disciples in their secular employment, before the Lord taught them a better method. Like the fishers of Gennesareth, they have been content to ply the net of the Gospel along the shores, and in the most accessible and promising positions, leaving untouched the vast ocean of darkness and guilt that lay beyond their soundings. This defect, visible in all the ages since the Apostolic, strikingly characterizes the evangelism of our own day. We forget not the inroads which modern Christianity has made on the domains of Heathendom, nor the numerous and mighty movements that have been organized to spread the light of Life throughout the empire of the Shadow of Death. We recognize progress in this direction, and hail it as the crowning glory of the era in which we live. Nevertheless, we affirm that in lands where the Gospel has long been planted, where its institutions have taken root,

where its influence permeates society, where Sabbaths and Bibles and sanctuaries and sermons are familiar things, there is a fatal want of religious enterprise, of aggressiveness, of breaking forth from prescriptive bounds, and bringing the enginery of God's Word to bear on the neglected multitudes all around us, whom no appliances of Mercy ever reach. We throw the net where we have always thrown it—in the church, in the Sunday School, in the congregation, in the parish—and know not or heed not the fact that, just outside of our wonted beats, are fathomless gulfs—dread volcanic chasms—where, down, down in the very bowels of sin and degradation, unsought millions grope in their blindness, with only a thin crust between them and a burning Hell. And the dwellers in these abysses—the votaries of irreligion, of infidelity, of godlessness—are constantly increasing. Amidst all the working of Christian ordinances, and all the outgoings of Christian labor, the numbers who scorn Jehovah, repudiate His worship, and shut themselves away from all the uplifting agencies of the Gospel, are becoming greater and more unapproachable from year to year. Here, then, is the fishing ground to which the Saviour calls us. Over this sea of unexplored vice and woe sounds the summons, as once it sounded over the Lake of Galilee,

“Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”

What are the requisites for such an undertaking? In what attitude must the Church of the Redeemer place herself in order to fulfil the mandate of her King? And what are the conditions under which she may expect the coming forth of His power to give success to her endeavors?

There is needed for this work a more entire consecration to the cause of Christ, and the recovery of the lost. Peter gave up his boat, his time, and himself to the service of his Lord. Had he refused to do this — had he urged the plea which so many urge, that the claims of his business and of his family forbade the surrender — there is no reason to suppose that any miraculous energy would have intervened in his behalf. Self-sacrifice was a necessary preparative for the blessing which he received. And the absence of a similar spirit in the great body of those who now bear the Saviour’s name, is one of the chief obstacles to the conversion of the God-despising masses. To pour the beams of Truth upon these abodes of ignorance — to distribute the waters of Mercy through these uncultured wastes — is an enterprise requiring means, time, labor — means in large supply, the time, the labor of myriad thinkers and myriad workers. Yet how few can be found, among the millions enrolled in the sacra-

mental host, who ever give a dollar, an hour, a thought, to the enlightening of the darkling wanderers that surround them on every side! Satisfied with having received the Gospel themselves, and limiting their obligations to the scanty support of its public ministries, the vast majority of professing Christians devote their energies to secular affairs, and put forth no personal endeavors for the rescue of the perishing. The illumination of the wide expanse of moral night is thus left to a few pulpits, shining feebly out here and there amid the gloom, like dim beacons scattered at distant intervals over a fog-shrouded and storm-lashed ocean. In the momentous crisis which is now upon the Church, all her resources, all the strength of all her children, whatever they have of wealth, of talent, of opportunity, of spiritual power, must be brought into requisition, not only to extend her boundaries, but to prevent the encompassing ungodliness from hemming her in, and swallowing her up. The wilderness is encroaching on the cultivated land. The sands of desolation are sweeping over broad heritages, where once echoed the shout of the ploughman and the song of the reapers.

Citizens of Zion! what mean ye? Awake! Awake from your security! Awake from your selfishness! Awake from your worldly engrossments! Awake from your visions of affluence and ease!

Awake to the great emergency! Awake to the claims of Christ, and the wants of the Christ-neglecting multitudes among whom you dwell! Dedicate anew body and mind, heart and soul, interest and sympathy — all that you are and all that you possess — to the gathering in of “them that are without.” And when thus you obey the Lord that bought you by yielding yourselves wholly to His use, His redeeming word will go forth over the deeps, and the net of His Grace be filled with the saved.

The people of God need to be animated by a livelier concern for the destitute. Until a deeper sense of their necessities prevails among Christians, we cannot hope that any adequate provision will be made to meet them. We all feel too little the unhappy condition of those who are living without God in the world. We feel it so little because we realize it so little; and we realize it so little because we observe and ponder it so little. Sheltered in our spiritual homes, environed by privileges, feasting on heavenly bread, rejoicing in the communion of the faithful, and in the promise of life eternal, we form but faint ideas of the peril and the woe overhanging the profane crowds that dwell apart from the mercies of the Gospel. We know them; but the knowledge does not impress us. It does not arrest our consciousness with such vivid truth and

force as to rouse us from inaction. To get such a conception, we must pass beyond the circle of Christian intercourse, and look out upon the bleak world of the godless; visit the haunts of intemperance, the resorts of the profligate, the dens of the vile; and see with our own eyes how the soul is destroyed, and heaven cast away. Then shall we obtain a view of the guilt and ruin of unevangelized men, that will impel us to seek their redemption with a vigor and earnestness of purpose to which we have hitherto been strangers.

A man of opulence and leisure is seated in his sumptuous mansion in the heart of a great city. It is a winter night; but the chill tempest that roars without, enters not there. Around him are all the comforts and elegances which wealth can supply. Soft couches are there, and splendid rooms, and costly furniture. And pictures are there, and books, and music, and cheerful warmth, and brilliant lights, and happy faces. He knows there is want in the city, and sorrow in the city — ragged ones, houseless ones, shivering with cold — chambers of sickness that have no light or fire — low, damp cellars on which the sun never shines — abodes of filth and misery where Hunger and Fever walk hand in hand. All this he knows. Yet he thinks not of it. It stirs no pity in his soul, calls forth no active benevolence. But let him go out

into the dark streets and the pelting storm. Let him meet poverty and suffering face to face. Let him look at the naked wretches huddling in corners ; at the starving child holding out its lean hand for alms ; at the pale mother in yonder garret clasping her dying babe to her breast, and trying in vain to shield it with her tattered garments. Let him thus see famine and destitution as they are, and if there be a heart in his bosom, he will feel, he must feel. None but a Dives come back from hell could turn away without emotion from scenes like these.

There is pestilence in a far off land. It is sweeping thousands into untimely graves. The young, the strong, the beautiful, fall before it like grass before the mower. We read of it, we talk about it, we know it. But it is distant. It is not in our sphere. It touches no home joy ; brings no personal bereavement ; and the impression produced by it is vague, unexciting. Let us visit that land ; trace the footsteps of the destroyer ; mark the gloom and the terror which proclaim his presence ; hear the trundle of the death-cart as it goes round from house to house ; count the hecatombs of the dead ; note the fresh mounds in every churchyard, the mourners in every street, the dismay and anguish in every countenance — and what new perceptions of the might and fearfulness of the scourge will spring up within us.

A wreck is on the shore. Dismasted by the gale, with sails gone and bulwarks stove in, a tall ship, full of passengers, is struggling among the breakers. The signal guns come booming inland over the hills to the peaceful valley in which you reside. You hear them — you know that a vessel is in distress — that human beings are in danger of becoming a prey to the yawning billows. Yet you do nothing to help. The calamity is out of sight. There is a little conversation — some questioning, some wonder — and then you resume your avocations as quietly as if treacherous oceans and stranding ships had no existence. Drop your implements of labor. Hurry to the coast. Look at that gallant crew, those shrieking women and children, exposed to the fury of the waves. See the mad surges breaking over them! Leap into the life-boat that is going to their rescue — brave death to save others from death — and all that is in you of manhood, of noble daring, of godlike compassion, will glow out in energetic deeds.

So, it is by going forth to seek the lost, by following them into all their retreats, by throwing ourselves into the depths where they hide, that we shall be most effectually incited to toil for their salvation. A sense of their undone state, awakened in us by actual sight, will be a far more powerful incentive than any inert theory respecting it. We comprehend

most clearly, and deplore most sincerely, the evils which lie under our own observation, and for whose removal we personally strive. And if we would commiserate sinners, we must go among sinners; study their condition; take the measure of their depravity; and bring home to our consciousness the awful jeopardy in which they stand. Thus, rowing out into the deep, we shall be prepared to let down the net into the deep.

The work of gathering in the outcasts demands a bolder faith than the followers of Christ commonly exercise. The opinion is very generally entertained by religious men, that they who voluntarily estrange themselves from the house of God, and abjure its hallowed solemnities, cannot be reached by any appointed means; and that, consequently, their conversion, though possible, is scarcely to be expected. Especially does this impression prevail in reference to the countless numbers that not only stand aloof from the instrumentalities of grace, but have become the pronounced thralls of unbelief and profligacy. The spiritual fisherman is too apt to imagine that to cast the net in such waters is well-nigh hopeless; that the Gospel has no apparatus which can go down into this abysmal profound, and draw up its sunken tenants to the light of day; and that, therefore, his labor may be more usefully expended at points of readier approach, and on subjects of easier

capture. Judging from ordinary principles, and by the recognized laws of moral probability, there would seem to be much less likelihood of success in dealing with the ignorant, with skeptics, and with the openly immoral, than with those who have been instructed in the truths of Christianity, and are accustomed to an outward attendance on its ministrations. And so, at another time, might Peter have found better fishing near the shore than out in the deep. It was the word of Christ which drew him from his old familiar ground to the strange and difficult one which his Lord had chosen. And it was the power of Christ, rewarding his confidence, that brought the marvellous draught to his net. The believers of to-day have the same word of Christ, commanding them to "launch out into the deep;" and they need only Peter's brave faith to insure the presence of the same power. Our glorified King wields the same authority over the deeps of the moral world, which He wielded over the deeps of Gennesareth. As the denizens of the one came flocking at His behest to the net of Simon; so will His all-compelling grace draw the benighted dwellers in the other to the net of the Gospel. His blood can cleanse the foulest, His Spirit can subdue the stoutest; and in all the ranks of the ungodly there is not one so debased by sin, so steeped in pollution, so lost to hope and heaven, that the Al-

mighty Renovator cannot redeem and purify him. The most hardened, the most besotted, the farthest gone from all that is good and true, may be pardoned and saved by atoning Mercy. Our work in the deep, then, is not vain, not impracticable. It is full of promise, full of inspiring assurances of Divine aid and blessing. Relying on help from above, and strong in the might which God ever gives to them that obey Him, we may let down the net into the blackest sea of iniquity without fear of failure. The voice of Jesus, more potent than Orphean lyre, will collect around it the wild beasts of the slums, transformed and humanized by the charm of His love. "All things are possible to him that believeth." The faith that dares is omnipotent. Clasp the Hand that rules all hearts — leaning on the Spirit of Power — with Prayer on its lips, and Hope in its eye — it is invincible, resistless. In religion, as in the world, the bold conquer. Let this intrepid courage, this dauntless confidence, pervade the Church of Christ, and what abundant trophies, won from the deeps, will she lay at the feet of her Lord!

In this sphere of evangelic effort, there is a special call for lay workers. The fish in these waters are very shy; they do not mean to be caught; and he who would approach them must wear no fisherman's garb, and show no fisherman's gear. They are

afraid of the Gospel; they hate the Gospel; they wish to shun all contact with the Gospel. Let its official teachers go among them, and they suspect the net at once, and refuse to come nigh it. But the advances of private Christians are not generally met by any such repulsion. Clothed with no professional functions, with nothing in look or tone or manner to betray his object, the layman has here peculiar advantages over the minister; and will often find access and sympathy where the minister could not. And if the irreligious masses are ever to be won to Christ and salvation, the result must be largely accomplished by laymen. Theirs are the circumstances, theirs the numberless tongues and hands and feet, which best qualify them to attempt it. And if the pitying love that led the Redeemer from the bosom of the Father and the thrones of bliss to the manger and the cross, could once fill and stir their hearts, loosening those tongues, unlocking those hands, setting those feet in motion, how soon would the beams of light and life shine upon all the abodes of the alien!

In an undertaking so great, a union of labor — the co-operation of every class and division of God's people — is imperatively demanded. Simon and Andrew, finding their own strength insufficient to secure the prize which Heaven had sent them, called to James and John for assistance. Had the

latter disregarded the summons, the net and its precious freight would alike have been lost. So, in drawing up the godless myriads from their debasement and ruin, the whole Christian Partnership must combine its energies. In other branches of religious effort, we may pursue our work separately, each occupying his own ground, and caring for his own portion of the spoil. But in this deep fishing, the boats must come together. Every member of every church, and every church of every name, must take part in the mighty task of lifting these submerged immortals from the floods into the Ark of the Gospel. All the disciples of Jesus, whatever station they fill, to whatever boat they belong, are needed here. There is verge and scope for every variety of talent, every diversity of operation, and weight enough to strain to the utmost the united power of all. And it is only when each is in his place, grasping the net with the whole force of his regenerate nature, that its vast burden will appear above the waves, and be hailed by the rejoicings of earth and heaven.

We may illustrate the importance of this union of effort in evangelizing the destitute, by a glance at the manner in which our cities are supplied with water. There is the distant river, or mountain lake, which furnishes the supply. There is the aqueduct which conveys it to the city. There are

the reservoirs which receive it, the mains which carry it through every street, and the connecting pipes that distribute it to every dwelling. In this series of mechanical agencies, the several parts are indissolubly allied and inter-dependent; and a defect in one frustrates the purpose of all. If the source fail, if the aqueduct is broken, if the reservoirs are suffered to crumble and decay, if the mains become obstructed, if the service-pipes are cut off, or have never been laid — the result is the same — there is no water for the inhabitants. Now, in the system of spiritual activities, which God has provided for the salvation of men, we may trace a similar alliance and inter-dependence — a similar chain of co-operating forces working to one design. From its birthplace among the Celestial Hills, deep in the heart of the universal Father, the Water of Life gushes down to our world. The Word of Inspired Truth is the aqueduct which brings it to us. Our Sanctuaries and Pulpits are the reservoirs which collect and treasure it. The Church, the Sunday School, the various methods of public instruction and influence, are the mains intended to dispense it along the highways and thoroughfares of society; while the labors of individual Christians are the service-pipes to carry it into every home, and into every lane and alley of guilt and wretchedness. Our Fountain-Head cannot fail. Our aqueduct

cannot be broken, for it is built of living rock on the Rock of Ages. But the reservoirs may be demolished, neglected, or rendered worse than useless by impurities; the mains may be choked up by selfishness and inactivity; and the service-pipes, through indolence or carelessness, may cease to fulfil their office. Whichever of these contingencies befalls, the order of the Gospel is disturbed, and its outflow interrupted. There is water — water broad and deep and full as the sea — water adequate to the wants of a world; yet it reaches no parched lip, refreshes no thirsty soul, purifies no scene of corruption. But let God's beautiful arrangement be preserved perfect in all its links; let the reservoirs and mains and service-pipes be kept in harmonious and vigorous play; and the blessed supply will be diffused in ceaseless streams, ample as men's needs, numerous as their habitations.

With whatever preparations and appliances we may launch out into the deep, we shall achieve nothing, unless we take Christ with us in the boat. This age of strange anomalies has seen no stranger spectacle than the unnatural affiliation of skepticism with philanthropy. Schemes have been devised, processes have been set on foot, for the uplifting of the fallen, which leave Jesus on the shore — thrust Him altogether out of sight — or, while admitting His nominal presence, take away His Godhead, His

vicarious expiation, His renewing Spirit; all, in short, that imparts to His character and office any vital, restoring efficacy. Such humanitarian fishers toil in vain. They may throw out the net of Reform, and sweep the deeps with their fine-spun theories of culture, and education, and benevolence — of man's natural goodness and inherent capacity for improvement; but the fish will remain at the bottom; or, should any appear to be taken, they will break through the gossamer meshes, and plunge back into their former darkness. The Cross of Christ is the only talisman that can call up a sinful soul from the abyss. His voice alone can dissolve the enchantments of carnality, and dispel the death-like slumber of transgression. His truth alone can illumine; His love alone can subdue and melt; His atoning work alone can deliver; His Spirit alone can transform and sanctify. Christ in the boat! Christ in the boat! Here is the secret of power, the pledge of success. Bearing Him with her wherever she goes, proclaiming His Sacrifice, invoking His Grace, let the Church redeemed by His blood, hearkening to His command, launch out into the deep, and the net will come home bursting with salvation.

CHAPTER XIX.

VAIN QUESTIONS.

“WHAT IS THAT TO THEE? FOLLOW THOU ME.”—*John xxi. 22.*

SUCH was the rebuke which our Lord addressed to Peter for neglecting his own duty while inopportunately concerning himself about the duty of another. The Saviour had commanded the Apostle to follow Him. The Apostle, having risen up to obey, turned round and saw John also following; and being the same impulsive and variable creature that he had ever been, his curiosity was at once excited, and his thoughts diverted from the service required of himself to the question of what should be the course of John, and what particular part Christ had assigned him to perform. Hence, instead of going forward directly in his own work, he stood still, and asked, “Lord, what shall this man do?”

To this unseasonable inquiry Christ's words are the answer. It is as if He had said — “Your question is entirely irrelevant. What John shall do has no connection with your responsibility. Your duty is personal, present, imperative, and independent

of the state and conduct of all others. I have commanded you to follow me. It is yours to obey, directly, unhesitatingly, and for yourself, without being influenced by what those around you may do, or may not do."

Such was the scope of the declaration as it was originally spoken. But apart from this special application, it contains a general truth of great and vital importance. It teaches us that our obligation to obey and serve Christ is individual, immediate, and unchanged by any obstacles that may arise from the deportment of others, or from the delusions of our own minds.

Many there are who, when urged to follow Christ by embracing His salvation, and devoting their hearts and lives to His cause, allow themselves to be deterred by some inquiry foreign to their duty, or by some real or imaginary difficulty with which they have no practical concern. Such may be found, in great numbers, both among those who profess to be religious, and among those who have never submitted to the claims of the Redeemer. To each of these classes the pregnant reply of our Lord conveys a most appropriate admonition. For the sake of brevity, however, I shall leave the former wholly out of view, and confine myself exclusively to the latter. It is my wish to address those unconverted persons who refuse to comply with the over-

tures of the Gospel, until every extraneous question, which they can ask, is settled, and every fancied impediment, which they can conjecture, removed out of their way.

The first class which I shall mention, as coming under this description, consists of those who hesitate to yield themselves to Christ, because they cannot understand all that the Bible contains.

It admits not of question that there are in the Scriptures some "things hard to be understood" — deep and inscrutable problems, which no human intellect can solve. This results necessarily from the weakness of our faculties, and the infinite nature of the subjects of which Revelation treats. It is to be expected that our feeble reason, which meets a thousand enigmas even in the affairs of this life, should find itself baffled and confounded, whenever it attempts to grasp the mighty secrets of eternity. But "what is that to thee?" These mysteries belong only to the field of speculative truth — to those recondite matters of the celestial world, which are wholly dissevered from thy present wants and duties. All that is practical; all that relates to the condition of man as a sinner — to the method of his recovery by the atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ — and to the obligations which press upon him in these circumstances — is entirely plain and simple. How irrational is it for men to

reject blessings of which they have a conscious need, and to disregard commands which they know and can comprehend, because there may be other points connected with them which their limited powers cannot fully explore! You would ridicule the folly of him who should refuse necessary food until he could trace out all the hidden processes of digestion and nutrition. Not less absurd are you in refusing to become religious because you cannot unravel all the mysteries of religion. There is no difficulty in anything that is essential to your salvation. You know, both from the Bible and from your own consciousness, that you are guilty and condemned; that you have broken the Divine Law, and are liable to eternal death. This you can understand. You know that God, though just and holy, is full of mercy to the children of men; and that He has given His Only Begotten Son to be their Redeemer, and to open by His obedience and sufferings a way for their deliverance. This you can understand. You know too — for the Gospel emphatically proclaims it — that if you repent and believe in Christ, you shall be pardoned and saved. This you can understand. *Then do it.* Go at once to the Saviour, and commit your everlasting interests to His hands. This you *can* do, and this is all you *need* do. Whatever obscurity may appear to your dim vision to hang over the higher realms

of Truth, the fact of salvation by faith in Christ is clear and intelligible to the weakest capacity. There is here no darkness, no mystery. All is distinct and palpable as the day. What madness, then, is it to turn away from the gracious offers of the Gospel — from the plain duties that are vital to your happiness — because the scheme of Redemption, which propounds those offers and prescribes those duties, may involve other topics too vast for your comprehension !

An emigrant is journeying across the Great American Desert to the Land of Gold, and the Clime of the Sun. He is perishing with thirst. The scanty supply of water which he took with him has long been exhausted ; and for many weary miles no spring or brook, and not even a stagnant pool, left from the winter snows, has met his eye. Nothing is visible wherever he looks but the blazing sky above, and the hot, arid waste around, brown with drought, or white with drifting salt. With staggering limbs, and parched lips, and swollen tongue, and brain on fire, he drags himself forward, battling with death ; yet feeling that he must soon give over the struggle. At length, just as he is about to abandon all further effort, and lie down in despair to die, his ear, rendered acute by suffering, catches the low, faint murmur of a distant stream. Hope and the love of life revive at the sound ; and with

all his remaining strength he hurries toward it. As he comes near, he sees a spring of water gushing out cool and clear from the side of a rocky bluff, splashing and sparkling in its little basin, and gliding away in a gurgling rill. But just as he is on the point of putting his lips to it, and quenching his thirst with full draughts, he stops, and says to himself, "Whence does this water come? Is it from rain falling on the mountain-top, percolating down through the fissures in the rocks, and bubbling out in the stream which I see? Or does its birthplace lie in some secret fountain deep in the heart of the earth? I do not know, and I will not drink of it till I do know." And so he turns away, to encounter again the horrors of the dry and burning desert.

Do you tell me that fatuity so monstrous is impossible? In relation to the supply of bodily wants it may be, but not in relation to the needs of the soul. Your own conduct is the strict moral parallel of the case I have supposed. You are in peril of dying from spiritual thirst. The necessities of your immortal nature cannot be met by anything within yourself, or in the world around you. But God has opened a fountain. Christ has said, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." The Waters of Salvation, welling forth from the Mercy Seat above, have descended in copious floods to refresh and bless the earth. And will you refuse to

drink of the River of Life which flows full and free before you, proffering health and gladness to your famished soul, because you cannot discover everything pertaining to its Source far, far away in the recesses of the Eternal Mind?

In one of those financial convulsions which so often sweep over the land, you have lost your all. Property and occupation are alike gone. The hoardings of former years are spent; and you have borrowed, and borrowed, till you have not a neighbor or acquaintance who would not go a mile out of his way to avoid you. Dig you cannot, for there are none to hire you. To beg is useless, for there are none to give you. For days, weeks, you have scarcely tasted wholesome food, and famine, gaunt and inexorable, stares you in the face. In this hour of your utmost need, an old friend, your father's friend, and your own friend in better times, meets you, and, looking pitifully into your dim eye, and at your haggard cheek, lays his hand on your shoulder, and says, "Come home with me to dinner." You go with him to a splendid mansion. You enter a large and richly-furnished dining hall. You see before you a long table loaded with food in every variety, from the plainest to the most luxurious. At the lower end where you stand, the dishes are all simple, nutritious, solid, precisely such as your famishing state demands. And every dish is

open, showing its contents at a glance. But further on towards the head of the board there are dishes of a more complicated character, reserved for a later stage of the feast; and these are covered, some with covers of tin, some with covers of silver, and some with covers of gold. Your host bids you welcome, and presses you most affectionately to sit down at once, and satisfy your hunger. But, instead of thankfully accepting his offer, you look along the table, and ask, "What is under those covers yonder?" Your friend replies, that those dishes are not suited to your present necessities; that they belong to the dessert; and that when you get to them, he will take the covers off. And again he urges you to partake of his bounty. But you draw yourself up haughtily, wrap your ragged garments about you, and exclaiming, "I'll not sit down to a table of mysteries," walk out into the cold, dark street, amid the howling storm, alone with your pride and your starvation.

Let me impress this point by yet another illustration. A man falls into a deep well in the cellar of a lofty building, and, without help, must inevitably be drowned. From the ceiling above a rope is let down to him through the hatchway, and friendly voices call to him to seize hold of it, while strong arms are ready to draw him out. But instead of doing this, he complains that he cannot see the

upper end of the rope, and does not know how it is secured. Those who are trying to rescue him tell him not to trouble himself about the upper end; they will take care of that; they have it fast to a beam in the roof; his business is to make sure of the lower end. Then he stops to ask, with what kind of a knot the rope is fastened, and what sort of timber the beam is made of to which it is attached. Thus, while neglecting the rope, he continues to cry, "How is it tied? how is it tied?" till the waters close over him, and his vain questions are smothered in death!

Do you say that such a man would be a fool? Take heed, dear reader, that thou be not a greater fool. Thou hast fallen into a well, a deep and loathsome well—"the horrible pit and miry clay" of impenitence and sin; and thou art in danger every moment of sinking down, down forever into "the bottomless pit" of hell beneath. God has flung out from heaven the golden cord, the three-fold cord, of the covenant of Mercy. He has made one end of it fast to the pillars of His throne, while the other reaches to thee; and He bids thee lay hold of it, and He will draw thee up out of the slough of thy pollutions to the purity and bliss of His own presence. Dost thou answer, that the upper part of the cord is above thy sight, and that thou canst not perceive all the processes by which

it has been secured? "*What is that to thee?*" Enough for thee to know that the rope is fast, that the rope is strong, able to bear thy weight, and that of millions like thee. O sinner! grasp the rope — lay hold of it by faith — cling to it by prayer — and thou shalt mount up, as on angels' wings, to the Paradise of God; and there, safe from the yawning abyss, thou mayest ponder through eternity the strength of the rope, and the infinite wisdom displayed in the mysteries of its adjustment.

A second class refuse to repent and believe in Christ, because they do not know how they became sinners; or, in other words, cannot comprehend the origin of moral evil.

The entrance of sin into the world is indeed a question that has baffled the profoundest minds. God has not seen fit to answer it; and, therefore, it must remain, in the present state of our faculties, unexplained and inexplicable. That the Almighty could have prevented the fall of our first parents, and the consequent corruption and ruin entailed upon their posterity, we cannot doubt; and the only reason we dare assign why He did not do it, is, that having resolved to govern the world by moral, not physical, force, in restraining men from sin by an act of absolute power, He would have destroyed their free agency, and thus have subverted the whole system of administration which He

had established. He, therefore, deemed it best, on the whole, to suffer evil to exist, determined ultimately to overrule it for His own glory, and the highest good of the universe. This conjecture, though probable, cannot claim to be an adequate solution; and human sagacity, after all its efforts, must leave the subject where it found it — among the incomprehensible things of Divine Sovereignty.

But “*What is that to thee?*” You are a sinner, however you became so. This is the naked, actual fact with which you have to do. By nature and by practice you are the enemy of God, estranged from Him in heart and in life, and exposed to the penalty of that holy law which proclaims, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The disease is within you, preying upon your very vitals; and infinitely more important is it for you to know how it may be cured, than how it arose. And, blessed be God, there is no obscurity here. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth¹ from all sin.” In the atoning Sacrifice offered on Calvary, a remedy has been provided for transgression; and whoever accepts that Sacrifice in contrition and faith, shall be purified from guilt, and absolved from punishment. This remedy is offered, without money and without price, to all who are willing to receive it. No philosophy is needed to understand it; no science to apply it. Its only mystery is this — Look and

live, believe and be saved. And will you neglect a provision so simple, so easy, so efficacious, because you cannot ascertain exactly in what manner you came to need it? That you do need it, is a great and fearful reality. Without it you are lost forever. Oh! what infatuation, to stand still and dispute about the parentage of sin, while sin itself, actual sin, personal sin, wilful sin, sin multiplied into a thousand forms and shapes of aggravation, is hurrying you down to the second death!

A city at midnight is roused by an alarm of fire. The bells ring out their startling summons. The engines thunder along the streets. A stately mansion is burning. From roof, and gable, and casement, and balcony, the maddening flames leap forth, dyeing the heavens with blood, and shedding a lurid glare on the upturned faces of the crowds below. Soon it is whispered that in one of the highest chambers of the building there is a man asleep, and at the mercy of the conflagration. A thrill of horror goes through the multitude. What shall be done? The stairways and passages are all in a blaze. Every avenue of escape seems cut off. A bold fireman seizes a ladder, and places it against the window of the room occupied by the unconscious victim. Up, up he mounts through blinding smoke and rushing flame, for it is life that he goes to save. He reaches the window—he dashes it in, and calls upon the

sleeper to come forth and descend. But the heedless inmate, instead of complying, raises himself on his elbow, rubs his eyes, and asks, *how on earth the house came on fire!* Fool, idiot, is the answer — no matter now how the house came on fire; *it is on fire;* and you will be burned up if you wait to find out in what way the fire caught. Still he insists that he cannot go till he has satisfied himself whether the fire was communicated by accident or by design; from a candle borne by some careless hand, or from the torch of the incendiary. And while he lingers in this bootless quest, roaming from room to room, over shaking floors, and beneath tottering rafters, the roof falls in, the walls collapse, and he is buried under the blazing ruins.

O sinner! such is thy conduct, and such will be thy fate, unless thou art wise in time. Thy house, the house of thy soul, is on fire. No matter whether man or devil kindled the flame — kindled it is, and is wrapping thy whole nature in its destroying embrace. It has spread to every faculty and to every affection. Body, mind, and heart are alike pervaded by it. It smolders in the workings of inward depravity. It blazes out in the lawlessness of open transgression. And this fire of sin, unless quenched by the blood of Christ, will soon become the fire of Judgment, the fire of God's wrath, the fire of hell, that shall burn forever. As yet, there is hope for

thee. The Waters of Mercy are flowing by. The Refuge of the Gospel stands open. Oh, flee before it be too late! Escape for thy life—look not behind thee, lest thou be consumed. Stop not to ask how the fire originated. It will be time enough for such inquiries when the fire is put out, and thou hast reached the Sanctuary above, whither it can never come.

Another class hold back from coming to any decision on the great matter of their salvation, because there is such a diversity of religious opinions in the world.

This is an excuse often urged. It is a very common thing for unconverted persons, when exhorted to give heed to their spiritual welfare, to reply that they know not what to believe; that amid the conflict of sects and creeds, each asserting its own infallibility, and denouncing all others, it is impossible to tell which is right and which wrong; and that, therefore, they deem it their wisest course to attend to their temporal interests, and let religion alone altogether.

But you seem to overlook the fact that the adoption of such a rule would cut you off from having anything to do with the affairs of this world, no less than with those of the next. Men differ as frequently and as widely about secular matters as they do about religion. In politics, in law, in medicine,

in trade, in agriculture, in science, in all departments of thought and occupation, they hold the most dissimilar opinions, and carry them out into lines of practice equally dissimilar. You can scarcely find two individuals who will take precisely the same view of the simplest proposition, or be fully agreed as to the best mode of doing even the most common thing. The minds of men are so differently constituted; their intellectual endowments are so unequal, their powers of perception so unlike; each is so enveloped in a haze of prepossessions and prejudices, and so inclined to look at all subjects from his own personal standpoint — that the marvel is, not that men should differ, but that they should ever agree. So that, if you are determined to have nothing to do with religion because contradictory theories are advanced respecting it, you must, to be consistent, keep yourself aloof from every pursuit and business in life.

As a matter of fact, however, you greatly overrate the real diversity of religious sentiment which exists among those whose opinions are entitled to any regard. It is a thing naturally to be looked for that unregenerate men, following blindly the impulses of their depravity, hating God, and God's revealed Word, should either wholly reject the great doctrines of the Gospel, or pervert them to suit their own sinful desires and passions. Their love

alike of present indulgence and of future safety leads them instinctively to dissent from whatever might seem to interrupt the one, or to endanger the other. And the forms of unbelief or of wrong belief which they embrace, will be as changeful and belligerent as the corrupt propensities from which they spring. The ungodly world is thus a vast caldron where all the ingredients of wickedness are seething together, and ever and anon sending up to the surface bubbles of falsehood of every shape and color. But among those who have been enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of Grace, there is a substantial agreement on all the fundamental truths of Christianity. They may separate in outward things, in modes of organization, and forms of worship; but in all that is intrinsically important, they are undivided. The vital teachings of the Bible with respect to the depravity of man, the atonement of Christ, the necessity of repentance and faith, the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, the eternal happiness of the righteous, the eternal misery of the wicked, are universally held by all real Christians throughout the world. And it has ever been so. The people of God, of all names, of all countries, of all ages, bear here one harmonious testimony. I listen to the voices of patriarchs and prophets coming down to me from the far off centuries; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the

blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of apostles and evangelists, speaking to me from the pages of the New Testament; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of the confessors and martyrs of the Reformation; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of all the pious in our own day, of every denomination, and in every land; and I find them to be in perfect unison, proclaiming, without one discordant note, "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus."

But supposing this were not the case; supposing the differences of doctrinal belief among Christians were as numerous and as broad as you imagine them to be—"What is that to thee?" To your own Master you must stand or fall. The Saviour requires you to follow Him, to embrace His Gospel, and fulfil His laws, regardless of what the whole world beside may believe or do. His Word is your only guide. It marks out the path you are to take with such clearness and precision, that only they who wilfully shut their eyes can fail to see it. With such light to direct your steps, the uncertainty and confusion of human opinion can furnish you no excuse for indecision and delay. No—amid all the windings of error, the finger of Eternal Truth points ever straight onward to the Cross

of Christ; and high above all the Babel-tongues of delusion, crying, "Lo! here, and lo! thêre"—its voice is heard, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Oh, when you stand at the Judgment seat, and the Bible, which you now neglect, shall follow you there as an accusing witness, think you the plea that you knew not what to believe will avail you? Make not now a defence which you will not dare to make then; but, taking the Book of God into thy hands, with lowly prayer for the Spirit's teaching, examine for thyself, decide for thyself, and thou shalt find rest to thy soul.

The last class which I shall notice justify their indifference to religion, by the alleged inconsistency and unfaithfulness of its professors.

Not seldom is the assumption put forth, that the avowed disciples of Christ differ in nothing from the mass of the ungodly around them; and hence, that religion is but a sham, and its votaries fanatics or hypocrites. To this we reply that the charge, in the extent in which it is made, is utterly untrue. Doubtless corrupt members may be found in the Church of God—men whose hearts have never been renewed, and who wear the mask of piety as a screen to the wickedness of their lives. This is to be expected; for in this fallen world no vigilance can guard even the most sacred retreats from the intrusion of the unworthy. We also acknowledge

with sadness, that the standard of Christian practice is nowhere as elevated as the Gospel demands; that many, whose sincerity cannot be questioned, often wander from the right way, or follow it with sluggish step; while all are more or less subject to frailty — frailty which they themselves are soonest to perceive and confess. Alas! perfect holiness dwells not now in our sin-blighted sphere. But, with all these deductions, we claim that Christians are “the salt of the earth.” Though not as good as they ought to be, they are incomparably better than anybody else. In integrity, in deference to conscience, in purity of motive, in uprightness of life, in philanthropic deeds, they are raised far above the profane crowd that reproaches and vilifies them. And this is one of the reasons why wrong-doing, when it does appear among them, is so marked. With the irreligious, wrong-doing is the rule, and is too common to be noticed; with the pious, it is the exception, and is on that account the more gazed at. No one heeds the smut on a collier’s frock; but a stain on the white robe of beauty attracts every eye.

Oh, it is a slander, fabricated by Satan, “the Accuser of the brethren,” that Christians are not better than other men! As a body, they are the best men the world has ever seen; and to their influence is owing everything good which has been

done in the world. Christians not better than other men! Who have kept the Truth and died for it, when all others disowned it? Christians. Who founded our political and religious institutions, our schools, and colleges, and churches, the safeguard and glory of the land? Christians. Who, by their teachings and example, purify public sentiment, and create a moral tone in society, without which it would become a den of thieves? Christians. Who visit hospitals and prisons, and go down into the dark, filthy homes of Vice and Want, seeking out the wretched, succoring the helpless, saving the lost? Christians. Who uphold the Sabbath and the Sanctuary, and keep the light of the Gospel burning on the watch-towers of Zion, to guide the benighted to safety and peace? Christians. Who are carrying that light to pagan shores, and kindling up its fires under the sky of the Equator, and amid the snows of the Pole? Christians. Who are the world's foremost leaders in its great exodus from barbarism, bondage, and woe, to civilization, freedom, and happiness? Again I say, Christians. Look at any work that honors God and blesses man, and you will find that Christians devise it, Christians superintend it, Christians do it. Christians not better than other men! And dare you say this — you who have never felt the power of one Christian principle? Christians not better than

you! The Christian fears God. You live as if there were no God. The Christian mourns over his sins. You glory in yours. The Christian prays. You swear. The Christian loves the assemblies of the saints. You love the theatre, the dram-shop, and the brothel. The Christian labors for the salvation of his fellow-men. You labor to prevent it. Oh! you do not, you cannot believe that the Christian is not better than you. You only wish it, and the wish is father to the thought. But whether you now believe it or not, be assured, that in the great day of decision, when all characters shall be revealed, you will discover that the moral distance between you and the most imperfect follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, is as wide as from hell to heaven. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not."

Granting, however, for the moment, that your allegation were just; that the great majority of religious professors in our day were false to their calling, and false to their God; and that our churches of every name had degenerated into synagogues of mere hypocrisy and formalism—"*What is that to thee?*" This fact could furnish no apology for your own unbelief and impenitence. It could not take one iota from your individual accountability, nor lessen in the slightest degree your

obligation to follow the Saviour. The command would still rest upon you in all its force. The Gospel itself, and not the conduct of its professors, would still be the law by which you are to act, and the standard by which you are to be judged. It would still remain an unchangeable truth, that "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Oh! if you die without conversion, will it lighten either your guilt or your doom, to know that others pretended to be converted, and were not? Nay, rather will it not aggravate both? Will not the Judge say to you, "Out of thine own mouth do I condemn thee. If thou knewest so well what my disciples should be, why didst thou not thyself become my disciple?" And when the sentence shall be pronounced, and you lie down in sorrow, will it mitigate your anguish to know that the hypocrites whom you so hated on earth, are your companions for eternity? No, no—your sin is your own, your punishment will be your own, and you alone must bear it.

Dear reader! how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? How long wilt thou cleave to thy refuges of lies? How long wilt thou bolster thyself up with objections that have no existence but in thine own depraved heart? Cast them all away. They are empty, false, and will vanish before the light of eternity, as the mist is swept

from the mountain's top by the morning beam. Go to Christ in humility and faith, and surrender thyself to the leading of His Grace. Listen to no voice but His — that voice which now sounds to thee out of heaven, as once it sounded by the blue waters of Gennesareth — "*Follow Me!*" And then, when the last decisive day is past, and the Saviour, having received "His own" to Himself, shall ascend from the throne of judgment to the throne of His everlasting glory, thou shalt hear that same Voice calling to thee, amid the harpings of angels, "FOLLOW ME."

CHAPTER XX.

HEAVEN WITHOUT NIGHT.

“THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE.”—*Rev.* xxi. 25.

THE grand excellence of the Gospel is its revelation of Immortality. Nor is that revelation obscure, indefinite, or doubtful. It deals with the question of a future life, not as a vague guess, an unsolved problem, but as a certain and absolute fact, and sets it forth with a clearness of outline, and a fulness of description, eminently fitted to impress the mind. And not content with merely affirming its existence, nor with any literal statement of its nature, it calls in numerous terrestrial analogies to illustrate it, and bring its attributes and circumstances within the grasp of our comprehension.

In the chapter before us, the celestial world is portrayed under a variety of figurative aspects, and by a series of sublime representations. It is described as a place of perfect order and transcendent beauty, filled with holy and happy inhabitants; as the city of the Living God—the peculiar abode and palace of Jehovah, radiant with the splendors

of His glory, and replete with all that can render it the scene of consummate purity and bliss. But among these striking views, perhaps the most significant and forcible is that which pictures heaven as crowned with changeless and refulgent light. In the visions of the rapt Seer of Patmos, we are told that "its light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;" that, self-illuminated, it "had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it;" that "the nations of the saved shall walk in the light of it;" and that "there shall be no night there."

Heaven, then, is without night. This is my theme. Let us study its meaning, and ponder the thoughts which it suggests.

The language of the text is doubtless true even in its literal sense; and is to be understood as teaching that in the material economy of heaven there is nothing which corresponds to the interchange of light and darkness existing on earth. In that supernal clime reigns one eternal day. Its skies are never shadowed; its sun never goes down. By what law of celestial physics, by what constitution and action of the elements, a condition of being so unlike our own is created and maintained, Inspiration has not informed us; nor would our present faculties be equal to the knowledge. Dismissing all such unfruitful speculations, we rest in the

Divine announcement, that the gloom of night never visits the realms above.

The absence of night from heaven is, however, to be regarded chiefly in its moral significations. Though a real fact, it has the intent and import of a symbol, adumbrating the spiritual features of the city of God, and embracing the whole range of its blessedness. In this bearing I shall now consider it.

We are wont to associate with night the idea of weariness. The physical nature of man cannot sustain an activity that knows no pause. Labor exhausts its strength; and without frequent rest and renovation, it sinks into the grave. The intellectual nature also, though of ethereal birth, and endowed with far more elastic energies, is yet liable, from its union with the body, to be weakened by the strain of protracted thought, or broken down by the weight of incessant care. How beneficent, therefore, is that ordinance of the Creator, which brings periodic darkness over the earth, and calls its busy multitudes to repose! Sweet to the myriad toilers in the world's vast workshop is the coming of the still evening hour, when the tasks of day are laid aside, and tired limbs and overwrought brains draw refreshment from slumber. So benign is this provision, that Scripture has included it among the special acts of Divine Goodness, in the beautiful saying, "He giveth His beloved sleep."

Now, as this arrangement is not found in heaven, the inference is obvious, that the denizens of that bright realm do not require its operation; and are so constituted as to be inaccessible to fatigue from any intensity or duration of employment. A condition so opposite to that in which we are now placed must involve amazing changes — changes which no earthly words can paint, or earthly mind conceive. The imperfections of our being, the materialism that clogs it, the weaknesses that impair it, the defilement that dishonors it, must be utterly eliminated and cast off. This corruptible body must become incorruptible; this natural body be made a spiritual body; this feeble body be imbued with power; this mortal body put on immortality; and this sinful body shine forth in the glory of holiness. The mental faculties, there is reason to believe, will experience a similar transformation, passing from their present infancy to angelic development; from the errors and delusions of this murky sphere to the perfect knowledge of the upper world. Thus our entire nature will be so recast, etherealized, exalted, as to render it superior to lassitude, and suffering, and decay; instinct with perpetual vigor and indestructible vitality. Hence there will be no need that the shadows of night should gather over the sky of eternity; no need that repose should follow exertion; no need that

thought and feeling should ever be locked in forgetfulness. To the blessed dwellers there capacities will be imparted, which will fit them to pursue, without languor or stay, the noble engagements of that higher life. And while each glorified mind and each glorified body will find full scope for all its endowments in the service of its God and Saviour, the everlasting years as they roll away will witness no intermission of that service, and no waste of the powers which supply it. In what delightful contrast is all this to our present circumstances! When we consider how feeble and languid our best duties now are; how soon we grow weary in them; and how often exhaustion compels us to withdraw from them; and then look forward to that coming state, in which we shall be girded with strength proportioned to the grandeur of our occupations — strength enabling us to worship and adore forever, and to fly, swift as sunbeams, from province to province of Jehovah's empire, in fulfilment of His behests — must we not anticipate, with the deepest longing of our souls, an abode in that world where darkness shall never shroud us, and where, from our constitution, we shall never feel fatigue?

Night is the symbol of ignorance. How often do the Sacred Writers represent the intellectual and moral blindness of men under the figure of darkness! Thus Job, describing the errors and follies

of the devotees of human wisdom, says, "They meet with darkness in the day time, and grope at noonday as in the night." And the fearful ignorance of God and of truth, which overspread the world at the period of the Redeemer's advent, is portrayed by the graphic declaration, "Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people."

In this emblematic sense, a deep and cloudy night stretches over the sphere which we now inhabit. How imperfect are our faculties! How narrow the limits of our knowledge! How obscure and uncertain our researches! What barriers of gloom and mystery meet us on whatever side we attempt to push our investigations! The torch of Revelation, which God has in mercy hung out from the skies, to direct the steps of benighted man on his path to eternity, sheds indeed a clear and steady light, sufficient for our guidance in all that is essential to salvation. But, like the moonbeams which cheer us in the absence of day, it gilds only the summits of Truth, and the high uplands of Faith and Practice, along which we must pass to the Heavenly Zion; while the deep valleys beneath lie in impenetrable shadow. What gems of knowledge, what treasures of wisdom, what scenes of beauty and of grandeur, what exhibitions of Divine skill and beneficence, are there hidden from mortal view, or revealed only in dim and misty outline! How pro-

found is the obscurity which rests on many subjects of the highest interest and importance! How little can we comprehend of the mystery of our own being; of the constitution of the world in which we are placed; of the nature and designs of that Providence by which it is upheld; of the attributes, purposes and glory of that Almighty One, under whose government we live, and to whose tribunal we are accountable! We here know but in part; we see through a glass darkly; and although the illumination vouchsafed is enough, if faithfully followed, to point out our way and to lead us in safety, yet there is much of a character vast, noble, sublime, which Inspiration does not disclose, or our powers are too weak to grasp.

But in heaven there will be no intellectual night. All the errors that now shade and darken our minds — all the obstacles which here impede and limit our acquisitions — shall there be forever removed. The faculties of the soul which, amid the fogs and illusions of sense, are so restricted in their range, and so distorted in their vision, will, in that radiant world, expand into seraphic strength, and under the beams of eternal day receive a new impulse, and a right direction. The veil also, which now hangs over so many departments of Truth, will then be lifted, and we shall enter her inmost temple, and worship at her most secret shrine. The full, unsul-

lied light of eternity will pour its all-revealing brightness upon the whole field of moral and religious inquiry, dispersing every cloud, illumining every depth, and bringing out each object into bold and distinct view. And, oh! what attainments in divine knowledge must the redeemed make, when, with powers rectified and enlarged, with a spiritual vision purged from all the weakness and obliquity of earth, they range over the boundless extent of Jehovah's works and ways, piercing to the profoundest abysses, soaring to the loftiest heights, pursuing their researches amid the blaze of his very throne; while all along their everlasting course, Heaven's unsetting sun sheds upon them its clear and serene effulgence! Of the world in which such a career awaits us, well may it be said, "There shall be no night there."

Night is the symbol of sin. The time which God has ordained for rest, man has appropriated to crime. All classes of the depraved and lawless look upon night as their chosen patron and protector. "The eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, and he saith, no eye shall see me. He goeth forth to her house, which is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night." And it is under the same sheltering screen, that the thief, the burglar, and the assassin carry on their warfare

against society. Hence darkness is often employed in Scripture as the emblem of sin. "The way of the wicked is as darkness." "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

When, therefore, we read of heaven as being without night, the expression evidently implies that into those holy realms no impurity can ever be admitted. Take the glass of the inspired Word, and study the nature and design of the City of God; and you will at once see how impossible it is that evil should find entrance there. It is the immediate residence of Jehovah, the all-perfect, the all-righteous, whose eyes cannot look on iniquity. It is the abode of Christ, to whom sin is so offensive that he stooped to the cross to put it away. It is the home of celestial Intelligences who have kept their garments undefiled. It is the dwelling-place of justified spirits, who have been cleansed by the blood of atonement, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. In a word, everything that we know of heaven, of its inhabitants, of its occupations, of its enjoyments, proves, beyond the possibility of doubt, that it is the scene of perfect holiness — a holy world, tenanted only by the holy. Heaven would cease to be heaven, if one unsanctified soul were to gain admission there. As soon might the pillars of eternal Rectitude give way, and rebellion usurp the throne of Infinite Majesty and Power, as a single unrenewed

spirit inherit the land of the saved, and share in its blessedness. Let those who presumptuously dream that they are going to heaven while destitute of all that can fit them for heaven, ponder the words spoken by Him who is the Lord of Heaven, and who cannot be mistaken in the qualifications which it demands. "There shall in no case enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And because there is no sin and no sinner in heaven, therefore it is said, "There shall be no night there."

Night is the symbol of danger. The hours in which darkness broods over the earth are peculiar for their insecurity. It is then that the robber, the housebreaker, the incendiary, and the whole tribe of depredators on property and life, steal from their lurking places, and roam abroad on their work of mischief. And then it is that perils easily avoided by day deepen and multiply their terrors. How a black, starless night intensifies the dread of the mariner, on a lee shore, with the tempest howling around him, and breakers roaring for his destruction. How it increases the jeopardy of the traveller in a lonely mountain gorge, where at any moment he may plunge over some precipice, which

the darkness conceals from his view. And with what undefinable, startling fear it thrills the man who is compelled, during its continuance, to traverse the streets of a city reeking with pestilence, or ravaged by insurrection. The very precautions we adopt evince our sense of special exposure, while the eye of the all-beholding sun is closed.

The exclusion of night from heaven may, therefore, be interpreted as a pledge that, in that secure asylum, no adversary shall assail us, and no possibility of evil ever menace our peace. The moral perils which environ us in this probational stage of our being, arise from the unholy tendencies of our nature; from the dominant wickedness of the world in which we live; and from the sleepless hostility of the great Enemy of all good. Even after the work of God's Spirit has passed upon the soul, breathing into it a new principle of life from above, transforming its character, and reversing its destiny — there yet remain in it many unsanctified affections, which are constantly struggling to regain their former ascendancy, and subject the ransomed child of Grace to his old thralldom. The outward conditions of the believer's course are also full of hazard. He has to fight his way through a country alien from heaven, and at war with whatever comes from heaven, or is going to it; a country, whose customs, habits, pursuits, intercourse, are in direct

antagonism to the temper—and conduct which the Gospel demands. At every step, he is beset by influences adverse to his religious progress; by temptations to earthliness, to unbelief, to remissness in duty, to sinful indulgence. At every step, the Arch-Deceiver spreads snares for his feet, and plies him with enticements to apostasy and ruin. And so mighty are these opposing forces, so formidable their combined array, that no mortal strength and no mortal resolution, unaided by power from on high, could suffice for the encounter. Were it not for Omnipotent succor, every celestial traveller would be overcome by the way, and never reach the glory at its end.

But once beyond the River — once sheltered within the walls of the Heavenly City — we shall no longer be exposed to any hostile interference. The seductions of the world, and the treachery of our own hearts, will not follow us there; nor can Satan cross the “great gulf fixed” between Hell and Heaven to vex us with his assaults. No foe can approach that Palace of the universal King — no danger lurk in its happy mansions. At the gates, and on every tower and battlement, angelic sentinels keep watch and ward; while over all, Infinite Love and Infinite Puissance stretch their inviolable protection. The Covenant of the Ever-Faithful and the Ever-Living infolds the blessed

ones who have been rescued from the pollutions of earth, and brought to immortality. Are they not, then, safe forevermore? And is it not fitting that a state, on which rests no shadow of fear for the present or for the future, should be described as having no night?

Night is the symbol of want. Sleep is the sister of death. During its reign over us, we retire within ourselves; the senses close their portals; and the soul is shut in from all its wonted delights. Communion with man and with nature has ceased. Perception is suspended. Reason is in abeyance. Gone are consciousness, memory, hope. The imagination may, indeed, go forth in dreams, revelling in the wild phantasmagories which its own aberrations have called up; but how vague and unsatisfying are they all! Incongruous, aimless, as little are they to be compared with waking realities, as the reflections of a broken mirror to the clear shining of noon. And even should slumber be interrupted, what a dreary blank does the eye behold! Hidden is the rich landscape—stream, and forest, and mountain—all the grand things and the lovely on which the daylight looks. Above us may glimmer the watching stars and the silvery moon; but they only awaken regret for the nobler luminary departed. Where is that wondrous orb at whose approach the stellar hosts veil their faces? Where

is he, in whose absence creation languishes; whose coming is hailed with joy; whose rising scatters life and gladness over the world; whose ray paints with gold every object on which it falls; and who sits on his throne of fire, the visible Shekinah, "emblem of the Invisible, lit up in the temple of the universe." So is it that night typifies want; and the fact that heaven knows no night is a most expressive sign that it also knows no privation.

Want, in one or another of its forms, is inseparable from our earthly condition. Pilgrims in the desert, we must expect to sigh in vain for much that is essential to perfect felicity. But when we reach the land of Divine fulness above, every need will be supplied. Do you find here a want of friends? Are there few whose hearts beat in sympathy with yours, and in whose lasting affection you can confide? In heaven you will have innumerable friends—friends bound to you by the holiest ties—friends who will never change—friends for eternity. United to the glorious assembly of the first born, you will hold high converse with patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles and martyrs, with the redeemed of all the ages; and each individual of that countless throng will be your brother by a bond sweeter and stronger than mortal kindred ever knew—the bond of love to the One Saviour, and of endless companionship in celebrating His praise.

Is there here want of knowledge? In heaven light will be poured upon us in the fullest effulgence which our capacities can bear. The clouds which now obscure the ongoings of Providence will be dispersed. Redemption will stand revealed in all its wonders; and we shall comprehend, with all saints, the matchless mystery of Incarnate Love. Is there here a want of happiness? Does the gloom of sorrow often settle down, like a funeral pall, upon the soul, filling all its chambers with woe, and shutting out every gleam of hope and joy? We shall leave all sorrow in the grave. There are no mourners in heaven; for pain and grief can never invade its secure repose. Hearts will throb no more. Tears will be shed no more. A Father's hand has wiped them all away. Everything around us, every scene, every object, every employment, will be adapted to exclude disquietude, and to minister delight. Every faculty, every passion, will be absorbed in adoration, and overflowing with ecstasy. And He that sitteth on the throne will bring out His treasures to augment our bliss, showering down upon our spirits all the raptures which Almighty Goodness can bestow.

Night is the symbol of death. There are few analogies in the whole range of sacred imagery, more suited to represent death than the season of night. And thus we find it very frequently em-

ployed by the inspired writers. The Psalmist, in speaking of the removal of his friends by death, says, "Mine acquaintance hast thou put into darkness." Job calls death "the day of darkness," and the grave "the bed of darkness" — "a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." Our Divine Teacher has also given us a very striking description of death under the figure of night. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh in which no man can work."

To beings situated as we are, it is hardly possible to form an idea of a state of existence in which death is unknown. In the whole compass of our observation, we can discover nothing in which his presence is not found. Every breath we draw, every bound of the heart, every beat of the pulse, tells of death. He is in all periods of life — in the snows of age, in the glory of manhood, in the flower of youth, in the bud of infancy. He is in all the seasons — in the showers of spring, in the beams of summer, in the ripeness of autumn, in the storms of winter. He is in the cloud and in the clear sky, on the mountain and in the valley, on the land and on the sea. There is not a condition, not a sphere, not an event, that gives no hint of death. He plants his foot on this fallen globe, and waving his

skeleton hand over its whole circumference, proclaims, "All this is mine!"

It is, therefore, difficult for us, having death thus always and everywhere before our eyes, to carry forward our thoughts to a state of being in which death and the grave can find no entrance. Yet this is true of heaven. Hear the decree uttered from that bright world, "There shall be no more death." No more death! Oh, what a soul-ravishing announcement is this! No more death! Then Hope has dawned on the midnight of the tomb; the King of Terrors is despoiled of his power; and the all-conqueror is himself conquered! No more death to our persons — no more death to our attainments — no more death to our usefulness — no more death to our joys! All are changeless and perfect. God is our portion, holiness our vesture, happiness our allotment, eternity our home. Oh, what a boon is Immortality when it thus stamps its own endless duration on all that awaits us in "the Better Land!"

Permit me, in closing, to advert briefly to the practical influence which this representation should have upon us. Merely to describe heaven would be a vain labor, even though we could paint its splendors in the glowing numbers of Milton, or with the magic pencil of Claude. Such a picture might charm the imagination, but would leave the

conscience and the heart unmoved. The moral bearings of Immortality, our personal interest in it, and the position in which we stand with respect to its awards, are the thoughts which every view of its happiness should suggest and impress. And most solemnly would I admonish all who have listened to the recital of the blessings that enrich the heavenly state, that unless they embrace its principles, and drink in its spirit, and put on its holiness through the power of its renovating grace, they can never inherit its beatitudes. The Lord of heaven has ordained a great and decisive preparation in the hearts and lives of men, as an indispensable prerequisite to its enjoyment. What that preparation is, you have been often and distinctly told. It consists in godly sorrow for sin; in the cordial acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for sin; in the work of the Holy Spirit, applying that sacrifice to the renewal and cleansing of the soul. Has this preparation been accomplished in you? Have you thus been made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light? If you are living without repentance, without conversion, without a purifying faith in the Blood of Atonement, you are passing, indeed, to eternity, but to an eternity of woe, and are linking your future being with those, of whom God has said, "They shall not see my rest." The only path in which a sinner can reach Eternal Life, lies by the

Cross of Calvary. Oh! tread that path. Linger long and trustingly by that Mount of salvation. Bathe, and bathe again, in the healing waters which flow from its riven summit. So shall your journey end amid the rapture of the skies.

If you are travelling to immortality by such a road, well may you look forward with exulting hope to the issue of your pilgrimage. That issue is nigh you even now, though the mists of earth shut it out from your view. When a few more steps are taken, a few more sufferings endured, a few more victories won, you will pass beyond the intercepting haze, and behold the City of God, the goal of your strivings, and your heritage forever. And then will the marvels of its beauty and its magnificence burst on your ravished sight. As you gaze round upon the wondrous vision, and your eye takes in at last the whole celestial panorama—the sapphire walls, the gates of pearl, the golden streets, the crystal palaces, the emerald fields spreading away on every side, the River of Life winding through them, and the Day that never ends pouring a flood of radiance over all—what a rushing tide of ecstasy will sweep upon your spirits, and what new conceptions of God's power and mercy engross every thought and faculty! Nor will its material elements alone occupy your contemplations. Its moral characteristics, its order, its harmony, its purity, its love, will afford

you still nobler themes of study, and sources of yet loftier pleasure. There you will see Divine Wisdom, Omnipotence, Majesty, Goodness, in their sublimest manifestations. There you will commune with Archangels and Cherubim, the elder-born of Creation, and drink deep knowledge from lips that sung the morning hymn of Time, and greeted the new-made earth with rejoicing hosannas. There you will meet the justified from among men. There you will find the loved ones lost below, and never lose them more. There you will look on the face of Jesus, and bask in His unveiled perfections with ever-growing wonder and delight. And there, before the central Glory, the all-encircling Effulgence that speaks the Presence of the Invisible Father, you will worship and adore through everlasting ages.

Is this blissful scene real? Is our future participation in it assured to us by the promise of the Saviour? Are we separated from it only by the narrow stream of death? Then why is it so seldom in our thoughts? Why are our aspirings towards it so infrequent and so feeble? Why do we even shrink back from the hour that shall summon us to it? Why cling we so closely to the Wilderness, forgetful of the Canaan to which we are bound? Why are we so eager in temporal pursuits, so elated

by success, so cast down by failure ; while the great things of the Life to come have over us so little power? Oh, let us awake to the grandeur of our Hope! Onward, ever onward, the swift years are bearing us to heaven. Ought we not to advance as rapidly in fitness for it, and in desire for its fruition? Amid the trials and infelicities of our earthly abode, let Faith fix her steadfast, longing gaze on that serene realm just beyond the boundary of the grave, where no weariness, no want, can ever be felt — no sin, no danger, no death, can ever come ; where all evil is banished — all good possessed.

Would that I might here drop the curtain. But our picture will not be complete without its contrast. The shadow must be put in as well as the light ; the gloom as well as the brightness. There is another world, the opposite of that which has been described — a world shrouded in unbroken darkness — a world in which there is nothing but Unrest, Guilt, Privation, Despair, and ever-living Death. Impenitent sinner! that world is your appointed dwelling-place. If you continue to reject the Saviour, and die unconverted and unforgiven, as sure as God's word is true, the never-ending misery of hell will be your portion. And as the ceaseless ages of doom drag on, your spirit, worn and crushed under its mighty torment, will utter,

ever utter, the hopeless cry, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And the watchman cannot answer, "The morning cometh;" but all along the slow-moving centuries will come back the response, "NIGHT—NIGHT STILL—ETERNAL NIGHT."

THE END.

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